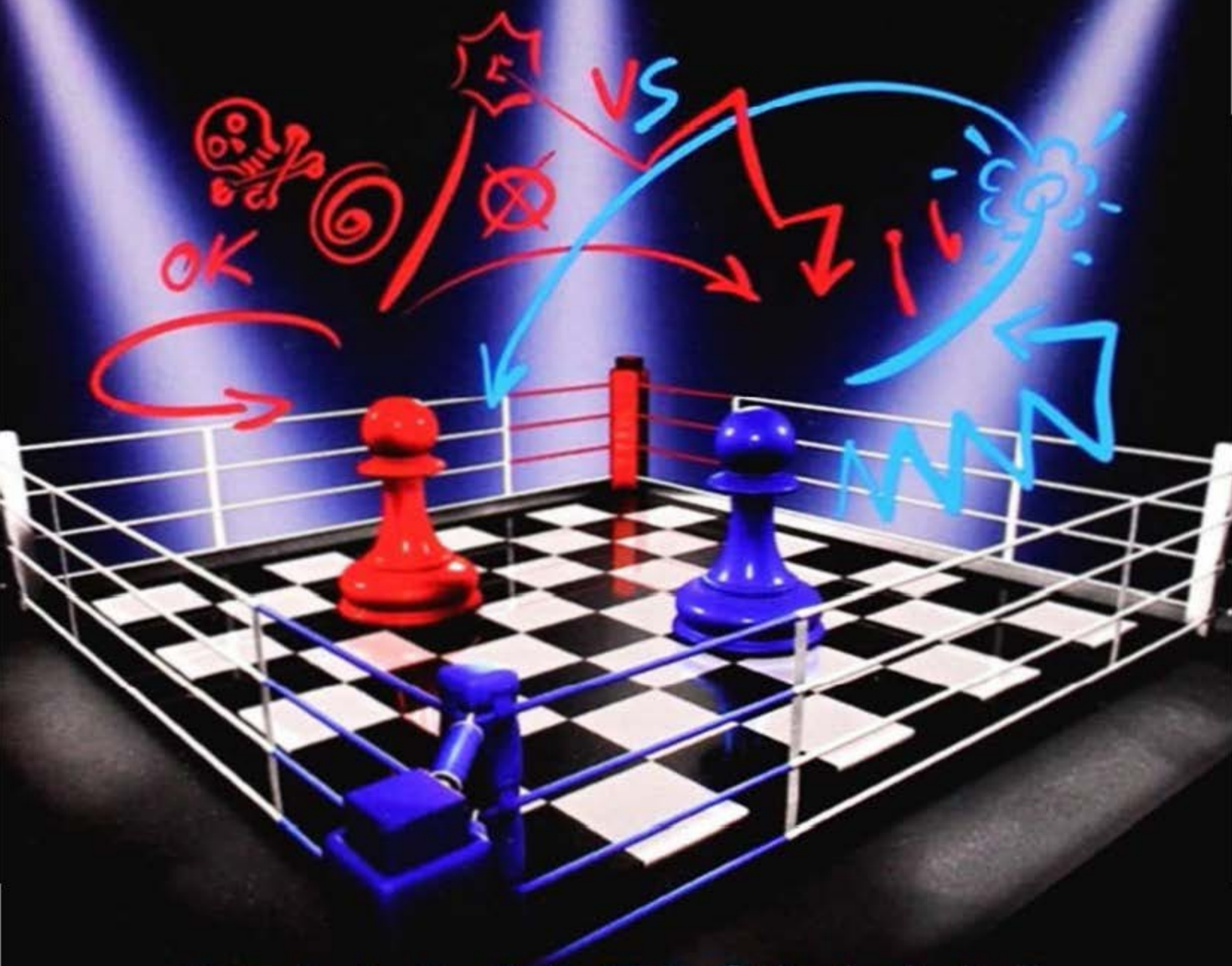


THE WORLD'S
MOST INSTRUCTIVE
AMATEUR
Game Book



DAN HEISMAN

Dan Heisman

**The World's Most Instructive
Amateur Game Book**



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- All the amateur players who submitted games to me that were used for the “Improve Your Chess” video series and this book. And all their opponents, who played in an instructive manner. ☺

To Joe Casey, in Memoriam.

Joe may have been an amateur chess player,
but he was a grandmaster human being.

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Glossary

Symbols

(?)	Inaccurate or not best move
?	Mistake
??	Bad mistake, outright blunder
(!)	Good idea, interesting
!	Good move
!!	Brilliant move, Hard-to-find best move
?!	Dubious move, Unnecessary complications
!?	Worth a try, Creating good complications
□	Only move – other moves draw or lose instead win, or lose instead of draw
=	Equal play or drawn
+–	White is winning
±	White is clearly better
±	White has a small edge
≡	Black has a small edge
±	Black is clearly better
–+	Black is winning
◐	Better is...
Δ	With the idea of...

Computer evaluations are expressed in pawns, e.g. +1.25 is one-and-one-quarter pawns better for White and -3.5 is three-and-a-half-pawns better for Black.

Introduction

“Well, Dan,” Howard Stern’s familiar bass voice intoned, “now that I am up to 1000, that’s about it. I just can’t seem to beat those 1100’s.”

“But Howard,” I protested, “you’re just giving them free pieces and they are taking some of them. They are giving you free pieces and you aren’t taking as many of them. If you just stop giving them free pieces and take all of theirs, you will beat them every game!”

“It’s not as easy as that. You’re a good player so you can do that but I’m not so good.”

“You’re right, but basically it’s as easy as that.”

Four years later Howard was rated over 1700 Internet Chess Club (ICC) Standard, about 1600 USCF. As usual he woke up early, but this time he could not find a friendly face to play. So Howard pushed the ICC’s then-new “45 45” pool button and the software paired him with the first available player, who happened to have a Standard rating in the 1100’s.

The game was over in 19 moves. The 1100 made several simple tactical errors and Howard had captured much of his army for free. Later in the day, Howard was on the phone for a lesson and I asked him if he wanted to review the game.

“No sense doing that,” Howard protested logically. “I won’t learn anything. He just gave me some free pieces and I took them.”

“Oh!” I remembered our conversation from four years ago and decided to have some fun, “That’s right, he’s one of those 1100 players you said you would never beat, back when you were 1000!” I knew Howard could see my smile right through the phone.

“Wise guy!” he replied good-naturedly, for he not only got my point, but appreciated it even more now that he was a much better player. At 1700 he was a competent amateur – at 1000 he had been closer to being a beginner.

* * *

“There’s a benefit to losing – you get to learn from your mistakes” – Megamind (2010)

If you examine the U.S. Chess Federation (USCF) database, about 99.5% of their members are amateurs – by definition, players rated under 2200 (master level). Moreover, the overwhelming majority of chess players never join the USCF, so the percentage of amateur players in the U.S. is much closer to 99.98%. That neighbor of yours you think is pretty good is just an amateur, as are the highest-level amateurs, the experts, who play very well and, rarely, might draw or even beat a grandmaster.

Yet when I suggest to players to read over instructive annotated games, both master and amateur, you can hear the disgust in many, who answer: “What can I learn from amateur games? Those guys stink. They just put all their pieces *en prise*. What can I learn from that?”

But these protesters are mistaking “amateur” for “beginner.” This is *not* a book about beginner games – all the players in this book are experienced in either over-the-board or online events. The book features a representative cast of amateurs ranging from lower tournament levels up through expert (one may have been stronger than that). While there are some very interesting reasons why amateurs leave pieces hanging and methods to minimize these mistakes are helpful, there are not that many pieces left *en prise* in the games chosen for this book.

Since 99.5% of tournament players are amateurs, it follows that they would benefit greatly from reading about the typical mistakes they make, and how to avoid or at least minimize them. IM Jeremy Silman’s popular book *The Amateur’s Mind* does that, but it does not include any full games, nor does it address time-management errors, but instead provides helpful snippets of amateur thought about various instructive positions and IM Silman’s insightful comments about their misconceptions. There is a big void in publishing amateur game books, although some of Lev Albur’s columns of amateur games from *Chess Life Magazine* were recently collected into the book *A Fresh Look at Chess*. One big difference between our books is that GM Albur’s work features move analysis by the players with the grandmaster’s insightful comments sprinkled about. My book is much denser: it features extensive master (and computer) analysis and a much larger dose of general improvement advice. I include much commentary on two big sources of problems – the thought process and time management – that are usually not covered in Lev’s column. Finally, the “Master vs. Amateur” genre includes several entries such as Euwe and Meiden’s classic *Chess Master vs. Chess Amateur*, Norwood’s *Grandmaster Meets Chess Amateur*, and the recent *Grandmaster Versus Amateur* edited by Aagaard and Shaw. The value of examining amateur play for the purpose of instruction is widely recognized.

I believe that any comprehensive course of chess study should include the review of many games by strong players, so that an inexperienced player would know what good moves and ideas looks like, and what he should be trying to do in typical positions. I studied at least two thousand games in my first few years of play and made expert after participating in tournaments for 3 years. Studying these master-level games helped me immensely and gave me a “chess conscience” where, when I ran across typical positions, I could hear those strong authors whispering in my ear, “In this type of position you should consider doing X.”

But that does not mean that there is not a large benefit to be had from seeing the mistakes of your peers. Many amateur tournament players are superior to the average chess book purchaser. Therefore, even though their mistakes may seem “basic” to a reader familiar with master play, they are the same mistakes that that reader, without taking remedial action, might keep making throughout his chess career. Just because a mistake is simplistic does not reduce its instructiveness; in fact, it is likely much more instructive and helpful than the more subtle strategic mistakes that often cause a grandmaster to lose.

I would estimate that 99% of games among players rated USCF/FIDE 1500 or below feature a safety mistake that would be either appropriate for a basic tactics book or too easy to be a puzzle in most “beginner” books. The day I wrote this Introduction, I reviewed a game by a student who aspires

to win the Under 1800 Section at the World Open and studies openings assiduously, where he left a pawn *en prise* on move six of a well-known opening. One theme of the book is that safety trumps strategy almost every time. First learn to keep your pieces safe and learn to spot when your opponent's pieces are not. Then strategy will become the tiebreak of equally safe moves.

Typical mid-level tournament players often play strategically interesting games. I have not included any games in this book by players rated below about 1000, where there is little rhyme or reason to the moves, and many are unsafe. Instead I chose typical tournament players, who know something about strategy yet ultimately fail because they don't handle (or recognize) critical positions very well. The skill I call *criticality assessment* is just that: the ability to recognize critical positions and give them the attention and time they deserve. Many of the mistakes by the amateurs in this book are due to either the inability to recognize a critical position or to the lack of desire to give those critical decisions some serious thought.

All serious chess games are played with a clock, and time management is a very important chess skill. Therefore, wherever possible, I have time-stamped the games by providing the number of minutes and seconds remaining after a player's move. Luckily, online games are always time-stamped, and the reader can learn quite a bit just by following how the players used their time. When strong players play, they almost always save their time for complicated and critical positions and then use a copious amount. But you won't find such wise time management as much in amateur play, and that's one of the major themes of this book. Most of the included over-the-board games were not time-stamped and, occasionally, I have lost the time notation on a particular move in a time-stamped game.

In several games, one or both of the players played too fast, and this became a major theme of the game; in others the player(s) played too slowly and got into unnecessary time trouble. When these were the dominant themes in the game – yielding instructional value – they were emphasized accordingly. In most cases, the reader can see the time-stamping and judge for himself the importance of how the player used his time, based on the time control and the position.

A bad move made after 10 seconds' thought is not the same mistake as the identical move played after 10 minutes' thought, although the error is manifested by the same bad outcome. We will try to get inside the players' minds – sometimes made easier by a post-game interview! – and show the reader what may have caused those players to play too fast or too slow. Hopefully, an astute reader (even those less astute than “Megamind”) can learn from these mistakes to minimize the likelihood that similar errors will occur in their games, too.

All of the games in his book were analyzed by a chess engine, usually *Houdini 2*, which is rated by computer rating services at about 3200. I feel the reader has the right to get as close as possible to the “truth” of the position, as best we can determine it. On many moves the reader will run across sentences similar to, “Best is 17. ♖g4” – that's almost never my opinion; you can read it as, “*Houdini* calculates that 17. ♖g4 is best,” or I might explicitly describe it that way. However, just regurgitating computer analysis is not very instructive. You won't find a high percentage of moves where the only annotation is, “White can't play ♙xf7+ because of ... ♔xf7 ♕h5+ g6!!-+.” While I will often provide helpful analysis and the computer's evaluation, *most of the instructional value should be in the supporting text, and not in the computer lines*. Of course, when the position is tactical and safety is paramount, the computer's almost perfect insight into the best play – on offense and on defense – is

often both aesthetic and instructional. You can often skip the computer analysis if you don't find reviewing it to be fun, but most of the notes are short and following them can be instructive.

Unlike Chernev's *Logical Chess Move by Move* or McDonald's *The Art of Logical Chess Thinking*, I won't comment on *every* move, but I did comment on a higher percentage than you would see in Karpov's *My Best Games* or Fischer's *My Sixty Memorable Games*. My comments will include fairly light supporting analysis and text intended to explain what the player is trying to do, sprinkled in with a generous helping of general principles and suggestions for improvement. Therefore, my book belongs in the "instructional" category along with the Chernev and McDonald books.

I have a wealth of award-winning follow-up material via my *Chess Café* column, "Novice Nook" (which is not just for novices!) linked at http://danheisman.home.comcast.net/~danheisman/Articles/Novice_Nook_Links.htm. Occasionally I address subjects that are quite interesting and relevant to the position, but for which a full discussion is beyond the scope of the book. In those instances, I have referred the reader to the appropriate column online. For example, "My Top Tips for Chess Improvement" are at <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman133.pdf>, and "Don't Know What to Do? Try Dan's Dirty Dozen" at <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman129.pdf>. However, *understanding the material never requires the reader to consult an outside source; this book is completely self-contained*. The references are for your additional reading pleasure only.

For readers worried about online cheating: that is always possible, but if an opponent cheated on every game they could win all the time, so their rating would reflect that. I think anyone reading through the games in this book, many of which were played online, would quickly find that their instructive – and sometimes embarrassing – mistakes would provide strong evidence that neither side received illegal aid!

This book was inspired by my Internet Chess Club (ICC) video series, "Improve Your Chess." At the time of this writing there are 160 videos and growing; most are amateur games. For this series, members would submit games and I would pick one to annotate for the weekly video. The submitted games did not have to be played on the ICC, but they had to be slow games. When ICC games are included, most of the ratings shown are ICC Standard, which run about 150 points higher than comparable USCF/FIDE ratings. So an ICC rating of 1750 would be approximately USCF 1600 and our USCF limit of 2200 maximum for amateur would be raised to about 2300+ ICC Standard.

Many of the games included here were selected as the "most instructive" from my video series, but I have used other sources to provide several encounters that were not in the series. In addition, I did not consult any of the transcripts from the video series. All annotations were completely made "from scratch" for this book. If a video emphasized a specific aspect of a game, it is entirely possible that different and/or additional aspects were highlighted in the text. Therefore, even a reader who has watched every "Improve Your Chess" video will find a large proportion of new material in this book.

Because many of these games were submitted to me by the winner, it is apparent that some of the participants were trying harder than others. If they had known that their game would be published, even anonymously, they might have made a better effort. But that's one of the many points of this book:

good players don't "turn it on and turn it off," deciding when to try their best. You don't find Yasser Seirawan, Boris Spassky, or Magnus Carlsen saying, "Yes, I played terrible that game but I wasn't really trying." One of the lessons learned in becoming a good chess player is that you primarily want to have only two gears: try your best, or resign. If you want to play quickly, play speed games; learning how to consistently best use your time resource is an important part of becoming a good player.

I have classified the games into five chapters, based on the following rough categories:

- 1. Too Fast** – games in which one or both of the players played too fast for the time control and/or position
- 2. Too Slow** – games in which one or both players played too slow for the time control and/or position
- 3. Endgame Mishaps** – games which are instructive throughout but particularly feature interesting and instructive endgames
- 4. A Variety of Instructive Play** – games with various themes: see-saw play, bad technique, opening development and tactical issues, etc.
- 5. Disaster Strikes** – games that were decided suddenly when one player made a critical bad decision

The decision to put a game into one chapter or another was often not clear-cut. A game found in the Endgame chapter could just as easily have been placed under "Too Fast" if the instructive endgame was affected by fast play. Annotation was not limited to play that represented the chapter heading – if a move was instructive for an entirely different reason, that move was annotated just as seriously as the ones reflecting chapter themes.

I occasionally included some lighthearted comments: "If I played this fast, I might be as low-rated as White..." Hopefully, the reader will forgive the rare levity and find the annotations both fun and instructive.

Howard Stern was a wonderful student, fun to work with, understanding, and he never got upset with my constructive criticism – he knew I was there to help him as best I could. During his four-and-a-half year chess career, he made his way up from beginner to solid mid-amateur (1800 ICC Standard), playing some memorable games along the way. In this book, all the names have been removed to protect the guilty – and the innocent! – but it would not surprise me if there were a few instructive games by Howard sprinkled inside...

Chapter 1: **Too Fast**

TOO FAST

In chess, you are given two main resources: your pieces and time on your clock. Many spend a lifetime studying the former, but don't give a second thought to learning how to wisely use the latter.

Time management is an integral part of chess. There are two major areas: how you use your time for an entire game, and how you allocate time to each move. Both are important. To try your best you aim to use almost all your time each game. Players who play too slow for the situation often get into unnecessary time trouble and have to play too quickly in critical situations. But the majority of amateurs play too quickly – they buy all kinds of chess books, but then wonder why they aren't much better after consistently spending 17 seconds on moves in a long time-control game. *You can't play what you don't see*, and you won't see anything if you don't take time to look.

This chapter features games where one or both players played too fast, and examines the sometimes silly decisions that result from this lack of thought. The second chapter addresses games where players moved too slowly, and the perils they faced later in the game when they really needed their time. In my experience, about 60% of tournament and Internet Chess Club (ICC) players rated below 1600 FIDE play too fast, about 20% play too slow, and only about 20% seem to use about all their time each game without consistently getting into unnecessary time trouble.

Tournament (and much Internet) chess almost always features time controls with increments or time delays. In an "N M" (e.g. 45 30) time control each side has N minutes to play the entire game, plus an increment of M seconds added after each move. In this book, the time remaining for each player (if available) is shown after each move; the great majority of the games are "time-stamped" this way. The amount of time taken by the player will often tell a crucial tale about how the game was played, and provide major insight into what the players were (or were not!) thinking.

Until you are rated about 1700, time management is one of the three big areas to concentrate on for chess improvement, the others being safety (tactics) and activity (using all your pieces all the time). The two key skills to work on are analysis and evaluation.

GAME 1: WHITE 1525 – BLACK 1587

Internet Chess Club 2012

50 minutes with a 50-second increment

French Defense, Tarrasch Variation

1.e4 50:43

e6 50:48

2. d4 51:27

d5 51:36

3. ♖d2 52:06

...

The characteristic move of the Tarrasch Variation. White has three major alternatives. Among these 3. ♖c3 (Classical) is by far the most popular. According to French Defense maven IM John Watson, the Classical is chosen in about 50% of international games, 3.e5 (Advance Variation) is played in about 25%, and the Tarrasch also about 25%. The third alternative, 3.exd5 (Exchange Variation), is rare at the master level due to its drawish nature, so strong players avoid it, but it is seen quite often among amateurs.

3...

♗f6 52:23

One of the two major lines against the Tarrasch, the other being 3...c5. But there are many minor variations (3... ♖c6, 3... ♗e7, 3...a6), and Black could also transpose into a Rubinstein with 3... dxe4.

4.e5 52:34

♗fd7 53:08

5. ♗d3 52:41

c5 53:51

The necessary pawn break. The famous Pointing Rule states that, *If the four central d- and e-pawns are all locked together, then place your hand across your two pawns. The direction they point indicates both where your preferable break move lies and the direction you wish to attack in.*

In the current position White's d- and e-pawns point kingside, so his break move is the eventual f4-f5 and he wishes to attack kingside. Black's d- and e-pawns point queenside so his break is ...c7-c5 and he wants to attack queen-side. Normally in the French, White has more space, but Black can more quickly achieve his break and start pressuring "his side" of the board.

Inexperienced players who don't know about pawn breaks often place their pieces, especially knights, in front of the break moves. This inevitably results in a cramped position where they sometimes complain, "I don't know what to do." That complaint is reasonable – there is often not much they can do once the damage is done, except learn about pawn breaks so that in future games they can use this idea to bring space and activity to their army.

6.c3 53:19

...

This move is almost automatic among stronger players. When Black breaks with ...c7-c5, he is threatening to weaken White's pawn center with a later ...cxd4, so White hurries to have a pawn that can recapture on d4, thus fortifying e5 and his space advantage. If White delays this action even by one move, it is usually correct for Black to play ...cxd4 and force White to capture on d4 with a piece. This is one of the key ideas for Black in the French, and one reason why players who understand this for Black often get very good games quickly with the French against weaker opponents playing White.

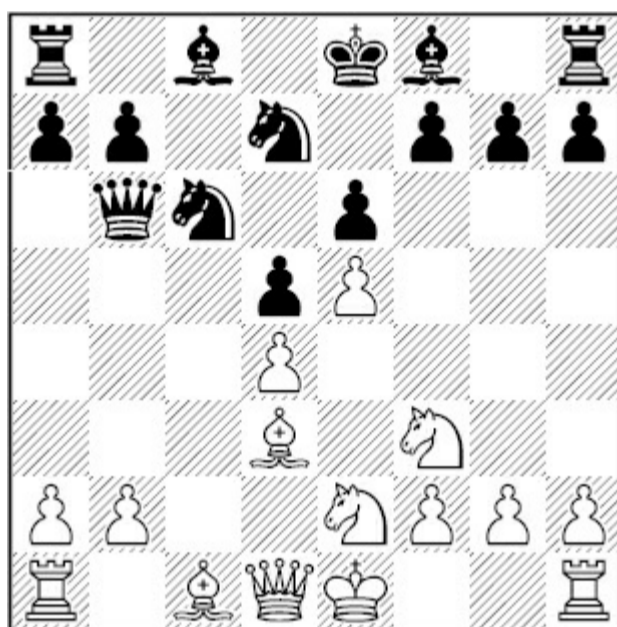
6... ♖c6 54:36
 7. ♗e2 53:52 ...

This is the main line. There is also a gambit line with 7. ♗f3, where White eventually gives up his d4-pawn for development, in a very similar manner to the Milner-Barry Gambit in the Advance French.

7... ♔b6 54:43

This is an older main line. More popular recently is the move order 7...cxd4 8.cxd4 f6, using the secondary break move to attack White's center.

8. ♗f3 52:30 cxd4 54:42
 9.cxd4 52:28 ...



Black to play after 9.cxd4

9... f6 55:23

Black thematically breaks again. The other major possibility is the old line 9... ♕b4+ 10. ♕d2 ♕xd2+ 11. ♖xd2 ♖b4, forcing an endgame that is slightly better for White. Note that after 11... ♖b4 White can castle or he can keep the king in the center and recapture after ... ♖xd2+ with ♗xd2 since the center is stable and, with the queens off the board, the king should be both safe and active in the center.

10.exf6 52:12 ...

Usually White captures on the ...f7-f6 break in the French since guarding e5 is problematic. Computer engine *Houdini* agrees, giving about a quarter-pawn preference to this move over the second best, 10.O-O. In return for giving up his center, White will get a semi-open e-file with a

somewhat backward black e-pawn. (My definition of a backward pawn is *a pawn that, if you removed everything but the pawns from the board, has legal moves, but can't continue to advance safely*. After 10... ♖xf6 Black cannot play ...e6-e5 without help from the other pieces, so the pawn on e6 is backward. Interested readers will find much more on understanding positional features in my book *Elements of Positional Evaluation*.) Experience has shown that Black in turn gets active play for his pieces. I have played both sides of similar positions successfully.

10...

♖xf6 55:35

The standard recapture. The other possibility, 10...gxf6?!, creates more pawns in the center and makes the e-pawn less backward, but leaves Black's position, including his king, a little loose after 11.O-O. *Houdini* goes so far as to evaluate White's position after 11.O-O as already possibly winning!

11.O-O 52:15

♗d6 56:12

The most active square for the bishop. Black does not have to play the passive 11...♗e7, worrying about guarding the knight on f6 after a later ♗g5 because after Black castles kingside, the active rook on f8 will join the g7-pawn in guarding that knight.

12.a3 49:55

...

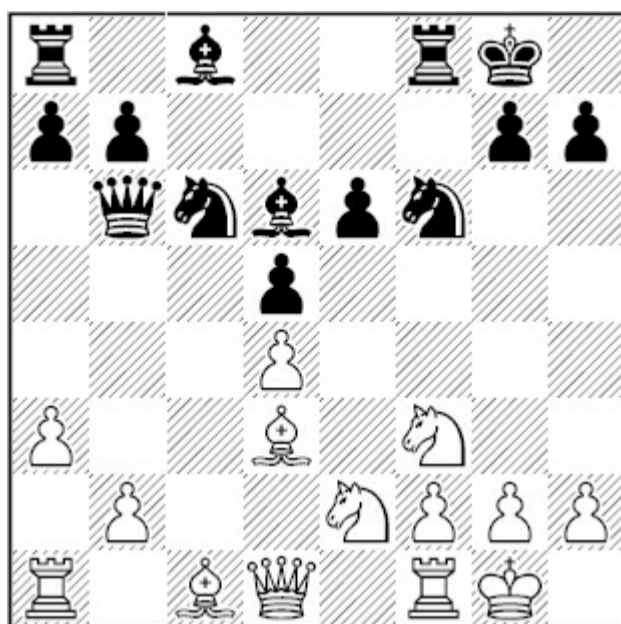
This is a book line but, as you can tell from White's time stamp, this is where he had exhausted his book knowledge. Both players have done a very good job navigating the opening. A crucial part of the game often begins when the pieces begin to clash and the players have to rely on their own analysis.

After the game, White said that he was worried that if he developed his queen bishop (the main lines, such as 12.♗g5), Black might be able to snatch the pawn on b2. While that is a legitimate concern, both grandmaster theory and computer analysis (which are merging these days) show that 12.♗g5 ♖xb2 is risky after 13.♖b1, e.g. 13...♗a3 14.♗f4 with active play. But we can't blame White for being concerned, since this is not a "refutation" and White has to rely on his evaluative judgment to see if this type of line is worth risking a pawn. Erring on the side of caution is not a bad idea, especially if the concern is losing material!

12...

O-O 56:44

Black continues to play quickly, taking only 28 seconds for this reasonable move. At some point Black got past his book opening knowledge and had to start thinking. At that point it would be prudent to slow down, take time to look around to find better moves, and double-check the safety of the moves he is considering. *If you wish to be a better player, you have to find better moves, and if you don't take time to look for better moves you can't play them.*



White to play after 12...O-O

If you wish to be a better player, you have to find better moves, and if you don't take time to look for better moves you can't play them.

13. ♖c2 48:40

...

This move allows Black to eliminate his backward pawn with 13...e5! Therefore, the computer prefers the solid 13. ♖c3 when 13...e5!? allows the combination 14.dxe5 ♗xe5 15. ♗xd5! ♗xd5 16. ♗xe5 ♕xe5 17. ♖h5! (17. ♕c4? ♕xh2+! is better for Black) 17... ♕xh2+ (Black is losing a piece one way or another due to the double threats to e5 and h7) 18. ♖xh2 and White stands well. We can't blame White for missing that! I might, too. Note that 13. ♖c3 ♗xd4?? 14. ♗xd4 ♖xd4?? loses to the well-known discovered attack 15. ♕xh7+ and 16. ♖xd4. If you aren't familiar with that trap, I suggest repetitious study of easy tactics books like Ward's *Starting Out: Chess Tactics and Checkmates*, Bain's *Chess Tactics for Students*, and my *Back to Basics: Tactics*. Treat learning elementary tactics puzzles like the multiplication tables – aim for quick recognition rather than the ability to solve.

13...

e5! 56:30

Black actually took over a minute for this move – don't forget to add the 50-second increment – so his extra thought paid off.

14.dxe5 46:00

...

Slowly played, but perhaps White could have decided more quickly if he had known a general principle that often comes in handy in these situations: *If your opponent breaks with a center (d- or e-) pawn and, if you capture with a pawn, he can't recapture with a pawn, then capturing is usually correct.* In positions similar to this, it is dangerous to continually allow your opponent the option of

playing a future ...e5-e4, chasing away the key defending knight on f3 and starting active kingside play.

14... ♖xe5 56:51
15. ♗xe5 46:00 ...

The best way to stop the dual threat of 15... ♗xf3 and 15... ♗xd3, winning the bishop pair.

15... ♗xe5 57:36

Botvinnik's Rule for opening time management states, "For a normal opening, take about 20% of your time for your first 15 moves." Clearly, for highly tactical openings that quickly take you out of "book," more time should be taken. However, this rule was formulated before increments were standard and, in a game with a large increment (50 seconds), the math works out that Botvinnik's Rule gives a bit too much time for the opening. It would imply that in this game the players can, on the average, have somewhat more than 80% of their time remaining on move 15, which works out to 40+ minutes. Despite the extra leeway, Black is still playing way too quickly, while White is probably in the rough ballpark of reasonable speed, given the increment and the number of book moves.

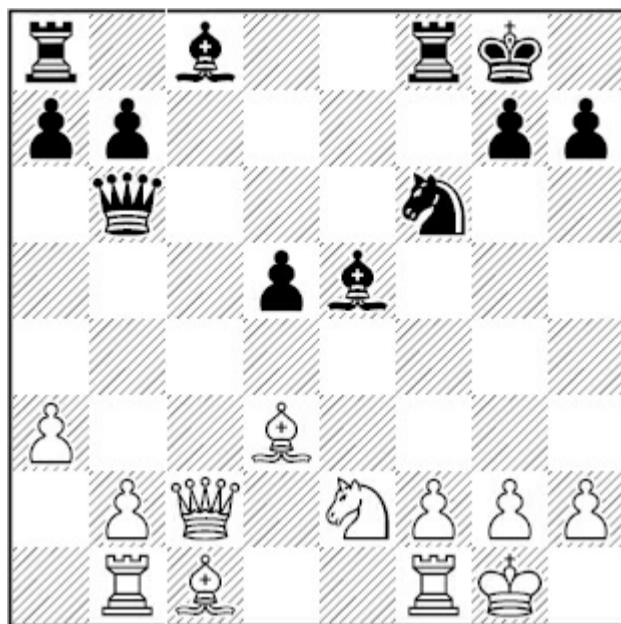
Botvinnik's Rule for opening time management: "For a normal opening, take about 20% of your time for your first 15 moves."

After the exchanges, Black has freed his game and achieved at least full equality. I believe someone once stated, "If Black achieves easy equality then the momentum is on his side, and both players will feel that Black has the advantage."

16. ♖b1? 43:56 ...

White is floundering for a way to complete his development. With the e5-bishop bearing down on b2, he conservatively overprotects b2 so as to free his bishop. However, *Houdini* notes that the much better 16. ♗f4 is safe, the tactical justification being 16... ♗xb2 17. ♗xb2 ♗xb2 18. ♖a2! and the bishop is trapped, but then Black can play 18... ♗h5! with equality after 19. ♖xb2 ♗xf4 20. ♗xf4 ♖xf4 21. ♖e1 when White's active pieces keep him level despite his pawn deficit. This is not an easy line for White to find, and not an easy decision to choose this line even if you could analyze and visualize the final position correctly.

Even the prophylactic 16.h3 is better than the passive 16. ♖b1? which allows Black to launch a strong kingside attack.



Black to play after 16. ♖b1?

16...

♙xh2+? 54:05

The right idea but the wrong move. Black gets some credit for recognizing the criticality of this move and taking – for him – a “very long” four minutes for this aggressive choice. But the complexity and criticality (in this case a potentially big difference) between moves like 16... ♙xh2+ and the correct idea 16... ♗g4! would have justified his taking even longer. I suspect that he spent almost all his time trying to calculate 16... ♙xh2+ without realizing he had a better, and simpler, move. Sometimes a player (even someone strong and experienced) can fall in love with a move or idea and spend considerable time on it without taking a little time to look around and realize that a better alternative might be available.

It turns out that 16... ♗g4!, with an unstoppable double attack on both h2 and f2, wins fairly easily:

- 17.h3 ♖xf2! and Black crashes through. This is true on most moves that save h2;
- 17. ♙xh7+ ♖h8 and White has no defense, e.g. 18. ♙e3 ♙xh2+ (now!) 19. ♖h1 ♗f6 with a winning attack.

17. ♖xh2 43:55

...

Sometimes a player (even someone strong and experienced) can fall in love with a move or idea and spend considerable time on it, without taking a little time to look around and realize that a better alternative might be available.

I have noticed an interesting reaction among inexperienced players when someone makes a sacrifice similar to a classical bishop sacrifice. Instead of taking sufficient time on the previous move

to see if this move should be allowed, they are surprised and take a long time deciding what to do about the “Greek Gift.” But calling this a Greek Gift is not apropos. That’s because *in chess this sacrifice almost always has to be accepted*, while the implication of a Trojan Horse is that (in real life) such a gift should *not* be accepted!

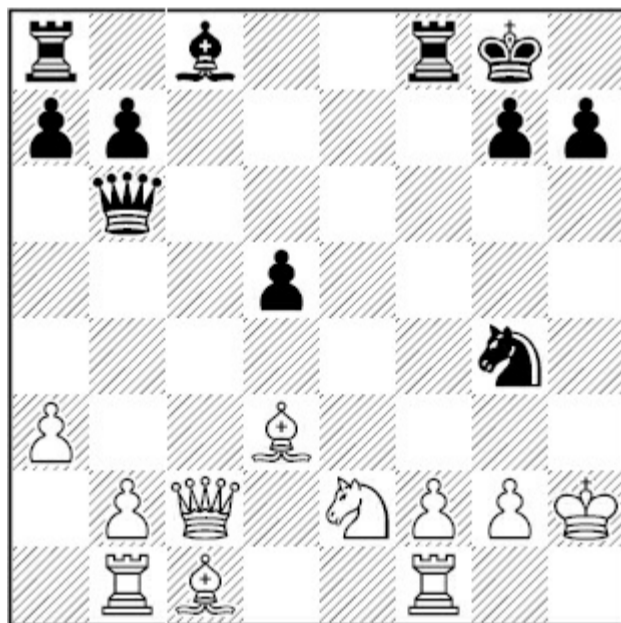
The logic for accepting the sacrifice is fairly easy: if you don’t capture the proffered bishop, then your opponent will be ahead in material and have a strong attack anyway. Therefore, since he is going to have a strong attack in either case, it makes sense to capture the bishop. That way you are ahead a piece, and you have some booty that you can possibly throw back at your opponent later to give some flexibility in fighting off the attack. Since strong players can win almost any game where they are ahead a pawn and have a strong attack, it makes sense, in a theoretical way, that the defender has to take the piece and see if he can hang on.

Admittedly, there are exceptions where capturing the piece leads to an immediate forced mate or to the win of enormous amounts of material, but these situations are in the minority and should be fairly easily spotted. The bottom line is that when your opponent, in an otherwise even material situation, plays a move like 16... ♔xh2+, unless you see something immediately disastrous on the capture, you may as well not take too much time and accept the piece, and subsequently spend whatever time is necessary to defend ferociously.

17...

♖g4+ 54:48

Question: What should White do now?



White to play after 17... ♖g4+

As you might expect from the position, this will be one of White’s most critical moves in the game – it is a more critical decision than whether he should have accepted the bishop on the previous move. Yet White, normally a slow player and having 44 minutes plus a 50-second increment to fall back upon, took only seven seconds (!) on this move:

18. ♔g1?? 44:38

...

Delving into why White played 18.♔g1 so fast, and what he should have done instead, hits at the heart of a big reason why amateurs are amateurs and identifies a key change many need to make in order to improve.

After the game I asked White why he played his move so quickly and he replied, “*It looked too dangerous to go out to 18.♔g3.*” In other words, he made his move quickly on a general principle: it is too dangerous to expose your king in the middle of the board with so many pieces around. I call this thought process error “*Hand-waving*” – that is, *using general principles to make a move in a position that calls for careful analysis.*

Hand-waving is an epidemic among weaker players, so it’s very helpful to identify it when it occurs so others can be aware and avoid making the same mistake. Hand-waving gets you in the habit of not doing critical analysis when necessary, even in long time-control games when plenty of time is available. Thinking this way in a blitz game is often not only acceptable, but necessary. However, in a slow game, failing to analyze (and, as a bad side effect, avoiding practicing how to analyze) in analytical positions not only avoids the work that is necessary to play strongly, but often points to the wrong answer.

In this position, White had a choice of four moves: 18.♔g1, 18.♔g3, 18.♔h1, and 18.♔h3. While one of these, 18.♔h3?, can be immediately dismissed due to the discovered check 18...♗e3+ winning White’s queen, it is not immediately clear which of the other three is best, especially since 17...♗g4 attacks the f2 square three times and it is currently guarded only once. *The only way to differentiate among those moves is to check carefully what might happen after each one. The general principle might tell you which move to analyze first, but only concrete analysis can tell you which move to play* (for more on this subject, see “Principles of Analytical Efficiency” at <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman103.pdf>).

It turns out that 18.♔h1?! is best met by 18...♗xf2+ 19.♖xf2 (forced) and now both 19...♖xf2 and 19...♗xf2 give Black a good attack, e.g. 19...♖xf2 20.♗d2 ♗g4 21.♗f4 ♖c8 22.♗xh7+ ♔h8 23.♗d3 ♗h6+ 24.♔g1 ♖xf4! 25.♗xf4 ♗xf4 with a good position for Black.

But ironically the “exposed” 18.♔g3! is best. If Black tries 18...♖xf2 then 19.♗f4 is solid and should win for White. On the other hand, 18...♗xf2 19.♗xh7+ ♔h8 20.♗f4 wins for White. The other forcing move, 18...♗d6+, only helps White after 19.f4. Black’s best try is the subtle 18...h5!, but even then 19.♗g5 leaves White solidly ahead, admittedly with a long tough fight on his hands. So it turns out that the difference is that on g1 White will be exposed to a monstrous discovered attack, while on g3 the king is relatively safe!

White may not have found 18.♔g3! had he taken more than 7 seconds and not hand-waved but, while practice does not make perfect, practice sure makes better. This was an excellent opportunity to practice some very critical analysis!

18...

♗xf2? 54:27

Black returns the favor, but he played a super-critical move in a complicated position in 71 seconds. If he had played the correct 18...♖xf2! in that same short span of time, at his skill level that

would have to be attributed mostly to luck, since he, like White, is facing some crucial analysis but instead is playing quickly. If Black could trade in his extra time for cash at the end of the game, I guess playing quickly would be worth it but, since he can't, why not spend it here, where he needs it? *Houdini* evaluates the difference between 18... ♖xf2 (about equal) and 18... ♗xf2 as 17 pawns, so that's pretty critical! *Thought process and time management are not only interrelated, but also crucial aspects in anyone's desire to play good chess.*

Black can read all the opening and endgame books he wishes, but if he does not consistently take time to find the best move he can in critical and/or complicated positions, he will never become a really strong player.

18... ♗xf2, threatening multiple discovered checks, wins – e.g., 19. ♗xf2 ♕xf2+ 20. ♔h1 ♕h4+ 21. ♕g1 ♕e1#; or 19. ♗d4 to block the discovery, but then 19... ♗xc2 just wins the queen and more; or 19. ♗xh7+ just delaying the above 19... ♗h8 and White has only temporarily postponed the above disasters, e.g. 20. ♕g6 ♗xf1+ 21. ♕xf1 ♕f2#.

19. ♗xh7+ (40:20) ...

The difference between 18... ♗xf2 and 18... ♗xf2 is that, without a black rook on f2, White can play his own discovery (along the second rank) and blockage (along the a7-g1 diagonal) with the cute 19. ♗d4!. Then Black has nothing left but 19... ♕xd4 20. ♗xf2 ♗xf2 21. ♗xh7+ ♗h8 22. ♕xf2 ♕xf2+ 23. ♕xf2 ♕xh7 when White is down a pawn, but his active pieces after 24. ♗e3 ♗d7 25. ♗c1 ♗c6 26. ♗h1+ ♕g8 27. ♗d4 and opposite-colored bishops give him excellent drawing chances. That's a difficult line to find and White's move 19. ♗xh7+ is reasonable, second best. However, all these lines show that Black's attack after 18... ♗xf2? is not nearly as dangerous as after 18... ♗xf2.

19... ♕h8 55:13

20. ♗g3 38:43 ...

The discovery can't be avoided: 20. ♗d4 fails to 20... ♗h3+! 21. g3 ♗xf1+ 22. ♕xf1 ♗xh3+ 23. ♕g1 ♕xd4+, but the best defense was 20. ♗f4! when after 20... ♗e4+ blocking the queen guarding h7, White has 21. ♕h2 ♕xh7 22. ♗e3 ♕d6+ 23. ♕g1 and he is a little better off than in the game. 20. ♗g3 is, once more, his second-best try.

20... ♗e4+ 47:33

Black finally slows down to look for the winning discovery, but it's too late! *Don't wait for things to go wrong to slow down and try to make them right.* It would have been better for Black to have spent some of his extensive time and found 18... ♗xf2! rather than waiting until 20... ♗e4+. In chess, as in life, sometimes when your chance comes you have to take it because it may not come again.

Don't wait for things to go wrong to slow down and try to make them right.

In a manner similar to the note above on 20. ♖f4, Black can now “only” block the b1-h7 diagonal and win back his piece.

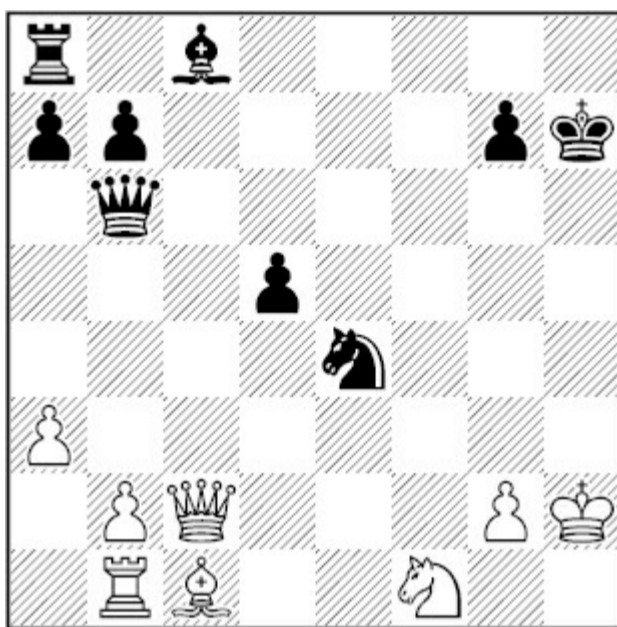
21. ♔h2 35:15

♖xf1+ 47:31

This trade is necessary to give Black time to capture the bishop.

22. ♗xf1 35:15

♔xh7 47:46



White to play after 22... ♔xh7

Things have finally settled down. Black is ahead a solid pawn with a lot of work ahead of him.

23. ♗e3 34:45

♔d6+ 48:13

24. ♔g1 35:12

♗f5 48:25

Black finally has some time to finish developing his queenside, which he correctly does.

25. ♖c1 30:28

...

If White did not wish to trade rooks, he could have avoided it with 25. ♖d1. However, in this situation trading rooks is not detrimental to his defensive chances, despite the strong guideline that *when ahead pieces, trade pieces but not necessarily pawns*, and the corollary, *when behind pieces, avoid the trade of pieces, but try to trade off pawns*. Black is only ahead a pawn, but trading pieces is still generally very good for him. It just happens that White has enough pieces remaining on the board that trading rooks is not especially dangerous.

25...

♖c8 46:45

26. ♔d1 30:17

♖xc1 43:47

Black took about four times as long deciding on this simple trade as he took to play 18... ♖xf2?. Maybe in this Internet game he was distracted or got something to eat...

When ahead pieces, trade pieces but not necessarily pawns, and when behind pieces, avoid trading pieces, but try to trade off pawns.

27. ♖xc1 24:31 ...

...and White took more than 50 (!) times as long to decide which way to recapture here as he did playing 18. ♔g1??.

Armed with this insightful time-stamping data, it's no wonder I sometimes tell students who use their time this way, "You've got chess backwards. You are supposed to take your time on complicated, critical moves, and play the other moves relatively more quickly, saving time for when you need it." GM Jonathan Rowson wrote something similar in *The Seven Deadly Chess Sins* (I paraphrase): "If you take more time on a move your analysis will improve, but taking more time won't improve your judgment." So take less time on judgment moves and more time on analytical moves.

Houdini thinks 27. ♖xc1 is slightly better, but if the decision is that close, taking almost seven minutes to choose will almost never be worth it. *Once you determine that a decision is close, and likely non-critical, that's a red flag that taking extra time is not wise.*

27... ♖g6 39:57
28. ♖e3 22:13 a6 40:03

Although placing pawns on the opposite color of an opponent's bishop is logical, *Houdini* thinks 28...b6 is slightly preferable. But preferable only by a tenth of a pawn, not comparable to the 17-pawn mistake Black made at move 18! *You should not be penny-wise and pound-foolish by working on your subtle problems when you get the most bang for your buck from fixing your big problems – usually those involving safety.*

29. ♖d2 21:55 ...

White again offers a trade of pieces when behind, but it's not so bad because he is only down a pawn and an endgame with bishops of opposite colors looms. It is very helpful to understand the most common exceptions to the "trade down when winning" principle. Trading towards bishops of opposite colors is a strong exception, since that is the most difficult endgame to win when ahead a pawn or two – or sometimes three!

Once you determine that a decision is close, and likely non-critical, that's a red flag that taking extra time is not wise.

29...

♔g3 40:00

Black says “No thanks” to the trade and instead moves his queen onto a threatening square. White now has to save his bishop.

30. ♖f1 20:56

...

Defends the bishop and attacks the queen. *Houdini* says that 30. ♖f3 may have been microscopically better than the text move, but such small differences in anyone’s evaluation, even a 3200-rat-ed computer, are not to be trusted. Let’s just say White has nothing clearly better than 30. ♖f1.

30...

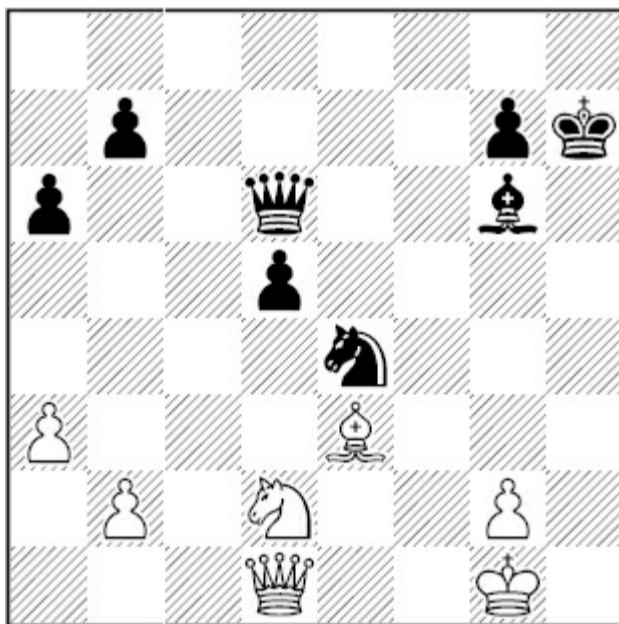
♔d6 39:26

Black retreats the queen to the same square from which it came. This could either be a draw offer (the position has to be repeated three times, not two), an attempt to gain time on the clock (unlikely), or just an attempt to look around before trying something different in the effort to win.

31. ♖d2 19:31

...

Why not? White is the one down the pawn and struggling to draw. If repeating the position is not clearly a mistake allowing the opponent a second chance at a missed opportunity (and here it is not a mistake), why not repeat? *Houdini* analyzes 31. ♔g4 as slightly better than 31. ♖d2, but I probably would have played 31. ♖d2 rather quickly to see if Black has the wished-for peaceful intent.



Black to play after 31. ♖d2

31...

♔g3 40:04

Played almost immediately. This is a good sign for White! *Houdini* thinks that Black would have

some pull after placing a different piece on that square, 31... ♖g3[≡].

32. ♖f1 20:04 ...

White is sensing this, too, and plays quickly.

32... ♙d6 40:36

Settling matters peaceably.

33. ♖d2 20:37 ½-½

All the fireworks took place earlier. I guess Black decided that it was not worth trying to win, although he has 80% of his time still available. This is the type of position where good players with Black would try to grind down the best of opponents with the feeling, “What have I got to lose? I am ahead a pawn, have plenty of time, and the chances of me winning are a lot better than my chances of losing. At the very least I’ll get a draw, so I have nothing to lose playing on for a while.”

One of the few draws in the book. A positive aspect to amateur games: they are often so naturally unbalanced that “too many draws” is not a problem for the spectators.

GAME 2: WHITE 1422 – BLACK 1386
Internet Chess Club 2012
45 minutes with a 45-second increment
Sicilian Defense, Closed Variation

1.e4 0:45:34 c5 0:45:31

2. ♖c3 0:46:05 ...

White has three possible main continuations in mind with this move:

- Play 3.g3 with the “Closed” variation (as in the game);
- Play 3.f4 with the Grand Prix Attack; or
- Play a Sicilian Chameleon with 3. ♖ge2 and possible transposition into an Open Sicilian with a later d2-d4.

2... ♖c6 0:45:52

The most common and flexible response. Hard-core Najdorf and Dragon players often play 2...d6 in hopes of transposing into their favorite Open variation.

3.g3 0:46:44 e6 0:45:11

Usually this is played on the second move as a secondary response to 2... ♖c6, but not in conjunction with it. The idea is to play ...e7-e6 and a quick ...d7-d5. However, a student told me he owned a repertoire book which recommended this solid, but slightly passive way of playing against the Closed.

4. ♗g2 0:47:14

5. d3 0:46:48

6. f4 0:47:10

d6 0:43:22

♗f6 0:42:32

...

This move is characteristic of the main line 1.e4 c5 2. ♗c3 ♗c6 3.g3 g6 4. ♗g2 ♗g7 5.d3 d6 6.f4 but is certainly reasonable here too. *When you study a line and your opponent makes different moves, you can't always just play the same moves you would, since the position is different.* Stronger players may chuckle at such obvious advice, but I have seen this error quite frequently in amateur play. For more on this interesting problem, see my *Chess Café* article "Openings vs. Opening Systems" at <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman105.pdf>.

When you study a line and your opponent makes different moves, you can't always just play the same moves you would, since the position is different.

6...

e5?! 0:41:13

This move violates the most important opening principle, *Move every piece once before you move any piece twice, unless there is a tactic.* While this is a very important principle, it is not a strong one, meaning it has numerous exceptions. To learn more about this idea, refer to the article "Strong Principles vs. Important Principles," <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman91.pdf>.

Some of my students know this principle but believe that it does not apply to pawns, due to the ambiguous nature of the word "piece," but it usually does.

Chess is a game of skill and knowledge, and having just one without the other is not sufficient to make you a strong player.

While 6...e5 would be a reasonable (although not required) reaction if the pawn were on e7, here it amounts to a waste of time, while weakening d5 as a side effect. The computer agrees that the safest course was to continue the solid play with the mundane 6... ♗e7.

7.f5?! 0:41:55

...

White reacts strongly to Black's counter. 7.f5 is the type of move that works very well against amateurs, but not so well against strong opposition. The idea is that if Black plays passively – does not break with ...d6-d5 to counterattack in the center but instead just castles kingside – then White

can storm the fortress with an eventual g4-g5 and Black will wonder what he did wrong. Instead of the committal 7.f5, White would probably do better to continue moving each piece once with the solid developing move 7. ♖f3.

It is interesting to note that White used about six minutes for this move, but hardly ever used more than his 45-second increment on any other move, making him one of the consistently fastest players in the book – not a great distinction. My guess is that at this point he probably took a break to answer the phone or get a sandwich! Isn't time-stamping wonderful?

7...

a6 40:11

Although this is hardly a normal Closed Sicilian position, if Black were familiar with how he normally attacks queenside in this opening with ... ♖b8, ...b7-b5, ...a7-a5 and possibly ...b5-b4, that might suggest that ...a7-a6 is a waste of time since Black probably wants to play ...a7-a5 in one step.

In the Open Sicilian Black rarely plays ... ♖b8 and ...b7-b5 and ...a7-a5, but instead pushes the pawn onto a6, setting up a later ...b7-b5. In this case ...a7-a6 not only supports ...b7-b5, but also protects the queen on the flexible square c7 from attacks with ♗b5. However, this is not an Open Sicilian (with which Black may have been more familiar), the queen probably is not going to c7 anytime soon, and therefore 7... ♗e7 or even 7... ♖b8 would be more consistent.

In this situation, knowledge of general patterns comes in very handy. *Chess is a game of skill and knowledge, and having just one without the other is not sufficient to make you a strong player.* Even Bobby Fischer and Garry Kasparov were not strong players the day they learned the moves, and brilliant people like Albert Einstein were not great chess players because they had no interest in taking time to learn the game well. Skill has to be developed and knowledge has to be obtained.

While I am often quoted as saying that *being a good analyst is the key skill in chess, and being a better analyst makes you a better player despite your chess knowledge*, it is also true that talented analysts become clearly better players as they learn more about the game. Working on your analysis skill is paramount, but that does not mean that chess knowledge is useless – quite the contrary.

8. ♗h3 0:41:25

...

A very strange move, moving a piece twice to put it on another blocked diagonal. This also takes the pressure off Black's pawn break ...d7-d5, so it's doubly bad. The position is not that critical, so the computer's evaluation of White's position after this move did not drop dramatically. So giving a "?" to 8. ♗h3 is justified in the human sense but, perhaps, not objectively. The consistent and aggressive 8.g4 would be a better attempt to punish Black's slow 7...a6. After 8.g4 *Houdini* gives White a "normal" opening advantage of about 0.15 pawns, as the two sides' inaccuracies even out.

8...

b5 0:39:18

How Dan Became a Master

The way I acquired chess knowledge was primarily through reading thousands of annotated games.

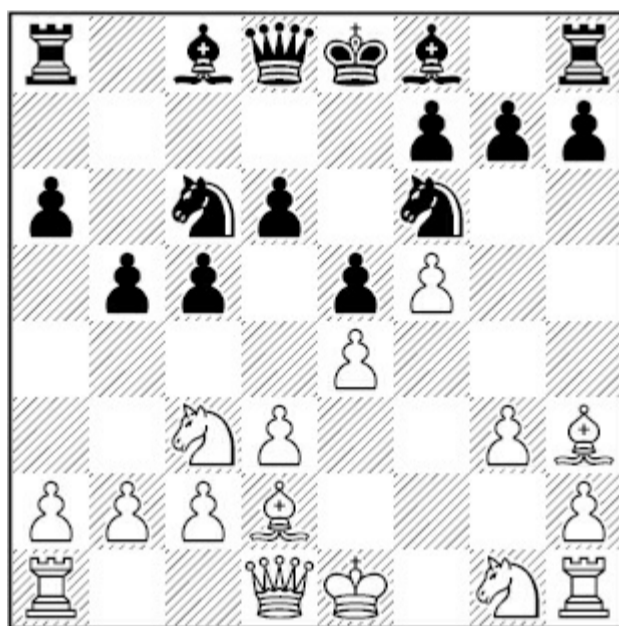
Those games covered the gamut of needed information, such as opening principles and common setups and how to play middlegames and endgames. I didn't as much rely on books that are specific to planning, endgames, or positional play, although I did have many separate books to augment the study of basic tactics and openings.

On the other hand, I learned how to analyze by playing many long time-control games slowly and then analyzing games with stronger players. That probably helped me more than simply reading all the annotated games, but I can't imagine I would be a master if I had done only one of the two.

Consistent and not bad. The computer thinks the developing 8...♗e7 is slightly more accurate.

9.♗d2 0:41:42

...



Black to play after 9.♗d2

White is obviously floundering a little with his two consecutive awkward bishop moves. I tell my students that *unless there is some sort of tactical threat along the diagonal e1-a5 or the bishop needs to get out of the way for a critical rook move (or protection), then developing the bishop by ♗d2 is probably incorrect*. This is no exception. *Houdini* recommends 9.♗g5, with the later idea of giving up the bishop pair by ♗xf6 to preserve control over d5. Note that this strategy, normally an idea an inexperienced player might reject since the bishop pair has an average bonus of about half a pawn, becomes more plausible due to White's committal 7.f5.

9...

c4 0:38:22

That's the fourth time that the players have moved a piece twice in the opening and we are only on move 9! Black was a student, so he was very familiar with the common advice about not moving

pieces twice. Among the four offending moves, only ...e6-e5 and f4-f5 were at all reasonable, and they were hardly best. This brings up an important point:

Unless you are a strong player, *if you know a principle that applies to your current position, you don't know another that would contradict it, and you don't have analysis that would show why it doesn't apply* (such as a tactic, which normally nullifies any general knowledge), *then just follow the principle!* You are much more likely to play good moves this way. Why so many inexperienced players like to treat simple positions as difficult, and want to “have a better idea” than the grandmasters or professional instructors is an interesting question. It's not only more effective, but faster than searching for exceptions, and slow players who need to speed up could do so by following this advice. (I delve into this and related issues in “Accidental and Purposeful Errors” at <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman97.pdf>.)

Just for fun, I let *Houdini* look at the top seven moves in this position and, up to depth 24, 9...c4 wasn't one of them. The top three were all very close: 9...b4, 9...♖e7, and 9...♖b7. 9...b4 does move a pawn twice, but it does not waste time since it is attacking a knight, and it helps challenge for control of the most important square on the board, d5.

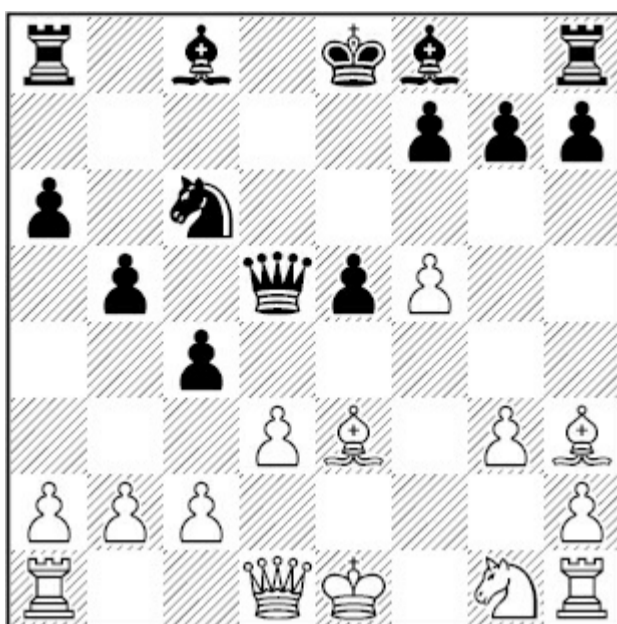
10. ♖e3? 0:41:20 ...

That makes five pieces moving twice. But 10. ♖e3? doesn't just lose time; it allows Black's pawn break on d5 to carry the additional threat of ...d5-d4, forking knight and bishop. Why is this important? Because it limits White's possible responses to ...d6-d5. When a player loses flexibility, the choices are limited and it makes the position more difficult to play safely.

10... ♖b7? 0:37:33

The computer points out how Black could have taken advantage of White's error. The following “break move” line is a typical example of why moves like 7.f5 are often ineffective, and also the basis for many of Black's missed opportunities later in this game: 10...d5! 11.exd5 (this reflects the lack of flexibility; White can't just ignore Black's threat of 11... d4) 11... ♖xd5 12. ♖xd5 ♗xd5:

Question: The rook is attacked on h1 – what should White do?



White to play after 12... ♖xd5 (analysis)

13. ♕d2! is best. Then the rook is poisoned, e.g. 13... ♖xh1 14. ♕g2 ♖xh2 15. ♕xc6+ winning the queen. Therefore better is 13... cxd3 14. ♕g2 e4 15. ♗e2 ♖xf5 16. cxd3 ♕b4. In this line the pawn on f5 is looking rather silly, and Black's play has made it into a liability rather than an asset.

11. ♕d2 0:40:56 ...

Reasonable, but even better is just capturing 11. dxc4. That would give the queen control over d5.

11... ♕e7 36:54

Black should continue 11... cxd3 12. cxd3 d5! similar to the above pawn breaks. *But once a player (not just an amateur) misses an idea in a position, it is less likely that he will find it in future moves, even if the position remains similar.* Nevertheless, strong players are much more likely to find something they missed on a previous move than are weak players. Strong players are not only more thorough, but usually more “open-minded” about realizing what they missed and quickly admitting their mistake by switching course when they find they could have done something better.

12. ♗f3 0:40:50 **cxd3! 0:36:44**

13. cxd3 0:41:15 **O-O 0:35:27**

Black does not realize why his previous move was good and misses – you guessed it – 13... d5!.

14. O-O 0:41:47 ♖c8 0:34:33

Even after White is castled and the rook safe from attacks by the queen on d5, 14... d5 is still best. Despite missing his best idea, Black's position is still fine.

15. ♕g2 0:41:42 ...

Around here 15.a4 is an interesting idea to break open the queenside and give the queen rook something to do.

15...

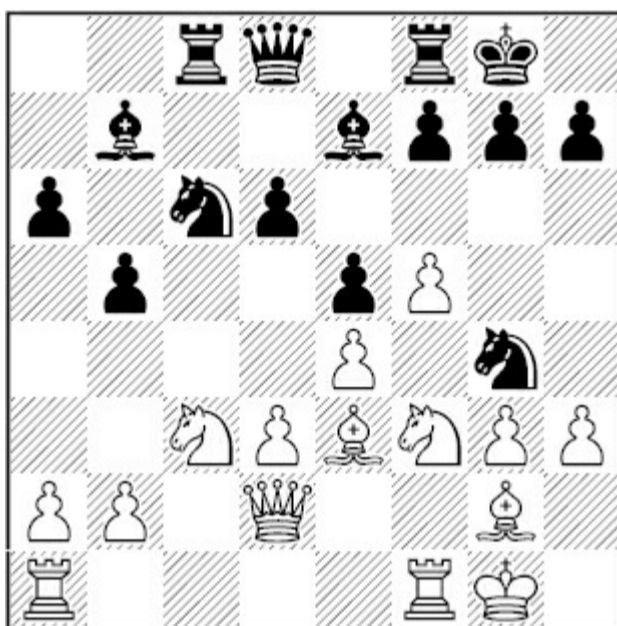
♖g4 0:34:24

Even with the bishop returning to g2, 15...d5 is still best.

16.h3 0:42:09

...

It is humorous that *Houdini* now calculates that White's best move was 16.♕h3! with rough equality. Who says computers have no sense of humor? With White's clock continuing to rise despite the non-trivial play, it indicates he is pretty much just making moves to see what will happen, and that philosophy is usually better left for speed games.



Black to play after 16.h3

16...

♖xe3 35:00

Black grabs the bishop pair, worth on the average about half a pawn. If you are not aware of this small but often meaningful advantage, or tend to downgrade it because you don't use it well, it would be helpful to put it higher on your "evaluation radar." My coach, the late, respected, and strong IM Donald Byrne – who at one point was the second-highest rated player in the United States – made it a point that I become more aware of this advantage. Therefore, I pass along his appreciated concern to the reader.

17.♕xe3 42:44

♖b4 0:34:00

After the game, my student said he made this move to threaten the fork on c2, but that's a lame idea since White can easily defend the threat. In general, *you don't want to make moves that make threats that are easily met unless the move is otherwise very helpful, i.e., the move does at least as much or more for you than your opponent's move which prevents the threat does for him.*

One of the hallmarks of “graduating” to an intermediate player from a beginner is realizing that the opponent will see your threats, so just making a threat in the hope that your opponent will miss it does not necessarily make it a good move.

It is ironic that my student’s computer after the game told him that 17... ♖b4 was a good move, but he did not know why. It turns out 17... ♖b4 guards d5 and discovers the b7-bishop’s path to d5, thus making it easier for Black to play the break ...d6-d5! after the fork threat is met. Of course, Black had been oblivious to the ...d6-d5 idea throughout the opening so this was news to him!

18. ♜fc1 0:43:23

♔d7 0:31:49

Is it boring annotation, or absolutely required, to write that Black missed the 18...d5! idea?

19.a3 0:43:59

♞c6 0:31:32

20. ♗d5= 0:44:05

♔d8 0:30:53

It’s safe to say Black could not play 20...d5 now, but *Houdini* suggests 20... ♕d8, preserving the bishop pair.

21.h4! 0:44:29

...

Since Black has continually missed his chance to counterattack in the center (*an attack on the flank is best met by a counterattack in the center*), White is finally able to make use of his pawn on f5 by starting kingside play, now that the center is a little more stable.

21...

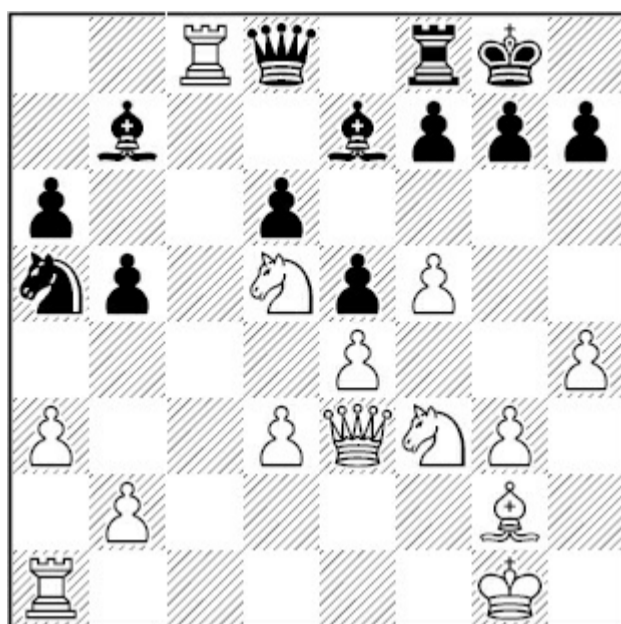
♞a5 0:27:01

You might assume that Black has not played “Hope Chess” (making a move without seeing if your opponent can reply on the next move with a check, capture, or threat that you cannot meet), and that he has seen that this move is safe because if White plays 22. ♜xc8 then Black can safely play 22... ♕xc8, since 22... ♔xc8?? loses the queen to 23. ♗xe7+. Waiting until the next move to figure this out could be fatal: what if Black did not have 22... ♕xc8 available? Then it would be too late. Understanding this analysis issue, if you had not before, is one of the critical lessons of this book! Learning to avoid Hope Chess certainly helped my own career immensely.

By the way, I call the opposite of Hope Chess “Real Chess” – where you *do* first check to see if all your candidate moves are safe before you play them (or before considering other aspects of the move).

22. ♜xc8 0:44:51

...



Black to play after 22. ♖xc8

22...

♔xc8?? 0:26:22

An attack on the flank is best met by a counterattack in the center.

Whoops! Despite thinking for 84 seconds on his move, Black leaves his bishop *en prise*, allowing a fork that wins his queen, too. Doing that pretty much proves that those 84 seconds were not spent asking the most important question (“Is it safe?”) with respect to the candidate move 22... ♔xc8.

It’s moves like this one that give amateur games a bad name! But I did not choose this game just to show the reader that losing his queen is a bad idea; I hope you already knew that.

23. ♖c1?? 0:45:31

...

White zips right along, playing this “win a tempo” move in five seconds, missing the big 23. ♖xe7+. I am sure he thought, “Oh yes, I can win control of the file and get a tempo on the queen,” so he played this without further thought. He certainly did not follow Lasker’s Rule:

When you see a good move, don’t play it! Look for a better move. You are trying to find the best move you can in a reasonable amount of time.

It is worth questioning why White is playing a 45-minute game with a 45-second increment so quickly that he now has more than his original time left. I believe a tremendously helpful and powerful principle to know is:

Never begin a game without the intention of using almost all your time. If you don’t feel like thinking that long, then play a shorter time control.

This type of advice is worthwhile – more so than the self-evident, “If you can win a queen then

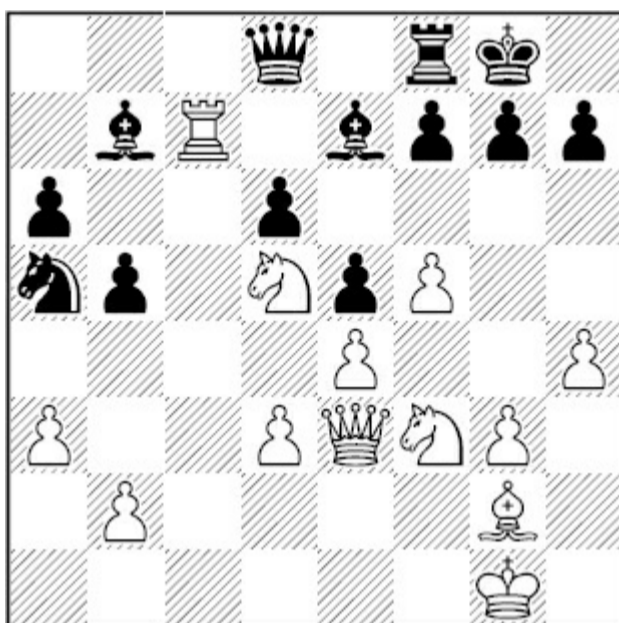
it's a good idea," which shouldn't teach you anything at all.

After our big "mutual blunder" we are back in a competitive game.

23... ♔d8 0:24:09

24. ♖c7?? 0:46:06 ...

As so often happens, White, having missed a win, makes a mistake immediately afterwards. Possibly he belatedly realized he had missed a win and now wished to play "aggressively." White took only 10 seconds to play this mistake.



Black to play after 24. ♖c7??

Never begin a game without the intention of using almost all your time. If you don't feel like thinking that long, then play a shorter time control.

24... ♗xd5! 0:24:23

After the terrible bad play, Black wakes up and finds the common "removal of the guard" tactic.

25. ♖xe7 0:46:48 ...

No matter how White plays he loses material, so he makes the best of a bad situation.

25... ♗xe7 0:24:40

26. exd5 0:47:30 ...

Steinitz taught that, "You can only attack where you have an advantage; a premature attack is

doomed to failure.”

The smoke has cleared and Black has won the exchange. But in amateur games the technique to ensure a win is not as well developed, so interesting play may still lie ahead.

26... ♔c7 0:23:54

Logical. Black wants to dominate the open file with his queen and rook and possibly force a trade of queens.

27.h5 0:47:57 ...

Also logical. White already has a space advantage on the kingside and Black's king is there, so why not throw the kitchen sink at the king and see if it works? That kind of strategy is almost always justified when you are losing (when desperation calls for desperate measures), but Steinitz's Principle, "*You can only attack where you have an advantage; a premature attack is doomed to failure,*" applies in positions when you are not losing.

27... h6?! 0:24:21

Black understandably doesn't wish for White to play ♕g5, nor h5-h6, so chooses a move which stops both. Still, one should move pawns only reluctantly in the opponent's attack zone. *Houdini* suggests 27... ♖b3! when both 28.h6 and 28. ♕g5 are met by 28... ♔c1+ forcing the queen trade and stopping the attack in its tracks.

28.f6 0:48:37 ...

White keeps blasting away at the black king. It's what you have to do when you're otherwise losing; passive play won't give White a chance to get back into the game.

28... ♖c8 0:23:56

28... ♖b3 is still the choice of the computer but Black's doing fine. Now White is between a rock and a hard place. How does he prevent Black from trading queens with 29... ♕c1+ and still maintain hopes of a kingside attack to get back into the game?

29. ♖h4 0:49:01 ...

He doesn't, but what do you expect from a 21-second think? Imagine if White spent as much time on this game as it took me to type in these annotations? Relatively best is 29. ♕h2, but after 29... ♖b3 Black is still winning.

29... ♕c1+ 0:24:17

30. ♕xc1 0:49:32 ♖xc1+ 0:24:57

It looks as though the rest will be mop-up, barring any super-blunders. White just doesn't have enough left to cause Black problems on the kingside – or does he...?

31. ♔h2 0:50:16

♘b7–+ 0:24:34

Sufficient – the knight heads back to stop ♘h4-f5xd6. Also winning is *Houdini's* suggestion of 31... ♖c2, when if 32.b4, then 32... ♘b3 33. ♘f5 ♘d4 34. ♘xd6 gxf6–+.

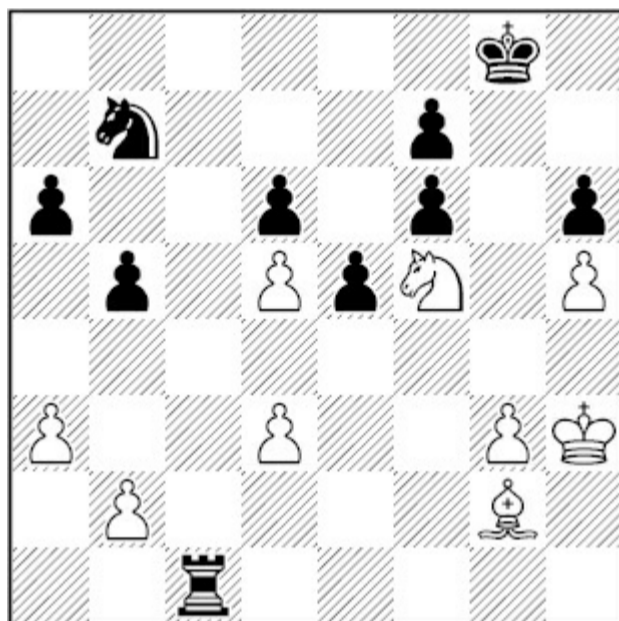
32. ♔h3 0:50:21

gxf6!? 0:24:30

Black needlessly creates some holes in his position, but nothing serious. Better was still the same idea 32... ♖c2.

33. ♘f5 0:50:46

...



Black to play after 33. ♘f5

33...

♔h7? 0:24:34

This overlooks White's next move, and then things aren't so easy anymore for Black. Better was 33... ♖c2 34. ♙e4 ♖xb2 35. ♘xh6+ ♔g7 36. ♘f5+ ♔h8 and, with the careful tiptoe of his king, Black should be well on his way to winning.

34. ♙e4! 0:51:28

...

Just like that, after Black's mistake and White's obvious but strong reply, *Houdini* has shrunk Black's lead from 4 pawns to only 2. In most non-deep endgames it takes about a 1-pawn advantage to win. That means Black's "margin for error" – the value of possible mistakes he can make and still possibly win the game – has shrunk by about two-thirds, from 3 to 1. For more on the useful subject of the margin for error, check out <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman82.pdf>.

34...

♔g8(?) 0:23:43

Another inaccuracy. It's getting difficult for Black to calculate exactly what will happen, but 34... ♔h8! makes things easier. *Houdini's* principal variation (PV; the predicted best move for both sides) after that move is 35. ♔g4 a5 36.d4 exd4 37. ♔f3 ♖c5 which should leave Black an easy win. However, a key line is 35. ♖xh6 a5, and if 36. ♖xf7+ ♔g7 and White cannot make further progress as 37.h6+? just loses to the simple 37... ♔xf7 38.h7 ♔g7-+. Sometimes you can play by feel, and sometimes you just have to roll up your sleeves and calculate.

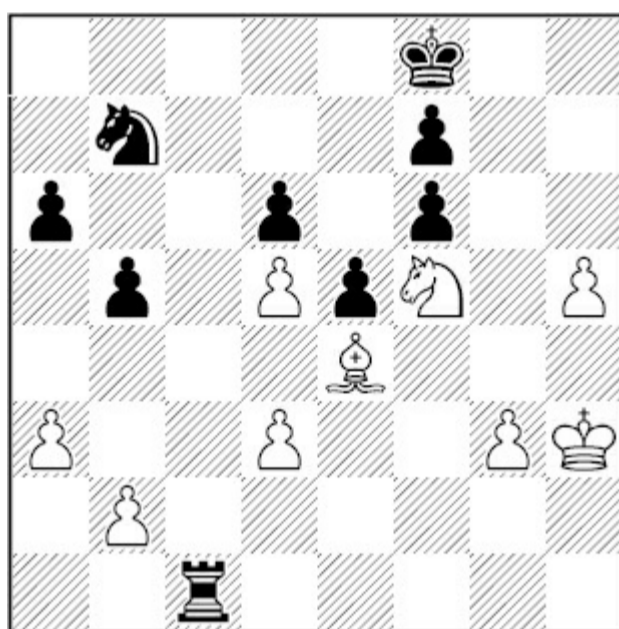
Black took 96 seconds for his move, but he had plenty of time; however, a strong player may have taken 5+ minutes just to make sure. If Black can weather the "storm" on the kingside, there is no resistance for him to mop up later on the queenside. He can afford to run his clock fairly low since he has the safety net of a 45-second increment, which should be plenty once the danger has been neutralized.

35. ♖xh6+ 0:52:08 ♔f8 0:24:18

36. ♖f5 0:52:51

...

After the game Black told me that he was frustrated by his lack of progress and thought his original plan of stopping the h-pawn with the king was not working, so he rather carelessly switched to the much less effective idea of switching the burden to the rook with...

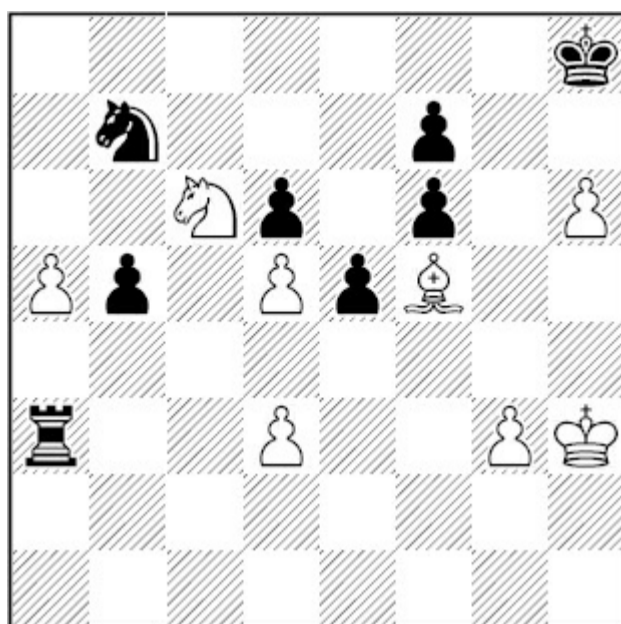


Black to play after 36. ♖f5

36...

♔e8?? 0:21:19

But this switch in plans does not work, to say the least. Instead Black should stick to his guns with 36... ♖c2 37.h6 ♔g8. This is the move Black has to take time to foresee. *It does take precise calculation, but if you don't try to do it, you won't get better at it!* Then if 38.b4 ♖c3 39. ♖e7+ ♔h8 40. ♖c6 ♖xa3 41. ♖f5 a5 42.bxa5:



Black to play after 42.bxa5 (analysis)

42... ♖xa5! and after 43. ♗xa5 ♗xa5 the b-pawn and knight will win easily while the formerly monstrous white h-pawn is a mere spectator.

37.h6!+- 0:53:27

...

Oh, my! It turns out now that neither the rook *nor* the king can stop the pawn.

37...

♔d7 0:21:21

38.h7 0:54:08

♖c8 0:21:53

The rook is only visually coming to the rescue.

39. ♗h6 0:54:52

♔e7 0:22:19

Hopeless, but now 39... ♖h8 40. ♗xf7 ♖xh7+ 41. ♗xh7+-.

40. ♗g8+ 0:55:34

♔d7 0:19:48

41. ♗f5+ 0:56:16

1-0

GAME 3: WHITE 1642 – BLACK 1367

Internet Chess Club 2011

45 minutes with a 45-second increment

Colle System

This is quite a game, both from the time-management and move-criticality standpoint.

1.d4 0:45:41

...

White takes four seconds to make his first move. Nothing unusual about that, except it seems that was almost the longest he took for any move in the game. I'm exaggerating, but not by much!

Before the start of a game, it is helpful to know the average time for a move. It is best to begin with the conservative assumption that there will be about 40 moves in the game. To calculate the average time in a sudden death (all moves in a specific time) time control, divide 40 into the number of minutes in the game and then add the increment (in minutes). This will provide the average number of minutes per move.

Using this formula for a 45 45 game yields $45/40 + (45/60)$, which is a little less than two minutes per move. For the sake of simplicity, two minutes is about right. Of course, book moves can usually be played very quickly to allow additional time for later moves. Let's see what happens...

1...	♗f6 0:45:21
2. ♗f3 0:46:24	e6 0:46:04

Black could also opt for a King's Indian setup with 2...g6 or 2...d6, or a Queen's Indian idea with 2...b6, although in that case playing 2...e6 first is more common, especially if White had played 2.c4, so that a later f2-f3 (in that case the pawn would not be blocked by 2. ♗f3) and e2-e4 were possible.

3.e3 0:47:07	...
--------------	-----

The characteristic move of the Colle (apparently this is pronounced Kohl, like the department store) System. This opening has a reputation for passivity at the grandmaster level, where it is rarely seen. I once heard someone say, "Every well-known opening is potentially good for White – except for the Colle System!" Nevertheless, the Colle is very popular at the club level due to a couple of books which extol its virtues, as well as to the fact that, while White often has trouble sustaining an initiative, he also often has difficulty getting into early trouble. The appeal of avoiding big early trouble also draws many devotees to the King's Indian Attack.

I come from a different school. I was taught that if I wanted to be a good player, then avoiding my weaknesses would not help me to get rid of them. So my mentors encouraged me to start with aggressive lines like 1.e4 right from the start and, if I got into trouble, then good – learn from it and play better next time. Also, 1.e4 is more tactical and even if you can postpone tactical situations, you can't avoid them, so you may as well learn to deal with them competently as soon as possible.

If you are trying to become a good player – and I assume most readers are interesting in improving – then masking your weaknesses is not the way to go for the long haul. On the other hand, if you are playing for \$10,000 in the final round of the World Open, masking your weaknesses is absolutely the best strategy – that's not the time to experiment and learn! However, most of your games are hardly that important, so it's more beneficial to play and learn than to just maximize your short-term winning chances.

I kept a log of my tournament results (today U.S. Chess Federation members can find their entire

history at its website) and, instructively, my rating was almost 2000 before I had won half my games! That is because I sought out strong competition and was not afraid of losing and learning. I would rather lose to a strong player and learn something than beat a really weak player and learn little when his elementary mistakes allow me to win.

If you are trying to become a good player – and I assume most readers are interesting in improving – then masking your weaknesses is not the way to go for the long haul. Work on eliminating them.

3...

c5 0:46:48

This attack against the fixed d-pawn is the common “pawn break” (or “break move”) to get pressure against White’s center. Although White’s pawn can legally move to d5, it is not safe to do so, so the pawn is essentially “fixed” for now on d4. As a counter-example, in the Old Benoni after 1.d4, the reply 1...c5 is *not* a break move because in reply 2.d5 is not only possible but good. It’s all semantics, but it helps chess players communicate with one another, and it helps inexperienced players understand concepts by giving them names. For more on the interesting subject of how naming and referring to chess ideas affects your memory and attitude towards them, see my article, “What’s in a Name?” (<http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman108.pdf>).

3...d5 first is possible but 3...c5 may even be more flexible.

4. ♖d3 0:46:03

♗e7 0:46:46

Black continues to refrain from ...d7-d5, which is hardly mandatory. So long as *White* cannot play d4-d5, ... ♗c6 is also possible. But once White has the pawn thrust to d5 supported, playing ... ♗c6 is dangerous. There are some grandmaster lines where ... ♗c6 is played allowing d4-d5, but there are many more lines where Black just gets into deep trouble. For example, after 1.e4 c5 2. ♗f3 ♗c6 3.d4 e6?, then 4.d5! and White already has a great position.

In some lines, Black’s bishop can be developed to d6 after ...d7-d5, but it’s much more risky before, when it blocks the d-pawn!

5. O-O 0:46:33

O-O 0:47:08

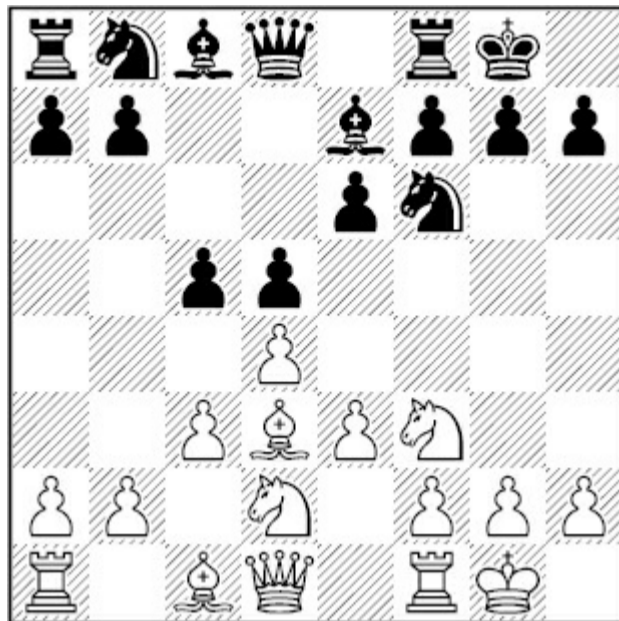
6. ♗bd2 0:46:47

d5 0:47:33

7. c3 0:47:29

...

This is the characteristic setup of a classic Colle. The alternative Colle-Zukertort system is characterized by b2-b3 instead.



Black to play after 7.c3

7...

c4(?) 0:47:50

I could write a book about this common inaccuracy – I almost have by now. There are several opening positions where a move like ...c5-c4 is plausible, as it usually is acceptable if it gives the mover a queenside majority, such as after 1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4 e6 5.♘f3 ♘f6 6.c5!.

But in the present position 7...c4 takes all the pressure off White's center and allows a later e3-e4 break since the d4-pawn is under much less pressure. Black is not winning a tempo (see "It's Not Really Winning a Tempo" at <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman18.pdf> and "Similar Positions, Different Evaluations" at <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman88.pdf>) because the pawn is not being developed by going to c4, and saving the bishop takes that same one tempo it took for Black to attack it.

At the start of a game, each non-rook pawn can be attacked twice and defended twice. But once the attacker has pushed a pawn past an opponent's target pawn, that balance is undone and the defender can now defend it with more pawns than the attacker can summon to attack. For example, after 7...c4 Black can only attack the key white pawn on d4 once but it can be defended twice. That gives White a lot more flexibility to prepare his strong central break with a later e3-e4, since Black cannot easily break down the d4 square. If you understand this concept, you can apply it to many positions!

Instead of 7...c4, *Houdini* recommends the flexible 7...b6 with equal play. *Houdini* sees 7...c4 as a mistake worth only about a tenth of a pawn, but if after that move Black targets the queenside, his target has shrunk considerably to the tiny, and not so important, a2-b2 area! Some mistakes may look small to the computer when tactics are still far away, but they can make the game much more difficult to play, despite the small difference in evaluation.

8. ♙c2 0:48:12

...


White plays this reasonable retreat, which keeps an eye on the later e3-e4 break in – two seconds! That is a major problem with amateur games: strong players are almost always trying their best, but amateurs often “don’t get it” and play even slow time controls superfast, making it difficult to tell the difference between indifference and pathos! Luckily a game can be instructive even if the lessons are the result of a player’s limited desire to think. In a similar manner, after a game one can learn about an opening just as well from looking up a speed game as from researching a slow game. Many of the 99+% of players who are amateurs make the same mistake of playing too fast (for a discussion of the benefits of slowing down, see “The Fun of Pros and Cons” at <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman94.pdf>), so we’ve devoted this entire chapter to addressing the various issues.

One lesson is clear – many intermediate players who play too fast could become measurably better if they took each move of each game seriously. But perhaps then they would have no built-in excuse after a mistake, such as “I wasn’t trying” or “That’s OK; I was just playing fast. I would have seen it if I had taken it seriously.” I think most strong players have too much pride in their play to consider resorting to such weak fallback positions. That pride may seem suspect, but it can be a constructive force toward getting someone to play each move with more effort.

8...  c6 0:48:30

Consistent with 7...c4 is 8...b5 with a queenside pawn expansion. At least superficially, *Houdini* then rates the chances as almost even. I prefer White, but then *Houdini* seems to win most of our evaluation “arguments.”


9.  e2 0:48:56 ...

Already White can break successfully with 9.e4±. Instead, 9.  e2 amounts to *over-preparation*, but it’s not a big deal in this instance.

9...  c7 0:48:47
10.e4 0:49:20 ...

The thematic central break called for after 7...c4.

10... h6± 0:45:58

Normally the principle that can be applied here is, “*If your opponent breaks with a center pawn and he cannot capture back with a pawn, you should usually capture the breaking pawn with your pawn.*” For example, in the Open Sicilian after 1.e4 c5 2.  f3 d6 3.d4 Black should play 3...cxd4 because White cannot capture with a pawn.

Many intermediate players who play too fast could become measurably better if they took each move of each game seriously.

However, *Houdini* strongly disagrees that Black should play the “automatic” 10...dxe4, probably because of the weakness of the c4-pawn (and consequently its desire to play ...b7-b5 earlier), suggesting 10...b5 with equal counterplay. The chess engine gives 10...dxe4 a “?” and suggests that after 11. ♖xe4 ♗xe4 12. ♙xe4 White has a very healthy advantage, bordering on ±. Therefore, it believes the passive-looking 10...h6 is actually better than the normal-looking 10...dxe4. I would not have guessed...

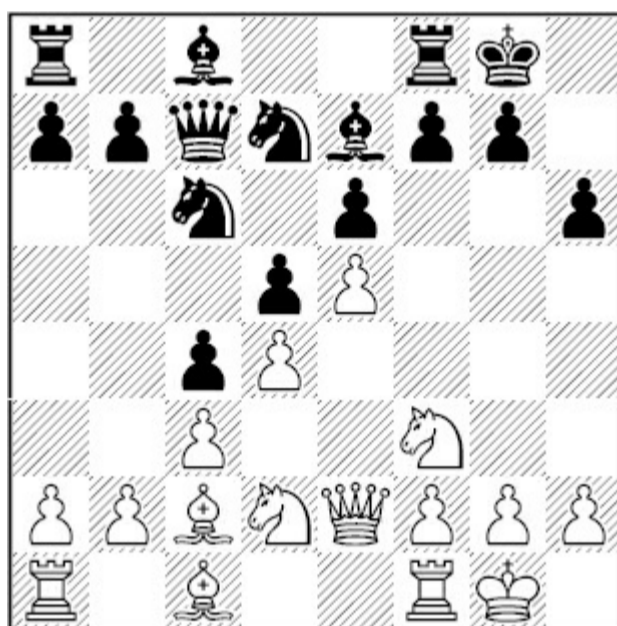
11.e5 0:50:02

...

White grabs central space. This usually prefaces a kingside attack, and this game is no different. Three seconds for this move, by the way; about average for White in this game. I guess we should call this “playing by instinct;” others might call it “mistaking a long time-control game for a blitz game.” Wonder why White did not prefer a 5 5 game, or maybe something even faster. Maybe he wants to give Black a big handicap.

11...

♗d7 0:45:22



White to play after 11... ♗d7

With Black allowing White to lock the center with e4-e5, we have now arrived at a pawn structure that could have been reached from an Advance French (1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 c5) where Black has restricted his queenside play with the dubious ...c5-c4.

This transition from a normally queen’s pawn opening structure (Colle System) into a king’s pawn opening structure illustrates the benefit of recognizing transpositions, for White and Black should both now plan in accordance with Advance French themes (for further ideas about this strategy, consult “Strategy Based on Central Pawn Structure” at <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman138.pdf>).

However, this common possibility of transposition also points out a more important issue for improving players: *slowly rotating your openings, and including common “fixed pawn structure” openings like the French Defense and King’s Indian Defense into your repertoire for at least a few*

months, seems extraordinarily beneficial. It provides a foundation for playing a host of openings that have similar, or even exact transpositional themes that frequently occur. Another example would be some Anti-Sicilians (like 1.e4 c5 2.c3 e6 3.d4 d5) that can transpose into a French.

My guess is that improving players who do rotate their openings slowly to include these common transpositional lines achieve benefits far above those achieved by just studying and sticking to an acceptable opening repertoire.

Slowly rotating your openings, and including common “fixed pawn structure” openings like the French Defense and King’s Indian Defense into your repertoire for at least a few months, seems extraordinarily beneficial.

12. ♖e1?! 0:50:29

...

With this locked central pawn structure, the “Pointing Rule” states that White would like to attack kingside and break with f2-f4-f5. Since Black already has a pawn on h6 as a target, another possible pawn break is g2-g4-g5. But the rook is already behind the f-pawn, so moving it to the open e-file can only have three purposes:

- White is planning a “rook lift” with ♖e1-e3;
- White is overprotecting the e-file so the rook will be active if Black plays ...f7-f6, or ...f7-f5 when White can take *en passant*;
- He is simply vacating f1 for the knight on d2 to go, say ♞d2-f1-g3(h2).

Any of these are possible, but at the moment none are the first priority. *Houdini* suggests the strange 12.a4, which violates the principles “Don’t make pawn weaknesses on the side your opponent is attacking” and “Play on the side you are strong, not the side you are weak.” So I probably would not have played 12.a4, but we have already discussed how *Houdini* does a lot better than I do by ignoring these principles.

Interestingly, over the next few moves, as both players play their best moves, *Houdini* starts to come around to my way of thinking by raising White’s evaluation. As a chess master, I can “see” that White’s attack is the more dangerous because his eventual target (currently beyond *Houdini*’s calculation window) is the black king, while Black’s target is not so valuable. So even if chances are only slightly in White’s favor, in practice his attack is much more dangerous; let’s just call that a different dimension of evaluation.

Houdini’s second choice, 12. ♞e1, is more salient. That puts the knight on the square where he chose to develop the rook instead but, more importantly, gets the knight out of the way of the other knight, the queen, and the f-pawn, improving communication among the white forces. In its main line the engine uses the queen and then the other knight: 12. ♞e1 b5 13. ♞g4 f5 (necessary to give Black’s pieces some access to defend the kingside) 14. ♞g3 ♖h8 15. ♞df3, with a slight advantage, but some

clear attacking chances.

12...

b5± 0:44:25

13. ♖f1 0:51:09

...

Five seconds' thought. So it was the knight maneuver White had carefully planned. *Houdini* shows it as the best move.

13...

b4 0:44:13

Consistent. Black is trying to open lines for his queenside forces. Other similar moves are 13... ♖b8 and 13... ♗a5. As computers (and wise instructors) teach us, there are many positions where finding the exact best move is not the issue, but you just have to find one of the several reasonable ones. We call these “non-critical positions.”

Another way of stating this from a time-management standpoint, is: *If you can determine that there is not much difference between some candidate moves, then don't take too long but use your judgment and pick one.* In his book *The Seven Deadly Chess Sins*, GM Rowson backs this idea up by stating that players who play slow in such non-critical situations are making a big mistake because, while their analysis of specific lines will get more accurate with time (up to a point), their judgment will not improve with additional thinking time.

14.h3 0:51:48

...

This is a common idea, often found in the King's Indian Attack with a similar pawn structure, to allow the knight on f1 to attack the vulnerable dark squares f6 and h6 via the maneuver ♖f1-h2-g4. From his six-second think, we can surmise White has seen this before. *Houdini* prefers the more direct 14. ♖g3±.

14...

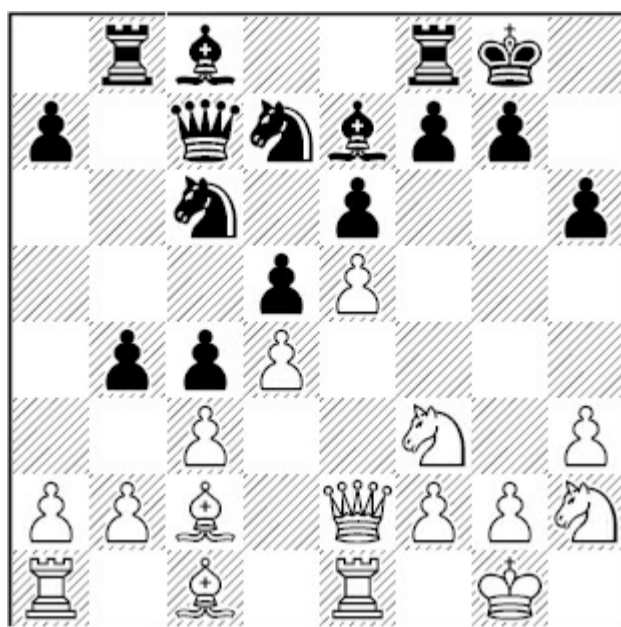
♖b8 0:43:07

The rook goes to the b-file in anticipation of a soon-to-be-played ...bxc3.

15. ♖h2 0:52:15

...

Obviously this approach is a little slower than the direct 14. ♖g3 would have been but, if Black does not react appropriately, the venom might be more poisonous.



Black to play after 15. ♖1h2

15...

♚a5? 0:43:05

Houdini prefers 15... ♚a5, to at least force White to tie down a piece guarding c3. It then claims the game is dead equal, foreseeing either a piece sacrifice to force a perpetual after 16. ♖g4 and then 17. ♖xh6+ (notice those “López bishops” on c1 and c2 pointing toward the black king) or possibly 16. ♗d2. I am not sure about that evaluation, but 15... ♚a5 does seem better than the move played, when Black is slowly but surely getting into trouble on the kingside. In any case, *Houdini* definitely feels that making the slow move 15...a5 is the turning point of this part of the game (but there will be more twists), hence the question mark.

It’s move 15, so we can check out how the players are doing at following Botvinnik’s Rule (“*In a normal opening you should use roughly 20% of your time for your first 15 moves*”). As we noted in Game 1, this is a little too much time when you have a big increment, so here the players should have somewhat more than 36 minutes left. Black is therefore playing fast, but not ridiculously so, since he has used more than his increment per move. On the other hand, let’s just say White is a tiny bit crazy. He probably did not envision this game being published, so we’ll cut him that break. In contrast, I always play my games as if they are going to get published; that allows me to practice much better.

16. ♖g4! 0:52:40

...

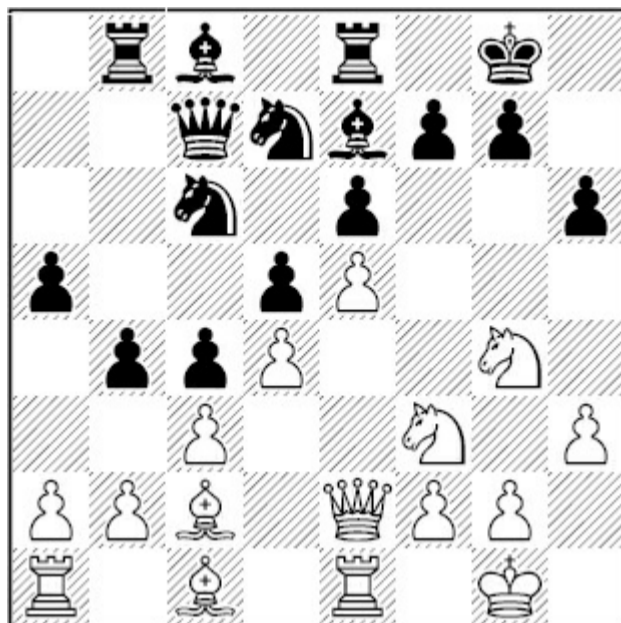
Now White’s maneuver looks positively prescient! Any experienced eye looking at the position can see that White has excellent kingside attacking chances.

16...

♗e8(?)+- 0:42:53

Black vacates f8 for his bishop, knight – or maybe king! *Houdini* thinks this is a defensive try, but his evaluation for White is rising since it allows sacrifices on h6. The other major idea, which it slightly prefers, is to immediately give some air to Black’s army by pushing the f-pawn with ...f7-f6 or ...f7-f5. Finally, the counterattack 16...bxc3 also comes into consideration. In any case, White is

much better, but after 16... ♖e8 he is demonstrably winning.



White to play after 16... ♖e8

17. ♗f2 0:53:16

...

This awkward-looking move is actually a very strong prelude to the attack. White clears the way for the queen, and readies the replacement of the knight on g4 if/when the first one is moved/sacrificed.

However, computer analysis reveals that both piece sacrifices on h6 are already sound, e.g. 17. ♗xh6 and if 17... gxf6? 18. ♕d2!+- so a better defense to 17. ♗xh6 is 17... bxc3, when White has 18. bxc3 gxf6 19. ♕e3 ♖b2 20. ♖ac1 with a winning attack.

The other sacrifice is also sound: 17. ♗xh6+! gxf6 18. ♗xh6 f5 19. exf6 ♗xf6 20. ♗e5, again with a complicated, but winning attack.

Even if you don't normally "see" attacks like this, you can learn quite a bit from playing through these computer sacrifices to see how it mobilizes the forces. And, if you are really interested, you can take my analysis a lot further on your computer to explore possible lines of attack and defense that are beyond the scope of this book.

Normally I suggest playing through games rather quickly and *only playing out these analytical sidelines if they are fun* (and that still holds here), but I also advocate once in a while getting "down and dirty" and having some fun investigating the details of pulling off a sacrificial attack.

You can learn quite a bit from playing through these computer sacrifices to see how it mobilizes the forces.

17...

♗f8 0:42:35

Houdini thinks that 17... ♖g5 is clearly the best defense, but even then White has 18. ♖xg5 hxg5 19. ♗f3 ♗e7 20. ♗xg5+- when White is up material with an ongoing initiative.

18. ♗xh6+! 0:53:07 ...

Best. White blasts open the helpless black monarch.

18... g6 0:42:15

No reason not to capture. If your opponent is going to have a strong attack anyway, better to be ahead material than behind! You would be surprised how many players refuse sacrifices, leaving their opponent with a material advantage *and* a strong attack. *You may as well have something on which to hang your hat if the opponent misplays the attack (or even if he plays it somewhat well).*

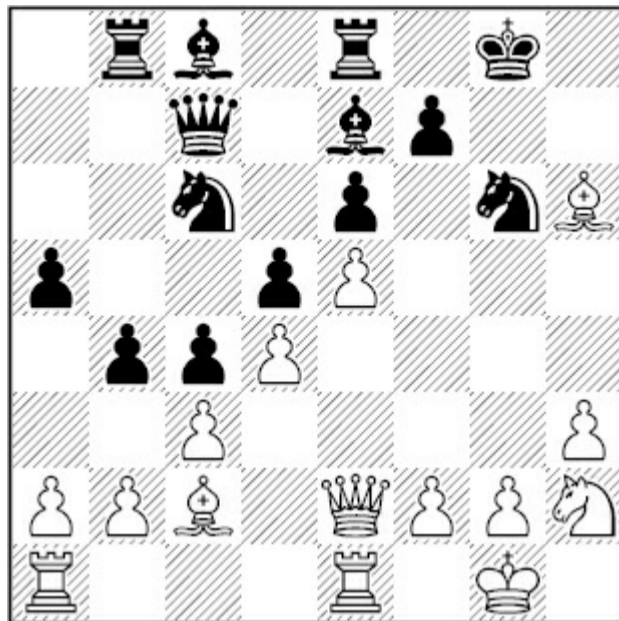
19. ♗xh6 0:53:49 ...

This is OK, but *Houdini* shows that both moves which bring in the queen first, 19. ♗g4+ and 19. ♗h5, are more accurate. Of course, in his three seconds (!) of calculation, White determined that 19. ♗xh6 was the way to go. At this point, I am guessing he was challenging himself to win the game without taking more than few seconds on any remaining move. With this position he might pull off that stunt, but if I played this quickly and threw away this large an advantage with this much time on my clock, I might never forgive myself. But again, that's the mindset of a master (if I may say so myself), while White is apparently a very talented, but fast-playing, intermediate.

19... ♗g6 0:42:20

19...f5 is the best defense, but *Houdini* still would have White ahead by at least 5.8 pawns after 20. ♗h5. At this point, the main lessons are not the exact way White could have played the attack. Anyone with a computer can go through a bunch of lines if they desire (and it would take up a lot of space if I had to show the gory details every move). Instead we get the point: White has a very strong, absolutely winning attack, and he has many ways to pull it off, even given the best defense. But the way both sides handle this situation will provide the most instruction.

Question: What should White play now?



White to play after 19... ♖g6

The situation has changed in one key respect. According to *Houdini*, Black's defense did have one gigantic selling point: in this position White has only one move which preserves his monstrous advantage. If he doesn't find it, then his lead shrinks all the way down to about a single pawn's worth.

Moreover, White needs to be aware that *this move is critical*. However, at the breakneck pace that he is playing, would he even be aware of that, or care? If I came across such a position, I would study it quite carefully and then, hopefully, might become aware from my analysis that only one move is clearly best – and play it. I don't always find it, but in slow games, given the time, I always try to determine exactly what is happening and hopefully find what I should do about it.

20. ♖g4?? 0:54:18

...

Surprise, surprise! White slows down to 16 seconds for his move, but fails to find the fatal blow 20. ♖h5+-. For analysis fans, the PV from *Houdini* would run 20... ♔d8 21. ♔xg6 and now if Black tries to recapture his piece with 21... fxc6, White has 22. ♖xc6+ when 22... ♔h8 is forced, allowing 23. ♖xe8+ finis. So with best play 20. ♖h5 would end the game in short order. Instead 20. ♖g4 gives Black a chance to get right back into the game.

20...

♔h8?? 0:42:39

Oops! Black thinks for only 26 seconds and fails to find the right defense (I wonder why...?). You would be surprised how many players come to me for lessons and, if I find them playing this quickly, my reaction is, *"If you don't slow down when you have the time, that masks all your other problems, so the first thing I need you to do is to try to take almost all your time every game, game after game. If you do that, then you will not only play a lot better, but we will also find out what you are doing wrong when you try your best."*

Then they often ask,

“But what should I do to slow down?” and I reply...

“That’s easy: *first, take the two gigantic steps:*

1) *Follow Lasker’s Rule: ‘When you see a good move, don’t play it! Instead look for a better one, you are trying to find the best one you can within a reasonable amount of time.’* And besides, the move you think is so good is not likely as good as you think if you are not a strong player and you found it in 26 seconds; and

2) *Make sure all your candidate moves are safe before you analyze them further, much less play them. Does the opponent have a dangerous check, capture, or threat in reply that you can’t meet? If so, then you likely have to eliminate that candidate move.* This takes time, so if you do it you won’t be playing many fast moves. If you do this consistently, I call this *Real Chess* – and if you don’t, I call this *Hope Chess*.”

Had he taken more time, Black might have found 20... ♔h7! when White’s advantage might still be winning with perfect play, but Black is no longer in resignable territory. The PV continues 21. ♕c1 ♖h8 22.h4 with a strong attack for White, but Black still has some fight.

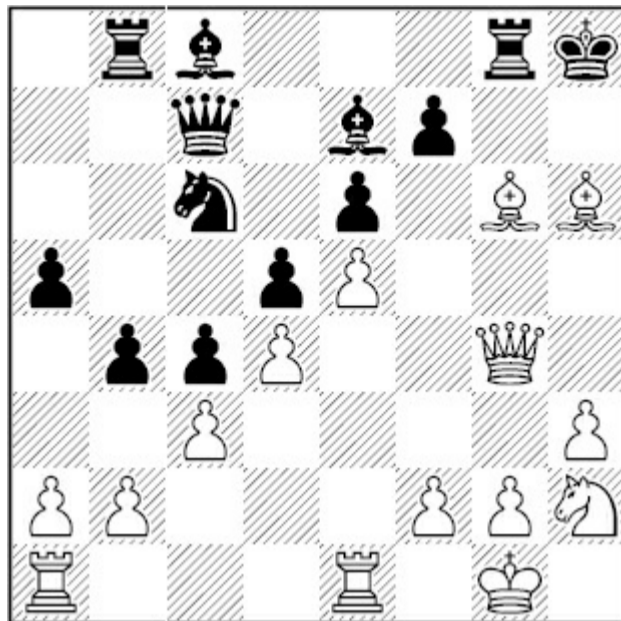
21. ♕xg6? ♖ 0:54:53 ...

Again missing the shot 21. ♖h5!. That’s not the only winning move; it’s not critical that he find exactly that one. *Houdini* quickly finds 21.h4 and 21. ♖f3 to be winning, too. Even 21. ♕f3 is much better than the move played – you get the picture. I guess in his ten-second analysis White miscalculated something.

21... ♖g8!? 0:42:53

This is roughly as good as the immediate recapture 21...fxg6. At least Black is following the policy of, *When you see a good move, look for a better one.* Where have I heard that before...?

It has been only two moves since White could have been ahead by the equivalent of about ten pawns! It “only” took two big, quick mistakes on his part. To further the irony, now it is White who needs to find a good move to keep almost even. *Houdini* thinks the position is better for Black!



White to play after 21... ♖g8!?

22. ♙f3(?) 0:54:36

...

White does sense the change in momentum and actually takes an eternity – 62 seconds – trying to figure out how to recapture the magic. However, he still fails to find one of his seven best moves. At 23 ply *Houdini* thinks 22. ♖e3+ is clearly best. After this inaccuracy, *Black's* lead is increasing.

22...

♖xg6 0:41:45

23. ♙d2 0:54:55

...

The computer prefers 23. ♗g4. But finding the computer's best line is not that important, as humans can't pinpoint the (almost) perfect move, move after move no matter how much time we take. We aren't rated 3200. What is important is that if White had taken more time – even now – to find just reasonably better moves, the game probably would have been over. As it is, the question is becoming more one of, "Can *Black* win?"

23...

♙g8 0:41:30

Second best. The king belongs on g7, where it both helps to guard f6 and h6, and clears the back rank for the other rook and queen to join the fun. So 23... ♙g7!-+.

24. ♗g4 0:55:35

...

Making the best of a bad situation. White is down a piece, but with some attacking chances still possible.

24...

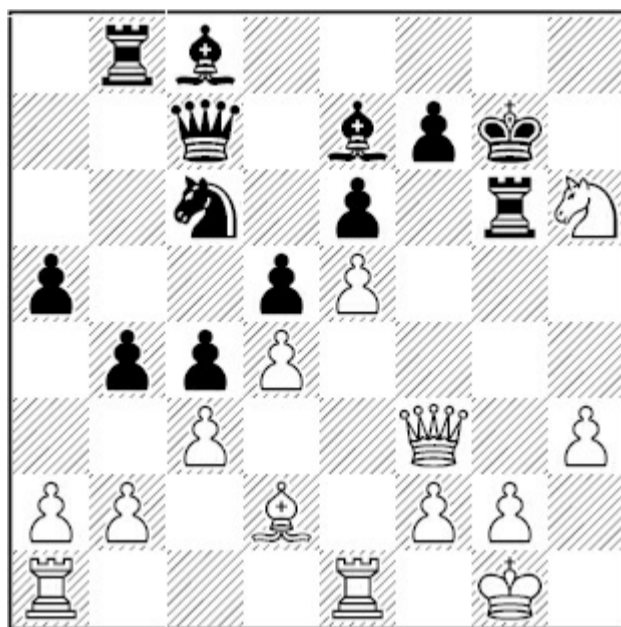
♙g7 0:39:42

Black hurries to fix his mistake. He could also try 24... ♙f8.

25. ♖h6 0:53:31

...

Wow! White took almost three minutes (yes, minutes, not seconds) on this move. Either he finally realized his attack was running out of gas or, more likely, maybe he had to get a drink of water. *Houdini* likes several other moves (such as 25.h4) better. Now all Black has to do is...



Black to play after 25. ♖h6

25...

♔f8(?) 0:38:31

...capture the knight with 25... ♖xh6+. I am not sure if he was worried about “losing” his rook – two pieces are worth a lot more than a rook – or if he saw a line like 25... ♖xh6 26. ♔xh6+ ♕xh6 27. ♖xf7 and got scared without further analysis. After 27. ♖xf7 *Houdini* recommends the simple 27... ♔d8+, allowing the queen to guard the seventh rank.

26. ♖g4 0:54:10

...

This move is plausible, but *Houdini* calculates that after the likely better 26. ♖h5 Black’s lead has shrunk to less than a pawn. But, water in hand, White reverts to his six-second move speed.

26...

♔e7 0:37:58

The bishop scurries to guard the vulnerable f6 square.

27. g3 0:53:50

...

That’s a curious move; difficult to guess the purpose. I could make some wild ones, but I will leave that to the reader. 27.h4 is the leader here.

27...

♔d8! 0:36:52

Good stuff. Black takes a little time (on his clock and tempos on the board) to re-route the queen to the kingside, where all the action is. If Black can consolidate, his extra piece should tell.

28. ♔f1 0:53:18 ...

Another strange move. I can understand the purpose of 28. ♔g2 (one of *Houdini*'s top candidates), but not this one. Perhaps White intends ♔e2 and then bringing the rooks to the kingside?

28... ♚h8! 0:36:08

Consistent and good. Will this be one of those games where the player taking his time, even though lower rated, actually wins?

29.h4 0:53:42 ...

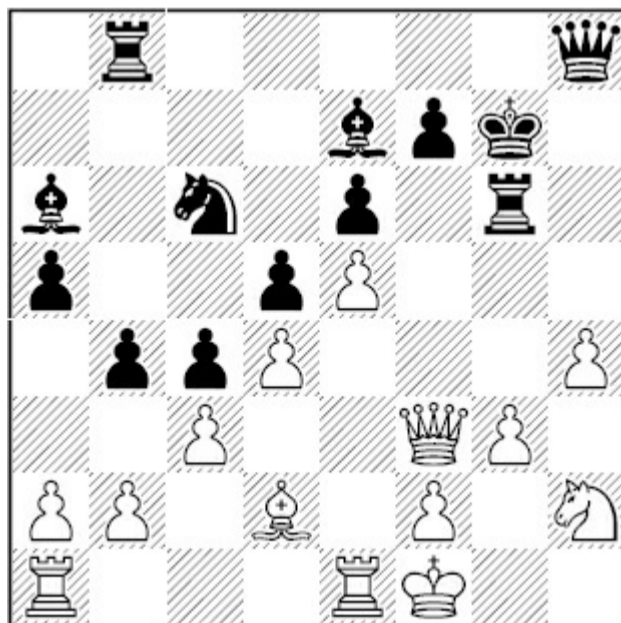
Although this and 29. ♔g2 are rated as the best two moves, after 28. ♔f1 it is understandable that White prefers not to admit his mistake on the previous turn by playing 29. ♔g2, assuming a reasonable alternative is available.

29... ♜a6 0:34:25

My first thought upon seeing this move was that it had more to do with connecting the rook on b8 with the kingside than with any prescient play on the f1-a6 diagonal – but see next move! The computer's top pick was 29... ♚h5+.

30. ♞h2? 0:54:03 ...

Not only missing Black's idea, but the computer thinks White missed another chance to lower the evaluation deficit. However, that would still involve retracing steps with 30. ♔g2!, always a difficult thing to admit.



Black to play after 30. ♖h2?

30...

♗xd4! -+ 0:34:41

My first glance on the previous move was wrong! My miss also illustrates the difference between speed play and serious slow play, where I would be embarrassed to miss something this obvious. It turns out Black did have his eye on the f1-a6 diagonal. A discovered attack looms. At this point the advantage for Black has ballooned to over six pawns. You don't very often see a 16+ pawn middlegame turnaround in the span of ten moves, where the advantage goes from one side winning to the other, outside of beginner games where it happens all the time.

31. ♔e3 0:54:31

...

Of course, if 31.cxd4 then 31...c3+ is a discovered check and an attack on d2 which opens the floodgates. Now it is White's game that is a mess. The computer suggests 31. ♔f4 as the best defense, but it doesn't make much difference.

31...

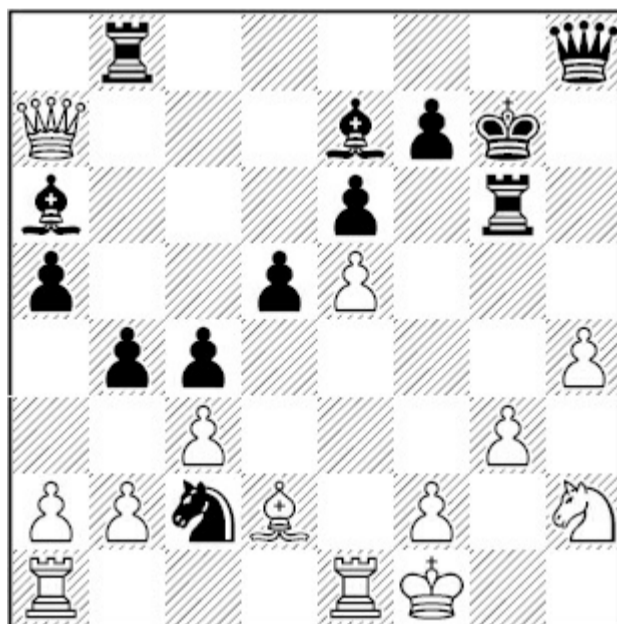
♗c2 0:33:22

Family fork.

32. ♔a7 0:55:14

...

White double attacks the black bishops. Even if this were not the best move, it is the best try: White needs to create a *Fire on Board*, meaning that *the player who is losing wants to create as much confusion and complications as possible so to maximize the chances that the player who is winning will make a big mistake and let the opponent back in the game.* The corollary is, "*When you are winning you want everything simple and uncomplicated.*"



Black to play after 32. ♔a7

32...

♖xe1 0:32:37

Black has an array of wins, including this one. However, *when capturing a forked rook where the rooks guard each other, you usually want to capture the one that is doing less*. The logic is that if the other rook recaptures then it has to take the place of the less well-placed one. This is no exception; 32... ♖xa1 is superior to 32... ♖xe1. However, neither capture is the best move, which is the complicated 32... ♕xh4, e.g. 33.gxh4 ♖xa1 34. ♖xa1 ♕xh4 or 33. ♖f3 bxc3 34.bxc3 ♕xg3 35.fxg3 ♖xa1. Also winning are 32... bxc3, 32... ♖xa1, and a cast of thousands. Among this array of complexity Black did take about 90 seconds on his move which theoretically reduces his lead by a couple of pawns, but he has plenty of margin for error.

33. ♕xe7 0:55:45

...

White has achieved the Fire on Board, but his position is burning. 33. ♖xe1 is best, but all the lines lose badly, so which one loses least bad is not a big issue.

33...

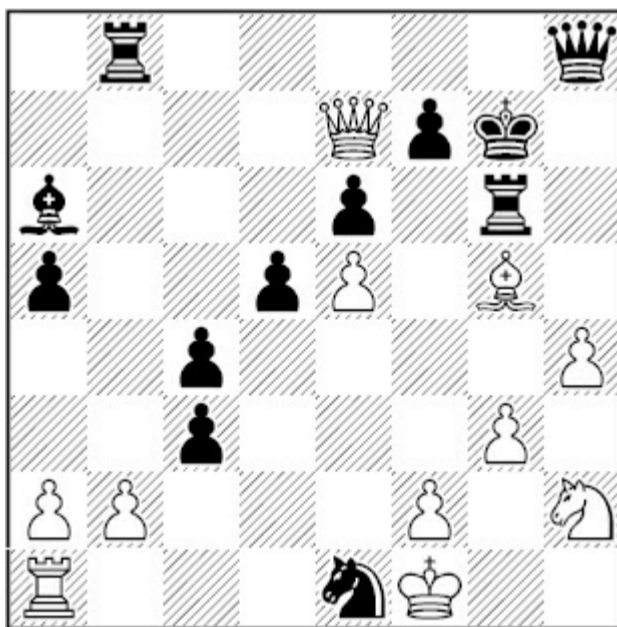
bxc3 0:31:13

Black could just save the knight with the simple 33... ♖d3 but this is better, theoretically. The idea is that if 34. ♕xe1 cxb2 and the pawns do storm.

34. ♕g5 0:56:22

...

White is grasping at straws, but by this point we can't blame him. He has achieved an extra 11 minutes on his clock since the start of the game...



Black to play after 34. ♕g5

34...

♖xg5 0:29:25

White was not threatening anything, so this wasn't necessary. Instead the cold-blooded 34...cxb2!

was the easiest way to put White away. If White then tries 35. ♔f6+ then of course giving up the exchange with 35... ♖xf6 is best, when after 36. ♗xf6+ ♔g8 37. ♗g5+ ♗g7 ends the checks, or 35.exf6+ ♔g8 36. ♖xe1 c3+ with an avalanche. By missing this chance to wait one move before sacrificing the exchange, Black's massive evaluation lead drops from 15 pawns to 5, which may or may not turn out to be significant.

35. ♗xg5+ 0:57:01

♔f8 0:29:56

It was not too late for Black to blunder with 35... ♔h7?? 36. ♗g4! when it's *White* who eventually mates!

36. ♗xe1 0:57:36

...

The floodgates widen considerably to a 20+ pawn lead by Black. Relatively best was 36.bxc3 ♗d3-+.

36...

cxb2 0:30:05

That should be it, right?

37. ♖bl 0:58:18

...

White is playing too fast to resign. Besides, never resign in these kinds of crazy positions because crazy things might happen, right? Right? I have a good idea: play fast and maybe your opponent, who has a lot more to lose, will fall for the psychological trap and play fast, too. Oh, White has been doing that all game, so how is Black to know..?

37...

c3 0:30:41

Best. *Houdini* says it's now mate in 12 for Black. However, it's a little scary that Black makes this move in 9 seconds.

38. ♗g4 0:58:32

...

It's down to mate in 8 if Black now finds 38... ♔h7.

38...

c2? 0:27:50

Can't blame Black for playing this move too fast, although with this much time and criticality perhaps 3+ minutes is still slightly fast. Besides 38... ♔h7 leading to mate Black had other, much better moves such as 38... ♔d3 or 38... ♖c8. The problem with Black's move is that, with c1 covered by the white queen, it forces the black rook off the back rank. Still, if Black is careful...

39. ♖xb2 0:59:15

...

Forced, but now White gets in a few checks.

39...

♖xb2 0:28:16

As noted above, not 39...c1 ♕?? 40. ♕xc1 when White is back on top!

40. ♕d8+ 0:59:57

♔g7 0:28:36

41. ♕f6+ 1:00:36

...

Objectively 41. ♕g5+ ♔h7 was supposed to be better, but White wants to make sure Black knows what he is doing. A good idea! White has now accumulated an hour of stored time; maybe that was a goal...

41...

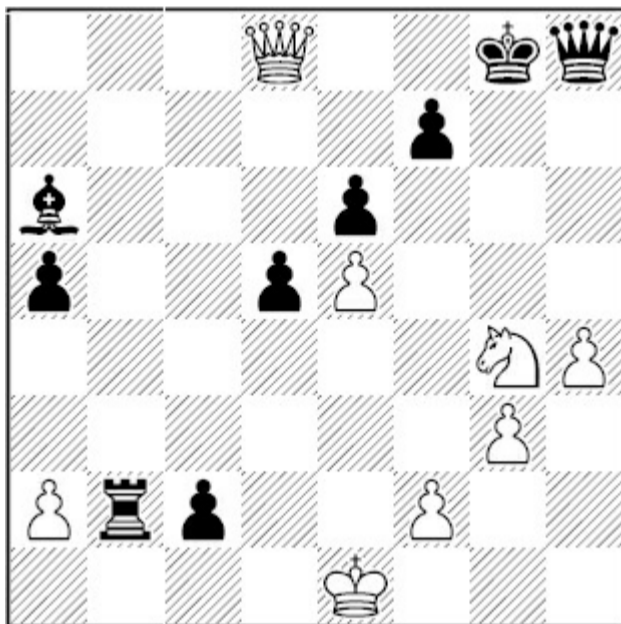
♔g8 0:27:25

The difference is that now Black's king is on g8 and not f8, which allows him to zigzag up to h7 and avoid the perpetual due to his own mate threats with ...c1 ♕#.

42. ♕d8+ 1:00:19

...

Because now 42... ♔h7□ and Black only has to calculate that 43. ♗f6+ is easily met by the pseudo-sacrifice 43... ♕xf6! since White's capturing on f6 allows 44...c1 ♕#. But what else can White try after 42... ♔h7 with ...c1 ♕# threatened?



Black to play after 42. ♕d8+

42...

♔g7? 0:27:47

What's this? Black takes only 21 seconds and does not realize he is winning by avoiding the repetition? Maybe he is happy with a draw because his opponent is rated almost 300 points higher. But I don't think he would be happy with a draw with anyone if he knew the computer said he had a

forced mate! Since he has over 1,600 seconds to figure it out, perhaps taking more than 21 would be worthwhile to bring home the win.

It is critical to note that the position has only been repeated twice! Black still has time to realize that after 43. ♖f6+ ♔g8, two “repetitions” ago the king was on f8 so, unless he moves his king to g7 next time, no position will have been repeated three times with the same player to move. After 44. ♖d8+ (44. ♗h6+ ♖xh6! 45. ♖xh6 ♖b1+ 46. ♔d2 c1 ♖#) 44... ♔h7 he still wins!

That’s why I gave 42... ♔g7 only one question mark.

43. ♖f6+ 1:01:02

1/2-1/2

GAME drawn by mutual agreement?? That gets two question marks.

So Black still did not know he was winning after 43... ♔g8 44. ♖d8+ ♔h7. In a sense, *agreeing to a draw was his biggest mistake of the game* because it was so final. This was a crazy, instructive game with plenty of “Don’t do that!” situations from which the reader can learn.

P.S.: There are only four draws among the 30 games in the book and you’ve already seen two of them, so decisive results rule the rest of the way, not that these draws were dull by any stretch of the imagination.

GAME 4: WHITE 1644 – BLACK 1544
Internet Chess Club 2012
50 minutes with a 50-second increment
Sicilian Defense, High School Variation

1.e4 0:50:47

c5 0:50:43

2. ♗c4 0:51:34

...

I call this common amateur line “The High School Variation” because so many high-school players, unfamiliar with the Sicilian, find this an attractive second move. I am sure there is some obscure “official” name for this variation I could locate via Google, but I rather like “The High School Variation” because it’s so apropos. Occasionally a grandmaster tries the more logical 1.e4 c5 2. ♗f3 d6 3. ♗c4!? because the black d-pawn is already committed to d6 and the light squares are slightly more vulnerable, but even that line is a rare bird.

2...

e6 0:50:54

The right prescription. Black should take away the bishop’s squares with moves like ...e7-e6 and ...a7-a6 and then go after it with ...d7-d5 and ...b7-b5. Black does not get an advantage doing this, but certainly White doesn’t either. Therefore, since good players want to get an advantage with White, this line is not played at the master level.

3. ♖f3 0:52:14

...

Sometimes I see 3. ♖c3 (to discourage ...d7-d5) and then 3...a6 4.a4 (to stop ...b7-b5 attacking the bishop) 4... ♖c6 5. ♖f3 ♖f6 and if 6.e5? ♖g4 7. ♔e2 ♔c7 and the e-pawn falls. This is a good sequence/pattern to know if you have just started playing the Sicilian, since it can occur with other move orders or in similar situations in other variations.

3...

d6 0:50:50

Black doesn't understand why 2. ♔c4 is a rare bird. By giving up on ...d7-d5 he justifies White's choice somewhat. A possible improvement might be 3...a6 4.a4 d5!.

4. ♗b5+ 0:48:47

...

Moving the same pieces multiple times in the opening is the bane of inexperienced players. Over the years I have found that this is one of the biggest strategic differences between my students and myself – in the opening I am always looking for how to get all my pieces in the game (which piece is next?), while they are always looking for how their already developed pieces can try something tricky without backup from all their forces.

I make an analogy with a company selling widgets: If you are the manager, already have a salesman selling 100 widgets a week, and hire a new salesman, which one would you train to sell more widgets? You can get the new guy up to 50 per week with a little training or you can try to squeeze an extra 5 or 10 from the veteran salesman.

Similarly, barring tactics (as is always the case), *it is usually far more efficient to take a piece which is doing nothing and have it do something, than it is to take a piece which is doing something and try to get it to do a little more.* Oversimplification, maybe, but you have to learn to “Walk Before You Can Run” (<http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman116.pdf>).

4...

♗d7 0:51:03


With the pawn on e6, offering the bishop trade makes a lot of sense for Black. I am surprised how many amateurs don't understand this idea of trading off their bad pieces in similar positions and instead block with the knight. It's not a big difference here, but in some positions it might be.

5. ♗xd7+ 0:49:28

...

White immediately trades as if this is a book move or forced, but neither is true. There were alternatives worth considering, like 5. ♔e2. *You don't learn how to weigh the pros and cons of serious alternatives without practicing doing so when appropriate.* For more on this very important analytical subject, see “The Fun of Pros and Cons” at <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman94.pdf>. This was hardly an example of White following Lasker's Rule. While taking 9 minutes on this move would be too long, taking 9 seconds is also too short.

5...


 **xd7** 0:50:58

I think this is the correct way to recapture and, thankfully, so does the computer. The idea is that with the pawn on c5 getting out of the way of the c6 square and fighting for d4, putting the knight on c6 in the very near future to support that fight is better than sticking it on d7.

It is usually far more efficient to take a piece which is doing nothing and have it do something, than it is to take a piece which is doing something and try to get it to do a little more.


You might have heard principles like, “Don’t move out the queen too soon” (what is “too soon” anyway?) or, “develop your minor pieces before you develop your queen and rooks.” However, in this situation Black has to recapture, the queen is well placed and safe on d7, and the knight’s best square is c6, so capturing with the queen first is best. Kudos for Black for both taking almost a minute to make his move (clock goes down 5 seconds plus the 50-second increment) – that’s about the right speed – and for recapturing with the queen.

6.O-O 0:50:04


 **c6** 0:51:24


7.c3= 0:50:48

...

This is a useful move in many Anti-Sicilians where White is trying to set up a strong center with d4/e4, and so delays playing d2-d4 until he can recapture with a pawn. However, it is by no means mandatory and White has other ways of proceeding, such as 7.d3, 7.d4, and 7. c3. Normally, d2-d3 gives too little space, but in positions where you have traded off your light-squared bishop, it’s not as bad since it supports e4 and does not interfere with as many of the other pieces. Still, White eventually needs some space and open lines for his pieces.


7...

 **f6** 0:52:05


The computer has a slight preference for 7...d5 or 7... d8 but the move chosen is quite acceptable. There are many possible permutations for either side to successfully develop all their pieces for the middlegame – and many possible unsuccessful ones, too. The key is to not take too much time and find one of the successful ones. Taking inordinate amounts of time trying to pinpoint the absolutely best setup is not only counterproductive for your time, but a hopeless human endeavor unless we include correspondence games played with legal computer assistance.

8.d3 0:51:21

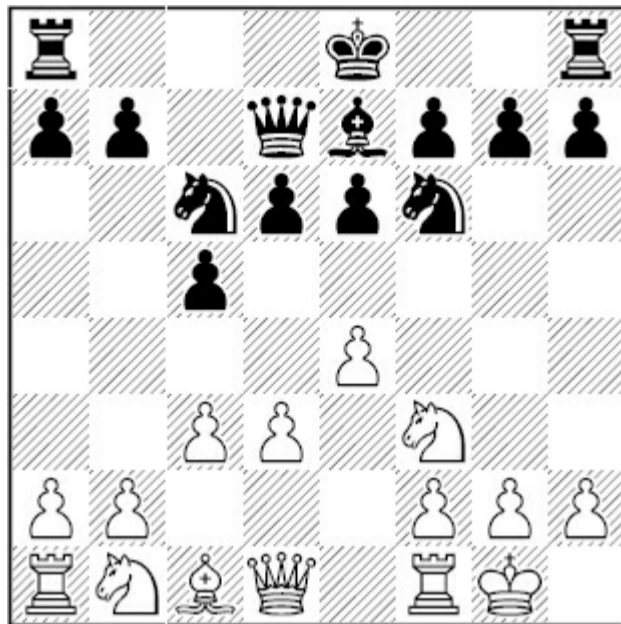
...

White could delay moving the d-pawn and guard the e-pawn another way with say 8. e1, with the idea of playing d2-d4 soon after. Although that would be more consistent, *Houdini* says it is not any better, so that’s good enough for me!

8...

 **e7** 0:52:48

Question: How should White continue his development?



White to play after 8... ♕e7

9. ♕e3 0:50:51

...

Usually White refrains from ♕c1-e3 if Black can successfully harass it with ... ♗g4. *Houdini* does not think this is an exception. Therefore, the normally tempo-wasting 9.h3 is acceptable here (for additional reading on this common question refer to “A Guide to P-R3” at <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman48.pdf>). White could also play 9. ♕f4 or 9. ♖e2, all with equality. Playing 9. ♕e3 immediately is certainly not a big mistake, but it’s nice to know about how the pieces best “fit” together when you are planning where your pieces should go in the opening. The best way to get a feel for that is not to lock yourself in the closet memorizing opening lines (which your opponents likely may not play), but to review many annotated master games to see what “good” patterns look like and commonly occur.

9...

O-O 0:53:25

Nothing wrong with castling, but 9... ♗g4 and 9... ♖c7 are the computer’s second and first choices, respectively. Both sides are playing a little too quickly; Black only took 13 seconds on this move. *To play really quickly until you see that you have gotten into trouble and then slow down to figure a way out of danger is a really bad time-management plan. It’s better to play a little more slowly before you get into trouble to at least attempt to avoid it.*

10. ♗bd2 0:50:51

...

It’s not too late to play 10.h3=.

10...

♗g4 0:52:37

It’s ironic that 10.h3 was *Houdini*’s best move but, when White failed to play it, 10... ♗g4 is not

its best reply (although it's close). The computer slightly prefers 10...♔c7, but these small differences would likely change or disappear if I let it think longer, or if the programmers would supply me with their next algorithm with slightly improved evaluation. That's why it would be incorrect, if not misleading, to tell the reader that 10...♗g4 is any kind of inaccuracy because it's not.

11. ♗f4 0:50:54

...

There is no bishop pair here and allowing 11...♗xe3 12.fxe3 would not only give White a healthy extra pawn in the center but also create the only semi-open file on the board for White's rooks. Still, the bishop on e3 is a good piece, and the computer thinks it is worth a tempo to keep it on the board. Such decisions are often pretty close and I am not sure that I would have done the same thing – in the past I've played it either way.

11...

e5 0:52:03

To play really quickly until you see that you have gotten into trouble and then slow down to figure a way out of danger is a really bad time-management plan. It's better to play a little more slowly before you get into trouble to at least attempt to avoid it.

A somewhat committal decision. *This does not “win” a tempo by attacking the bishop, nor does it “lose” a tempo by moving the same piece twice in the opening. It costs a tempo to move the pawn the second time, but this forces the bishop to move again, so the tempo issue is actually moot.* The key question is, “Is moving the pawn to e5 and getting the bishop to go to a different square good for White or good for Black?” There are pros and cons, and learning to weigh those up is one of the best things you can do for your evaluation skills. For example, with this move Black permanently weakens the central d5 square but gains space and more control over d4 and f4.

Houdini thinks activating the queen rook with 11...♖ad8 is best, but the difference is only a tenth of a pawn (which is still larger than many of the differences it calculated earlier in the game).

12. ♗g3 0:51:32

f5 0:51:09

Another committal decision on Black's part, to go immediately for his kingside break. It's not like the center is closed with White's pawns on e4/d5 vs. Black's d6/e5 as in a King's Indian Defense, when an early ...f7-f5 break is mandatory. Here, with the d-pawns not fixed against each other (i.e., White's d-pawn is not on d5), breaking with ...f7-f5 is normally all right, but it much more depends on the position. *Houdini* suggests 12...b5 with a minor advantage to White, not even “±”.

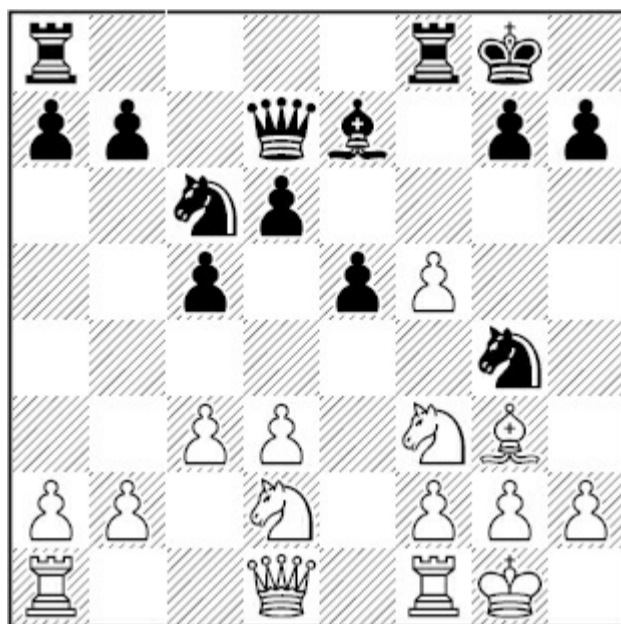
13. exf5 0:51:56

...

Activating the queen with 13.♔b3+ is an attractive idea. The computer's other top move is to drive the knight back with 13.h3. Certainly White cannot allow 13...f4 trapping the bishop. Therefore, when analyzing, this becomes a “killer move” which eliminates White's move 13

candidates that just lose the bishop. White took only 26 seconds and still has more time than when he started the game, so he's not really examining the alternatives and weighing pros and cons. If he wants to play this quickly, maybe he should have played a faster time control than 50/50.

Question: How should Black react to White's capture 13.exf5?



Black to play after 13.exf5

Houdini's idea is interesting. Neither 13... ♖xf5 nor 13... ♗xf5 is among its top three moves. Its main idea is to play 13... ♘h6 and then recapture with the knight! The pawn is not going anywhere.

13... ♖xf5 0:49:31

At least Black thought on this move and, unlike White, actually has less time remaining than the amount with which he started the game.

14.h3 0:50:14 ...

A reasonable choice. *Houdini* slightly prefers 14.a3± or 14. ♖e1±. Certainly the latter move, activating the rook, is the kind of activation move you want to strongly consider in these early-game positions.

I am always amazed how inexperienced players can castle, and then leave their rooks dormant for many moves. Someone once said, “*Whoever uses their rooks best in the opening usually wins the opening,*” and that’s probably a good way to think about it.

14... ♘h6 0:48:14

It’s close between 14... ♘h6 and 14... ♘f6. Ironic that Black picks this square now that it is not so easy to redeploy via f5.

15. ♗e4(?) 0:49:18 ...

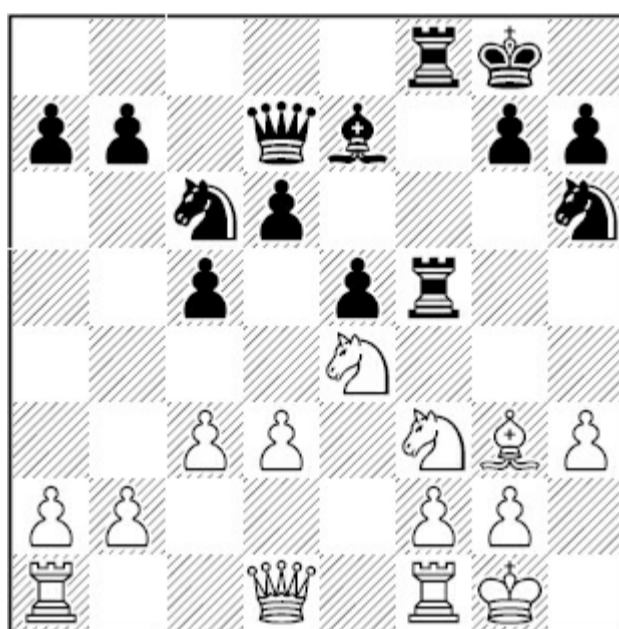
White moves this knight twice for little apparent purpose other than blind centralization. *Houdini* liked the esoteric idea of 15.a3± followed by 16.b4 gaining space on the queenside, but what does it know? Actually, the more I look at that, the more it strikes me as something I wouldn't have strongly considered but it's logical, e.g. 15.a3 ♖af8 16.b4 b6 17.♗b3+ ♔h8 18.♕ab1, intending 19.bxc5 with interesting queenside play. That's not my style, but maybe it should be!

15...

♖af8= 0:45:58

A good move, bringing the final piece of his army to an active square. Sometimes good chess is not that difficult.

Question: To what common tactical idea should both sides be alert?



White to play after 15... ♖af8

Whoever uses their rooks best in the opening usually wins the opening.

Now that Black's rooks have taken powerful posts on his only semi-open file, the common exchange sacrifice ... ♖xf3 needs to be taken into consideration by both players on each move. The *Seeds of Tactical Destruction* (patterns that might allow a tactic) are that the knight is attacked enough times that the queen can't recapture, while gxf3 would leave doubled and isolated f-pawns and isolate the h-pawn as well. The other issue is that White is castled kingside and the queens are still on the board, so that would make the white king extremely vulnerable. These reasons would be enough to make an alert player aware of the possibility of ... ♖xf3. White should be aware that he can't allow this possibility if Black has any kind of good follow-through, and Black should be aware that it may be a dangerous sacrifice leading to a strong attack.

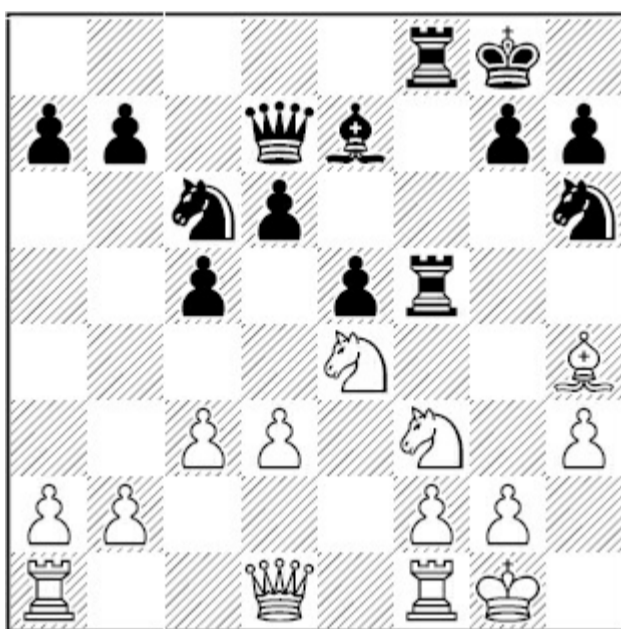
After the game, Black said he was aware of this possibility starting at this point.

16. ♔h4?? 0:49:24

...

White takes less than the increment and makes a losing move with almost 50 minutes left on his clock. This should never happen, but *some players think the clock is there more as an annoyance than as a serious pacemaker on how much time they should take for their decisions.*

Instead of allowing Black his stock sacrifice (which I assume was not even taken into consideration – that would have taken more time to calculate), White could have “taken back” his last move to protect f3 with 16. ♖ed2, or first checked with 16. ♗b3+ and then played 17. ♖ed2. Of course, most players are very reluctant to admit a mistake, so if the only way to save the game is for them to move their piece back to where it was, we should not be surprised when they don’t do it. *Many view taking their move back on a subsequent move as a sign of weakness and won’t consider it. I view the issue as quite the opposite – an opponent who is willing to take his move back, when necessary, is a wise and dangerous one.*



Black to play after 16. ♗h4??

16...

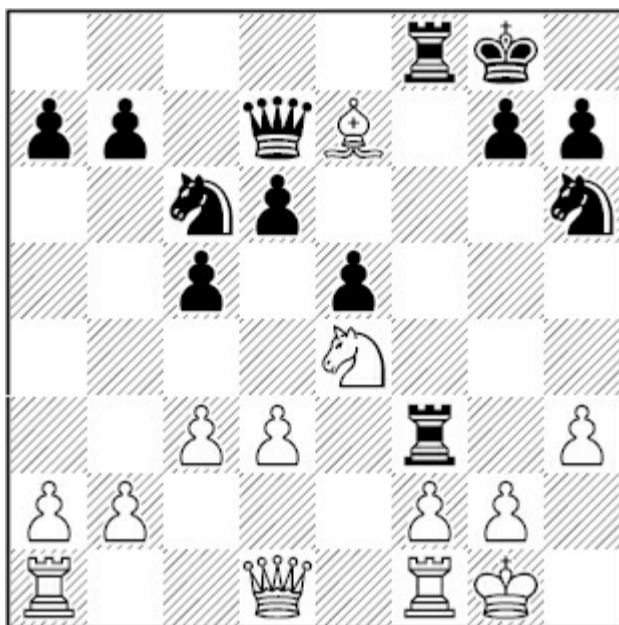
♜xh4?? 0:40:51

It’s worth taking some space here to walk through, step by step, how Black could have calculated his combination, at least as far as it would be necessary to play the first move.

Let’s start by assuming something we already know, which is that Black is aware that 16... ♜xf3 is sometimes a good idea. If you don’t know that, you do now, and any capture – even if it loses material – might be the start of a forcing combination. Many basic tactics books are filled with easy problems that begin with pseudo-sacrifices where the initial move gives up material; however, the player making the combination is not taking any risk because it can be shown that in a move or two he will get it all back and more. That’s not strictly the case here, but it’s close enough that anyone playing Black should take the time to calculate the consequences of starting with 16... ♜xf3!

Players who don’t consider sacrifices like this because “I would be losing a rook for a knight, and knights are worth less than rooks,” are making *quiescence errors* (stopping their analysis too soon – see <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman55.pdf>) and often complain that, “I get this type of problem right in my tactics books but I never find them in my games!”

Now that 16... ♖xf3 is “on the radar” we have to roll up our sleeves and carefully calculate how good it is. The first thing you should notice is that 16... ♖xf3 has the added bonus that White can't just recapture 17.gxf3? because there has been a “removal of the guard” of the bishop on h4. Therefore, if White plays 17.gxf3, then the immediate 17... ♗xh4 puts Black ahead two pieces to a rook (an advantage of roughly 1.5 pawns) plus all the other benefits: weak king, wrecked pawn structure. Of course, 17. ♗xf3? ♖xf3 also loses material for White so you should use deductive logic to conclude that 17. ♗xe7 is White's only hope. At that point in your analysis you should be visualizing the following position:



Black to play after 17. ♗xe7 (analysis)

Both of Black's rooks are attacked, but the one on f3 is part of the intended exchange sacrifice, so it makes the most sense to just recapture on e7, thus saving the rook on f8. The question is whether Black should capture with the queen or with the knight. At least superficially (you really would not have to decide “for sure” until you reach that point in the game), it seems the key is that the queen can capture on h3 on the next move. Because White would have to play 18.gxf3 or else be behind a piece, that capture overworks the g2-pawn, which cannot both capture the rook and guard h3. Since the queen is already attacking h3, it makes sense (for now) to assume that the correct idea is to play 17... ♗xe7 and after 18.gxf3 at least consider 18... ♗xh3 (incidentally, *Houdini* says both 18... ♗xh3 followed by 19... ♗g6 or reversing the move order starting with 18... ♗g6 are clearly winning).

At this point (16... ♖xf3 17. ♗xe7 ♗xe7 18.gxf3) you have reached sufficient quiescence, so you can stop and evaluate. Things look very good for Black: for his exchange (rook for knight, normally worth about 1¾ pawns) he already has:

- A weakened white king with plenty of attacking ammunition;
- A sure extra pawn if it's wanted (via ... ♗xh3); and
- A wrecked white pawn structure.

That's more than enough for the exchange, and enough to consider 16... ♖xf3 as a *King of the*

Hill (leading candidate move).

That leads to an interesting question: by this point if you think that 16... ♖xf3 is sound, should you just play it? Of course not! Unless you think a move wins easily, or you are playing a speed game, then you should look for a better move, just as you always do. It may turn out that it is easy to prove that a better move doesn't exist (in this case it's true), but you may find that another move is an easy win. If that were true, your brilliant sacrifice may turn out to be completely unnecessary and risky. That's why it's important also to follow Purdy's advice to, "*Look wide before you look deep*" because, if such a clearly better move does exist, then spending several minutes calculating the consequences of a complex sacrifice may be completely wasted time!

In the game, Black did take five minutes to start to investigate this, but backed out. Speaking of backing, back to the game...

17. ♖xh4 0:46:58

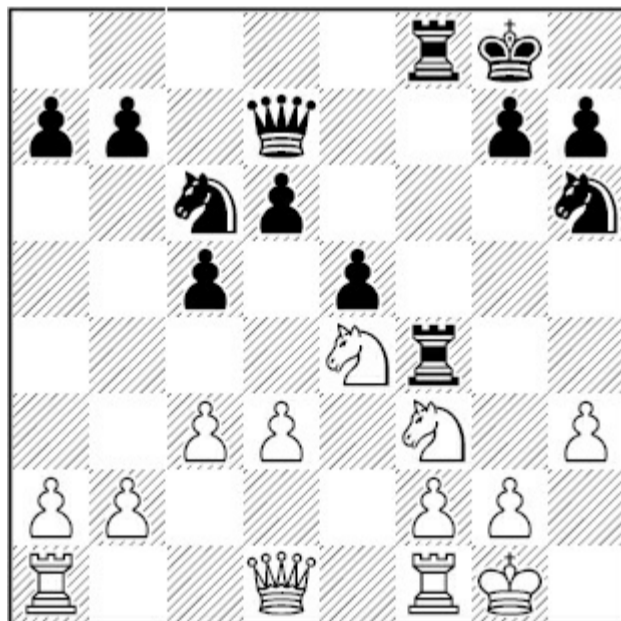
♖f4! ♖ 0:37:01

I think Black realized he missed an opportunity and was hoping that it would occur again. Therefore, even though 17... ♖f4 is the best move, I think it was made with some hope that he'd get a second chance, rather than on any other considerations if White played a better 18th move and prevented the sacrifice.

18. ♖f3? 0:46:20

...

At 24+ ply, *Houdini*'s top three moves are 18. ♖h5, 18.g4, and 18.g3 – all alternative ways of saving the knight and avoiding what happens.



Black to play after 18. ♖f3?

18...

♖xf3! 0:35:02

19.gxf3 0:46:20

...

There's no good way to decline the offer. White must accept or else he is just down a piece. Once it gets this far, like it or not, you have to accept the sacrifice. You can't just let non-beginners win a piece for nothing and hope to survive, so this "acceptance" logic is pretty clear, no matter how strong you think the sacrifice is. Of course, if you see that your opponent has mate in two if you accept but don't want to resign, you can decline the sacrifice and remain down a piece, but the outcome in that case should be fairly clear. Therefore, *on your previous move* you need to analyze whether you want your opponent to be able to sacrifice – and prevent it at that point if you don't – rather than waiting until it is too late (as many amateurs do...).

19...

♔xh3 0:35:05

Our 3200-rated electronic aide indicates that the sacrifice, while still winning as it was on move 16, is not as easy here. Plus, there's a very troubling sign that Black played 19...♔xh3 in 47 seconds when he had a few other very promising ways to continue the attack. One of the themes of this book, and certainly this chapter, is that *if your position is critical – or you think it might be – and you have the time to examine possibly stronger alternatives, you won't ever get to be a good player if you don't learn to take that time and see what you can find out (and learn, too)*. If Black expects to win with this attack, it may not be trivial, so playing quickly doesn't have much upside.

At 20 ply the computer suggests 19...♔xh3, but the main alternative was 19...d5, which should also win. We can be pretty sure Black did not investigate any possibilities other than 19...♔xh3 too deeply.

20. ♖g3 0:45:53

...

Although White has no good defense, this is not one of his stronger tries, and the fact that he took only 77 seconds to reply indicates he wasn't that interested in analyzing lines to see which ones put up the most resistance. *Sometimes in losing positions if you can just throw enough difficult decisions in your opponent's path, he may find a way to let you back in the game*. But that takes work, and 77 seconds when you have 46+ minutes and a 50-second time delay is not much work at all.

It's no wonder that at tournaments which feature players of all levels, almost all the weaker players finish their games first. The stronger players, who think faster, more accurately, and need less time to deduce the same information, consistently take almost all their time and are the last ones finished. To play more quickly would be to play less than their best, and that's not how one gets to be a strong player.

20...

♖f4 0:34:48

Similarly, Black, who has an array of attacking possibilities ranging from easy wins to dead ends, takes only 67 seconds (!) and plays the first idea he thinks will work. Even if this were a forced mate on the next move, I probably wouldn't play it that fast. But here, with all the complications on the board, Black manages to find his "best" move that, at 20 ply, doesn't make the computer's top few! *When you see a good move, think longer and make sure it's really as good as you first believed!*

If your position is critical – or you think it might be – and you have the time to examine possibly stronger alternatives, you won't ever get to be a good player if you don't learn to take that time and see what you can find out.

In losing positions, sometimes if you can just throw enough difficult decisions in your opponent's path, he may find a way to let you back in the game.

Since Black has several wins on this move, such as 20... ♖e7 Δ21... ♗g6-f4(h4), I will reserve discussion of his best 20th move until move 22, when that best move becomes his *only* winning idea!

21. ♔b3+ 0:46:27 ...

The best try, although (because White only took 16 seconds) I don't think he was considering alternatives. What's worse, if you told White that his game was eventually going to be published in this book, I fear he still would not have taken more than 16 seconds to find a better defense. I hope I am wrong...

The good news is that Black slows down – a little – to make sure he finds a good way to meet the check. And his simple move, although tying up the knight on h6 to prevent some back-rank mates, is best.

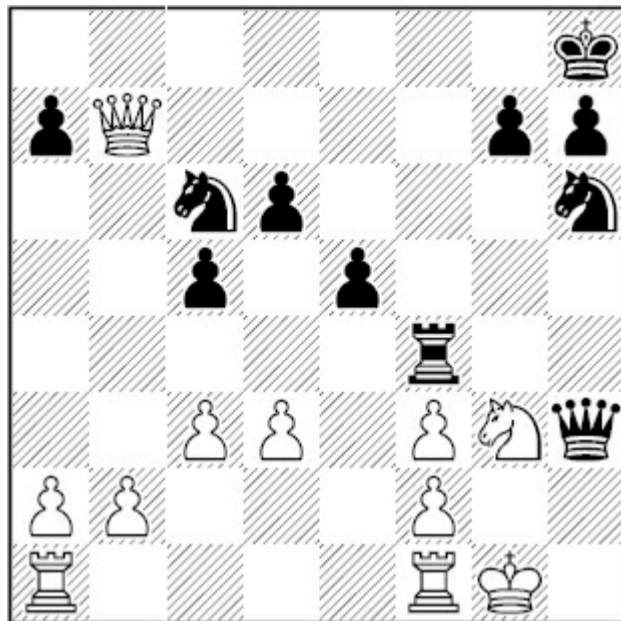
21... ♔h8 0:32:41

The other winning way to get out of check was 21...c4, attacking the queen. White now has his choice of poisons, so he needs to contemplate which one will give him the best chance to switch the poison to Black.

22. ♔xb7 0:47:12 ...

Five seconds for this move. We could say that White deserves to lose, but that's altogether too harsh. However, nothing saves the day. The good news is that White's move has created a problemlike situation where Black has one move which wins easily once it's located, but it's not easy to find.

Question: Black to play and win!



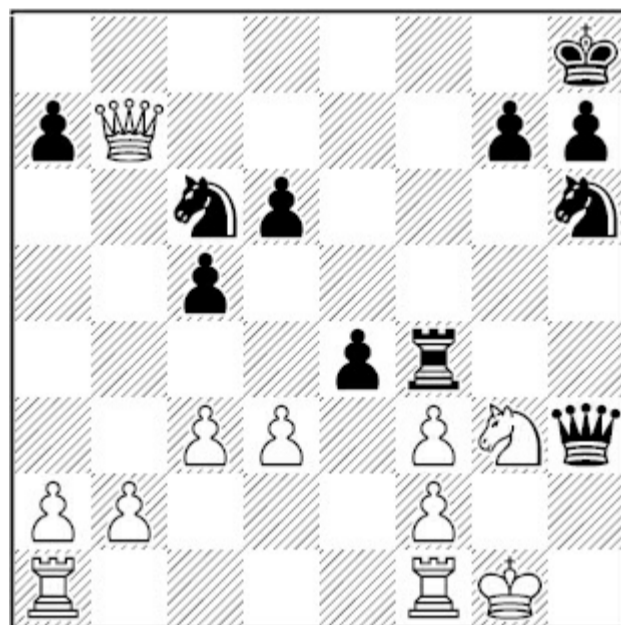
Black to play after 22. ♔xb7

22...

♖h4?? 0:32:00

In this super-critical position Black thinks for a minute and a half and uncorks a lemon. One difference between amateurs and stronger players is that stronger players have better *criticality assessment* and time management so, when we play lemons, it is with a lot more thought!

Black misses a beautiful – and easy to understand once you see it – win with 22...e4!:



White to play after 22...e4! (analysis)

This “line clearance” move threatens to bring two pieces – the pawn on e4 and the knight on c6 – to f3 with winning mate threats. White can easily stop one or the other, but not both:

- 23. ♔xc6 exf3 and White has to give up his queen to stop 24... ♔g2# since the knight on h6 can always go to g8 to block back-rank checks;

- 23.dxe4 ♖e5 when the threat of 23... ♗xf3# is unstoppable after a queen spite check or two;
- 23.fxe4 ♖e5 with the same 23... ♗xf3# threat. If then 24.f3 to allow the rook to guard f3, 24... ♗xg3+ 25.♔h1 ♖h4# is easy enough.

No other moves win for Black. His second-best move is 22... ♖d8, when 23.♗b8 is evaluated as “+”. The move played in the game, 22... ♖h4??, is the third-best move, and is evaluated as a win for White!

23. ♖fe1! 0:47:59 ...

This is the best square for the rook, which must move to prevent 23... ♗h2#. However, although this is forced, it is also good for White, something Black should have foreseen last move. When contemplating 22... ♖h4, Black should think, “This is mate unless White moves his rook off f1, but suppose he does that – what would I do next?”

If he had taken some time to think that way, who knows – he might have found the beautiful 22... e4 and had a game worth publishing. Oh, wait! It got published anyway, but not for the reasons he would have wanted.

At this point White unexpectedly had to leave so he asked Black to adjourn the game, which Black graciously did. Once the game was adjourned, it was “fair game” to ask the computer what was happening. Upon finding out that he now had a lost game (well, at least a bad one after *Houdini*’s best line of 23... ♖d8 24.♗a8 ♗h2+ 25.♔f1 ♗h3+ 26.♗e2 when White is way better, maybe winning) ...

23... **1-0**

I would not have resigned, but throughout this book there’s a lot of things I would not have done, which is one reason I wrote it!

GAME 5: WHITE 1459 – BLACK 1510
 Internet Chess Club 2010
 45 minutes with a 45-second increment
 King’s Indian Defense, Sämisch Variation

1.d4 0:45:38	♗ f6 0:45:36
2.c4 0:46:21	g6 0:46:15
3.♗c3 0:47:04	♗ g7 0:46:55
3... ♗g7 is the King’s Indian Defense; 3... d5 is the Grünfeld.	
4.e4 0:47:46	d6 0:47:35

Bobby Fischer played a famous game where he baited with 4...O-O, inviting 5.e5. However, White can just play a different fifth move, transposing if Black plays 5...d6.

5.f3 0:48:29 ...

The characteristic move of the Sämisch Variation. In a sense, this is a cousin of the Yugoslav Attack in the Sicilian Dragon: White fortifies the center with f2-f3, castles queenside, and throws the kitchen sink at Black's kingside.

5... **O-O** 0:47:49

6.♗e3 0:48:33 ...

The main line. The second most common grandmaster move is 6.♗g5.

6... **c5** 0:48:20

The modern gambit line. The older line is 6...e5, when one fun line is Bronstein's queen sacrifice 7.d5 ♗h5 8.♗d2 ♗h4+ 9.g3 ♗xg3!? 10.♗f2 ♗xf1 11.♗xh4 ♗xe3 and then 12... ♗xc4 after White defends against ... ♗c2+. Black has both bishops and two pawns for the queen. The computer likes White in this line, but a complicated middle-game is in store where humans playing Black will have interesting play.

7.d5 0:49:14 ...

Declining the gambit. The theory of accepting with 7.dxc5 dxc5 8.♗xd8 ♖xd8 9.♗xc5 is beyond the scope of this book; however, it suffices to say that White's winning chances have been low enough that grandmasters have mostly avoided playing 7.dxc5 (and even 5.f3) for quite a while, after attempting to bust it about twenty years ago.

7... **♗bd7?!**

Black normally breaks with 7...e6. In *Play The King's Indian*, GM Joseph Gallagher writes that in similar lines Black should not play ... ♗bd7 until the White's KN moves to e2. He suggests that ... ♗bd7 gives White the option to develop safely with ♗h3, with flexible play after a later ♗h3-f2. If White plays ♗h3 before ... ♗bd7, then Black has the option of ... ♗xh3. *Houdini's* top two moves at 23 ply are 7... ♗a5 and 7...a6.

8.♗d3 0:49:11 ...

Houdini must have been reading Gallagher as 8.♗h3= was its #1 choice.

8... **♗e5** 0:46:39

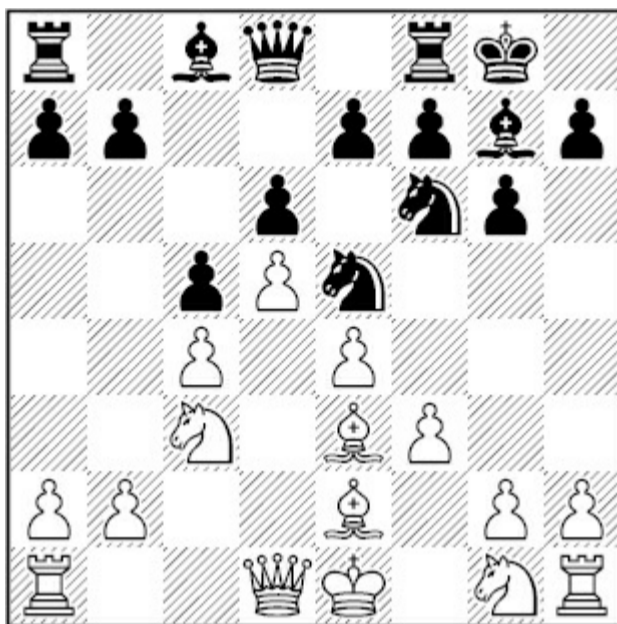
The move played and 8...a6, anticipating queenside castling and counteraction, are the top two

candidates.

9. ♖e2(?) 0:48:37

...

It's good to save the bishop pair, but this bishop is too blocked in and Black has already spent two tempos on his centralized knight, so it is illogical for White to spend a tempo saving it. The computer's clear choice is 9. ♖e2.



Black to play after 9. ♖e2(?)

9...

a6 0:44:53

Black has the right idea, but it's even better to revert back to the original break square with 9... e6. Then if 10.dxe6 the interesting recapture 10... ♖xe6, accepting a backward d-pawn but attacking c4, is the computer's pick.

10. ♗d2 0:49:16

...

Normal for this type of position, but more to the point was 10.f4 to drive back the offending knight. Then 10... ♗eg4 11. ♖d2 (this bishop must be preserved!) 11... b5! 12.cxb5 axb5 13.h3 b4! and the fight is on, with chances for both sides. White is playing very rapidly as if he were in a book line, but in fact the play is already non-book and delicate. Many amateurs keep playing rapidly even though they are out of book, to their detriment both in becoming a stronger player and when they face stronger players.

10...

♗b8 0:45:09

Reasonable, as is 10... ♗a5, the computer's top choice. Both continue play on the queenside, where White has indicated he will probably provide residence for his king.

11.O-O-O? 0:49:34

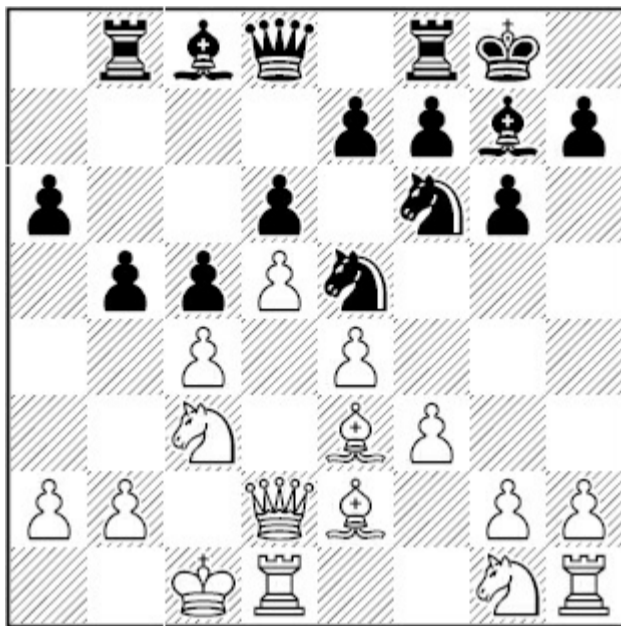
...

Consistent, but probably just loses. The top two moves are 11.a4 and 11.Qg5.

11...

♖e8? 0:43:40

Black doesn't understand. He thinks that 11...b5! –



White to play after 11...b5! (analysis)

– is not safe because White has three pieces attacking it and it's only guarded by two.

It was worth including this game in the book, no matter the rest of its value (and it is an interesting game), just to persuade the reader that “unsafe” moves like 11...b5 are exactly what is required in opposite-side castling positions similar to this one. Moreover, 11...b5 is by far the computer's top choice, and we all know how materialistic computers are, so they are not going to “sacrifice” a pawn unless they calculate that they will get something for it.

So let's analyze 11...b5!:

1) Suppose White accepts the pawn with 12.cxb5. Then Black will wish to open lines with 12...axb5 and now:

1a) 13. ♖xb5 ♕a6! 14.a4 (14. ♖c3 ♕a5–+; 14. ♖a3 ♕b6–+) 14...c4! 15. ♖d4 ♕c7 with a decisive attack;

1b) 13. ♕xb5 ♕a5! 14.a4 ♕a6 15. ♕c2 ♖c4 16. ♕d2 ♕xb5 17. ♖xb5 ♖xd2 18. ♖xd2 ♕h6–+.

To paraphrase Bobby Fischer, “Of course White can play differently, but then White loses differently.”

2) What if White declines the offer?

2a) 12. ♕f4 ♕a5 13. ♕xe5 dxe5 14.d6 exd6 15. ♖b1 ♕e6–+;

2b) 12. ♖c2 ♗d7 13. ♘f4 ♙xc4 14. ♗xc4 bxc4 15. ♚ge2 ♜b7 16. ♔b1 ♚a5–+.

Memorizing any of these lines is useless – just get a feel for what is happening. The point is that 11...b5 launches all the action on the queenside and the white king is caught in the maelstrom. Any sacrifice of a pawn in front of your opponent's king is worth consideration and some, like 11...b5 above, are so positionally desirable that it's not even worth calculating to see if you get the pawn back. In speed chess, good players make moves like this instantly on faith alone, and play the same move with a little more thought in a slow game even though they know they can't calculate all the lines.

12.h4 0:49:46 ...

At least White knows who is paying the bills and where he would prefer the action.

12... ♙c7? 0:44:01

If you haven't guessed, the idea should have been to play 12...b5! or 12... ♚a5. In both cases the computer thinks Black is on the brink of winning – not nearly as much an advantage as 11...b5 was, but still enough to likely win. Queenside, queenside, queenside...!

Instead, Black makes three moves with a knight that was guarding the kingside, and it still isn't that close to aiding a queenside attack.

13.g4 0:48:11 ...

White has definitely got the right idea, but the break 13.h5 was more accurate. If White had made that move, the computer would have finally returned White to equal chances.

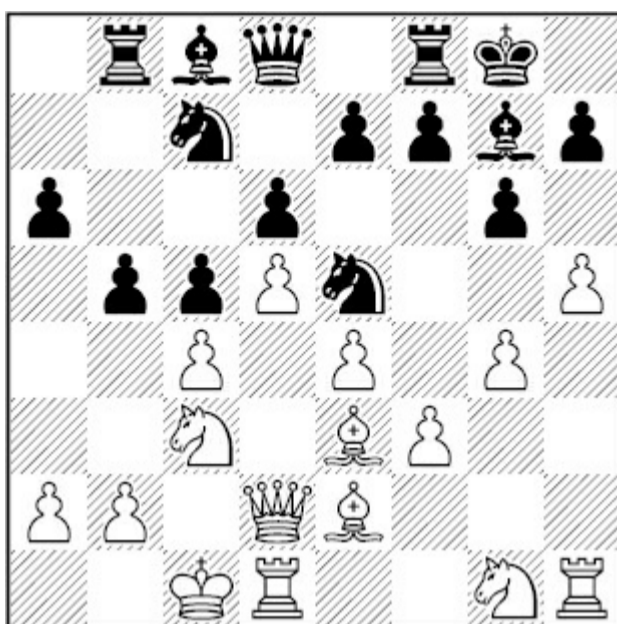
13... b5! ♞ 0:44:10

I guess better late than never. It's still #1.

14.h5 0:48:16 ...

Ditto. The race is heating up.

Question: What is Black's best move?



Black to play after 14.h5

14...

bxc4 0:42:00

This is an interesting choice. Black is going by the general principle of opening lines on the side where he is attacking, and we can't blame him for that. On the other hand, the computer is going through some strange gyrations trying to figure out whether Black should play an offensive or defensive move. Normally in opposite-side castling positions you play mostly offensive, but that's "normally" and not "always." Chess is just so much fun that way.

The question before the diagram about the best move was really a trick question, so I apologize! At 24 ply the computer picks the avant-garde move 14... ♖f6 and thinks Black is ahead by about half a pawn. My guess is that if you gave this position to 100 grandmasters very few would pick 14... ♖f6. So don't feel bad if you don't always find a computer's best move – I hardly understand this one after I see it! More instructively, what you are trying to do is to avoid big mistakes, take advantage of your opponent's obvious mistakes, and do the best you can bringing into account the question, "Of all the things I know about chess, which things are relevant to finding a good move in this position?" and then take your time to analyze it carefully.

15.hxg6 0:48:23

...

White also is in the open lines mode. "Getting more space" with 15.h6 would be the opposite of what you would want to do unless that would somehow permanently lock the bishop out of the game. Still, 15.hxg6 is only the computer's second choice behind 15. ♖h6, which it rates as almost even.

15...

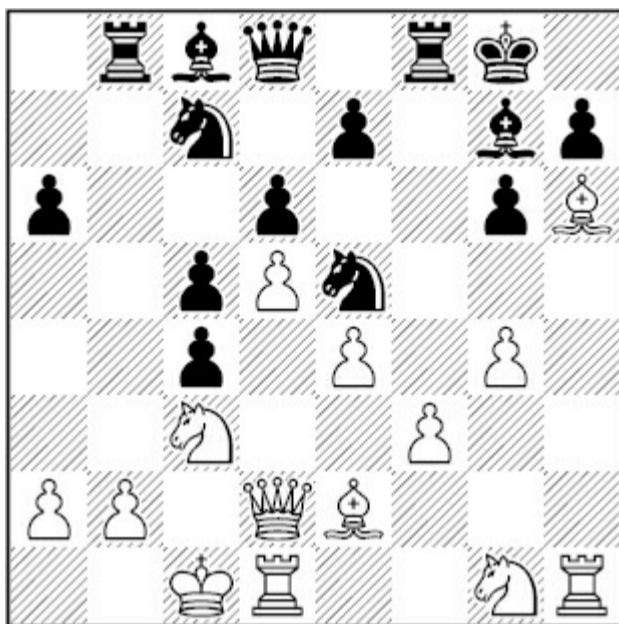
fxg6! 0:40:48

Some inexperienced players think recapturing with the h-pawn and opening the h-file is always wrong, but it's not always correct to take back with the f-pawn in similar positions. Little things like which way to recapture can make a big difference, although here the difference is "only" about half a pawn. Here the inexperienced players would be correct, because 15...hxg6 16. ♖h6 is a pattern

dangerous for Black. The computer thinks that Black is a little better after the correct 15...fxg6 but that White is a little better after 15...hxg6.

16. ♖h6 0:48:50 ...

The only logical way to press the attack (and it was played in 18 seconds, so if there was another logical way, it likely would not have been considered).



Black to play after 16. ♖h6

16... ♜e8??+-

This move seems to indicate “Hope Chess” – that is, *Black is not looking for White’s possible forcing moves in response, to see if he can meet them safely next move.* In this instance, the most obvious capturing sequence followed by the white queen’s penetration with tempo is not safe for Black. Not being able to find the most obvious line after your move usually means that *you didn’t consider whether you would have a defense, rather than that you looked for a defense and failed to find it.* The time-stamping for this move is lost, but Black had 40:48 remaining on move 15 and 40:04 left after move 17 so, given the 90 seconds’ incremental time, that is only 134 seconds for two very complicated and critical moves. He has over 2,400 seconds remaining and a 45-second increment, so taking a little extra time would have been very wise.

Instead, Black should play 16... ♜f7! 17. ♖xg7 ♜xg7+ and the recapturing rook on g7 guards the critical h7 square.

17. ♖xg7 0:48:54 ♜xg7 0:40:04

It’s too late now. The alternative 17... ♜xg7? is even worse: 18. ♖h6+ ♜f7 19. ♖xh7+ ♜g7 20. ♖h3+-.

18. ♖h6 0:48:38 ...

In comparison to the line 16... ♖f7 17. ♕xg7 ♖xg7, where the rook guarded h7, in the current position there is no defense to 19. ♗xh7. *If you wait until your opponent makes threats like this and ask, “What should I do now?” the answer sometimes is, “Nothing – you should have seen this one move ago and prevented it.”* You can play fairly strong chess if you just consistently look one move ahead and make sure you at least have a safe move on the next turn. That’s what Black apparently failed to do on move 16.

18...

♔f7 0:40:44

There’s nothing better. Although he was not “Born to Run,” His Majesty has to high-tail it now.

19. ♗xh7 0:49:18

...

Before making a move like this, you at least have to check that a reply like 19... ♖h8 does not trap the queen. Since White took the pawn in five seconds, he either checked it earlier or not at all (my guess is the latter and he was lucky, but the reader is welcome to give him the benefit of the doubt). In this position, of course, 19... ♖h8?? is not safe and loses to 20. ♗xh8 but I have seen plenty of positions where White does not have a rook on h1, plays a move like 19. ♗xh7 right away and then, after 19... ♖h8 trapping the queen, slows down and thinks, “Uh-oh, what do I do now?” – see my comments on Hope Chess after Black’s move 16.

The computer thinks that 19. ♗xh7 wins, but looking deeply it finds that 19. ♕h3 is another strong candidate. It’s not that we expect White to find this potentially better idea – I probably wouldn’t, but I would take more than five seconds trying, each time there is a possibility of a clearly better move.

19...

♕d7 0:40:58

A candidate, although I am not sure how Black decided to play it so quickly. Sometimes in positions such as these the critical idea is not connecting both rooks and the queen for defense on the back rank, but making sure the king has a path like ... ♔e8-d7 to escape. Since it could be that either idea is critical, it would be worth investing a little more time to make sure you are putting up the most resistance. At 22 ply *Houdini* finds several moves that are stronger, led by the counterattacking 25... ♗b6. Nevertheless, Black is lost in every line, assuming good play by White.

20. ♗h6 0:47:57

...

White takes two minutes for this move (one of his slowest moves!) but I think it would have probably taken him longer to find the clearly best choice, 20.f4!. This move involves a pseudo-sacrifice of the g-pawn, which can’t be captured: 20.f4! ♖xg4 21. ♕f3 ♗b6 22. ♖d2 followed by 23. ♕g5+ and 24. ♗xg7. But it’s still bad if Black declines to capture the pawn, e.g. 20... ♗b6 21. ♖d2 ♖h8 (there is nothing better) 22. ♗xh8 ♖xh8 23. ♖xh8 ♕xg4 24. ♕h3 with a winning attack.

20...

♗b6 0:29:57

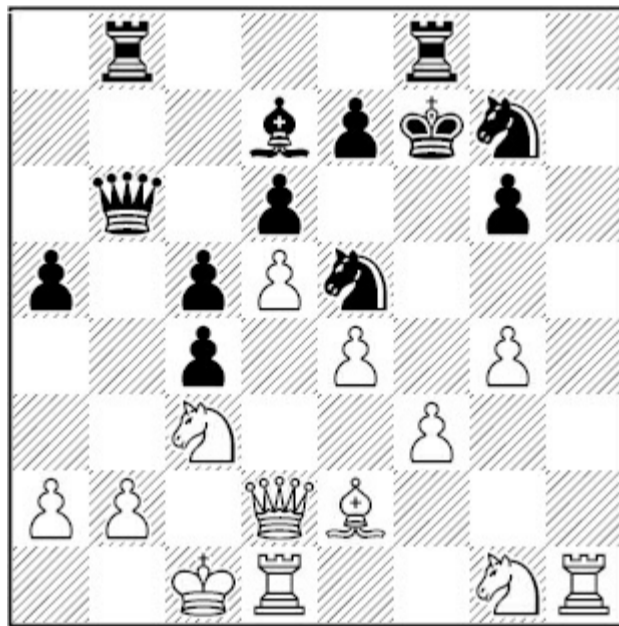
Black has to try queenside action sooner or later to get counterplay. However, there were a couple of better alternatives in 20... ♖a5! and 20... ♖g8. After 20... ♖a5! 21. ♘h3 ♔e8 22. ♖d2 (22. ♗xg7 ♖xb2! gets Black enough play to draw) 22... ♕a4! and if 23. ♗xg7 ♔d7 and Black has some good counterattacking chances. Therefore better is 23. ♗e3! when White is probably winning after 23... ♕d7 or 23... ♔d8, but there's still a big fight ahead and Black has chances.

21. ♗d2? ± 0:47:01 ...

Abandoning his kingside attack too quickly. The mate can just as easily be met by only tying up the rook with 21. ♖d2 when White's kingside action, as demonstrated in similar lines before, should be winning. *When there is castling on opposite sides with the queens on the board and the center is stable, then whoever gets to the opponent's king "firstest with the mostest" wins.* After 21. ♖d2, one possibility is 21... ♖h8 22. ♗f4+ ♔g8 23. ♖xh8+ ♔xh8 24. ♘h3 with a winning attack.

21... a5 0:29:37

Black's heart is in the right place, but perhaps not his king. The computer suggests getting the king to e8 as fast as possible, with the idea of anticipating and countering the white knight's getting to g5 quickly. Still, 21...a5 is not bad and the fight is still to the strong.



White to play after 21...a5

22. ♘h3 0:45:55 ...

Heading to the aforementioned weak square at g5. The close alternative was to shore up the defenses with 22. ♔b1, but the move chosen is more aggressive and maybe better, too.

22... ♔g8? ± 0:28:48

Wrong direction. Black heads back toward the fire! Moving the king was correct, but the more obvious 22... ♔e8± was safer. This is yet another losing move, but Black is running out of lives.

23.f4 0:45:41

...

This aggressive pawn offer is one good way to punish 22... ♔g8. Another was 23. ♖g5, e.g. 23... ♗f7 24. ♖xf7 and if 24... ♔xf7 25. ♕h7 or 24... ♕xf7 25. ♕h6, and either way White is winning with best play.

23...

♗xg4 0:27:14

If Black decided not to accept the offer, preferring to keep fewer lines open around this king, then the best defense was 23... ♗f7 when White has to find 24.f5! to maintain a winning advantage. Still, in this line the computer had to look fairly deeply to establish that 24.f5! is much better than moves like 24. ♖f2 or 24. ♗xc4, so it isn't an easy attack for White.

24. ♗xg4 0:45:57

...

White took 29 seconds for this move but it's not the easiest way to take advantage of Black's last move. The computer prefers 24. ♕dg1!+-, e.g. 24... ♗f6 25. ♕xg6.

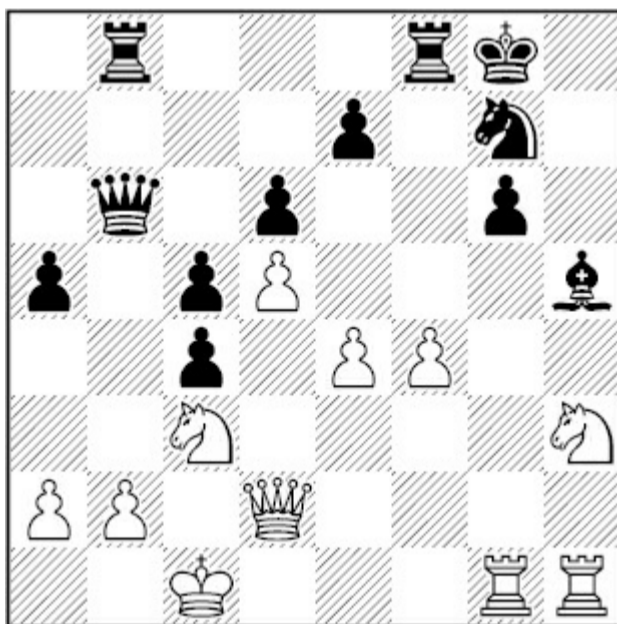
24...

♗xg4 0:27:01

25. ♕dg1 0:45:36

♗h5! 0:25:24

This is the difference between the line in the game and White's better alternative 24. ♕dg1 – in the former case the skewer wins the g-pawn, whereas now Black has some chances to defend by guarding it. Still, with correct play White is still winning. The following moves are very analytical with the strategy simple: White is attacking and Black is holding on for dear life on the kingside.



White to play after 25... ♗h5!

26. ♖g5 0:45:04

...

Logical and winning. Also decisive would be 26.f5 (26. ♕h2 is similar) 26...a4 27. ♕h2 ♔f7

28.fxg6+ ♔e8 29. ♖f4+–.

26...

♖xf4 0:24:55

Also insufficient is 26...a4 27. ♖e6 ♜f7 (27...a3 28. ♖xf8+–) 28. ♖xa4! ♜b4 29. ♖c3 ♖xe6 30.dxe6 ♜h7 31.f5+–.

27. ♖e6 0:45:16

...

Also winning is 27. ♖a4! ♜b4 28. ♜xf4 ♜f8 29. ♜h4 ♜xa4 30. ♖e6.

27...

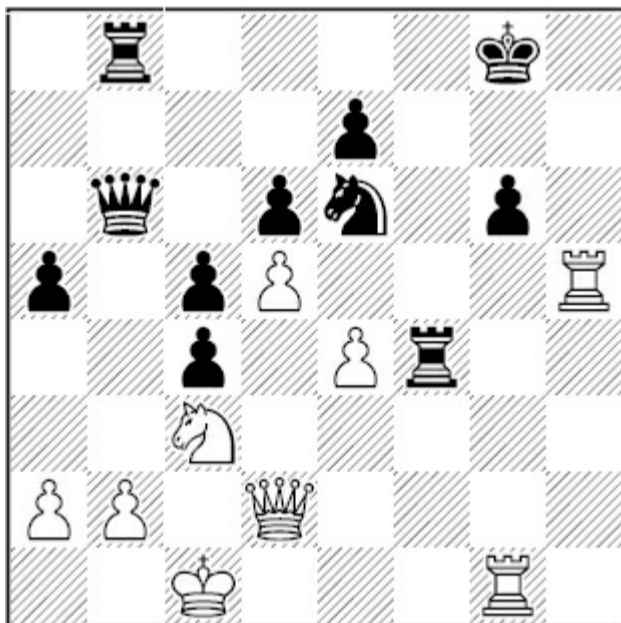
♖xe6 0:24:57

Likely not the best practical defense, but nothing works: 27... ♜f7 28. ♜xh5 ♖xh5 (28...gxh5 29. ♖d1! frees the queen for a devastating entry into the kingside) 29. ♖a4! ♜b5 30. ♜xg6+ and again the queen's entry will win easily.

28. ♜xh5 0:44:46

...

In this type of attack there is often more than one winning move, e.g. 28.dxe6 wins after 28... ♜g4 29. ♜xg4 ♖xg4 30. ♜g2+–. It's good for White that he has multiple winning lines because the speed he is playing at indicates that he is taking the win for granted, which is a dangerous attitude. After 28. ♜xh5 either the rook or the knight falls, which should about do it.



Black to play after 28. ♜xh5

28...

♔g7 0:25:14

Rather than just giving up the knight, Black may as well have tried 28... ♖g7 29. ♜xg6 ♜f1+ 30. ♖d1 (30. ♜c2?? ♜xb2#), but that fails too since 30... ♜xb2+ 31. ♜xb2 ♜xb2 32. ♜xb2 ♜xd1 allows 33. ♜5g5, winning the knight and leaving White a rook ahead.

29. **dxe6** 0:44:13
30. ♖ **hg5** 0:44:48

♔ **bf8** 0:25:33
...

The quickest mate starts with 30. ♖ **hh1** but everything reasonable wins.

30...
31. ♖ **xf1** 0:45:20
32. ♔ **c2** 0:46:03

♔ **f1+** 0:24:24
♔ **xf1+** 0:25:02
...

Blocking with the knight was not as good, as White calculated in the two seconds it took him to move. He was getting worried that he might finish the game with fewer minutes than when he started, so time was of the essence.

32...
33. ♗ **g2** 0:46:26
34. ♘ **d5** 0:47:04

♔ **d8** 0:24:52
♔ **f6** 0:23:55
...

The knight's entry into the attack should seal the deal.

34...
35. ♘ **f4** 0:47:26

♔ **xe6** 0:24:20
♔ **e5** 0:22:59

35... ♔ **f6** doesn't provide enough support to the g-pawn so it doesn't matter. Resigning is also good.

36. ♖ **xg6+** 0:48:05
37. ♖ **g8+** 0:48:37

♔ **f8** 0:23:39
1-0

GAME 6: WHITE 1288 – BLACK 1206

Internet Chess Club 2010

45 minutes with a 45-second increment

French Defense, King's Indian Attack

1. **e4** 0:45:35
2. **d3** 0:45:44

e6 0:45:44
...

White chooses to avoid the main 2.d4 lines. Instead he chooses the King's Indian Attack which Bobby Fischer, apparently frustrated by his attempts to win with 2.d4, played occasionally, especially earlier in his career.

2...

d5 0:46:24

3. ♖d2 0:46:19 ...

The idea is that if Black captures 3... dxe4 in the near future, White can retake with the pawn without exposing his queen to a trade which would preclude castling.

3... ♜c5 0:46:55

This is a main line but not the only move. Black can play 3...dxe4 here, for one.

4. ♖gf3 0:44:52 ♖c6 0:47:33

Black's knight fits nicely behind his advanced c-pawn.

5.g3 0:45:24 ...

This fianchetto is the main feature of the King's Indian Attack.

5... ♖f6 0:48:03

According to IM John Watson in *Play the French*, if Black wants to put his bishop on d6, as in the game, then 5... ♖d6 should be played here, followed by 6... ♖ge7.

6. ♖g2 0:45:37 ♖d6 0:48:29

6... ♖e7 is more usual, but Black's 19-second think is a harbinger of some rapid and erratic play. GM Lev Alburt and Al Lawrence write in *Chess Rules of Thumb* that the first move out of book (from the player's perspective, not someone using a database) is a critical move, and one should play it slowly and carefully. Using this as a guide, we see little evidence where Black went out of his book since he kept merrily spinning out moves. This criticism could be applied to a number of players in this book.

The famous game Fischer–My-agmarsuren from the 1967 Interzonal tournament at Sousse went 6... ♖e7 7.O-O O-O 8.e5 ♖d7 9. ♖e1 b5 10. ♖f1 b4 11.h4 a5 12. ♖f4 a4 13.a3!, and Fischer went on to win with a memorable kingside attack (see the whole game at <http://www.chessgames.com/perl/chessgame?gid=1044267> or annotated in Fischer's *My 60 Memorable Games*).

7.O-O 0:45:57 O-O 0:48:25

8. ♖e1 0:43:41 ...

White of course is now threatening the winning fork 9.e5, which Black can stop in a number of ways, e.g. 8... ♖c7, 8... ♖e7, 8... ♖c7, 8...dxe4, but not...

8... ♖b6? 0:48:38

Well, that error, overlooking a simple pawn fork, should end this game. Why is it even in the book?






9.c3? 0:43:43 ...

White thinks for 43 seconds but fails to find the basic tactic with 9.e5. Double blunders are very rare at the grandmaster level (sans time scrambles) but quite common at lower levels, and these players are among the weaker ones in the book. But it does make for a competitive and instructive game, so for that we can be grateful – I think.

9...  **g4** 0:49:16

It wasn't too late to revert to the 9...  e7 defense, but Black's attempt is more lively.

10.exd5 0:43:56 ...

The straightforward 10.h3  ge5 11.exd5 exd5 12.  xe5  xe5 13.  xd5  xh3 trades a rook's pawn for an important center pawn.

10... **exd5** 0:49:55






11.  f1 0:43:25 ...

Houdini thinks 11.c4 is the only way to play for an advantage. Perhaps White had seen a game/line similar to Fischer–Myagmarsuren and felt the knight had to go to f1, despite the fact that the position is quite different. A general principle to apply would be, *the more open the position, the less likely you can waste time with intricate piece maneuvers; those slower maneuvers work best in closed positions.*

11... **c4** 0:50:32

But that doesn't mean that 11...c4 is the best antidote, either. The best Black can do here is the prophylactic 11...h6.

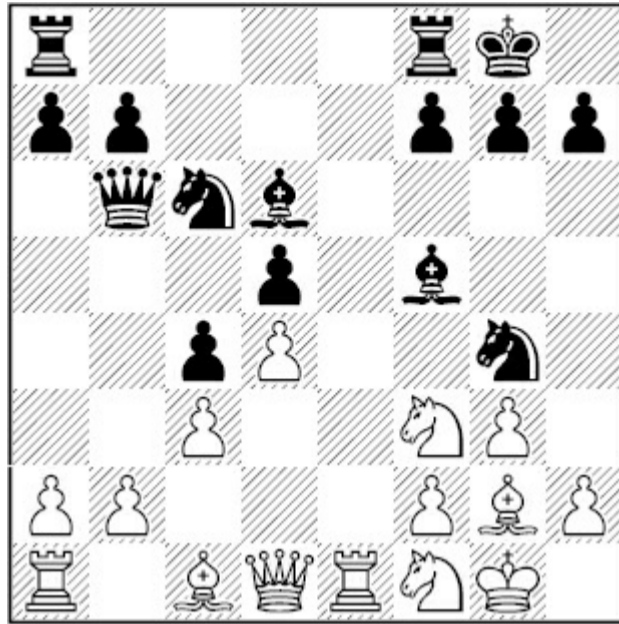
12.d4 0:43:45 ...

This “closing” move is one that amateurs make automatically, and here White did so in 25 seconds. Yet you have to consider each move on its merits and here it is not necessary. The computer prefers 12.  e3, activating a piece and attacking d5 and g4. Then, after 12...  xe3, 13.  xe3 attacks the queen, when 13...  xb2?! allows 14.dxc4! and White is doing well, so Black should play 13...  c5 and now 14.d4 becomes logical.

12...  **f5?!** 0:50:16

An interesting choice, but it does allow some fireworks.

Question: What is White's best option here?



White to play after 12.... ♖f5?!

13.h3 0:42:30

...

The interesting and best idea is 13. ♗h4! attacking the bishop, knight, and d5-pawn in one move. Then if 13... ♕e6, attempting to hold all three, 14. ♖xe6! is an attempt to remove the guard. Then after 14... ♗xf2 15. ♔xf2 fxe6+ 16. ♔g1 and White is better. If you can find an “anti-positional” but good tactical idea like 13. ♗h4! in a reasonable amount of time, you probably have a good feel for taking advantage of loose pieces.

13...

♗f6 0:50:51

14. ♕g5 0:40:39

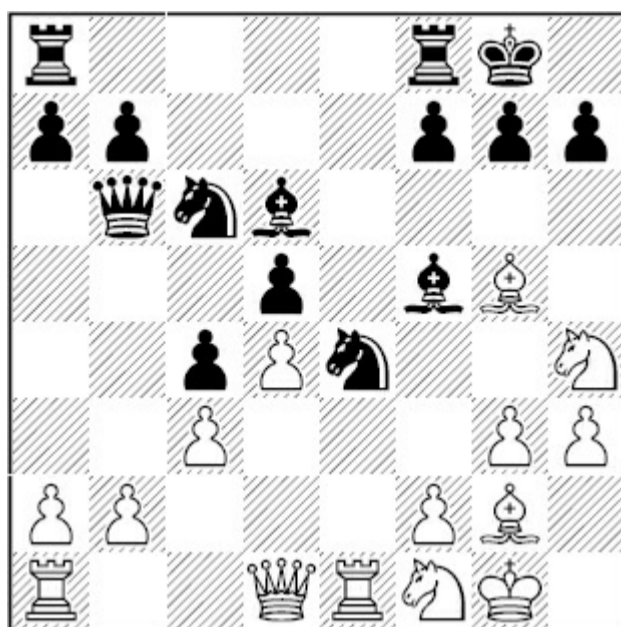
♗e4!? 0:51:15

Giving White an interesting choice.

15. ♗h4! 0:39:36

...

Calling Black's choice and raising him one! Saving the bishop pair and the b-pawn with 15. ♕c1 was reasonable, but it only gives White a microscopic advantage. 15. ♗e3 is possible but also inferior to White's fine move.



Black to play after 15. ♖h4!

15...

♙g6? 0:51:18

This was one of Black's slower moves, taking 42 seconds.

The desperado 15... ♙xh3 is interesting, when 16. ♙xh3! ♖xg5 17. ♙g2 gives White the bishop pair and good kingside prospects. So *Houdini* slightly prefers 15... ♙d7± at 21 ply. The text just loses a pawn on the removal of the guard on e4.

A wild alternative is 15... ♙xb2 16. ♖e2 ♙b6 17. ♖xf5 ♖xc3 18. ♙c2 ♖xe2+ 19. ♙xe2 ♖xd4 20. ♖xd4 ♙xd4 21. ♖d1 ♙e5!, when Black's pawns give him some good play for the piece, e.g. 22. ♙xe5?! ♙xe5 23. ♖xd5 f6 and the computer rates Black as having almost full compensation, so better is 22. ♙e3± or 22. ♙g4±.

16. ♙e3? 0:38:27

...

Instructive and best is 16. ♖xg6 hxg6 17. ♙xe4 dxe4 18. ♖d2 winning a pawn, as 18... ♙xb2 allows the Counting sequence 19. ♖xc4 ♙b5 20. ♖xd6 ♙xg5 21. ♖xb7. Instead 16. ♙e3 abandons the b-pawn although (as is often the case) taking the b-pawn with the queen is not always such a clearly good move.

16...

♙xb2 0:51:46

Taking the bait, but can White reel in the fish? Best was 16... ♖e7 when White is only slightly better after 17. ♖xg6 ♖xg6 18. ♙xe4 dxe5 19. ♖d2.

17. ♖e2? 0:36:58

...

Ah, no, not even close. The only way to punish the pawn snatch is 17. ♖xg6 hxg6 18. ♙xe4 dxe4 19. ♖d2±. Instead, the thoughtless 17. ♖e2? just forces Black to capture the c-pawn, and White's

game starts to spiral downhill. It doesn't take much, sometimes...

17... ♔xc3 0:52:18
18.f3?? 0:36:31 ...

From bad to much worse. White had to try 18. ♖xg6 hxg6 19. ♖c1 ♕d3 20. ♕xe4, when 20... ♗xd1 21. ♖xd1 dxe4 at least keeps him in the game. White again forces Black to capture something that's inadequately guarded.

18... ♖f6? 0:52:48

My internal "Safety Table," a database consisting of all occupied, attacked squares and their safety balance, tells me that 18... ♖xg3 would capture a pawn that is attacked more times than it is guarded. The move chosen also wins, but misses this easy opportunity (in 15 seconds).

If your rating is 1200 and you play chess like this – fast and silly – don't listen to others who tell you to study the Caro-Kann or *My System* and then you will become a much better player. *I could give you a pill that allows you to memorize an entire book on the Caro-Kann and, if you play hasty moves like the past few, you will stay near 1200.* Learn to analyze slowly and carefully – practice may not make perfect, but it will make better.

19.a4 0:36:03 ...

Allowing the bishop to invade with 19... ♕d3 hastens the end, but here's the big picture: Once someone is this far ahead, the only thing that really should matter for the losing player is to play aggressively, give the opponent some rope, and see what happens. Although 19.a4 isn't much of a move, *in these circumstances it is fairly senseless to criticize White's mistakes, other than the ones that fail to capitalize on – or maximize the chances of – Black's letting him back in the game.* Since 18... ♖f6 was still winning but hardly optimal, what White plays is a lot less important than what Black does. With little to lose, White can play as aggressively as he wishes – and he should – no matter what Steinitz's Laws would say about the appropriateness of the attack.

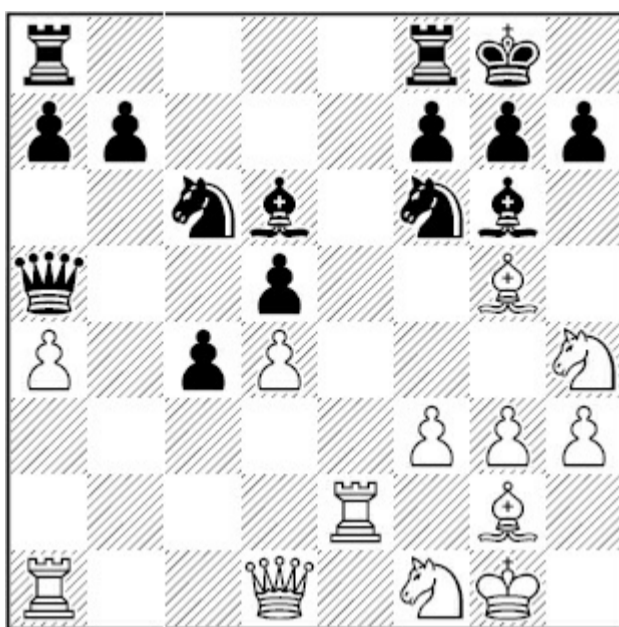
Give a 1200 a pill that allows him to memorize an entire book on the Caro-Kann and, if he plays hasty moves like Black's last few, he will stay near 1200.

19... ♔a5 0:52:35

As noted above, 19... ♕d3! is far superior, initiating some tactics which the computer calculates as winning further material. However, since the move played is still winning, it's unfair to harshly criticize Black for anything other than playing too fast when he has a lot to lose.

20. ♕g5 0:35:41 ...

20. ♖xg6 is still the best, but that's "only" -3 on the computer's evaluation (Black is ahead by approximately three pawns).



Black to play after 20. ♕g5

20... ♗d7 0:52:48

Easy is 20... ♗xd4! and if 21. ♗xd4? then 21... ♕c5 pins and wins the queen. To stop analyzing after 20... ♗xd4 because the pawn is guarded would be a quiescence error – usually you shouldn't stop analyzing forcing sequences until there are no further checks, captures, or threats of consequence, and 21... ♕c5 would certainly be of consequence! (For more on the common quiescence error, refer to <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman55.pdf>.)

21. ♕d2 0:34:38 ♕c7 0:53:10

22. ♗e3(?) 0:34:04 ...

Leaving d4 unguarded. Much better, but of course still losing, is 22. ♗xg6 hxg6 23. ♕e3+.

22... ♗f6 0:53:16

Thirty-nine seconds should be enough to find 22... ♗xd4.

23. ♗ef5 0:33:18 h6? 0:53:32

This error is worth noting; Black weakens g6 and wastes both time and opportunity. The simple 23... ♕xg3 is best since the g-pawn is attacked twice and only defended once. It's fair to say the players in this game aren't quite up to the level of many of the other players in the book.

24. ♗xd6 0:33:10 ...

This time White makes the most of his opportunity. You don't want to trade pieces when losing

(pawns are good to trade off unless there are so many pawns you might be able to lock up the entire board from the superior army), but here White's trades leave plenty of pieces on the board while easing his defensive burden.

- 24... ♔xd6 0:54:08
- 25. ♖xg6 0:33:18 ♜fxg6 0:54:51
- 26. ♜b1? 0:32:14 ...

26. ♗f4 is much better, simultaneously attacking the queen, saving g3, and guarding d4.

- 26... ♘xd4 0:55:20

Finally!

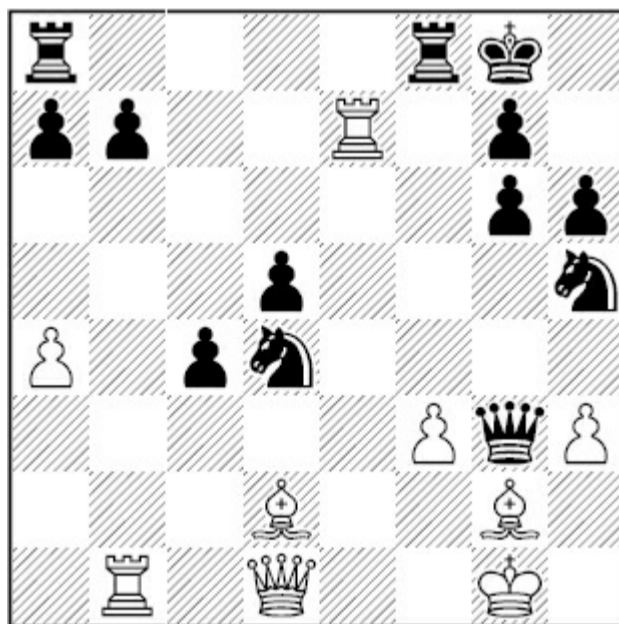
- 27. ♜e1 0:31:32 ♔xg3 0:55:53

Could the mistake of 26. ♜b1? be the one where Black finally seizes control and takes advantage of his opportunities? So far, so good...

- 28. ♜e7 0:30:56 ...

Not best (28. ♗c3 is) but, as mentioned before, when you fall this far behind you want to put up resistance and the rook on the seventh is at least active.

- 28... ♞h5 0:56:06



White to move after 28... ♞h5

- 29. ♜bxb7 0:30:41 ...

Now we're really getting into big rolls of the dice. The good news is that 29. ♔e1 would have been the clearly best move, hindering ... ♖xf3+; the bad news is that even after 29. ♔e1 Black is still winning easily with best play. Therefore, White reasons that if he doubles his rooks on the seventh rank, it at least gives him a chance *if* Black removes his knight from guarding g7. He's swinging for the fences and hoping for a 12-run homer (for more on this idea I refer the reader to, "Don't Allow the Floobly" at <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman80.pdf>).

29... ♖xf3+ 0:56:30
 30. ♔xf3 ...

Or "resigns" since other moves are an even faster mate for Black, but that 12-run homer is still possible without the queen.

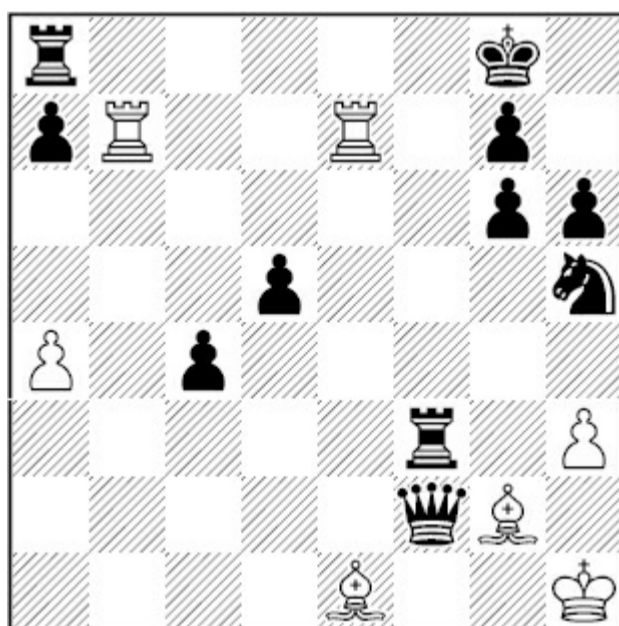
30... ♖xf3 0:57:09
 31. ♔h1 0:28:27 ...

Waitin' and Prayin'.

31... ♖f2 0:57:04

31... ♖f2 is the fastest mate, but that's just to update the reader's tactical scoreboard, and not a criticism of Black's easily winning move. Of course, the sooner you end your opponent's suffering, the less likely you are to make a miserable Floobly.

32. ♔e1 0:26:20



Black to play after 32. ♔e1

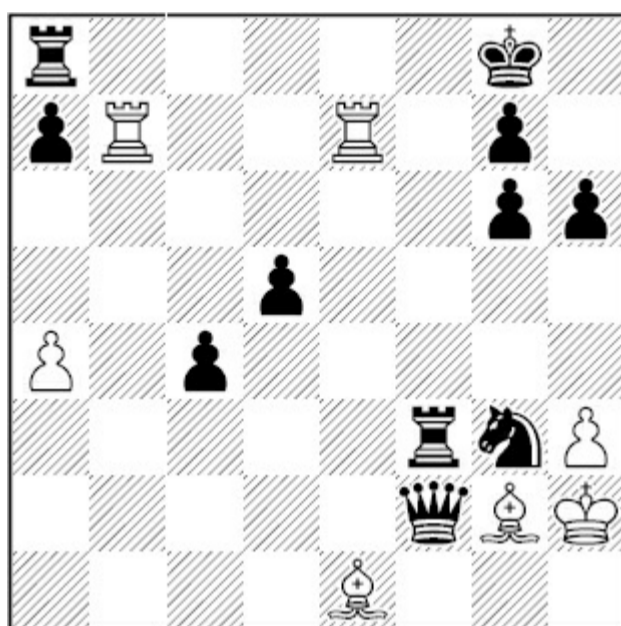
32... ♖g3+ 0:56:42

If you are willing to realize that pseudo-sacrifices are possible (where you give up material but there is no risk because you get it all back and more by force), you might spot that Black could have played 32... ♖xh3+ 33. ♙xh3 ♘g3#.

The bad news for White is that this forces checkmate. The good news is that if Black *doesn't* force checkmate, the knight's abandonment of g7 gives White real chances for Black to blunder on the next move, for the first time in a great while.

33. ♔h2 0:26:57

...



Black to play after 33. ♔h2

33...

♙c2??

As baseball Hall of Famer Richie Ashburn used to exclaim to his broadcast partner Harry Kalas, “Hard to believe, Harry!”

Black is more interested in saving his queen than in checkmating – or preventing checkmate! This is a great example of not “Thinking Defense First” since Black is still playing super-fast and not exactly worrying about what White can do. *An important part of becoming a good player isn't memorizing a million opening moves; it's consistently taking the time to be careful.* I lost the time-stamping for this move but, judging from Black's clock after moves 32 and 34, we can deduce that this move was played in a few seconds.

Of course, Black could have taken some time and seen 33... ♘f1+ 34. ♔h1 ♖xh3+ 35. ♙xh3 ♙h2# but that would involve a pseudo-sacrifice. Or he could have just guarded g7 with 33... ♙d4. Instead it's Floobly time!

An important part of becoming a good player isn't memorizing a million opening moves; it's consistently taking the time to be careful.

34. ♖xg7+ 0:26:25

♔f8 0:57:48

Black's clock is still going up but his easy win has gone up in smoke. If 34... ♔h8 then it is still mate, just as in the game but after the preliminary 35. ♖h7+ ♔g8 36. ♖bg7+ ♔f8 37. ♕b4+...

35. ♕b4+ 0:26:52

♔e8 0:58:22

36. ♖g8+ 0:27:19

♖f8 0:59:02

37. ♖xf8# 0:27:58

1-0

I can hear a typical player who has just lost a game like this saying, "I had that game completely won!" (true) and "You were lucky!" (partly true).

What you almost never hear them say is, "If I had taken my time, tried to find good moves, and consistently looked for your threats, this never would have happened, so it's all my fault. I am never going to play that fast again in a long time-control game and I am going to learn to manage my time to optimize my play and minimize the chances to make such large mistakes."

This game is not up to the quality of most of the other games in the book. However, I see so many amateurs play long time-control games very quickly and throw away big advantages that I would be doing the reader a disservice not to include a couple of games with this as a theme.

Chapter 2: Too Slow

TOO SLOW

As mentioned in the first chapter's introduction, time management is a very important part of conducting a chess game. In this chapter, we examine games where one or both players played more slowly than the situation required and got into unnecessary time trouble.

For these slow players, a partial savior was the increment. About two-thirds of the games in this book were played on the Internet Chess Club (ICC). On the ICC, a 45 45 time control is popular due to both the Team 45 45 League (www.team4545league.org) and the ICC's decision to implement a "45 45" rating pool with an associated button to automatically pair a game at that speed. A larger increment often (but not always) saves slower players from certain defeat, for many slow players face imminent forfeits when they play the "race conditions" of zero-increment games. Whether you are a believer that zero increment is the real game of chess (the condition under which we older players were brought up) or a champion of the modern time controls, you would have found the following games exasperating to watch for the slowness of play. The good news for the spectators (in this case you, the reader) is that this slowness eventually creates excitement, as the player(s) try to cope with diminishing time resources.

Many players are slow because they are afraid to make a mistake but, in doing so, are making a *bigger* mistake by turning a possible problem into a certain one. There are many reasons why players play too slowly but, if you are one of those who suffer from this malady, finding a permanent solution that enables you to pull the trigger earlier in non-critical situations will pay big dividends.

I call the ability to play moves at a reasonable rate *The Goldilocks Principle* because you can't play too slow (cold), nor too fast (hot), but only "just right" to yield optimum results.

GAME 7: WHITE 1696 – BLACK 1606

Internet Chess Club 2010

45 minutes with a 45-second increment

English Opening

1.c4 0:45:40

♘f6 0:45:42

There are many acceptable first moves against the English: 1...e5, 1...e6, 1...c5, 1...♘f6, 1...f5, 1...g6, 1...d6, 1...c6 – and probably a few more!

2.g3 0:46:17

...

White can also play 2.d4, transposing into a queen's pawn opening, or commonly adopt moves like 2. ♖f3 and 2. ♖c3.

2... **g6 0:46:18**

Playing like a King's Indian. One of the wonderful things about the King's Indian is that it can be played this way as a "setup" against non-1.d4/c4 lines by White (in fact, almost any irregular opening), and not just as the King's Indian Defense against 1.d4/c4.

3. ♗g2 0:46:56 **♗g7 0:47:02**
4. ♖c3 0:47:34 **d6 0:47:39**
5.d3 0:48:11 ...

White decides to stay in an English and forego transposing into the fianchetto line of the King's Indian with 5.d4.

5... **O-O 0:48:21**
6. ♗g5 0:48:42 ...

A waiting move to see whether Black is going to play an early ...c7-c5. This move was suggested by GM Mikhail Gurevich and championed by GM Tony Kosten in his book, *The Dynamic English*.

6... **h6 0:47:58**

Black properly "puts the question" to the bishop. If he doesn't do it immediately, then White can follow up with ♗d2, stopping ...h7-h6 and establishing the bishop on g5 as what I call a "two-way bishop" – one that is very strong on both its diagonals.

7. ♗d2 0:49:18 **e5 0:48:34**

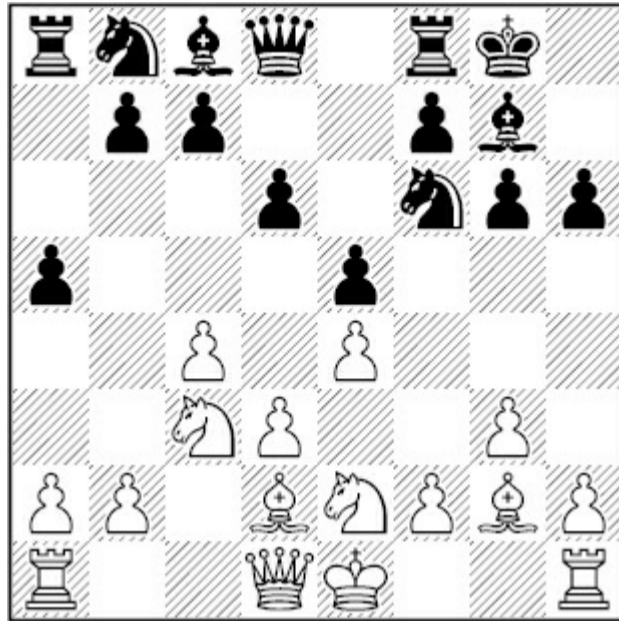
Black commits to ...e7-e5. Kosten says this is a signal for White to play the "Botvinnik Attack," which White proceeds to do. In a later work, *Grandmaster Repertoire: The English Opening*, GM Mihail Marin states that White can play the Botvinnik Attack whether Black commits to ...e7-e5 or ...c7-c5 in similar situations (so he doesn't advise 6. ♗g5, waiting for Black to commit).

8.e4 0:49:10 **a5 0:46:34**

An unusual choice. Usually Black waits to play this until White commits to a2-a3, or at least threatens b2(b3)-b4. Instead Black more often plays 8... ♗c6 or 8...c6. Without its opening book, *Houdini* suggests 8... ♗c6 by a slight margin over 8... ♗a6 or 8...a6 at 21 ply. At 22 ply they all tie at an evaluation of 0.00.

9. ♖ge2= 0:49:07 ...

White continues in Botvinnik style.



Black to play after 9. ♖ge2

The final move to complete this setup's *tabiya* would be O-O (except that the “waiting” bishop on d2 would normally still be on c1).

Houdini has a slight preference for 9. ♖f3, which is not where the knight usually wants to be developed in the Botvinnik, since White is aiming for an early f2-f4.

9... ♜bd7 0:47:11

As good as any; according to the computer, Black has easy equality with a variety of moves.

10.h3 0:46:49 ...

This move is preparatory to ♙d2-e3, stopping ... ♜f6-g4, and possibly promoting a later aggressive g3-g4 pawn thrust. However, there was no reason not to play 10.O-O first. *This reluctance to castle is a mark of many beginning and even intermediate players, who often think they have something better to do, or that it will cost them a tempo for their attack. But castling is the best move in many openings, since it is the only move where a player is legally allowed to move two pieces, one of them the most important piece on the board, thus “gaining” a tempo.*

10... ♞c5 0:47:45


This is logical since the knight has to move at some point to free the bishop. Placing the knight on c5 also justifies the presence of the pawn at a5, which now stops b2-b4, a move that would displace the well-placed knight.

11. ♙e3 0:47:19 ...


White moves the bishop a second time, again eschewing 11.O-O? but this time for a good reason,

since he has to save the d- pawn.

11...

 f7?! 0:47:57

Castling is the best move in many openings, since it is the only move where a player is legally allowed to move two pieces, one of them the most important piece on the board, thus “gaining” a tempo.

This move is often played when Black really needs to force ...e7-e5, but here that’s already been played. The second reason would be to break with ...f7-f5, but White does not have a pawn on d5, so losing tempos to make that break is a double-edged sword when the center is not locked. If White was threatening f4-f5, then this retreat to allow a quick ...f7-f5 would make sense. In any case, it’s not a terrible move, just a little strange given the present position. The computer suggests 11...  e7 or the more thematic 11...c6=.


12.O-O 0:47:13

...

Better late than never.



12...

f5? 0:48:28

This is a typical break move, but (to use a technical term) it’s a little loosey-goosey in this type of position. The computer suggests the “normal” 12...c6, but that’s tied with the space-gaining 12...a4. Its third choice (only 0.03 behind) is the interesting 12...h5, with possible ideas of ...h5-h4 or a later ...  h6.





13.f4 0:44:25

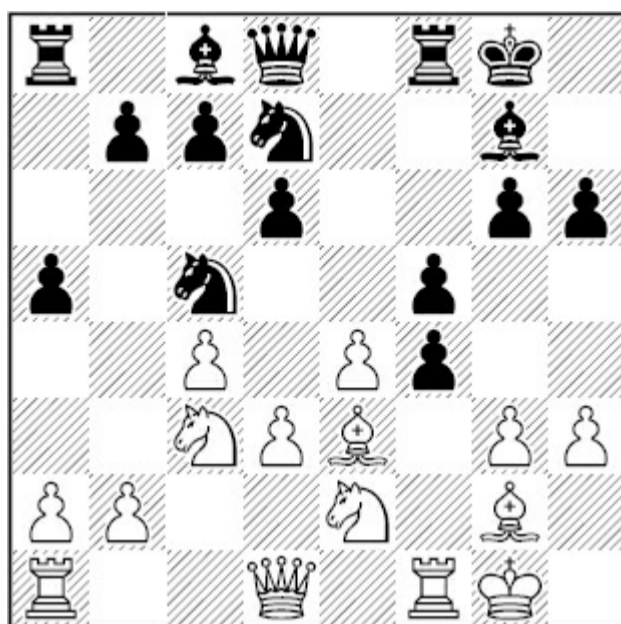
...

Here the beginner’s first thought, to capture, is correct. This is *not* an “Every Russian Schoolboy Knows” position, which would occur if the central pawns were locked at e4/d5 vs. d6/e5. Therefore White, who is better developed, should open things up. *Houdini* gives 13.exf5! gxf5 (13...  xf5 14.d4±) 14.  d2±.

13...

exf4 0:46:55

The preferred sequence is 13...fxe4 14.  xe4  xe4 15.  xe4  c5 when Black is almost equal. Without a computer, I would be perplexed as to a “best” suggestion, as similar positions are quite common, but the balance is very delicate and the best idea often varies depending on the exact placement of each of the pieces.



White to play after 13...exf4

14.gxf4(?)= 0:43:15 ...

Goes along with the Russian Schoolboy idea of capturing toward the center with a pawn, but here the computer has a strong preference for 14. ♖xf4±. In that line the squares d5, e6, and g6 are all weak and beckoning! For example, 14. ♖xf4 g5 15. ♖h5 is very pleasant for White.

14... ♖e8 0:40:15

Houdini somewhat prefers 14...fxe4, when Black maintains approximate equality.

15. ♔d2 0:41:34 ...

It is attractive to form a ♔d2/♕e3 battery when the opponent has fianchettoed his king bishop, but that's not automatic. It's somewhat better to play 15. ♔c2± to guard the light squares, like e4. That overprotects e4 and makes moves like ♖c3 d5 safe. On the other hand, the pawn at f4 blocks the battery, making 15. ♔d2 less attractive.

15... ♖f6? 0:32:22

15... ♖b6= or perhaps 15...fxe4 are preferable. The big issue is that Black took almost nine minutes on this move. Sometimes you play too slowly on a noncritical move because you are indecisive, but sometimes it is because you are not so sure it might not be critical! It's admirable to err on the side of caution but, if you do it too frequently, later on you might have to throw caution to the wind!

16. ♖g3 0:32:25 ...

The way to take advantage of 15... ♖f6 was 16.e5!. Black can't capture 16...dxe5?? because the d-pawn is overworked guarding the knight on c5, thus allowing 17. ♕xc5. Intermediate players often

overlook this inability of pieces (in this case the d-pawn) to fully protect multiple squares. As your tactical vision improves, you begin to “see” these safety issues more clearly even though they were right in front of you all the time.

Since 16...dxe5?? is not possible, Black has to move the f6-knight, but there are no great squares, e.g. 16...♞h5 17.d4±. Note that White took *10 minutes* on this move, an enormous amount of time for this type of position at this time control – if it were 40 moves in 2 hours that would be quite different. So both sides have slowed down, at least for a move.

16... **fxe4 0:30:45**

Again somewhat inaccurate. 16...a4 or 16...c6 were preferable. However, as mentioned earlier, these positions are delicate and 16...fxe4 could easily have been correct with a slight rearrangement of a piece or two.

17.dxe4± 0:32:11 ...

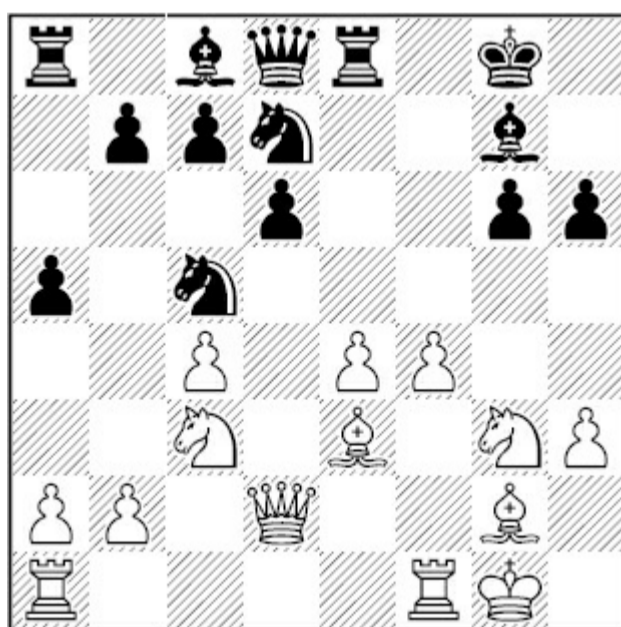
Although this gives White “hanging pawns” on e4 and f4, it is the best way to recapture. White’s pieces are a little better than Black’s and, by retaining pieces on the board, he keeps some pressure.

17... ♞fd7 0:29:37

We’ve seen this before, but Black doesn’t have much better.

18.♞ad1± 0:23:51 ...

Getting the final piece into the action. Unless activating that piece causes you to miss a tactic, that’s rarely a bad idea. Of course, our computer friend doesn’t care about such niceties and slightly prefers the immediate complexity with 18.e5.



Black to play after 18.♞ad1

18...

b6??+- 0:28:43

As often happens in amateur games, both sides play fairly reasonably for an extended period until one makes a big tactical mistake. If White now looks for his checks, captures, and threats he will find...

19. ♖d5+ 0:23:23

...

Forking the king and rook. Should be an easy win, but there's still a lot of play ahead.

19...

♔h7 0:28:48

20. ♖xa8 0:23:51

♔h4 0:28:45

When you're way behind, complicate and play aggressively. You might also envision a future position where you can do something positive, like making an unstoppable threat, and see if you can work toward that possibility. That's not a bad idea even when you are not losing, but more important than ever if you want to get back in the game. Here Black may envision guarding d5 after White saves the knight on g3, and then trying to trap the queen on a8. Keep an eye on that and see how well Black does about trying to make that happen.

Meanwhile, if you are White and ahead a rook, "Think Defense First," "Keep it Simple," "Make fair trades of pieces but not necessarily pawns," and "Avoid unnecessary time trouble." In this position, trading pawns is rather neutral since winning an endgame is not an issue. For more on winning technique, see "When You're Winning, It's a Whole Different Game" at <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman13.pdf>.

21. ♕f2 0:22:11

...

21. ♕ge2 is more flexible, and just better. Guarding has inherent liabilities such as tying down your pieces and allowing possible removal-of-the-guard tactics. Therefore, if you can just move an attacked piece to a good square, that is often preferable.

21...

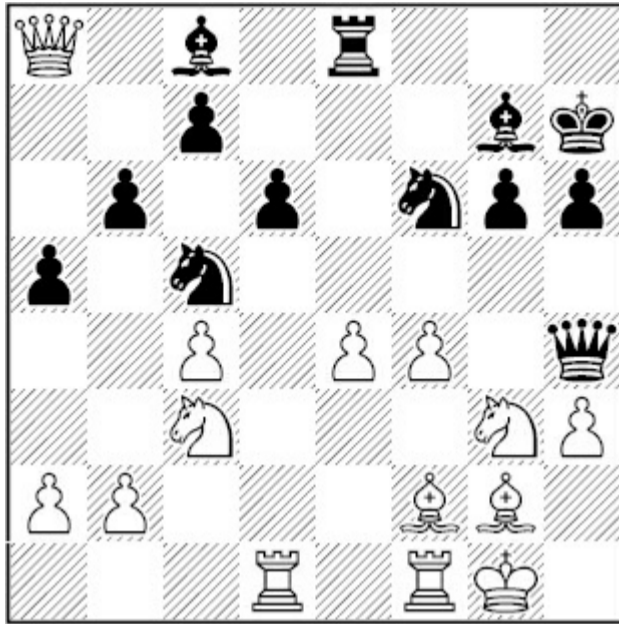
♕f6 0:28:58

Taking away the queen's flight square on d5. *Houdini* prefers 21... ♕xc3 but, as was noted in other games, playing the "best" move when you are losing badly is no longer a key issue, unless that best move is also the one that gives you the best chance to get back into the game.

When you're way behind, complicate and play aggressively.

Now Black is attacking the h-pawn, and playing ... ♕xh3 will also make a discovered attack on White's queen. White doesn't want to complicate things, but he can't really avoid complications on this move. He has a wide array of choices and some win more easily than others.

Question: What would you play for White?



White to play after 21... Nf6

Houdini's top seven moves (at 20 ply) all score better than +4.5:

- 1) 22. Nf5 +9.4
- 2) 22. Qc6 +6.5
- 3) 22. Nd5 +6.3
- 4) 22. e5 +6.1
- 5) 22. Nh1 +6
- 6) 22. Nge2 +5.6
- 7) 22. f5 +4.9

I believe I would have chosen the retreating 22. Qc6 because it avoids complexity. Instead 22. Nf5 is a discovery on the black queen but introduces a pinball series of Zwischenzugs, or in-between moves, by desperado pieces) that I would be afraid I could not calculate accurately and might let Black back in the game. [Ed. note: I settled on 22. Nd5 to remove the guard from Black's rook, making tactics such as ... Qxh3 less attractive.]

22.f5 0:15:36 ...

White is gobbling up time trying to find something simple to do but it just isn't there. He'd better not gobble too much or he'll find himself a time-starved turkey.

22... gxf5 0:28:02

Black's best try is 22... Qb7 but, if White were a computer, he could wend his way through the complications with 23. fxe6+ Kh8 24. Qa7 Ra8 (scary, since the queen seems to be trapped) 25. Nf5 Qg5 (Black's queen is not exactly comfortable either!) 26. Qxa8+ Qxa8 27. Nxe7 Qxe7 28. Qd4 and the complications are massively in White's favor despite his having to return the queen for some material. This is not what you want to be faced with when ahead by a rook! But that's what makes this

game so much fun.

23.exf5 0:14:43

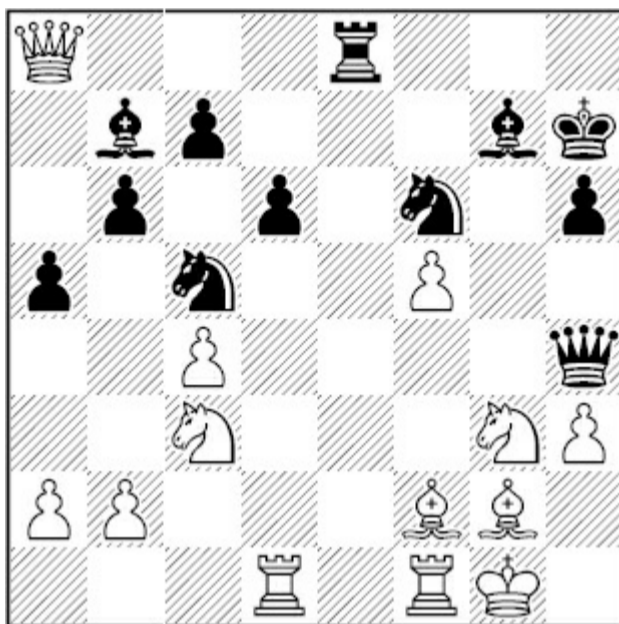
...

Reasonable, but the complicated 23. ♖xf5 is the killer. In some ways, it's nice to be a computer.

23...

♜b7 0:28:06

Attacking the queen. What should White do? Tic-toc...



White to play after 23... ♜b7

Now the “simple” 24. ♖a7 is strongest, when 24... ♜a8 (best) to trap the queen is met by the complex combination 25. ♖xb7 (or 25. ♜d4 immediately) 25... ♖xb7 26. ♜d4! and White is bound to win a ton of material, e.g. 26... ♖g5 27.h4 traps the queen. No, I would not have seen this. Test your nearest grandmaster to see how he would defend...

24. ♖ge4? 0:10:58

...

Giving up the queen for too little. Even 24. ♖xb7 ♖xb7 25. ♜d4! is much better, but not 24. ♖xe8? ♖xe8 25. ♖ge4±. White's lead is shrinking, but he's still winning.

24...

♜h5 0:24:48

Black can quit while he is ahead – well, less behind – with 24... ♖xf2+ 25. ♜xf2 ♜xa8, but he gambles that White will panic with his time dwindling. It's a fight and a really exciting one!

25. ♖xf6+ 0:06:04

...

White takes almost half his time but comes up with clearly the best move. Bravo! He's still winning but it is nail-biting time, both on the clock and on the board.

25...

♙xf6 0:25:30

26. ♖d5? = 0:05:13

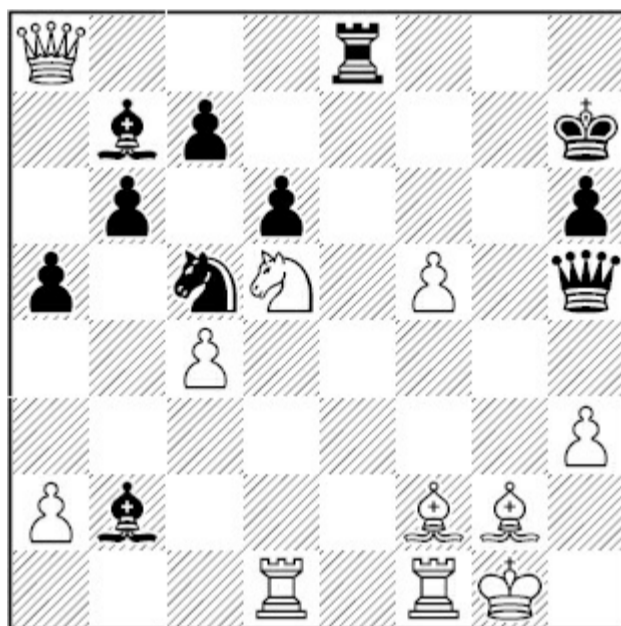
...

Ouch! White finally gives in, but I might have, too. Actually, a mistake here is likely, since most humans are not too competent in this type of wild position. Still winning was 26. ♙xb7 ♖xa8 27. ♙xa8 ♗xh3 28. ♙g2+-.

26...

♗xb2? 0:22:08

Black is correct in wanting to move the bishop on the a1-h8 diagonal to guard against the fork at f6, but he chooses the wrong square. Again, it's tough to be critical; all I can do is point out the wonderful computer analysis and explain the boxing match. In pre-computer days, I might have spent weeks trying to figure out what might have happened and I still would have written something you would laugh at years later with *Houdini* at your side. The computer says best is 26... ♙e5! 27. ♗xe8 ♗xe8 28. ♖xc7 ♗h5=.



White to play after 26... ♗xb2?

27. ♖f4 0:03:03

...

White is back to barely winning after this move, but he had two much better alternatives:

- 27. ♙d4!! (renewing the threat of ♖f6+ with a family fork) 27... ♙xd4+ 28. ♖xd4 ♗g7 29. ♖g4+ (or 29.f6+) 29... ♗f8 30. ♗a7 ♖a8 31. ♖f4!+-;
- 27. ♖d4 (same blocking threat to clear f6) 27... ♙xd4+ 28. ♙xd4, and if the queen tries to guard the rook on e8 with 28... ♗f7, then 29. ♗xe8 gets the fork anyway after 29... ♗xe8 30. ♖f6+. Saw it all the way...

27...

♗f7 0:19:54

Best. The queen saves itself and guards the rook on e8.

28. ♕xb7? 0:02:52 ...

The correct way was 28. ♖a7! ♜a8 29. ♖xa8 ♕xa8 30. ♕xa8 because now the double attack 30... ♖g8+ is met by 31. ♕g2 and White has more than enough material for the queen. That's not easy to find with three minutes on your clock and more complicated moves to come. White can at least give thanks to the 45-second increment.

28... ♜xa8? 0:20:29

Black plays much too fast (10 seconds) and misses the same idea. For him the right move order is 28... ♖g8+! first, when he garners the extra piece after 29. ♖h1 ♜xa8=.

29. ♕xa8+- 0:03:35 ...

White plays quickly to try to gain some time for future complications. Sometimes that works if your choice is clear, but be careful about doing that too much!

29... ♖xc4 0:19:38

Since once again 29... ♖g8+ is met by 30. ♕g2.

30. ♖d5 0:01:49 ...

Better is 30. ♕xc5 – that protects the knight on f4 while simultaneously getting rid of the pesky enemy knight. Queens work very well with knights. This will cost White the bishop pair but leaves him with a likely win.

30... ♖e4! 0:19:13

Black makes the most of his chance. Manic knight on the loose!

31. ♖xc7 0:01:42 ...

Houdini thinks the best is 31.f6, but who is going to find that with two minutes on their clock? White's move is sound since there is a discovered attack on the e4-knight.

31... ♖xf2?+- 0:19:25

It is rarely correct to play quickly when your opponent is in time trouble and you are not.

Black plays too fast, in less than the increment, but he is not using the advantage of the extra time

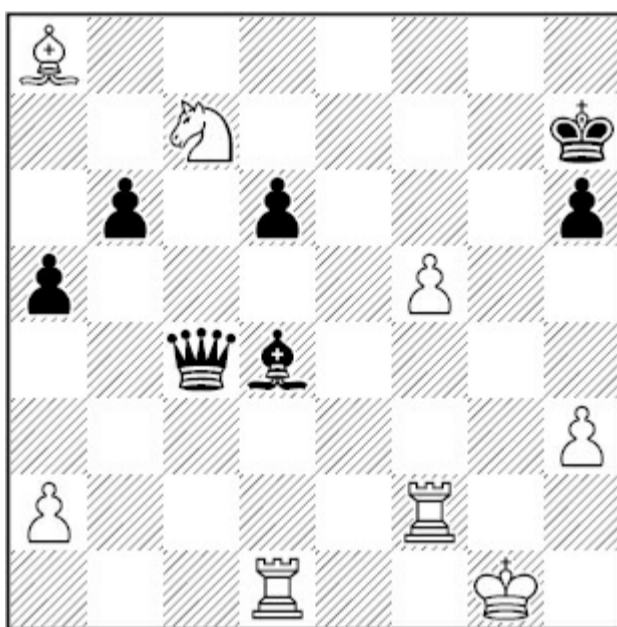
he has. Unless you are in a resignable position, *it is rarely correct to play quickly when your opponent is in time trouble and you are not.* Instead, make better use of your extra time. You can be much more efficient thinking on your time, when you know what you are considering and your opponent does not. Of course, if you have a forced move, then just play it quickly – in that case don't let your opponent think on your time.

Black understandably wants to trade off his desperado knight so he can win the horse on c7, but he probably did not see that the recapturing rook would be also attacking his bishop on b2. So take some time and find 31... ♖g5!± when White's lead is reduced due to the double threat of 32... ♙xc7 and 32... ♖xh3+.

32. ♖xf2 0:01:11

♙d4? 0:19:31

32... ♙xc7 33. ♖xb2+- . But better was 32... ♙e5! with some chances.



White to play after 32... ♙d4

33. ♖xd4! 0:01:16

...

The last difficult move. It's forced, but very effective. After the recapture, the queen and pawns will be no match for the well-placed rook, knight, bishop and, especially, the monster passed f-pawn. It's also a much clearer position to play than a half-dozen moves ago, which makes White's time trouble much more tolerable.

33...

♙xd4 0:20:13

34. ♖e6?± 0:01:36

...

Oops! The straightforward 34.f6 was the winner. Now if Black can take his time and play carefully...

34...

♙f6 0:20:22

Black is speeding up. I am not sure if he thinks that he is lost or if he thinks that playing fast with White short on time is a good idea. Still, his blockade of the dangerous pawn is best.

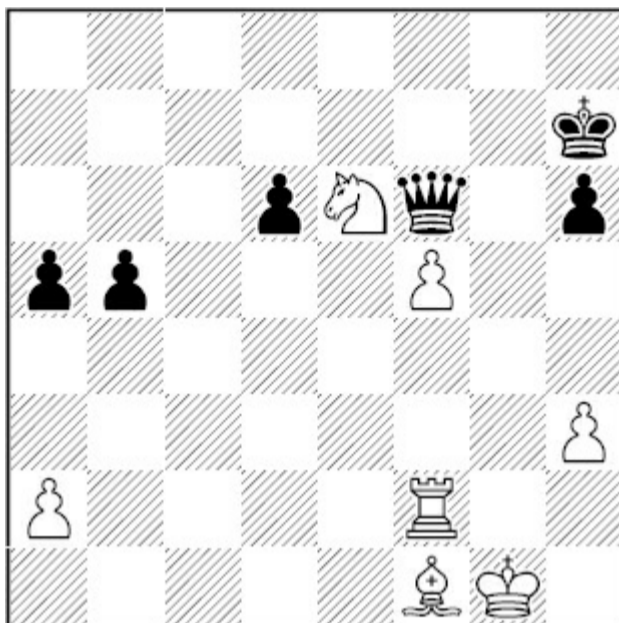
35. ♔g2 0:01:45

b5 0:20:56

36. ♔f1 0:00:54

...

White is playing reasonable, safe moves quickly. He wants to keep enough time to figure out how to release the queen's blockade of the pawn.



Black to play after 36. ♔f1

36...

d5? 0:20:57

Giving away free material, especially one of those beautiful pawns, can't help the cause. Instead the natural 36...b4± keeps the issue very much in doubt.

37. ♔xb5 0:01:06

♔g8 0:20:58

38. ♖g2+ 0:01:23

♔f7? 0:21:30

This time fast bad play seals the deal. The last chance was 38...♔h8 or 38...♔h7, when with careful play (39. ♖f2 after either move is *Houdini's* choice) White should win. Instead, 38...♔f7? allows...

39. ♖g7+ 0:01:55

...

White breathes a big sigh of relief! So did his coach (me) – I was watching in “real time” on the Internet Chess Club.

39...

♔xg7+ 0:22:10

The only legal move.

40. ♖xg7 0:02:34

41. ♗d3 0:03:07

42. ♔f2 0:03:46

43. ♔f3 0:04:21

♔xg7 0:22:54

d4 0:23:32

♔f6 0:24:16

a4 0:24:53

Black resigned after making his move. **1-0**

Kudos to these two fighters for playing a fun game for the spectators! White kept his cool when his clock got low. Meanwhile Black, even after losing a rook, correctly kept the position complex and might have drawn – or maybe even won – if he hadn't tried to play quickly when his opponent was in time trouble. This time “too slow” beat “too fast,” but that's not always the case...

GAME 8: WHITE 1637 – BLACK 1726

Internet Chess Club 2010

30 minutes with 30-second increment

English Opening

1.c4 0:30:27

2.g3 0:30:51

♗f6 0:30:13

c6 0:30:30

This is a common and good way to meet the early fianchetto 2.g3 in the English. As a general rule, when someone plays a pawn up to c6 (or c3 if they are White) and has a pawn on e5 (e4 for White), the best idea is to take advantage of the queen knight's inability to guard the e-pawn by attacking it immediately. In this position, that means White should reply with 3.d4 or 3.♗f3, with the former being preferred in the English. If we reverse colors, that applies to the c3 or “Alapin” Variation of the Sicilian after 1.e4 c5 2.c3, when Black usually plays 2...d5 or 2...♗f6, although there are other acceptable lines.

3. ♗g2 0:31:13

...

In contrast to the moves that attack e5 mentioned in the previous note, this “natural, automatic” move is considered passive. White allows Black to set up a strong center. If you do play a move like 3. ♗g2, then afterwards you need to attack the center quickly – White needs to play like Black does in the Grünfeld Defense.

3...

4. ♗f3 0:31:32

d5 0:30:50

...

This is *Houdini's* #1 move, allowing Black to take the pawn on c4. Its other ideas are 4.d4 dxc4 5. ♗f3 and 4.cxd5 cxd5 5.d4 (a thematic way to play), both with rough equality.

4...

e6 0:27:16

Black goes into a think about whether to accept the pawn or not, and decides to set up a “Semi-Slav” pawn triangle. Interestingly, 4...e6 is not among the computer’s top three moves, which include 4...♗f5 and 4...g6, both yielding a tiny White advantage. 4...dxc4 is tied with 4...♗f5 for best at 23 ply, with the line continuing 4...dxc4 5.O-O ♖bd7 6.♗a3 ♖b6 7.♙c2 g6 8.♗xc4 with a slight edge for White. If Black tries to hold the pawn after 4...dxc4 5.O-O b5?! (the type of line amateurs playing White fear when I review games with them) *Houdini* suggests the positional pawn sacrifice 6.b3!?, when after 6...cxb3 7.axb3± White has strong pressure not only along the semi-open a- and c-files, but also the long diagonal h1-a8. I see the computer suggest similar sacrifices quite often when Black tries to hold the pawn in similar positions.

5.O-O 0:30:56

♗**d6** 0:27:25

This is the computer’s top move, and the accepted place for the king bishop in this Semi-Slav structure (black pawns on c6/d5/e6 vs. White’s c4/d4). Notice White cannot even legally play ♗c1-g5 yet, so settling for 5...♗e7, as is often made, is much more passive. True, the d6-bishop “bites on granite” on g3, but that’s not the only square it is affecting!

6.b3 0:30:38

...

This is an acceptable way to guard the c-pawn. Black would not wish to capture it now, because after 6...dxc4 7.bxc4 he would be trading his strong central d-pawn for White’s weaker b-pawn without much other resultant benefit. *When you trade, you want to weigh the pros and cons and make sure you come out at least even on the “tiebreak” issues besides material.*

Weak players who think that trading helps them to draw against stronger players (a dubious conjecture at best) often hasten to initiate inferior trades, which are only superficially even when judged solely by material. The result is often a bad position, thus achieving the opposite of what they intended to accomplish.

Always play the moves you know you have to play before the moves you think you want to play.

Interestingly, White often does not fianchetto his queen bishop after 6.b3, preferring to wait to see what Black does. If Black takes space with an early ...d5-d4, the position becomes like a reversed Benoni, and the bishop is not always well placed at b2, where it is blocked by Black’s d4-pawn.

6...

♖**bd7** 0:27:27

Castling first is more normal. *Always play the moves you know you have to play before the moves you think you want to play.*

7.♗b2 0:30:34

...

With the black c-pawn on c6, this is an acceptable development for white’s queen bishop. With

the pawn on c5, the possibility of ...d5-d4 blocking the bishop means that ♖c1-b2 should be deferred, and maybe forgotten, depending upon what occurs.

7... ♔b6 0:27:18

Just because this contains the cheap threat 8...dxc4 and the white b-pawn is pinned, does not make this a good – or bad – move. However, in similar positions the queen is not particularly well placed on b6. I gave this position to *Houdini* and, at 20 ply, 7...♔b6 was not in the top seven moves, and those seven included two other queen moves, 7...♔e7 and 7...♔a5. The best move was – surprise – 7...O-O.

8.d3 0:28:18 ...

Guarding the c-pawn a second time and stopping the threat. Interestingly, *Houdini* rates 8.d4 (ignoring the threat) as best, as after 8.d4 dxc4 9.♗bd2! it gives White a strong advantage, e.g. 9...cxb3 10.♗c4 ♔c7 11.♗xd6+ ♔xd6 12.axb3. White has more than enough for his pawn with the bishop pair, and Black's weak dark squares are about to be exploited by ♖b2-a3. This is similar to, but not the same as, the sacrifice noted after Black's fourth move, when he tries to hold the c-pawn with ...b7-b5.

8... O-O 0:27:09
9.♗bd2 0:28:17 ...

There are pros and cons between d2 and c3 as the knight's best square. White's move is best, but only by a small margin.

9... e5 0:26:51

Black's grab of space costs time, as he moves the e-pawn twice. On the other hand, it will eventually help the light-squared bishop. The computer rates 9... ♖d8 higher. *This placement of a rook on the same file as the opponent's queen was mentioned by GM Soltis in Grandmaster Secrets: Openings as the opening principle with the least exceptions!*

10.♔c2 0:27:27 ...

Houdini rates 10.cxd4 cxd4 11.e4, clarifying the center, as clearly best. I guess it wants to try to force the black pawn off d5 to get access to the c4 square for the knight, since the continuation is 11...d4 12.♗c4. In this line, the white queen bishop becomes blocked by the black d-pawn, yet *Houdini* thinks White is almost a half-pawn ahead.

10... ♖e8 0:25:11

Now that the queen has gone to a file that is inaccessible to this rook, it will have to chose between 10... ♖e8 and 10... ♖d8, incidentally the computer's top two choices (almost a coin flip).

11. ♖ac1 0:24:45

...

The top-rated sequence is still 11.cxd5 cxd5 12.e4±. Sometimes clarifying the center can help you decide where your pieces are best placed. Black's queenside is a little underdeveloped; this is a further indication that opening up the position is a good idea.

11...

♗c5 0:24:45

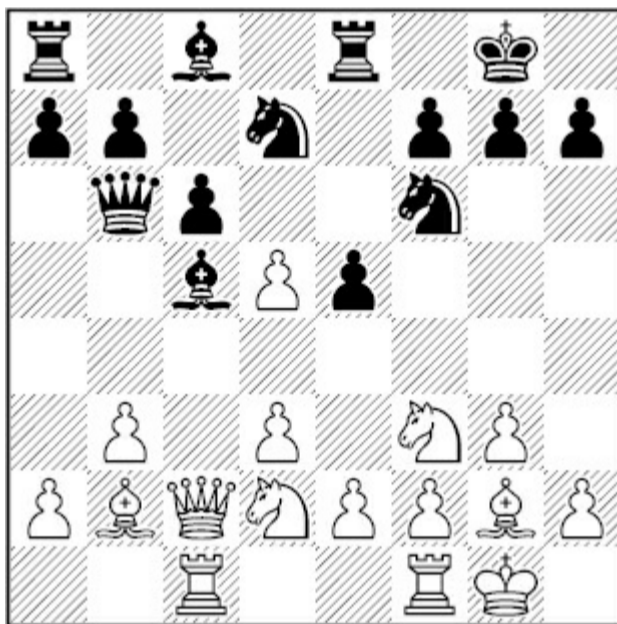
The computer has a strong preference for Black to close the center with 11...d4, keeping all the white queenside pieces jammed in, with at least full equality for Black.

12.cxd5 0:23:24

...

Still best.

Question: After 12.cxd5, how should Black recapture?



Black to play after 12.cxd5

Turns out Black has to play 12...cxd5, allowing White to try and take advantage of the overworked knight on d7 (guarding both the e-pawn and the bishop on c5) with 13. ♗xe5!?.

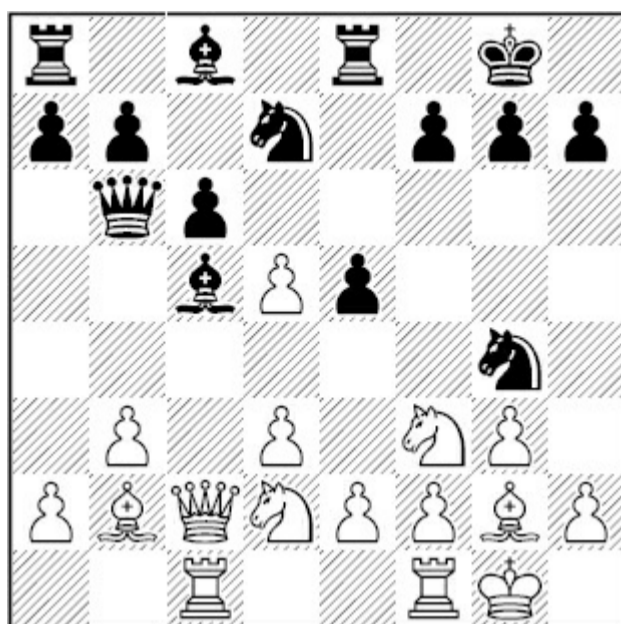
Instead 12... ♗xd5 gives White access to the c4 square with 13. ♗c4, again attacking the queen and the e-pawn. Then the computer's PV is 13... ♖a6 (13... ♖c7 to guard e5 runs into 14. ♗cxe5!± anyway since the knight on d7 is still overworked) 14. ♗cxe5 ♗xe5 15. ♖xc5 ♗xf3+ 16. ♗xf3 ♖xa2 17. ♖d4 ♗f6 18. ♖c3±.

12...

♗g4? 0:23:59

Aggressive and complicated, but White's position has too much flexibility.

Question: How should White meet Black's attack on f2?



White to play after 12... ♞g4

This question is not so easy to answer. However, to a strong computer engine nothing is eventually unclear, and it calculates that 13.d4! should be winning, e.g. 13...exd4 14. ♞c4 ♚a6 15.dxc6 ♜xc6 16. ♞ce5+-. However, three other moves score solidly: 13.dxc6, 13. ♞c4, and White's choice 13. ♞e4. Notice that the first two allow 13... ♙xf2+, a luxury White can afford because he is already ahead a pawn.

Give yourself "reasonable credit" (scored in units of personal satisfaction) if you selected one of those three. I am suspicious of books and "Solitaire Quizzes" that award you 5 points for finding 13.d4 and only 2 for guessing one of the others. How exactly can the quizmaster quantify your score, based on your selection of a move that wins, but not quite as accurately? Does two-fifths of the best score for a guess that the computer evaluates as, say, 0.07 pawns less really make sense?

13. ♞e4 0:19:59 ...

White takes four minutes and decides to allow the check. As noted above, that move was a very reasonable, if not best, decision. 13. ♞e4 should be good enough to win. That's usually an acceptable lower boundary unless you had a very easy win prior to your move, and your choice made winning much more difficult.

13... ♙xf2+ 0:22:27

Tempting, but the tricky 13... ♞e3 scores higher on *Houdini's* analysis. The bad news for Black is that both should be losing with best play. After 13... ♞e3 the principal variation proceeds 14.fxe3 ♜xe3+ 15. ♚h1, and if 15... ♙xc1 16.dxc6! begins a complicated Counting/desperado sequence that's good for White, while 15...cxd5 16. ♞ed2 saves the exchange.

14. ♞xf2 0:18:54 ...

Sure – this is basically forced. Two pieces for a rook and a pawn is almost always a great trade. I

have seen many inexperienced players here decline to capture in similar positions because they fear the fork on e3, but they usually miscount the two pieces for the rook and/or think that giving up a pawn and an attack is superior – which it almost never is.

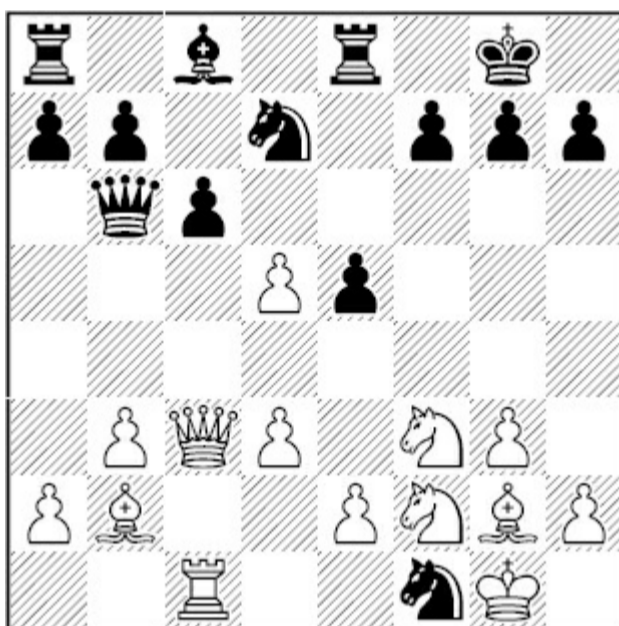
14... ♖e3 0:22:34
 15. ♚c3! 0:17:53 ...

The best square for the queen.

15... ♖xf1 0:22:18

Black can throw in 15...cxd5 first and allow 16. ♚fe1 but *Houdini* thinks the evaluation would come out about the same.

Question: White has three ways to capture the knight. What would you do?



White to play after 15... ♖xf1

Another tricky question! Turns out that by far the best move is to play the *Zwischenzug* 16.dxc6 attacking the other knight, too. Then no matter how Black twists and turns, this Counting sequence comes out badly too, e.g. 16... ♖xh2 17. ♖xh2 ♖b8 (17...bxc6 18. ♚xc6+-) 18.c7+- is *Houdini*'s PV.

16. ♚xf1 0:18:11 ...

By losing the d-pawn, White loses about half his advantage. The computer evaluates the position as “barely winning” i.e., White is winning, but he’s hardly winning easily; his margin for error is now razor-thin.

16... cxd5 0:22:22
 17. ♚h1 0:17:08 ...

It's reasonable for White to get out of the pin before too much damage can occur. In general, *if a tactical "seed of destruction" like a pin, loose piece, or weak back rank exists but is not yet exploitable by the opposition, then unless you have a forcing tactic, it's better to create a safer pattern as soon as possible rather than wait until the situation becomes truly dangerous.* This is a good example. The computer suggests slightly better moves like 17. ♖c1 and 17. ♗c2, but then again the computer doesn't get back-rank mated, either!

The smoke has cleared and White has two pieces for a rook and a pawn, plus the bishop pair and a lead in development. That's theoretically just enough to win.

17...

♗e3? 0:22:05

This just places the queen where it can be attacked with tempo. Much better is another queen move, the difficult-to-accept 17... ♗d8. Not too many humans would want to "undevelop" the queen this way. But 17... ♗e3 is not even close.

18. ♗d2 0:13:05

...

18. ♗g4! is by far the strongest move. Then after 18... ♗c5 19. ♗d2 ♗d6 (to guard e5) 20. ♗g5, White's pieces are very menacing. Instead of this White offers a trade, which is great when he's way ahead – but after this move his winning chances are problematic, assuming Black replies correctly.

18...

♗c5? 0:21:38

I see this in amateur games quite a bit: Player A offers the trade of queens (or offers something) and, no matter how good it is for the opponent, Player B declines, reasoning that, "If Player A offers the trade of queens, then it must be good for him, so I won't do it!" There are two main fallacies to this reasoning:

If a tactical "seed of destruction" like a pin, loose piece, or weak back rank exists but is not yet exploitable by the opposition, then unless you have a forcing tactic, it's better to create a safer pattern as soon as possible rather than wait until the situation becomes truly dangerous.

- Player A may have made a mistake and the trade of queens is in fact good for Player B (as is the case here; *Houdini* says 18. ♗d2 was not White's best move and 18... ♗xd2 is Black's best); or
- Even if the trade of queens *is* good for Player A, declining the trade of queens may be even better for Player A (also applicable here, since *Houdini* says that any move other than 18... ♗xd2 is far worse for Black).

Therefore, when your opponent offers something, analyze it carefully and evaluate it on its own merits. Don't fall for the trap of assuming that it's always best to decline something being offered; sometimes it is but often it isn't.

19. ♔c3? 0:12:30

...

The inadvertent comedy of errors continues as White not only offers the trade of queens, but offers to repeat the position when he is much better. Best is 19.d4+–.

19...

♔d6? 0:20:53

Black not only declines his best move, 20... ♔xc3, he also declines the opportunity to repeat the position with 20... ♔e3 despite his bad situation! Who says there's no humor in chess?

20. ♖g4 0:12:16

...

This move, which was so strong on move 18, may also be best here. The problem is that “best” now means White has good winning chances, while on move 18 it was clearly winning.

20...

f6 0:20:57

Best. *Houdini*'s evaluation is about +1, so if Black keeps playing good moves it will be very difficult for White to win.

21. ♕c1(?) 0:10:09

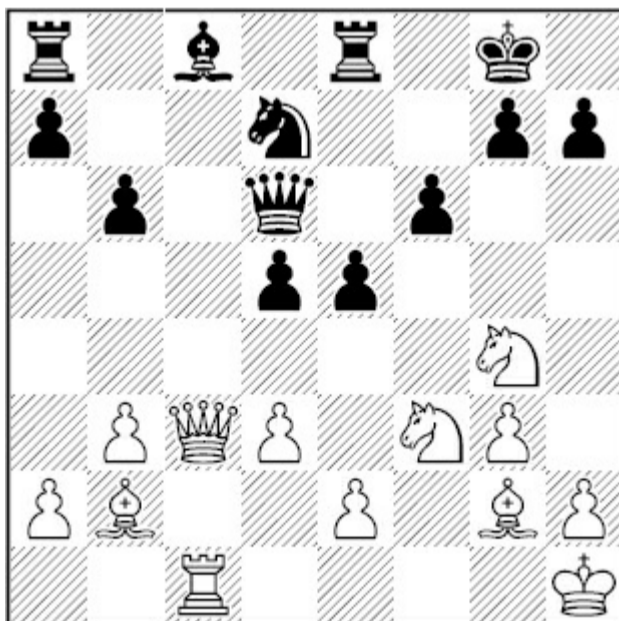
...

The computer does not like this reasonable-looking move, indicating that it loses most of White's advantage despite the possibility of getting the queen to c7. Instead, it suggests 21. ♖e3 with good pressure on the light squares. If Black replies 21...d4, the fork is easily met by 22. ♔c4+ or 22. ♖c4.

21...

b6(?) 0:20:29

Black returns the favor by weakening c6. Instead 21... ♖b6 followed by the development of Black's queen bishop (finally!) was the right idea.



White to play after 21...b6(?)

22. ♔c6?! 0:09:46

...

You have to be a better player than I to see that 21...b6 allowed 22. ♗e3!, when White is back in command, e.g. 22... ♗c5 23.d4 exd4 24. ♗d4 with probably a winning position.

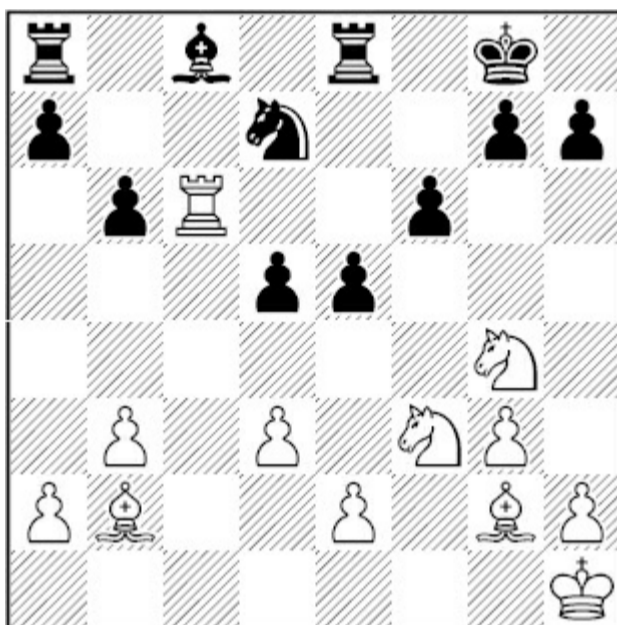
However, White's move looks reasonable, right? Pretty much forcing that queen trade he wanted, due to the additional attack on a8.

22...

♔xc6 0:20:26

23. ♖xc6 0:10:12

...



Black to play after 23. ♖xc6

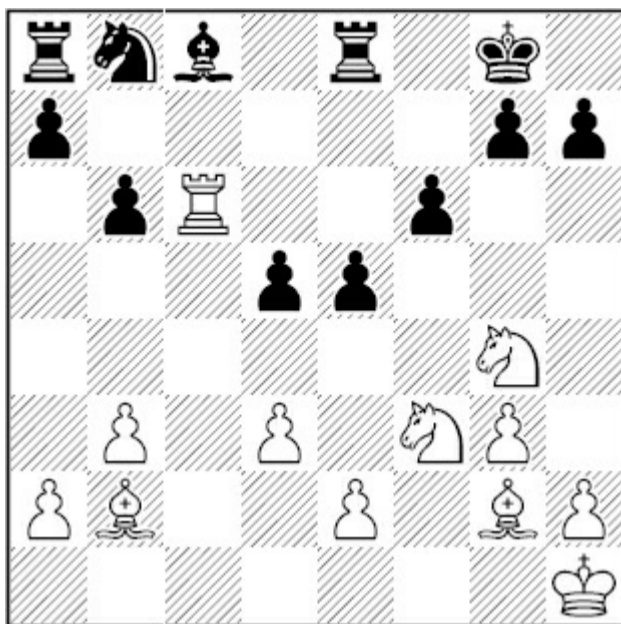
23...

♗b8!? 0:20:41

Black uncorks a stunner in only fifteen seconds. His clever – and difficult to see – retreat attacks the rook on c6 but also discovers an attack by the bishop on the hanging knight at g4. White can't save both, can he?

Sometimes your chess strength is measured by your defensive prowess in tactical situations. In situations like these many players panic and move quickly, but you should not panic, but instead roll up your sleeves, collect your nerves, and take some time to see what kind of opportunities still exist.

Question: What would you do here as White?



White to play after 23... ♖b8!?

White's fallback position is that he can just give up the exchange with 21. ♖xc8 ♖xc8 22. ♗fxe5 which is almost dead even (22... fxe5? 23. ♕xd5+ +-). But does he have more?

It turns out he has not one but two better ideas, which is why 23... ♗b8 was not the computer's best move – it was 23... ♗c5 with approximate equality. After 23... ♗b8 White can try 24. ♗xf6+ gxf6 25. ♖xf6 giving up a piece for two pawns. That would leave him with only one pawn for the exchange, which is usually insufficient compensation. But in that position White is also ahead in development and Black's pawns are targets, so White is better.

Trickier and possibly slightly better after 23... ♗b8, is 24. ♖d6. Then if 24... ♕xg4!?, 25. ♗xe5! hits both the bishop and the d-pawn, when Black's best is 25... fxe5 26. ♕xd5+ ♔h8 27. ♕xa8 ♕xe2 28. ♕xe5 and White is on the verge of winning. So a better answer to 24. ♖d6 is 24... e4 when White has the computer-like 25. ♗e3! with advantage. I would not find that line from 23... ♗b8 if you gave me the entire two hours. It is just too difficult to see.

Even non-beginners sometimes are not thorough in investigating all the “side effects” of a move such as discoveries for both sides, no-longer-guarded pieces and squares, and interferences.

But White takes only 56 seconds in this super-critical position and completely collapses. I am not sure he saw both the discovered attack on the knight (which he saves) and the simultaneous attack on his rook. Likely the fact that his clock was ticking below ten minutes when he was only on move 23 caused him to play more quickly than the position required. *Beginners often miss discoveries. But even non-beginners sometimes are not thorough in investigating all the “side effects” of a move such as discoveries for both sides, no-longer-guarded pieces and squares, and interferences.*

I give the label “acquiescing” to a situation where a player moves quickly and just allows a serious threat to be executed, even though he has both the time and the chance to (maybe) thwart the threat. So, whether intended or not, White acquiesces with...

24. ♖ f2?? 0:09:46

...

Ironically, White saves the piece that was exposed to the discovered attack, but not the one subject to the direct attack.

24...

♖ xc6 0:20:59

0-1

GAME 9: WHITE 1755 – BLACK 1838

Internet Chess Club 2010

45 minutes with a 45-second increment

Slav Defense, Schlechter Variation

1.d4 0:45:26

d5 0:44:02

2.c4 0:46:06

c6 0:44:05

The Slav Defense is currently one of the most popular defenses to 1.d4 at the grandmaster level. That also makes it popular at the amateur level, although GM Andy Soltis in *Grandmaster Secrets: Openings* makes a good case that amateurs are better off choosing openings that are not currently popular at the grandmaster level, and I agree. One reason is that the popular openings are the ones that your opponents are most likely to know. A second is that some reasons a grandmaster would avoid the less-popular openings would not be applicable at lower levels, e.g. White's only getting equal positions after long forced variations is not a concern for amateurs.

3.e3 0:46:45

...

A very calm way of playing against the Slav. The most common move is 3. ♖ f3, followed closely by 3. ♖ c3. However, 3.e3 can transpose into either of those lines. One drawback of this move order is that White can no longer play lines where he develops the queen bishop to g5 or f4.

White is a talented young player, and he likely had prepared this line for his opponent. One advantage of playing in the Team 45 45 League via the ICC is that the league supplies a database of all previous games indexed by player. Therefore, it is easy to find your opponent's repertoire and prepare, if you wish, just like in international round robin play. It's been a while, but I believe this game was played in the league (the 45 45 time control is common on the ICC, even outside the league).

3...

♖ f6 0:44:09

4. ♖ c3 0:47:14

g6 0:42:11

Graham Burgess, in *The Slav*, says 4...g6 transposes into a sideline in the Grünfeld, which opening theorist and former world champion Max Euwe named the Schlechter Variation. Alternatives would be 4... ♖ f5, or 4...e6 heading into a Semi-Slav.

5. ♖f3 0:47:12

6. ♗d3 0:47:18

7. O-O 0:47:40

♗g7 0:42:45

O-O 0:42:40

b6 0:38:02

Black opens a second diagonal for his queen bishop. That's not bad – this idea occurs in several main line Semi-Slavs – but also not necessary. *Houdini's* number one move at 23 ply is a tie between the interesting 7... ♗e6!? and the mundane 7... ♖bd7, both ±.

8. ♗d2 0:47:03

...

Usually grandmasters delay developing this bishop in the e2-e3 lines, waiting for a better square to place it. The computer agrees, suggesting 8. ♗e2 or 8.h3.

8...

♗b7 0:38:39

Consistent with his previous move and, surprisingly, *Houdini's* top choice.

9.c5? ±

...

A mouse slip, the online equivalent of a “touch move” error. White intended the better 9.cxd5. *Houdini* suggests 9. ♗e2 or 9. ♖c1.

9.c5 not only takes the pressure off the central d5 square, it also allows Black a target on c5 to help finish his development. Luckily, it still made for an interesting game!

9...

bxc5 0:37:28

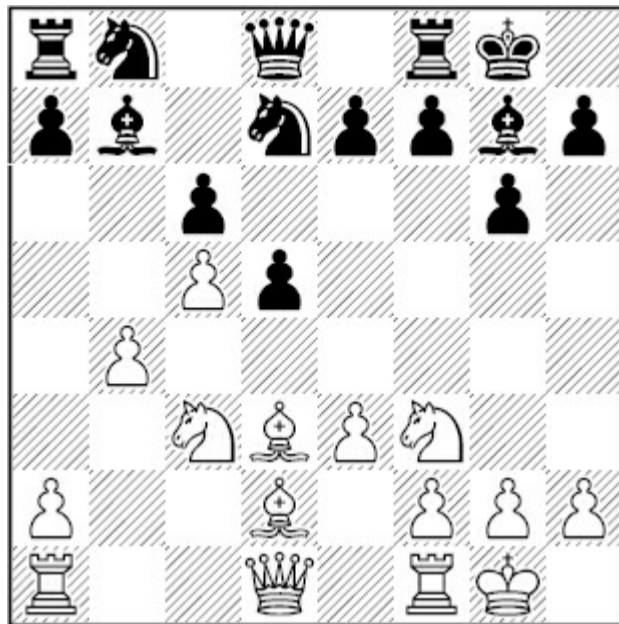
10.dxc5 0:45:08

♗fd7 0:36:19

Black overthinks this decision, it seems. The straightforward 10... ♖bd7 is better, and even the developing 10... ♖a6 could be considered.

11.b4 0:43:56

...



Black to play after 11.b4

11...

♞e5 0:22:28

A large part of strategic play involves activating your worst pieces and eliminating (or at least neutralizing) your opponent's most active pieces.

Here Black should immediately strike at the pawn chain with the break move 11...a5. Then after 12.a3, 12...♞a6 activates the blocked bishop and, due to the pin on the f1-rook, forces a trade for White's better bishop. *A large part of strategic play involves activating your worst pieces and eliminating (or at least neutralizing) your opponent's most active pieces.*

Notice that Black took an inordinate amount of time – almost 15 minutes(!) for this move. Sometimes, while playing online games, one can get distracted and the time is not actually spent thinking. Whatever the reason, Black is already getting into some time difficulty.

12. ♞xe5 0:40:52

...

White gladly trades rather than losing time moving his bishop or, worse, leaving his good bishop to be taken, thus losing the bishop pair. To show how important this decision is, the computer rates every other move at about half a pawn or more worse. Consistently making mundane but important decisions like this correctly helps one become a stronger player. *Strategy is the tiebreak of equally safe moves*, and here White has several safe moves but clearly chooses the correct strategy.

12...

♞xe5 0:23:06

13. ♞c1 0:39:31

...

Get out of the a1-h8 diagonal pin now, not later. *Don't wait in dangerous patterns until they become a real problem.* Appropriately backing this thought, the computer's top two moves are

13. ♖c1 and 13. ♖b1.

13...

♗d7 0:23:03

Strategy is the tiebreak of equally safe moves.

14.f4 0:39:06

...

An aggressive, committal move. At 21 ply it ties for third on *Houdini*'s list, and the evaluation is within 0.1 of the top choice 14. ♖b3, so that's close enough to be more than acceptable. The game remains roughly equal.

14...

♗g7 0:22:59

15. ♗e2 0:36:36

...

I like 15. ♗e2. Everything else being equal, I have a strong preference for first getting all my pieces doing something before moving a given piece twice, as with ♗b1-c3-e2.

15...

e5! 0:19:13

Black takes some of his valuable time and finds the best idea – to strike in the center while White is reorganizing his forces.

16. ♗c3 0:32:25

e4(?) 0:18:00

Black chooses a committal move that fixes the center but does not cause White any problems. For example, White gets good use of the now available d4 square. Inexperienced players frequently like to play pawn moves that attack pieces and “gain space” in the center. That's often acceptable, but here it would be better to keep things fluid and flexible with the queenside break 16...a5! or even a developing move like 16... ♖e7 or 16... ♖e8. You don't have to play the exact correct move in non-critical positions like this, you just have to make a constructive play. The game is back to equal.

17. ♗c2 0:31:09

...

Houdini also thinks allowing the rook to continue to protect c3 with 17. ♗b1 is worth considering, but the difference is very small. The flexibility of White's choice, allowing the bishop to go to b3 or a4 later, looks fine to me.

17...

♗f6 0:15:56

Again 17...a5, or maybe 17... ♗xc3 18. ♗xc3 a5, was slightly more to the point. Now White has momentum and a slight pull.

18. ♖d4 0:29:22

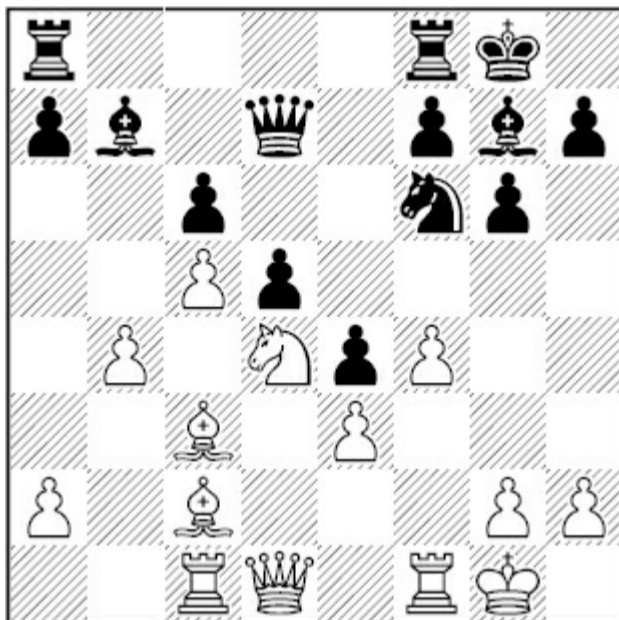
...

A solid square for the knight. Activating the bishop with 18. ♗a4 was a good alternative.

18...

♚d7 0:15:30

It turns out White can take advantage of the queen on this square, so placing it on e7 or c7 was better.



White to play after 18... ♚d7

19. ♚e1 0:26:25

...

Not the most accurate. The nice geometric motif is 19. ♗a4, when pinning the c-pawn on the same diagonal to the queen and requiring the queen's guard, leads to good play for White. The computer's top lines are a little esoteric, so I don't think it would be instructive to attempt to explain them; nevertheless, it calculates 19. ♗a4 as giving White almost twice the advantage, although still small, over other moves.

19...

♗a6! = 0:14:23

Taking advantage of the queen's blocking the f1-rook along the first rank.

20. ♗f2 0:25:50

♗g4 0:11:48

Tempting, but 20... ♗g4 is not necessarily the best move and it took Black a few minutes to play it, so time is certainly a factor. Better are 20... ♗c4 or 20... ♗d3. Although he has some initiative, there is a lot of chess left to be played. Black only has about a quarter of his original time left and it's only move 20.

21. ♗d2 0:25:58

♗h6 0:10:08

A curious retreat. Black has yet to develop a rook and that is making *Houdini* nervous, so it strongly suggests activating one, either 21... ♖fc8 or 21... ♖ac8.

22. ♗a4 0:24:10 ...

As is sometimes the case, the best move (or idea) a move or two ago is not best anymore. The computer spots a cute mini-tactic here: 22.b5! ♗xd4 (the first tactical justification is 22... ♗xb5 23. ♗xb5 cxb5 24. ♗xg7 ♖xg7 25. ♗xe4+- and another is 22...cxb5 23.c6 ♗c7 24. ♗b4±) 23.bxc6 ♗xc6 24. ♖xd4±, and now not 24... ♗xc5? as 25. ♗b4 wins the exchange via a skewer.

22... ♗xd4! 0:08:08

It's not often that you can give up a fianchettoed bishop in front of your king for a knight with the queens still on the board. But this is an exception since the knight is strong and black has a knight to help guard the kingside. Other ways of saving the c-pawn are worse: 22... ♖ac8 23. ♗xc6! and if 23... ♖xc6 24. ♗xg7! (to guard c5 before pushing b4-b5) 24... ♖xg7 25.b5, or 22... ♗b7 (reasonable) 23. ♖b2± or 23. ♗d1±.

23. ♗xd4 0:23:38 ...

It would be a positional crime to make either of the other recaptures!

23... ♗d3 0:07:29

Black is close to equality again.

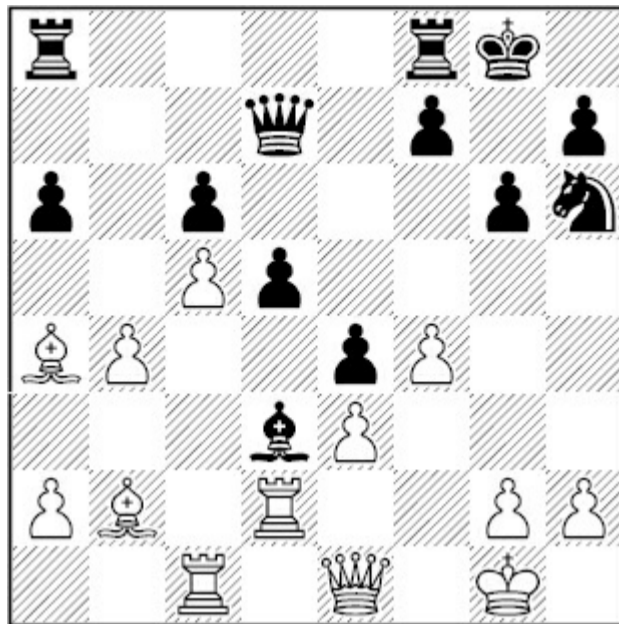
24. ♗b2 ...

White makes a threat that Black completely misses. The wrong move order would be 24. ♗h4 ♗f5.

It would be poor strategy to do what inexperienced players often do – make a poor move that contains a threat in the hopes that the opponent won't see it just so (if that occurs) you can win. But here, although 24. ♗b2 is not the computer's number one move, it isn't far off, so making a subtle threat has almost all reward and very little, if any, risk.

24... a6?? 0:07:45

Moves that meet the threat are limited to 24...f6, 24... ♗f5, or 24... ♗e6. Black is low on time, but this was a bad move to try to gain time on the clock, as he obviously did not see that White planned...



White to play after 24...a6??

25. ♔h4!+- 0:20:03

The double threat of 26. ♕xh6 plus 26. ♕f6 followed by another double threat of 27. ♕h8# and 27. ♖xc6 will cost Black some material.

25...

♗f5 0:07:27

Saving the knight and guarding at least the g7 square for now.

26. ♕f6 0:19:29

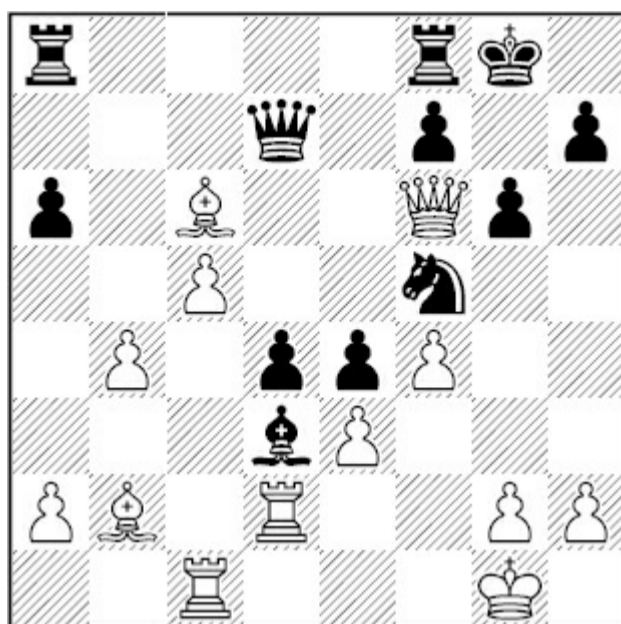
d4 0:06:35

Although Black took over a minute, this is the only reasonable try to stop 27. ♕h8#.

27. ♖xc6 0:14:40

...

Preferable to the also strong 27.exd4+-, but only if you correctly take into consideration Black's next move.



Black to play after 27. ♖xc6

27...

♔d8! 0:07:14

The point. White can't win the exchange since 28. ♖xa8?? loses to 28... ♔xf6, and, if 28. ♔xd8 first, then 28... ♖axd8 saves the rook. This type of defensive idea where you can offer a trade and then recapture with the attacked piece in order to save it is common, and thus a good one to know. White is still winning, but not by as much as if Black had not found this nice defense.

28. ♖xd4 0:11:38

...

A second pawn falls, but White makes a minor time-management error and takes too long for this move. While it is very helpful to find this strong move, at some point White gets diminishing returns on his time, since he is winning anyway. If he saw 28. ♖xd4 earlier in his thought process, it was better to make the decision a minute or so more quickly.

28...

♖xd4 0:06:53

If 28... ♔xf6 29. ♖xf6 ♖ac8 attempting to double-attack the bishop and e-pawn, then 30. ♖b7 ♖b8 31.c6 abandons the e-pawn for even better compensation, e.g. 31... ♖xe3 32.c7 winning easily.

29. ♔xd4 0:11:54

♖b8 0:05:34

Black does not wish to allow 29... ♔xd4 30.exd4 ♖ad8 31.d5 with the three connected pawns marching in the endgame, nor to trade queens at all. However, his first priority is to avoid losing the exchange, and in doing so he must allow a queen trade.

30. ♔xd8 0:11:51

...

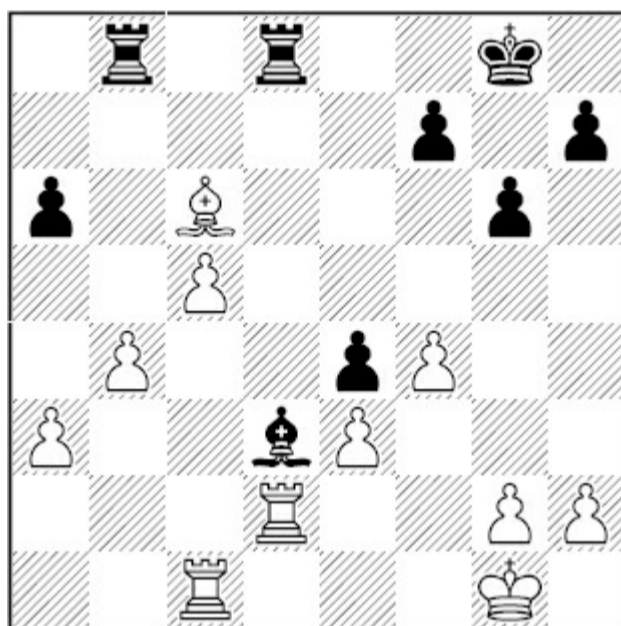
But of course now White can trade anyway, sans the extra passed pawn. *Houdini* doesn't worry about trading since computers don't worry, and simplification is not always necessary for computers

to find easier paths to victory. So it prefers 30.a3 or 30. ♔d7. It evaluates them at better than +3 (that is, an advantage amounting to more than three pawns' worth), while 30. ♖xd8 is only about +2, so White's choice does narrow his margin for error for winning.

30... ♖fxd8 0:06:14

The correct way to recapture, as 30... ♖bxd8 allows 31. ♔b7 ♖b8 32.c6 and Black is without counterplay.

31.a3 0:12:25 ...



Black to play after 31.a3

The smoke has cleared, and White, with extra material and twice as much time, should win the endgame with accurate play.

31... f5 0:06:26

Overprotecting the e-pawn releases Black's bishop for possible other duties, such as defensive play blockading the queenside pawns.

32. ♔a4 0:11:56 ...

Planning to evict the annoying invader on d3 with ♔c2.

32... ♖dc8 0:07:03

The rook is not doing much here since White can take his time getting the pawns ready to roll, so better is to activate the king with 32... ♔f8.

One of the biggest sub-goals in a chess game is to *use all your pieces all the time*. The big

exception is to avoid activating the king too early when it is vulnerable. But in the endgame that exception goes away, so activating the king becomes part of that goal. In passing, the main goals are to win, try your best, and have fun.

33. ♕c2 0:11:09

♔b5 0:06:47

Black avoids trades, as is par for the course. Getting strong opponents to trade when you are winning is like pulling teeth – it's tough because they won't do it willingly!

34. ♖cd1 0:10:01

♜a8 0:06:24

Use all your pieces all the time. The big exception is to avoid activating the king too early when it is vulnerable. But in the endgame that exception goes away.

34...a5, to loosen the white pawns, is the most accurate.

35. ♕b3+ 0:09:14

♔g7 0:06:47

36. ♕d5 0:07:55

...

White can also activate the monarch with 36. ♔f2. One thing I learned from teaching full-time is that intermediate players are often slow in bringing out their king when it is safe to fight. The other top-rated move is 36. ♜d6, spearheading a penetration by the rooks.

36...

♜a7 0:07:21

The lessened tension has enabled Black to make some quick moves and catch up on time, while White is struggling a little trying to find a winning plan. Actually there is no rush (with regard to the board, not the clock), and White can slowly build up his position with moves like 37. ♕e6. Black can either wait or try to start queenside action with ...a6-a5, but that's the side of the board where White has the extra pawns. White should use his bishop to help lift Black's blockade of the light squares.

37.g4?! 0:08:07

...

White loses a little patience. As noted above, 37. ♕e6 was best.

37...

a5 0:06:10

The "normal" 37...fxg4 or 37...♕a4 were best, but Black senses an opportunity to mix it up a little and see if he can get back in the game.

38.gxf5! 0:08:21

...

The correct reaction. White's pieces should be in good shape for handling any opening of the

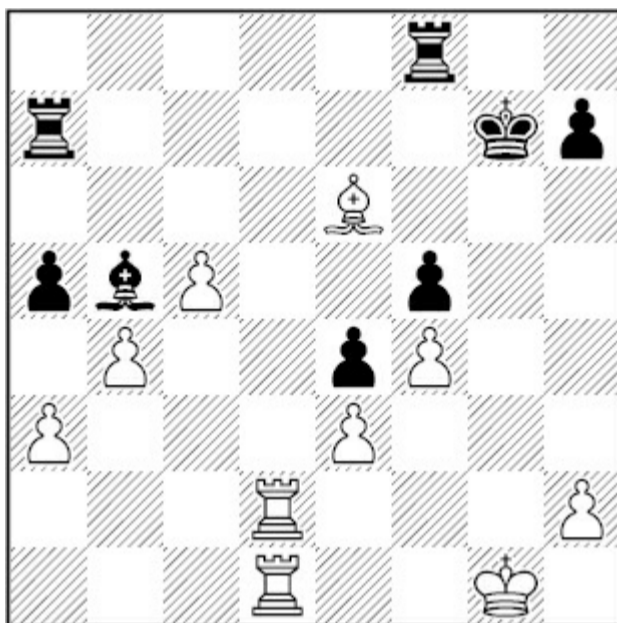
position. But it does involve a little care...

38... **gxf5** 0:06:41

39. ♖e6! 0:08:05 ...

White has been winning for quite a while, but now he is making some tangible progress.

39... ♖f8 0:07:15



White to play after 39... ♖f8

40. ♖d6! 0:07:16 ...

Another accurate move. The rook is poised for action on either wing. Black is now under heavy pressure.

40... **axb4** 0:07:13

41. **axb4** 0:07:51 ♖f6 0:07:46

Black wants access to the open g-file. Down two pawns with bishops of the same color, he can't play passive defense. Therefore, he understandably wishes to penetrate on the a- and g-files and try to make the white king as uncomfortable as possible. However, the cost is that it allows White an immediate "shot."

42. ♖b6 0:05:48 ...

Despite playing carefully, it is no surprise that White, short on time, misses the stronger 42.c6! when the pawn starts to roll, e.g. 42... ♖g6+ 43. ♔f2 (43. ♔h1? ♕e2=) 43... ♔h6 44.h4! (a real computer move; the human-like 44. ♖d7 also wins).

42...

♖g6+ 0:06:32

43. ♔f2 0:06:24

...

Forced – not 43. ♔h1?? ♕e2 and *Black* wins! The ability to sense danger – criticality assessment and tactical awareness – can never be turned off. Too many players get lazy or overconfident when they are winning and end up saying, “I was winning easily until I ...!”

43...

♕d3 0:06:14

Black would love to get his rook from the a-file into the attack and make some real threats, but for the time being the white bishop on e6 guards the critical a2 square.

44. ♖g1! 0:04:17

...

This isn't the only move that wins, and it's not even the best move (that's likely 44. ♕d5), but it's a great move for a human in time trouble: Get rid of the opponent's dangerous pieces.

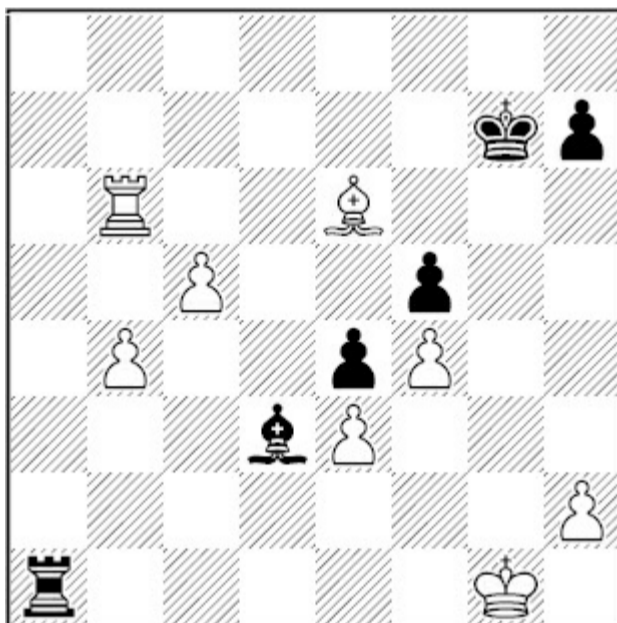
44...

♖xg1 0:05:57

45. ♔xg1 0:04:58

♖a1+ 0:06:31

The bad news for White is that Black's other rook can enter via the first rank, but White has just enough space for his king to wriggle away.



White to play after 45... ♖a1+

46. ♔f2 0:05:20

♖f1+ 0:06:36

47. ♔g2 0:05:44

♖e1 0:06:23

48. c6! 0:03:36

...

White stops to calculate that it's time to advance! Good time management, good move.

48...

♖c1 0:05:24

Black reluctantly switches to defense, which he knows is bound to lose but the alternatives offer no hope.

49. ♖b7+ 0:03:55

...

Good enough. The simple 49. ♖xf5 and 49. ♖d7 were the computer's top picks.

49...

♔f6 0:05:43

50. ♖d7 0:03:53

♖e2 0:04:44

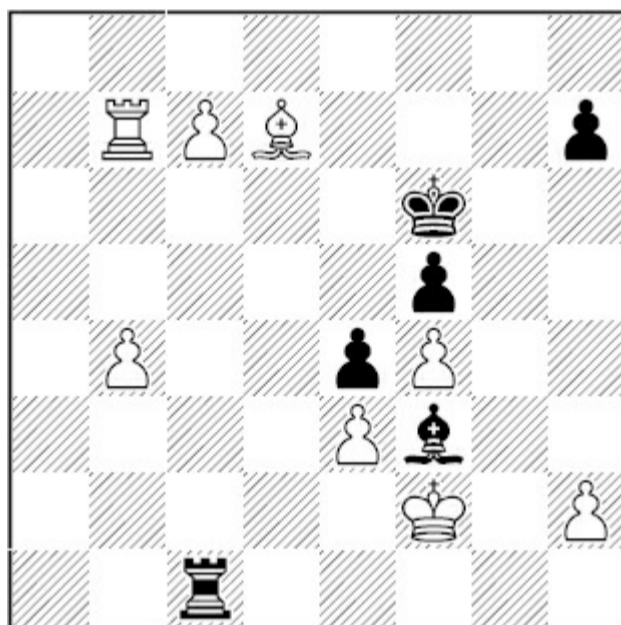
One last attempt to play offense, but the patterns for checkmate or even perpetual check are just not there for Black. Maybe if his king were closer...

51. c7 0:03:06

♖f3+ 0:05:09

52. ♔f2 0:02:41

...



Black to play after 52. ♔f2

White will wriggle toward the fresh air of the queenside. Going kingside with 52. ♔h3 or 52. ♔g3 also turns out to be safe. This is the type of position where, if you can visualize well, a forced sequence will lead to victory. If you can't, you might miss escaping – or, worse, fall into a checkmate pattern. It's the one last bit of care that White needs to wrap up the game.

52...

♖c2+ 0:05:40

53. ♔e1 0:02:46

♖c1+ 0:05:13

54. ♔d2 0:02:46

...

“You can have my bishop with a skewer if you want!”

54...

♔ d1+ 0:05:19

55. ♔ c2 0:02:58

♔ xd7 0:05:20

56. c8 ♖ 0:03:26

♖ d1+ 0:05:56

Spite check!

57. ♔ c1 0:03:41

1-0

Both sides wisely played the endgame quickly enough that they always left a little time in reserve for some thinking. Thank goodness for large increments.

Because many of the games in the book were submitted by the winner for my Internet Chess Club video series, it is fair to state that many of the players – especially their opponents! – were not trying their best. If they were, they may not have been accustomed to playing consistently slowly in long time-control games, or at least they did not treat the game as an important one.

That's certainly not the case in the following encounter. It was played on first board in the state high-school championship, the players were tied for the lead with perfect 3-0 scores, and the winner would likely hold on and win the title. Therefore, despite the fairly fast time control of G/60, both players were trying their very best. The bad news was, this was the fourth round of the day and, with the first day's schedule calling for rounds at noon, 2, 4, and 7 PM, the players must have been exhausted (well, at least Black was...).

GAME 10: WHITE UNRATED – BLACK 1700

Pennsylvania High School Championship 1968

60 minutes with no increment

Queen's Pawn Game

1. ♖ f3

...

I think White, who was unrated, was a little afraid of his opponent, the top-rated favorite, and wanted to avoid sharp, booky lines which his opponent likely knew better.

1...

g6

This is a very dangerous move if you don't know or wish to go into the Modern Defense with 2.e4. There are numerous transpositional possibilities into both e-pawn and d-pawn openings. I don't believe that Black was too worried about that and wanted to keep a flexible, King's Indian-type position to maintain tension in the position, since he was playing for a win.

2.g3

...

White sticks with a straight, King's Indian Attack formation – for now.

2...

♗g7

3. ♗g2

♘f6

4. ♞c3

...

This perfectly good move (but not theoretically best like 4.d4 or 4.O-O) is the one that will put the question to Black. Does Black wish to stop White from establishing a Pirc/Modern position with 5.e4 by playing 4...d5, the “theoretical” move? Or will Black stick to his guns and allow 5.e4? If Black does play 4...d5, then having White’s knight in front of his traditional “break move” with c4 should give Black at least close to equality, but it also could be more difficult to unbalance the game and play for a win.

4...

d5

Black decides that, with ...c7-c5 available to him and not c2-c4 for White, it is worth deviating from a strictly King’s Indian setup with 4...O-O or 4...d6, both of which allow 5.e4. Instead, he chooses to play a double d-pawn game with the freedom to use that c-pawn. An interesting alternative is the thematic 4...c5 right away. All these lines are roughly equal, but can lead to quite different types of imbalances and middlegame options.

5.d4

...

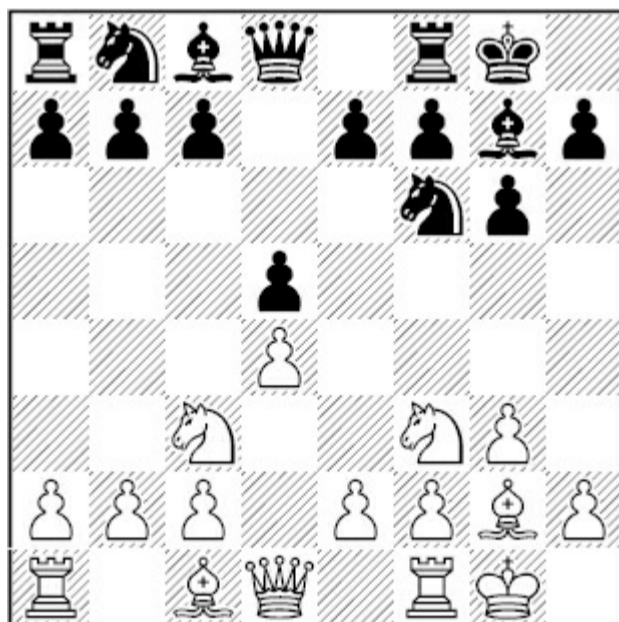
White is probably happy to get the ...d7-d5 commitment from Black and rushes to equalize space in the center.

5...

O-O

6.O-O

...



Black to play after 6.O-O

6...

♞bd7

This is not very consistent with 4...d5. 6...♖bd7 is a much more King's Indian-type move, trying to get ...e7-e5 in after ...d7-d6. In this position, Black needs to play a little bit more like a Grünfeld (but lacking White's c2-c4) and play the more dynamic but symmetrical 6...♖c6 or 6...c6. An interesting line is 6...c5 7.dxc5! ♗a6 8.♙e3 trying to hold the pawn, when *Houdini* thinks White is a little better. Admittedly, Black is very reluctant to go for symmetry and the differences are small, so there's not much to criticize.

7.h4 ...

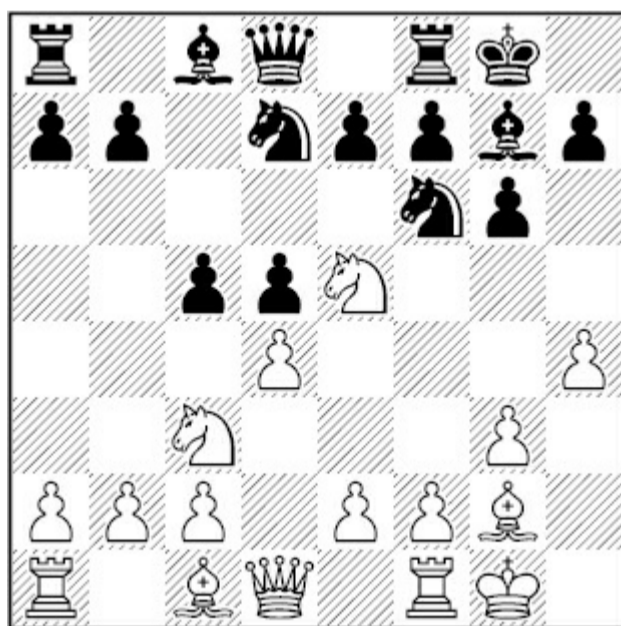
After some initial caution, White goes for the gusto! It is true there are some King's Indian Attack positions where h2-h4 is played after castling kingside, but these positions usually feature fairly locked centers with a white pawn on e5. The computer's suggestions are 7.a4 or 7.♙f4, with a very tiny, normal opening advantage for White either way.

7... **c5**

As per principle, Black reacts with an attack on the flank with a counterattack in the center. The play is flexible and any number of strategic options are open. At 22 ply *Houdini* thinks 7...♖e8 is slightly better than the strange-looking 7...♗b6 and the more normal 7...c6, but the differences are tiny and we can consider all these moves as providing roughly equal chances for both sides. That's all White really wanted out of the opening.

8.♗e5(?) ...

This is probably inaccurate. At 23 ply *Houdini* prefers the aggressive and consistent 8.h5, when 8...♗xh5 is obviously met by 9.♗xd5, exchanging the rook's pawn for the important central pawn. The other rook's pawn move, 8.a4, is second – Bent Larsen would be proud! Developing with 8.♙f4 is also acceptable for non-rook's pawn fans.



Black to play after 8.♗e5(?)

8...

cx d4!+

Black puts his finger on why White's move is not that good. He not only trades a side pawn for a central one, but also removes the guard of the knight on e5, gaining additional time.

9. ♖xd7

...

This is forced. Don't know if either side realized that 9. ♖d4? is met by 9... ♗h5! and White doesn't have any way to stay level, e.g.:

- 10. ♗f4 ♖xf4 11. gxf4 (11. ♖xf4?? ♖xe5--+) 11... e6 and the weakness of the h-pawn gives Black a big, probably winning advantage;
- 10. f4? ♖xg3--+;
- 10. ♖xf7?! ♗xf7 11. ♖xd5 ♗xc3 12. bxc3 ♖c7--+.

9...

dx c3?

Black's fatigue turns into delirium and he miscounts (for more on this key skill, see "The Most Important Tactic" at <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman35.pdf>). Instead he should simply play 9... ♖xd7 10. ♖xd4 ♗c6±.

This fatigue-induced mistake had a bigger effect on Black than just this move – it affected the rest of the game (as it should not have) and his development as a player (for which he was thankful).

10. ♖xf8±

...

Black had simply lost track of the fact that this move was possible and it left him in temporary shock. That happens to all of us occasionally, but it's what you do afterwards that counts. Black was inexperienced enough not to get up and get a glass of water, but instead wallowed in his misery. No sense crying over spilt milk.

The other issue here has to do with the relative values of the pieces. Black made the (in this case) rather large mistake of assuming that the "Reinfeld" average values of the pieces (♙=1, ♘=3, ♗=3, ♖=5, ♔=9) were correct, and that losing the exchange (knight or bishop for rook) was worth a full two pawns. The value of the exchange is closer to two pawns than to one pawn, but it's worth enough less than two that, in situations where other factors come into the picture, the difference suffices to convert what might seem to be a clear disadvantage into possibly an advantage. In other words, Black thought that here he was losing by more than he actually was. More on this later! (For the latest word on computer-based evaluation of material, see GM Larry Kaufman's advanced article "The Evaluation of Material Imbalances" at http://danheisman.home.comcast.net/~danheisman/Articles/evaluation_of_material_imbalance.htm.)

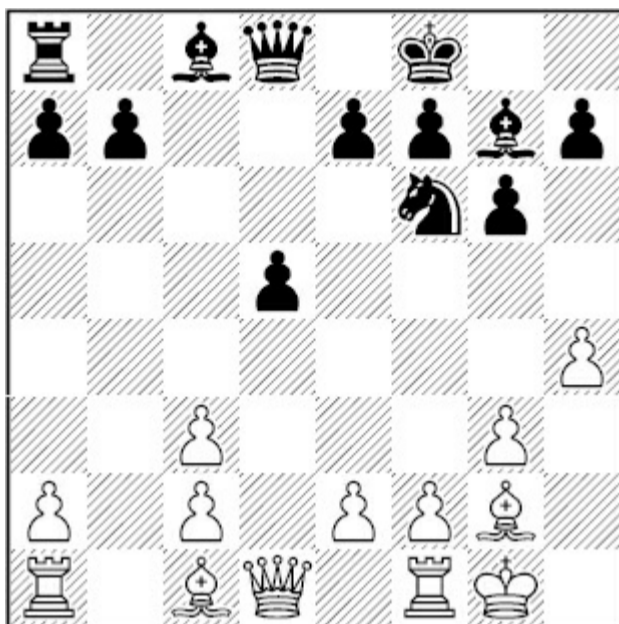
10...

♔xf8

Either this or 10... ♖xf8 is better than the uglier 10... ♕xf8. *Houdini* rates White as better by only at most half a pawn, but Black believed he was down the equivalent of two pawns (his mistaken value for the lost exchange) minus a little for White's weak queenside pawn structure after...

11.bxc3

...



Black to play after 11.bxc3

Despite also having a more solid center (to which he ascribed quite little value), Black thought he was about a full pawn worse than he actually is – that's a monstrously large evaluation error that colors his thinking throughout the rest of the game – for the worse.

11...

♕f5

Houdini likes this developing move, which both clamps down on e4 and ties the queen to the defense of the c2-pawn, as clearly best. Black actually has very free play for his pieces while White's position is rather lifeless. Still, being ahead the exchange is an advantage...

12. ♕b2

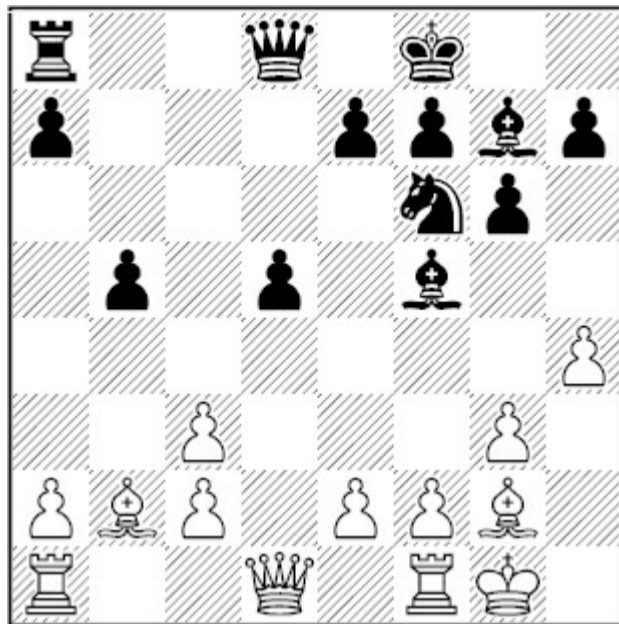
...

An ugly square for the bishop. White retains some advantage after the more active 12. ♕f4± or the logical 12. ♖b1±.

12...

b5(?)

Black's heart is in the right place – but not necessarily his pieces. This is a reasonable-looking move which attempts to clamp down on the c-pawns by making them as backward as possible. Indeed this does cause White some problems. However, *Houdini* has seen more – so, armed with its analysis, we can say objectively that Black should have tried 12... ♖c8 attacking those squares directly with almost even chances.

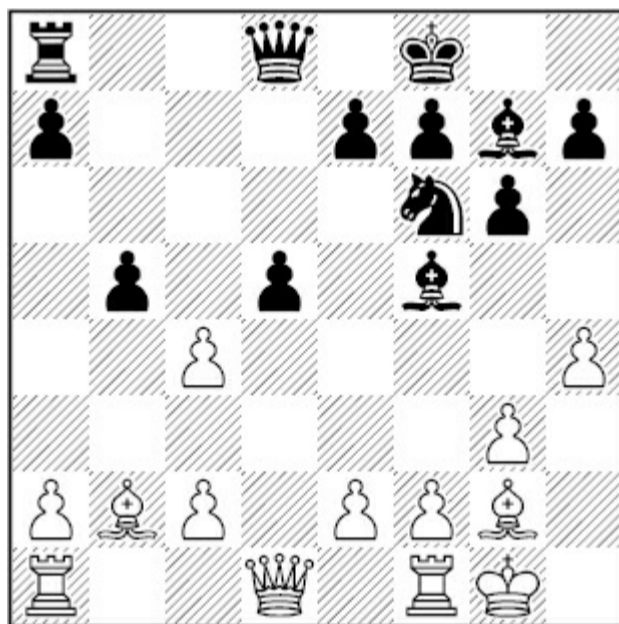


White to play after 12...b5(?)

13. ♖d2(?)

...

White has two choices to break up Black's queenside hegemony. The first is the normal break move 13.a4, but the second is the eye-opening 13.c4! which at least deserves an exclamation point for surprise:



Black to play after 13.c4! (analysis)

It's easy to see that 13...dxc4 is questionable after 14. ♗xa8 winning a second (!) exchange, although White will suffer some due to the bishop pair and weaknesses on the light squares. But what about 13...bxc4, the other capture?

It takes a computer to figure out that after 13...bxc4 14. ♖b1 White has a commanding lead. The dark-squared bishop is threatening to remove the guard on the d-pawn, when White's superiority will tell, e.g. 14... ♗c7 15. ♗xf6 ♗xf6 16. ♗xd5 ♖d8 17. ♖b7!.

White's move 13.♔d2 still holds the advantage and missing 13.c4! cannot be criticized, but missing 13.a4, with a bigger advantage than in the game, is certainly worth noting.

13... ♖e4

In his depressed state, Black is rattling off some good moves – this is *Houdini's* best. Maybe the kid has some talent after all.

14.♗xe4 ...

White is faced with a choice of minor evils and decides to give up the bishop pair. *Houdini* thinks this is as good a decision as any, the main alternative being 14.♔e3±.

14... ♗xe4

This is the right way to recapture, as 14...dxe4(?) 15.♔xd8+ ♖xd8 16.♗fd1 solidifies the advantage. Not only does Black not want to trade but, *in positions where the material is almost even and one side has two rooks and the other just one, the side with two rooks usually wants to trade a pair of rooks* (Kaufman).

In positions where material is almost even and one side has two rooks and the other just one, the side with two rooks usually wants to trade a pair of rooks (Kaufman).

Black was certainly aware that the bishop pair was a supposed advantage but he hardly gave himself the half-pawn bonus, on average, that the bishop pair is worth. Black's evaluation errors are adding up...

15.f3 ...

White doggedly hangs on to his small edge. The computer likes 15.♖ab1 almost as much. These small differences in evaluation are usually “noise,” meaning that the error in the evaluation could be as large (or larger) than the difference between the best and second-best move. Therefore, the second-best move might actually be best, assuming we had a perfect evaluator (whose value would always be “loss,” “draw,” or “win” as explained in “Steinitz, Zermelo, and Elkies” at <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/skittles358.pdf>).

15... ♗f5

This seemingly forced move is not the only choice. Black can also try the *Zwischenzug* 15...♔c7 attacking g3, which is best met by 16.♔g2± or the less good 15...♔b6+ when 16.♔g2 ♗f5 is met by 17.♖ab1.

At this point Botvinnik's Rule would state that each side should have about 48 minutes (80% of

total time) left to finish the game. However, this has already been a tense battle, so we have to cut the players some slack. Although I don't have the time-stamping, both players were gobbling up their time, possibly too much.

16.g4 ...

White is still playing aggressively and optimistically, but perhaps a little too much so this time. Still, it's tough to fault someone for playing this way when so much is at stake and nerves are a big factor.

Instead the straightforward 16. ♖fd1 was best, when after 16...b4 17. ♙xd5 ♜b8± Black is still hanging in there.

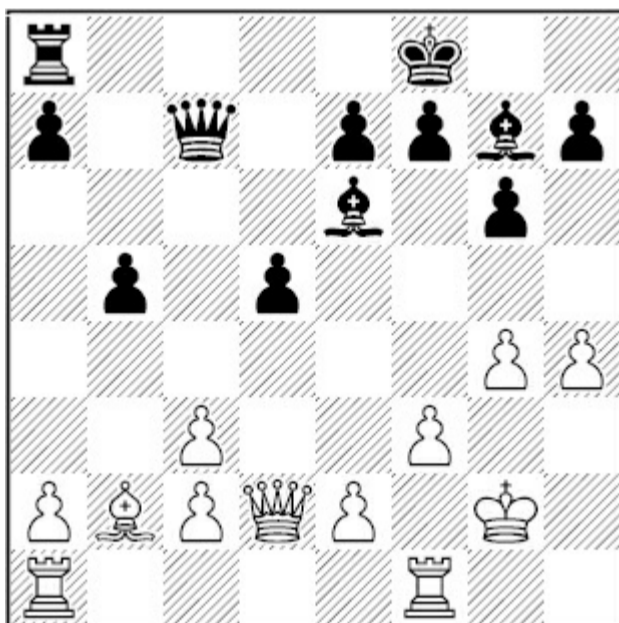
16... ♜e6

The correct square for the bishop. It overprotects d5 and keeps an eye on f7 despite blocking the e-pawn. Again there was the alternative 16... ♙c7, eyeing a draw with 17.gxf5 ♙g3+ but, in a quick, tense 60-minute game it is easy to overlook this type of *Zwischenzug*.

17. ♙g2 ...

Reasonable; the computer likes putting a rook on the semi-open b-file a little better.

17... ♙c7



White to play after 17... ♙c7

A handy place for the queen but the computer thinks 17... ♜c8 is fully equal. At this point, both players are trying to complete their development and jockeying for position. Note that despite his material "deficit," Black's position is much easier to play and his pieces have more flexibility. That's one reason why the computer had much preferred that White play 13.a4 or 13.c4, to open lines for his

rooks and avoid this type of inflexible position.

18. ♖h1(?) ...

Again it was better to place a rook on the b-file, e.g. 18. ♖ab1±.

Black is slowly developing an initiative and he takes advantage of the pin of the c3-pawn on the bishop with...

18... b4

19. ♕g5(?) ...

Lashing out with the queen, possibly in frustration, but the tame 19. ♕d3 is better and still about equal, e.g. 19...bxc3 20. ♖c1 d4 21.h5 with some play. Although White is making a series of second-best moves, Black is still blinded by his one big error on move 9, and he does not objectively evaluate his progress.

19... h6

Black wants to evict the queen first and that's not bad, but it also wasn't necessary. After 20... ♕c4!± he can take advantage of the white queen's abandoning the area and cause White to lose a tempo guarding the e2-pawn.

20. ♕e3 ...

Best, returning to the scene of the crime and guarding e2.

20... bxc3

Black is very happy to cash in and get at least some of his material back. In his mind he is still down a pawn (exchange worth two pawns and he is ahead one) but *Houdini* has a better evaluation: Black is already slightly ahead! Running low on the clock and being tired are not helping, either.

21. ♖a3 ...

It's a close call between this square and 21. ♖c1, when disconnecting the rooks has to be weighed against control of the c1-h6 diagonal. The bishop has good mobility on a3, but not that much activity for now. Black's army is much more flexible.

21.... ♖c8

Many players would make the move 21...d4! right away because it "wins a tempo," but it doesn't really win a tempo because it costs a tempo to move the pawn and a tempo to save the queen. The real question is whether the pawn is better off on d4 or the queen is better placed somewhere else. It turns out that 21...d4 is best because, although the queen can plant itself on e4, after 22... ♖d8±

Black's pieces still have more constructive things to do.

22.g5?

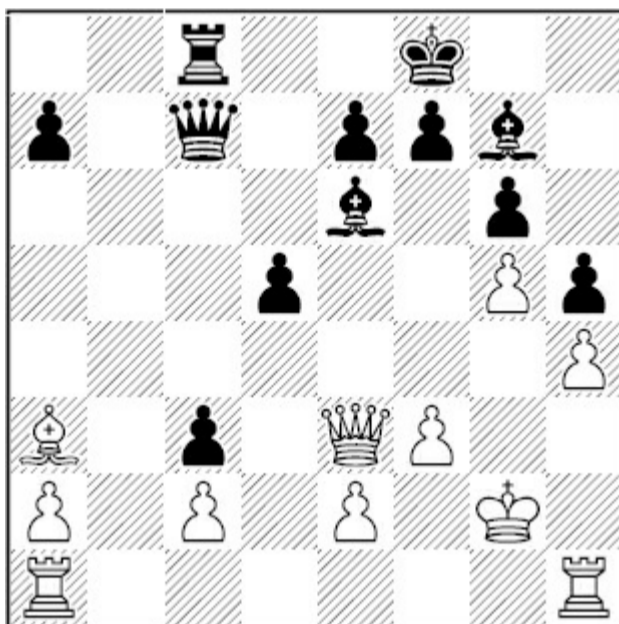
...

This, on the other hand, is the first fairly serious strategic mistake White has made in a while. It violates Steinitz's principle of attacking – and opening lines – where you are stronger. By allowing Black to close his kingside, the action shifts to the rest of the board, where White is struggling, especially since his kingside light squares are weakened. Instead, if White tries 22.h5 (best), then when Black replies 22...g5 to close the kingside, this works more in *White's* favor primarily because Black's light-squared bishop is much more restricted than in the game. Black can also answer 22.h5 with the more double-edged 22... d4, with a minor advantage.

Steinitz's principle: attack – and open lines – where you are stronger

22...

h5



White to play after 22...h5

At this point, with his clock running, White wisely offered a draw. It also helps to admit that – you guessed it – I was the one engineering the Black pieces – and I was unaware that offering a draw on your move is not the proper method. I should have politely asked White to make a move so I could consider it – I have nothing to lose by doing that since, by rule, White cannot withdraw his offer. Then I could see if White's move created a position strong enough to accept the offer.

But I was tired and still mad at myself for allowing 10. ♖xf8, no matter the current position. As noted earlier, I felt I was worse, due to my abysmal evaluation function that gave too much value to the exchange and too little value to the bishop pair and my other advantages. The real question is whether Black is winning by force!

So I made my biggest error of the game by accepting the draw offer.

½-½?!

This left the two contestants tied for first but it was a great moral victory for White – he had gotten a draw with his main, higher-rated rival and his road ahead was easier. White had already defeated the number two player but I had yet to play the second-rated entrant.

That second-rated player was my friend and tournament roommate, Lester Shelton. After the game finished, Lester exclaimed, “How could you give him a draw? Look at your position!”

In my debilitated state, I tried to defend my decision and White’s game. But once we returned to our room, Lester calmly set up the position and commandeered the black pieces. It did not take me long to realize that he was absolutely right – in spite of the “Reinfeld” material numbers, the real question was whether or not I was winning, and it wasn’t fun to play White at all.

To make matters worse, on the final day my rival for first won all his games while I had to settle for a draw against Lester and a second-place finish. It still hurts that I lost the title, but I learned a very valuable lesson about evaluating positions – a lesson that soon helped me become an expert level player and later a master.

Is Black winning? Let’s briefly examine three possible lines:

- 23. ♖d3 ♗a5 24. ♘c1 ♙f5 25. ♚d1 (White is in full retreat mode) 25... ♜b8 26.a4 (what else?) 26... ♞b4 27. ♙e3 ♚g8!. The computer works in mysterious ways, but it says this is a clear win for Black;
- 23. ♞ab1 (putting a rook on b1 is White’s best try) 23... ♗a5 24. ♘b4 ♗a4 25. ♞hc1 d4 26. ♖d3 ♚e8!. Yet another mysterious move that *Houdini* calculates at 22 ply is the best road to victory;
- 23. ♞hb1 (trying the other rook) 23... ♙f5 24. ♞d1 (counterattack, as 24. ♞c1 d4! 25. ♗f2 ♗a5 wins) 24... ♖d7, simultaneously guarding d5 and threatening ...d5-d4 and ... ♙xc2 with good winning chances.

Whether you believe Black is winning or not, the bottom line remains: *evaluation is a terribly important chess skill – I believe it is second only to analysis*. Improving analytical and evaluation skills are the key paths to improvement. (For additional reading on these subjects refer to, “Bootstrapping Analysis Skills” at <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman89.pdf> and “Evaluation Criteria” at <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman27.pdf>.)

GAME 11: WHITE 1397 – BLACK 1259
Internet Chess Club 2010
45 minutes with a 45-second increment
Queen’s Pawn Game

1.d4 0:45:40
2. ♖f3 0:45:00

♗f6 0:45:14
...

This is a flexible move which could become a popular queen's pawn opening after 3.c4 or a Colle System after 3.e3. If you don't know any book, it would also help to follow these two opening principles:

- *Knights before bishops* – but not necessarily both knights before both bishops (this can often be interpreted as *the knight on one side before the bishop on that side*); and
- *Develop the pieces on the side you wish to castle before the pieces on the other side*. In most queen pawn openings, but not all, White castles kingside.

2...

g6 0:45:45

As in several games in this book, Black is seemingly willing to go into a King's Indian setup no matter which line White plays.

3. ♖c3 0:40:55

...

Maybe not! White thinks a long time – almost five minutes – and decides to offer a Pirc if the game continues 3... ♗g7 4.e4.

Already White's clock is lower than many other "fast" players in the book ever managed to achieve!

3...

d5 0:44:30

Black decides to fight for the center now and forego the King's Indian setup with 3... ♗g7.

4.e3 0:35:30

...

The move chosen avoids the Pirc and instead becomes a passive Veresov deviation but with White's queen's bishop shut in by e2-e3. White is already playing dangerously slow – *in a game with a long time control, I suggest that after each move a player ask, "Am I playing too fast or too slow (for the time limit and board situation)?" and then adjust accordingly*. If White does that, we should see him speed up immediately during these relatively non-critical moves, but...

4...

♗g7 0:43:49

5. ♗b5+ 0:31:55

...

In a game with a long time control, after each move you should ask, "Am I playing too fast or too slow (for the time limit and board situation)?" and then adjust accordingly.

Despite his slow play, White violates the important opening principle, *Don't put your pieces where pieces of lesser value can just attack them and drive them back*. Luckily for White, playing this type of move does not hurt him that much due to the flexible and non-tactical nature of the position. Slightly better is 5. ♖d3.

5...

♖d7 0:41:46

I would have played 5...c6 automatically, because I can drive the bishop away and make a constructive move simultaneously. However, *Houdini* says, "Not so fast!" and thinks Black is just as well off playing 5... ♖bd7 and then ...c7-c6 later. It also states that 5... ♖d7 is about a tenth of a pawn less effective if White answers with 6. ♖d3, but instead he plays...

6. ♖xd7+ 0:30:49

♗bxd7 0:39:29

This is about equally good with 6... ♗xd7, reserving c6 for the knight. Compare to Game 4, where 5... ♗xd7 was clearly preferable. The big difference is that in the earlier game the black pawn was already on c5.

7. O-O 0:31:31

O-O 0:40:01

The position is fine for Black and, visually, White is cramped since he not only developed his queen's knight in front of his break move c2-c4, but he also did not play dynamically enough to justify it. Still, any transgressions were minor and Black's advantage is minimal.

8. ♖e1 0:30:33

...

Preparing the e2-e4 break to free the queen bishop and give his army some life.

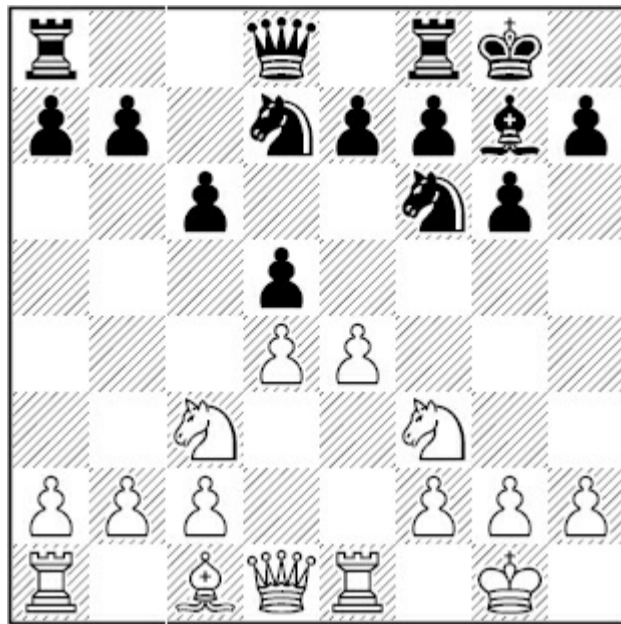
8...

c6 0:33:44

Rather than this passive move, which just allows White what he wants, Black could make a pre-emptive strike with his own break 8...c5. *Houdini's* other top move is 8... ♖e8, readying the other central thrust, ...e7-e5. Either way Black's game is slightly preferable.

9. e4 0:29:21

...



Black to play after 9.e4

Here's a handy principle to cover positions like these: *If your opponent makes a pawn break with a center pawn and, if you capture, he can't capture back with a pawn, then you should generally make that capture.* This position is such a case: White has made the break on e4, Black can capture, and White can't capture back with a pawn, so Black should capture it. The question is, which way should he capture?

This principle is even stronger if the pawn you're capturing with is not a center pawn, but the c- or f-pawn.

By the way, if your opponent makes a center pawn break and, if you capture, he *can* recapture with a pawn, that does *not* mean you should not capture! It just means that your capture is no longer automatic and you have to rely more on the particular position.

9...

dxe4 0:34:03

Turns out 9... ♖xe4 and 9...dxe4 were pretty even, so it didn't matter much.

10. ♖xe4 0:29:56

♖xe4 0:34:34

I notice that many inexperienced players, once they initiate trades on a particular square, continue capturing immediately as long as it is safe to do so. While sometimes that is best, chess is not checkers and each capture has to be examined individually for whether it makes sense. For example, in the Sicilian you see many inexperienced players play 1.e4 c5 2. ♖f3 ♖c6 3.d4 cxd4 4. ♖xd4 ♖xd4(?) 5. ♔xd4, when White has a dominating central queen and an extra tempo. The first capture 3...cxd4 was almost mandatory, as explained above, but Black's second capture 4... ♖xd4 was anything but – it merely helped White get ahead in development. So be careful!

In this position, the second capture is fine, but Black made it in 14 seconds, so I strongly suspect he did not weigh the options very heavily.

11. ♖xe4 0:30:34

♗f6 0:35:02

Another quick move! This time Black took only 17 seconds. It's a very reasonable move, but the pawn-break alternatives, 11...e5 and 11...c5, were both slightly preferred by *Houdini*, and I'll go with the big guy (well, big in rating, anyway). *You can't play what you don't see* and, in 17 seconds, I don't think he saw.

12. ♖e2 0:22:32

...

Wow! White takes almost nine minutes to figure out where to put his rook. It may be somewhat important to avoid minor mistakes, especially if you are playing Petrosian, but a bigger one is playing too slowly and getting into unnecessary time trouble. White is the higher-rated player, but if he keeps this up he will beat himself. 12. ♖e1 and 12. ♖h4 are best by small margins.

12...

♗e8 0:34:26

I notice that many inexperienced players, once they initiate trades on a particular square, continue capturing immediately as long as it is safe to do so. While sometimes that is best, chess is not checkers and each capture has to be examined individually for whether it makes sense.

The main theme of this game for Black is missed – or misunderstanding – break moves. Here 12...c5 is perfectly safe since the d-pawn is pinned, and would get Black's position back close to equal. As it is, White has only a small advantage.

13.c3 0:16:41

...

A solid move, but Black was not threatening anything and White took over six minutes on this move, too. I guess he was not adjusting his pace after seeing that his last non-critical move took nine minutes. What is he going to do if the game gets complicated or his moves become much more critical?

13...

♔c7 0:32:18


14. ♗g5 0:09:00

...


White took almost half his remaining time to develop one of the pieces that had not moved yet. In a 45 45 game, each player has an average of slightly less than two minutes per move, and in general you want to spend much less than that on non-critical moves and save the remainder for critical, complicated moves. White's last three moves were highly non-critical (there was not a big difference in evaluation between his top few moves), yet he ran his clock down from 31 minutes to 9!

If I were Black, I would look at White's clock and think, "Keep this up and I won't have to do anything but watch your clock in order to win!"


14...

 **ad8** 0:30:56

Getting his last piece into play. Can rarely argue with that and I won't here, either.



15.  **d2** 0:05:05

...

White only has two more pieces to develop but one of them has to move out of the way first. The queen has several good places to go (15.  b3 looks best), but he takes about half his remaining time (at least before factoring in the increment) to find one of the easily safe ones.

15...

 **h8?**

Instructive mistake, costing Black about a quarter-pawn of computer evaluation (from equal up to +0.26 for White). The cure is worse than the nonexistent disease he was trying to prevent. Black tries to preserve his fianchetto bishop against the “threat” of 16.  h6. *But the idea of White's offering a trade of bishops by creating a battery with the queen (here the queen on d2 and the bishop on g5) and then going  h6 is much more commonly seen in grandmaster games when the players castle on opposite sides, for example in the Yugoslav Attack of the Sicilian Dragon, the Sämisch Attack in the King's Indian, or the 150 Attack in the Pirc. In the current position, the battery is not a big deal since the kings are on the same side and starting a kingside attack – or even trading bishops – is not much of a threat.*


My notes indicate that I asked Black after the game why he made this move, and answered with the common refrain, “I did not know what to do!” If he had played over hundreds of annotated games, or learned about common opening principles, he would know that *in similar structures Black is always trying to equalize space and central structure through pawn breaks*. Here the breaks against White's central d-pawn would be ...c6-c5 and ...e7-e5 and, in this position, “what to do” would be to play the safest break, 15...c5=.


16.  **f4** 0:05:41

...

Nine seconds! White gains (45-9) = 36 seconds. It seems he looked at the clock, said “Oh my! I'd better get going!” and went into a completely different gear. Sometimes, the clock becomes more important than the board. Let's see how this newfound awareness affects his game...

16...

 **c8** 0:23:09

This square seems a little awkward. The active 16...  a5± seems right.

17.  **ae1** 0:04:20

...

Two minutes to get the last piece in the game, onto the only semi-open file.

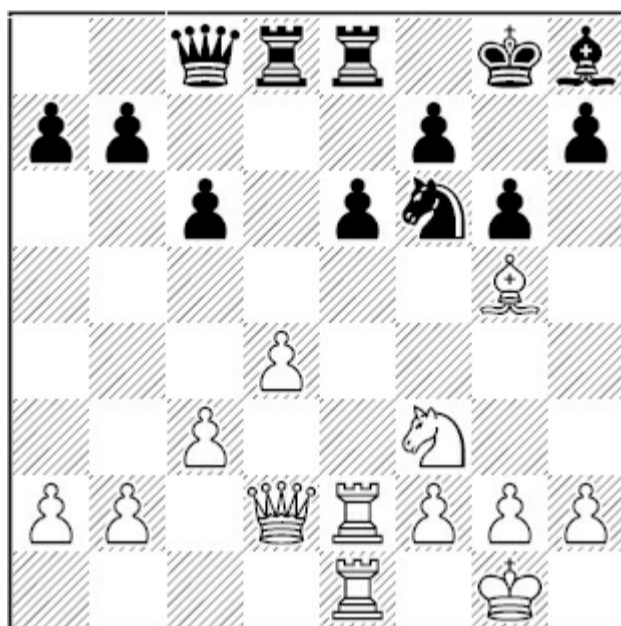
17...

e6 0:11:39

This simple defense of the e-pawn is as good as any, but now it was *Black* who took half his time making this decision. It must have been a slow day...

18. ♖g5 0:04:25 ...

A good idea. It won't be difficult for White to turn up the pressure on the pinned knight, and Black must be careful to avoid losing material.



Black to play after 18. ♖g5

18... ♜d7?

Ironically, Black makes a mistake similar to White's on move 5, allowing a lesser piece to attack. The problem is that the stakes are higher now because the pieces are clashing more perilously, so the cost to Black is greater, should White take advantage of the misstep.

Houdini thinks the break move 18... c5!± is still correct, when White can't win material with 19. ♜f4 because 19... ♘d5 gets out of the pin with an attack on the queen.

19. ♘e5!+- 0:01:53 ...

Not only attacking the queen, but also allowing White to build up the pressure on the pinned knight. Of course, White doesn't have much time to exploit his pressure, but the 45-second increment is some consolation, so there's still quite some drama in the situation.

19... ♜e7 0:09:21

Black has nothing better, but now there are *two* pieces of greater value on the other side of the pinned knight, so breaking it will be extremely difficult.

20. ♜f4 0:02:21 ...

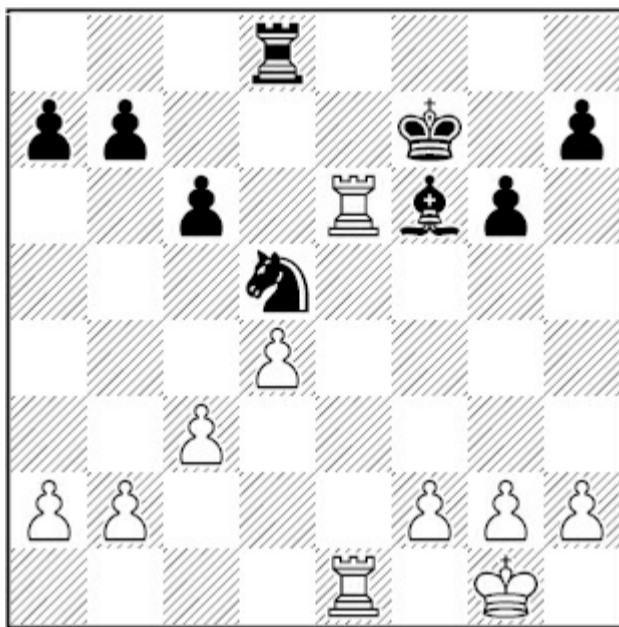
Can't blame White for not finding the right move here in 17 seconds – we'd have to blame him earlier for not leaving himself enough time for critical moves so that he would have a better chance to find strong moves.

It turns out that 20. ♖e3!+- does the trick, threatening 21. ♖f3.

20...

♗g7? 0:08:56

Black has the same defense to the pin as in the notes to Black's move 18: he can simply play 20... ♗d5 attacking the queen and then threatening ... f7-f6+ with a fork of the knight and bishop, so White has nothing better than 21. ♙xf7+ ♙xf7 22. ♘xf7 ♙xf7 23. ♗xd8 ♖xd8 24. ♖xe6 ♗f6:



White to play after 24... ♗f6 (analysis)

– when Black has two pieces for a rook and two pawns, which is often slightly inferior but OK here. *Houdini* rates the position after 24... ♗f6 as +0.12, which seems about right.

21. ♗g4? 0:02:39

...

As we have seen with previous moves, getting the queen out of the way of the freeing ... ♗d5 is necessary if White is to press the advantage, so finding the pressuring 21. ♙h4! would not be too difficult if White had more time. We could see that White was headed for this problem as early as moves 3 and 4! If this unnecessary time trouble often occurs in your games, then finding the tactical awareness, opening skills, and confidence to play more quickly in early, non-critical moves will pay large dividends. (See more on this in “Speeding Up” at <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman124.pdf>.)

21...

♗d5! 0:05:15

Black takes about four minutes, but he had to find the only idea 21... ♗d5 or 21... ♗h5, counterattacking. All other moves lose miserably, and saving more time for misery doesn't sound like a good idea!

22. ♔xe7 0:03:03

...

White has two moves which retain a small advantage, 22. ♔c1 and 22. ♔d2, both allowing 22... f6 23. ♔h6±. Instead he trades into an equal endgame. That means good news and bad news with both players short on time. The good news is that some equal endgames are not as tense and often feature many non-critical moves where both sides can play quickly. The bad news is that the game can last for a long time and, with both players short on time, there are bound to be some very critical moves sprinkled in along the way.

When an annotator presents a game such as this, there is the “normal” story of who is winning and losing and what the position is telling us. But there is also the story of the players and the clock, and what’s affecting the position from the “real life” side. To concentrate on just the position would detract from the goal of making the reader a better player, because the reader will find that, in playing games such as these, handling more than just the pieces – your nerves and the clock, where time remaining and increment size are both monumental – will go a long way in determining who will win the game. From the standpoint of the position, just good moves will do, but how they get made is not just a matter of calculating correctly each move.

22...

♖xf4 0:05:54

23. ♔xd8 0:03:43

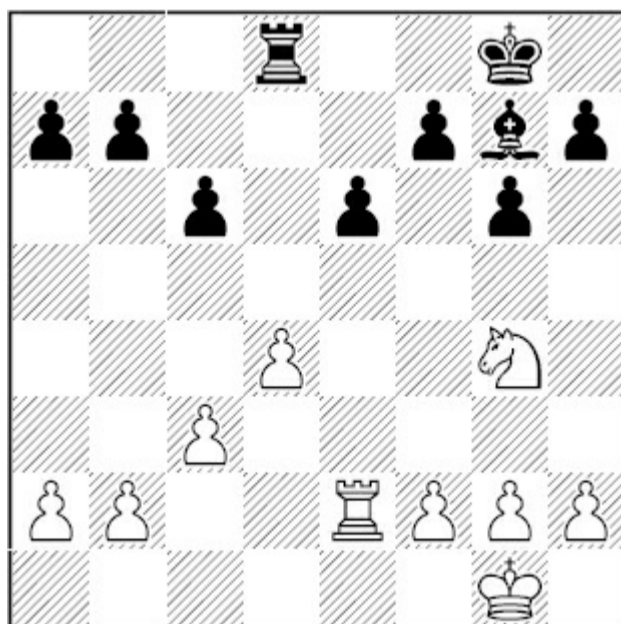
♖xe2+ 0:06:37

24. ♖xe2 0:03:18

♖xd8= 0:07:16

In games such as these, handling more than just the pieces – your nerves and the clock, where time remaining and increment size are both monumental – will go a long way in determining who will win the game.

These forced moves have allowed both players to recover some incremental time for what may prove to be a long endgame.



White to play after 24... ♖xd8

25.b4? 0:01:46

...

White uses up half of his time – again. Sometimes putting pawns on the color of the opponent's only bishop is wise, as it blocks in the bishop, while other times it is disastrous as it creates targets. This is more the latter than the former if Black can find the right key.

25...

b5 0:06:36

Since the theme of the game, from Black's viewpoint, is missed break moves, it is not surprising that he misses 25...a5!. Inexperienced players often don't "see" moves that seem to put pieces *en prise*. However, when you show them what happens if White captures 26.bxa5, they begin to realize that moves like 25...a5 are not nearly as unsafe as they look. In this case, Black has 26...c5! (instead of the normal 26... ♖a8 27. ♖b2=) 27. ♖d2 cxd4 28.cxd4 ♖ and it becomes apparent that not only can't White hold onto his extra pawn, but trying to cage the bishop with moves like 25.b4? can easily backfire.

26.g3 0:01:53

...

White makes *Luft* on the opposite color of the bishop. He can't stop ...a7-a5, but he can stop ...e6-e5 by trying 26.f4=.

26...

♖f8 0:06:49

If Black can't see ...a7-a5 or ... ♖a8 to prepare ...a7-a5, then the endgame will be tough because the pawn density will favor the knight.

27. ♖g2 0:02:34

♖e7 0:07:29

28. ♖f3 0:02:41

♖d5= 0:06:05

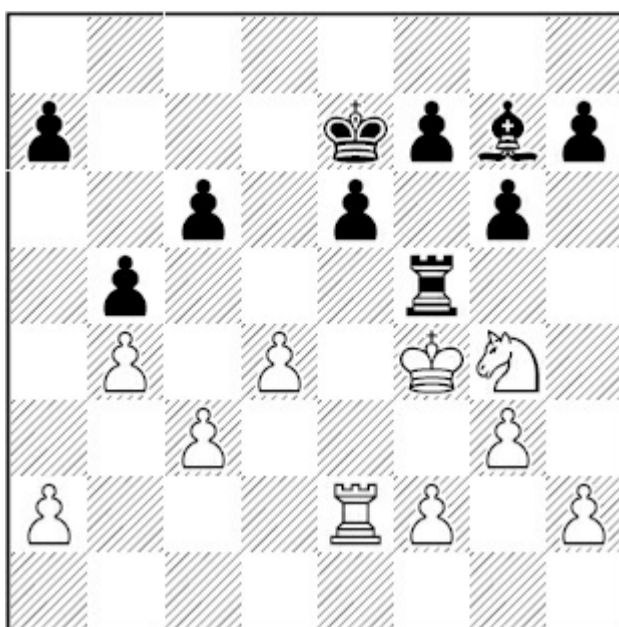
29. ♖f4 0:02:02

...

This is a little dangerous. There is a question of how safe and effective the rook can be on the fifth rank, but this tilts the equation toward good for Black. Instead 29. ♖e3 and *Houdini* suggests that the better part of valor is 29... ♖d7=.

29...

♖f5+ 0:05:24



White to play after 29... ♖f5+

30. ♔e4 0:01:55

...

White wisely avoids 30. ♔e3?? h5! and the king has usurped the knight's only safe retreat square, so White not only loses a pawn after 31. ♗e5 ♕xe5 32.dxe5 ♖xe5+ 33. ♔d3 but has to go into a losing king-and-pawn ending after 33... ♖xe2 34. ♔xe2. If you don't know how to win this type of endgame (hint: always get your majority rolling), then play it out a few times with a friend (and ask the computer how you did). That's one way to improve!

30...

♔d6?! 0:03:43

If you don't know how to win this type of endgame (hint: always get your majority rolling), then play it out a few times with a friend (and ask the computer how you did). That's one way to improve!

30... ♖h5 is totally equal. The threat of 31... f5+ not only forks the king and knight – if White just avoids that by moving the king, it also removes the guard on the h2-pawn. Therefore *Houdini* suggests 31. ♔e3 f5 32. ♗e5 ♕xe5 33.dxe5 ♖xh2 34.a4! and White equalizes by breaking into the queenside while Black's rook is out of play. Where have we seen a similar break move suggestion before...? However, with the move played, Black tilts the equation back in the favor of the rook's being awkwardly placed on the fifth rank.

31. ♗e3!± 0:01:47

...

31.f4 also does a similar job taking away squares on the fifth rank. Black's rook is losing its flexibility.

31...

♖h5 0:04:02

32.f4 0:01:45 ...

Black has to be careful because even if he doesn't drop the rook, just getting it trapped on the h-file might be enough to lose.

32... **f5+!?** 0:04:07

Lashing out makes the e-pawn backward and creates a more locked position for the knight to roam, but it does keep the g-pawn out of the rook's hair. Black could just wait with 32...a6.

33.♔d3 0:01:57 ...

Keeping an eye on the rook with 33.♔f3 seems more consistent.

33... **♖h3** 0:04:11

I think Black is (or should be) planning to push his own h-pawn to extricate the rook, so he clears the way for ...h7-h5. As we shall see, this idea is a double-edged sword.

34.c4 0:02:13 ...

White feels he has to strike by opening lines for his central forces while the black rook is otherwise occupied. 34.a4 might be an even better way to do this.

34... **bxc4+?** 0:03:58

White was not threatening much, so Black could keep the damage to a minimum with the consistent 34...h5. 34...bxc4+ leaves him with isolated a-and c-pawns and a backward e-pawn. Moreover, the knight has some new entry routes as well.

I gave the players question marks on objective evaluation, but to play accurately under these time conditions is very difficult. Like many slow games that deteriorate when the players run short on time, this contest has become more of a fight than a science.

35.♔xc4(?) 0:02:20 ...

A curious recapture. I am not sure if White thought that he needed the knight to keep the rook at bay, or that it was automatic to get out of check by a king move. Perhaps capturing with the king was to avoid Black's king advancing after 35.♖xc4+ ♔d5?!, but that reply is disastrous due to the cute 36.♖e5+! ♕xe5 37.dxe5 threatening 38.♖e3#. If Black tries 37...c5 then 38.b5! covers the escape square and clinches the eventual mate. Note that 35.♖xc4+ ♔d5?? 26.♖e5+ ♕xe5 37.fxe5?? fails to 37...f4!-+ when not only does the f-pawn stop 38.♖e3#, but the pin of White's g-pawn leaves him without any constructive moves. In any case 35.♖xc4+ was better, when after the correct 35...♔d7 36.♔e3! is *Houdini's* clear choice for progress.

Ever since their clocks got low, both players have picked up the pace and are leaving a little reserve time in case they need a deeper think. That idea would have worked even better before it was forced upon them, but still they deserve credit – I know some players would not have been able to do that. In fact, I know some players who, in over-the-board chess, rather than make a hasty move, would just let their clock fall! Then, after you claim a win on time forfeit, they ask, “Would you like to finish the game to see what would have happened?” That doesn’t make much sense...

35...

a6 0:04:26

Black made this move relatively quickly (17 seconds) as if it were forced to stop 36.b5. So I asked *Houdini* where 35...a6 stood on its list of moves and it indicated it was fourth at 25 ply (35... ♖h5, 35... ♗f6, and 35... ♔e7 were the top three). So stopping b4-b5 is not a priority, but I might have done something similar. I also noticed that the thematic 35...h5 to push on to h4 was not in the top 10. The reason is that 35...h5 36. ♗d1! h4 37. ♗f2 ♖xh2 38. ♗e4+ fxe4 39. ♖xh2 hxg3 40. ♖h3 wins the exchange and the game for White. So in this line (not forced, of course), the knight that should have taken on the previous move does have a handy role! Keep this possibility in mind...

36.a4 0:02:45

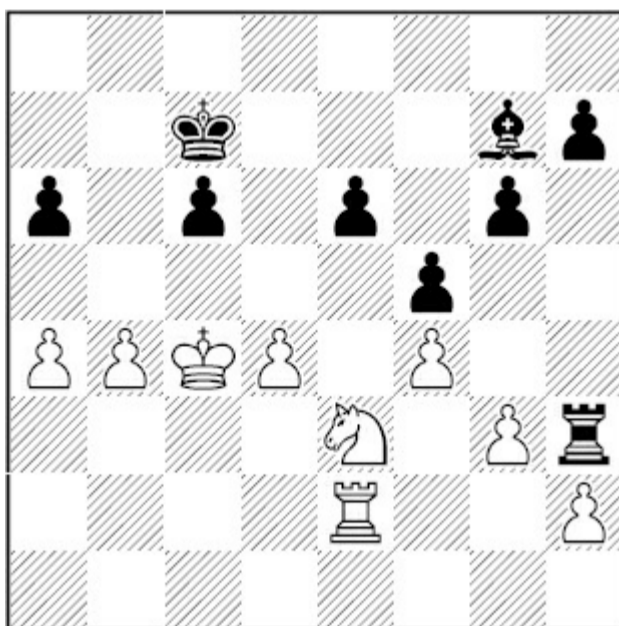
...

The best idea is 36. ♗d1 heading eventually to c5 or e5.

36...

♔c7? 0:04:01

Houdini wants Black to change course with 36... ♖h5 and 37...g5 to break out of prison. Staying on the h-file too long could be fatal, as eventually White will find some way to use his more active army to break through elsewhere. The move chosen does allow White a labyrinth to victory.



White to play after 36... ♔c7?

37. ♔c5? 0:02:29

...

The winning path was 37. ♖c2! ♗f8 38. ♖e1 ♔d7 39. ♖f3 ♗e7 40. ♖e5+ ♔c7 41. a5. Something has got to give: Black is running out of moves, e.g. 41... ♔b7 42. ♖d3 and the e6-pawn falls along with all the other dominoes.

Assuming you do have time, how do you find maneuvers like the one above? First, look for the following conditions:

- You have a knight;
- The pawn structure is relatively stable; and
- The opponent's position is not overly dynamic (helpful but not necessary).

Then, find ideal target square(s) for the knight. For example, in the above position you might consider e5. Then work backward to find paths to that square from the knight's current square, noting which intermediary squares may or may not be safe. Then ask whether taking that path would be possible, and worth the tempos. This last part is just an application of IM Jeremy Silman's suggestion for a good plan: *Is it feasible?* and *Is it effective?* If either of these questions fails, then the plan likely should be discarded.

37... ♗f8+ 0:04:38
38. ♔c4 0:02:59 ♔d6(?) 0:04:59

Superficially reasonable but instead 38...h5! works again. Isn't chess fun?

39. ♖c2 0:02:55 ...

White is getting the right idea. *Houdini* likes 39. ♖d1 even better.

39... ♗e7 0:04:48

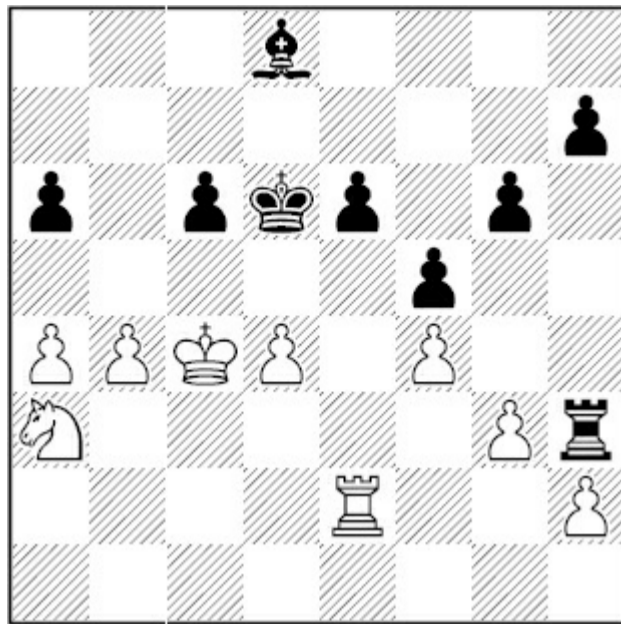
39...h5 is the best chance.

40. ♖a3? 0:02:18 ...

Wrong way, Harrigan! 40. ♖e1 Δ ♖f3, ♖e5/g5+–.

40... ♗d8 0:04:32

Black has some breathing room and can play 40...g5! =, 40...h5, or possibly even 40... ♔d7 first. Studying endgames would not have helped Black, but some extra time and careful analysis might have done the trick.



White to play after 40... ♕d8

IM Jeremy Silman's suggestion for a good plan: *Is it feasible?* and *Is it effective?* If either of these questions fails, then the plan likely should be discarded

41.b5!?! 0:01:59

...

This is at least consistent with 40. ♖a3: "A bad plan is better than no plan." – I thought that quote was from Alexander Alekhine, but *Wikipedia* says it was Emanuel Lasker. Of course, *Wikipedia's* information is only as good as its source, but the sentiment is the same. I think I could show many positions where having no plan (doing nothing) is much better than doing something bad, so that quote is at best just for fun and only where applicable. 41. ♖c2± is best.

41...

axb5+ 0:03:53

42.axb5 0:02:38

cxb5+ 0:03:46

This second capture on b5 is not required. 42...g5± should do nicely.

43. ♖xb5+ 0:03:17

♔d7 0:03:45

Not 43... ♔e7? 44.d5+–.

44. ♔c5 0:02:33

...

44. ♖c3 is the best shot, but I am willing to bet the players were starting to get groggy from playing on the 45-second increment so long. No time to take breaks!

44...

♕e7+ 0:03:51

45. ♔b6 0:02:24

♕d8+ 0:04:23

46. ♔b7 0:02:35

...

I know inexperienced players hate to repeat moves, but 46. ♔c5 was a better chance. Still, the worst is over for Black, barring something disastrous.

46...

♞a5 0:04:29

46...h5 is more than good here. It's amazing that White never found one of the ways to make progress while Black was struggling to figure out how to activate the rook.

47. ♔a6 0:01:58

♞d8 0:05:07

48. ♘c3 0:01:32

♔d6 0:05:12

Houdini likes 48... ♞f6 a little better but I suspect it won't matter.

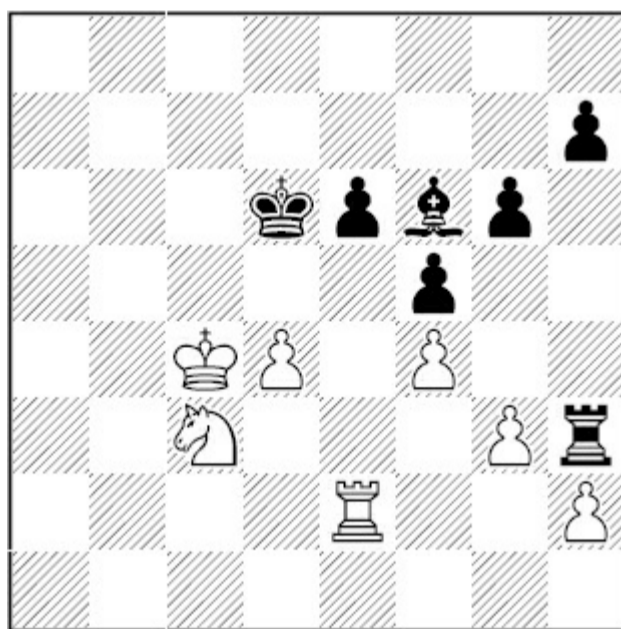
49. ♔b5 0:01:45

♞f6 0:04:46

49...h5 was again the clearest path to equality, but the reason is that Black's king can reach d5 after sacrificing the exchange: 50. ♘d1!? h4! 51. ♘f2 ♜xh2 52. ♘e4+ fxe4 53. ♜xh2 hxg3 54. ♜g2 ♔d5 55. ♜xg3 ♞h4 and now 56. ♜xg6 is dangerous due to 56...e3, so White has to settle for 57. ♜g4=.

50. ♔c4 0:02:02

...



Black to play after 50. ♔c4

50...

h5(?) 0:04:34

Ironic! With the pieces placed this way it turns out that 50...g5! was the correct defense. Instead 50...h5 is dangerous (but still possibly not losing) because the line mentioned at Black's 49th move is

not possible as the black king cannot reach d5. If that makes the reader shudder, imagine how you would feel as a player if you lost the game because of that?

51. ♖b5+ 0:01:49

...

One chance is 51. ♖d1 h4 52. ♖f2 ♜xh2 53. ♖e4+ fxe4 54. ♜xh2. However, with the reduced material, is this enough to win for White? After 54...hxg3 55. ♜h3 g5 56.fxg5 ♙xg5 57. ♜xg3 we have one too many pieces on the board for a sixpiece tablebase solution, but I strongly suspect that with best play Black can hold fairly easily.

Upon deeper inspection, the computer finds 51. ♖a4!. Then, after 51...h4 52. ♖c5 ♙e7 53.d5 ♙f7 54.dxe6+ ♙e8 55. ♖a6 hxg3 56.hxg3 ♜h7! (56... ♜xg3? 57. ♖c7+ ♙f8 58. ♖d5+—) 57. ♜a2, I suspect Black may not be able to hold, although the computer sees only a very strong position for White.

51...

♙d7 0:04:46

Game **drawn** by mutual agreement ½–½

White could continue to play for a win after 52. ♜a2 ♙d8 53. ♜a7+ ♙e8 54. ♖d6+ ♙f8 55. ♜a8 ♙e7 56. ♖b7!±, but I suspect he both was exhausted and subconsciously felt that his opponent deserved a draw in the fight even if Black still stood slightly worse in the game.

Chapter 3:

Endgame Mishaps

Endgame Mishaps

On average, the endgame is the most critical part of the game – a higher percentage of “reasonable-looking” moves can instead be mistakes that throw away a win or draw. A small mistake early on in the game usually affects the evaluation of a position just a little. However, mistakes in the endgame are magnified, not just because there is no further part of the game in which to recover (that certainly is a factor), but also because of the discrete possibility that wins and draws can be much more easily demonstrated due to the reduced material.

I prefer the following definition of *endgame*: “The final part of the game, usually commencing when it is safe for the king to participate in the action.” Others have disagreed with this, but it can’t be far from accurate. No matter the definition, the endgame almost always features the king’s active participation. The fighting value of a king is worth about four pawns (possibly a bit more), so how soon and how well one uses his monarch in the endgame is always a big factor.

A very important issue throughout the game, but especially in the endgame, is deciding which pieces to trade. The general principle that one should not trade pieces when losing but should trade pawns is often accentuated in the endgame. However, clear exceptions emerge, such as the desirability of trading into a bishops-of-opposite-colors endgame when down a pawn (or two). One thing is certain: *never trade into a king-and-pawn ending unless you are almost certain to get what you want* – a win or a draw. King-and-pawn endgames are very deterministic; with computer aid, I can probably calculate within a reasonable time whether 99.9% of positions are wins or draws. Trading into a king-and-pawn endgame down a pawn or more without carefully analyzing whether you won’t lose is almost always a recipe for disaster.

Importantly, when you have a winning endgame, don’t let your guard down. In addition to stalemates, there are other dangers lurking in the shadows that your opponent might uncover if you don’t take your time and analyze carefully.

Never trade into a king-and-pawn ending unless you are almost certain to get the result you want.

GAME 12: WHITE 1433 – BLACK 1541

Internet Chess Club 2012

45 minutes with a 45-second increment

King’s Indian Defense

1.d4 0:45:35
2.c4 0:44:31
3.♖c3 0:45:01

♗f6 0:45:36
g6 0:46:16
♙g7 0:46:56

3...d5 is the Grünfeld, an opening not seen at “low amateur” levels since it is difficult to stumble across. Instead, as players improve they “discover” the Grünfeld and then play it “on purpose.”

4.♗f3 0:44:39

d6 0:46:58

Black can also delay ...d7-d6 a move or two, waiting to see if White plays e2-e4. That's microscopically more flexible as it allows other central pawn formations, depending on what White does. But diehard King's Indian players don't care – they want the pawn on d6 anyway!

5.♙f4 0:42:31

...

The main line is 5.e4. The move chosen gives the game an independent turn. 5.♙f4 is much more often seen at the amateur level than at grandmaster level, where it is rare. Its main drawback is that when Black enforces ...e7-e5 he will win a tempo, but there are some countering arguments, such as ♙f4 making it a little more difficult for Black to play that same pawn break, ...e7-e5.

5...

O-O 0:47:26

6.g3 0:41:17

...

Usually the combination of ♙f4 and g2-g3 does not work very well, since that limits the bishop's flexibility (similarly, ♙c4 and b2-b3 don't coordinate, either). *Houdini* agrees and thinks White should just play the normal-looking 6.e4.

6...

♗bd7 0:46:49

7.♙c2 0:40:08

...

Not bad, but you rarely see a strong player make a move like 6.g3 and then not play 7.♙g2, and this is no exception, so 7.♙g2 was more consistent and better.

7...

♙e8 0:46:26

Black prepares for the thematic break ...e7-e5. Also good is the immediate break ...c7-c5, with more of a “Benoni” character.

THE CAUSES OF ENDGAME MISTAKES

Most endgame errors in amateur games are not caused by the offender's lack of familiarity with well-known endgame positions; they are caused by fast play, lack of careful analysis, or both.

8.d5 0:39:13

...

The computer thinks this is inaccurate and again prefers the normal 8. ♖g2.

8...

c6 0:43:15

Houdini suggests the more aggressive 8... ♗c5, with the idea of 9... ♗f5, to discourage e2-e4. If immediately 9.e4 to stop ... ♗f5, then 9... e6! breaks open the center for the rook while White is unprepared to castle, and if 9.b4, then the *Zwischenzug* 9... ♗f5 hits the queen and gives Black's knights access to e4 with a large, almost winning advantage.

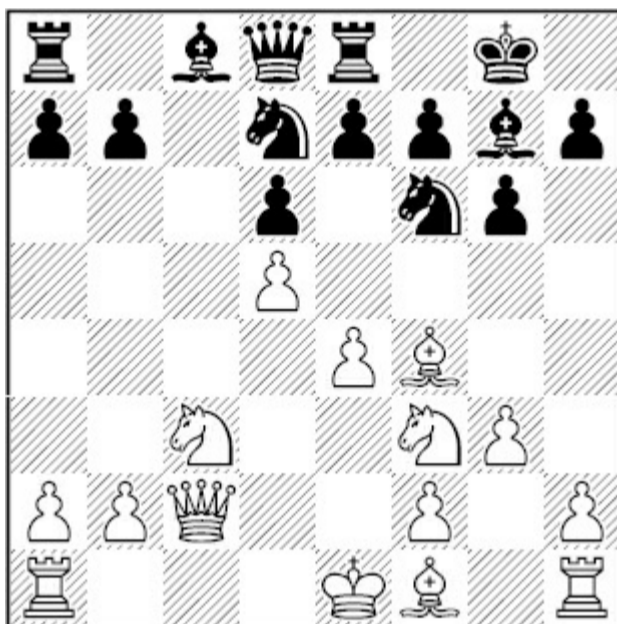
9.e4 0:36:48

cxd5 0:41:13

10.cxd5! 0:35:43

...

Practically forced, since 10.exd5? allows 10... ♗c5 with play as in the note to Black's move 8, and 10. ♗xd5 permits 10... ♗xd5 11.cxd5 ♗c5 as White has some problems on the light squares.



Black to play after 10.cxd5!

10...

♗h5? 0:38:10

This may look logical, but consider the following:

After Black makes this knight move and White responds by moving the bishop to preserve it, which piece will be gaining more with those two moves?

I think the answer is that the bishop should be just fine but the knight on h5 is awkward. *In King's Indian games where the d- and e-pawns are all locked together (not the case here since the e-pawns are not against each other), then moving this knight to allow an ...f7-f5 break is de rigueur.* Here, though, it makes little sense. Better is 10... ♗c5, when 11.b4? is met by 11... ♗g4! 12. ♗g2 ♗cxe4! 13. ♗xe4 ♗c8—+ because, if the queen tries to guard d3, Black gets a discovery on a1, e.g.

14. ♖d3 ♗xe4 and White's game collapses. Therefore White should settle for 10... ♗c5 11. ♗g2 ♖c7+.

11. ♗g5 0:34:46 ...

It doesn't make as much sense to move the bishop where it can be attacked again, this time with 11...h6 (although Black has better), so more logical is the calm 11. ♗e3=.

11... h6 0:37:01

As mentioned in the previous note, this is logical but 11... ♗c5 is slightly better.

12. ♗e3 0:34:31 ♗e5(?) 0:34:13

This is a common minor tactical oversight often made by low intermediates. The bishop on g7 is overworked by its need to guard h6 and the desire to guard e5. Better is to retrieve the wayward knight with 12... ♗hf6=, but it's always difficult to admit a mistake.

13. ♗d4(?) 0:29:03 ...

Returning the favor. The logical 13. ♗xe5 is best and whichever way Black captures is bad: 13... ♗xe5 allows 14. ♗xh6, and 13...dxe5, which saves the pawn, is disliked by *Houdini* even worse after 14.f3 or 14. ♖c1 and Black's king bishop is a minor prisoner. *Always be on the lookout for forcing continuations (checks, captures, and threats) which can not only win material, but even simply make your opponent's forces less powerful.*

13... ♗g4= 0:30:34

13... ♗g4!+, harassing the bishop once again, is thematic since the bishop is frozen guarding the knight on d4. If you are not familiar with this maneuver, which often wins the bishop pair, take a moment to absorb the idea for future reference.

14. ♗e2 0:28:31 ♗xe2 0:30:37

15. ♖xe2 0:29:09 a6 0:28:24

This is a little slow. The bishop on e3 is not attacking the pawn. So 15... ♖c8= is a little better.

16.f4! 0:29:32 ...

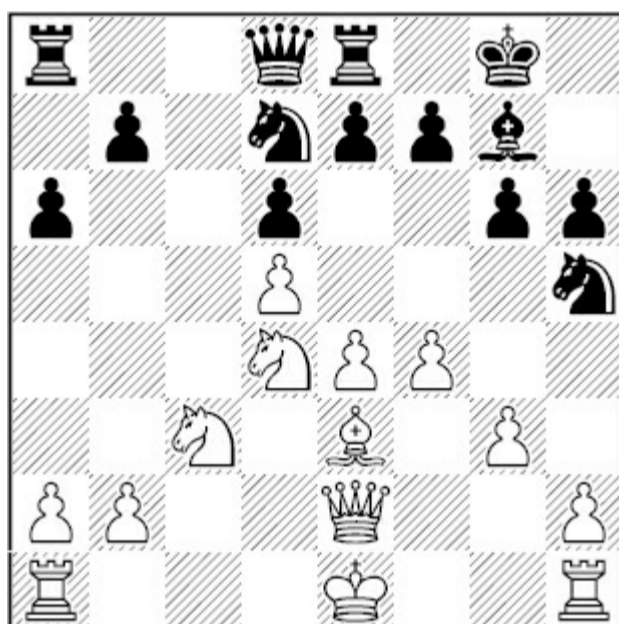
Driving the strong knight out when it has no access to c4 or g4. Notice that if Black had played 15... ♖c8 16.f4, then 16... ♗c4 is a different story.

16... ♗d7 0:28:36

Although this move took only 33 seconds, it is the only safe move on the board. If you can determine that only one move is possible and can make it quickly, that will save time for later, more critical moves. If you have doubts and think there are some tricky possibilities, that would be quite different and 33 seconds might be too fast. This time-management issue is very minor here, but similar considerations (both fast and slow) can add up quite a bit over the course of a game. The time and board situation always determine what is a reasonable amount of time to take for a move. For example, if this game were played over-the-board at 40 moves in two hours and you had to record the moves, then taking 33 seconds for a clearly forced move when you have significant time remaining could be fine.

Always be on the lookout for forcing continuations (checks, captures, and threats) which can not only win material, but even simply make your opponent's forces less powerful.

Question: What is White's best plan here?



White to play after 16... ♖d7

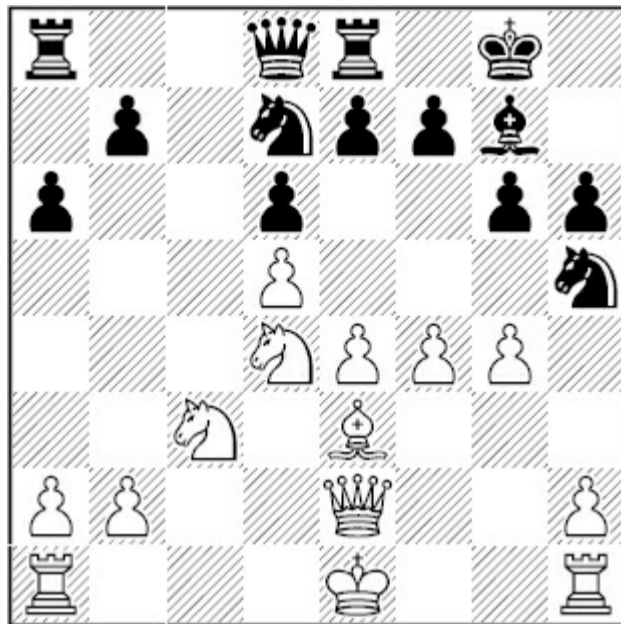
This is not an easy decision and there is no answer that stands out above the rest. But that's quite normal. Positions don't always play themselves out according to clear long-term plans, and searching for one that doesn't exist is not going to be productive. Let's consider *Houdini's* top two lines:

- 17.f5, making a hole at e5 but going after the king. 17... ♕xd4 stops White's possibility of 18.fxg6 fxg6 19. ♖e6 but at the cost of the key defending dark-squared bishop, which gives White a small advantage after 18. ♕xd4 ♖hf6; and
- 17.O-O ♖hf6 18. ♖ac1 ♖c8 19. ♖c2. White calmly finishes his development and prepares to play on both sides of the board. Again, White has a small advantage.

17.g4? 0:28:43

...

But this move is not so good. Do you see why?



Black to play after 17.g4?

17...

♖hf6 0:28:38

This time Black takes 43 seconds to play the only move that looks safe, but it's a quiescence error to stop after 17... ♖xf4! believing that 18. ♕xf4 wins the knight. Looking one move further should uncover the simple 18... ♗xd4 because the e3-bishop is overworked trying to guard the pawn on f4 and the knight on d4. If then 19. ♕xh6 to regain the pawn, Black has 19... e6! and the double threats to capture on d5 (opening up lines for the rook) and 20... ♙h4+ (picking up the bishop on h6) leave White with a lost position. Therefore after 17... ♖xf4! White should settle for 18. ♙d2 when he is down a pawn with a miserable game. After the game, Black admitted never considering 17... ♖xf4 – he probably rejected it automatically as guarded and thus not safe – a quiescence error.

Developing the ability to consistently spot mini-tactics like 17... ♖xf4! can add a couple hundred rating points, certainly more than memorizing a book on a particular opening. I don't know anyone who has memorized an entire opening book since it was rumored in the 1960's that IM Bernard Zuckerman had memorized the tenth edition of *Modern Chess Openings*, thus earning him the moniker "Zuck the Book."

18.f5± 0:29:19

...

As mentioned earlier, this creates a weak square on e5 for Black's pieces but, as Fischer said, "To get squares, you gotta give squares," so this is about as good as White can do.

18...

♗c5 0:26:23

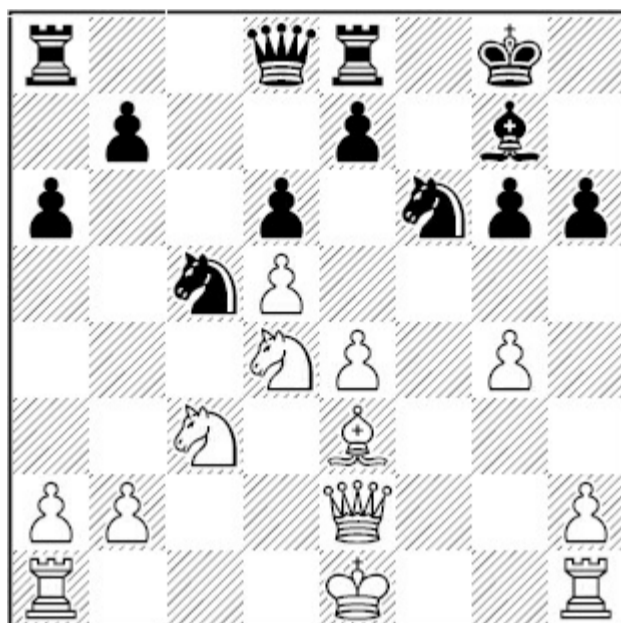
A reasonable response, attacking the pawn on e4 and fortifying e6 against a possible fxe6 fxe6 sequence. *Houdini* suggests that the committal 18... g5, attempting to lock the kingside, is also worth considering. In that case, White should take advantage of the fact that his rook is still on h1 with the

break move 19.h4, and then castle queenside, facilitating a kingside attack.

19.fxg6 0:29:36 ...

The aggressive 19.O-O-O is probably better. Both sides of the board are “airy” for White but he has attacking chances on the kingside.

19... **fxg6** 0:26:42



White to play after 19...fxg6

20.♘e6? 0:30:16 ...

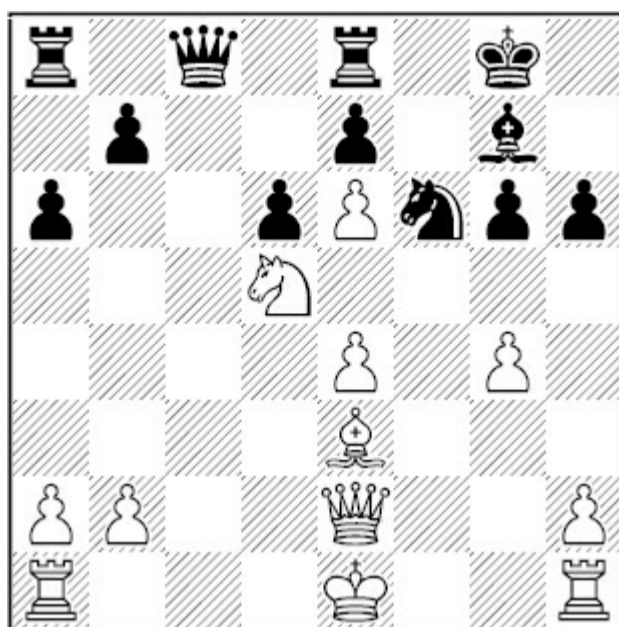
An instructive mistake played in five seconds (where have we read this before?). This move changes the entire character of the game. Though e6 is a big hole in Black’s position, he has it guarded, and plopping the knight in there now will allow Black not only to fill the hole with a white pawn, but also to mess up White’s central pawn structure and leave the e6-pawn a target.

20... **♘xe6** 0:27:16

21.dxe6 0:30:57 **♙a5** 0:26:07

Black misses the direct attack on the important e-pawn with 21...♙c8. Then a thematic try for White would be 22.♘d5 to indirectly attempt to guard against 22...♙xe6 by threatening the fork 23.♘c7.

Question: After 21...♙c8 22.♘d5, what would you play for Black?



Black to play after 22. ♖d5 (analysis)

I am happy to say I guessed the right idea here immediately, which is to play 22... ♗xe6! anyway, allowing the fork on c7. After 22. ♖c7 ♗xe4, White already has two pawns for the exchange and is attacking the rook on h1 with more to come. Choosing 22... ♖xd5? to trade off the strong white knight is the wrong plan; it would only result in equality after White is allowed to repair his pawns with 23.exd5.

22. ♗d2 0:17:04 ...

Passive but understandable. *Houdini* prefers the direct guard on e4 with the mysterious 22. ♗g2

22... ♗e5! 0:24:50

Some inexperienced players have the misconception that queens don't belong in the middle of the board. What you don't want is for any of your pieces to be harassed by opponent's pieces of lesser value, such that your pieces are forced to abandon good squares. Here the queen assumes a dominant central post and not only is it fairly unassailable, but the key e6-pawn is under pressure. Getting the "worst piece" rook on a8 into play with 22... ♖ac8 was also very good. There's not always one clear best move and, in good positions, your pieces' flexibility often provides you more than one way to skin a cat.

In amateur games, having a good position is not nearly as helpful an indicator that things will turn out well in the end as it would be in grandmaster games. Black is better in the current position, but how he does or does not use his advantages – and what he could have done with them – is instructive.

23.h4 0:15:42 ...

A mysterious move, but ultimately one of *Houdini*'s top tries. Possibly White felt under pressure, and so lashed out at Black's king. However, this doesn't follow Steinitz's principle: *Attack where*

you have the advantage. White doesn't have much of an advantage anywhere on the board, so possibly attacking isn't the best idea – but some players only know the idea of “attack somewhere!” This desperation may be spurred by White's realization that his king does not have a future haven.

23... ♔g3+ 0:24:07

Possibly Black was afraid White might castle kingside, so this check is attractive. At 22 ply, *Houdini* suggests 23...b5 or 23... ♖ac8. The latter is more my style: get those dormant rooks into the game and Black's position, already attractive, starts to look dominant.

24. ♔d1 0:11:32 ...

Best. It looks undesirable to keep the king in the center with queens on the board, but getting the queens off first with 24. ♔f2 ♔xf2+ 25. ♔xf2 ♖xg4+ was a very unattractive endgame. If you stand worse, it's usually better to stay in the middlegame – there is more play left than in the endgame and so more time and chances to recover.

24... ♔xg4 0:24:18

Again, 24... ♖ac8 was a strong alternative. However, after 24... ♔xg4 Black is forcing the queen trade when ahead, so this is probably the easiest idea.

25. ♔xg4 0:06:29 ...

White took almost half his time for this move. Even with a 45-second increment this is far too slow; trading queens one way or another was forced, so the decision is rather limited and the criticality not that high. Letting Black do the trading after 25. ♖d5 was relatively best. *Sometimes time mismanagement will have a greater effect on the game than a series of less-than-optimal moves. When time begins to run short, it is often much more effective to play a suboptimal move fairly quickly than to burn time looking for a slightly better one. The key lies in developing the criticality assessment skill to discern when greatly better moves are not likely available.* That's yet another reason why recognizing basic tactics quickly and accurately is so important.

25... ♖xg4 0:23:59

Black is wasting time. He took 64 seconds to make an absolutely forced recapture; 10 seconds was more than enough. *Once you have determined the best move, and are absolutely sure, just play it. Taking additional time to see what might happen next move is just a waste of time.* You will be able to use that time next move to figure out what to do, and you will also have the information of what your opponent's move will be.

26. ♔e2 0:05:58 ...

Once you have determined the best move, and are absolutely sure, just play it. Taking additional

time to see what might happen next move is just a waste of time.

26. ♖g1 skewers the knight and g-pawn but Black has 26...h5 or 26...♗e5. Still, *Houdini* slightly prefers 26. ♖g1 as the best way of preventing 26...♗f2+.

26... ♗xc3?! 0:21:17

After the game Black told me that he wanted to stop the knight from becoming dominant on d5, and wished to trade when ahead. Both are good ideas, but the trading principle implies making *fair* trades when ahead. Black is not that far ahead, so slightly negative trades can have a large effect on winning chances. Before 26...♗xc3, the bishop on g7 is very good, so it's not surprising that the computer recommends 26...♖c8 as somewhat better.

27. ♗xc3 0:06:28 h5 0:20:45

It's getting a little silly that Black is not activating his rooks, considering that *the main idea of the opening is to efficiently, effectively, and safely activate all your forces*. Yet Black has made 27 moves and his only rook move was back on move 7 to support an eventual ...e7-e5, which is no longer much of an issue. Therefore, once again, activating a rook with 27...♖f8! was correct.

28. ♖af1 0:05:25 ...

White is of necessity playing more quickly. However, why he chose to place this rook on f1 is a mystery since the h-rook is hardly being used to guard h4 or to do much of anything else. Therefore, better is 28. ♖hf1 or 28. ♖ac1.

28... ♖f8 0:21:02

When ahead, place your pieces on strong squares which offer advantageous trades, putting your opponent in the no-win situation, "trade or retreat!"

Necessary to prevent all kinds of tactical disasters if White had been able to play ♖f7, threatening ♖g7+.

29.a3 0:03:48 ...

Interestingly, *Houdini* rates 29.a3 as White's third-best move. It certainly would not be one of the first candidate moves I would consider, but White did take quite of bit of his precious dwindling time. It rates 29. ♗d4 as best.

29... ♖xf1 0:21:17

30. ♖xf1 0:04:27 ♖f8 0:21:36

Black finally activates his rooks, and promptly offers to liquidate them. This is one key to technique: When ahead, *place your pieces on strong squares which offer advantageous trades, putting your opponent in the no-win situation, “trade or retreat!”* With his extra pawn, Black should have good chances to win the endgame.

31. ♖xf8+ 0:03:23 ...

White has nothing better – he’s between a rock (trade to a bad endgame) and a hard place (abandon to Black control of the open file with ... ♖f4 looming). Or is that a rock and a hard place...?

31... ♔xf8 0:22:18

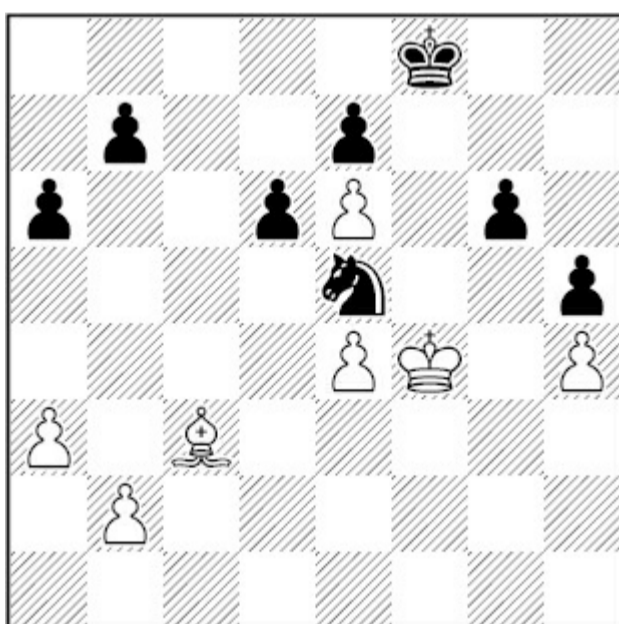
We have reached a deeper endgame, where Black has a knight and an extra pawn vs. White’s bishop. It’s an interesting endgame – enjoy the ride...

32. ♔f3 0:03:56 ♘e5+! 0:20:37

By blocking the diagonal, Black allows himself access to g7 and f6, when the e6-pawn is vulnerable. The knight is strong and White dare not trade yet. Both sides have to be careful to follow the principle, *Don’t trade into a king-and-pawn endgame unless you are pretty sure of getting what you want out of the position.*

33. ♔f4 0:03:57 ...

33. ♗xe5? is hopeless as Black can activate his kingside majority with a later ...g7-g5, plus the e6-pawn is vulnerable.



Black to play after 33. ♔f4

It’s not what you trade that matters, but what’s left on the board after you trade.

33...

♔g7!! 0:16:06

Black took five minutes to play this blockbuster move, sacrificing his precious extra pawn. In this situation, Black can use the extremely strong principle, *It's not what you trade that matters, but what's left on the board after you trade.* And what's left is calculable as a win...

However, a chat with him afterwards revealed that he didn't carefully calculate to see if this worked, but rather did it on a "general analysis," figuring his kingside majority should outweigh White's better king and doubled, isolated e-pawns. His judgment was good but, as we will see, his ability to understand exactly why and to execute are not so good. In the interests of truth in advertising, *Houdini* states the similar sacrifice 33... ♔g8! is just as effective.

34. ♕xe5+!? 0:02:06

...

This is a really interesting decision for White. If he sits there and does nothing, then ... ♔f6 and ... ♔xe6 will put Black ahead by two pawns. But if White calculates deeply and sees that taking the pawn via 34. ♕xe5 doesn't work, then he should not trade down into a lost king-and-pawn ending unless he wishes to gamble that his opponent won't find the win.

White does not have a lot of time, so he makes a good practical judgment – take the pawn and see if Black can figure something out. If short on time, I probably would have done the same thing, although I can't say I would have been very happy about it, since a strong opponent should be able to find a win here if a win is to be found – and that would be likely.

34...

dx5+ 0:16:48

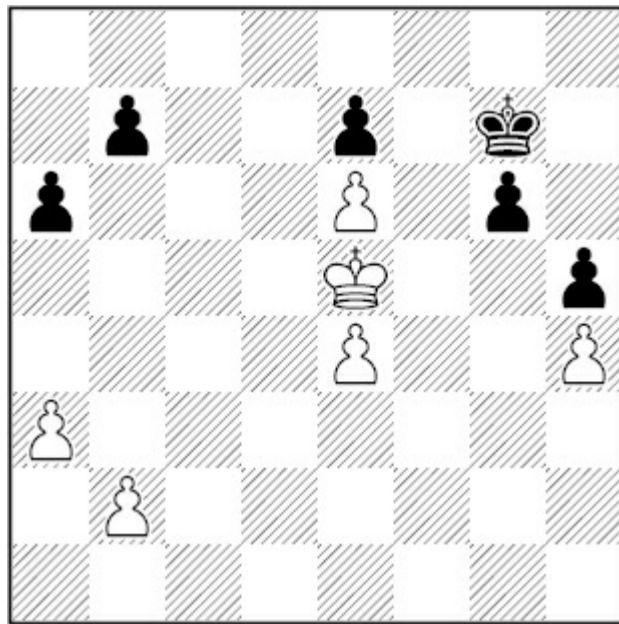
35. ♔xe5 0:02:12

...

White could have played that move more quickly. If he recaptured in 5 seconds, then 40 seconds would be added to his clock instead of taking 39 and only getting 6 additional seconds. Little things like this can sometimes affect the outcome.

After 35. ♔xe5, this is a very critical position for Black, but he has time.

Question: What would you play for Black, and what result would you expect?



Black to play after 35. ♔xe5

35...

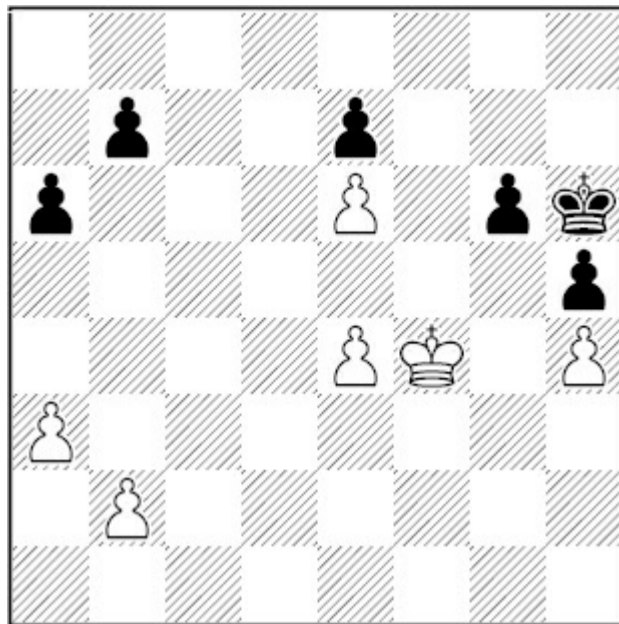
g5? 0:12:43

One of the keys to this position is that *the pawns on the queenside are perfectly symmetrical*. That means neither side can gain a tempo if the other side just matches the moves. For example, if at some point Black plays ...a7-a5, then White can play a2-a4 and if Black then plays ...b7-b6, White can play b2-b3 and it's still going to be Black's move. So the queenside pawns cannot be used to gain or lose a tempo unless someone makes a mistake.

However, it is also important to understand that just because you can't use the queenside pawns to win or lose a tempo, that does not mean that it might not be critical to use those pawns for other means, such as to fix (or not fix) the pawns for later targets of king forays. The fact that you can't gain a tempo and that the pawn location might be important both come into play in some lines.

We will deal with what happens after 35...g5 in the game continuation. However, it turns out that this is not even a good move, much less the best one. It's very instructive to see what Black should have done instead, since the general ideas can often occur in other king-and-pawn endgames.

Let's start with another idea for getting the pawns rolling, the immediate 35... ♔h6 to support ...g6-g5. White cannot afford to bring his king to the queenside to race in any of the lines where Black keeps his 2-1 kingside majority, e.g. 36. ♔d5? g5 and Black wins. Therefore, White has to try 36. ♔f4, which makes sense. At this point Black can use a little pawn-break trick that's good to remember:



Black to play after 36. ♔f4 (analysis)

36...g5! 37.hxg5+ ♔g6. Black temporarily sacrifices a pawn to put White into *Zugzwang*. Black wants White to use up all his pawn moves. Failing to wait costs White, e.g. 38. ♔g3 ♔xg5 just wins after 39. ♔h3 ♔f4 40. ♔h4 ♔xe4 41. ♔xh5 ♔f5 and 42... ♔xe6. But if White goes first he can't gain a tempo with his queenside pawns: 38.a4 a5 39.b3 b6 40.e5. White has finally forced Black to abandon his h-pawn, but at the cost of placing his pawn on e5. That makes all the difference between 35... ♔h6 and 35...g5 because now after 40.e5 h4 41. ♔g4 h3 42. ♔xh3 ♔xg5 43. ♔g3 ♔f4 Black wins both e-pawns and then the game.

Just playing “obvious” moves quickly can be disastrous, even in reduced-material positions.

However, Black can gain an extra tempo and win even more easily by improving with the clever 35... ♔h7. That puts White in *Zugzwang*, since 36. ♔f4 ♔h6 reaches the same position above after 35... ♔h6, except it is now *White's* move, and Black does not have to sacrifice his h-pawn. Therefore, Black wins whether or not White captures on ...g5, e.g. 37.a4 a5 38.b3 b6 39. ♔g3 (39.e5 g5+ and now both 40. ♔g3 gxh4+ 41. ♔xh4 ♔g6 and 40.hxg5+ ♔g6 41. ♔e4 ♔xg5 are hopeless) 39...g5 and White still loses whether he takes or lets Black capture on h4.

Carefully analyzing moves like 35... ♔h7 should convince anyone that *just playing “obvious” moves quickly can be disastrous, even in reduced-material positions*. Even “simple” endings contain many dangerous moves that can easily turn a win into a draw – or loss! If you have time, use it to analyze carefully, and keep in mind that *it only takes one bad move to cost the game*.

From the above analysis, we can conclude that both 35... ♔h6 or (even easier) 35... ♔h7 win. Black took five of his remaining 16 minutes to play the game continuation 35...g5?, but maybe he should have taken a couple more...

36.hxg5 0:02:09

...

Black threatens both 36...gxh4 and 36...g4, so this is forced.

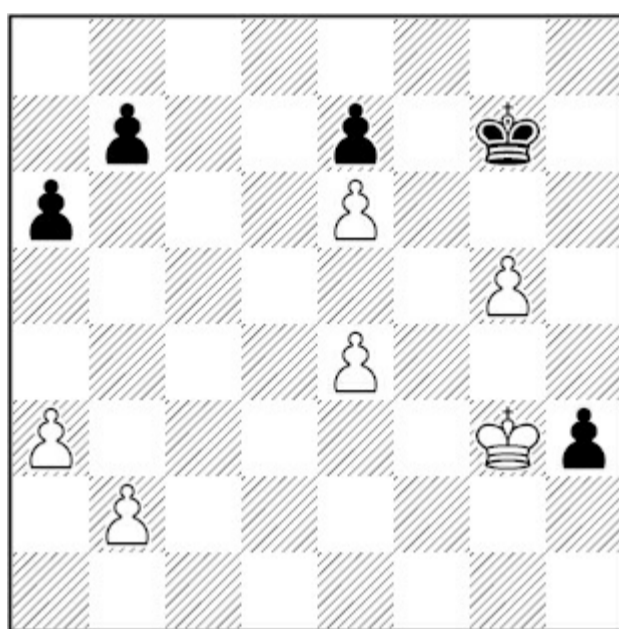
36... **h4** 0:12:41

As it turns out, 36...♔g6 first would transpose.

37.♔f4 0:02:50 **h3** 0:13:14

Again, 37...♔g6 would transpose into the game.

38.♔g3 0:03:32 ...



Black to play after 38.♔g3

38... **♔g6** 0:12:37

I have seen many inexperienced players play a move similar to 38...h2 here quickly, thinking that “it gets the opposing king further away.” Yet, in most positions this at best does nothing (as in this case) and at worst can cost a tempo. *Once you have deflected a king with a passed pawn, pushing it further is usually a waste of time* as the king has to get it anyway. Instead, it’s often more constructive to use that tempo somewhere else.

39.♔xh3 0:04:13 **♔xg5** 0:13:21

40.♔g3 0:04:55 **♔f6** 0:13:39

This position shows us the difference between 35...♔h6 and 35...g5?. In the former Black could have forced White to play e4-e5 first and now ...♔f5 winning the e-pawn would have been possible. However, in the present position the white pawn is still on e4, so f5 is inaccessible. Therefore, only the more advanced e-pawn falls, leaving the material equal. But that’s not the end of either side’s winning chances.

There was also an important external factor affecting both players' decisions: this was a playoff game in the online Team 45 45 League. Black needed to at least draw the game for his team to advance to the next round. For him, a win was no better than a draw, but White needed to win. Up to this point, that wasn't a big factor (and for instructional purposes I wanted the reader to see how Black could force a win), but it soon becomes one!

41. ♔f4 0:05:22

♔xe6 0:14:20

42.e5 0:05:42

...

This is not necessary, but I guess one could argue that it gives both sides more chances to go wrong.

42...

♔d5 0:13:13

Ditto. Black is fine, but we are nearing a decision point. Black now threatens to *Zugzwang* White's king with 43...e6.

43. ♔f5 0:05:13

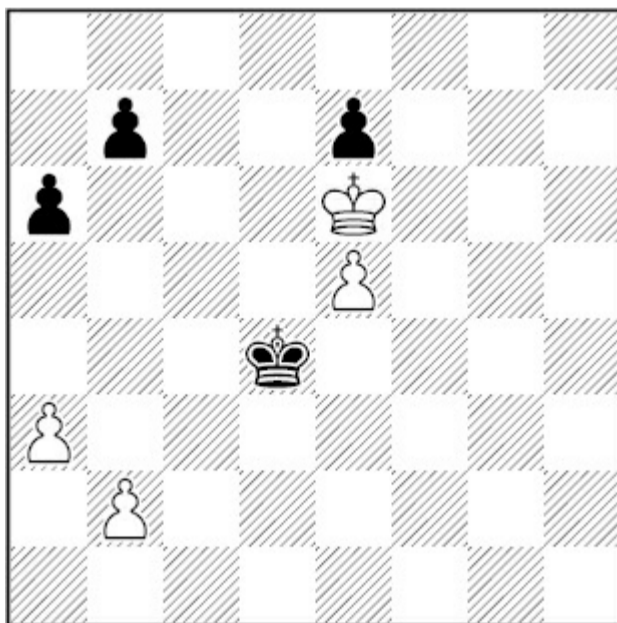
...

Forced, else 43...e6 will win. This decision wasn't difficult. White wisely took a little time but, in general, he has been handling his clock well in the endgame and has a little margin for error. At this point Black has plenty of time and quite a few moves that draw.

43...

e6+?? 0:13:22

This allows the famous *trébuchet* position (see the diagram following White's 44th move). The *trébuchet* is a mutual *Zugzwang* where either side to play loses. The fact that neither side can gain or lose a tempo among the queenside pawns is paramount now. Instead Black could have drawn with 43...b6, 43...a5, or 43...♔d4, although the latter makes a cute problem after 43...♔d4 44. ♔e6:

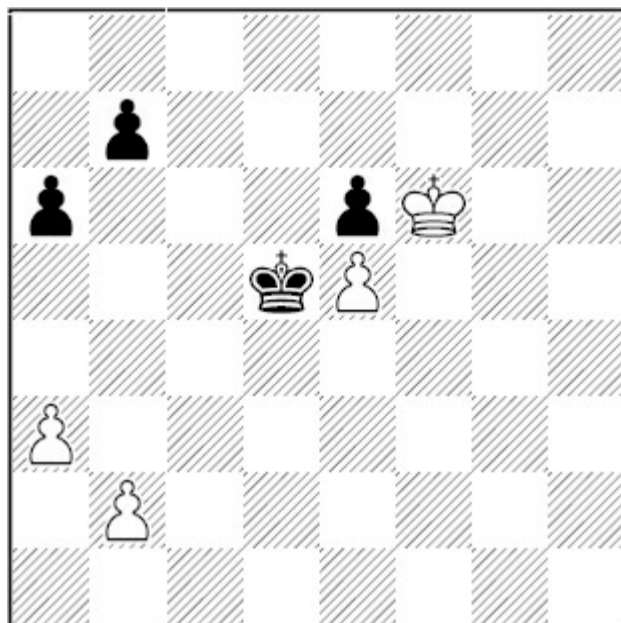


Black to play after 44. ♔e6 and draw (analysis)

The solution is 44...b6!! (the only move that draws) and if 45.♔xe7 ♔xe5 46.♔d7 ♔d5 47.♔c7 ♔c5 48.♔b7 ♔b5 (or 48...a5) 49.b3 a5□ 50.a4+ ♔c5, draw.

44.♔f6 0:05:51

...



Black to play after 44.♔f6 (*trebuchet*)

In this *trébuchet* position both kings are in mutual *Zugzwang* – the one which moves first will lose.

44...

a5 0:09:01

As we have seen in the earlier analysis, since White does not wish to gain or lose a tempo, he should just “mirror” Black’s moves, with 45.a4 b6 46.b3. Then Black is in *Zugzwang* and loses, and White’s team goes to the second round of the playoffs!

45.b4?? 0:03:31

...

Ouch! We can’t fault White for not realizing this was critical. After playing relatively quickly on previous moves, he correctly realized this one might make a difference and took almost 3 minutes. Maybe he should have taken 4 or 5 to calculate a few more times!

Not believing his good fortune, Black breathes a big sigh of relief and sees that his first candidate move wins. He then recalculates it a few extra times for extra caution. Good idea!

Rather than playing quickly to show how smart you are, take extra time on critical moves to make sure your analysis is correct, thus showing how wise you are!

Many Internet players think the faster you make a “winning move” the smarter you are, since

that shows you must have calculated it more quickly. Nothing could be further from the truth. Rather than playing quickly to show how smart you are, take extra time on critical moves to make sure your analysis is correct, thus showing how wise you are!

45...

a4 0:07:49

45...axb4 46.axb4 b5 also leaves it as White's move, winning for Black.

46.b5 0:02:35

b6 0:08:16

47. ♔e7 0:02:58

♔xe5 0:08:53

48. ♔d7 0:03:41

♔d5 0:09:27

49. ♔c7 0:03:56

♔c5(!) 0:09:53

Why even consider racing with 49... e5?? (it turns out that this only draws!) 50. ♔xb6 when, with 49... ♔c5(!), you can show you are the only side off to the races? This seals the deal...

0-1

A very instructive endgame at more than one stage!

GAME 13: WHITE 1500 – BLACK 1500

Internet Chess Club 2010

Slow time control

Pirc Defense

This game is based on one of my more highly rated videos, which primarily deals with the endgame of this contest. While I don't have the time control, the time stamping, or the exact ratings, it's an instructive game I thought should be included.

1.e4

d6

2.d4

b6

A very unusual move. More common is 2... ♗f6, but 2...g6, 2...e5, ...c5, and even 2...c6 are seen. If you don't know what to do, follow good opening principles. Here Black already has made one move with his d-pawn to open a diagonal for his light-squared bishop. He would not usually wish to open another one so soon thereafter: it's not very efficient and it unnecessarily weakens the light squares on his queenside. Still, as computers have shown in many similar positions, it would take a lot more than that for Black's game to become untenable.

3. ♗f3

...

White has many ways to play this. His choice is fine, and he could also play moves like 3. ♗c3, 3.f4, or 3.c4. *When your opponent gives you space in the opening by letting you advance multiple*

central pawns safely, you usually should take it. Therefore, at some point White should consider moving his c- or f-pawn one or two spaces.

3...  f6
4.  c3 ...




4.  d3 is equally good, but White prefers “knights before bishops.”

4... h6

Another slow move. If I didn't know better I would think Black is trying to play the Modern Hippopotamus except that he would not place the knight on f6; it would belong on e7 after ...e7-e6. That makes me doubt Black's play almost completely.

5.  d3 ...






When your opponent gives you space in the opening by letting you advance multiple central pawns safely, you usually should take it.

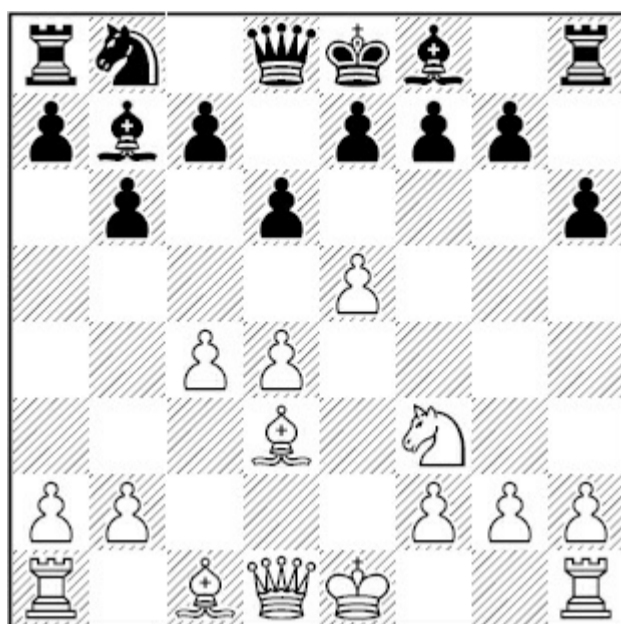
Already *Houdini* is thinking that White is close to winning if he plays 5.e5! dxe5 6.  xe5 a6 (to stop a later  b5+ exploiting the weakened light squares) 7.  c4 e6 8.O-O± and Black's game is a mess. This is a helpful line to review and understand, because inexperienced players often give their opponents opportunities like this early in the game. One instructive use of modern 3200+ computers is seeing how they exploit “quirky” play by opponents.

5...  b7?

This looks natural but my silicon buddy says it is not playable. Instead Black should make the best of a bad thing with the passive 5...e6 and chances of survival.

6.O-O ...

Solid and second best, but missing the opportunity. Instead *Houdini* rolls out the aggressive and fully justified 6.e5!  d5 (6...dxe5 7.dxe5  d5 8.e6!+-) 7.  xd5  xd5 8.c4  b7:



White to play after 8... ♙b7 (analysis)

Now 9.e6! is a common tactical opening pattern. Inexperienced players allow similar opportunities quite often and, when they do, alert opponents can obtain winning positions fairly quickly. After 9.e6! things are bad for Black, e.g. 9...fxe6 10.♙g6+ ♔d7 11.O-O with a winning attack – White will continue with a move like 12.♖e1 pressuring the e-file. Don't be afraid of being a pawn behind in these situations – it is more than compensated by Black's inability to develop his pieces and his weakened king.

6...

♘bd7

Always play with confidence, aggression, and respect for your opponent's moves and ideas.

Again, this passive move looks superficially reasonable, but watch what the computer would do to punish it (next note).

7.♖e1(?)

...

I call this error *overpreparation*. White can safely play 7.e5! at once, so using a tempo to place a rook behind it is unnecessarily slow, e.g. 7.e5 dxe5 8.dxe5 ♙xf3 (8... ♘d5 9.e6! and the rook is again on) 9.♙xf3 ♘xe5 10.♙b5+! (the point) 10... ♘fd7 11.♙xd7+ ♘xd7 12.♙b5! (threatening the pseudo-sacrifice 13.♙xa8+ ♙xa8 14.♙xc7+) 12...c6 (if 12... ♖c8 then the simple 13.♙xa7+–) 13.♙xc6 ♖c8 14.♙e4, and White is on the verge of winning with his dominant position. Instructive! *This is a good example of playing aggressively, which you should always do when presented with the opportunity. Always play with confidence, aggression, and respect for your opponent's moves and ideas.*

7...

e5!±

Good idea, stopping all those White e4-e5 possibilities.

8.dxe5

...

To take or not to take – that is the question. *When White has the pawn structure d4/e4 vs. e5/d6 it is generally positionally undesirable to capture dxe5, because after ...dxe5 the removal of the d-pawns favors Black as he gains in space.* However, there are positions where White is far ahead in development and, in those situations, *opening up the position takes clear precedence over any lost positional niceties.*

Here 8.dxe5 is more the former case, so capturing is probably not correct, and *Houdini* suggests the masterly idea 8.a4±. This is the type of space-grabbing move strong players routinely make on the wing, but inexperienced players rarely consider.

8...

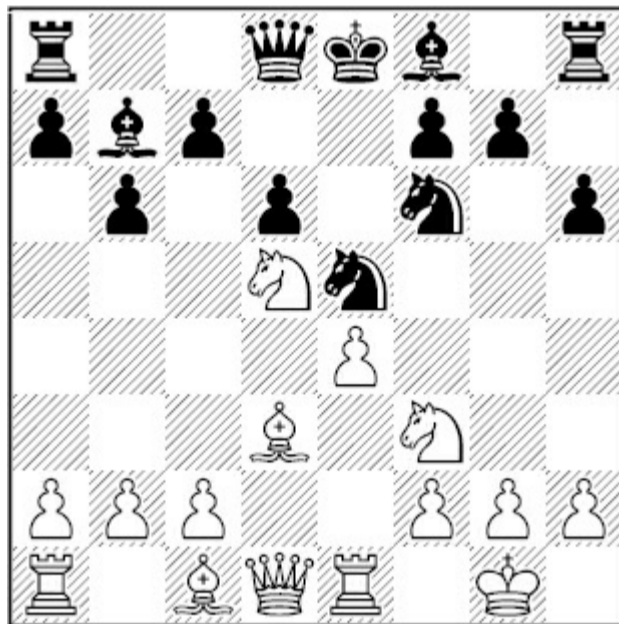
♞xe5

Many amateurs make a similar capture with the knight quickly, but it is usually not best. This is no exception and the space-equalizing 8...dxe5 is slightly better.

9.♞d5

...

Moving a piece this early twice when there is no tactic is often inferior. Therefore, unless you are a really strong player with keen judgment in the opening, there is likely a better move to be found. Here 9.♞d5 is not bad, but it is not best, either! The computer suggests 9.♞f4 or 9.h3. *Don't play the opening like it's the middlegame.*



Black to play after 9.♞d5

9...

♞xd5?

Normally this capture would make sense because White's knight can be very strong on d5, but

here the opening of the e-file, which includes a white rook and a black king that is not immediately able to castle, does not bode well for Black. Instead *Houdini* suggests the solid 9...♔e7, activating his final minor piece and getting ready to castle.

10.exd5+- ♔f6

Black should acquiesce and give up the pawn with 10...♔e7 11.♖xe5 dxe5 12.♗xe5. However, he does not wish to give in so easily; therefore, he plays his second-best move, and that is understandable.

11.♔b5+! ...

Taking advantage of the weak light squares and the pin on the e-file. Black has no choice but to lose his right to castle.

11... ♔d8
12.♖xe5 ...

A reasonable decision to try to open up the center. However, further aggression on the light squares is indicated and the computer finds 12.♖d4!, e.g. 12...a6 13.♖c6+ ♔xc6 14.♔xc6 ♖a7 15.a4+- and White is in total command.

12... dxe5
13.♔c6?± ...

This looks tempting, but White is allowing the position to be simplified in the defender's favor. 13.♖g4!, threatening mate on d7, keeps the initiative, e.g. 13...♔c8 14.♖e4 ♔d6 15.♔c6 ♖b8 16.♔d2 with great pressure. Sometimes simple threats, even though they can be easily met, still help the player doing the threatening. *The key question to ask is, "Does the tempo that I spend on making the threat, help me more than my opponent is helped by the tempo that he spends on meeting my threat?"* If the answer is yes, then the candidate move becomes much more attractive!

“Does the tempo that I spend on making the threat, help me more than my opponent is helped by the tempo that he spends on meeting my threat?”

13... ♔xc6!

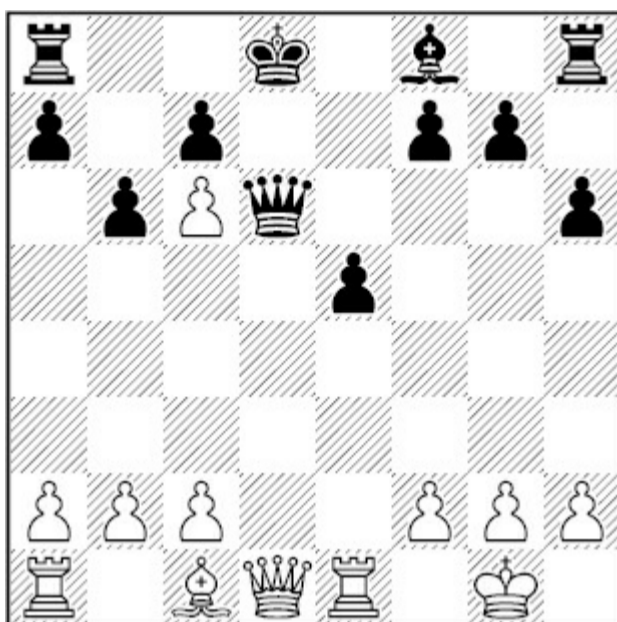
The best idea. White gets a discovered check, but Black gets relief from the pressure.

14.dxc6+ 0:51:51 ♔d6?

With his king stuck in the middle, Black understandably would love to trade queens. However,

just because Black wants to trade queens and makes the offer doesn't make it a good move, since White is under no obligation to capture – chess is not checkers! Therefore, much better is 14... ♖d6, when Black will have some time to catch up in development since White has no immediate way to step up the pressure.

Question: White does not wish to trade queens. What's the best way to avoid the trade?



White to play after 14... ♖d6?

15. ♖e2(?)

...

Attacking the e-pawn is attractive, but *Houdini* clearly prefers 15. ♖g4!, making the bishop defend g7 for at least a move further, e.g. 15... ♖xc6 16. ♖xe5 ♖d6 17. ♖e1 ♖e8 18. ♖xe8+ ♖xe8 19. ♖d2±. Normally d2 is a passive square for the bishop, but here it threatens 20. ♖e1 and so White keeps a strong initiative.

If you picked 15. ♖f3 to guard the pawn on c6, that's also good but it gives Black the computer-like defense 15... ♖e6! when White's advantage is not quite as large as after 15. ♖g4!. But your choice was a good one – better than the move White chose.

15...

♖xc6±

Black is happy to remove this annoying pawn.

16. ♖xe5

...

White's best chance of maintaining the advantage is 16. ♖d1+ ♖d6 17. ♖xe5 f6 18. ♖f5±.

16...

♖c8!=

Best, since Black still needs to keep an eye on the g7-pawn. If 16...f6?, then 17. ♖f5! ♖d6 (17... ♖d7 18. ♖e4 Δ 19. ♖f4+-) 18. ♖f4 ♖xf4 19. ♖xf4 ♖c8 20. ♖f5+ ♖b8 21. ♖e6±.

17. ♔ f4

♔ b7

Again, 17... ♔ d6? is premature since 18. ♖ xg7 attacks the rook.

18. ♖ ad1

...

Thanks to some small but meaningful inaccuracies on moves 12-16, White's advantage has shrunk to zero. His army is all dressed up with no place to go.

18...

♔ d6

With the white queen tied down to the defense of his bishop, Black is no longer afraid of 19. ♖ xg7, and so can catch up in development with tempo.

19. ♖ e4

...

This queen trade offer is an admission that White feels he no longer has an advantage. Compare with his correct decision not to trade queens in the more promising position of move 15.

19...

♖ he8

Black has several reasonable ways to complete his development and this is one of them.

20. ♖ xc6+

♔ xc6

With the reduced material, the king is strong in the middle and not in jeopardy.

21. ♔ xd6

...

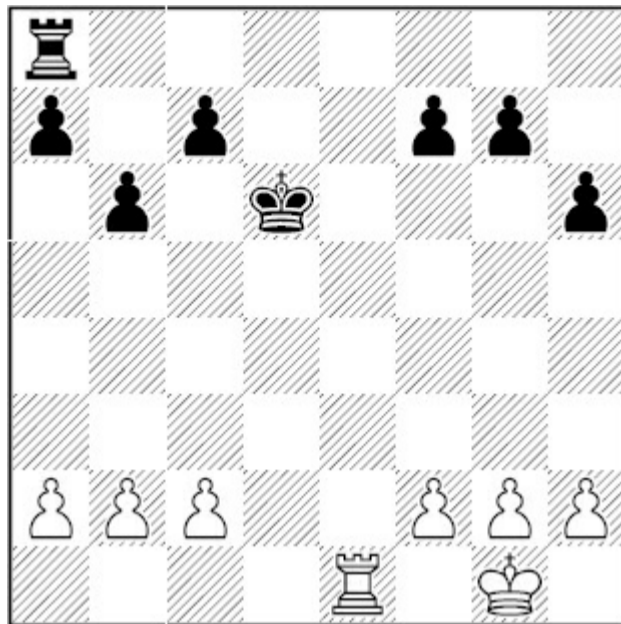
Trying to get an isolated pawn for his troubles, but Black's reply ensures that White won't achieve even that.

21...

♖ xe1+

22. ♖ xe1

♔ xd6



White to play after 22... ♔xd6

Despite Black's centralized king and White's temporary control of the open e-file, neither side has an advantage.

23. ♔f1= ...

White correctly activates his king, whose average fighting value in the endgame is 4+ pawns. He could first play 23.f4 to give his king access to the more central f2 square, but I don't think that it would affect the ingrained equality, and the computer agrees.

23... **c5**

Moving up pawns to create space and promotion opportunities is often a double-edged sword. Pawn advances also create weak squares and thus opportunities for the opposing side to have access to attacking squares, increasing the vulnerability of such pawns. On the other hand, as the pawns advance the opposing pawns which don't advance have less space to maneuver, which in addition may make them vulnerable. Moreover, the advancing pawns make promotion possibilities more likely in the future.

Here the advance 23...c5 does not upset the applecart either way – yet.

24. ♖e3 ...

White looks for ways to infiltrate along the third rank, but at this point there's nothing there.

24... **a6**

25. ♖d3+ ...

White may have been hoping for the “centralizing” 25... ♔e5 but, even then, after 26. ♖d7 the retreat 26... ♔e6 27. ♖b7 b5 would only give White a minor advantage. In order for White to make

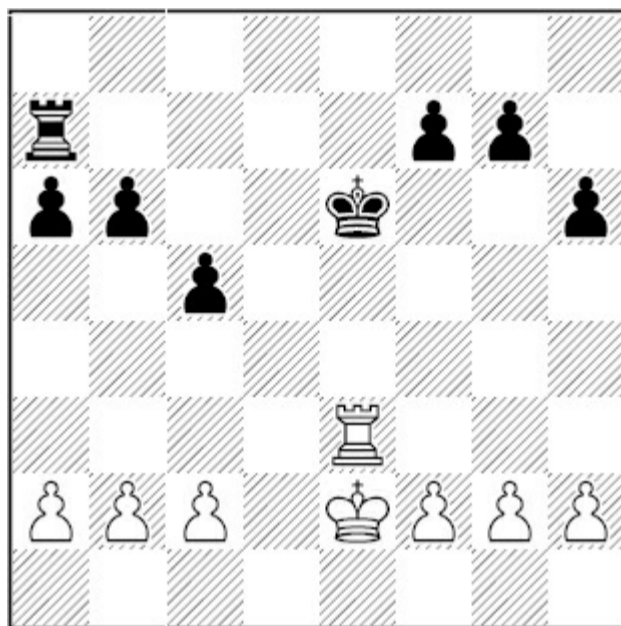
progress, he has to make threats that would tie down Black's army in defense.

25... ♔e6

Black sees no need to let the rook penetrate.

26. ♔e2 ♖a7

27. ♖e3+ ...



Black to play after 27. ♖e3+

The penetrating 27. ♖d8 ♖d7 28. ♖a8 would yield little after 28...a5. *After bishops-of-opposite-color endgames, single-rook endgames are the easiest for the inferior side to draw.*

There are three main ways one side can be better in an even-strength rook-and-pawn endgame:

- Better king placement;
- Better (usually more aggressive) rook placement; and
- Better pawn structure.

The general principle is: *If you are better in one factor and equal in the other two, you have the initiative and can squeeze the opponent, but it should be a draw with proper defense. But a lead in two (or three!) of these factors should be a win with correct play.*

Here neither side is inferior in any of the three factors, so that means the position is very drawish. At this point two strong players could agree to a draw, but in amateur games you might play on and learn something – anything might happen....

27... ♔d6

28. ♖d3+

♔c6

29. ♖d8

...

Black finally allows White to penetrate, but I think he probably realizes no great damage can be done. There are not enough vulnerable spots to attack.

29...

h5

Rook-and-pawn endgames, which are difficult to lose, king-and-pawn endgames are by far the easiest to lose (and win).

In this type of position, even the computer's second-, third-, and fourth-best moves hardly change the evaluation of the position from dead even. When that occurs, it is the epitome of a non-critical situation since it is difficult to go wrong. This is not the instructive part of this endgame...

30.h3

g6

31. ♖d3

♖d7

Finally offering the trade of rooks. *Unlike rook-and-pawn endgames, which are difficult to lose, king-and-pawn endgames are by far the easiest to lose (and win).* So if White wants a draw and is uncertain of his chances in the king-and-pawn endgame, he should simply decline the rook trade with a move like 32. ♖e3 and continue in the balanced rook-and-pawn endgame as before.

32. ♖xd7

...

White accepts the challenge. Although his pawns are not as advanced as Black's – having more advanced pawns is usually, but not always, a big advantage – White has a well-placed king and should still be able to draw.

32...

♔xd7

33. ♔d3

...

White wisely advances his king. It won't be able to go far, but it will be needed to block Black's king advance.

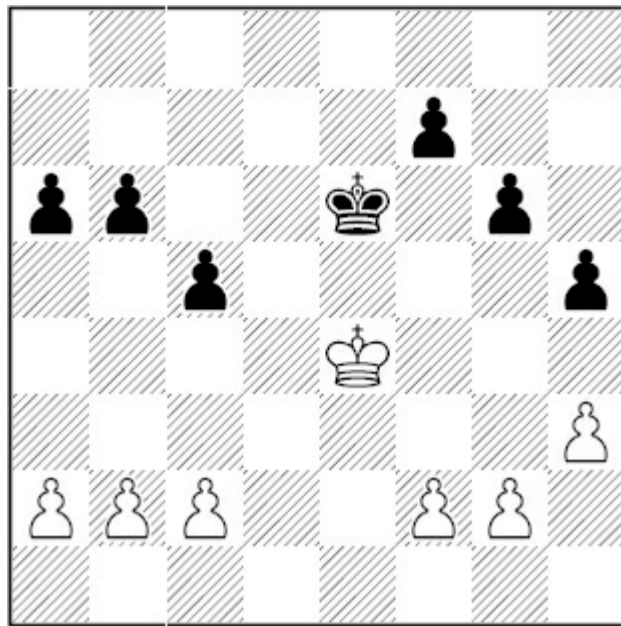
33...

♔e6

34.f4(?)

...

Although this move is not in itself enough to cause defeat, it does make White's task somewhat more difficult. Let's see what would have happened if White had advanced his king to the fourth rank with 34. ♔e4:

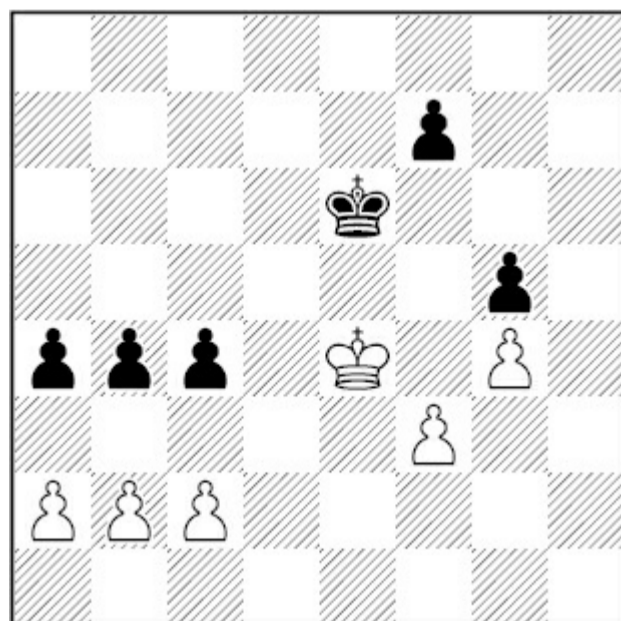


Black to play after 34. ♔e4 (analysis)

Although it looks as though Black can just drive him off this square with 34...f5+, that does not accomplish much after 35. ♔f4 ♔f6 36.h4!, stopping ...g6-g5+. In the resulting position, Black can still draw, but White has no worries with his king more aggressively placed on the fourth rank vs. Black's king on the sixth.

Therefore 34...f5+ makes less sense than first advancing the g-pawn to g5 to prevent ♔f4. But now White can keep the status quo (slightly favorable to him) by preventing ...f5+ with 35.g4. At that point, the game could continue 35...hxg4 (Black is slightly worse and would like to make fair trades of pawns, diminishing White's winning chances) 36.hxg4 b5, and the game should be drawn after 37.c3.

Sometimes, in these positions I see amateurs in Black's situation advancing all their queenside pawns in hopes of the famous three-pawn vs. three-pawn trap where they are praying White moves no queenside pawns and allows a position like this:



Black to play (analysis)

Black hopes to play 1...b3 hoping for the well-known breakthrough pattern 2.axb3 c3! 3.bxc3 a3! and Black wins!

However, there are two giant problems with this simplistic approach:

- Even if White is not familiar with this pattern, he will likely stop it inadvertently just by moving some of his queenside pawns earlier; but
- The bigger problem is that the trap doesn't work with White's king so close! The move 2.axb3?? is not only not forced, it's terrible. Instead White is fine with 2.cxb3, when if Black insists with 2...a3?? he loses to 3.bxa3 c3 4.♔d3 and the white king easily corrals the c3-pawn.

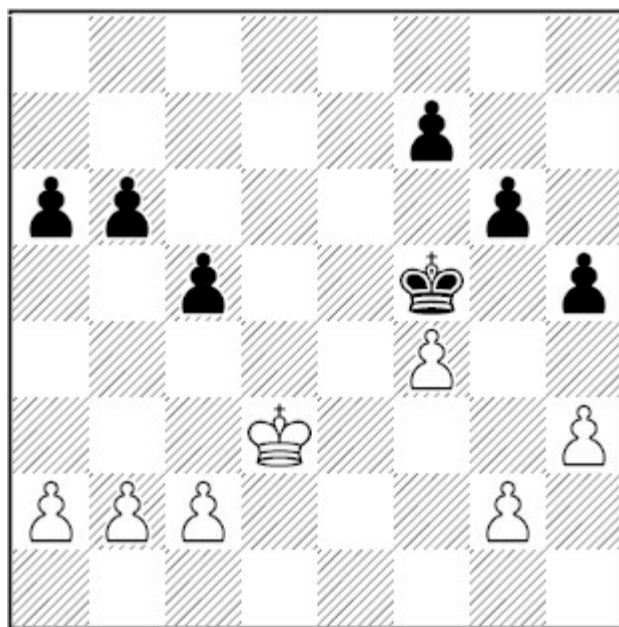
Earlier, we quoted Alekhine (or Lasker) to the effect that, "It's better to have a bad plan than no plan at all." I don't think he was referring to Black's trying to go for the three-pawn vs. three-pawn "trap" in this position!

34...

♔f5

Black logically attacks the pawn and is the first to place the king on the fourth/fifth rank, usually a sign of the better-placed king. Now White has two ways to save his f-pawn.

Question: How should White save his f-pawn?



White to play after 34... ♔f5

The correct answer is that White must play 35.♔e3. White's king is not as well placed as Black's, but after 35.♔e3 he should be able to hold, e.g. 35...b5. Black's idea is to lock up all the pawns and penetrate with his better-placed king. This idea will win in many king-and-pawn endgames so White has to be careful not to allow such a winning maneuver.

Now (after 35.♔e3 b5) White can try 36.g3 to reinforce f4 and be able to answer 36...h4 with 37.g4+. White cannot wait to do this. For example, if he plays 36.c3 instead, then 36...h4 37.g4+??

allows 37...hxg3 *e.p.*

But after 35.♔e3 b5 36.g3, Black has no useful way of moving forward. 36...b4 looks wrong because White can play 37.b3, making the black a- and c-pawns backward. This is the kind of position Black is usually looking to avoid. But after 36...a5 most reasonable moves draw for White, e.g. 37.♔f3, 37.c3, or even 37.b3. So with best play it should be a draw.

35.g3??

...

Ouch! I don't have the time stamping, but this losing move was played fairly quickly even though White had plenty of time on the clock. Where have we seen this massive time-management mistake before?

35...

h4

At this point I believe the thought that entered White's mind was the infamous "Uh-oh – I didn't look at that. What do I do now?" Since 36.gxh4 ♔xf4 and 36.g4+ ♔xf4 are both hopeless, the answer was...

0-1

After the game, I asked White if he had analyzed the simple threat 35...h4 before playing 35.g3. He admitted he had not. The game was thrown away with one thoughtless move. Sound familiar?

If you play moves without first analyzing to see if your opponent has a dangerous check, capture, or threat in response that you can't safely meet, I call that "Hope Chess." It's Hope Chess because once his check, capture, or threat is played you are hoping that you can find a safe response instead of having one prepared. This aspect of the thought process is one of the biggest differences between intermediate and advanced players. Intermediate players often make moves and wait to see what the opponent can do. Strong players ask (even if they don't do it consciously), "If I make that move and he answers with a [specific] dangerous check, capture, or threat, what would I do?" If the answer is, "I don't have a defense," then that means that candidate move is almost always rejected.

When I first reviewed this game, my first thought after seeing 35.g3 was, "Hmm. But what can White do if Black plays 35...h4?" The first thing I analyze when I look at any candidate move is, "Is It Safe?"

The following game was the subject of an ICC video titled, "Interesting in Every Phase" (available to members via https://webcast.chessclub.com/icc/c/Heisman/2009_12_05/Heisman.html). Recently a student e-mailed:

"I don't know why I never took advantage of this before, but I finally have been going through your weekly chess videos and they are fantastic. Just finished 'Interesting in Every Phase' and thought

you should consider starring that one. I've probably gone through about 2 dozen videos so far (including all the starred ones) and it is by far my favorite. True to its title, it is full of treasures about every aspect of the game."

With that high praise, here's hoping my explanation of this game is as good – or better than – my description in the video!

GAME 14: WHITE 1600 – BLACK 1600

Internet Chess Club 2010

45 minutes with a 45-second increment

King's Indian Defense

1.d4

 f6

2.c4

g6

3.  c3

 g7








Instead 3...d5 is the Grünfeld, with Black's choice between two famous "Indian" defenses possible at this juncture.

4.e4

d6

5.  e2

...





If White is intending to play the Main Line with  e2 and  f3, the move order matters a little, with most grandmasters agreeing with White's choice of playing  e2 first (which avoids lines like 5.  f3  g4 while still keeping open the option of playing the Averbakh System with 5...O-O 6.  g5), while amateurs favor "knights before bishops" with 5.  f3.

5...

O-O


6.  f3

e5

Now the Main Line continues 7. O-O  c6 8.d5  e7 and the *tabiya* has been reached, where 9.b4 (Bayonet Attack), 9.  d1, and 9.  d2 are the most common.

7.d5

...

This the characteristic move of the less common, but not rare, Petrosian System. This system is especially popular with amateurs who think that gaining space with moves like 7.d5 or playing 3.e5 after 1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 in the French as soon as possible is very attractive. Most grandmasters prefer to wait until Black's queen's knight has joined the fray with 7.O-O  c6, since then 8.d5 attacks the knight and forces it to the somewhat awkward e7 square.

Chess is a game of information, and the more you know what your opponent is doing, the better you can place your pieces. The trick is to wait by playing required moves, not wasting time, in the

meantime receiving information for your discretionary moves. By not waiting a tempo and playing 7.d5, White is telling Black not to place his knight on c6, and also that the c5 square will be inviting. Therefore, Black often plays 7...a5 with a later ...♘a6 and ...♘c5. There is a problem with playing the immediate 7...♘a6 – wait! – that was played in the game. I will explain it as we go...

7...

♘a6?!

Chess is a game of information, and the more you know what your opponent is doing, the better you can place your pieces. The trick is to wait by playing required moves, not wasting time, in the meantime receiving information for your discretionary moves.

The problem with this move (instead of the preparatory 7...a5) is that there will be no way to keep it on c5 if White plays b2-b4. But White cannot play just 8.O-O since 8...♘c5 9.b4? loses the e-pawn. Therefore, it is most accurate for White to first overprotect the e-pawn with a move like 8.♗c2 (or even the thematic 8.♘d2) so that, if Black plays 8...♘c5, the e-pawn is solid and 9.b4 properly punishes Black. This idea occurs in several openings, so understanding the logic helps you in more than just this specific position.

8.♗g5

...

Once *Houdini* gets to 23 ply it thinks 8.♘d2 is as good as 8.♗g5, and it likes 8.♗g5 slightly more than 8.♗c2. Way to go, *Houdini*, for making my previous note look less accurate. It's OK, I forgive it. Without *Houdini*, the analysis part of this book would have been much more difficult and a lot less competent.

8...

h6

A good move, putting the question to the bishop. If Black waits, White can play ♗d2, cementing the bishop on g5 and making it a “two-way bishop.” I use that description because it has the battery with the queen stopping ...h6 on the c1-h6 diagonal and the pin on the f6-knight on the h4-d8 diagonal, stopping that knight from moving. Moreover, in this pawn structure Black would like to move that knight to allow his conventional, King's Indian locked center (e4/d5 vs. d6/e5) “Pointing Rule” pawn break, ...f7-f5.

9.♗e3

...

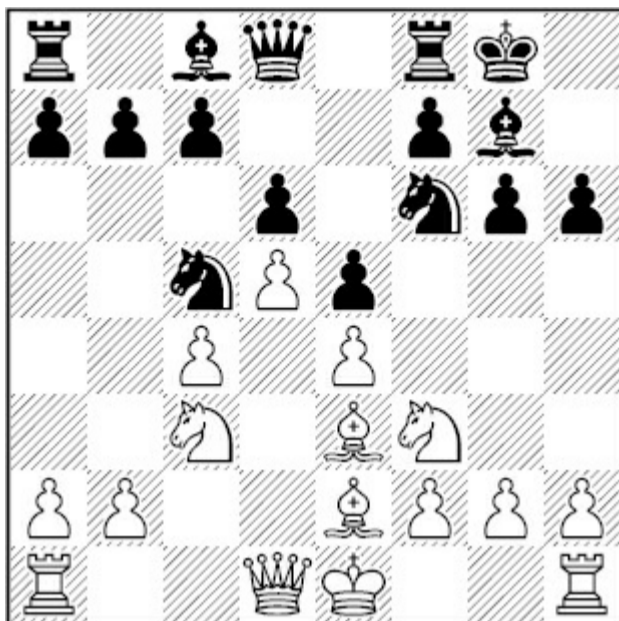
In the video, I question this move because it allows Black to move his knight off f6 with tempo (9...♘g4 hitting the bishop) so he can get in ...f7-f5 more easily. This is still all true, but *Houdini* thinks 9.♗e3 is probably best anyway!

9...

♘c5

Houdini agrees with 9...♘g4 as the best by a small margin over 9...♘h5. Moving the other

knight, as in the game, is third. Thanks for making me look good this time, computer!



White to play after 9... ♞c5

10. ♞d2±

...

As explained above, White is forced to save his e4-pawn and this is a standard (*Houdini*: “Best!”) way to do it. 10. ♞d2 simultaneously saves e4 and clears the f3 square so that both ... ♞g4 and ... ♞h5 are discouraged. After the thematic break ... f7-f5, White can again guard the e-pawn with f2-f3 or ♙f3.

Many intermediate players immediately play 11. ♙xc5 here because they love to double their opponent’s pawns, but I have rarely seen a grandmaster play this move in a similar position. (Studying grandmaster games provides numerous benefits. Although this is a book of amateur games, I will plug the competition since both are helpful!)

Houdini rates 11. ♙xc5 as third best. One big reason this move is not as good as it looks is the bishop pair, with an average value of about 0.5 pawns. Normally, doubled pawns don’t lose half a pawn in value, so giving up the bishop pair just to double pawns is usually insufficient compensation. The bishop pair *is* given up to double pawns in many openings, but there is almost always some additional side benefit to make up the difference, such as tying down the opponent to the defense of another square or weakening his king’s safety. ’Nuff said.

10...

a5

Black makes the thematic move to protect the knight from b4. It is also given the *Houdini* Seal of Approval.

11.a3

...

In positions like these, when White wants to support b4, he often has to play the sequence b2-b3, a2-a3, and then b3-b4. The first time I saw this, I immediately wondered, “Why not a2-a3 and b3-b4

right away?” The answer is that if immediately a2-a3, Black usually can play ...a5-a4, which is annoying. Then b2-b4 can be answered by ...axb3 *e.p.* and, after White recaptures on b3, the white a-pawn is isolated, the knight is unassailable by pawns on c5, and the black rook has a nice semi-open file to pressure the a-pawn.

Understanding little “mini-plans” like the above is a large part of a stronger player’s chess knowledge. It is not as important as being able to take your time, calculate carefully, and determine the safety of moves, but it’s not chopped liver, either!

11...

♖d7

Here 11...a4 would lose a pawn to the removal-of-the-guard sequence 12.♖xc5 dxc5 13.♗xa4 so White can play a2-a3 first with yes, the *Houdini* Seal of Approval, although 12.O-O is rated at least as good.

Normally a passive square like d7 is not a great place for a bishop. However, from the annotations on the previous move, it does make sense here, guarding the key a4 square, and making ...a5-a4 possible.

Although Black is supposed to play on the kingside, once he commits his knight to c5, it makes sense to consider spending a move or two fortifying that situation for intermediate-term gain, and then turn his full attention to the kingside. The problem is that White can play 12.b4 right away, spoiling the “miniplan,” so – does Black have something better to do with his tempo instead of 11...♖d7?

It turns out it’s almost a 50-50 proposition: 11...♖d7 is still a reasonable move even if White can play 12.b4, but *Houdini* slightly prefers foregoing that and playing the thematic 11...♗fd7. Some inexperienced players shrink in horror at this retreat because this moves a knight twice and blocks the bishop, but the King’s Indian is not a classical, open position. Therefore, moves like this are not only sometimes acceptable, but even required. The main idea is that Black releases the block of the f-pawn to allow his required ...f7-f5 break sooner rather than later, and reinforces c5. The latter issue is not currently as important since 12.b4 will take that square away anyway.

Finally, there is a trick involved: 11...♗fd7 12.b4 ♗xe4! 13.♗dxe4 f5, and Black will win his piece back by either trapping the bishop after 14.♗d2 f4 or forking after 14.♗g3 f4. Pretty neat. If you saw that combination before you read it, you are probably a better player than I am...

12.b4

axb4

It’s an easy decision for Black to exchange rather than just move the knight – he doesn’t have to worry about the a-pawn, he gives his rook something to do (even if it’s just to trade for its counterpart on a1), and he loosens up b4 so that White has to guard it. Hence the following sequence:

13.axb4

♖xa1

14.♖xa1

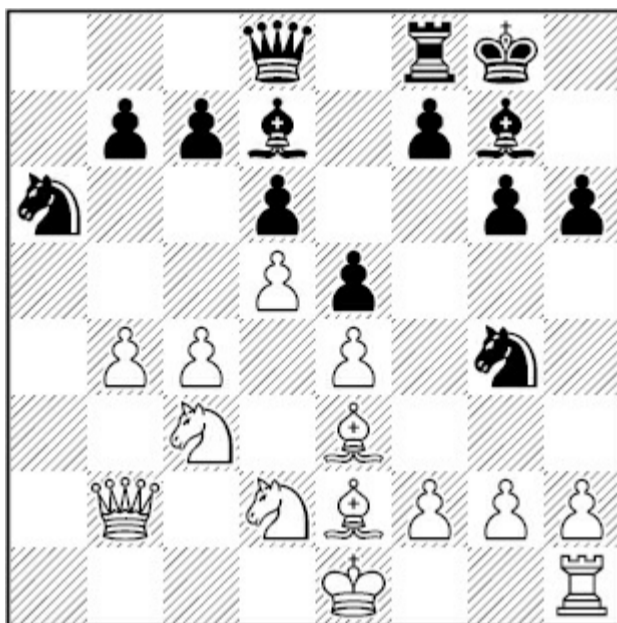
♗a6

Now 15.b5 would make c5 weak, e.g. 15... ♖c5, and if 16. ♕xc5!? dxc5 17.b6! (the only move to give White play) and White is fine, although not as well off as he would be by saving the pawn with 15. ♖a3, 15. ♖b2, or the dynamic 15.c5!?

15. ♖b2

♗g4

Logical in terms of the earlier explanations about 9. ♕e3 and ...f7-f5. *Houdini* rates this about equally best with 15... h5. In either case, White is nicely better by about half a pawn.



White to play after 15... ♗g4

16. ♕xg4!

...

White gives up his “lesser” bishop. You can’t always tell which bishop is better by the color of the squares where your center pawns are located (the bishop on that color is supposed to be weaker). However, if the pawns are fixed as they are here, there’s a good chance this “center pawn color” rule will work, and here it does, so White – with his pawns fixed on light squares – properly gives up his light-squared bishop.

16...

♕xg4

17.O-O±

♕d7

I guess Black wants to play ...f7-f5 but is worried about getting his bishop trapped. At 23 ply *Houdini* rates the top two moves as 17... b6 and 17... ♖e7, with 17... ♕d7 a respectable third.

18.c5

...

The thematic “break” indicated by the Pointing Rule (see Game 1).

18...

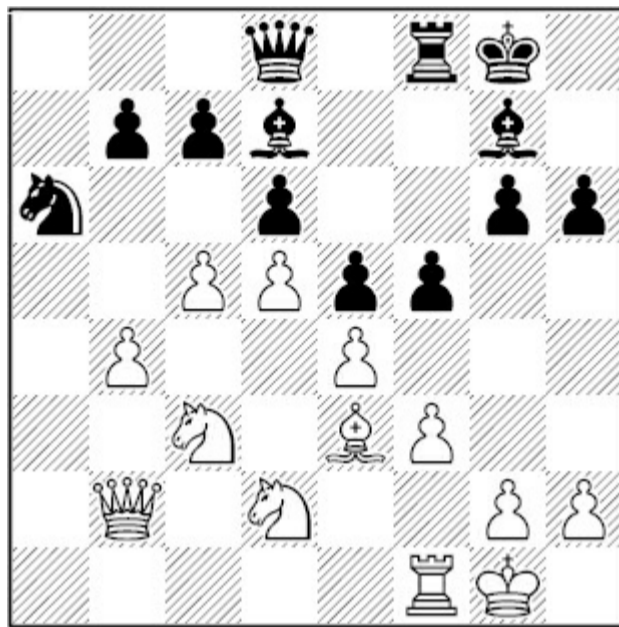
f5

Ditto! It's not often you see the two thematic breaks played on consecutive moves.

19.f3

...

White decides to keep his structure “smooth” – a good idea. This does not necessarily mean that if Black captures ... fxe4 (not always a great idea) then White will reply fxe4 – he could recapture with a knight, making that knight strong and stopping the black e-pawn. A knight on e4 would also help keep the bishop on g7 fairly bad by attacking kingside dark squares and blockading the obstructing black e-pawn.



Black to play after 19.f3

19...

f4

Black makes the committal decision to close the f-file and attack kingside. In theory White is better, with more space and the advantage in time, but White's king is the target of Black's attack, so the position can become rather double-edged. *Houdini* prefers the flexible 19... ♖f7± or 19... ♕c8±.

20. ♕f2

g5

21.cxd6

...

Open lines on the side you want to attack. That means 21.cxd6 makes sense, and that Black is trying to break open the kingside via ...g5-g4. Interestingly, the computer much prefers 21.c6! here, since 21...bxc6 22.dxc6 ♕xc6? is refuted by 23.b5 ♖b8 24. ♕a2+ or just 23. ♕a2+, picking up the loose knight. Therefore, Black would have to settle for 21... ♕c8 22. ♖a1 b6 23. ♖b3 Δ 24. ♕c4+-.

21...

cxd6

22.b5(!)

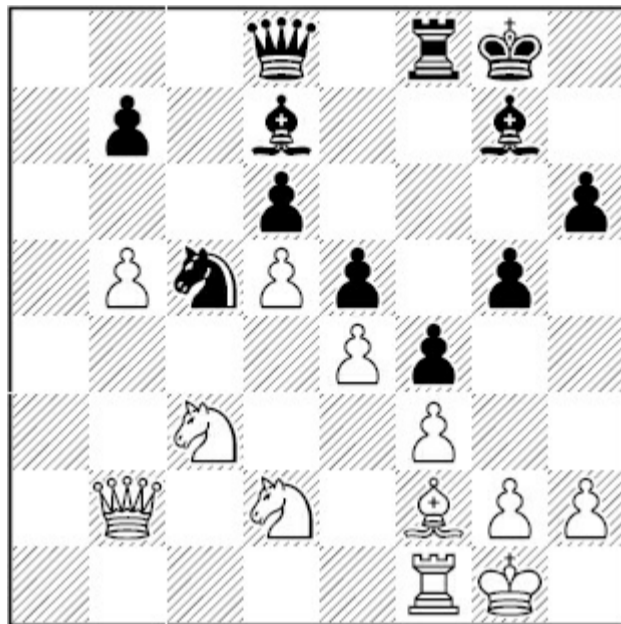
...

An interesting decision. White has several ways to proceed such as 22. ♕c4, 22. ♖c1, or 22. ♖a1, although in the last of these playing a later b4-b5 to open the file would seem to be indicated

anyway. *Houdini* likes 22.b5 best, so let's go with that.

22... ♖c5

It's not obvious whether 22... ♖c7, or perhaps 22... ♖c5 (allowing things to get mixed up with 23. ♙xc5), is correct. This time the computer has a slight preference for 22... ♖c7, the move that was not played.



White to play after 22... ♖c5

23. ♙xc5 ...

A reasonable decision and likely best. It's not so much that White gets a protected passed pawn (that's not bad), but that he keeps the action going on the queenside and does not let the knight blockade the position. Note that White is not giving up the bishop pair – Black already had that from the trade on move 16. Giving up a bishop for a knight is nearly always less costly when it does not involve surrendering the bishop pair.

23... dxc5

24.g4?= ...

What's this? White is trying to blockade the kingside? That might make sense if he has never heard of *en passant*. Generally, you don't move pawns in front of your king in a "pawn storm" position unless it is to blockade the area or recapture. Here that doesn't qualify. *Houdini*'s top two moves are 24. ♖c4± and 24. ♙a3±.

24... fxg3

"No credit for other moves." Black must open the position on the side of the board where he wishes to attack.

25.hxg3

g4

Another interesting decision. Black's bishop on g7 is fairly weak, so moving pawns off the dark squares may help, and ...g5-g4 is still a type of break. *Houdini* thinks it is OK, close to its top-rated alternatives such as the similar 25...h5 and the active 25...♔a5.

26.fxg4

...

To take or not to take – that is the question. It turns out in this case it doesn't make that much difference, but that's why you analyze – to see if it does. White's choice is probably equally best with 26.♔g2.

26...

♙xg4

27.♖xf8+

...

Similar issues – and similar result. Taking is not wrong or right – it's just a line that's about equal, as are others, if followed up correctly.

27...

♔xf8

Houdini thinks 27...♔xf8 is better than 27...♙xf8, but the reason why is not easy to explain. 27...♔xf8 controls the open file and freezes the knight on e2 to prevent the queen from penetrating, but that is too simplistic – especially since the deeper it looks, the more it likes 27...♔xf8. That usually means there are some long sequences where 27...♔xf8 is advantageous, but they can't be readily explained by examining the initial position.

28.♔b1

...

Another tiny inaccuracy. This allows 28...c4!± which is tactically justified due to 29.♗xc4?? ♔c5+ snaring the knight. But c5 is going to be available for the black queen in any case, which doesn't fully explain why 28...c4 is the best move, but at least it's a start. Best is 28.♔b3= or 28.♔a3=.

28...

h5=

Second best (behind ...c5-c4).

29.♔f1

...

Continuing the series of close but important decisions. White offers the queen trade rather than keeping the queens on, which is best accomplished via 29.♔d3, with roughly equal chances.

29...

♔e7

Black has the bishop pair, but that doesn't necessarily mean that trading queens into the ending is automatically correct. Chess isn't always that easy. Here 29... ♖xf1? 30. ♔f1 gives White a good position, e.g. 30... ♗f6 31. ♘c4 (an excellent spot for a knight) 31... ♔f8 32.b6± when Black's pawns are split and his bishops passive. *Houdini* likes 29... ♗f6= best, and avoiding the queen trade – for now – was the correct decision.

30. ♘f3 ...

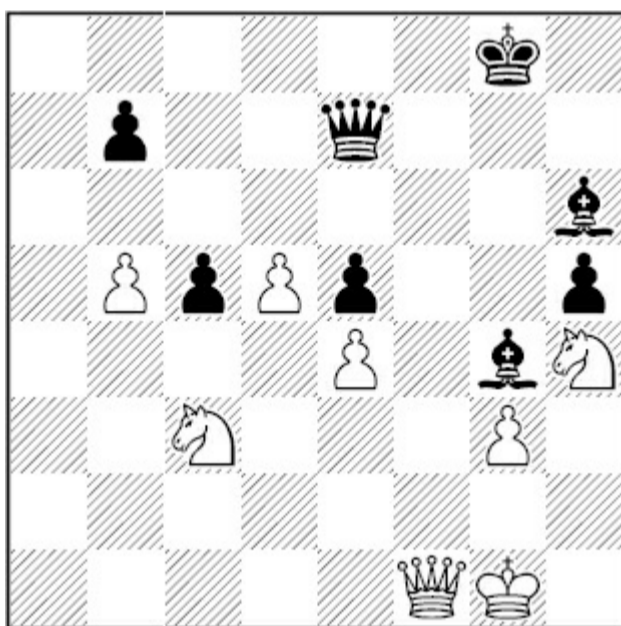
The gritty play continues. 30. ♘c4 is supposedly best, but the game continuation is fine.

30... ♗h6!

Finally activating the long-dormant bishop. In the King's Indian, if Black's dark-squared bishop can participate in the main action, that's usually a good sign for him!

31. ♘h4(?) ...

This, however, is inaccurate, as the knight decentralizes and Black is getting entry points. Better is 31. ♔g2=.



Black to play after 31. ♘h4

Many Ways to Skin a Cat

Modern computers have shown us that in some non-dynamic positions there are many acceptable ways to skin a cat. In other words, so long as you play a reasonable move, you are fine. The problem for humans is determining which positions these are (*criticality assessment*) and the ability to then pick out a reasonable move fairly quickly, leaving time for more analytical, critical moves later.

One way to determine that a move is likely critical is the complexity of the position, but that is not

always sufficient. For example, where to place the king, whether to trade queens, or whether to go into a king-and-pawn endgame can also be extremely critical decisions.

31...

♔g5!

The only move to secure an advantage. The threat is 32...♔e3+ picking up the knight at c3. Notice how active the bishops are here, compared to the line where Black appropriately avoided the queen trade on move 29. It only took one or two inaccuracies by White and accurate moves by Black to turn things around.

32.♔e1?

...

White is suddenly on the defensive and, as so often happens, he is not able to shift gears and find a good defense. It is psychologically difficult to go into defensive mode after not playing defense for a while. White had to play the dangerous-looking 32.♔f5! when, after 32...♕xf5 33.♔xf5 ♔xg3+ 34.♔f1 ♔f4+ (necessary because White's queen was ideally placed for counterattack), White plays 35.♔e2 with chances to hold. But it's understandable that, once we calculate as far as 33...♔xg3+, losing a pawn with check might cause us to eliminate that line at that point. The problem is that the alternatives, such as the game continuation, are even less promising.

32...

♔f7?

Missing the win. The bishops break in after 32...♔d2! 33.♔xd2 ♕xd2+ and White has to place his attacked knight on an awkward square. After that, the bishops would rule.

33.♔g2

...

It's much easier to make meaningful mistakes when the play gets sharper. Again the sacrifice 33.♔f5! ♕xf5 34.exf5 ♔xf5 35.♔e4 was best, when two important general principles help to offset White's loss of a pawn:

Black had to give up the bishop pair (worth on the average a half a pawn, and here clearly at least that) to win the pawn; and

Notoriously, queen and knight is a better combination of pieces to have than queen and bishop.

Despite the above, the action at this point in the game is more about careful analysis than about understanding general principles.

33...

♔e8(?)

Now 33...♔d2+!-+ is on again, although the computer has to look deeper than on the previous move to see that this continuation is still winning. Missed opportunities abound, but that's normal even for strong players when the game gets complex. You can't worry about making mistakes – they are going to happen, and mistakes earlier in the game are gone (worry about them *after the game*

when you study what you did, to learn something for future play). *During the game you can only be concerned about doing the best that you can with the actual position and your clock situation. Anything that detracts from your ability to find the best move that you can in a reasonable time is detrimental.*

34. ♔ f2(?)

...

During the game you can only be concerned about doing the best that you can with the actual position and your clock situation. Anything that detracts from your ability to find the best move that you can in a reasonable time is detrimental.

Interestingly, switching the side of action to the queenside with 34. ♖ a4! or 34. ♗ b1! gives White equal play.

34...

♔ e3?

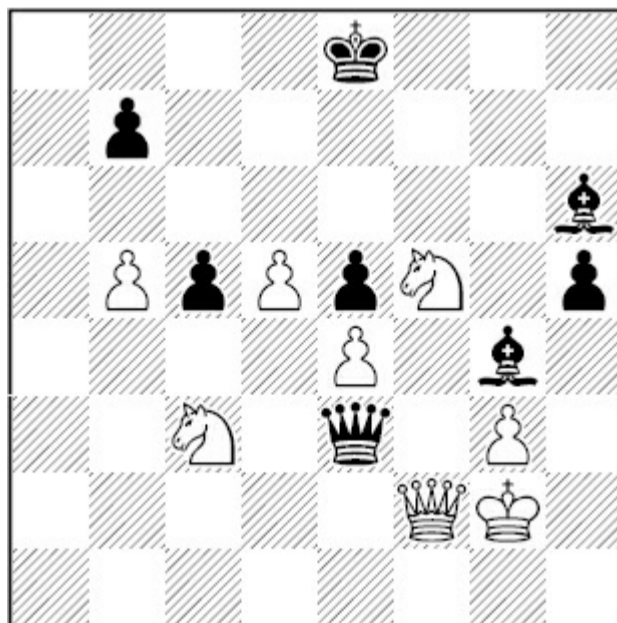
The series of errors continues, as Black just doesn't realize how strong the idea of 34... ♔ d2! is, e.g. 35. ♔ xd2 ♕ xd2 36. ♖ a2 ♔ d7, with a very likely win for Black.

35. ♗ f5?

...

As happens elsewhere in this book, the formerly saving move is now a clear mistake! Those things can happen even when the position only changes a little. Instead 35. ♔ f6 makes the best of a bad situation.

Black to play and win:



Black to play after 35. ♗ f5?

35...

♔ xc3?

Missing the win with 35... ♖h3+ 36. ♔g1 (Of course not the removal-of-the-guard 36. ♔xh3? ♕xf2, winning the queen. If you assumed that was the entire answer, you are incorrect since taking the bishop is not forced. You have to prove the win in each critical line against best play, not just against one poor defensive line) 36... ♕xf5--+ winning a piece after 37.exf5 ♕xc3, but not 36... ♕xc3? 37. ♖xh6, or 36... ♕c1+? 37. ♔h2 ♕xf5 38. ♕xf5 ♕xc3 39. ♕xh5+, picking up the bishop with a slight advantage to White.

36. ♖xh6= ...

With a sigh of relief?! Now it's *White* who threatens to escape with 37. ♕f7+ and Black has to look for the counter! In dynamic positions, things can change fast with even one critical mistake.

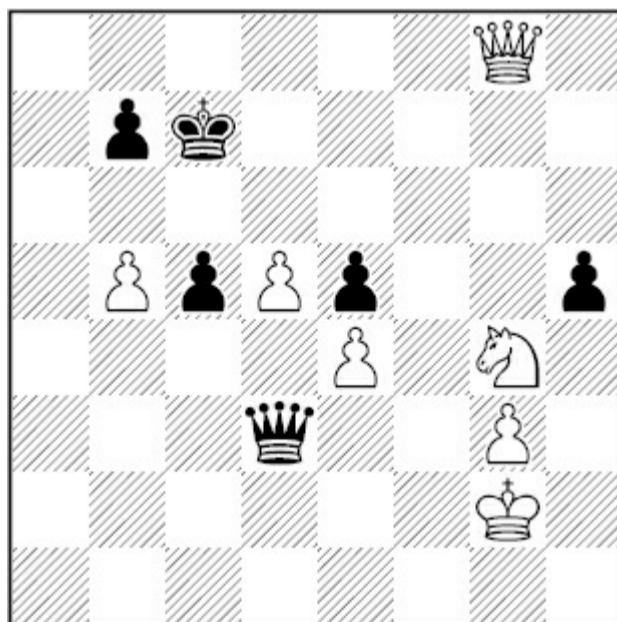
36... ♕d3(!)

Since 37. ♕f7+ cannot be stopped, Black makes sure that his queen is in a good position to counterattack if White stops afterwards to take a pawn.

37. ♕f7+ ♔d8=
38. ♕g8+ ...

The awkward placement of the knight, combined with the exposure of White's king, makes it difficult for White to do serious damage to Black's king. Still, more accurate was 38. ♕f8+ with equality, to prevent Black's king from going to the c-file due to 38... ♔c7? 39. ♕xc5+.

38... ♔c7!
39. ♖xg4? ...



Black to play after 39. ♖xg4?

Allowing Black a timely *Zwischenzug* to win a pawn, which he does. If White wanted to trade on

g4, he should first have played 39. ♖f7+ ♔b6 40. ♖g6+ (guarding the e4 square is crucial, as compared to the game) 40... ♔a5 41. ♗xg4 hxg4 42. ♖xg4 c4 43. ♖d7! ♖+.

39...

♖xe4+!

40. ♔h3?–+

...

The easiest endgame to lose (and win) is the king-and-pawn endgame, which White invites with this move. Much more important to learn than positional principles like “doubled pawns are bad” is, “Never intentionally go into a king-and-pawn endgame that can be avoided if you are not pretty sure of getting what you want.” This is an extension of the famous principle, Avoid trades of pieces when you are losing. Here White wants at least a draw, but I don’t think he gave a lot of thought as to whether the resulting king-and-pawn endgame was salvageable before he allowed the queen trade.

Instead, the calm 40. ♔f1 gave White good chances for survival in a tricky queen-and-pawn ending down a pawn after 40... ♖xg4 41. d6+! ♔xd6 ♖b8+ 42. ♔d5 ♖xb7+ 43. ♔c4 b6!. *In queen-and-pawn endgames, sometimes the advantage lies not with the player with the most pawns, but the one with the most dangerous passed pawn.*

40...

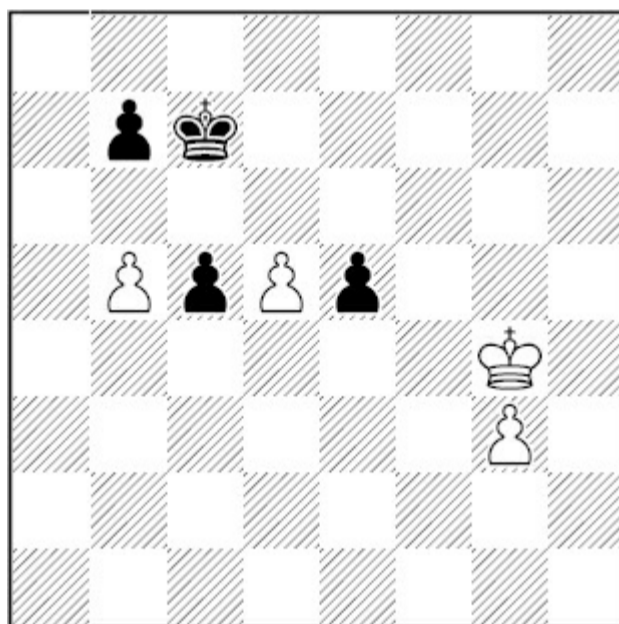
♖xg4+!

41. ♖xg4

hxg4+

42. ♔xg4

...



Black to play after 42. ♔xg4

42...

♔d6

Also instructive – and winning – is 42...c4 43. ♖f3 c3 44. ♖e3 e4! (tying up the white king) 45. g4 ♔d6 46. g5 ♖xd5 47. g6 ♖e6 and Black wins easily. If Black could have looked ahead and seen that 44...e4 would freeze the white king and that he would therefore have the time to both pick up the d-pawn and stop the g-pawn, he could have won immediately. You can’t play these very

deterministic positions by principle – only precise calculation will do. But Black's move wins, too, as we shall see...

43. ♔f3

...

In queen-and-pawn endgames, sometimes the advantage lies not with the player with the most pawns, but the one with the most dangerous passed pawn.

Passive, but the active 43. ♔f5 ♚xd5 44.g4 c4 45.g5 ♚d6 46. ♔e4 ♚e6 47. ♔e3 ♔f5 wins for Black too. After 43. ♔f3, Black should win easily.

43...

♚xd5

44.g4

b6

By fortifying his c-pawn before going after the g-pawn, Black is trying to make sure that he wins even if he loses his e-pawn. Nevertheless, 44...c4 wins more easily, as in the previous note.

45.g5

♚e6

46. ♔e4

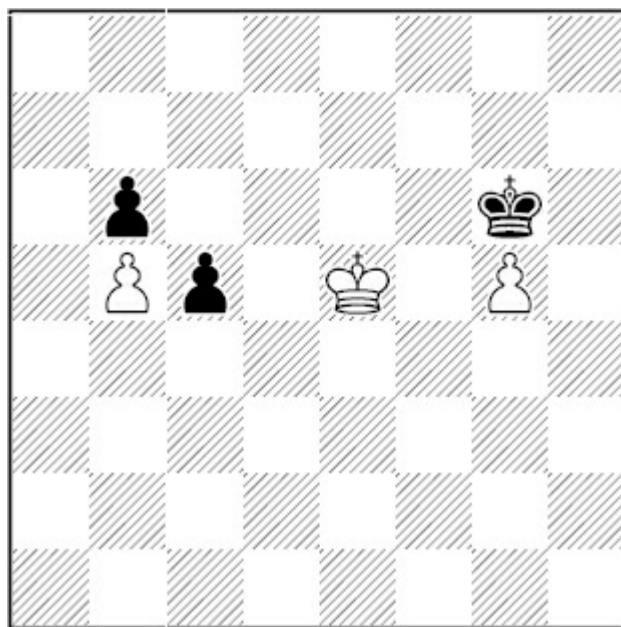
♚f7??

Whoops! But it's not *this* easy! Black needs to calculate each candidate move carefully. Instead both 46...c4 and the enigmatic 46... ♚d6 win. Since the former is less tricky, let's examine that: 46... c4 47.g6 ♔f6 48. ♔e3 ♔xg6 and White's king is helpless in approaching the pawns, e.g. 49. ♔d2 e4! freezing the king, as 50. ♔c3 e3! is hopeless.

However, after 46... ♚f7?? Black cannot shake the white king off the g-pawn without giving up his c-pawn, and the game should be drawn.

47. ♔xe5

♚g6



White to play after 47... ♔g6

48. ♔d5??

...

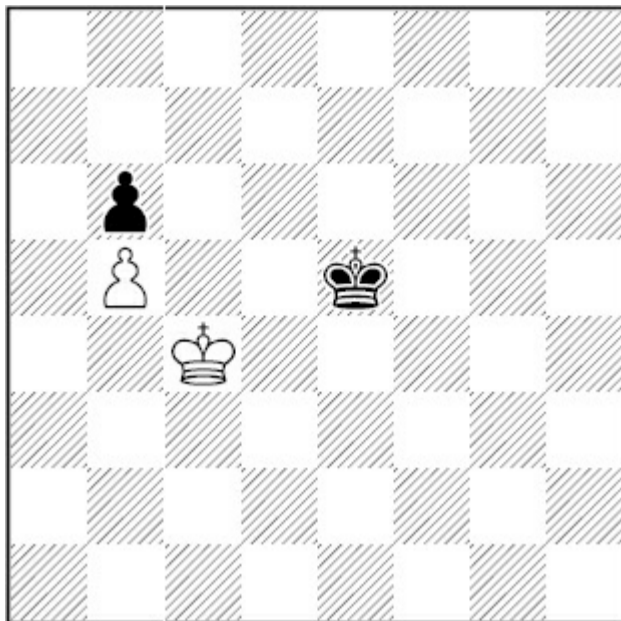
Oh, my! Perhaps White thought the position was hopeless, but this pretty much gives up a drawn position without a fight. If you don't calculate lines carefully and just "hand-wave" some superficial analysis, you might make this type of giant mistake. And if you can't – or won't – calculate in relatively straightforward king-and-pawn endgames during a slow game, when would you? We don't know if White was in severe time trouble but, if he were, I would not think his instinct would have been to abandon the g-pawn.

When some strong players see this type of mistake, they often admonish, "Weak players should study endgames first!" and everyone takes this as gospel. But it's really a complex question. You certainly won't find this specific endgame in many endgame books (or maybe not at all) like you would a Lucena or Philidor rook-and-pawn endgame. So if the admonition means, "Study *how* to analyze endgames carefully," rather than "Study specific endgames," it makes more sense.

However, I feel what is really happening in these instances (and verified by my asking students about similar mistakes) is that the weaker player is not accustomed to careful calculation and, when it is called for, either bypasses it completely or does it superficially, "hand-waving" a generic plan of play. *This lack of careful analysis cannot be "fixed" by studying endgames unless studying endgames also has the side benefit of convincing the student that only careful analysis will do in many endgame positions.* It is far more common for weak players to lose positions where they refuse to (or don't, for whatever reason) take the time to do the required detailed analysis, than it is for them to lose in a position where finding, say, the right plan is required. Therefore, their shortcoming is not due to weakness in the endgame, per se, but rather to the fact that the endgame is where analysis often needs to be quite discrete: it is very easy for moves like 48. ♔d5?? to turn a draw into a loss.

White should have played 48. ♔f4 guarding the pawn, and it doesn't take much to see that this is a draw, e.g. 48... c4 49. ♔e4 ♔xg5 50. ♔d4 ♔f5 51. ♔xc4 ♔e5. We have now reached what I call a "dance-around" position, which is so common that everyone should take a couple of minutes to learn

it:



White to play and draw after 51...♔e5 (analysis)

Since Black at some point needs to capture the b5-pawn, all White needs to know is that he needs to occupy b3 with his king *after* Black captures on b5 to get the opposition and draw; being on b3 at the point that Black captures the pawn gives up the opposition and loses.

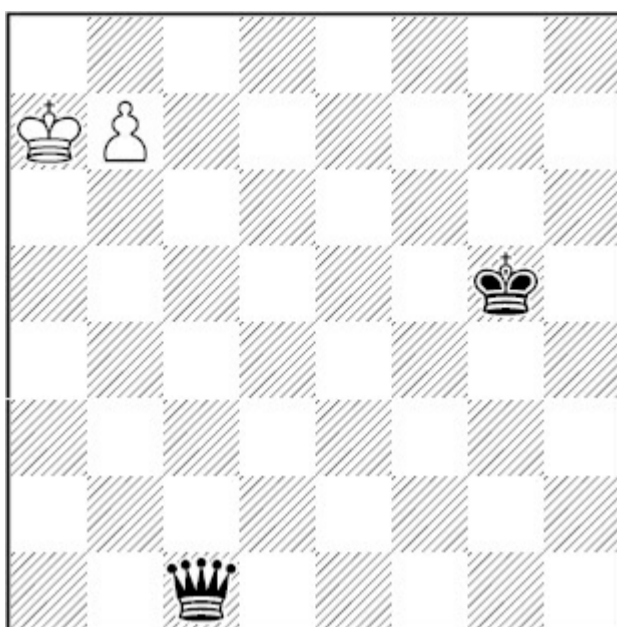
With this information, we can deduce that *the easiest thing for White to do is to have his king “dance around” on squares that touch b3, waiting for Black to take the pawn so that the white king can jump on b3*, e.g. 52.♔c3 ♔d5 53.♔b2 ♔c5 54.♔a2 ♔xb5 55.♔b3 with a draw, as any elementary king-and-pawn text (or computer engine) will show. This is an important idea to understand, as it can occur in many king-and-pawn endings.

If White had known this (or possibly taken the time to figure it out), he likely would have played 48.♔f4 and drawn.

48...	♔xg5
49.♔c6	...

White does not even wait for Black’s king to approach and *Zugzwang* him into losing his b-pawn. Rather, he just opts to get into a race where Black will promote in time to win. Both of White’s possibilities lose in this position. Even if White can get his pawn to the seventh rank with support from the king, as happens in this case, an endgame with a knight pawn is always lost to a queen. This is where studying specific types of endgames *would* help!

49...	c4
50.♔xb6	c3
51.♔a7	c2
52.b6	c1♔
53.b7	...



Black to play after 53.b7

Now Black has a well-known maneuver to continually force the white king to move in front of its pawn so that the black king can approach. I believe Black told me afterwards he was happy to remember most of this.

53... ♔a3+
 54. ♔b6 ...

Correctly avoiding going in front of the pawn with 54. ♔b8, when the black king can start approaching right away with 54... ♔f5.

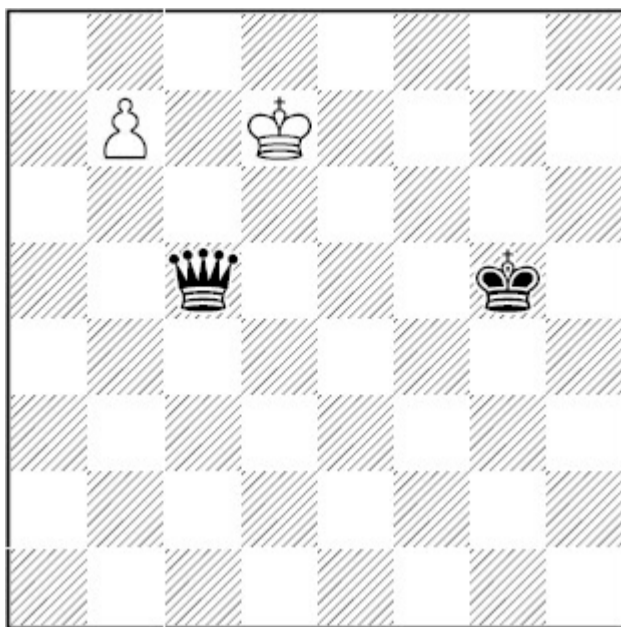
54... ♔e3+

54... ♔d6+ is more to the point.

55. ♔c7 ♔f4+

Ditto for 55... ♔c5+.

56. ♔c8 ♔f8+
 57. ♔c7 ♔c5+
 58. ♔d7 ...



Black to play after 58. ♔d7

58...

♚b6!

The key idea. Continuous checking will not work. Black forces the king to guard the pawn so that next move he can check and force the king in front of the pawn. That, in turn, gives time for the black king to approach.

59. ♔c8

♚c6+

60. ♔b8

♚f5

61. ♔a7

♚c7

62. ♔a8

♚a5+

This sequence can be repeated as often as necessary to create time to approach with the attacking king. With a rook or bishop pawn, the defender can threaten stalemate by going into the corner (and draw if the attacking king is sufficiently far away), but no such luck with a knight pawn.

63. ♔b8

♚e6

64. ♔c8

♚a6

65. ♔c7

♚d6+

66. ♔c8

♚c6+

67. ♔b8

♚d7

68. ♔a7

♚a4+

69. ♔b6

♚b4+

70. ♔a7

♚c7

0-1

GAME 15: WHITE 1422 – BLACK 1728

Internet Chess Club 2011
45 minutes with a 5-second increment
French Defense, Winawer Variation

Unlike many of the games in this book, which were played with a large, FIDE-like increment, this game was played with a short, USCF-like five-second increment, and the time management was strongly affected.

Before the start of each event, it is helpful to use the formula shown in the introduction to Game 3 to estimate the average time per move. In a 45 5 time control, the average (in minutes) is $45/40 + 5/60$, or about a minute and a quarter per move. This is a good assumption for the start of a game, and that average includes early, easier decisions that should be made relatively quickly, leaving additional time for very complicated moves that likely will occur later.

1.e4 0:44:21

e6 0:44:57

2.d4 0:44:19

d5 0:44:52

3.♗c3 0:44:14

♗b4 0:43:07

The Winawer Variation has varied in popularity over the years and still remains a viable and fighting opening choice for Black. The main alternatives are $3...♗f6$ (Classical) and $3...dxe4$ (Rubinstein).

4.a3 0:40:49

...

A common sideline. The main line is $4.e5 c5$ and then $5.a3$.

4...

♗xc3+ 0:42:24

5.bxc3 0:40:52

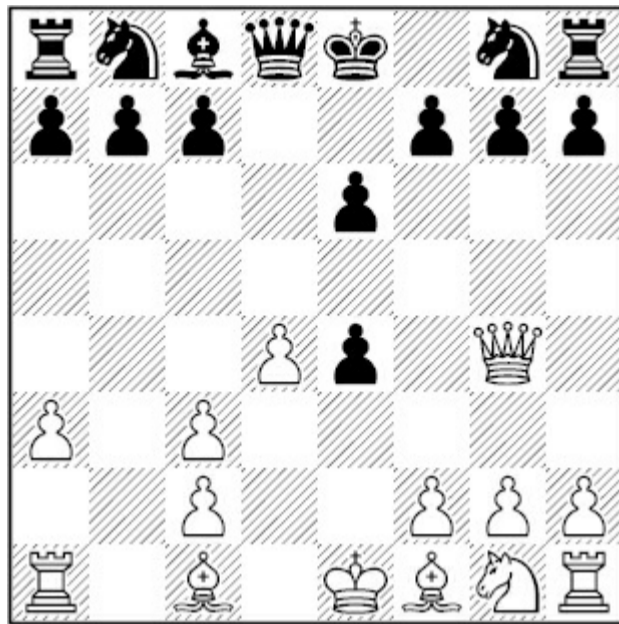
dxe4 0:42:20

This is Black's best plan – to take the pawn and then return it judiciously afterward...

6.♙g4 0:39:56

...

This is the correct idea: the queen double attacks the e- and g-pawns and White wins back his material.



Black to play after 6. ♔g4

6...

♔f6(?) 0:40:19

Judging from his time usage, Black is out of his book. By far the most common defense is 6... ♘f6 7. ♗xg7 ♖g8 8. ♔h6, when theory holds that Black has good play (which is why the 4.a3 line is rare at the grandmaster level). Interestingly, *Houdini* thinks White has at least the normal opening advantage, if not slightly more. Just as interesting, upon calculating for an additional 23 ply *Houdini* thinks that Black's best move after the above line ending in 8. ♔h6 is the rare 8... ♗e7, when it gives White a 0.2 pawn advantage.

Black's move 6... ♔f6 seems reasonable because, superficially, it makes sense to give up the doubled e-pawn rather than the "solid" g-pawn. However, practice has shown that giving up the g-pawn and getting action against the white queen is the better choice.

7. ♗xe4 0:37:37

...

The computer has White up by about a half-pawn, a relatively large opening advantage due to the bishop pair and good central control.

The bad news for White is that he has only played seven moves and already he has used almost all of his "Botvinnik's Rule" time. Yet Black's 6... ♔f6 was the first move that was out of the ordinary and 7. ♗xe4 was the only way to regain the pawn. Nevertheless, White had already spent almost six minutes for the first six moves and now spends over two more.

7...

♗e7 0:39:13

Waiting to move the queen so that this knight can go to f6 is also possible. *Houdini*'s number one choice is 7... ♗g6, hitting the white queen right away.

8. ♘f3 0:36:34

...

Over a minute just to develop the knight to its natural square. Too slow for 45 5 (but maybe OK for 45 45).

8...

h6 0:38:42

Since Black can just play 8...♖g6 right away (the computer's top move), it doesn't make any sense to stop 9.♕g5 hitting the queen. When you consider moves like this, make sure it is worth the tempo, such as if prevents the queen from getting trapped. Otherwise it takes a tempo to move the queen anyway, so using a tempo to prevent the opponent from making a specific move doesn't always make sense, especially if the opponent has good alternatives. After this passive move, *Houdini* jumps the evaluation from "White is a little better" to "White is much better," just about winning (~+1 pawn evaluation).

9.♕d3

...

I accidentally overwrote the time-stamp for this move on my database, but my comment there is, "Way too slow for such a non-critical position!" Since the next move is 7 minutes after the previous move, I believe this normal developing move took about 5 minutes! This is how the seeds of defeat get planted early, since extra time will be needed later for more complicated, critical decisions. If you are Sammy Reshevsky, Donald Byrne, or Walter Browne you can get away with this type of slow play due to your wonderful speed chess decision-making skills, but even those notoriously slow players did not have to play slow games with sudden-death time controls (at least not until Walter got older).

9...

♖bc6 0:36:12

Black is in some trouble on the board, but he still has some relatively straight-forward developing moves which can be played without taking too much time. He should look at White's slow play as an opportunity to get back in the game later if he can just hang on.

10.O-O± 0:29:24

♕d7 0:31:02

Black is doing the same thing. He takes over five minutes simply to develop his final minor piece. The computer rated 10...♖f5 as microscopically better at 23 ply, but it would never be worth five minutes at this time control to try to eke out a microscopically better move. The real question on these moves is, "Is it safe?" and the answer (for now) is "Yes" – and it doesn't take too long to see if 10...♕d7 is safe.

11.♕d2 0:24:49

...

This is a fairly passive spot for the bishop. *Think twice about developing a bishop to d2 unless there is a tactic on the e1-a5 diagonal or you just need to find a safe place to get it out of the way.* Better is placing the rook on a semi-open file with 11.♖b1 or pressuring the center with 11.c4.

The key issue is that White took almost another five minutes for this move. Botvinnik's Rule

would have the players making their 15th move in a “normal” opening with 36 minutes (80% of total time) remaining on their clocks. It would be advisable for both players, after they move and check their clock, to ask, “Am I playing too fast or too slow?” and adjust accordingly. Given the 75-second average that could have been calculated before the start of the game, the answer for both at this point is a clear, “Need to play a little faster!”

11...

♔f8? 0:26:04

Black makes a strange decision to keep the king in the middle, blocking the connection between the rooks. Even with the semi-open b-file, 11... O-O-O 12. ♖ab1± is better, with 11... ♗f5 second. Still, five more minutes! It doesn't take a science-fiction writer to predict that time management will be a big issue later in this game. It's tough enough to make good moves, but don't beat yourself by taking way longer than the board and time circumstances indicate.

12. ♗e5 0:16:26

...

Why does White wish to move this piece twice with both his rooks undeveloped? This is the single biggest strategic problem that inexperienced players have – they don't follow the principle, *Don't play the opening like the middlegame*, and have a tendency to move pieces multiple times before their entire army is ready for action. Sure, there are often tactics in the opening, but the main goal is to make sure all the pieces are activated quickly, safely, and efficiently. The computer's number one move does that: 12. ♖ab1+-. All the greatest players and instructors have suggested activating the entire army using principles like, *Move every piece once before you move any piece twice (unless there's a tactic)* so, unless you are a very strong player, *Don't have a better idea!*

Not only that, but when you play the opening like the middlegame it takes *much* more of your time because you are looking for clever play rather than simple development. Notice that White took over a third of his time – more than 8 minutes – to make a clever move. Instead, he could have found a simpler, better one, by following principles that would activate pieces that are not doing anything and putting rooks on open and semi-open files. Many players who play too slowly often do this – they want to make chess that complicated, rich game it is – but too early in the action.

At 24 ply *Houdini* rates 12. ♗e5 as White's fifth best move – it could have been even worse!

12...

♗e8 0:23:31

Good move. Also acceptable is 12... ♖d8. Black sees that trying to isolate White's c-pawns while saving his d7-bishop fails tactically: 12... ♗xe5?? 13.dxe5 ♔g6 (or 13... ♗f5) 14. ♔d4+- as White is simultaneously attacking the queen and the bishop.

13.f4!? 0:06:45

...


White took 10 of his 16 minutes for this move! Maybe he misunderstood Botvinnik's Rule as, “Try to play your first 15 moves before you use all your time.”

If you asked me, “You have 16 minutes remaining. What type of move would justify using 10 minutes of your time?” I would answer, “Either a deep endgame move which is the final, or almost final, critical move of the game,” or “A move which will likely put you decisively ahead or (on the defensive side) a move that, if not found, would cause you to resign.”

White’s move 13 does not come close to satisfying either criterion, so it’s somewhat insane to take this long – you’re just beating yourself. If I were Black, I might think, “Great! At this rate, White is going to either time-forfeit in a few moves or get into momentous time trouble. All I have to do is stick around with some reasonable moves and he is sure to self-destruct.”

13.f4 is not that bad, but it’s certainly not worth all that time. *Sometimes the time situation becomes more important than the board situation* and we’re headed for that possibility very quickly, if we’re not there already.

13...

 h4? 0:20:25

13... ♖d8 was the move. Black is getting into bigger and bigger trouble on the board just as White is getting into bigger and bigger trouble on the clock. Who will win, the irresistible force or the immovable object? This type of tense mystery keeps annotated-game readers glued to their seat and helps make studying chess fun!


Sometimes the time situation becomes more important than the board situation.

14. ♖f3 0:04:49

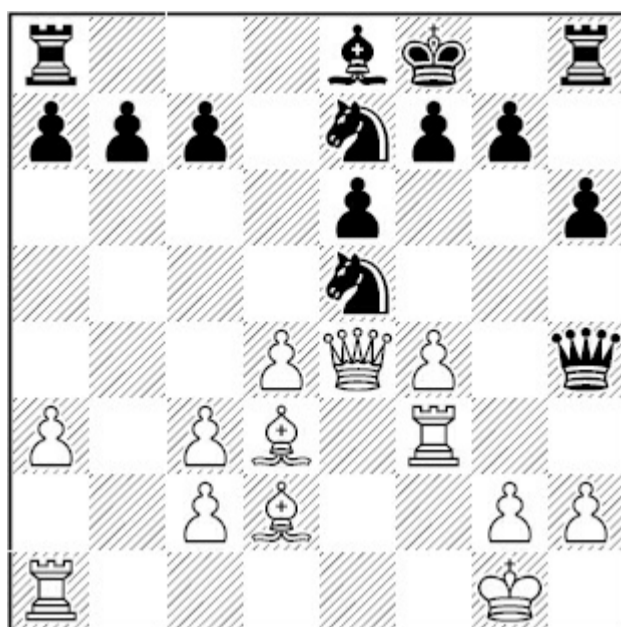
...

Almost two more minutes go by – one-third of his time. White wants to harass the black queen, but 14. ♕e1 ♔f6 15. ♖b1+- was the better way to do it.

14...

 xe5 0:19:00

Question: Which way should White recapture?



White to play after 14... Nxe5

15.fxe5? 0:02:01

...

Over half his time for this move – amazing. I don't know whether to applaud White for trying to get toward a less-complicated queenless middlegame so he can play faster, or to chide him for taking the pressure off Black! Much better was 15. Qxe5 Qc6 16. Rf2 when *Houdini* thinks White should be winning with best play. After 15.fxe5? White's advantage drops in half, and the computer thinks he just has a good position, no longer winning (+0.6).

15...

Qxe4 0:16:33

A fairly easy decision.

16. Qxe4 0:02:05

...

Kudos to White for recapturing in one second, thus gaining four seconds on the clock. He needs every second he can get!

Some players delay making forced moves, trying to figure out what happens next. That's almost always a waste of time. It is worth repeating: *Once you find the best move* (which is certainly the case in a forced recapture like 16. Qxe4), *it is rare that you should do anything except make the move immediately*. Then wait to see what your opponent does, and if you think his move is forced too, then assume that move and think on his time instead of yours.

The bad news for White is that with a queenless middlegame, this game could go on for quite a while (in terms of moves). However, due to his time trouble, he doesn't really want a long game. Unlike some of the other games in the book where a long increment saved the player who was short on time, it is much less likely to do so here.

16...

Rb8 0:15:10

Making the b-pawn safe. The ugly 16...c6 would block in Black's bishop, but the computer likes 16...♙c6 best by a small but clear margin.

17.g4(?) 0:01:26 ...

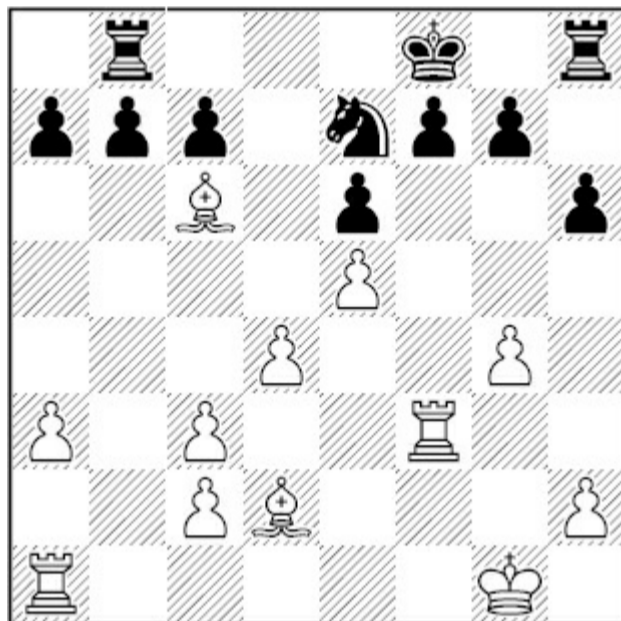
Preventing the knight from going to f5, but giving away most of his advantage. 17.c4 was better, but that's not the main story... Tic-tic-tic...

17... ♙c6 0:12:07

Houdini thinks Black could almost equalize with 17...♙b5. My guess is that it wants to try to blockade the central light squares.

18. ♙xc6± 0:01:27 ...

Best move in four seconds. Good stuff. The mystery heightens: will White make it after all...?



Black to play after 18. ♙xc6

18... ♙xc6 0:10:01

Another strange time-management decision. Black takes more than two of his 12 minutes to make the “normal” recapture. Instead 18...bxc6 would wreck his pawn structure but I guess he had to look at a possible penetration by the rook to b2. The move played allows Black to guard 19. ♖af1 with 19...♙d8, a key difference. Maybe that is what he was discovering. If so, then maybe it was worth it...

19. ♖af1 0:01:29 ♙d8 0:10:00

I guess Black calculated this defense last move; only six seconds for his response.

20.g5 0:01:04

...

Throw the kitchen sink – there’s not much time to think!

20...

♔e8 0:09:03

21.g6?! 0:00:15

...

Down to 15 seconds. It’s time for White to start playing just using his small five-second increment. Because this will be an ongoing issue for the remainder of the game and the reader can see White’s time each move, I’ll try not to mention it, but keep your eye on the clock! It’s tough to be too critical of White’s moves now – it was his earlier dawdling that put him in this difficult position, timewise. Still, it’s worth pointing out that, although **21.c4±** is objectively better, with this aggressive move White is at least attempting to make something happen before his flag falls.

As for White’s move, it looks like he wanted to push the pawn when Black’s king was still on f8 so that the black f-pawn would be pinned. However, when Black moved his king away last move, White could not find a better idea in short order, so he did it anyway! Better was **21.c4±**.

21...

fxg6 0:08:53

22.h4 0:00:11

c6 0:07:46

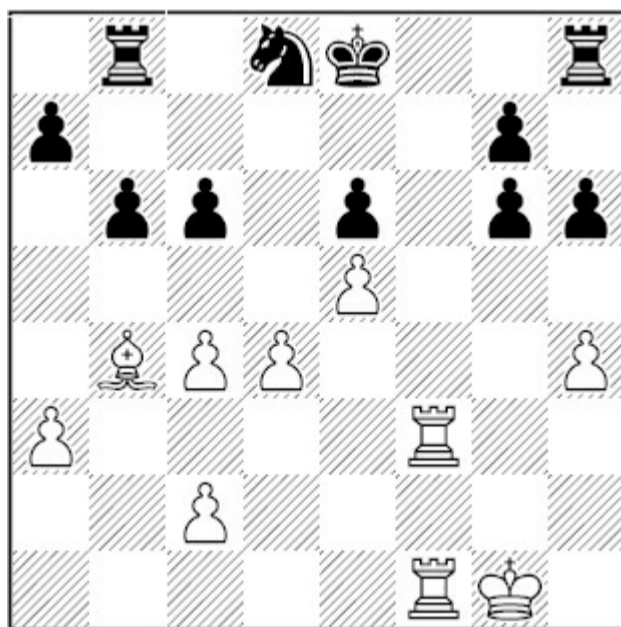
23.c4 0:00:14

b6 0:07:19

24. ♕b4 0:00:14

...

Good scramblin’ stuff. In his dire time trouble White is able to find some reasonable moves, making one wonder if he could not have used some of that same skill earlier to come up with reasonable moves a little faster.



Black to play after 24. ♕b4

24...

♔d7 0:05:49

Houdini finds the clever defense 24... c5! 25.dxc5 bxc5 26.♙xc5 ♖c8= winning back the pawn on c4.

25.♙d6 0:00:16

♖c8? 0:04:23

Despite his time situation and being rated 300 points lower, White is outplaying Black! Instead necessary was 25... ♖b7±.

26.♖f8 0:00:19

...

Better is 26. ♖g3, regaining the pawn with a dominating position that *Houdini* thinks might be just enough to win.

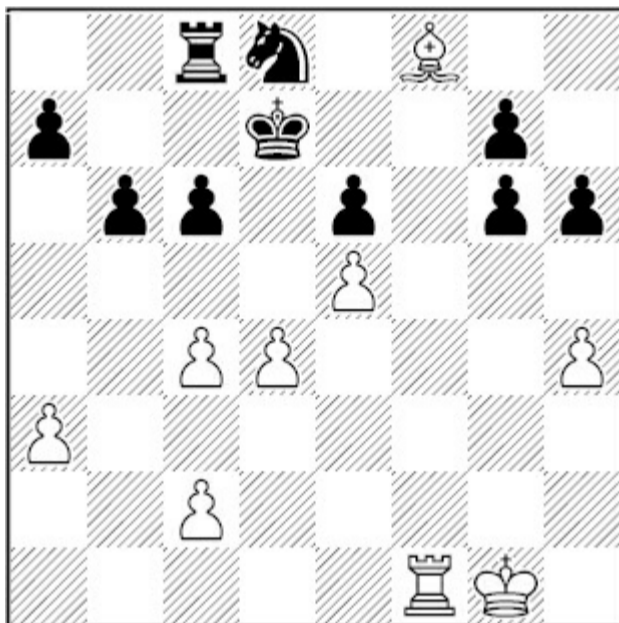
26...

♖xf8 0:02:49

27.♙xf8(?) 0:00:16

...

Tempted by the black pawns, White recaptures inaccurately. Better is 27. ♖xf8 with a bind since the knight needs to protect f7. Nevertheless, White retains a nagging advantage.



Black to play after 27. ♙xf8(?)

27...

♖c7 0:02:22

With the bishop on f8, Black can afford to move the knight with 27... ♞b7! since 28. ♖f7+ ♔e8 29. ♖xb7 ♔xf8 30. ♖xa7 ♖d8 31.c3 c5! equalizes. However, it is asking quite a bit from Black to find that – his own time is also getting fairly low. In his defense, I am not sure I would trust that line as best for Black even if I thought for 20 minutes...

28.♙xg7 0:00:14

h5 0:02:25

29.♔g2(?) 0:00:10

...

29. ♖f6+- winning the g-pawn is the obvious improvement.

29...

♔b7+- 0:02:14

Once again the 29... ♘b7! idea is clearly best and likely saves the game. It's nice to have *Houdini* to figure it out for me. After 29... ♔b7 White is probably winning with accurate play and, for the next two moves, he gets it!

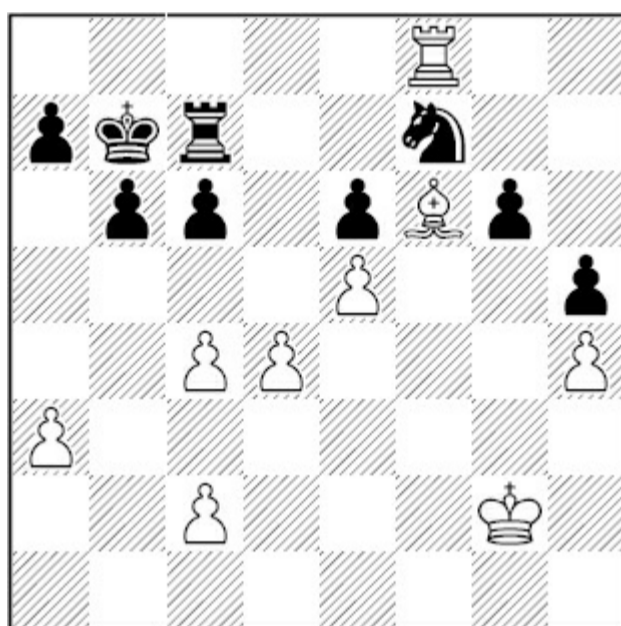
30. ♖f8! 0:00:11

♖c7 0:01:36

31. ♘f6! 0:00:11

♘f7 0:01:12

29 precious seconds for the only move!



White to play after 31... ♘f7

32. ♖g8? 0:00:09

...

Very tempting, but instead activating the king with 32. ♔f3 should be enough to lead to victory.

32...

♘h6! 0:01:01

Keeping a cool head! Black makes the most of White's lapse and activates his knight with a vengeance. White can get the g6-pawn, but the white pawns become vulnerable to the black steed.

33. ♖xg6 0:00:13

♘f5 0:00:53

34. ♔h3? 0:00:12

...

That pawn is already guarded. The computer finds the best chance with 34. ♘g5! ♘xd4 35.c3 ♘c2 36. ♖xe6±.

34...

♘xd4= 0:00:49

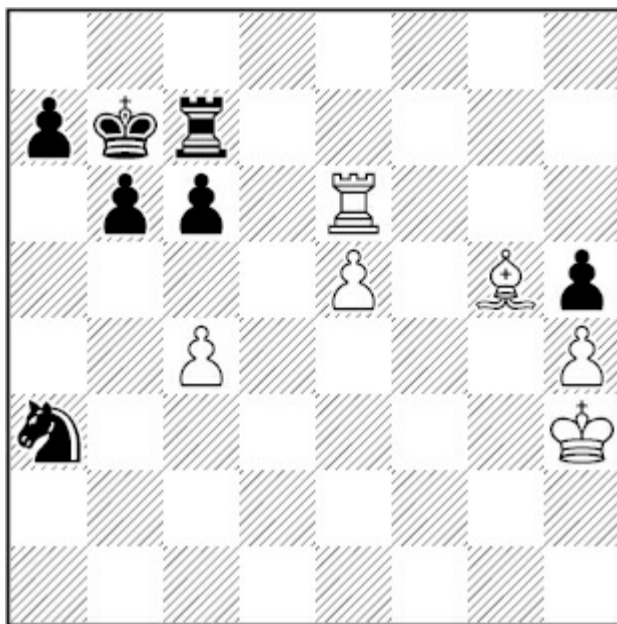
Black is back to equal and currently has four times as much time as White.

35. ♖g5 0:00:10

♗xc2 0:00:33

36. ♖xe6 0:00:12

♗xa3 0:00:23



White to play after 36... ♗xa3

The pawns have fallen like dominos and the landscape has changed. If either side had some time, they should use some to reassess the new situation!

37. ♖h6 0:00:12

...

Best, with roughly equal chances.

37...

♗xc4 0:00:22

38.e6 0:00:12

...

Black has more pawns but White has the most dangerous one! Passed pawns must be pushed – within reason – and only if safely.

38...

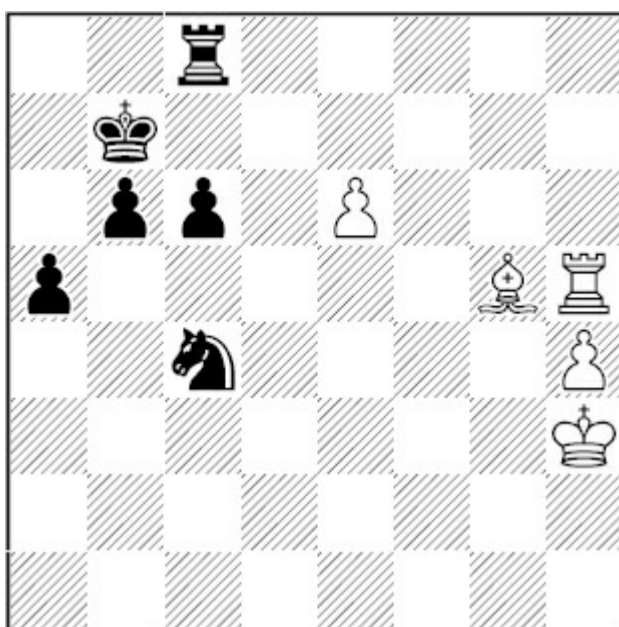
♖c8 0:00:13

39. ♖xh5 0:00:10

a5? 0:00:14

Black needed to play 39...c5=.

Question: Why was 39...c5 much better than 39...a5?



White to play after 39...a5?

39...c5 is better because when White checks, the black king can approach the dangerous pawn instead of being forced further away.

40.e7? 0:00:09

...

The winning idea was 40. ♖h7+ ♔a6 41. ♖d7!. Not an easy move to find in time trouble for anyone. Other moves may win also, but 41. ♖d7! is a killer, e.g. 41... ♖e8 42.e7 ♗e5 43. ♖d8+–.

40...

a4= 0:00:15

Back to equal and the beat goes on. Watching these time scrambles is even more fun for live spectators.

41. ♖h7 0:00:07

♔a6? 0:00:17

Wrong way, Harrigan. 41... ♖e8 was the only move to save the game.

42. ♖f7 0:00:08

...

Good enough. 42.h5+– and 42. ♗f6+– both also win.

42...

♗d6 0:00:10

43. ♖f8! 0:00:12

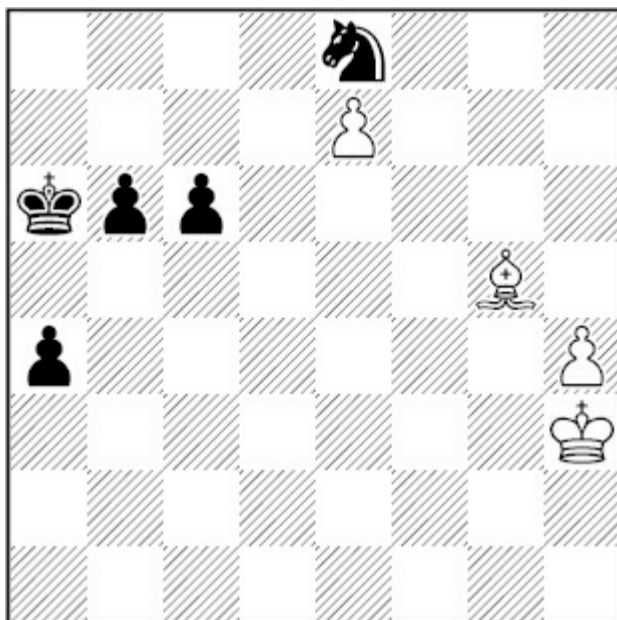
♖e8 0:00:14

If 43... ♗e8 44.h5 a3 45. ♗f4. Getting to the long diagonal is the only idea White needs to find, e.g. 45...a2 46. ♗e5 c5 47.h6 ♖c6 48. ♖xe8 ♖xh6+ 49. ♔g4 ♖e6 50. ♖a8+ ♔b7 51.e8 ♔+–. You don't need to find entire lines like this to play endgames well – there were several other sequences that won and visualizing every move at this point is often not necessary. At the least, you need to calculate the start of the key lines carefully and avoid the big mistake. Here the time issue precludes

that caution and gives the defender hope.

44. ♖xe8 0:00:09

♗xe8 0:00:17

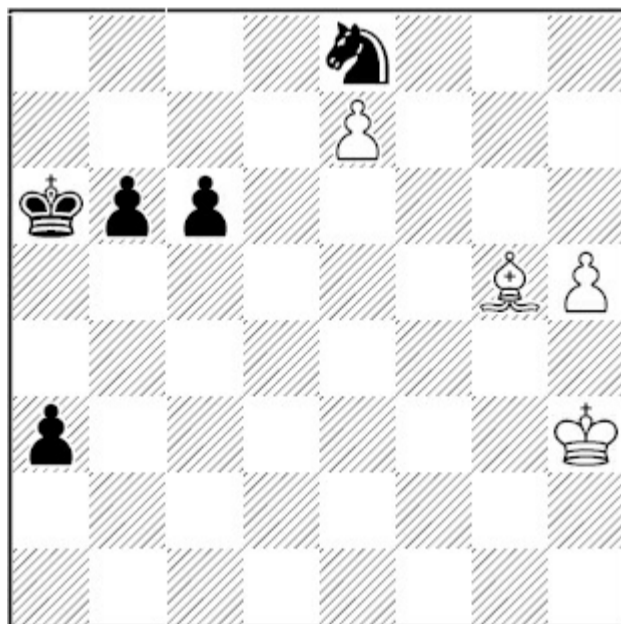


White to play after 44... ♗xe8

This is an easy win. What could possibly go wrong?

45. h5 0:00:12

a3 0:00:12



White to play after 45... a3

46. h6?? 0:00:09

Oops! White forgot that his bishop can stop Black's pawn but Black's knight can't stop both of White's. Therefore, since f6 is currently unavailable, White only needs to spend one tempo moving his bishop to a square that can safely get to the diagonal a1-h8 next move: 46. ♗c1, 46. ♗f4, 46. ♗e3,

and 46. ♖d2 would each win easily, e.g. 46. ♖c1 a2 47. ♖b2 b5 48.h6+–.

46...

a2 0:00:15

47.h7 0:00:06

a1 ♚ 0:00:18

White forfeits on time 0-1

In the end, although White's clock fell, it was the mistakes caused by his fast moves that caused his demise, and not taking time and still finding bad moves in a winning position. I guess that is very small consolation.

When I watch games like this, I often think, "I wonder how the lower-rated player is going to find a way to lose," and am often amazed how ingeniously they do it. But in watching this game live on the Internet, I was quite impressed with the way the lower-rated player was able to compete after he got so far behind on time – and *then* I was amazed at how ingeniously he lost it!

GAME 16: WHITE 1668 – BLACK 1946

Texas 2012

75 minutes with a 5-second time delay

Pirc Defense, Classical Variation

1.e4

d6

2.d4

♗f6

3. ♖c3

g6

4. ♖f3

...

There are many lines against the Pirc. Among others, 4. ♖f3 is the Classical, 4.f4 is the Austrian Attack, and 4.f3 with the intention of 5. ♖e3 and 6. ♚d2 is the modern, aggressive "150 Attack."

4...

♖g7

5.h3

...

This is one of the few openings where playing h2-h3 to prevent a pin with ... ♖g4 has the grandmasters' blessing (the main line of the Closed Ruy López with 9.h3 comes to mind), and h2-h3 can even be played on the fourth move. One reason it makes sense in the Classical Pirc is not just the importance of the knight's guarding d4 due to Black's fianchettoed bishop, but also that Black's light-squared bishop has no other good moves on the c8-h3 diagonal. If it did, then wasting a tempo and just allowing the bishop to go to another perfectly good square would seldom make sense. For more on this issue, see "A Guide to P-R3" at <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman48.pdf>.

The main alternative is 5. ♖e2.

5...

O-O

6. ♖e3

...

In *The Pirc in Black and White*, author James Vigus identifies this line as, “The Accelerated Classical.”

6...

c6

In the games in the *Pirc* book when Black played 6...c6 or 6...a6 (the most common moves), White almost inevitably plays 7.a4 to stop ...b7-b5. When I questioned White after the game, he was completely unaware of this idea, even though it stops the move that ...c7-c6 and ...a7-a6 threaten and protect. Moreover, White has to be mindful of the maneuver ...b7-b5-b4 to undermine protection of e4.

Pawn moves on the flank to gain space – or to prevent the opponent from doing so – are much lower on amateurs’ radars than central moves to gain space, or even flank-pawn moves to initiate an attack.

Like tactics, positional ideas are known in increasing sophistication as players get stronger. As a master, I know some ideas that, when shown, cause experts to look at me quizzically. But then there are many ideas that higher-rated players take for granted which are not automatically known to me, either. It’s not so much specific knowledge as it is general knowledge, such as, “Whenever you play an opening where ...a7-a6 or ...c7-c6 can threaten a fruitful ...b7-b5, be aware of this move and likely consider containing it with a prophylactic a2-a4.”

It’s quite acceptable not to be aware of a good positional idea – the first time you encounter it. But once it’s brought to your attention by a strong player – or by any other means – you don’t want to miss the same idea continuously. For more on this important learning concept, check out “The Improvement Feedback Loop” at <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman98.pdf>.

Having eschewed a2-a4 and allowing a possible ...b7-b5, the game now takes an independent turn from the ones in the *Pirc* book.

7. ♗d2

♗a5

Black does initiate action on the queenside but it’s satisfying that *Houdini* prefers 7...b5 just a bit more.

8. ♖e2

...

Overprotecting e4 with 8. ♖d3 is probably more accurate. There are not a huge number of standard opening variations where White develops both bishops to the same rank, but the *Pirc* (and its cousin, the King’s Indian) has several of them, including here if White had played 8. ♖d3.

8...

♗bd7

Black is developing a bit cautiously, perhaps due to his feeling that White does not understand the opening and is waiting for some inaccuracies. Still, 8...b5 is likely best. Ironically, as Black plays slow, he justifies White's play rather than refuting it.

9.O-O ...

The right decision for the king. After allowing Black to expand on the queen-side, going kingside is definitely preferred.

9... ♖ d8

GM Soltis wrote that the opening principle with the fewest exceptions is, “Develop your rook to the same file where the opponent has developed his queen.” If that's so here, then Houdini's suggestion of 9...b5 (again) will just have to wait a move.

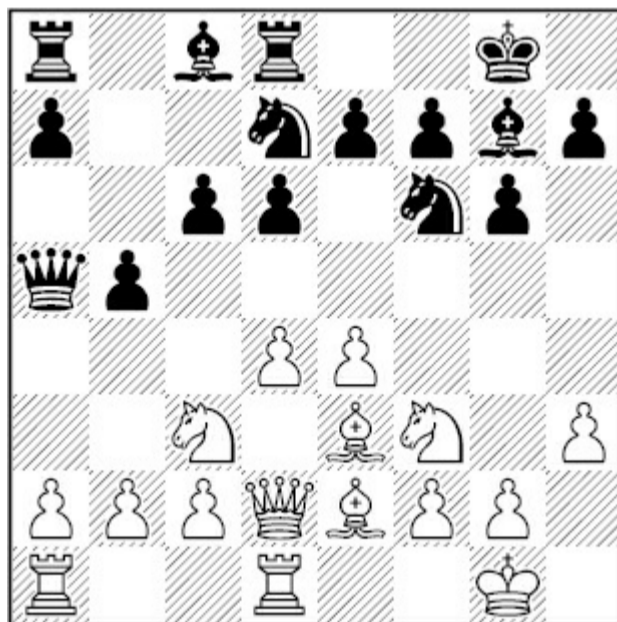
10. ♖fd1± ...

Our old buddy 10.a4 pops to the top of the list again. And when White doesn't play it...

Develop your rook to the same file where the opponent has developed his queen.

10... b5

This is still best (surprise!).



White to play after 10...b5

11.e5(?) ...

White feels the need to react, but this move makes 9... ♖ d8 look prescient. Instead the steady

11.a3 or the computer-like 11.b4 were best. The latter takes some explanation: 11.b4 ♔xb4 12.e5 (now!) 12... ♖e8 13. ♗g5! with complex play favoring White. That's a line a grandmaster would play only with computer preparation!

11... **b4!**

This counterattack is the right reaction, guaranteeing at least equality. The key: if a desperado capturing sequence breaks out, the pawn capturing on c3 will be threatening White's queen.

12.exf6 ...

There is nothing better.

12... **bxc3**

Forced, to regain the piece.

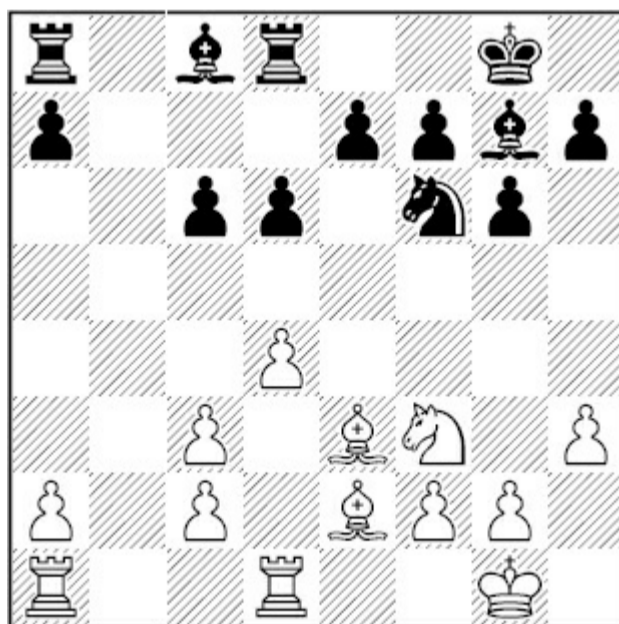
13. ♔xc3 ...

White has a choice: he can go for this queen exchange or keep things richer with 13.bxc3. Both are roughly equal, so it depends on your style. Possibly White decided to get the queens off the board against a higher-rated player. Simplifying against higher-rated players sometimes works, but it often fails since there is no guarantee that having fewer pieces on the board will make the position that much easier to calculate. Even many king-and-pawn endgames are easy to misplay.

13... ♔xc3

14.bxc3 ♖xf6

The computer likes 14... ♖xf6 a mite better.



White to play after 14... ♖xf6

The smoke has cleared and it's time to take stock. White has a small lead in development but his c-pawns might become weak if not tended to properly. White can get to the open b-file first but Black should be able to prevent penetration and neutralize that threat. *Houdini's* bottom line: +0.00.

15.c4(?) ...

This turns out to be the most important decision of the game, the one that lays the foundation for White's later woes. Playing 15. ♖ab1 would satisfy the needs of the position: the rook would control the open file, it would escape the watchful diagonal of the bishop on g7, and d4 would stay supported. Perhaps White wished to force up the c-pawn to undouble, but, if so, that amounted to a miscalculation.

Nevertheless, I can't give 15.c4 a full question mark because it doesn't really jeopardize the equal position – it just makes it much more difficult to figure out how to hold it, and that's often just as bad.

15... ♗e4

A good move, threatening to win the bishop pair with 16... ♗c3 while simultaneously unleashing the g7-bishop.

16. ♕f1 ...

White goes the wrong way. The centralizing 16. ♕d3 is about equal after 16... f5 17. ♕xe4 fxe4 18. ♗d2 ♕a6 19. ♖ab1, when his active pieces almost make up for Black's bishop pair.

16... c5!

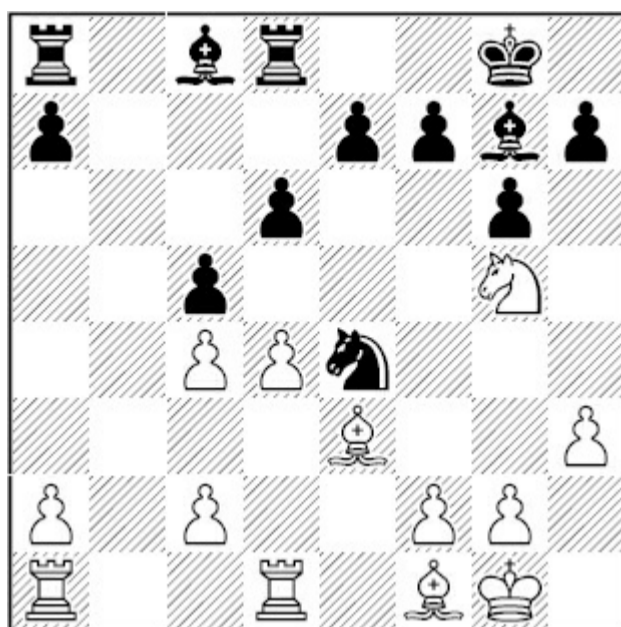
Black is making the most of his opportunity. The pressure on d4, which started with 15.c4, now intensifies, and the pin on the d-pawn is a little awkward.

17. ♗g5? ...

Inexperience often becomes apparent when straight calculation is required. It's fairly easy to keep a decent game when all you have to do is follow general principles, but the stronger players show their stripes when they have to roll up their sleeves and think carefully.

White's best was 17.a4⁺. There's that move again. Instead, 17. ♗g5 allows Black a nice little tactic.

Black to play and win a pawn



Black to play after 17. ♘g5?

17... cxd4!-+

That's it! "No credit for other moves."

18. ♘xe4 ...

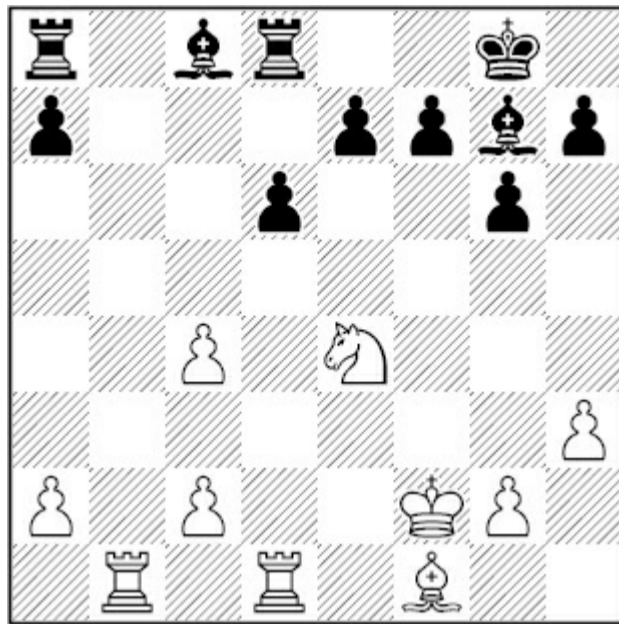
Obviously not 18. ♙xd4?? ♘xg5, winning a piece as the knight on g5 loses its guard.

18... dxe3

The discovery on the rook gives White no time to regain the pawn. It turns out 15.c4 sowed the seeds, but 17. ♘g5? was the culprit.

19. ♖ab1 exf2+

20. ♔xf2 ...



Black to play after 20. ♔xf2

The second smoke has cleared and White's game is a mess:

- He is down a pawn;
- All his queenside pawns are isolated;
- The doubled, isolated pawns are on a semi-open file;
- Black has the bishop pair.

That's plenty to declare a theoretically winning position for Black.

20... ♔a6

More accurate is 20... ♔d7 with the flexibility to go to either c6 or a4, depending on how White reacts. If then 21. ♖b7? ♔c6 22. ♖xe7 ♔f8 and the knight is lost.

21.c5! ...

Makes sense. White wants to rid himself of both a weak pawn and Black's bishop pair.

21... ♔xf1

22. ♔xf1 d5

Black does not wish to dissolve White's doubled pawns. *Houdini* says this can be done even more accurately with 22...f5.

Now White needs to ask, "Where is my knight going?" Unlike queens, rooks, and bishops – which can reach distant squares on their line of motion in a single move – knights are path pieces, so if a good destination can be found, it needs to start on its way. No sense making the first safe knight move

you see and later asking, “Now where should I go from here?” That’s just too late – the time is now.

23. ♖g5(?) ...

Wrong path! A better idea was 23. ♖f2 with the flexibility to go to d3 or possibly just stay on f2 and hold e4. The computer can look at millions of lines in a few seconds and see that 23. ♖f2 leads to better positions than 23. ♖g5. It helps to have the right tools!

23... h6

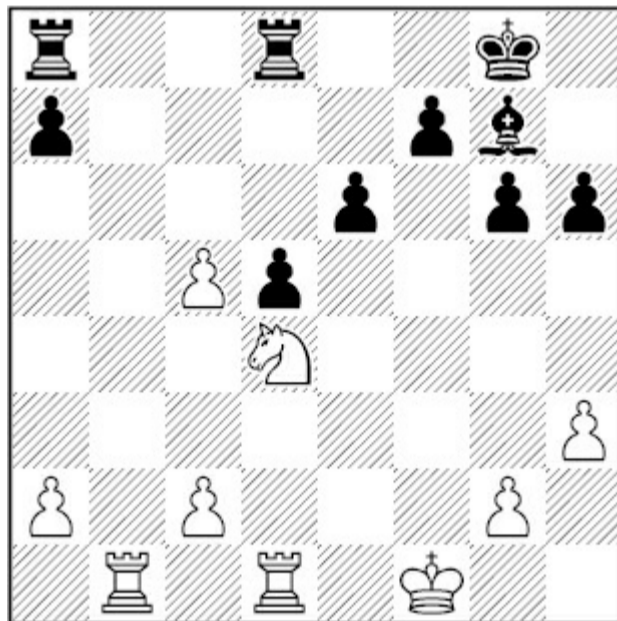
Unless Black is planning to move the f-pawn and give the knight access to e6, the knight is poorly placed on g5. While there is nothing wrong with 23...h6, it’s not automatic like it might be to attack a potential two-way bishop in the opening. Since the move is fairly neutral from Black’s side, the real question for Black is where he would rather have the knight, and probably g5 is just as good or better than f3. Therefore, there’s no reason to hurry with ...h7-h6. *Houdini* prefers 23... ♜ac8 by almost a quarter-pawn.

24. ♖f3 e6

Again the computer thinks 24... ♜ac8 was the most accurate move, expecting 25. ♜b7 e6 26.c4 d4 27. ♜xa7 ♜xc5—+ Instead 24...e6 allows White time to maneuver the knight to d3 to guard c5.

25. ♖d4 ...

The suggestion is 25. ♖e1 ♜ac8 26. ♖d3 when Black still has a big advantage.



Black to play after 25. ♖d4

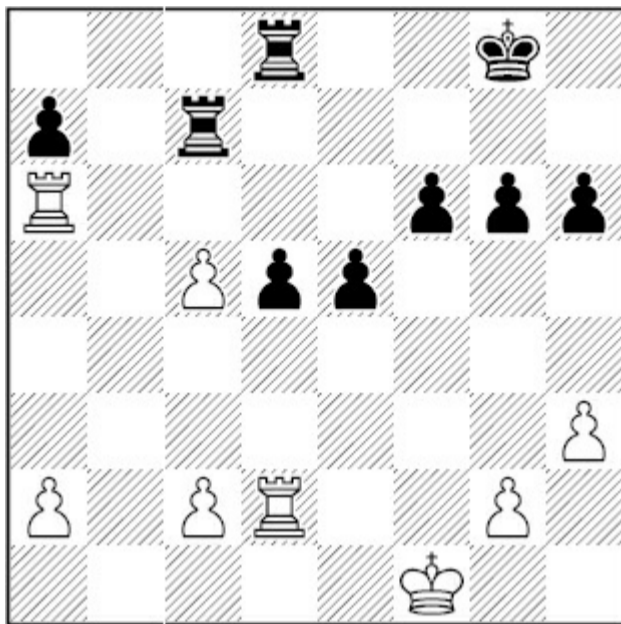
25... ♜xd4(?)

An interesting decision. Perhaps Black felt the action was going to be on his queenside and the

30. ♖a6

...

White immediately tries to tie Black down guarding sixth-rank pawns. There is also the strong possibility of ♖d6 in some lines. Still, the top three moves (all close) were 30.c3, 30.♔e2, and 30.♖d3.



Black to play after 30. ♖a6

30...

♔g7?

It's a natural move to bring the king up, but 30...♔f7 pretty much dominates 30...♔g7 if that's the idea. However, even 30...♔f7 throws away about half of Black's advantage after 31.g4±. The only way to play for a win was 30... ♖xc5. Then whether White chooses 31. ♖xa7 d4 or 31. ♖xf6 ♖f8! trading rooks, Black has good winning chances. I, too, might have played this incorrectly— there are some tricky nuances in the line I would have mis-evaluated, even if I had analyzed it correctly. Like most other categories of positions, rook-and-pawn endgames have a collection of principles to help guide you, but your analysis and evaluation skills are still paramount.

31. ♖d6!

...

Seizing the opportunity to straighten out his pawns and minimize his deficit.

31...

♖xd6

This may look forced, but Black had the choice to play 31... ♖dc8 32. ♖6xd5 ♖xc5 33. ♖d7+ ♔f8 34. ♖xa7 ♖8c7, which the computer evaluates as slightly better than the game continuation for Black, but in both cases his lead is rather small (±).

32.cxd6

♖d7

33. ♖xd5

♔f7

Now Black wishes he had played this on move 30 (assuming he did not play the correct 30... ♖xc5) – he would be ahead an entire tempo! Nevertheless, Black’s king is going to arrive on the scene one tempo before White can stabilize his connected passed pawns with c4-c5, e.g. 34.c4 ♔e6 when 35.c5?? is not possible due to 35... ♔xd5. So something has to give – and White needs to plan for how to meet it, now!

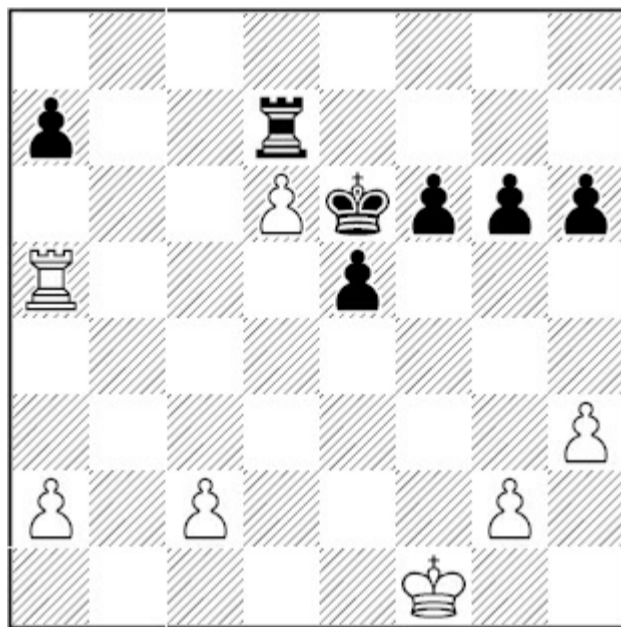
34. ♖a5! ...

White makes the right decision to counterattack the a-pawn, but there are still some important nuances on how best to handle this.

34... ♔e6

A critical position. White has gotten back into the game but his hold is tenuous due to Black’s far more active king.

Question: How should White proceed to maximize his drawing chances?



White to play after 34... ♔e6

35. ♖a6(?) ...

A very tempting decision – I might have played this too, especially if I was running short on time – but it’s not the right solution. It’s not trivial to see that this line will fail due to the poor placement of the white monarch. Instead, White had to activate his king with 35. ♔e2!. If Black decides to win the pawn (as most humans would), then the game might proceed 35... ♔xd6 36. ♖a6+ ♔e7 and now White has several moves which give him good drawing chances: 37.g4, 37.a4, 37.c4. The point is that his active rook and king provide good compensation for his pawn minus. This was one of those positions where the guideline, “*In a rook-and-pawn endgame it is often better to play actively and be down a pawn than to play passively to stay even in material,*” is fully applicable.

After 35. ♖a6, White will be fighting an uphill battle. It still may be possible to draw, but there’s

not going to be anything clear or easy about it.

In a rook-and-pawn endgame it is often better to play actively and be down a pawn than to play passively to stay even in material.

35...

 **xd6!**

A good decision. The weakness of the c-pawn – White's king is one square too far away – makes the difference. After that, Black's 4-2 majority will swamp White's passed a-pawn.




36.  **xa7**

 **c6**

Showing that his previous move had this correct plan in mind.


37.a4

...

This is a tough decision and I believe White was running a little low on time at this point. I might have chosen to activate my king with 37.  e2  xc2+ 38.  f3, but *Houdini* says White's move is actually better. The bad news is that neither choice promises to save the game.

37...

h5(?)


A minor inaccuracy which gives White a chance to put up resistance. More accurate was to get the king into position to help the majority with 37...  f5.

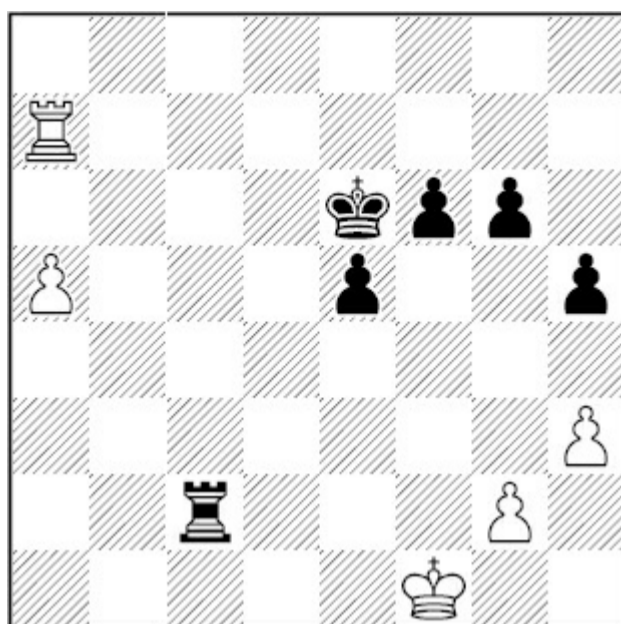
38.a5

...

White can try 38.g4, but then Black can play 38...hxg4 39.hxg4 f5 or, even more accurately, 38...f5 immediately.

38...

 **xc2 0:08:09**



White to play after 38... Rxc2

It's always difficult to decide how far to push the a-pawn in positions like this. Sometimes the a6 square is optimal (leaving a7 for a possible king residence), and sometimes it's a7 (to tie the opposing king down to shelter from winning checks). Here the white king does not need shelter on a7; that would be more likely in positions where the a-pawn is the extra pawn and White, not Black, is ahead. The white king is cut off (one of his big problems, as explained on White's move 35) and the extra black pawns need to be defended. However, it is possible that neither of these pawn placements is correct...

39.a6(?) ...

Houdini thinks White should make a run for it now while his a-pawn is not yet attacked with 39. Rg7! Ra2 40. Rxc6 Kf5 41. Rh6 Kg5 42. Rh8 Rxa5 with good chances of saving the game after 43.g3. Instead, White heads toward an endgame where the advancing black pawns will inevitably tell.

39... Ra2

It seems logical to play 39... Kf5 first to prevent the line in the previous note, but interestingly *Houdini* thinks this is not any better, as after 40. Rf7 Ra2 41.a7 Black is no better off than in the game.

40. Ra8(?) ...

Now 40. Rg7 is still best, but after 40... Ra6 41. Rxc6 Kf5 Black is a little better than in the previous line. Still, something like this had to be tried.

40... Kf5

By guarding the g-pawn, Black now does eliminate those active defenses.

41.a7

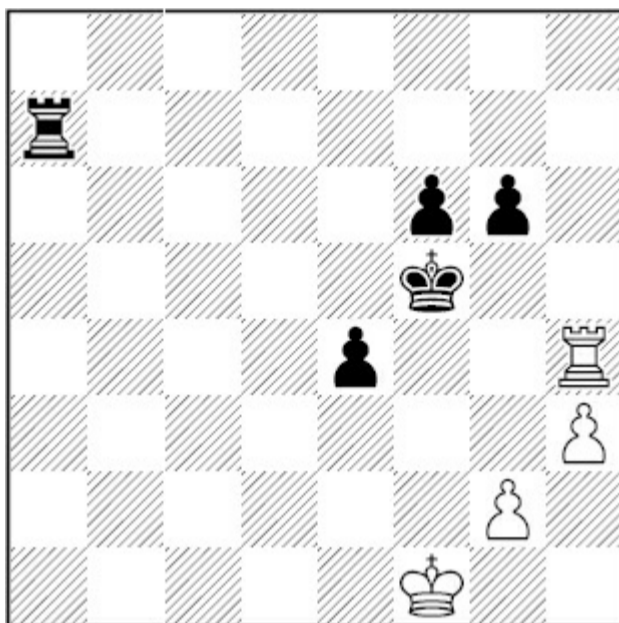
h4

Making the white g-pawn backward. That wasn't strictly necessary and *Houdini* is already thinking win after 41...g5, e.g. 42. ♖h8 (White can't sit passively by and see the central pawns advance) 42... ♜xa7 43. ♜xh5 e4.

42. ♔g1(?)

...

The final chance for active resistance was 42. ♖h8 ♜xa7 43. ♜xh4, but after 43...e4:



White to play after 43...e4 (analysis)

Black's more active king and protected passed pawn would make the win more likely. It's quite well known that a 3-2 pawn advantage on the same side is a theoretical draw in rook-and-pawn endgames where there are no passed pawns, e.g. f- through h-pawns vs. g- and h-pawns. But in this line Black has e- through g-pawns vs. g- and h-pawns, and that is a much bigger advantage due to the strong e-pawn and the more active black king. Try playing this out for both sides against a friend (or a computer, if friends are busy) to see why White's defense is so difficult. One possible continuation is 44. ♖h8 ♔f4 45. ♜b8 ♜a3 46. ♜b2 f5 47. ♔f2 g5 48. ♜c2 e3+ 49. ♔e2 ♔g3! and Black is making progress.

After the passive 42. ♔g1, it's all over as the pawns roll.

42...

g5!

Eliminating those "active rook" continuations that make the win more difficult.

43. ♔f1

e4

44. ♔e1

♔f4

45. ♜f8

♜xa7

46. ♜xf6+

♔e3

White was in time trouble and had to stop recording (the U.S. Chess Federation rule is that both sides may stop recording if either side has less than five minutes remaining), but **Black won** easily. For example, 47. ♔d1 ♖a1+ 48. ♔c2 ♖a2+ 49. ♔b3 ♖xg2 is a trivial win.

0-1

Chapter 4:

A Variety of Instructive Play

A VARIETY OF INSTRUCTIVE PLAY

There are so many instructive areas of chess that it is difficult to put them all into a few categories. Therefore, this chapter contains games that did not as easily fit into one of the other chapters. While one of the players may have played too fast or slow, or the game proceeded to the endgame, that may not be the most instructive aspect of the play.

Among these themes is *see-saw play*, where both amateurs make a series of mistakes that throw the advantage back and forth. This bouncing of the advantage happens for a variety of reasons, such as both sides missing the same tactical pattern, making moves hastily, or neither knowing how to play once they assume command. This latter affliction of *bad technique* is often due to the introduction of needless complications, not paying sufficient attention to what the opponent is doing, not taking advantage of key trading opportunities, or getting into unnecessary time trouble.

One of the most common problems amateur players have is that they don't pursue the goal of *using all their pieces all the time*, and its accompanying opening principle, *Move every piece once before you move any piece twice, unless there's a tactic*. Sometimes if both players stumble about equally slowly (as often happens in games between players of the same level) the result is an apparently even game. But if the players are at different levels with regards to development, or one of them happens to get all his pieces into play efficiently for whatever reason, we often see a game where it is possible to win during the opening or early middle-game without a big tactical error from the loser.

Many players feel they often lose games because "I didn't know what to do" and therefore they did not pursue the correct strategy. After investigating these cries, I have often found that the problem could be best attributed to other causes, such as poor analysis or fast play. Nevertheless, bad strategy can certainly be the cause of problems. For example, Game 21 features an opening where White signals that he will castle queenside and throw his kingside pawns at Black. Black's answer is to quickly castle kingside and hunker down in the teeth of the avalanche! Needless to say, this was close to the worst strategy Black could have adopted. Was that enough to cause Black to lose? Stay tuned...

GAME 17: WHITE 1600 – BLACK 1500

Internet Chess Club 2011


Slow time control

Queen's Gambit Declined

This game is a wonderful example of what can happen when you don't follow one of the key principles of what do when winning easily: Keep it simple! This is a close cousin to the famous KISS

principle, “Keep it simple, stupid,” except that I never imply anyone is stupid – certainly not my readers wise enough to learn from this book!

1.  f3 ...

With this flexible move order, multiple transpositions are possible and Black has many acceptable replies: 1...d5, 1...  f6 1...e6, 1...d6, 1...c6, 1...g6, 1...c5, 1...f5 – and more!

1...  f6

2.c4 ...


English Opening, maybe?

2... e6




3.d4 ...

How about some variation of the Queen’s Pawn Game?



3... d5

Black settles for a Queen’s Gambit Declined – so far. He could also consider 3...b6 (Queen’s Indian), 3... b4+ (Bogo-Indian), or even 3...c5 (Modern Benoni). Transpositions are tough on amateurs, but even master-level players can sometimes be tricked into playing an opening for which they are not prepared.

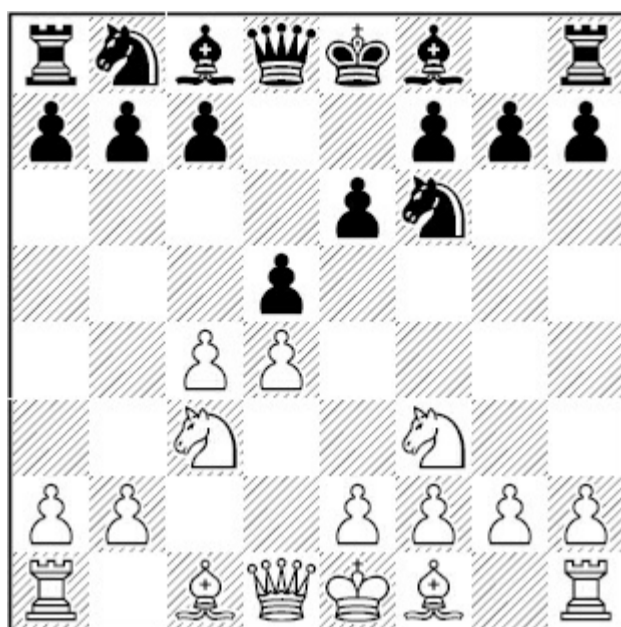
4.  c3 ...

White can also play 4.cxd5 or 4. g5. Now Black’s main alternatives are 4... e7 (Queen’s Gambit Declined), 4...c5 (Tarrasch), 4... b4 (Ragozin), 4...c6 (Semi-Slav), or 4...dxc4 (Queen’s Gambit Accepted).

4...  d6

However, 4... d6 is a rare bird. Usually the bishop does not go to d6 unless Black has played ...c7-c6 first and the pin  g5 is not a possibility. Here neither circumstance is true, so you won’t find this position in master play. Just for fun, I let *Houdini* (without its opening book) decide how reasonable it is.

Question: What did Houdini think was Black’s best fourth move?



Black to play after 4. ♘c3

At 22 ply 4...♙d6 was not in the top seven, but there was about a tenth of a pawn's difference between #1 and #7. The highest-rated move was, believe it or not, the “beginner’s move” 4...h6(!) closely followed by the Queen’s Gambit Accepted via 4...dxc4. So, next time someone suggests ...h7-h6 in a similar position, be careful about lecturing them on how terrible it is.

At 23 ply *Houdini* changed its mind and moved 4...h6 back to fifth, though still only 0.05 pawns behind. That’s a little less fun to report, but it shows that at these tiny differences it’s not that critical which move you pick, so long as you choose one that continues your development. At 23 ply 4...♙b4, the recently popular Ragozin System, became the new leader at +0.16, which means White is evaluated as ahead by about one-sixth of a pawn.

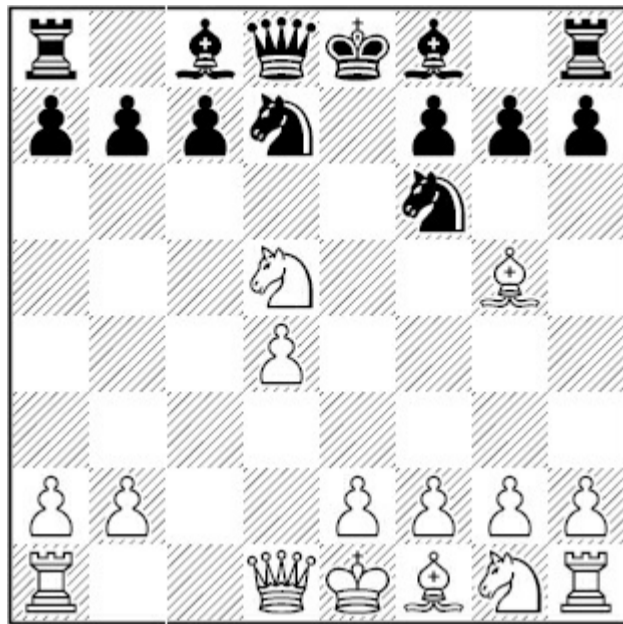
5. ♙g5 ...

Houdini likes this best. The tempting 5.c5 does not really win a tempo (if you wish to read more about threats and tempos, see “The Three Reasonable Types of Threats” at <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman86.pdf>), since it takes one move to attack the bishop and one to defend it, and the pawn is not necessarily better placed on c5. After 5.c5?! ♙e7 White’s advantage is minimal.

5... ♘bd7!?

There are still no transpositions to major lines, due to the strange placement of Black’s king bishop. But can White take advantage of it?

It looks as though Black’s queen’s pawn is hanging since one of its two defenders is pinned. That is the basis for one of the most famous opening traps, from the Cambridge Springs Defense: 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3. ♘c3 ♘f6 4. ♙g5 ♘bd7 5.cxd5 exd5 6. ♘xd5??:



Black to play and win after 6. ♘xd5?? (analysis)

6... ♘xd5! (the knight is pinned only relatively to the queen, not absolutely to the king) 7. ♙xd8 ♙b4+ 8. ♚d2 ♙xd8 and Black will win back the queen and remain ahead a piece for a pawn.

However, in the current game things are a little different. How does that affect White's ability to win the d-pawn? Sometimes these questions, even if you know all the background, are not that easily answered, which is why strong players usually take time even in familiar-looking positions.

Amazingly, at 22 ply *Houdini* thinks that 5... ♘bd7, allowing the capture on d5, is as good as any other move! Why is it better now that we have the moves 5. ♙g5 ♘bd7 played first? That, I don't know; I could guess, but I might be wrong. Let's call it beyond the scope of this book...

6.cxd5 ...

And, amazingly, the computer thinks this is not White's best move, although it's not bad. At 21 ply it is close, but the tempting (and often wrong) 6.c5 is as good as any.

6... ♘b6?

Thinking the pawn is clearly lost, Black panics a bit and complicates with a poor choice. Best is to recapture with 6...exd5, and if White plays 7. ♘xd5 then 7...h6! when Black has some play for his pawn, e.g. 8. ♙xf6 ♘xf6 9. ♘c3 O-O±.

7.e4! ...

Strongest. White just holds the pawn and increases his control of the center. *Houdini* suggests White is winning. Sometimes games are won just that quickly, which is one reason this game is so heavily annotated throughout the opening.

7... ♙b4

Avoiding the fork 8.e5, but at the cost of more time. Relatively best was 7...h6 8.♙b5+ when Black has to settle for 8...♔f8 and White is clearly on top.

8.♙b3 ...

Good, but more to the point is trading off his doubled pawn with 8.dxe6 ♗xe6. You hate to help the opponent to develop, but 9.d5+– hitting the newly developed bishop is the justification. The computer also suggests 8.♗h4, threatening 9.e5, since 8.e5 immediately is met by 8...h6.

8... ♗xc3+

Black may not wish to part with the bishop pair, but he desperately needs tempos, so he's forced to take the knight. 8...♗e7 gives White time for 9.♗b5+, when Black has to reply 9...♔f8, as 9...♗d7? allows 10.dxe6! – a standard theme – and Black's position starts to get really ugly.

9.bxc3! ...

No respite. The insipid 9.♙xc3? allows salvation through the “standard” pin-breaker 9...♗xe4! =.

9... ♙d6??

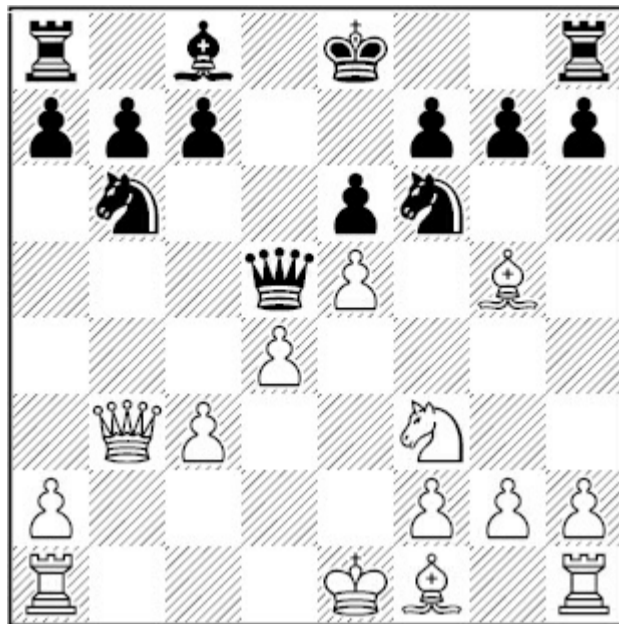
Ugh – allowing the same fork he prevented on move 7. This looks like a bad amateur game – what's so worthy about it besides White's opportunities in this interesting opening? The answer is that, now that White is winning, he fails to put the victory away as he should – and that's an understatement. So for all those readers who say, “I was killing him and then I did XXX and he got back in the game” – this one's for you.

10.e5 ...

Black's game goes from lost to resignable. But he fights on, and with a little help from his “friend” ...

10... ♙xd5

White wishes to trade queens but, more importantly, he wants to win a piece. So he should reject 11.♙xd5??, which allows the saving 11...♗fxd5, and just take the booty with the obvious 11.exf6. When you're way ahead, keep it simple!



White to play after 10... ♖xd5

11.c4??

...

What's this? Amateurs often read advanced books and articles describing grandmaster games and think, "I am going to play cleverly like they do – that's the fun and challenge of chess!" But even the cleverest grandmasters like Tal or Shirov don't outsmart themselves when they have easy wins – their opponents just resign. Instead, these grandmasters use their cleverness to find the winning ideas when playing good positions that call for genius to show why those positions are not just good – they're winning. Or, these maestros use their genius to show how challenging and unexpected problems can be placed upon their opponents in seemingly balanced positions.

The position in the game isn't anything like those situations. White should just grab his material with 11.exf6 and play straightforwardly with an easy win. Instead he tries for truth, beauty, and ... unnecessary silliness.

11...

♗a5+??

Ouch again! All Black has to do is to find a tempo to save his knight, and that is easily found with his other safe check, 11... ♖e4+. Then White cannot interpose in a way that attacks the queen and still wins the knight. White would still be winning after 12. ♕e3 ♖g8, but not nearly so easily as if he were ahead a full piece. So White dodges a big bullet. Does he learn his lesson?

12. ♕d2

...

The attack on the queen will still win the knight. Lucky!

12...

♗a4

Unfortunately for Black, he doesn't just fail to save his knight, he also has to trade queens since 12... ♗a6 13.c5 with a discovered attack on the queen is even worse.

13. ♖xa4+

♘xa4

14. exf6

...

Having learned his lesson, it should now be easy for White, right?

14...

gxf6

15. c5?!

...

When I asked White after the game why he played this strange move, he answered that he wanted to take the knight's flight square away in order to trap the knight. There are two problems with that idea:

- If the opponent is alert, it won't work, so it amounts to a bit of a cheap trap, but worse –
- White has no need to play fancy and try to win the knight. If it's a trivial win of material and there for the taking, then of course White should win it. But here there's no forced win of the knight, so a plan to trap it is not necessary. The analogous situation in soccer (for non-Americans, football), would be his team is ahead 10-0, so he doesn't need to pull his goalie or rush his defenseman to pad the lead. He's plenty far enough ahead already.

The computer's number-one move is the simple 15. ♖b1, activating a piece that is currently inactive. That's the kind of solid move that will win the game. It doesn't need to be won twice, and there's no need to try to trick Black. In fact, quite the opposite: trying to get tricky when winning can only hurt the one who is winning easily. Black has nothing to lose.

15...

c6

Stopping 16. ♗b5+, which would not win the knight but would force the trade of bishops. It's even more accurate for Black to play 15... ♗d7, but he is losing in either case.

16. ♖b1

b6

17. ♖b4

...

White is still bent on going after the knight. That's not the way I think in positions like this. *Houdini's* top two moves are developing the inactive king bishop with 17. ♗e2 or 17. ♗d3. That's more my style and the kind of play that should win this game without any sweat.

17...

b5

Forced (to save the knight), but Black doesn't mind. Maybe White will come up with some other idea that will get Black back in the game.

18. ♗d3

...

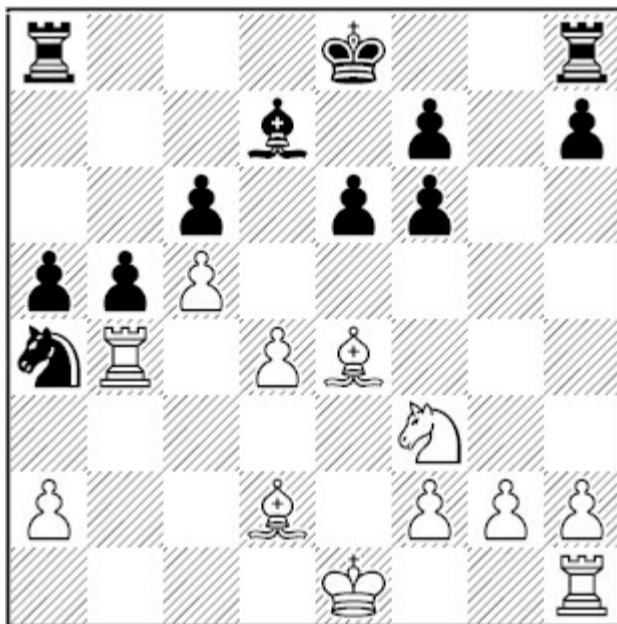
Solid move! Is this a sign that White is coming to his senses?

18... a5
19. ♖e4!? ...

No! Tal to the rescue. While this move is not at all bad – it is just as good as the simple 19. ♖b3 (Black can't reply 19... axb4 due to 20. ♗xc6+ winning back the rook), it represents a reprehensible attitude. *When you are winning easily and someone attacks one of your pieces with something worth less, if there is a way to just move that piece to safety, that's almost always the simple and best way to save it* (for more on this, see "The Five Ways to Make a Piece Safe" at <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman96.pdf>). If White doesn't change his philosophy, I foresee trouble ahead...

19... ♗d7

Guarding the pawn and threatening to capture the rook.



White to play after 19... ♗d7

20. ♖xb5? ...

When you are winning easily and someone attacks one of your pieces with something worth less, if there is a way to just move that piece to safety, that's almost always the simple and best way to save it.

Oh no! Shirov would not approve. White is getting tricky and thinks he sees a way to win a pawn, despite the fact that he is so far ahead that an extra pawn does not mean much. Can you spot the hole in his analysis?

20...

cxb5?

Unfortunately for Black, he couldn't. I don't have the time-stamping for this game, but I recall Black played this "I am resigned to my fate" move rather quickly. If he had taken some time he would have noticed the removal-of-the-guard idea 20...f5!. This attack on the bishop while maintaining the attack on the rook wins material; if the bishop moves off the h1-a8 diagonal, then nothing is stopping the c-pawn from capturing the rook. Therefore, White would be forced to leave his bishop on e4 while saving his rook, and Black wins a piece with 21...fxe4. White would still be winning, but his margin for error would shrink considerably.

21. ♖xa8

b4

22.c6

...

White presses ahead with his best move, but it would be nice at some point to find a way to activate his rook.

22...

♖c8

23.O-O

...

Solid, so I can't complain. *Houdini* thinks 23. ♖b7! is more consistent with the previous move.

23...

♔e7

24. ♖c1

...

That's more like it. Now all of White's pieces are in the game and, barring further shenanigans, the win should be within sight.

24...

♖a6

With a discovered attack on the bishop at a8. But White does not need heroics here – just a solid move.

25. ♖b7

...

This simple move is the golf equivalent of paring another hole with a 7-stroke lead. Now all he needs to is to keep hitting toward the middle of fairways and greens to wrap up the green jacket.

25...

♖xb7

26.cxb7

...

White would have to either leave pieces *en prise* or get back-rank mated to mess this up. So, fingers are crossed, but all looks good (we've said *that* before).

26...

♗b6

To stop 27. ♖c8. Slightly more accurate is 26... ♖b8, but after 27. ♖c7+ ♔d6 28. ♖xf7 the issue is not in doubt.

27. ♖f4 ...

Threatening to get a queen.

27... e5

Temporarily blocking the line, but the dike has long since burst.

28.dxe5 ♖d7

Resigning is starting to look good.

29.exf6+ ♔xf6

30. ♖c8 1-0

White won despite his best efforts to let Black back in the game. As we know, it doesn't always turn out that way. I think Black was playing too quickly and despondently to notice.

Afterwards, when we reviewed the game and I pointed out what he had done, White was chastened and said to me that he learned his lesson. Later I recorded my annotations to this game via an ICC instructional video titled, "How Not to Play When Way Ahead – And Still Win." After listening to the video, White reiterated to me that he could not believe how much he misunderstood what he was supposed to do and how much he had learned. Can an instructor ask for more? My hope is that the reader learned a bit, too.

GAME 18: WHITE 1665 – BLACK 1750

Internet Chess Club 2010

45 minutes with a 45-second increment

English Opening

1.c4 0:45:39 ...

The English is a good choice for amateurs because it is a respected, solid opening, and it is relatively easy to learn some of the basic lines and ideas. Some amateurs avoid it because it is "too positional" but, like many openings, it can become quite tactical fairly quickly in many of the sharper lines. It all depends on how both sides play the opening, not just the first move. This game is a good example of a line in the English that is not all positional!

1... e5 0:45:41

Heading into a reversed-Sicilian variation of the English, i.e., this position is exactly the same as 1.e4 c5 with the colors reversed. If it were the Sicilian position, it would be Black's move instead.

2.g3 0:46:02

♞ f6 0:46:19

3.♞g2 0:46:37

d5 0:46:57

This is the typical pawn break that, if the sides were reversed, would be the characteristic d2-d4 of the Open Sicilian.

4.cxd5 0:47:12

♞ xd5 0:47:36

5.♞f3 0:47:37

...

Going along with GM Kosten's suggestion in *The Dynamic English* to delay ♞c3, which would transpose into the main line.

5...

♞ c6 0:47:58

6.d4? 0:45:23

...

White slows down, but he is still mixing up lines. He should play 6.O-O first when, if Black plays the natural 6...♞e7(?), then 7.d4 is strong, e.g. 7...e4 8.♞e5 with good play. Instead, after 6.O-O Black should play 6...♞b6, allowing the queen to guard the d4 square and thus prevent White from playing d2-d4. Playing d2-d4 in this position before castling is dangerous.

6...

e xd4 0:47:30

A natural move and probably best. The alternative is 6...♞b4+ but that can wait until White tries to recapture the pawn.

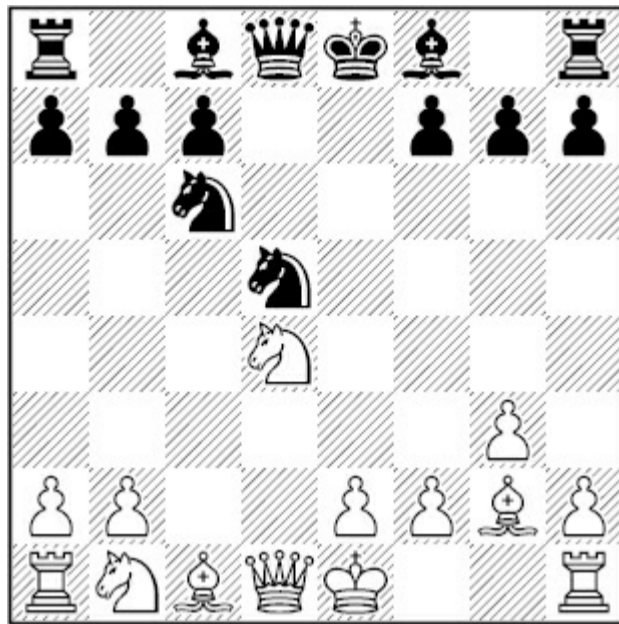
7.♞ xd4? 0:45:32

...

White continues with a little delusion, believing he is playing a normal position when actually there is danger. Note that he played the move in less than the 45-second increment, indicating that he is not aware of any analytical issues worth consideration. Some students who play too slowly worry that there is danger hiding behind every nook and cranny, and consequently get into unnecessary time trouble almost every game because they can't tell when the danger is really there, erring on the side of too much caution. Here they *would* be happy because the danger is there.

The best solution is to learn to recognize possible danger (*criticality assessment*) by doing numerous basic tactics puzzles, having a good thought process (looking for the forcing moves: checks, captures, and threats for both sides), and playing over many annotated master games to see what looks reasonable, and what is shown to be safe and dangerous.

Instead of 7.♞ xd4, *Houdini* suggests White should postpone the recapture and play 7.O-O, allowing Black to guard the pawn with 7...♞c5.



Black to play after 7. ♖xd4?

7... ♖xd4? 0:45:30

Returning the favor! Black takes his time (all you can do is try your best) but misses the refutation with 7... ♕b4+!. All interpositions now lose significant material, e.g. 8. ♕d2?? ♖xd4, so White is forced to abandon castling with 8. ♔f1 when after 8... O-O Black has a fairly nice advantage (0.6 pawns in computer parlance). Black is a promising young player – in a couple of years I don't think he will miss 7... ♕b4+!.

8. ♔f1 0:45:50 ...

After trading mistakes, White (luckily for him) ends up in a position where he has a normal opening advantage of about a tenth of a pawn. It's nice to be lucky, but in chess start out by setting your goal on becoming good. We often hear that "Good players are lucky," and that's true – they are alert and make their own luck...

8... ♕e6 0:45:43

This natural move pins the knight to the b-pawn, so perhaps slightly more accurate is 8... c6.

9. O-O 0:44:28 ...

If White wants to take advantage of the previous move, he could try the ending after 9. ♖c3 c6 10. ♖xd5 ♕xd5 11. ♕xd5 ♖xd5 12. ♖xd5 cxd5 when Black's isolated queen's pawn is not enough to lose, but White has the better of it and can play for a long time with pleasant prospects.

9... c6 0:44:14

10. ♖c3 0:42:21 ...

10. ♖d2 is an interesting alternative. Although it temporarily blocks the bishop, it has a variety of

interesting “paths” it can take through b3, c4, e4, or f3. I call this idea “flexibility”: when your pieces are flexible, it is usually a sign that they are also powerful.

10... ♖xc3 0:41:36

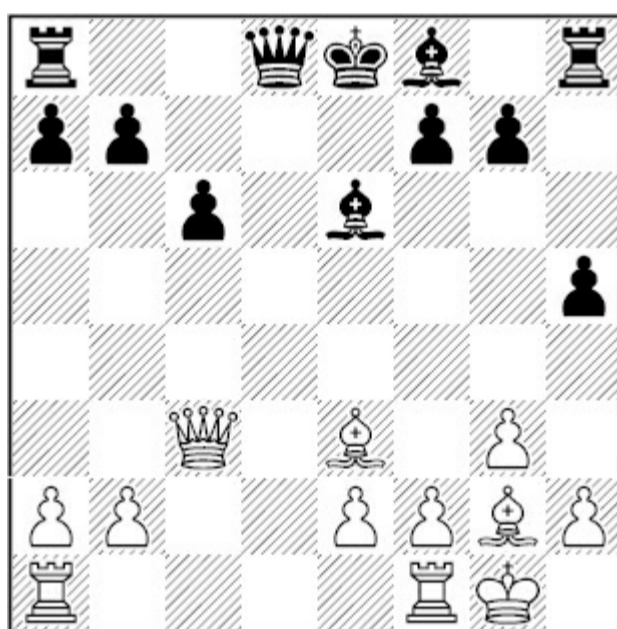
Because the g-pawn is under the white queen’s scrutiny, the computer prefers 10... ♕f6, when Black is essentially equal. After the line played, 11... ♕f6 will not be possible next move since the knight is no longer available for recapture.

11. ♕xc3± 0:42:14 h5!? 0:40:59

An aggressive and optimistic move from the youngster. However, Steinitz’s principles imply that *you can’t attack where you don’t have an advantage*. Therefore, with proper defense a kingside attack should not work. Still, 11...h5 is the computer’s second-best move behind 11...f6 so it’s not a complete reach.

12. ♕f4 0:41:00 ...

A solid move. The alternative is 12. ♕e3, which blocks the e-pawn:



Black to play after 12. ♕e3 (analysis)


This is a clear example where blocking a center pawn with a piece is acceptable. The features to consider when blocking a center pawn are:




- Does that center pawn need to move to allow another piece to activate?
- Does that center pawn need to move to guard something or provide space?

If both of these are not a problem (they are not here), then blocking the center pawn may not be a mistake. In this position, the e-pawn is the potential passed pawn on the kingside majority and eventually will want to advance. However, it is fairly early in the game and the black king does not

have great shelter, so other considerations may come first. The bottom line: blocking the e-pawn may not be the best idea long-term, but in the short run it is acceptable.

12...


 b6 0:35:32

Inconsistent with his previous move, but there was nothing better. Black switches his play from the kingside to the queenside, although the pin of the f-pawn may come in handy after a later ...h5-h4 and ...hxg3. It was not bad to try 12...h4, when White should find 13.  fd1  b6 14.  e3 keeping a nice advantage.


13.  fd1 0:36:09

...




You can't attack where you don't have an advantage.

The computer likes moving the bishop a second time with 13.  e3, but it thinks developing the f-rook is the next best idea.

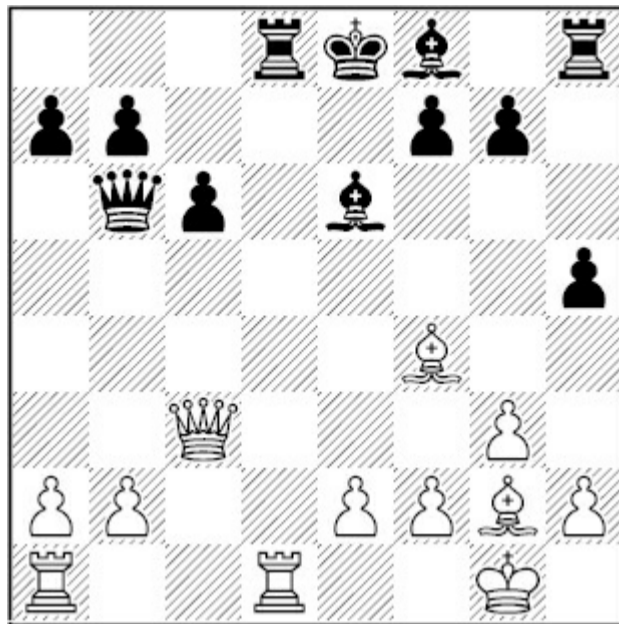
13...

 d8? 0:30:01

Again, Black takes his time but fails to find the right idea. Normally it's good to contest an open file, but here (as is often the case in the opening) White's connected rooks are a big advantage and he can just trade one and let the other one dominate.

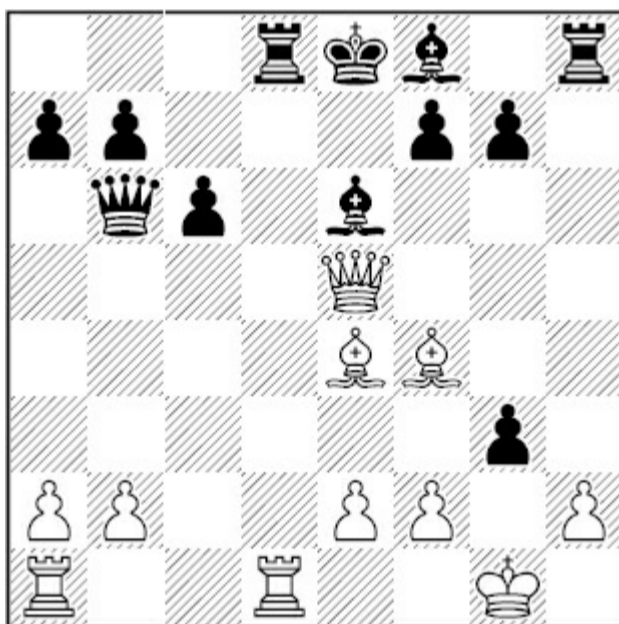
The best idea was to offer a queen trade with 13...  c5± when White has nothing special. What's a hint that this might be the best strategy? Black is behind in development, so it makes sense to offer the trade of queens in order to diminish White's attacking potential. Of course, if you are chasing the attacking queen to a better square, that strategy can be counterproductive, but after 13...  c5 White, who doesn't want to trade for the same reasons, has nothing better than 14.  f3.

Question: The computer now finds a clever move that would win for White – can you?



White to play after 13... ♔d8?

White's win is the difficult-to-see 14. ♕e5!+-. What does that do? It somewhat paralyzes Black's army – can you find a good reply? *Houdini* thinks Black's best is then 14...h4, when 15. ♖e4! still leaves Black lacking a good plan, e.g. 15...hxg3(?). Not best, but Black is lost anyway:



White to play after 15...hxg3 (analysis)

16. ♗xe6+!!. Now 16...fxe6 17. ♕g6+ ♔e7 18. ♕g5# is a cute mate! Better for Black is to give up a piece with 16... ♕e7, but at that point White can just trade with 17. ♖xd8+ with a winning position.

14.a3 0:33:46

...

White takes more than three minutes to find this interesting move. If I remember correctly, his logic was that b4 was the best square for the queen and later possibly the bishop, and since Black's king was in the center and he did not have a great way to develop the king bishop without losing the g-pawn, he did not wish to allow ... ♗b4. White misses the win shown in the previous note with

14. ♖e5!, but 14.a3 is not second or third, either. Nevertheless, White's position remains very pleasant.

14... ♜xd1+ 0:28:28

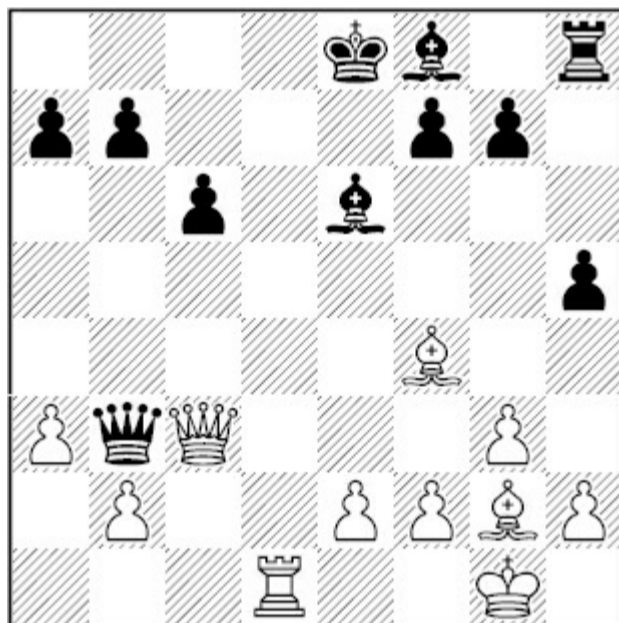
There's nothing better, but now White's remaining rook is very dangerous.

15. ♜xd1 0:34:11 ...

Black needs to play very carefully here, or this could be a short game. White has the kind of lead in development that one often finds in "miniature" games (those lasting 25 moves or less).

15... ♚b3? 0:28:57

As noted earlier, offering the trade of queens when behind in development is often the correct idea, and it is here, too, but only 15... ♚c5!± will do. Then Black has good chances to hold. If instead 15... f6, the second-best move, then 16. ♗e4 puts the finger on the weak light squares and, after 16... ♔f7 17. ♚d3, Black is in trouble.



White to play after 15... ♚b3?

16. ♗xc6+! 0:29:02 ...

White said he saw this possibility right away, but of course he wanted to take some time to analyze it to see if it really works. Great idea! *When you see a move that seems to win, that's a red flag! Slow down and make sure it really works because by definition that's going to be a critical move, especially if it involves a sacrifice.*

Even if White could only get two pawns and a very exposed king for his bishop, this sacrifice would be worth serious consideration, but here it is much stronger than that.

The key to the strength of this sacrifice and seeing it to the end is anticipating White's fine, line-

blocking 18th move. That requires looking two-and-a-half moves (5 ply) ahead. White doesn't have to find it now but, if he does, the sacrifice turns from a speculative sacrifice to a pseudo-sacrifice, since then there is no risk.

16...

bxc6 0:26:34

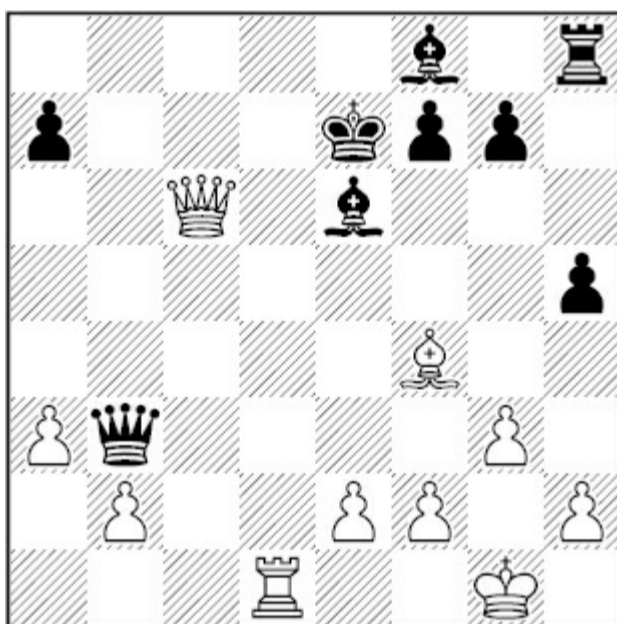
There is no sense declining the sacrifice since White would then be ahead material and his attack remains murderous, e.g. 16... ♔e7 17. ♕c5+ ♔f6 18. ♕g5#.

17. ♕xc6+ 0:28:50

♔e7 0:27:04

Question: Can you find the move that puts Black away?

When you see a move that seems to win, that's a red flag! Slow down and make sure it really works because by definition that's going to be a critical move, especially if it involves a sacrifice.



White to play after 17... ♔e7

White takes almost six minutes to find the only move that wins – and it does more than that – it mates...

18. ♕g5+! 0:23:48

...

I was watching this game live and I was proud of my student both for taking his time and especially for using it to find the right idea! If White tries the hasty 18. ♕c7+ ♔f6 instead, then the black king escapes, e.g. 19. ♕e5+ ♔g6 20. ♕g5+ ♔h7 21. ♕xh5+?? (the better 21. ♖d8 g6+– just leaves Black a piece ahead) 21... ♔h8 and Black wins due to the double threat of 22... ♖xh5 and 22... ♕xd1+.

18...

f6 0:24:30

19. ♔c7+ 0:24:14

1-0

It's mate after either 19... ♕d7 20. ♔xd7# or 19... ♔e8 20. ♖d8#. White no longer plays chess, but he can be proud of this game and, hopefully, remember it fondly. Black, on the other hand, with continued improvement may become a USCF expert within a year of the publication of this book. At the time of this writing he is the 80th-ranked 12-year-old in the United States – this game was played when he was probably still 10. They both seem to be doing well.

GAME 19: WHITE 1600 – BLACK 1250

Pretoria, South Africa 2012

40/90; SD/15 time control

Queen's Pawn Game

1.d4

♘f6

2.c4

e6

3. ♘c3

♕e7

What's this? Black usually either prevents White from playing e2-e4 with 3... ♕b4 (Nimzo-Indian) 3...d5 (Queen's Gambit Declined), or attacks the center with 3...c5 (Benoni). 3... ♕e7 does neither and allows White to set up a "big center."

4.e4

...

White has to play this move and then sit back and see what Black has in mind. Black's third move may be passive, but his position is still very flexible. This is *not* the type of position where White takes extensive time asking, "If I play 4.e4, what are all his checks, captures, and threats in reply, and do I have at least a safe response if he makes one?"

4. ♘f3, allowing Black to get into a more normal defense with 4...d5, would not be sufficiently challenging.

4...

d6

Continuing Black's theme of flexibility. The other acceptable "*Houdini* move" is the more committal 4...d5, which can be answered by 5.e5 ♘e4 6. ♕d3±.

5. ♘f3

...

Logical and computer's #1 – White has plenty of space, so he gets his other knight ready for central action.

5...

b6

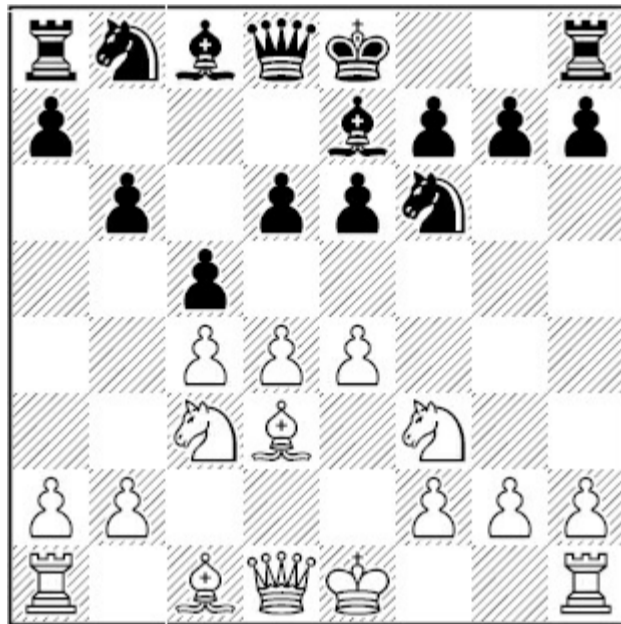
With his pawn on e6, this is a logical choice for activation of his queen bishop. The central counter 5...c5± or just 5... O-O± are the computer's top choices.

6. ♖d3 ...

White continues to play solid developing moves, not waiting to put his pieces on their best squares.

6... c5??

Question: Can you find the refutation of this move?



White to play after 6...c5??

Strategy is the tiebreak of equally safe moves.

Superficially, this move attacking the center looks quite reasonable, and even desirable from a positional sense, but it contains a critical tactical flaw (*strategy is the tiebreak of equally safe moves*). After the game White said that he had learned not to take every developing move for granted, but to be on the alert for potential mistakes that might lose a piece. He sure was right about 6...c5??. Instead Black should have played the natural 6... ♖b7, 6... ♗bd7, or 6... ♗c6, all±.

7.e5!+- ...

White is alert! At first, this does not seem all that strong until you notice that White can occupy the long diagonal with ♖e4 and Black does not have time to plug it. For example, 7...dxe5 8.dxe5 ♗fd7 fails to 9. ♖e4 and 7...cxd4 fails to 8.exf6 dxc3 9.fxex7. There's also the immediate 7... ♗fd7, intending to answer 8. ♖e4 with 8...d5. This is answered by 8.exd6 hitting the bishop. Then, after Black recaptures 8... ♗xd6, 9. ♖e4 again wins a piece, as Black has to give up at least that much to save the rook. This "typical" combination is the type you need to spot consistently if you are going to

be a good player.

How to Play When You're Way Ahead

The main objectives for an easily won position can be summarized in six short suggestions:

- 1) *Think defense first* – this does not mean playing defensively or passively. It means that if there are multiple issues to be addressed on a given move, you should think about the defensive ones first, like “Can I get back-rank mated” or “Can he trap my queen?” If these are all covered, then play all the offense you wish.
- 2) Keep it simple – complications favor the losing player.
- 3) Make fair trades of pieces, but not necessarily pawns.
- 4) Make sure that you use all of your pieces all of the time – you have more of them, so using all will create the chess equivalent of the power play in hockey.
- 5) Don't worry about the little things. The isolated pawn which can be so bothersome when you are even doesn't rate much thought when you are ahead by a piece.
- 6) Don't get into unnecessary time trouble. When you are short on time, crazy things can happen. That's to be avoided when you are winning easily because you have so much to lose. On the other hand, don't speed up dramatically either. For example, in a two-hour game, just aim to have about 10 minutes left at the end of a game instead of one or two; if you have lots of time when you are initially winning, then that's only a small percentage increase in your move frequency.

If you learn these six pointers cold and follow them religiously, I can promise that your results when you are winning will be quite excellent. Many of my students throw away winning games, but you can almost always point to one or more of these six where they “voluntarily” went astray.

You may snicker and wonder why I selected an “easy” combination that a 1250 player fell into, but the winner emailed me and his database reveals that a 2355 player fell into the same trap, as did multiple others rated over 2000, so it's not that easy!

7...

8.dxe5

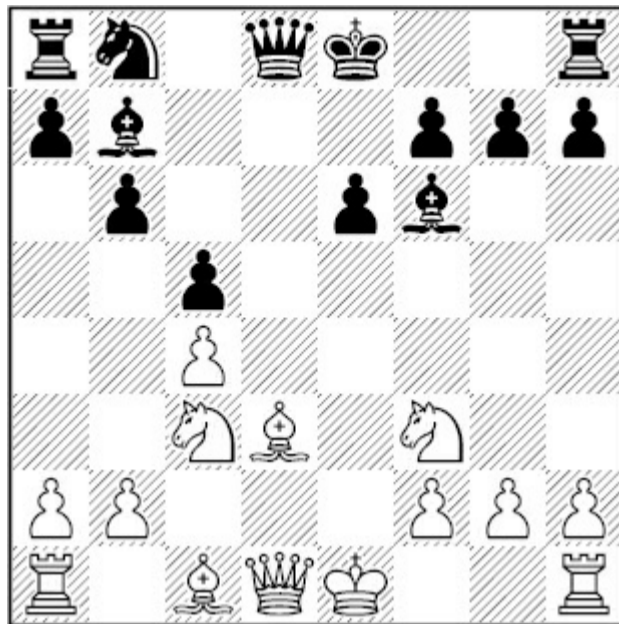
Black has nothing better.

9.exf6

dxe5

 **b7**

 **xf6**



White to play after 9... ♕xf6

The smoke has cleared and White is up a knight for a pawn, clearly a winning advantage.

In several of my articles (notably “When You’re Winning It’s A Different Game,” at <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman13.pdf>), I explain that how you wish to play in these situations is altered radically from relatively equal positions. Many of your goals have changed and numerous principles that apply in relatively equal positions no longer apply (see “The Six Common Chess States,” at <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman09.pdf>).

10.O-O

O-O

11. ♖e1

...

I am not sure the rook belongs on e1. White eventually wants to trade, so it makes sense to plan placing both rooks on the d-file. Therefore, moves like 11. ♖f4 or 11. ♖e2 (the computer’s second- and third-best moves) make sense to me. Its top selection, 11. ♖c2 allowing 11... ♕xf3 12.gxf3, is OK if you are a computer and never have to worry about defending your king in complications, but is a little too non-human for me. Still, we are discussing very small-valued issues compared to the amount White is ahead (almost three pawns by *Houdini’s* evaluation score).

11...

♗d7

12. ♖f4

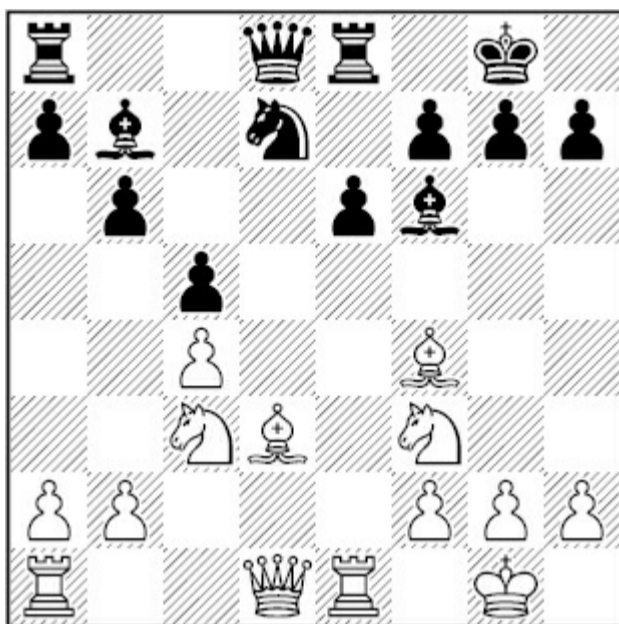
...

Close to the top-rated move. Now “think defense first” would alert White that he has to watch out for Black playing a later ...e6-e5 hitting the bishop followed by a fork on e4. That’s not possible yet because Counting shows that the black e-pawn is not close to safely advancing to e4, but it’s something to keep in mind. It’s anticipating and stopping problems like this before they occur that avoids unnecessary accidents down the line.

12...

♖e8

This rook move was likely played with that e-pawn advance in mind, with associated tactical chances. *When a player is lost and trying to resist, it's often better for the annotator to critique his moves based on their ability to get him back in the game, rather than their absolute quality.*



White to play after 12... ♖e8

13. ♘b5!? ...

This is a very good move for a computer (which plays fantastically in complex positions with many choices and never gets confused), but unnecessary and dangerous for a human. White violated “When You’re Way Ahead” Rule #2: Keep it Simple. He enters into complications which are good for him, but there’s the rub: these are complications, and humans are more likely to make mistakes in such situations.

Therefore, Black is very happy to “mix it up” since he has little to lose. When I saw this move, I shuddered a little. I would just continue developing. The computer still likes c2 best among queen moves but its second choice for the queen, 13. ♙d2, is fine. If White does want to move a piece twice, a good choice is 13. ♘e4, offering some trades, although White would have to calculate 13... ♗xb2 14. ♖b1 followed by 15. ♘d6. Still, this is less complicated than 13. ♘b5.

13... ♗e7(?)

Black gets his complications; nevertheless, this is not a great move. *Houdini* rates several moves higher, including 13... ♖f8 and 13... ♘f8. But that’s rather moot since White still has to find some good moves in the complications.

14. ♘c7 ...

This is consistent and likely best, although it’s ironic that *Houdini* now rates the simpler queen developing moves of 14. ♙c2 and 14. ♙e2 almost as high – not that evaluations near +5 pawns require any nuances.

14...

e5(!)

Of course. Black is dead lost, but he presents White with a variety of juicy alternatives, along with some lesser enticing ones. This is just the type of position Black would want to have when lost – things could get worse in the complications but they could also take a dramatic turn for the better. Worse than dead lost is still dead lost.

15. ♖xa8

...

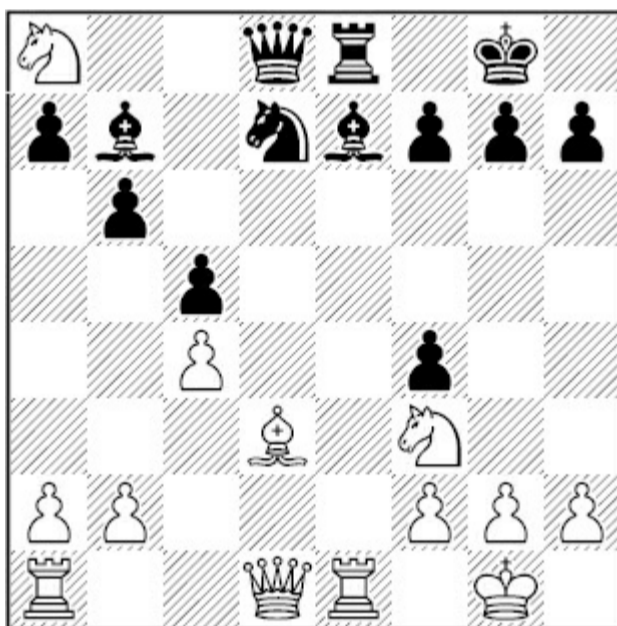
Not White's top move, but not bad either. While rated two pawns lower than 15. ♖xe5 and 15. ♖xe8, this still leaves White at +6 pawns, more than enough for an easy victory. One problem is that the lines that maintain such a healthy lead will be a little more difficult to spot in upcoming moves, and that could spell trouble.

15...

exf4

Black is doing his part to keep things interesting. Now White is faced with an interesting choice.

Question: What would you play here as White?



White to play after 15...exf4

Superficially, it looks like White's knight is trapped and that he should just get a pawn for it by playing 16. ♖xb6. Getting a pawn for a trapped piece is a common tactic among intermediate players and is correct in many positions, especially endgames. However, believing that you get a pawn in every similar position is a very dangerous fallacy that can cost you dearly in complicated situations. To understand this logic, let's backtrack and examine the value of a tempo:

Normally when someone plays an opening gambit which sacrifices a pawn, in return they get roughly two tempos plus an extra semi-open file, and the evaluation of the position is roughly equal. Assuming the extra semi-open file is also valued at some fraction of a pawn, this means that *at the start of the game, when the pieces are not clashing, we can roughly assess the value of a tempo as*

about one-third of a pawn.

However, later in the game a tempo's value can change greatly. In the endgame there are many positions, such as pawn races or the opposition, where a tempo makes the difference between winning and losing or winning and drawing.

Another way of showing the greatly increased value of a tempo later in the game is the following: Suppose you are playing a weaker player and give him the handicap that at any point in the game he is allowed one extra tempo (move). How big an advantage is that? The answer is: huge! On many moves he would have the choice to use the free move to attack and then capture your queen, so this handicap is about as big as queen odds.

Both of the above examples show that *after the opening and once the pieces are clashing, the value of a tempo can soar, especially in complex positions.*

After the opening and once the pieces are clashing, the value of a tempo can soar, especially in complex positions.

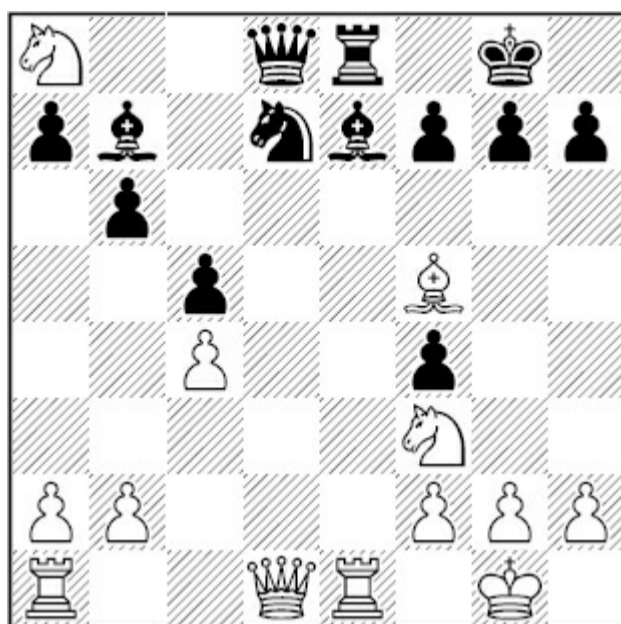
What has this got to do with the game? The current position is rather complex and, if Black has to take the time to capture the knight, that will cost him that one valuable tempo, while if White takes a move to play 16. ♖xb6, then Black's capture 16...axb6 will not cost him an *extra* tempo – it will just match the time it took for White to play 16. ♖xb6. But that means that if White foregoes 16. ♖xb6 he has an extra tempo instead. In this particular position, that one extra tempo is very precious! (For more on this subject, check out “Examples of Chess Logic” at <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman41.pdf>.)

When I gave this position to *Houdini*, it suggested that if White uses the extra tempo to attack, the evaluation was +6, while if he spent the extra tempo to sacrifice for the pawn, it was only about +2. That's a difference of 4 pawns – very large! Considering that it usually takes about +1 to win a game, the margin for error is enormously higher at +6. I will show the +6 line after White's move...

16. ♖xb6?

...

Throwing away most of the advantage, as explained in the previous note. Instead of wasting time trying to get a relatively meaningless extra pawn, White could wrap up the game with a number of better moves, and *Houdini*'s best line is instructive: 16. ♕f5!:



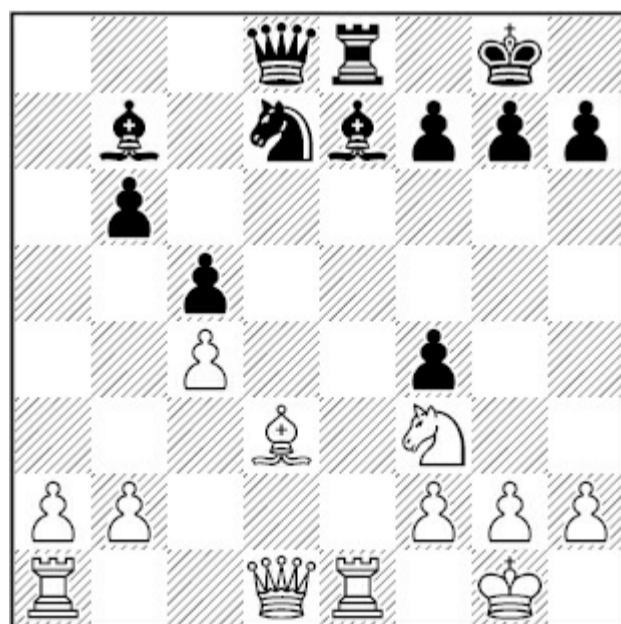
Black to play after 16. ♕f5! (analysis)

With this attack on the knight, neither 16... ♖xa8 17. ♕xd7+- nor 16... ♕xa8 17. ♔xd7 (*better to take with the queen and try to force the trade of queens when way ahead; inexperienced players often take with the bishop in these types of positions*) works, so Black is forced into the insipid 16... ♕c6, when the straightforward 17. ♕xd7 ♕xd7 18. ♗e5 keeps all the material and walks to the bank.

16...

axb6

With the smoke clearing, White's material advantage has shrunk from a piece for a pawn down to the exchange (rook for bishop) against the bishop pair. That's not a good transition, even with slightly reduced material. It doesn't do much good to trade material when you are winning if that greatly reduces both your material advantage and your chances of winning. *Sometimes it makes a great deal of sense to purposely trade material at a loss to simplify the position and leave a much easier win,* but that is hardly the case here.



White to play after 16... axb6

17. ♖e5(?)

...

Sometimes it makes a great deal of sense to purposely trade material at a loss to simplify the position and leave a much easier win.

After this, the win is at best problematic. The computer suggests something like 17. ♕f5 ♕c6 18. ♖d3 with the idea of mobilizing White's army and controlling the center with a winning position (but not nearly as easily winning as before!). White also would threaten ideas like 19. ♕xh7+ and piling up on the pin with 19. ♖ad1.

17...

♖f6

According to our silicon friend, Black's best resistance is 17... ♖xe5 18. ♖xe5 ♖f8, but that line is not easy to find and a little counterintuitive since, in general, one doesn't want to trade pieces when behind. Therefore, I understand Black's move. Even though Black would prefer keeping the pieces on the board, that doesn't mean that any specific piece trade might not be greatly in his favor, compared to the alternatives. The more pieces that are traded, the more you don't want to trade the ones you have left, and if you are trading into a losing king-and-pawn endgame, that is usually the trade you most want to avoid!

18. ♖f3

...

It's noble to admit his mistake, but in this case withdrawing his previous move is not the most accurate. Instead 18. ♕e2 or 18. ♕f5 is better.

18...

♕c7

19. ♖c2

...

White finally plays the move that he could have played prior to all the complications, with advantage.

19...

♖d8

Black could certainly consider the "obvious" (but not always good as it is here) 19... ♕xf3 20.gxf3, giving his bishop pair to mess up White's pawn structure and expose his king. *Houdini* says this is Black's best move, but that White would retain almost a one-pawn advantage. Nevertheless, one pawn is a lot less than White had just a few moves ago.

Based on this analysis and evaluation, the next few moves by both players are logical.

20. ♖ad1

...

Slightly more accurate is the finesse 20. ♖e2 ♖e8 21. ♖ad1, with good winning chances.

20... ♔xf3
21.gxf3 h6
22. ♖e2 ...

This is the computer's top move at 25 ply! *Houdini* also suggests 22. ♔e4 (offering a trade of rooks) and 22. ♖d2 as close.

22... g5(?)

An interesting decision to solidify his kingside pawn structure. Black gets space, but he does weaken the light squares that are controlled by White's queen-bishop battery. Overall, *Houdini* questions this move and suggests 22... ♔d6 or 22... ♖b8.

23. ♖de1 ...

Again 23. ♔f5!, offering the rook trade, *makes the instructive "technique" statement to his opponent: "Trade or retreat!"* This is the kind of idea you want to know – and implement – in order to make progress toward victory. It's nice to control the e-file, but even better to control both central files.

23... ♔f8
24. ♔f5 ...

Ironically, here that same move, while still good, loses a bit of punch as it does not offer a trade. Another problem with his strategy is that White can't immediately penetrate to e7 or e8 with his doubled rooks on the open e-file. 24. ♖d2 was best.

24... h5

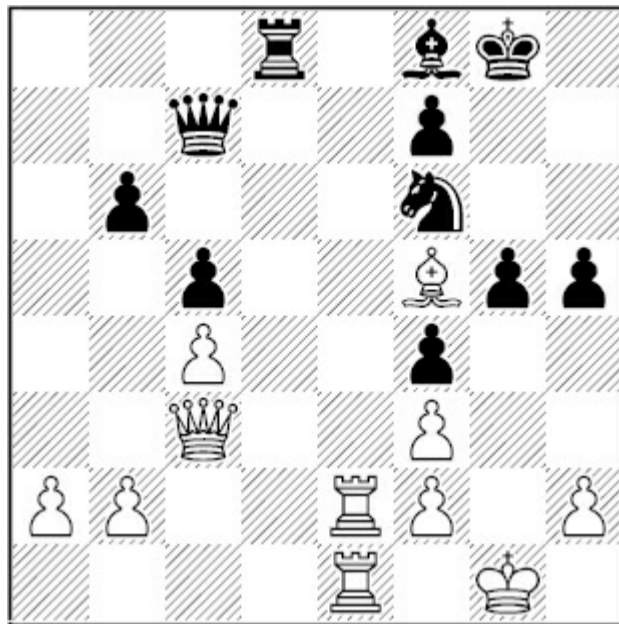
Black continues aggressive play when behind. The mundane 24... ♖c6 was the computer's suggestion, but we can't blame Black for pressing toward complications.

Two Rooks to One? Trade Rooks!

GM Larry Kaufman notes that when one side has two rooks and the other has only one but the overall material is roughly even (as it is here), then it almost always makes sense for the side with the two rooks to trade off the opponent's only rook for one of his. There are several reasons for this: the rooks have a tendency to get in each other's way ("redundant pieces") and the opponent's rook usually coordinates well with the other pieces.

25. ♔c3 ...

White is on the right track, as his pieces dominate the board.



Black to play after 25. ♖c3

25... ♗g7

A logical way to save the knight, but it does give White a shot at making further progress.

26. ♖c2 ...

It is understandable that White does not wish to give Black the opportunity for a discovered attack on his queen. However, the computer points out that 26. ♖e5 or 26. ♖e7!, both attacking the black queen, would take the most advantage of his board control.

26... g4

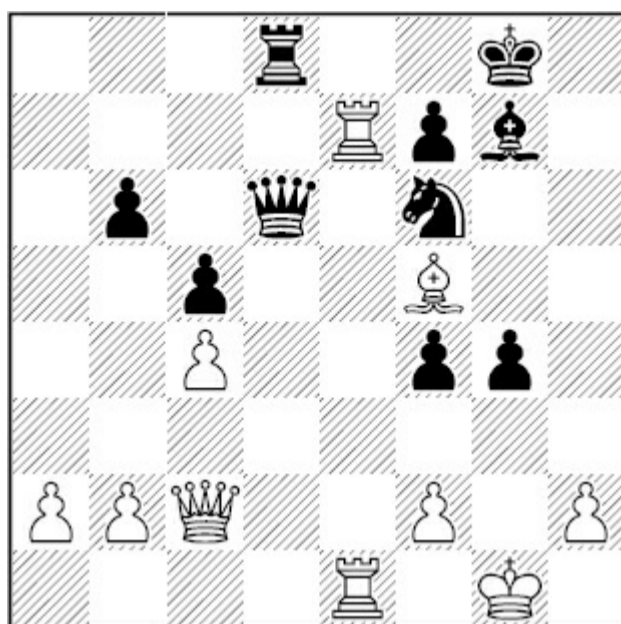
A double-edged move. It does attempt to open up White's king, but at the same time it enables White to undouble his pawns and open up lines for his own pieces.

27. ♖e7 ...

Before undoubling, White wisely makes his rook more active. When making a move like this, you just have to be careful that you don't force the black queen to get into a better position to take advantage of the coming pawn exchanges. In this case Black can't take advantage, so White is making progress.

27... ♗d6

28. fxg4 hxg4



White to play after 28...hxg4

29. ♔e2(?)

...

White misses the cute 29. ♘g6! attacking the weak f7-pawn. The bishop cannot be touched, e.g. 29...fxg6?? 30. ♔xg6 and all the moves that stop mate on g7 are just disastrous, e.g. 30... ♘h5 31. ♖e8+ ♗xe8 32. ♖e8+ and Black has nothing better than 32... ♔f8 (or resigning). But if Black just defends f7 with 29... ♗f8 (best), then 30. ♔d3! and once again the “trade or retreat” leaves White winning.

Worse, White’s move allows Black a clever defense...

29...

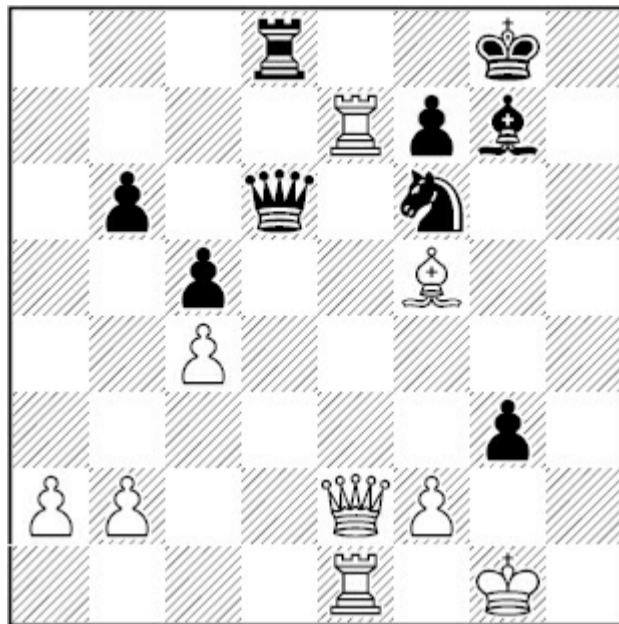
g3

...which he understandably misses. The right idea, not easy to find, was first to play 29... ♗f8! dislocating the white rook. Then after 30. ♖a7 ♗e8 Black grabs the e-file, on which 31. ♔f1 ♖e5! or 31. ♔d1 f3! puts Black in the game. I think a grandmaster with sufficient time would likely find this, but I wouldn’t be surprised if most players at my much lower “master” level were to miss it, too.

After 29...g3, White should be back on top...

30.hxg3

fxg3



White to play after 30...fxg3

31.fxg3? ...

White makes a very strange decision, allowing Black to capture the pawn with check and again relinquishing a large advantage. Moves that guarded f2 and g3, including 31.♔g2, 31.♕f3, and 31.♖e3, were all much better, with a winning advantage to White.

31... ♕d4+?

Black returns the favor with a very strange move of his own. The simple 31...♕xg3+ was clearly his best move, when Black has chances to save the game. Perhaps he was afraid of opening up the g-file or maybe he was just trying to be too clever. Sometimes chess is not that difficult and the most obvious move is also clearly best, so always looking for complicated moves when simple good ones are strong gets diminishing returns. We certainly have to give Black credit for, “When you see a good move, look for a better one” – the problem was that the one he found wasn’t better.

We should also note that, unlike many of the games in this book, which were played at a sudden-death time control (all the moves in one time period), this game had a first time control of 40/90, so both players needed to first get to move 40 in their allotted time. So it is possible that some time trouble could have been involved (I don’t have access to the time-stamping).

32.♔f1+- ...

Houdini likes the more solid-looking 32.♔g2, guarding g3, a little better.

32... ♖h6

33.♕c2 ...

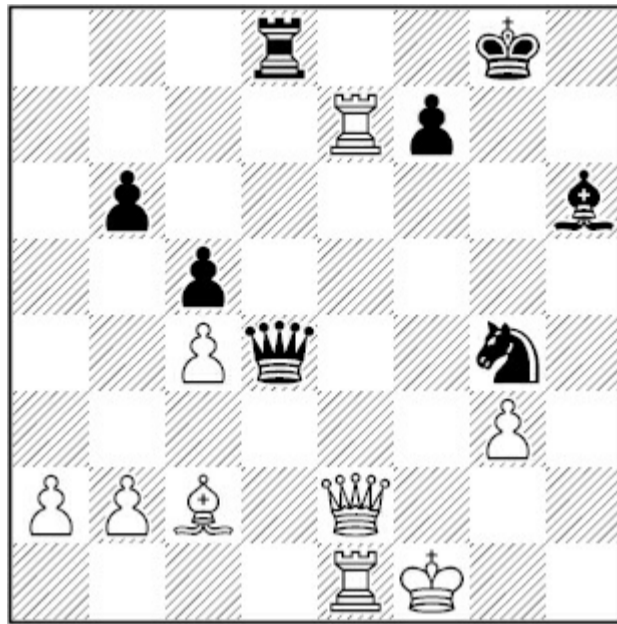
A reasonable idea. This gives White the flexibility to play a move like ♖d1 to remove some pressure. Once Black’s threats are minimized, the advantage of the exchange and the extra pawn

should win easily.

33...

♞g4

This again gives White the opportunity to play a little combination.



White to play after 33... ♞g4

34. ♜e8+?

...

White of course wants to trade, but the double attack 34. ♜e4! wins on the spot. Black is forced to try 34... ♞f6+ to attempt to save the knight, but that simultaneously takes away the knight's only safe square! Therefore, after 35. ♞g1 , Black has to settle for 35... ♞e3 36. ♜xe3 when both 36... ♞d4 37. ♞f1 ♞xe3 38. ♞xe3 and 36... ♞xe3+ 37. ♞xe3 are insufficient to cause any problems.

Worse, the resultant position after the trade contains a forced draw for Black.

34...

♜xe8

35. ♞xe8+

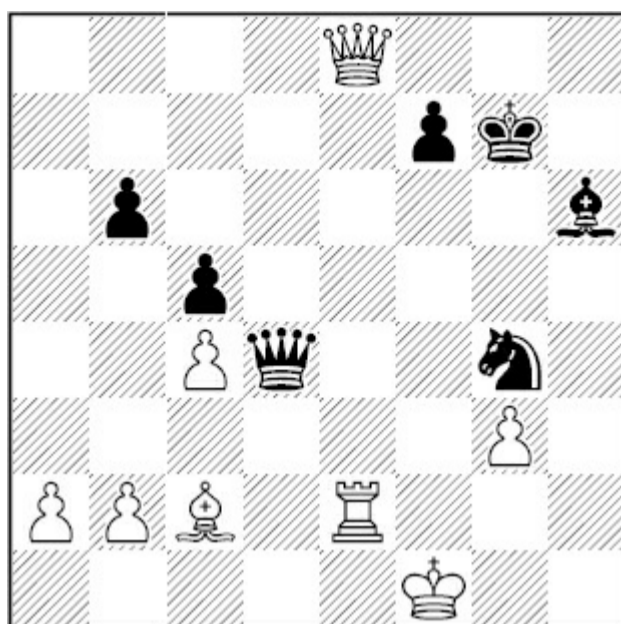
♞g7

Black's threat of mate on f2 reduces White's defenses to 36. ♜e2 and 36. ♞g2 , but Black can draw on either of these.

36. ♜e2

...

If 36. ♞g2 , then 36... ♞f2+ 37. ♞h3 ♞f3! and Black draws with the perpetual-check idea of ... ♞f2+ and then ... ♞g4+ .



Black to play after 36. ♔e2

36... ♔xc4?

The draw was 36... ♗e3+! and then:

- 37. ♔e1 ♗xb2! is at least even, e.g. 38. ♖xe3 ♗c1+ 39. ♗d1 ♗xe3=;
- 37. ♖xe3 ♗xe3= as the exposed white king and bishops of opposite colors gives Black equal play.

37. ♗e4!+- ...

Back on the right track – again!

37... ♗xe4

Black cannot avoid the trade of queens, e.g. 37... ♗e3+ 38. ♔f2 doesn't help.

38. ♗xe4 ...

The only safe recapture; it's never too late to be vigilant: 38. ♖xe4?? 38... ♗e3+ and the fork on the bishop forces 39. ♖xe3 (better to lose only the exchange than to lose an entire piece – I've seen so many students make that mistake!) 39... ♗xe3=.

38... ♔f6

39. ♔g2 ♗e5

40. ♔h3 ...

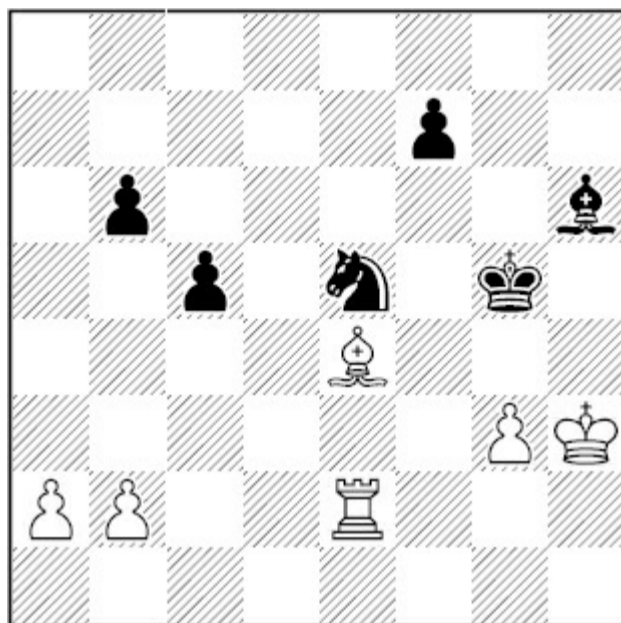
White's last move before the time control, decentralizing the king, is a strange one. It will take him quite a few moves to untangle himself from that misdirection. He had a host of better alternatives,

including 40. ♖d5, 40.a4, 40.b3, and 40. ♔f2, among others.

40...

♔g5?

Black tries to box in the white king but *Houdini* points out that this gives White an immediate tactic to put the game away. The good news for the players is that they have hit the time control. The bad news is that the second time control is SD/15, meaning they only get 15 additional minutes to complete the entire game! This can be an extremely short time if the endgame goes long.



White to play after 40... ♔g5?

41. ♖d5?

...

White misses the relatively easy 41. ♖f2!, when the threat of 42. ♖f5+ is unstoppable: Black cannot both save his knight and prevent a devastating discovered attack after the forced 42... ♔g6, e.g. 41. ♖f2 ♖c4 (Black has nothing better) 42. ♖f5+ ♔g6 43. ♖xc5+ f5 44. ♖xc4 fxe4 45. ♔g4 ♖f8 46. ♖xe4, and the win is trivial.

Instead, it's back to "good technique" time. The position after 41. ♖d5 will take a little patience.

41...

f6

42.a4

...

It's always difficult to figure out on which color you want your pawns in bishop endings. I believe the general rule is that if you have bishop of opposite colors (as here) and these are the only pieces left on the board, then you want your pawns on the same color as your bishop so you can defend them. However, if there are more pieces on the board (with bishops of opposite color), then you want your pawns on the opposite color of your bishop so that your opponent's pawns are likely fixed on the color of your bishop, making them targets. So White wants Black's pawns fixed on light squares. That would tend to indicate that White *might* not want his pawn on a4, but it's not always that easy. *Houdini* thinks that 42. ♖e3 is the best move, with the PV 42...c4 43.a4 ♖f8 44. ♖e2 ♖e7

45. ♖e4+-.

42...	♙f8
43. ♙e6	♘f3
44. ♖f2	...

Too late for this square. 44. ♖e3 is the best way to make progress. Notice that White is still paying for his transgression of cornering his own king.

44...	♘d4
45. ♙d7	♙d6
46.g4	...

Committal, but White was having problems figuring out how to proceed. And judging from *Houdini's* top lines (a little obscure and not instructive to include here), it is understandable that White loses a little patience. Still, 46.g4 is not that bad.

46...	♙e5
47. ♙e8	♙f4
48. ♙f7	♙e5

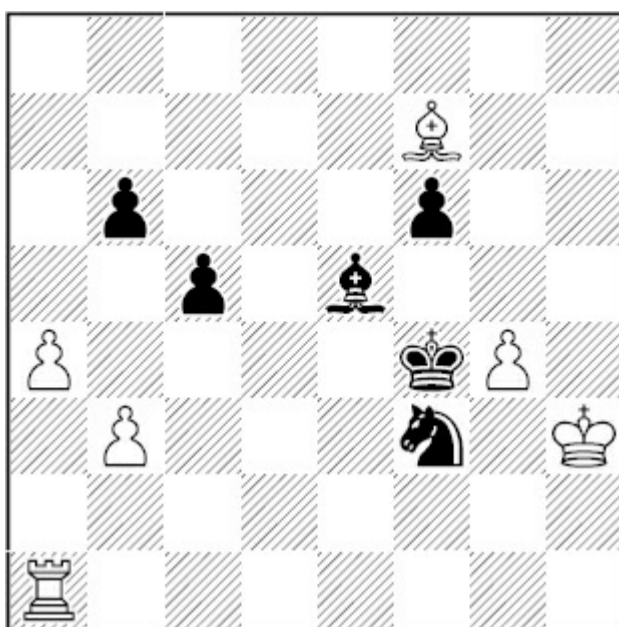
Black is not seeing White make progress, so he wisely just does nothing to see if White can find anything. That's often a great policy (especially if short on time) as the defender can often make it easier for his opponent to win if he tries something desperate.

49.b3	♙d6
50. ♖f1	♙e5

As in the previous note, it's in Black's best interests to keep the status quo and put the onus on White to try to make progress. Kudos to Black for his patient play.

51. ♖e1	♙f4
52. ♖a1	♘f3

This finally gives White an idea, so perhaps returning the king with 52... ♙g5 would be more prudent. That would force White to find 53.a5! which, from his previous move, it seems likely he would.



White to play after 52... ♖ f3

53. ♜ f1! ...

This pin is the only way to play for a win. It's also White's only move to meet the double threat of 53... ♗ xa1 and 53... ♘ xg5+ winning the bishop.

53... ♔ e3
 54. ♙ d5 ♘ g5+
 55. ♔ h4 ...

White's patience pays off and his king finally manages to escape! Now it will be a lot easier to make progress. *In the endgame the king's average fighting value is worth 4+ pawns* so, with Hercules unleashed, he can go on a rampage.

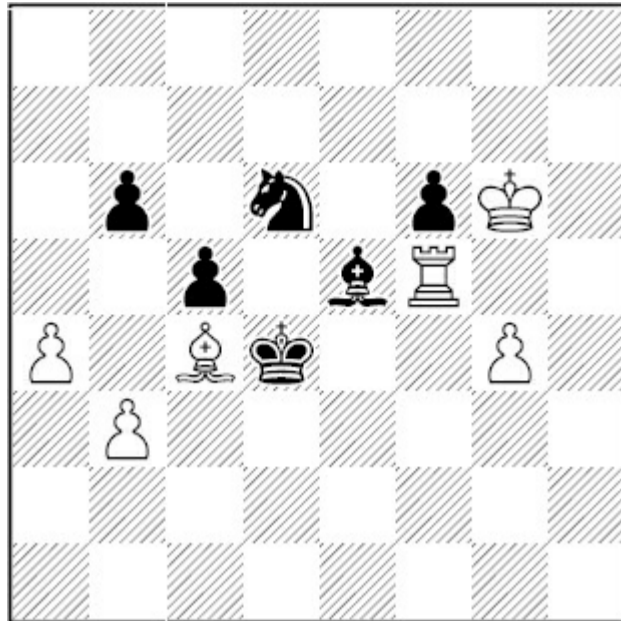
55... ♘ h7(?)

This makes things easy, but after Black's best defense 55... ♔ d4 56. ♙ c4 ♘ e4 57. ♜ f3 White is slowly making progress.

56. ♔ h5 ♘ g5
 57. ♜ f5 ...

57. ♔ g6! is more thematic. That's the kind of move that would attract my eye quickly. In some lines, White may even be able to follow that up with ♜ xf6, but that type of "technique" sacrifice always takes some careful calculation.

57... ♔ d4
 58. ♙ c4 ♘ e4
 59. ♔ g6 ♘ d6



White to play after 59... ♞d6

Black was losing anyway, but this forces White to play the winning simplification, which he did...

60. ♖xf6!

♜xf6

61. ♔xf6+-

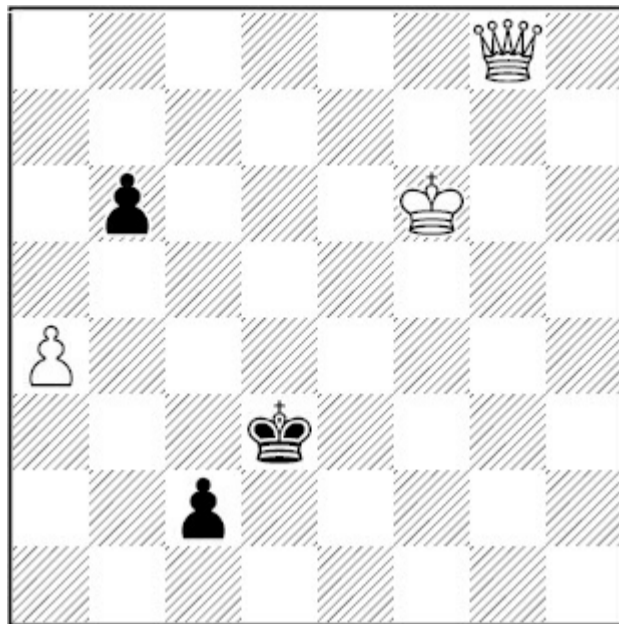
...

The recording ended here as both sides were short of time – not surprising, given the complexity of the game and the brevity of the second time control. Black played 61... ♞e4+ in a time scramble and White won with 30 seconds remaining on his clock (there was no increment).

1-0 (eventually)

It is worth showing the technique for White to win if Black had tried 61... ♞xc4: 62.bxc4 ♔xc4 63.g5 ♔d3 (instead 63... ♔b3 allows White to promote with check, which is almost never good) 64.g6 c4 65.g7 c3 66.g8 ♔ c2:

In the endgame the king's average fighting value is worth 4+ pawns.



White to play after 66...c2 (analysis)

If there were only one pawn on the board and Black's king were one square closer to the promotion square, then a queen cannot beat a bishop's pawn unless the king is sufficiently close. However, in this case the black king is not close enough and there are extra pawns on the board, and either would be sufficient to allow White to win.

For learning purposes, let's assume that the extra two pawns on the a- and b-files are off the board – that would make White play most carefully.

The method to figure out the most precise move is to identify the promotion square and the square(s) the black king would need to move to in order to guard that square. Here they are c1 and d2, respectively. Next, locate all the squares to which the queen could safely move and attack both those squares. Those are e1, f4, g5, and h6. Since in this position White's queen has access to g5, that is the right move. Therefore, 67. ♔g5 followed by the “Go to Sleep” idea of 68. ♔c1 leads to a trivial victory! (For more on this helpful endgame idea, reference <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman03.pdf>.)

GAME 20: WHITE 1615 – BLACK 1726

Internet Chess Club 2010

60 minutes with a 60-second increment

French Defense Advance Variation, Milner-Barry Gambit

1.e4 1:00:57

2.d4 1:01:50

3.e5 1:02:43

e6 1:00:58

d5 1:01:52

...

The Advance Variation is much more popular among amateurs than among professionals, although it's a solid choice. When I ask amateurs why they play this line, they think the idea is to grab as much space as soon as possible and “lock in” Black's pieces. This is ironic because at their level, one of

the easiest variations to play *as Black* is the Advance since the ideas, such as targeting d4, are so straightforward.

3...

c5 1:02:47

This main line in the Advance French is one of the best examples of a break move against a fixed pawn center, hitting at the base of the d4/e5 chain. As mentioned in other games, it is advisable to play this break as soon as possible once the Pointing Rule (primarily once all four central pawns are fixed together) is in place.

4.c3 1:03:31

...

Ready to replace the d-pawn whenever it is captured with ...cxd4, thereby maintaining the central chain.

4...

♘c6 1:03:41

5. ♘f3 1:04:21

♙b6 1:04:02

The other major line is 5...Ed7.

6. ♙d3 1:05:07

...

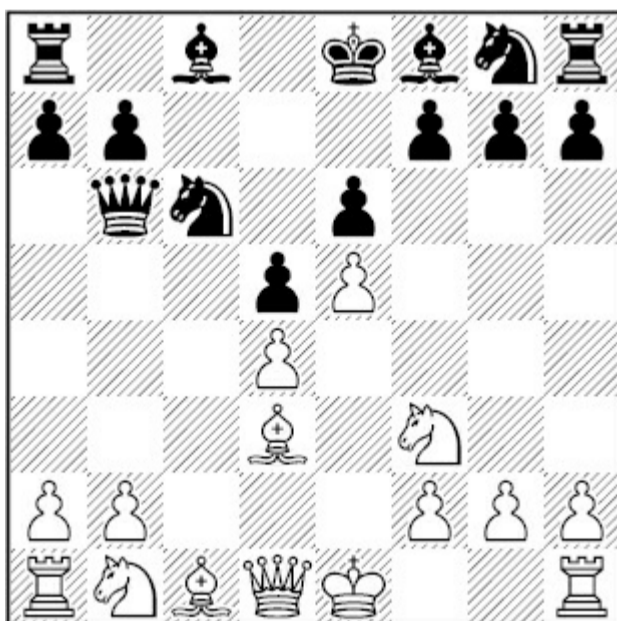
White chooses the Milner-Barry Gambit. The main line is 6. ♙e2, which allows the queen to keep an eye on the d4 square, and the other principal alternative is the more modern 6.a3.

6...

♙d7 1:04:35

One of the most famous opening traps is 6...cxd4 7.cxd4 –

A well-known trap: Black to play and lose:



Black to play after 7.cxd4 (analysis)

7... ♖xd4?? 8. ♗xd4 ♜xd4? 9. ♕b5+ ♕d7 10. ♖xd7+ (an entire piece superior to the hasty, though still winning, 10. ♜xd4) 10... ♔xd7 11. ♜xd4 winning the queen.

This particular discovered attack is a standard tactical motif. An almost identical tactic can occur in other openings. However, when this pattern occurred in games by intermediate players I was surprised to find that many did not recognize it right away. It was only after I asked what was wrong with 7... ♗xd4 that they replied something like, “Oh yeah! I’ve seen that someplace!”

To avoid the trap and really threaten to capture the d-pawn, Black should answer 7.cxd4 with 7... ♕d7.

Moral of the story: It’s not enough to be able to solve basic tactical patterns. You need to recognize them *quickly and accurately* from both sides of the board, on offense and defense (for more, refer to “A Different Approach to Studying Tactics,” <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman04.pdf>).

7.O-O 1:06:02

...

There is no good way to protect the pawn, as moving the bishop on d3 not only costs a tempo but placing it on c2 has the additional drawbacks of allowing a later ... ♕b5 to control the f1-a6 diagonal and ... ♗b4 to embarrass the bishop, e.g. 7. ♕c2? (a common amateur move) 7...cxd4 8.cxd4 ♗b4 9. ♕b3 (just allowing 9... ♗xc2 is better, but still not good for White) 9... ♜a6! and Black is much better.

It’s not enough to be able to solve basic tactical patterns. You need to recognize them *quickly and accurately* from both sides of the board, on offense and defense.

7...

cxd4 1:05:01

8.cxd4 1:06:56

♗xd4 1:05:46

9. ♗xd4 1:07:21

♜xd4 1:06:37

10. ♗c3 1:08:19

...

The *tabiya* (standard position) of the Milner-Barry has been reached. Just for fun I let *Houdini*, without its opening book, choose White’s tenth move and at 29 ply (!) it preferred 10. ♜e2 at -0.3 (meaning that it preferred Black slightly). In his excellent book *Play the French* (3rd edition), John Watson writes, “Like most lines in this section, 10 ♜e2 has scored overwhelmingly for Black...” I guess neither John nor *Houdini* think that much of the Milner-Barry Gambit, but it is a tricky line.

After 10. ♗c3, the main theoretical moves for Black are 10... ♜xe5 and 10...a6.

10...

a6 1:04:38

Houdini's top choice. I think Black knew the book, but took a couple of minutes just to be cautious. Both sides have reserved a lot of time for a potentially complex game.

11. ♔e2 1:09:09 ...

The main book move here, too. *Houdini* thinks 11. ♖e1 might be at least as good.

11... ♗b6 1:01:52

The first non-book move, but not bad at all. Usually the queen doesn't move until challenged, so Watson and *Houdini* both prefer 11... ♗e7.

12. ♔h1 1:09:13 ...

This is the main move against 11... ♗e7 and also logical against 11... ♗b6. White wishes to maintain the option of supporting the e-pawn with a later f2-f4. *Houdini*'s top two moves are 12.b3 and 12.a3.

12... ♕c5 1:01:53

Houdini's PV is 12... ♗e7 13. ♕d2 d4 14. ♗e4 ♗g6. It rates 12... ♕c5 as adequate, still giving a slight advantage for Black.

13.f4(?) 1:07:36 ...

Consistent with the previous move, but not nearly best. Rating almost half a pawn better is 13. ♗g4.

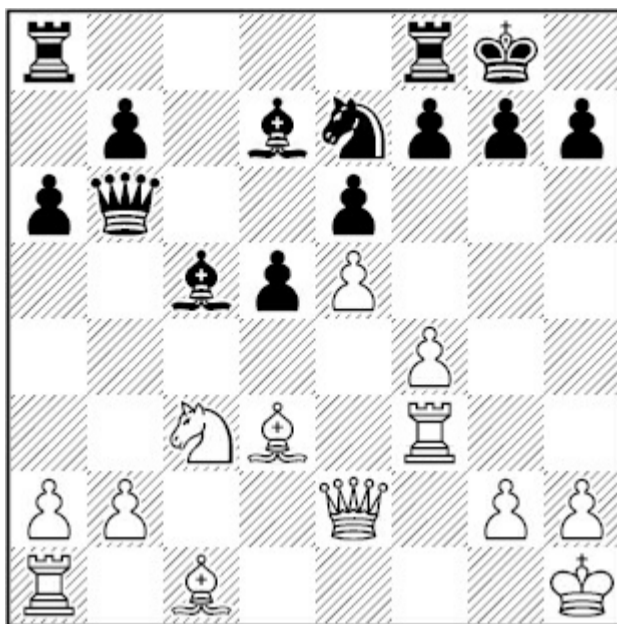
13... ♗e7 1:01:19

Now White has very little for his pawn investment.

14. ♖f3 1:02:13 ...

This is a strange-looking move that would make more sense if Black foolishly castled kingside in the next move or two. Still, I was surprised when *Houdini* calculated there was nothing better (equal best with 14. ♖b1).

14... O-O? 0:59:39



White to play after 14...O-O?

Oops! After playing the opening very well, Black throws White a big “chip” and lets him back in the game. This move is not terrible – two question marks is completely unwarranted and even one may be too harsh, but it is certainly dangerous and not best. 14... ♖c8 or 14...g6 maintain Black’s nice advantage. It only takes one bad or careless move...

15. ♗xh7+! 0:58:13 ...

White does well to seize his opportunity and the game takes a sudden dynamic turn towards complexity. This classical bishop sacrifice (sometimes called the “Greek gift”) is a common tactical motif. The “!” is not because 15. ♗xh7+ is that strong – if Black plays perfectly after the sacrifice he still retains an edge, albeit less so than he had before 14...O-O – it’s that this complicated sequence is the only way for White to get back in the game.

15...

♔xh7 0:56:03

This type of sacrifice almost always has to be accepted. If it is declined, White has just won a pawn for nothing (although Black was up a pawn to spare) and White would get a strong attack anyway against the exposed king on h8. Of course if you see that 15...♔xh7 just gets mated immediately or allows something disastrous then you have to decline. But if you see only a strong speculative attack, you may as well have something to hang your hat on (an extra bishop). You may have to give up material later in the sequence, so having an extra bishop to play with may be enough to save the game. Alternatively, White could play the attack wrong and then the extra material could win.

This position is no exception; the sacrificing piece must be captured, even if White gets a good attack, so 15...♔xh7 is forced and 15...♔h8?? gets mated in 7 or less: 16. ♖h3 g6 17. ♗xg6+ ♔g7 18. ♖h7+ ♔g8 19. ♗h5 f×g6 20. ♗h6 ♖f5 21. ♗xg6+ ♖g7 22. ♗xg7#. I could criticize Black for taking so long to accept – over 4 minutes – but the position is very critical and you can’t just always blindly accept (especially when ahead a pawn before the sacrifice) in case that turns out to be an

even quicker and bigger disaster.

The following couple of moves are also forced and lead to interesting play. Even though *Houdini* thinks Black is slightly better with best play (and thus, theoretically, the question mark I attached to O-O may be somewhat harsh), there is a big difference between having a good position with no complications (as Black had before) and having a good position where if you defend like a computer against a strong attack you can come out with a slight advantage! There is a practical side to chess, and what works or works easily for humans is not always what is trivial for computers.

16. ♖h3+ 0:59:06

♔g8 0:56:47

17. ♖h5 0:59:56

...

So far, so forced, but now what should Black do about the mate threat? Does it make any difference whether he plays 17...f5 or 17...f6? Sometimes the answer is “No,” but when the answer is “Yes” it may make the difference in whether you can conduct a successful defense. Therefore, if it is a slow game and you have plenty of time, you can’t just throw a move out there quickly and hope it’s the right one. We can debate whether to call that Hope Chess – but there’s no debate that it would be bad chess. If your choice works, you are just lucky. If you want to be a good player, you have to consistently and carefully analyze positions that require analysis!

17...

f6 0:54:05

It turns out that White should play 18.exf6 *e.p.* if Black plays 17...f5, and should also capture on 17...f6 as well, so this is one case where Black’s choice makes no difference, but that’s assuming White plays correctly. However, suppose White only plays his second-best move. In that case, after 17...f6, 18. ♖h7+ ♔f7 is the second best for White and if 17...f5 18.b3 d4 is second best for White. Both are winning fairly easily for Black, so again in this case it doesn’t matter that much although the 17...f6 “second-best” line is a little better for White.

There is still one more issue to help choose between ...f7-f6 and ...f7-f5, assuming the best lines are close in evaluation. That other issue is, “Which move is more likely to get White to reply incorrectly?” I think here 17...f6 is more likely to entice White play 18. ♖h7+?, so the tiebreak goes to 17...f6. And that’s what Black played. Knowing the issues when you analyze is sometimes very helpful!

18.exf6 0:53:06

♖xf6 0:54:05

18...gxf6?? 19. ♖g3+ mates quickly.

19. ♖h8+ 0:43:39

...

If you want to be a good player, you have to consistently and carefully analyze positions that require analysis!

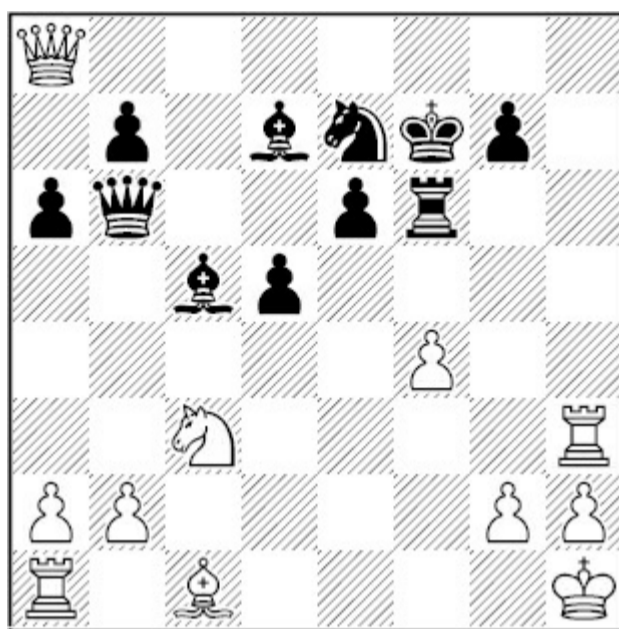
White had seen this skewer but he took ten minutes making sure he had nothing better. In this kind of position, looking around for a better sequence is important – not sure there is enough here for ten minutes, but at least at this point he had time to look around.

19...

♔f7 0:54:59

20. ♖xa8 0:44:39

...



Black to play after 20. ♖xa8

When a player wins the exchange in this type of sequence, the opponent (Black in this case) is often not that badly off, despite the material deficit and the exposure of the king. Why?

There are several reasons:

- First, it took time to win the material and it will take time to extricate the awkward queen;
- Secondly, White's pieces may have had to go to squares whose only purpose was to support winning the material and now they are misplaced for the subsequent play;
- Finally, a classic bishop sacrifice may have allowed the opponent to get the bishop pair, which is the case here.

If we simply count material, Black is down the exchange for the bishop pair. If, as beginners do, you count the exchange as 2 points and the bishop pair as 0, that's a two-pawn lead. But if you count the exchange as less than 2 and the bishop pair as averaging $\frac{1}{2}$, the material-only lead is roughly 1, which makes a *big* difference.

This position is not an exception. *Houdini's* top two moves for Black, 20... ♔d6 and 20... ♔c6, give *Black* about a half-pawn advantage. So the net result is that Black started with a very good game, allowed the classic bishop sacrifice, and then ended up with a somewhat lesser good game. However, as noted earlier, the complexity of the position has picked up and either side could easily make a big mistake. That's another benefit for the player who initially was worse, in this case White.

20...

♖g6 0:39:16

Black nobly tries to stop the white pieces from occupying h8, while attacking f4. As noted above, 20... ♖c6 (trying to take advantage of White's lack of a light-squared bishop) and 20... ♖d6 (to pressure f4 in a different way and leave f5 available to the knight) are somewhat better.

21.a3(?) 0:43:36

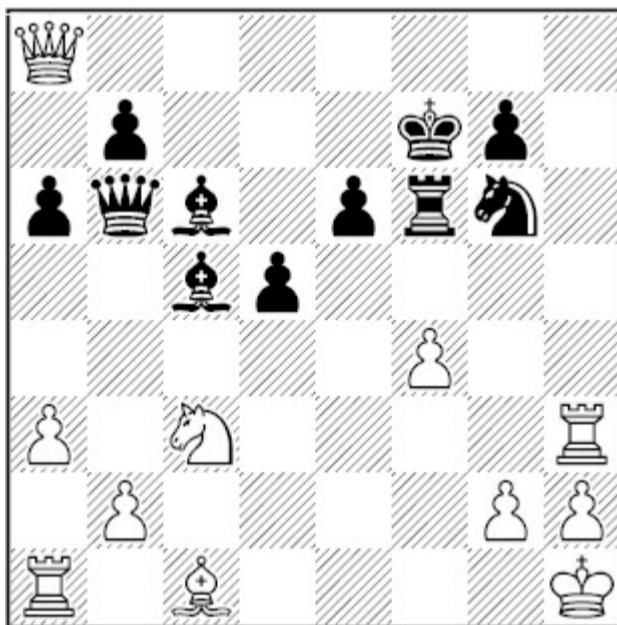
...

Preparing 22.b4, but ironically it was playable – and good – right away: 21.b4! and Black should not capture the pawn. If 21... ♖xb4 22. ♖a3 (computer magic!) 22... ♖xa3 23. ♖xb7 and White is at least equal. The other capture for Black is also inadequate: 21... ♖xb4 22. ♖b1 d4 23. ♖e4 with good play for White. So 21.b4 ♖e7 is best. The loss of time on 21.a3 could be fatal, but the play is complex and Black needs to find some accurate lines.

21...

♖d6 0:33:13

This leads to a good position; however, the computer finds a win here with the finesse 21... ♖c6!:



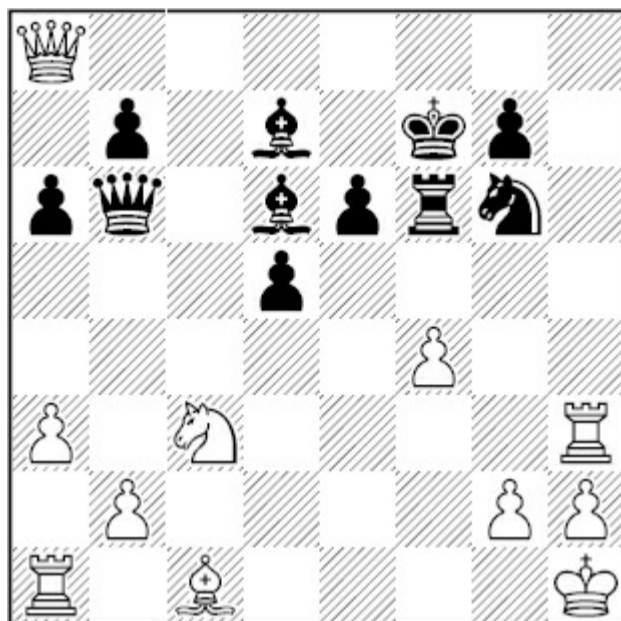
White to play after 21... ♖c6 (analysis)

White can twist and turn, but he can't survive, e.g. 22.b4 ♖d6, and now what? Suppose he tries to activate his queen with 23. ♖c8 – then 23... d4 (this would have been the reply to many of White's moves besides 23. ♖c8) 24. ♖d1 (trying to save the knight) 24... ♖b5, and there is no good defense to 25... ♖f1#, e.g. 25. ♖g1 ♖e2, mating.

This is not the type of line everyone can find, but similar play can be found for Black once you realize the general idea of the power of ...d5-d4. This line is also typical of the kind of attack a player can generate when he controls the board and the opponent's pieces are scattered to the edges, ahead the exchange or not. In that sense, this position is eerily reminiscent of Game 10, where Black also found himself the exchange behind but White's pieces were confined to the periphery of the

board.

Question: What is White's best move?



White to play after 21... ♔d6

22. ♕e3!

...

This looks like a blunder (I certainly thought so when I first saw it), allowing the black queen to penetrate on b2, winning a pawn with a double attack on a1 and c3, but it's not. Believe it or not, the computer says it's clearly White's best try! Amazing.

Let's show one other line to illustrate the danger White is facing: 22. ♖d3 (ostensibly safer than 22. ♕e3), but 22... ♕c6! 23. b4 d4 and White's game falls apart, e.g. 24. ♗e2 (all moves are hopeless – this is just an example) 24... ♙b5 25. ♖d2 ♗xf4 and mate will soon follow.

22...

♕xb2 0:23:39

Black took ten minutes for this move. It is the best and most obvious choice, so either Black could not believe his apparent good fortune, or he was trying to figure out some of the upcoming complications.

It's a good idea to keep in mind that *your goal on each move is to find the best move you can in a reasonable amount of time, not to figure out exactly how good your best move is.* Your time should be spent comparing options, not focused on evaluating the best move once you have determined which one it is. Not knowing this principle cost the loser a full point in Game 28!

Your goal on each move is to find the best move you can in a reasonable amount of time, not to figure out exactly how good your best move is.

23. ♖b1! 0:13:32

♔xc3 0:23:01

24. ♖c1? 0:14:27

...

It's so easy to go so wrong in complicated positions such as this. It turns out that 24. ♖xb7!, pinning the bishop to the king and leaving the back rank defense to the e3-bishop, gives White the best chance. After this move, White's game in theory goes from marginally lost to dead lost, but it's not resignable yet.

24...

♔b2 0:21:01

Other moves, including 24... ♖xa3, are also winning. Now White has nothing except the complexity of the position and a human opponent. Black is ahead in both material and position. *However, sometimes it's better to be badly losing a complex position than it is to be mildly losing a very simple one – except against a good computer!*

25. ♔d8 0:03:42

...

White must try to get the queen back in the game somehow before it's too late. The skewer of the two bishops at least temporarily stops Black's avalanche down the board, as seen in his best lines above.

25...

♔b5 0:15:58

Sometimes it's better to be badly losing a complex position than it is to be mildly losing a very simple one – except against a good computer!

Six minutes seems a little slow to locate this best move to save both bishops (if possible, when winning easily avoid unnecessary time trouble). Other moves are not nearly as good, e.g. 25...d4 26. ♖xd7+ is check...

26. ♖h7 0:04:20

...

Anything to generate some threats. And White is wise enough to play his move quickly, since finding the exact best move is hardly necessary – he just wants to keep it complicated and have enough time to find a way to get back into the game, if Black lets him.

26...

♔xf4! 0:12:43

The best move, but Black is starting to hear “clock-steps” – tic-toc, tic-toc. Even with a sixty-second increment, these complex games are hard on your nerves (assuming you are trying your best to find good moves). Black has more to lose than White does, so moving very quickly becomes a double-edged sword.

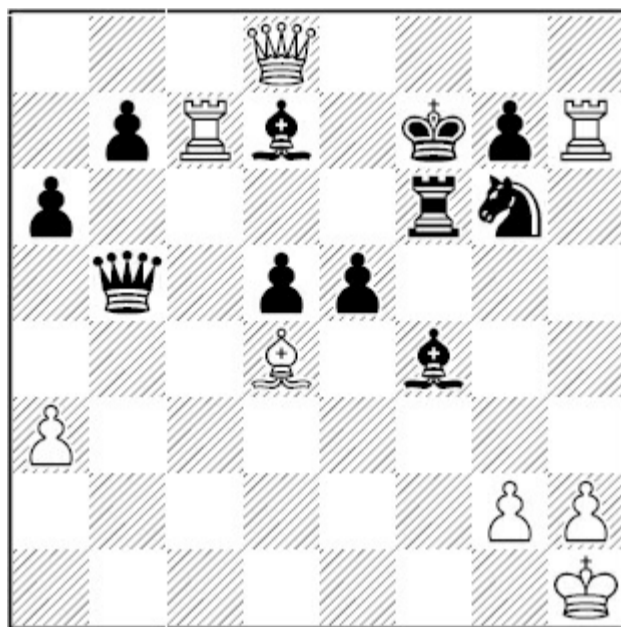
27. ♖d4 0:04:39

e5 0:08:33

To his credit, Black is playing wonderfully and, in one sense, making good use of his time to find these accurate moves. But at the rate of over four minutes for this move, he would use all his time in two more moves. Therefore, his opportunity for long thinks is almost gone.

28. ♖c7? 0:04:27

Allowing a mate but, since White is already dead lost, the question mark is certainly optional.



Black to play after 28. ♖c7

28...

♖d6?

I saw the “stock” mate pretty quickly – it’s just a question of continuing to check the king: 28... ♖f1+ 29. ♖g1 ♖xg1+ (A nice queen sac for mate, just like those in beginner tactics books and software tactical sets. If you get this far, in your analysis, *you should always consider the queen sacrifice in similar back-rank mate attacks, since if it doesn’t work, you won’t play it.* The only risk is on your time, and for a highly likely mate, the extra few seconds are well worth it almost any time.) 30. ♖xg1 ♖e3+ (removing the guard of the f1 square) 31. ♖h1 ♖f1#. If you stopped analyzing after 29... ♖xg1+ because the bishop is guarded and you lose your queen (or did not consider the sacrifice at all), that would be the common quiescence error.

If you have the time, keep analyzing potential sacrifices so long as the possible reward is greater than the risk. Here the possible reward is checkmate, so even the need to give up the queen to continue the attack should not stop your analysis until you see whether mate is possible. Of course, if it turns out that your sacrifice does not work, don’t do it and you have not risked any material – you have merely spent a little time (precious here, as both sides are short).

If you have the time, keep analyzing potential sacrifices so long as the possible reward is greater than the risk.

29. ♖c8?! 0:01:53

exd4?! 0:01:20

Black again makes a non-fatal quiescence error, missing 29... ♗xc8. Yes, the bishop is pinned, but it's a *relative pin* (the alternative is the *absolute pin* where the piece is pinned to the king and can't legally move), and the piece it can capture is just as valuable as the piece he would lose – and making fair trades is good when you are winning. Secondly, this would give Black time to capture the bishop on d4 after 30. ♗xd6 exd4. Then all Black would have to do is to see that the white queen doesn't have a perpetual check, which it doesn't – and is less likely to, since Black has just removed a white rook and bishop from the attack!

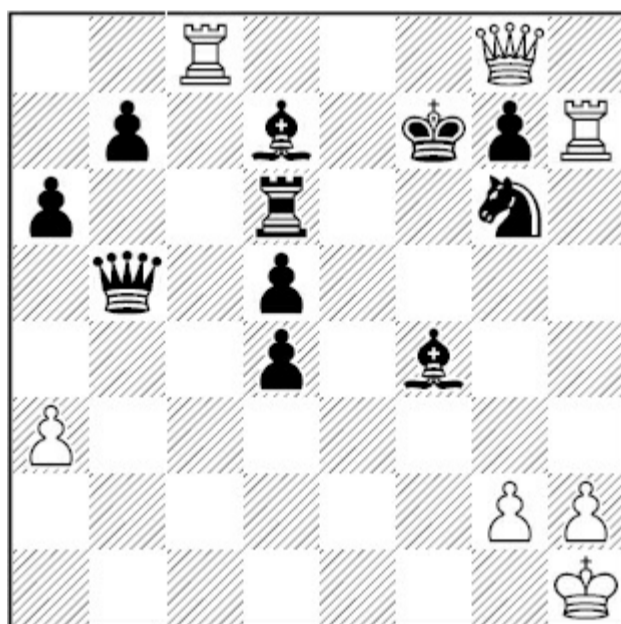
Ironically, now White does get a few checks which look very dangerous but, with accurate play, turn out to be mostly sound and fury. Still, 29... ♗xc8 was less risky all around!

Sometimes inexperienced players think, "My bishop is pinned! I can't move it," when they should be thinking, "What if I just move the bishop anyway?"

When I watch a game and a student makes a move like 29...exd4, I worry about my heart...

30. ♗g8+ 0:02:08

...



Black to play after 30. ♗g8+

30...

♗f6 0:01:24

Forced. *Houdini* says 30... ♗e7?? 31. ♗xg7+ leads to mate for White! This is a tough position for Black to play with only a minute left.

31. ♗xg7+ 0:02:53

♗g5 0:01:58

It's a lot scarier than it had to be. The computer likes 31... ♔f5 better, but Black is just trying to make sure both his clock and his king stay afloat.

32.h4+ 0:03:37 ...

Luckily for Black, in the key line 32. ♗h6+ ♔f5 33. ♗h5+ ♔e4 34. ♗f3+ ♔e5 35. ♖h5+ ♔e6 36. ♗g4+ ♔f6 White runs out of safe checks. This could just as easily have been a mating net if a piece had been on a different square, since Black did not have time to figure it all out. More than one easy win has been lost by needlessly allowing this type of king chase.

32... ♔f5 0:02:37
33.g4+ 0:01:55 ♔xg4

The minefield has been neutralized and Black's king finally reaches safety. That was way too exciting for the Peanut Gallery (boy, does that reference show my age!).

34. ♖xd4 0:01:20 ♔f1+ 0:03:11

Black jumps on the chance to trade queens. After the game, he said that at this point he could finally breathe again!

35. ♖g1+ 0:02:11 ♗xg1+ 0:03:59
36. ♔xg1 0:03:11 ♖xc8 0:04:54
37.h5 0:03:45 ♗h4 0:05:09
0-1

GAME 21: WHITE 1814 – BLACK 1689
Internet Chess Club 2010
45 minutes with a 45-second increment
Queen's Pawn Game

1. ♖c3 0:45:40 ...

This rare move usually doesn't stay independent, but instead transposes into a better-known opening. However, this game never quite transposes.

1... ♗f6 0:45:41

Black stays flexible as well. There are lots of reasonable moves. 1...d5 could transpose into a Veresov after 2.d4 ♗f6 3. ♗g5, a Center Counter after 2.e4, or even a Main Line French after 2.e4 e6 3.d4.

2.d4 0:46:19

...

Other transpositions are also possible. For example, 2.e4 d5 is still a Center Counter, 2.e4 e5 is a Vienna Game. But 2.e4 c5? is not good for Black as White has the thematic 3.e5, when Black can't get into a Sicilian or an Alekhine's.

2...

g6 0:46:04

As noted above, 2...d5 could be a Veresov but Black elects to continue his King's Indian setup. Now it would be a Pirc after 3.e4 d6...

3. ♖ **g5** 0:46:50

...

...and this gives the opening an element of a Trompovsky!

3...

♗ **g7** 0:46:23

4. ♔ **d2** 0:47:30

...

This move makes White's intentions pretty clear. He is going to castle queenside and attack kingside. When someone sends this kind of signal about pawn storming early, you often want to be careful about "castling into it" by castling too quickly to that side. Instead, in response a flexible plan is useful. For example, in this position a plan involving ...d7-d6 and/or ...c7-c6 gives Black the opportunity to quickly attack on the queenside with ...b7-b5 and possibly ...a7-a5 if White commits his king first. The ability to keep flexible and be able to meet your opponent's plan if he commits early is a good one to have, because these aggressive ideas can crop up in many openings.

4...

d6 0:46:32

5.O-O-O 0:48:01

♗ **f5(?)** 0:44:13

Based upon the note to White's fourth move, it is not too surprising that *Houdini's* top two moves are ones that quickly support ...b7-b5 – 5...c6 and 5... a6. In this type of position ...a7-a6 is not a waste of time, but instead rather aggressive, as Black will use this to launch a quick queenside pawn storm.

The problem with 5... ♗ f5 is that White can use it as a target when he goes to launch his kingside pawns via g2-g4 (or possibly e2-e4), which is exactly the opposite of what Black should want.

6.f3 0:47:29

...

A good move which supports both g2-g4 and e2-e4, attacking the bishop and garnering space on the kingside. The computer's other try is the prophylactic 6. ♔ b1.

6...

O-O(?) 0:42:07

Castling kingside in this position may not be bad – if you can defend like a computer – but it certainly is dangerous. Again a flexible move like 6...c6, or even 6...h6 putting the question to the bishop, might end up easier to play.

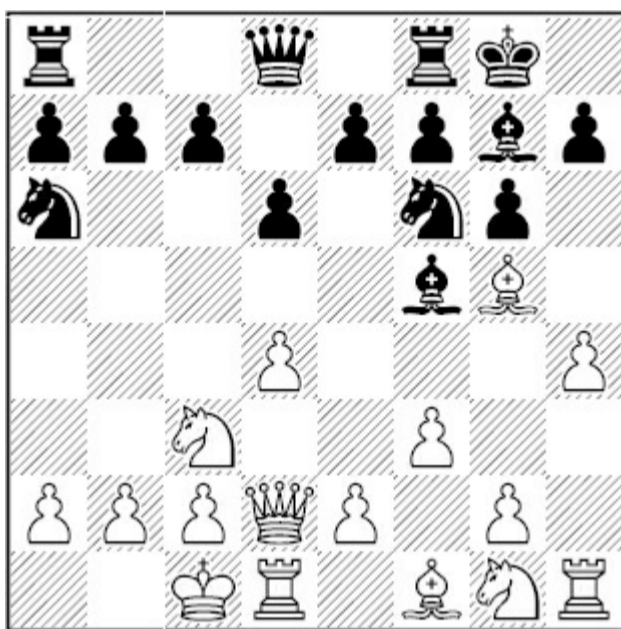
7.h4 0:46:48

...

Reasonable. White could also play 7.e4 first and then later g2-g4 or h2-h4.

7...

♖ a6(?) 0:42:19



White to play after 7...♖ a6(?)

Many amateurs fold quickly when faced with this type of pawn avalanche as Black. “He threw all his pawns at me and I didn’t know how to play against it!” they lament. Explaining how to combat a generic situation, like a pawn avalanche, is more difficult than recommending a move in specific positions. In this game, an early ...c7-c6 and delaying ...O-O is one way to combat the pawn avalanche.


In this specific position, after a lengthy search *Houdini* suggests Black should fight to control the g4 square with 7...h5!?. It takes some nerve to weaken the king like this – I believe GM Svetozar Gligorić was the first to popularize the move ...h7-h5 after h2-h4 in a Sämisch King’s Indian when White was pawn storming in the 1950’s. Similarly, in the 1970’s GM Andy Soltis suggested ...h7-h5 lines in the Sicilian Dragon to combat the Yugoslav Attack. But first he had to try ...h7-h5 in tournament play and Andy’s first guinea pig was ... me!

8.g4± 0:44:24

...

This is a good answer to 7...♖ a6 – but the computer likes 8.e4 ♕e6 9.♕h6 slightly better and thinks White may be winning already. This early “win” evaluation shows how delicate it is to castle on opposite sides and the ease with which one or two less-than-optimal moves can possibly lose the game when the position is unbalanced.



8...

d7 0:41:23

Black has nothing better. It is clear that White's pawn storm will arrive first, which means that if he plays it well Black is already in big trouble.

9. h6 0:43:07

...

The alternative 9.h5 is more accurate. The game could proceed 9...c5 (*an attack on the flank is best met by a counterattack in the center*) 10.e3 cxd4 11.exd4 c8 12. h6, with a promising attack.


9...

c5! 0:39:10

Black finally plays actively and finds the only way to counterattack, trying to exploit White's slight inaccuracy on the previous move. When your game is precarious, you need to pounce on any inaccuracy by your opponent to claw back into the game, assuming you can spot it and take advantage of it. However, Black is by no means out of danger yet.

10.h5 0:41:53


...

Sometimes it makes a big difference whether you play 10. xg7 or 10.h5 first. Apparently, here it doesn't and they will just transpose. The computer also notes that 10.dxc5 first might be more accurate.



10...

cxd4 0:37:34


Continuing to pound away at the center is both the right idea in principle and the right move as calculated by the computer. Of course, these two ideas don't always mesh, which is one reason why chess can be such a fun – and frustrating – game! Your goal is to calculate as well as possible; however, often the game is so complicated that, after a reasonable think, you have to go with the move that you were analyzing as best, even if there is no time to try to confirm your decision.




11. xg7! 0:42:34

...

White doesn't have much choice, as the queen is overworked trying to guard d4 and h6. So 11. xd4?? xh6+ would not be wise.

11...

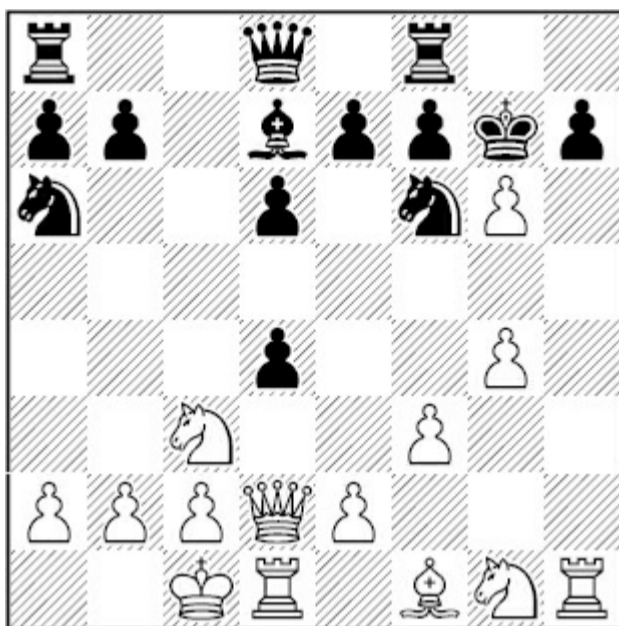
xg7 0:36:27

The alternative is 11...dxc3?, taking the knight instead. But White would be forced to try the good 12. h6, when even the greedy 12...cxb2+ fails to 13. b1! (using the pawn as a shield) 13... a4 14.hxg6+–.

12.hxg6? 0:43:16

...

White takes this pawn in three (!) seconds, leaving his c3-knight hanging! I don't care whom I am playing (assuming my opponent is a human of course) – if they leave a knight for one of my pawns to capture in only three seconds, *I am going to assume they did not take the time to see if I could capture it safely*. Therefore, I am going to take quite a bit of time seeing if I can get away with taking it!



Black to play after 12.hxg6?

12...

fxg6?? 0:35:41

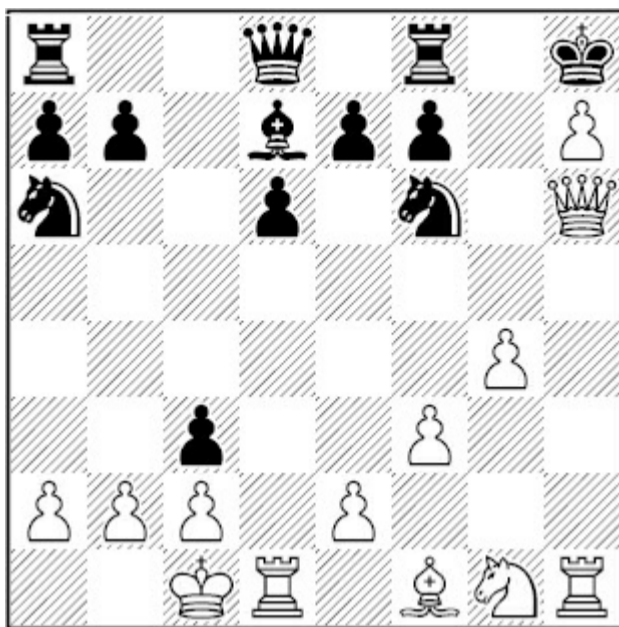
Black's answer came in 91 seconds. Unless he is a fantastically good calculator, I don't see how he could have proven that 12...dxc3 is bad that quickly. In fact, since *Houdini* calculates that 12...dxc3 wins and everything else loses (pretty much the definition of a super-critical move!), it seems safe to state that Black did not take nearly enough time for such an important decision.

If you want to be a better player, you should learn to recognize critical positions and be willing to roll up your sleeves and calculate carefully when the opportunity arises. This is one such case. Not many suggestions will help an aspiring player as much as this one! (Hint: Critical positions can be recognized as either complex, tactical positions or ones with high strategic importance, like Black's castling early in this game. For more, see "The Most Important Strategic Decisions" at <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman58.pdf>.)

Black should have played 12...dxc3. Then if 13. ♖h6+ ♔g8 (13... ♔h8?? 14.g7+ forks the king and rook) 14.g5.

(If White plays 14.gxh7+, which would scare many amateurs, then of course 14... ♔h8:

If you want to be a better player, you should learn to recognize critical positions and be willing to roll up your sleeves and calculate carefully when the opportunity arises. This is one such case. Not many suggestions will help an aspiring player as much as this one!



White to play after 14... ♔h8 (analysis)

(The white h-pawn provides an excellent shield for Black from the white pieces! A good idea to know.)

After 14.g5, there now comes 14... cxb2+ 15.♔b1 (another shield!) 15... fxg6! 16.gxf6 ♖f7 and Black is the one who is better and probably winning.

13.♔h6+ 0:42:05 ...

White's attack rolls on, but in this line Black doesn't have an extra piece to provide comfort.

13... ♔f7? 0:35:33

Only 53 seconds for another costly mistake. Black's best chance is to escape via 13... ♔h8, with 13... ♔g8 second and 13... ♔f7 dead last. The good news is that the difference is "only" a half-pawn but that's quite a bit unless one side is far ahead, and in all these lines White's advantage is still less than two pawns.

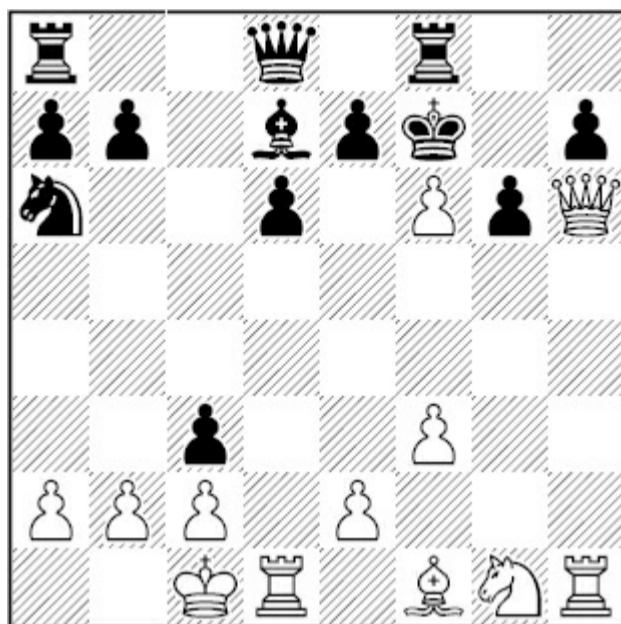
14.g5? 0:39:13 ...

White recognizes the criticality of this move and slows down (or else left the computer for a glass of water...). However, he fails to find the best continuation, which is just the simple 14. ♖xd4!+-, assuring that his attack will remain the stronger.

14... dxc3! 0:33:50

Black does not wait to be asked twice. Other moves just lose, e.g. 14... ♔e8 15. ♖xd4+- or 14... ♗h5 15. ♖xd4 and Black has no moves, e.g. 15... ♔g8 16. ♖xh5! (a good sacrificial pattern to learn!) 16... gxh5 17.g6+-.

15.gxf6± 0:39:46



Black to play after 15.gxf6

15...

cxb2+? 0:31:37

It is rare that a move like this can cause a lot of harm, but apparently Black had to play 15... ♔xf6!, a very difficult move to anticipate.

The subtle reason is that after 15... ♔xf6 16. ♖h4 (if Black had given check first, this move would be strong: 15... cxb2+ 16. ♔b1 ♔xf6 17. ♖h4!) Black can now play 16... ♗b6, threatening to capture on b2, so that after 17. ♖f4+ Black has time for 17... ♕f5□, e.g. 18.bxc3 e5 19. ♖xf5+ ♔xf5 and Black survives after 20. ♗h3±. Amazing. That's an example of how \$50 software engines now beat grandmasters easily enough that we don't hold those contests any longer.

16. ♔b1 0:40:20

...

Correct. Not the exposing 16. ♔xb2? which allows 16... ♗b6+ 17. ♔a1 ♔xf6! and Black is a little better!

16...

♔xf6 0:30:27

This no longer works, but neither does anything else: 16... ♔e8 17. ♗g7+–, 16... ♕e6 17. ♗g7+ ♔e8 18.e4+–, and even worse is 16...exf6 17. ♗xh7+ ♔e8 18.Ixg6+ +–.

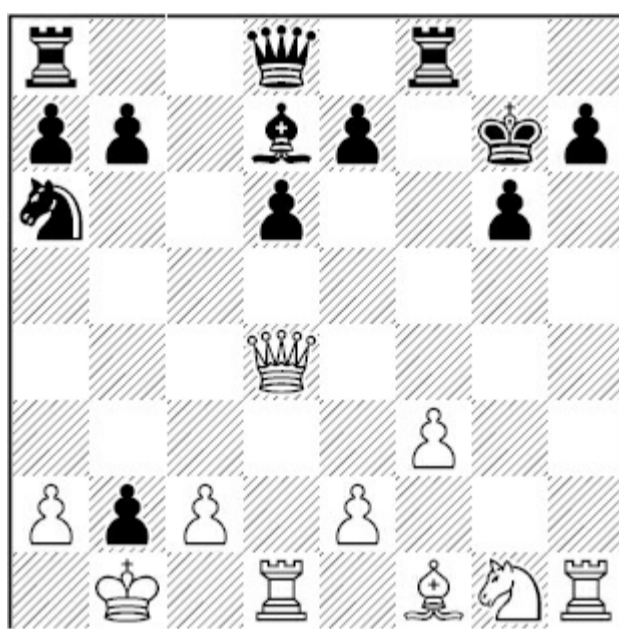
17. ♗f4+?± 0:39:05 ...

As noted earlier, White isn't that interested in taking a lot of his available time to find minor issues, like what might happen after various candidate moves, or which moves win. So instead he takes about two minutes and misses 17. ♖h4!+– which, as noted after Black's move 15, is the winning idea. That is not to say that if he had taken more time on the move he would have found it (17. ♖h4

isn't an obvious move and it's easily overlooked), but at least his chances would have been a lot better.

17... ♔g7 0:30:01
 18. ♖d4+? 0:38:53 ...

Psychologically, White has no desire to return to the square from which he came, but that's the only way to retain the advantage: 18. ♖h6+ and of course if 18... ♔f6? 19. ♖h4!+–, so 18... ♔f7 is best, but then 19. ♖xh7+ and White is still better. However, now...



Black to play after 18. ♖d4+?

18... ♔g8 0:26:27

This move is OK and, after it, Black may even be winning. Moreover, Black gets kudos for taking a reasonable amount of time to consider his alternatives. However, as it turns out, the most accurate reply is the self-pin 18... ♖f6!+–. White would have no clear way to continue the attack and his underdeveloped state would cost him the game if Black played accurately, e.g. 19. ♔h3 ♖c8 20. ♕xd7 ♖xd7 21. ♗h3 ♖f5+–.

19.e4 0:38:48 ...

White needs to get some additional pieces into the game and this is as good a way to begin as any. The alternative 19. ♗h3 ♕e6 20.e4 is not an improvement.

19... ♕e6! 0:21:51

It took Black over five minutes, but the investment was likely worth it as he finds the most accurate move, with excellent winning chances. If instead he first tries to get his “worst” piece into action (usually a great idea!), then 19... ♖c8 allows 20. ♕c4+ which is still fine for Black, but the move played is even better.

20. ♖c4 0:39:01 ...

White plays quickly (surprise!) but also finds the best chance. After 20. ♖h3 ♗a5, White is denied the thematic 21. ♗g5 and 21... ♗xa2# is threatened.

20... ♗xc4 0:19:22

A tough choice. *Houdini* calculates that 20... ♗c8 is more accurate, but the move selected is reasonable.

21. ♗xc4+ 0:39:46 ♔g7 0:19:01

22.e5! 0:38:49 ...

White thought for almost two minutes (!) and found the best chance.

22... ♗b6? 0:17:03

Another difficult choice, but this time Black slips up (don't we all occasionally?). The computer suggests that after 22... ♗c7 or 22...h5 Black retains good winning chances. My rating is about one thousand points below the computer's, so many of my own moves also look relatively bad when I analyze my games with it afterward.

23.exd6 0:38:31 ...

This is good, and White has other moves which equalize, such as 23. ♗h4 and 23. ♗e6.

23... exd6 0:17:26

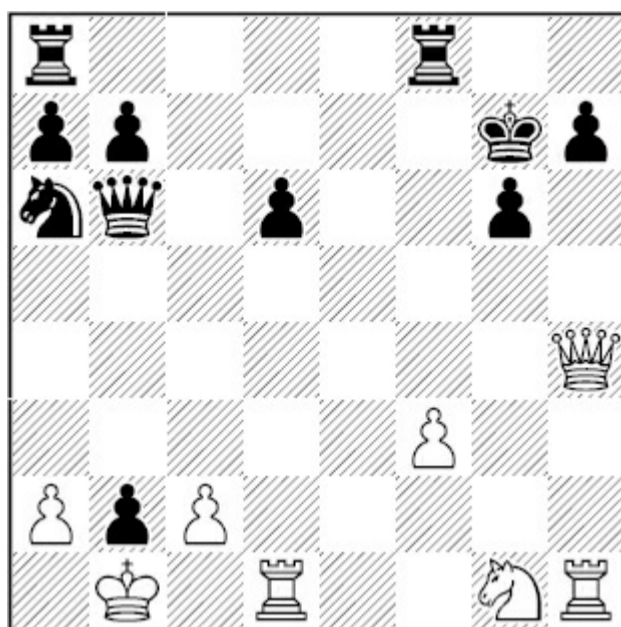
In wide open positions like this one, "automatic" recaptures are not always so automatic, but in this case Black has nothing better, e.g. 23... ♗c5 24. ♗e6 ♖ae8 25.d7 ♖d8=.

24. ♗h4 0:38:39 ...

White has a wide array of plausible alternatives, so it is no wonder it took him 37 seconds to decide, saving his other 2300+ seconds for more critical decisions. ☺

It turns out 24. ♗e6 was White's best chance, but the move he played does threaten an easy win with 25. ♗xh7+, so:

Question: What is Black's best defense to the threat of 25. ♗xh7+?



Black to play after 24. ♖h4

This might be the easiest question in the book. Black's only defense is 24...h5!. Chances are at least equal if White can find the only good line, e.g. 25. ♗e2! ♜c7 26. ♗f4 ♖c5 27. ♜d5! ♗xd5 28. Ce6+ ♔h7 29. ♗xc5 dxc5=.

Unfortunately for Black, his move wasn't nearly as good...

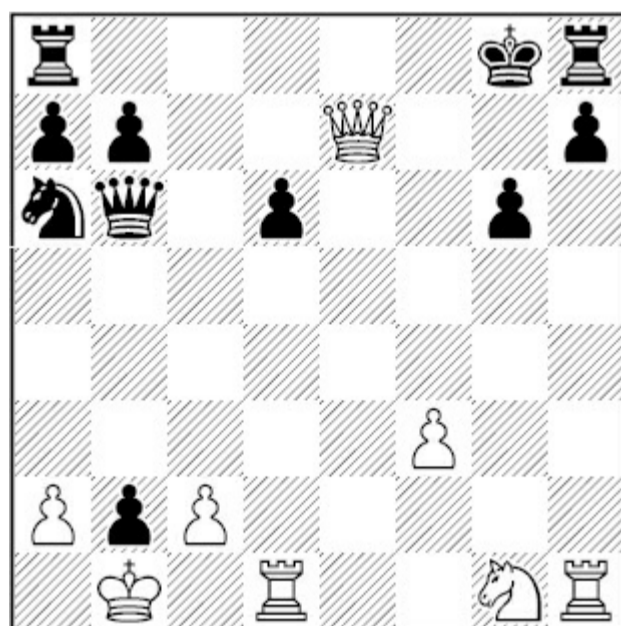
24...

♜h8??+- 0:16:14

This move would qualify the game for Chapter 5: Disaster Strikes! Possibly he just completely missed White's easy reply.

25. ♖e7+ 0:39:02

♔g8 0:16:40



White to play after 25... ♔g8

Even if Black did not visualize a mating attack here, just “seeing” that his king rook is completely out of play on h8 should have been enough for him to question this line strongly and search for another one which “looked” better.

26. ♖xd6 0:39:22

♔c5 0:15:42

Black has no defense to the many threats, e.g. 26... ♔c7 27. ♖d7 threatening mate and the queen.

27. ♔e6+ 0:39:30

...

I guess Black’s only hope was that White would forget that the black queen is guarded and play 27. ♖xg6+??, when 27...hxg6 wins for Black.

27...

♔f8 0:15:26

28. ♖d7 0:39:21

...

This is clearly the best idea and it ends the game immediately. White played the final few moves perfectly.

28...

♔f5 0:13:20

29. ♔e7+ 0:39:50

1-0

It’s mate after 29... ♔g8 30. ♔g7#, but you knew that!

GAME 22: WHITE 1704 – BLACK 1505

Internet Chess Club 2011

45 minutes with a 45-second increment

Sicilian Defense, Chekhover Variation

1.e4 0:45:37

c5 0:45:18

2. ♖f3 0:46:13

d6 0:44:48

3.d4 0:46:55

cxd4 0:45:17

4. ♔xd4 0:47:40

...

The Chekhover Variation. If my rough calculation from the database is correct, the common 4. ♖xd4 is about 25 times more popular, but there’s nothing wrong with this capture.

4...

♖c6 0:43:44

When I made a video on this game, I recalled from my old Sicilian theory that 4...a6 and 4... ♖d7 were logical and popular. The idea of those two moves is that White cannot immediately pin the knight as he can after 4... ♖c6 5. ♖b5, and Black could safely chase away the queen next move with

5... ♖c6.

After the video was published, I received an e-mail in which I was severely criticized (to put it mildly) by a strong player who basically wrote, “How dare you put out such bad information! You don’t deserve to be making videos.” He went on to state that in the intervening years since I had played this line, 4... ♗d7 had gone out of fashion and 4... ♖c6 has become the main move, followed by 4... a6. So I apologized for being a bad person and leading everyone astray. As a “Type A” personality, I work very hard on everything I do but I’m hardly perfect. I will try to make amends by publicly admitting that I was wrong and correcting myself by writing that 4... ♖c6 is not only fashionable, but a database search indicates it has done better than the “discredited” 4... ♗d7. I hope these notes allow me to be forgiven.

5. ♖b5 0:48:21

♗d7 0:42:05

6. ♖xc6 0:48:58

...

White captures, giving up the bishop pair to avoid losing a tempo. In the opening, the value of the bishop pair and a tempo are close. On the average the bishop pair is slightly more valuable, so it really depends on the position whether it is worth it or not. Grandmasters figure this out by trying various logical lines and seeing which ones work best over time. Here the capture is the book play; the computer, without its book, calculates 6. ♗d3 as slightly preferable at 22 ply.

6...

♖xc6 0:42:25

More pawns in the middle is good, but here the bishop’s central pressure from c6 is slightly preferable (and book) to 6... bxc6.

7. ♖c3 0:49:40

...

The less-popular but also logical alternative is to set up a Maróczy Bind-type structure with 7.c4.

7...

e6 0:40:55

The main line, 7... ♖f6, is about ten times more popular. It makes sense that Black would be the first to stray from the main line since White is playing quickly and has obviously studied the 4. ♗xd4 lines, while Black is a little taken by surprise and understandably is playing cautiously. At 26 ply *Houdini* rates these two top choices for Black as dead even.

8. ♖g5 0:50:08

...

By far the most common move here, although *Houdini* rates 8. ♖e3 just as good.

8...

♖e7??+-0:40:01

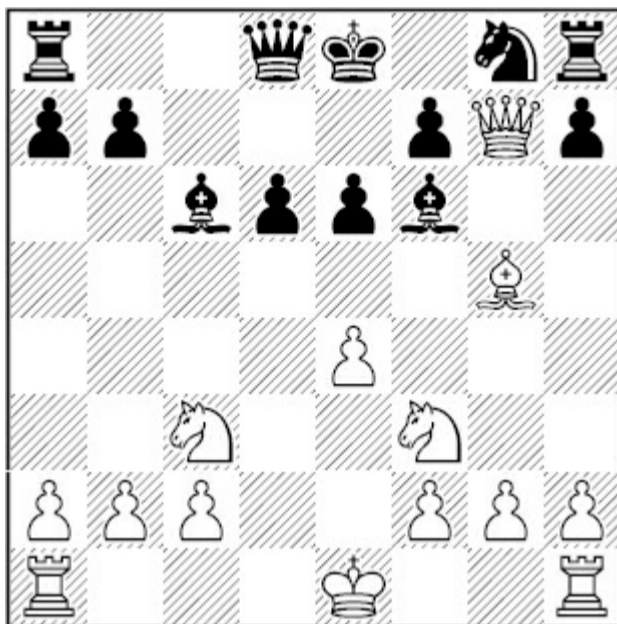
It doesn’t take much to get a lost game, and, when you’re facing good players, it often only takes one bad move. Black does not move too quickly but just overlooks that his move is not safe because

the square that the moved piece was guarding is no longer guarded. There are several ways a move can affect the position, and this is one that is easier to overlook, especially for inexperienced players.

9. ♔xg7 0:50:06

♞f6 0:34:41

Question: What should White play?



White to play after 9... ♞f6

10. ♞xf6? 0:50:48

...

This is a fairly straightforward Counting problem. White has two main candidate moves, 10. ♞xf6 and 10. ♔xh8. So the first step is recognizing that both are possible, especially 10. ♔xh8, since the bishop on f6 is pinned to the queen. The next step is to carefully count each capturing sequence – multiple times if necessary, to make sure you have counted correctly until quiescence and picked the one which leaves you the furthest ahead in material.

In this case, White played his move in three seconds! I don't care if he had counted it while Black was thinking (doubtful, but possible). Too much is riding on the move – it could be quite critical. If he did not do any thinking about this line on his opponent's turn, that means he played 10. ♞xf6 without even considering 10. ♔xh8.

10. ♞xf6 just trades off and leaves White ahead a pawn. Not bad, but that still means you should analyze the other candidate 10. ♔xh8. If White captures the rook, Black has two tries:

- 10... ♞xh8 11. ♞xd8 ♜xd8. After White won the pawn, he gets Black's rook and queen, Black gets White's queen and bishop. So White wins the exchange (rook for bishop) and Black has the bishop pair as consolation. Added to the pawn he was already ahead, that leaves him ahead about two pawns, roughly;
- 10... ♞xg5. However, this allows 11. ♔xg8+, so 10... ♞xh8 is preferable.

Since 10. ♖xh8 leaves White ahead the equivalent of two pawns *and* trades queens while winning, that is far superior to 10. ♗xf6, which leaves White ahead only a pawn.

That's the type of analysis you must go through if you want to be a good player. It won't turn you into Garry Kasparov, but practice and you will get improve. There's no way White could have done this in three seconds. Want to get better? Learn to analyze slowly and carefully.

10... ♔xf6 0:34:30
11. ♖g3 0:46:57 ...

Normally you want to trade queens when ahead, but each position has to be analyzed on its own merits. To just trade instead of analyzing is “hand-waving” – using principles to make moves in analytical positions. Here 11. ♖xf6 ♗f6 helps Black to develop and White has to play 12. ♗d2 to save the e-pawn. But after 11. ♖g3 White attacks d6 and gives himself a tempo to castle. So that's a little better, all other things being equal. Ironically, it was on this move that White slowed down a little, not on the previous move when the difference between what he did and what he could have done was greater – or maybe on this move he got up to get something to drink...

11... ♗e7!? 0:32:23

If a master made this move, we would have to say it was a deeply considered sacrifice by a player already down a pawn, to mix things up and create complications. Black did take two minutes so we will give him the benefit of the doubt and assume that he did (possibly) see that his d-pawn was hanging. *Houdini* likes 11...e5± best.

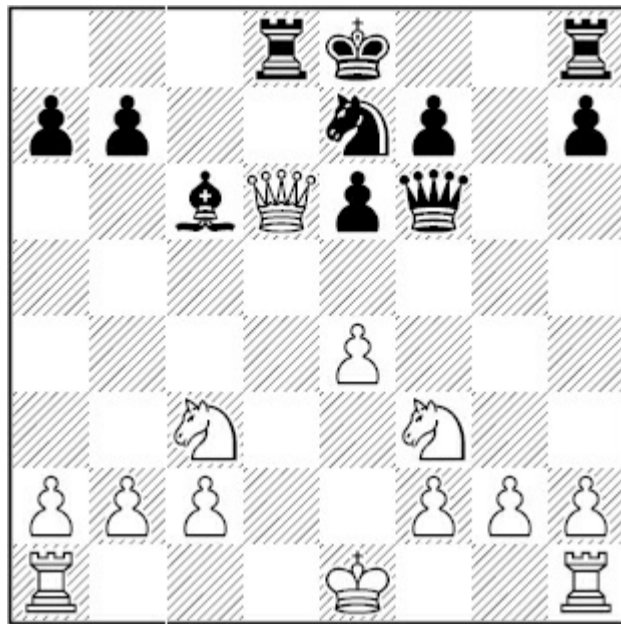
12. ♖xd6 0:43:47 ...

White takes the second pawn and decides to dig in. He could also play 12.O-O-O when the computer suggests Black's best reply is 12...e5, trying to hold onto the d-pawn. Computers are materialistic, so it prefers 12. ♖xd6.

12... ♗d8 0:32:36

Houdini was predicting 12... ♗g8 13.O-O-O ♗xg2 14. ♗d3, when White is on the brink of winning. Instead, Black poses White a problem.

Question: How many safe moves does White have?



White to play after 12... ♖d8

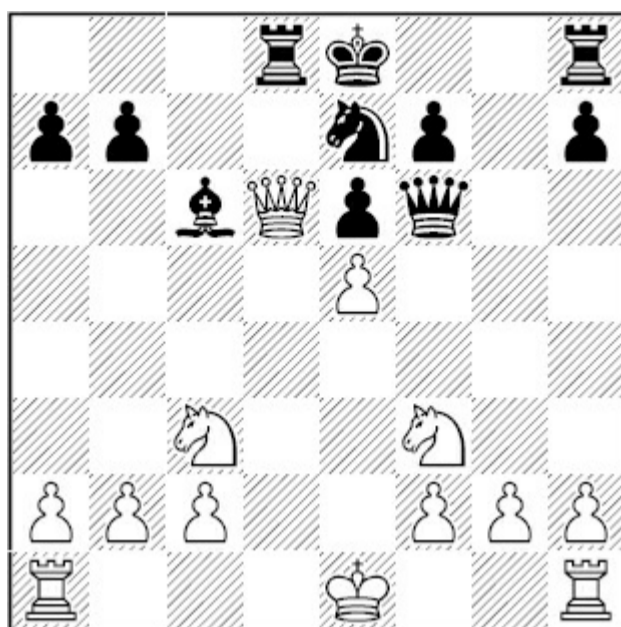
Since White probably has to give back a pawn and he's currently ahead two, any move that leaves him at least a pawn ahead can be considered safe. That would be three: 13. ♖e5 (trading queens and best), 13. ♖c5, and possibly 13. ♖c7. After that, there is a drop-off: 13. ♖a3, 13. ♖b4, and 13. ♖g3, all superficially safe moves, run into trouble against the common reply 13... ♖g8, when the threat to the g2-pawn is difficult to meet. For example, 13. ♖a3 ♖g8 when 14.g3 loses to 14... ♖xf3, 14.O-O loses to 14... ♖xf3, and 14. ♖f1 ♖g6 gives Black a good attack. White can play 13. ♖a3 ♖g8 14. ♖xa7 (best), but then 14... ♖f4 makes it difficult for White to get his king to safety, e.g. 15. ♖e3 ♖xe3 16.fxe3 ♖xg2 when Black has good compensation for his material investment.

This is the type of question you need to ask when saving an attacked piece – you can't tell what is the best way if you don't know all the ways from which to choose.

13.e5?? 0:44:01 ...

White takes 31 seconds to counterattack. Tip: *If your opponent attacks one of your pieces with a piece that is worth less, the overwhelming majority of the time you should just move it. To counterattack is dangerous. And, when you are winning, as White is here, you want to keep things simple, and counterattacking is dangerous because it is also complicated.* So 13.e5 represents bad strategy and tactics on White's part.

Question: Can you spot why 13.e5 is a big mistake?



Black to play after 13.e5?

13...

♞f5? 0:31:50

Black couldn't. He took only about a minute and a half to make this lemon. The answer is that Black can save his queen and make a second threat by putting the queen on the g-file with 13... ♞g7! or 13... ♞g6!. Then, when White saves his queen with 14. ♞c7, Black simply captures 14... ♞xg2, with a double attack on the rook and knight and winning a piece.

You can't tell what is the best way if you don't know all the ways from which to choose.

Complicated positions like this are worth a little extra time. One thing we find about the slower players in this book: *they often get into time trouble by playing too slowly in non-critical positions, not necessarily by taking a long time in more critical positions like this.* So whether you play too slowly at the start in non-critical positions and get into unnecessary time trouble and then have to play fast in critical positions, or whether you have plenty of time but play too quickly as Black did here, the result is often the same – missed opportunities or good positions thrown away. It is noteworthy that after both sides miss this idea, they slow down afterwards. Better late than never?!

14. ♞c5 0:33:56

...

Ironically, after all this unbalanced play and mistakes, *Houdini* rates the position as almost exactly even after this move, which is White's best.

It is important to point out that most of the positions in this middlegame are very analytic, and not so strategic. In other words, it's not so much a question of planning and figuring out what to do, but of reacting to threats or figuring out whether it is possible to create threats that are unstoppable (or at least uncomfortable to meet) – an unstoppable threat being a tactic. For example, Black's move 13 should have been the start of a tactic, but he missed the idea. Much of chess is this way: the safety of

the pieces and the analysis of what will keep your pieces safe or show your opponent's pieces as unsafe often dominate the "what should my plan be?" type of play.

When I play "out loud" against a computer for my students and ask after the game what they learned, the most common answer is, "Wow! You do a lot of analysis!" Very little time is spent on strategy (but it's there in helping me pick out candidate moves).

14... ♖g8 0:31:05

This is a candidate, but Black does have the f3 square attacked more times than it is guarded. Therefore, the obvious 14... ♗xf3 15.gxf3 ♕xf3 16. ♖g1 gives Black at least equality and indeed is rated best (14...b6 is also ranked highly). As mentioned in the previous note, safety considerations are often the dominant issue. Some players see grandmasters occasionally abstain from winning material and think that is normal, but in most cases the simple, safest move is best.

15. ♗d4!± 0:33:49 ...

Tricky, but Black has both g2 and f3 attacked and this is the only way to retain a little advantage.

15... ♕g5? 0:28:17

White is going to take on c6, so Black needs to figure out where to move his attacked queen. The decision is not easy and 15... ♕g4 is likely best. The problem with 15... ♕g5 is that in some lines White will be able to play a later ♗c3-e4, hitting the queen with a critical tempo, and then ♗f6+.

16. ♗ce2? 0:25:42 ...

With all the big guns trained on g2, 16. ♗xc6! is best, when 16...bxc6 17. ♗e4! ♕xg2 18. ♗f6+ ♕f8 19. ♕e2! should bring home the point. After Black saves the rook on g8, White has an extra pawn and the attack, e.g. 19... ♖g4 (*Houdini's* best) 20. ♖hg1+- . Note that 19... ♖g4 20. ♗xg4? lets Black get back into the game after 20... ♕xg4+ 21. ♕f1= (21. ♕e3?? ♗f5#; 21. ♕e1?? ♕e4+ picks up the h1-rook with check; 21.f3? ♕g2+ 22. ♕e3 ♕d2+ 23. ♕e4 ♖d5-+) 21... ♕h3+ 22. ♕e2 ♕g4+ with perpetual check.

16... ♗f5= 0:18:21

Once again the errors even out and equality is reached. That's not always the case, since some mistakes are much greater than others!

17.f4 0:22:58 ...

This pawn thrust is a good try; 17. ♖d1 is also good. The position is delicate – safety issues abound – and, despite the mutually balancing errors, the next player to make one might not be so lucky.

17...

♙h4+ 0:15:36

Best. If 17... ♗xg2? instead, then:

- Not 18. ♖g1?? due to 18... ♗xg1+ (forced, but winning) 19. ♗xg1 ♖xg1+ 20. ♔e2 ♖g2+ (better than the also winning 20... ♖xa1) and no matter where White's king goes, it's curtains, e.g. 21. ♔e1 ♗xd4; however –
- Correct is 18.O-O-O! when Black is in big trouble: 18... ♗xd4 19. ♗xd4 and *Houdini's* top line is 19...a6 20.b3 ♗xh1 21. ♖xh1 ♕xh1 22.f5, with a great game for White.

18.g3 0:23:24

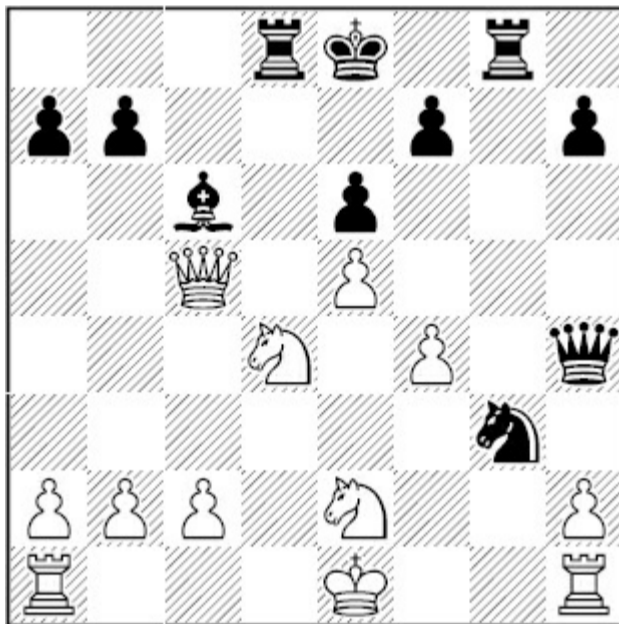
...

Forced. White allows the capture of this pinned pawn, but all other moves are a disaster. For example, 18. ♔f1?? ♗e3+ 19. ♔g1 ♖xg2#. White played 18.g3 fairly quickly, and in this instance that's good because the position has remained complex and both sides are going to need some time to calculate.

18...

♗xg3 0:15:48

Question: How would you answer 18... ♗xg3?



White to play after 18... ♗xg3

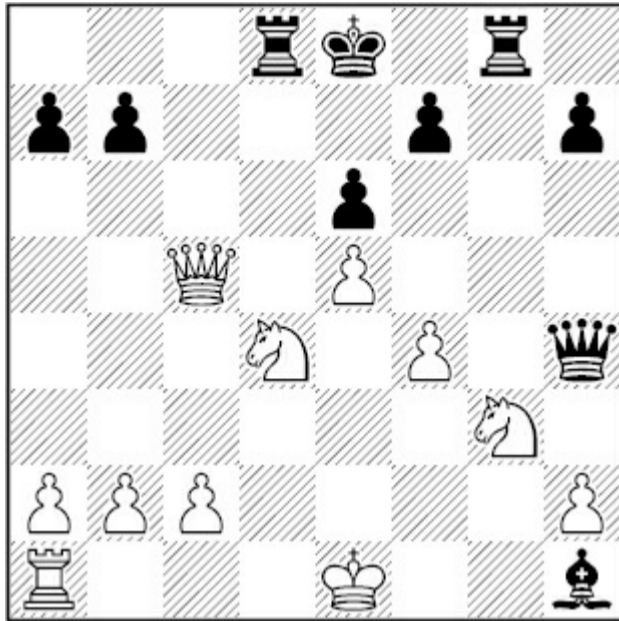
19.O-O-O?+ 0:23:35

...

White returns to his “fast mode” (34 seconds!) at a very inconvenient moment, on this critical move. The position is complicated, but there is only one move to hold the game. Two of the key aspects are that the rook at h1 is attacked twice and Black also threatens a strong discovered attack with his knight.

The only move to maintain the balance is 19. ♗xg3! ♕xh1 (if 19... ♖xg3 20.O-O-O is now

correct, as if 20... ♔xh1 then 21.hxg3 maintains equality):



White to play after 19... ♔xh1 (analysis)

20. ♖b5!! . A real “computer” move. White is down the exchange and his king is caught in a crossfire, but his threats save the game. For example, 20... ♔f3 21. ♖c7+ ♔d7 22. ♖b5 forces Black to repeat the position with 22... ♔e8 and draw because, if he does not retreat the king, the threat is 23. ♗d6+ ♔e8 24. ♖c7#.

We can't blame White for missing that (I would miss it too, as would most masters, I am confident to guess) but, at 34 seconds, he wasn't even trying.

19... ♖xh1 –+ 0:15:13

So we have reached another one of those positions where one player is way ahead (the computer evaluates Black's lead at more than six pawns), so the most important annotating issue is whether that player does something to allow his opponent back in the game. White should try to create complications and stay alert to opportunities allowed by Black's missteps.

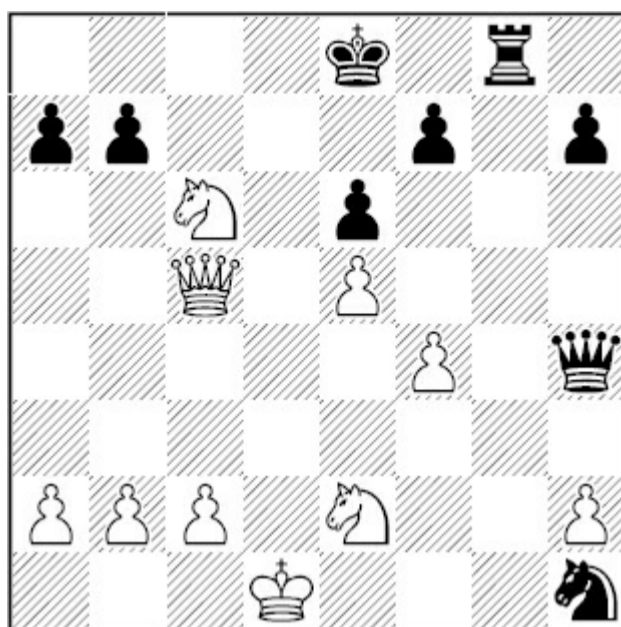
20. ♖xc6 0:23:05 ...

Allows trades, but White feels he can possibly get some counterplay. 20. ♖xc6 does just that, as Black needs to play accurately for the next couple of moves.

20... ♔xd1 + 0:11:56

Although Black took over three minutes, this move is forced, as 20... bxc6?? 21. ♔xh1 and White is back in the game.

21. ♔xd1 0:23:50 ...



Black to play after 21. ♔xd1

21...

♞f2+! 0:08:16

Four minutes was well worth it for this very accurate move. Black removes his knight from the vulnerable h1-a8 diagonal before thinking about capturing on c6.

22. ♔c1 0:24:31

...

Other squares lose the queen instantly to either a fork (22. ♔d2? ♞e4+) or a discovery (22. ♔e1 ♞d3/e4+).

22...

♞e4 0:07:27

The analysis for this move gets into the instructive and frequently encountered issue, “What should a human who is winning easily play, as compared to the moves rated highest by the computer?”

In other words, *when a player is way ahead in material, the moves that get rid of counterplay and win without trouble are often quite different from the computer’s “best” or “fastest” win, which might require considerable risk or complications.* Since a computer will always find its way through the complications, there is no risk on its part, but a human following its initial advice without the benefit of its continuing analysis might be risking unnecessary complications.

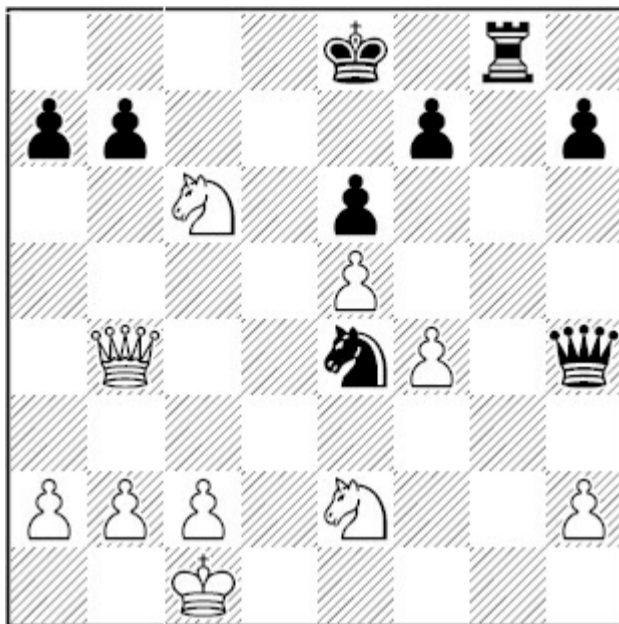
For example, here I might play 22... ♞d3+ (have to consider those queen forks) 23.cxd3 (but if you stopped analyzing here because the knight was left *en prise* to a pawn, that would be a *Quiescence Error* – <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman55.pdf> – and you would miss the line clearance for the queen to get to e1) 23... ♞e1+ 24. ♔c2 ♞xe2+ 25. ♔c3 bxc6 26. ♞xc6+ ♔f8, when the king will run safely around to g7, so long as I saw that White had no possibility of perpetual check on the kingside. That’s a very forcing line with little risk that just leaves Black ahead a rook in the endgame. *Houdini* rates this line as second best behind Black’s choice of 22... ♞e4, but I think

my line is much “easier.” ☺

23. ♔b4 0:22:09

...

White has to watch e1 with his queen, else 23... ♕e1#.



Black to play after 23. ♔b4

When a player is way ahead in material, the moves that get rid of counterplay and win without trouble are often quite different from the computer’s “best” or “fastest” win.

Houdini calculates that Black has five moves that win easily here. I might have chosen the straightforward 23... bxc6 since 24. ♔xe4?? allows 24... ♕e1#, and after 24. ♔b8+ ♔e7 White has no perpetual, while now 25. ♔xg8?? allows the same 25... ♕e1#. 23... bxc6 is only fourth on *Houdini*’s list, but that doesn’t matter as it’s fairly easy to calculate. However, not near the list is:

23...

♖g1+??= 0:05:59

It’s ironic that Black thinks he can deflect the knight safely when, if he wants to get tricky, he should sacrifice his *queen* and not his rook: 23... ♕xf4+ and now 24. ♖xf4? ♖g1+ 25. ♔e1 ♖xe1#, so 23... ♕xf4+ just wins a pawn with check and Black remains way ahead in material. Not as simple as the line I suggested in the previous note (23... bxc6). Trying to get tricky when ahead this much material is not only unnecessary, but dangerous.

When you are winning easily you rarely need to resort to complications, and doing so exposes you to situations where you have a lot more to lose than you have to gain.

24. ♖xg1 0:22:03

...

Of course. Now the white queen guards e1 from mate, and if 24... ♖xf4+ 25. ♔d1 it also guards d2 against mate. If I remember correctly, this second line is what Black told me after the game that he had missed. But the key point is that *there was no need to get tricky. When you are behind, being tricky can be salvation; when you are otherwise even, being tricky can show genius, but when you are winning easily you rarely need to resort to complications, and doing so exposes you to situations where you have a lot more to lose than you have to gain.* With the move played, Black just loses a rook and the game is back to... dead even (again).

24... ♖xf4+ 0:06:28
25. ♔d1 0:22:24 ♖g4+? 0:05:26

Black can only win one of the knights, so it was simplest just to take the one currently *en prise* with 25... bxc6=. The move played essentially gives White a free tempo.

26. ♗e2± 0:22:26 bxc6 0:00:52

Wow! Black took almost all his time (his clock got down to 7 seconds before the increment put him back at 52) to play an essentially forced move. There were alternatives like 26... ♗f2+?, but none that would be worth flirting that closely with a forfeit. It was a bad time for a phone call or coffee break!?

27. ♖b8+ 0:22:35 ...

A standard sequence to pick up the pawn with check. Actually, Black is not all that upset about being forced to move quickly, as the increment allows him to gain some time.

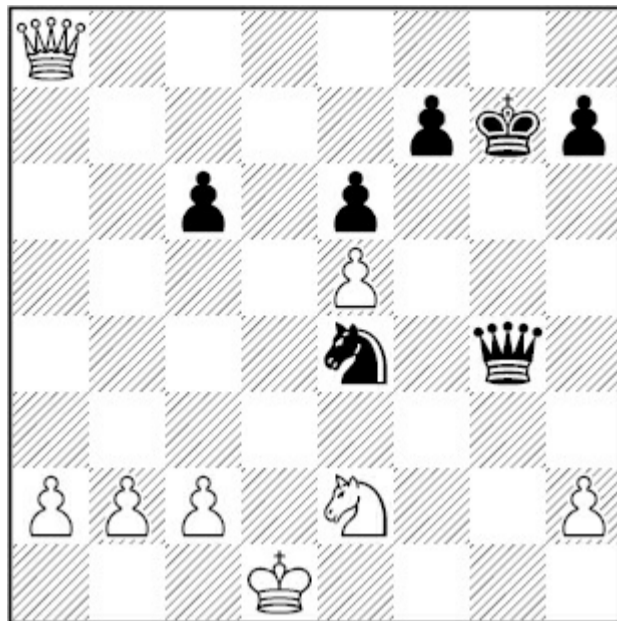
27... ♔e7 0:01:07

Thirty seconds. The only other legal move, 27... Kd7, could not be that much better, so even that is a little slow. Every extra second might count.

28. ♖xa7+ 0:20:16 ♔f8 0:01:41
29. ♖a8+? 0:20:24 ...

White has plenty of time, but he moves in less than the increment and does not strongly attempt to find the most accurate move, which is 29. ♖a3+. Then if 29... c5 (to get the pawn onto a guarded square) 30. ♖e3±.

29... ♔g7= 0:02:11



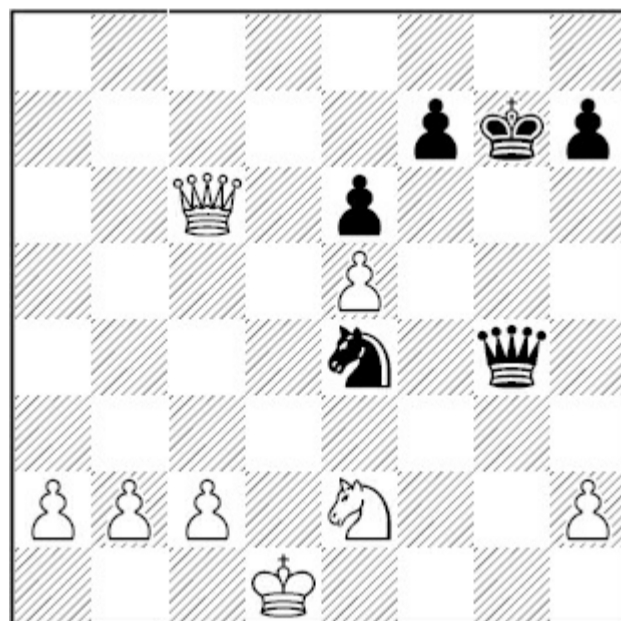
White to play after 29... ♔g7

30. ♕xc6?? 0:20:59

...

White gobbles the pawn in 10 seconds, leaving Black multiple winning moves. If White had taken a few minutes and asked, “For this candidate move, does my opponent have a check, capture, or threat which I can’t meet?” his chances of finding one of those for his opponent after 30. ♕xc6?? might have been good. Instead, just capturing the unguarded c-pawn was good enough for him. It turns out that White had multiple moves that were good enough for equality, such as 30. ♕d8, 30. ♕a5, 30. ♕a3, and possibly 30. ♕a7.

Question: Can you find at least one forced win for Black?



Black to play after 30. ♕c6??

30...

♕f5+ 0:02:13

Good enough, but much more decisive is to place the queen on the long diagonal with 30... ♕f3

or 30...♔g2, when the dual threats of 31...♔f1# and 31...♖c3/f2+ (winning the queen on a discovery) can't both be met safely. *When you see a good move, look for a better one, unless your good move wins very easily or you're running out of time to make that move.* Here Black is a little low on time, so we can't be too harsh – quite the opposite – it's admirable he found one of the wins.

Notice that finding a win by 30...♔f3 or 30...♔g2 or even 30...♔f5 is more difficult because these are “quiet moves” – not checks or captures, although threatening 31...♔f1# is about as loud as it can get.

31. ♖g3(?) ...

The proverbial blunder in a lost position. Since Black is not threatening the discovery on the queen, but just the mate, White can ward that off with 31.c4 ♔f1+ 32.♔c2 ♔xe2+ 33.♔b3 ♖d2+ 34.♔b4 ♔xh2 but with his clock gaining time and a nice increment, Black should win easily. After 31. ♖g3, Black spots the easy mate:

31... ♔f3+ 0:02:30
 32. ♔e1 0:17:24 ...

Same thing on 32. ♔c1 ♔e3+ 33. ♔d1 ♔d2#.

32... ♔f2+ 0:03:00

It's mate next after 33. ♔d1 ♔d2#, so...

0-1

This was a seesaw game with a heavy dose of analytical moves. Black had lost the rook on move 23 and stood worse, but White's quick, sloppy play put his opponent right back on top.

GAME 23: WHITE 1653 – BLACK 1352
 Berlin, Germany 2012
 40/90 followed by SD/15, 30-second increment
 Tarrasch Defense

Like many games in this book, the present one features a preponderance of analytical moves where safety is paramount and strategy is secondary.

1.d4	d5
2.c4	e6
3. ♖c3	♖f6
4.e3	...

Instead of the main line 4. ♖g5, or 4. ♖f4, or even the steady 4. ♗f3, White plays somewhat passively, allowing Black many possibilities for transposition. If you wish to avoid book and don't mind giving away your advantage as White, a solid but unpretentious move can often obtain a tough-to-crack position against a booked-up opponent.

4... c5

Black opts for a Tarrasch Defense. He could go in for a Semi-Slav with 4...c6, a Queen's Gambit Declined with 4...♖e7, or even a Nimzo-Indian with 4...♖b4. After the game Black, an active player, said he felt 4...c5 fit his style better than the seemingly more passive 4...c6, although Semi-Slav players might like to educate him!

5. ♗f3 ...

A flexible move – there's nothing better.

5... cxd4

Normal is 5... ♗c6, and *Houdini*

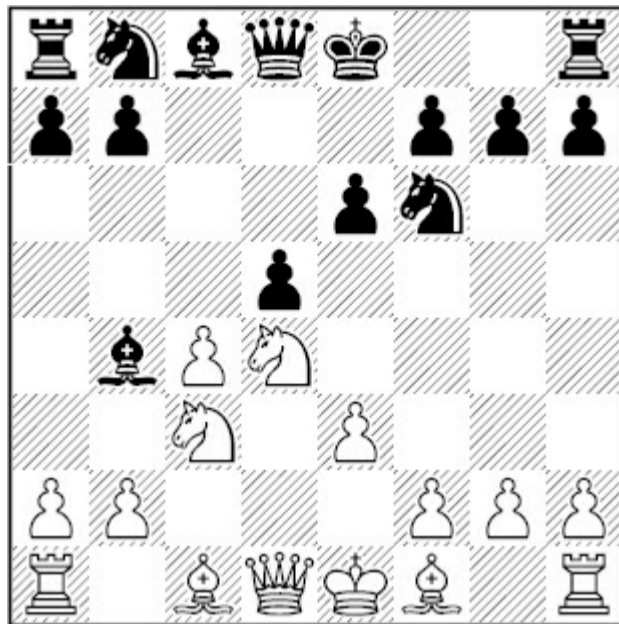
thinks that is best by a slight margin. It then suggests 6. ♖d3 with rough equality, but I prefer the theoretical 6.a3.

5...cxd4 allows White to re-open the c1-h6 diagonal for his dark-squared bishop.

6. ♗xd4 ...

Plausible, but the space-grabbing 6.exd4 is much more to the point. Inexperienced players often avoid the pawn recapture because they are afraid Black will play ...dxc4 isolating their queen pawn. However, White is doing fine in the typical isolated queen pawn (IQP) position – slightly better than after 6. ♗xd4. Note that 6.exd4 dxc4(?) immediately would allow White to develop his king bishop with tempo, so Black normally waits until that bishop moves first before capturing on c4.

6... ♖b4?



White to play after 6... ♖b4?

Black took three minutes on this move, but apparently none asking what would happen if White played his only check, 7. ♗a4+, forking bishop and king. If you often miss opponents' checks, you are spending relatively too much time on strategy or on the safety of other moves that you end up not playing. Instead, you should first ask, "Is my candidate move safe?" i.e., "Does my opponent have a forcing move – check, capture, or threat – that I can't safely meet next move?" Not consistently asking that – playing "Hope Chess" – can cap your progress permanently.

7. ♕d2? ...

Double blunder – White is not looking for checks, either! It turns out 7. ♗a4+ does not win a piece, but it does give White a big advantage and is clearly the best move. The main line is 7... ♗c6 8. ♗xc6 ♕xc3+ 9. bxc3 bxc6! (if 9... ♗d7?, then 10.cxd5 ♗xd5 11. ♗d4 ♗xc6 12. ♗xg7+-, e.g. 12... ♗xc3 13. ♗xc3 ♗xc3 14. ♕b2) 10.cxd5 (better than 10. ♗xc6+) 10... ♗xd5 11.c4 ♗d6 12. ♕a3±.

As so often happens, after this pair of mistakes, things settle down – for a few moves.

I usually suggest that my students resist playing ♕d2 unless there is a tactic on the e1-a5 diagonal or the bishop must move to quickly vacate an important square for the queen's rook.

7... O-O
8. ♕e2 ...

8.a3 is logical, hoping to take advantage of the bishop's otherwise passive placement on d2. That way if 8... ♕xc3 (≠8... ♕c5=) then 9. ♕xc3 might give some chance to activate the bishop, but then Black would play the thematic 9... ♗e4 when White's advantage is minimal. Best by a slim margin is 8.cxd5, but even then White's advantage is microscopic.

8... dxc4

Good move, but there's no rush to capture just because the white king's bishop has moved. The alternative is the aggressive 8...e5, which takes advantage of White's decision to play 6. ♖xd4.

9. ♖xc4

e5

A classical break against the white center to equalize space.

10. ♖f3

♕c7

One principle often violated by amateurs is, *Don't develop your pieces where they can easily be attacked by pieces of lesser value.* Here the queen moves to the open file, where it can eventually be harassed by ♖c1, but also is a target for ideas like ♖b5 or ♖d5. For more on this idea, see "Attack it with Something Worth Less" at <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman132.pdf>.

Better was the pedestrian 10... ♖c6; sometimes the simple moves are best. If Black had to move the queen, he should have played 10... ♕e7, which, at 23 ply, *Houdini* rates almost as highly as 10... ♖c6.

11. ♕b3

...

A logical move which develops, guards, and attacks all in one. I once heard the tongue-in-cheek principle, *Anytime a move does one thing, that makes it a candidate move; if a move does two things, it is a strong candidate; if it does three things you may as well just make it!* ☺

11...

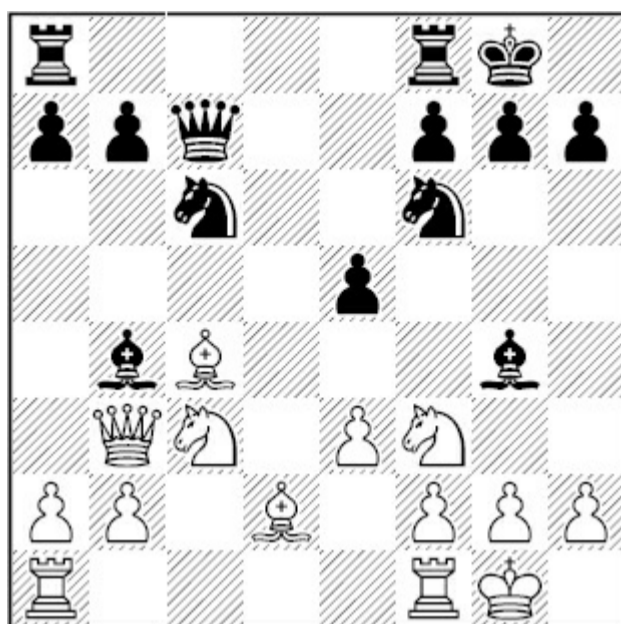
♖c6

12.O-O

♕g4?

Black should either play 12...a5 to fortify his queenside, 12... ♖xc3 to minimize White's play at the expense of the bishop pair, or 12... ♕e7 to correct the queen's placement. The move chosen creates a safety problem.

Question: Can you see how White can take advantage of Black's awkward piece placement?



White to play after 12... ♔g4?

13. ♘d5?

...

This is the wrong knight attack. White should play 13. ♘b5! attacking the queen and discovering a second attack on the b4-bishop. Black would have to guard the bishop with 13... ♕a5 or 13... ♕e7, but then:

- 13... ♕a5 14. ♘xb4 ♕xb4 15. ♕xb4 ♘xb4 (the c6-knight is overworked guarding b4 and e5, a recurring theme in this position, so the guard is removed), and now 16. ♘xe5 wins a pawn;
- 13... ♕e7 14. ♘xb4 ♘xb4 (14... ♕xb4 15. ♕xb4 – again, the knight at c6 is overworked – 15... ♘xb4 16. ♘xe5, and the e-pawn falls) 15. ♘xe5 is good for White, e.g. 15... ♕xe5 16. ♕xb4+ =.

13...

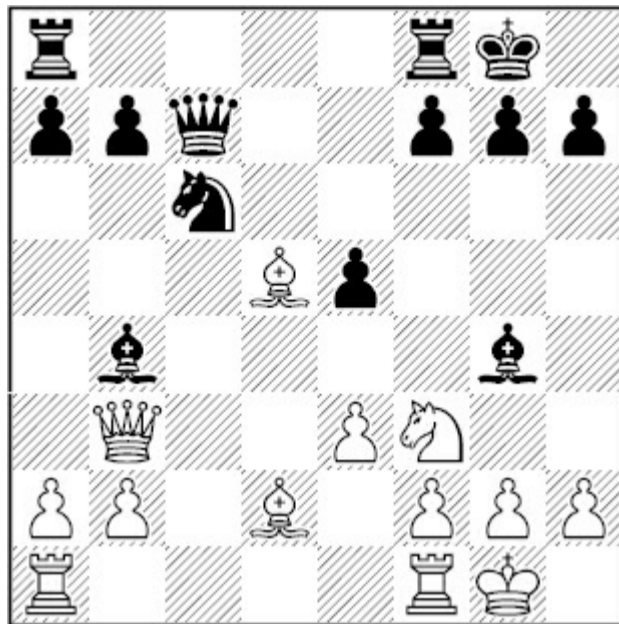
♘xd5

14. ♘xd5

...

But 13. ♘d5 was worse than just missing the win of a pawn – it actually loses! Black has already played the first move toward winning. Can you find the rest?

Question: Black to play and win.



Black to play after 14. ♖xd5

14... ♖xf3!

So far, so good!

15. ♖xc6 ...

Making the best of a bad lot. Other moves are no better:

- 15. ♖xf3 ♖xd2 is easy – the defender of d2 was removed and Black wins a piece;
- 15. gxf3 ♖xd2, ditto – removing the guard wins a piece;
- 15. ♖xb4 ♖xd5 and the queen is overworked trying to recapture on d5 and guard b4, so Black again wins a piece after 16. ♗xd5 ♖xb4.

15... ♖xg2?

Settling for way too little. Black can win with 15... ♗xc6! attacking g2, e.g.:

- 16. gxf3 ♖xd2 winning a piece with our recurring removal-of-the-guard motif;
- 16. ♗xb4 ♗g6! (16... ♖xg2 also wins) 17. g3 ♖fd8, when White's threats on the light squares will eventually win at least the exchange;
- 16. ♖xb4 ♖xg2, and White cannot capture on f8: 17. ♖xf8? ♗g6 mates, e.g. 18. f4 ♖f3+ 19. ♖f2 ♗g2+ 20. ♖e1 ♗e2#, but other 17th moves are insufficient for White, too.

These “multiple capturing possibilities” positions are critical – a red flag. Take your time to carefully calculate the possible capturing sequences. If you can do that consistently, your results will improve. When these possibilities arise, the difference between the best move and a second best

move is likely big enough to affect the outcome of the game.

16. ♖xg2	♖xd2
17. ♗fd1	...

Black is ahead a pawn, but White has good compensation with opposite-colored bishops and a lead in development.

17...	♗fd8
-------	------

Using the other rook was better, as one of those vulnerable light squares, f7, can be attacked with...

18. ♖d5!	♖a5
----------	-----

The best way to save the bishop.

19. ♗ac1	♖e7
20. e4(?)	...

White is trying to make things too difficult – a common problem with inexperienced players. There's no reason for White to delay winning his pawn back. Taking first with 20. ♖xb7= (e.g. 20... ♖xb7 21. ♖xb7, when 21... ♗ab8 is met by 22. ♗xd8+ with equality) is preferable to 20. ♖xb7, allowing an unnecessary pin with 20... ♗ab8.

These “multiple capturing possibilities” positions are critical – a red flag. Take your time to carefully calculate the possible capturing sequences.

There are many positions where two pieces (say, a queen and knight) attack a pawn and one piece (assume a knight) guards it, when of course the first capturing piece has to be the one of lesser value (the knight and not the queen). But this logic does not follow if the guarding piece is a queen. *In fact, the opposite is often the case and it often is preferable to capture first with the more valuable piece.* In this latter situation, no principle can overcome a case-by-case analysis to see which capture is better.

20...	♖b6!
-------	------

The Conundrum of Opposite-Colored Bishops

While opposite-colored bishops are the most drawish endgame, they also make for a sharp and definitely non-drawish middlegame, as the presence of several other pieces makes it difficult for both

sides to defend squares of the color of the opponent's bishop.

Black settles in with his extra pawn. The presence of bishops of opposite color indicates a tense middlegame is still likely.

21. ♖c3 ...

A flexible rook that can be used to double on the c- or d-files or swing over to the kingside to facilitate an offensive.

21... ♖f8

Houdini suggests 21...g6 or 21... ♖ac8, activating Black's last piece – almost always a good idea. Instead, Black sees the pressure building on f8, admits his inaccuracy on move 17, and reverses course. It is the sign of a player's maturity that he is willing to take a move back even when it's not forced.

22. ♖g3 ...

Onto the same file as the king...

22... ♔h8(!)

...which then gets off the file. This is not necessary, as the king may be needed to help guard f7, but Black's good plan is to push the f-pawn and eliminate the focal point completely.

23. ♖dd3(?) ...

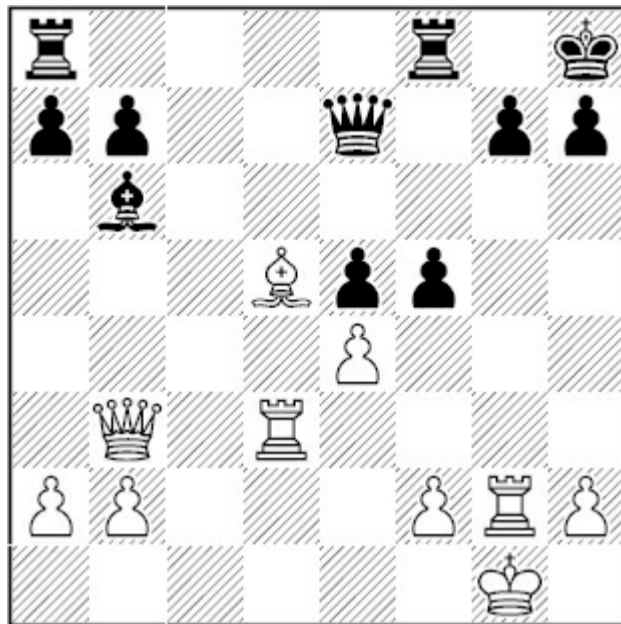
White abandons the back rank for maneuvering along the third rank. Since he stands worse, aggressive play is required. The computer prefers 23. ♖f3, refocusing pressure on the f-file.

23... f5

A good pawn break, and one consistent with the previous move. Due to the very mild inaccuracy of 23. ♖dd3, *Houdini* calculates that Black may have crossed the line from big advantage into winning (it's very close), so that's why 23. ♖dd3 deserves at least a "(?)". *Sometimes you can make a big error that takes you from the good side of a draw to the bad side, but then make a small error that theoretically takes you from the bad side of a draw to a loss. Therefore, the technically losing move is not always a "big" mistake, depending upon how you define it.*

24. ♖g2?- ...

A strange move, removing this rook's lateral mobility. Possibly White is thinking about doubling his rooks on the g-file. Now all doubt is removed; the computer is emphatic that Black is clearly winning with best play, so the "?" on 24. ♖g2 is easily deserved.



Black to play after 24. ♖g2?

24...

f4?

Ouch! Giving the favor right back. Many inexperienced players love to play these “protected pawn” moves, but they’re only as good as the position allows them to be. Here Black could target f2, a dark-square point of focus for the bishop, and even other squares on the f-file. Opening lines where you have the advantage and where your pieces are strong (rook on the f-file) by 24...fxe4 is indicated.

24...fxe4 is more than just positionally desirable, as White cannot recapture: 24...fxe4 25. ♕xe4 ♖h4! attacking both f2 and e4. How can White defend both? If 26. ♕f3 (26. ♖h3?? ♖xe4) 26...e4 27. ♖a4 to pin the pawn, then the pretty 27... ♖f4 alleviates the pin and wins a piece. If instead 24...fxe4 25. ♕xe4 ♖h4! 26. ♕xb7, then 26... ♖xf2!-+ is much better than the lame 26... ♕xf2+. *Sometimes threats of discovered check are much stronger than an actual check* – there is no principle, it could be that one or the other is stronger – and the only way to tell is to analyze the position carefully. Finally, if 24...fxe4 25. ♖d1 (best), Black still has 25... ♖f4! winning, e.g. 26. ♖h1 ♖af8 27. ♖a3 ♕c5 and White’s kingside falls apart.

25.h4

...

The best defense was 25. ♖h3. After the “attacking” 25.h4, Black can regain his winning advantage with the right idea...

25...

♖ad8

Right piece, wrong square. For some reason Black places the rook on the file where the white bishop is currently granite (courtesy of 24...f4?). The winning idea was 25... ♖ac8 to force White to guard the back rank, e.g. 26. ♖d1 ♕d4.

25... ♖xh4? was dangerous. White could use the open h-file to advantage: 26. ♖h3 ♖f6

27. ♖xh7+! ♔xh7 28. ♖h2+ when White is at least equal after 28... ♔g6 29. ♖g2+, or 28... ♕h6!?
29. ♖xh6+ ♔xh6 30. ♗f7 g6 31. ♕e6.

26. ♖h3 ...

If I remember correctly, White was playing very quickly but Black was starting to run into time trouble. 26. ♖h3 is another strange move. Even if White could run his pawn up to h6 (doubtful), the attacked square g7 is dark, which means it will be difficult to target with White's bishop being the wrong color.

26... ♖f6(?)

The computer indicates that 26... ♖c8!, admitting his mistake, is winning, but that's always psychologically difficult.

27.h5 ...

Sure, why not? After 26. ♖h3 any other move would be illogical, and *Houdini* suggests it is White's best chance.

Sometimes threats of discovered check are much stronger than an actual check.

27... ♕d7

Not surprisingly, the computer likes 27... ♖c8.

28. ♕f3? ...

A strange decision. *Houdini* likes the consistent 28.h6 g6 and, although Black is still better, White is in there fighting. The text allows Black a strong reply, which is...

28... ♖c8!

Better late than never! White's king will have a safe haven at h2, but that will remove a defender from f2 and White's pieces will all be scrunched on the king-side, to use a technical term.

29.b3 ...

Better resistance is offered by 29. ♕b3, which meets with 29... ♖c1+, e.g. 30. ♔h2 ♖h6 and the computer foresees that Black can slowly maneuver his way to victory.

29... ♖c2

30.a4 ♕c8

Good idea – the flexible queen keeps an eye on both sides of the board. *Houdini* likes 30... ♔d4 and 30... ♖h6 a little better but 30... ♙c8 should suffice. This type of position is difficult for White, who doesn't have many active options. No one likes to play passive defense, and amateurs are notably impatient even when they have the advantage.

31. ♔c4

♔d4

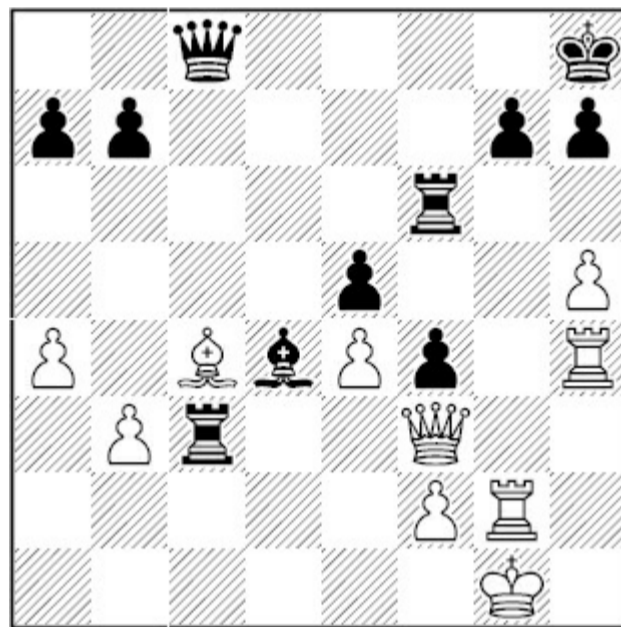
32. ♖h4

...

Abandoning the third rank, to allow Black rook's to penetrate more easily, hastens the end. White should just play 32. ♙h2 and try to hang on, although he is theoretically lost no matter what he tries.

32...

♖c3



White to play after 32... ♖c3

33. ♙g4

...

This does give White a chance to get back in the game... if Black doesn't see both threats! Believe it or not, I have had multiple students in Black's situation whose opponents' move attacked pieces and they thought, "Why did White make that move?", answering simplistically, "Because I was attacking the queen with my move 32... ♖c3," and then overlooked 34. ♙xc8+ or 34. ♙xg7# and lost. A better question would have been, "What are all the things my opponent's move does?", and for 33. ♙g4 the answer would include avoiding capture from the c3-rook, threatening mate on g7, and threatening the queen on c8. It only takes one threat that you miss to lose the game.

What are all the things my opponent's move does?

33...

♙f8

The best way to stop the mate. Now ...f4-f3 is on its way and the hammer will be down. The tricky 33... ♖xf2+ also works but is not necessary.

34. ♔h2

f3

White's forces are rather sad-looking and *Houdini* has Black ahead by over 10 pawns with best play. Black does not play perfectly and allows White to hang on for a while.

35. ♖g1

♖xf2

In fairness, this move is perfect.

36. ♖f1

♖xh4

37. ♗xh4

♖f4

38. ♗g3

♖c2+

39. ♖f2

♖xf2+

40. ♗xf2

b6

An irrelevant move, but this may have been made hastily as the final move before the time control. 40... ♖xe4 and 40... ♗f6 both close in on the white king.

41. ♖d5

♗c5

Again 41... ♗f6 is the right direction. Besides planning the attack, Black should also be thinking, "*What's the only way I can lose this position?*" and make sure there are no back-rank mate possibilities.

42. ♗g3

...

Theoretically, White holds out the longest with 42. ♗xc5 but we can understand why he doesn't want to play that. *When in dead-lost positions it's better to make moves that give you a chance to get back in the game rather than ones that provide the computer's best evaluation score.* Here 42. ♗xc5 has a computer evaluation of about -10 pawns in Black's favor, while other moves are about -20 or mate, so it's not as if 42. ♗xc5 gives any real hope.

42...

f2

43.h6

...

Why not? If you're not going to resign, may as well play a move that allows a miracle.

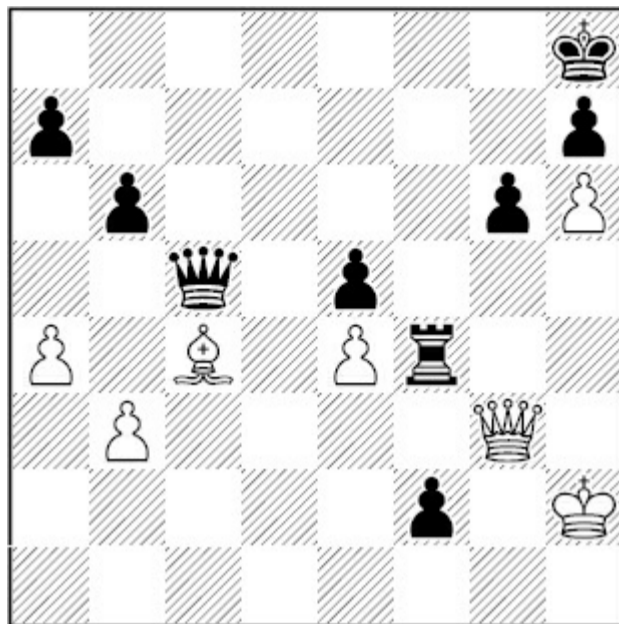
Black should also be thinking, "*What's the only way I can lose this position?*"

43...

g6

44. ♔ c4

...



Black to play after 44. ♔ c4

44...

♙xc4

A good move that puts an end to resistance.

45. ♙g5

...

If 45.bxc4 f1 ♙ is “best,” but 45... f1 ♘+ also shuts down counterplay. White’s move isn’t really a threat (if 45... f1 ♙ 46. ♙d8+ ♙g8), so maybe it would be more accurate to say he is hanging by a thread.

45...

♙c7

If Black continues to prevent anything that comes close to mate, he’s going to win. ☹

46. ♙xf4

...

Hard to believe White is hoping for stalemate with all those queenside pawn moves available.

46...

exf4

47. ♙g2

♙e5

48. ♙xf2

♙xe4

49. ♙f1

f3

50. ♙g1

♙e2

51.b4

♙g2#

0-1

Chapter 5:

Disaster Strikes

DISASTER STRIKES

Most of us are fascinated by train wrecks. We laugh at someone slipping on a banana peel or get excited when a football player is knocked flat. Chess is no different – chess players are fascinated with the myriad ways their fellow players can snatch defeat from the jaws of victory, and cringe (or worse, laugh) when we see a game where the apparent winner jumps off a cliff, figuratively.

In soccer, if you are leading 10-0 with 2 minutes left you can't lose even if you pull your goalie. But chess is not that way – you can always stalemate when way ahead in material, and there are many ways to lose when your opponent has mating material – back-rank mates, time forfeits, and placing queens *en prise* come to mind. I have dubbed these ways of suddenly losing (or drawing) when way ahead “Flooblies,” as in “*When you are winning easily, make sure you don't allow a Floobly.*” This chapter contains some painful Flooblies. For those of you who enjoy train wrecks, we have saved the best for last.

OPPONENT KNOWS A TACTICAL PATTERN YOU DON'T

Everyone who learns chess starts out knowing nothing about the game. At the other end of the spectrum, all World Championship contenders have quite a bit of the same advanced knowledge. But in-between, in the land of the intermediates, it is likely that players near the same rating level have quite different talents and knowledge. It works out that the players' “net result” – their current playing strength – is about the same.

Because of these differences, it is common for amateur players to head for tactical patterns they know in the hope that their opponent either does not know that pattern or will not recognize it in time. A simple example would be a beginner trying to Scholar's Mate his opponent with 1.e4 e5 2.♔h5 ♘c6 3.♕c4 ♘f6?? 4.♔xf7#.

If the opponent does not recognize the pattern, our “sudden disaster” can often arise. In the following game, Black plays in unnecessarily risky fashion in the attempt to deal a blow he hopes his opponent will not see. This time it succeeded, but *making bad moves and hoping your opponent will not know how to refute them is a bad habit* which will come back to haunt you as your opposition gets stronger. The following game could just as easily been placed in the “Too Fast” chapter due to Black's unnecessarily quick play.

GAME 24: WHITE 1638 – BLACK 1705

Internet Chess Club 2010

45 minutes with a 45-second increment

English Opening (Reversed Sicilian)

1.c4 45:41
2.g3 46:15

e5 45:40
...

White fianchettoes his king bishop early, trying to control the light squares in the center. This variation has been championed in books by grandmasters Andrew Soltis, Tony Kosten, and Mihail Marin.

2...

♖f6 46:17

2...c6 is also popular and thematic. The idea in that line is for Black to get in a quick ...d7-d5. In response, theory calls for White to immediately attack the e5-pawn while Black cannot respond ...♗c6, via 3.♗f3 or the preferred 3.d4.

3.♗g2 46:38

d5 46:57

Black here plays the characteristic pawn break of the Reversed Open Sicilian. He has other reasonable ways of developing such as 3...g6, 3...♗c6, 3...♗c5, or again 3...c6.

4.cxd5 46:59

...

It's worth repeating the handy principle, "*If the opponent breaks with a center (d- or e-) pawn and when you take with a pawn he can't recapture with a pawn, then capturing is usually correct.*" If the capturing pawn is a c- or f-pawn, then the capture is even more correct. If the opponent can capture back with a pawn, then you just have to analyze the position! Here the capturing pawn is a c-pawn and Black cannot take back with a pawn, so the capture is close to mandatory.

4...

♗xd5 47:38

5.♗c3 47:25

...

The text transposes into the main lines after the more common sequence 1.c4 e5 2.♗c3 ♗f6 3.g3 d5 4.cxd5 ♗xd5 5.♗g2.

5...

♗e6 48:11

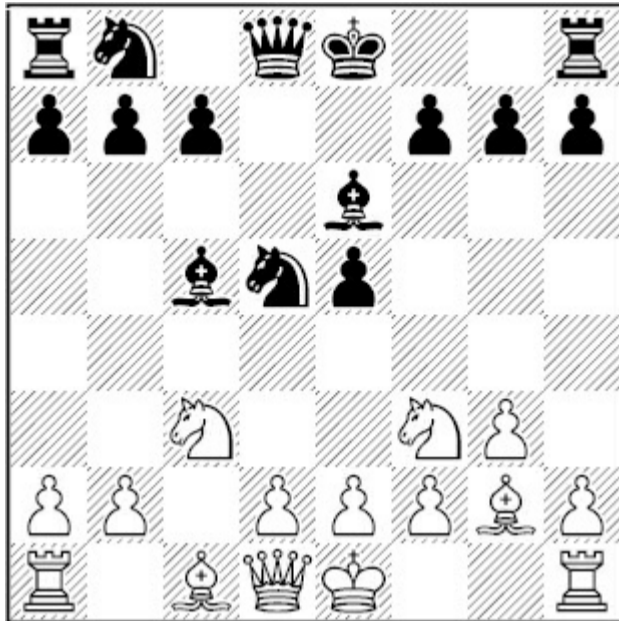
6.♗f3 46:18

♗c5 48:37

Normal is 6...♗c6, guarding the e-pawn. After 7.O-O Black plays the thematic 7...♗b6, allowing the queen to aid in discouraging 8.d4.

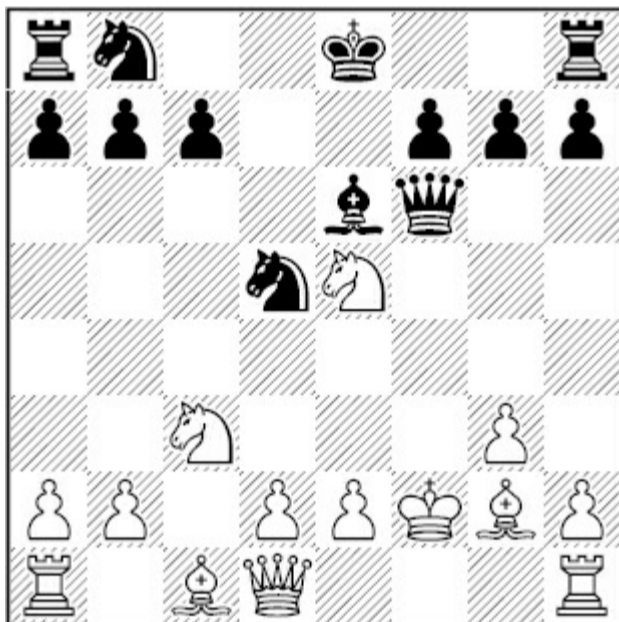
This is the first move where White has slowed down (the players have an average of a little less than 2 minutes per move if we assume the game will go about 40 moves) but Black is still playing like a rocket. One wonders if Black even saw that his e-pawn was *en prise*; he played so fast that we can't tell if it was an oversight or if he quickly thought he was setting a trap!

Question: Is it safe for White to capture 7. ♖xe5?



White to play after 6... ♗c5

Answer: Yes, and that's why Black's sixth move deserves a question mark. After the game, I asked White why he did not capture the pawn, and he said that he feared 7. ♖xe5 ♗xf2+ 8. ♔xf2 ♕f6+ with a double attack on his knight and king:



White to play after 8... ♕f6+ (analysis)

White was unable to visualize 9. ♖f3, remaining a piece ahead. The reader has the advantage of seeing the diagram, but White had to both anticipate the possibility of the dangerous 7... ♗xf2+ and visualize that it does not work. Other attacking lines such as 7... ♕f6 8.d4 (or 8. ♖d3! – *Houdini*) are also easily defended by White, with a clear pawn extra.

When you see a possible win of material like 7. ♖xe5, take extra time to analyze since the risk and reward are both raised! If your opponent plays a move like 6... ♗c5 allowing a simple capture, either he has made a mistake, tried to set a trap, or both! In any case, he is basically signaling that

your move is critical, so take your time. Don't assume that just because he offered the pawn it is bad to take it – figure it out for yourself!

When my students lose a game, it is rarely because of something they did not know. Usually it is analysis mistakes like the one above. However, aspiring players think that acquiring more knowledge (opening, endgames, principles) is the golden path to improvement. But I believe GM Rowson when he writes in *Chess for Zebras* that he has come to the conclusion that giving intermediate players more knowledge does not make them better players.

What makes a player better? Learning to analyze and evaluate positions more quickly and accurately.

What does make a player better? It is learning to analyze and evaluate positions more quickly and accurately, and that includes improving abilities like time management, thought process, criticality assessment, tactical vision, and visualization.

7.O-O?! 44:03 ...

White took only a little less than three minutes (don't forget to add in the 45-second increment) to miss 7. ♖xe5. That's not too fast, but when you have a chance to win a pawn, perhaps spending a little extra time would have helped.

7... ♖c6 49:15

Defending the pawn, but this time White can capture on e5 for a different reason.

8.d3 43:32 ...

A passive move, missing the thematic center fork trick 8. ♖xe5 ♖xe5 9.d4. The center fork trick usually doesn't win material – it just simplifies or opens up the game. In this case White is doing well after 9... ♖xc3 10.bxc3 ♔d6 11.dxe5 ♔xe5, when either 12. ♖a4+ or 12. ♖xb7 leaves White nicely better.

8... ♔d7 49:46

Black wishes to castle queenside, but that gives White a chance to disrupt Black's development.

9. ♖xd5 41:41 ...

One of the most important goals in every game is to try your best, which is best indicated by moving at a pace that would end up using almost all your time.

Sharper and thematic is 9. ♖g5±. The threat is to win the bishop pair (worth, on the average, about half a pawn), retaining an advantage for White.

9...

♖xd5= 50:21

Black continues to play very quickly. One of the most important goals in every game is to try your best, which is best indicated by moving at a pace that would end up using almost all your time. It's analogous to how a marathon runner's best pace is the one that finishes the race with almost no energy, or someone taking an essay test pacing themselves to write the best possible essay before the time expires.

Never start a game without the intention of using almost all your time.

I tell my students, "*Never start a game without the intention of using almost all your time.*" Of course, if your opponent blunders a queen on move 14 and resigns, you will have quite a bit of time remaining on your clock, but you should have been pacing yourself to use almost all your time, had the game been of normal length.

Don't feel like using almost all your time in a long time-control game? Then the answer is simple – at the start agree to a shorter time limit, where you *are* willing to use almost all your time! If you start following a policy of trying to use almost all your time every game – and you don't currently do so – that will have a much bigger positive effect than memorizing an entire opening book!

10.a3 41:14

...

White wants to play a later b2-b4 with tempo on the c5-bishop.

10...

h5!? 50:50

This is consistent with 8... ♔d7: Black wishes to castle queenside and start a quick attack on White's king. This idea outlines Black's swiftly devised plan for the remainder of the game.

11. ♕c2 41:01

...

Of course, more consistent is 11.b4, as mentioned on White's move 10. White is moving a little fast, too, but not nearly as carelessly as Black.

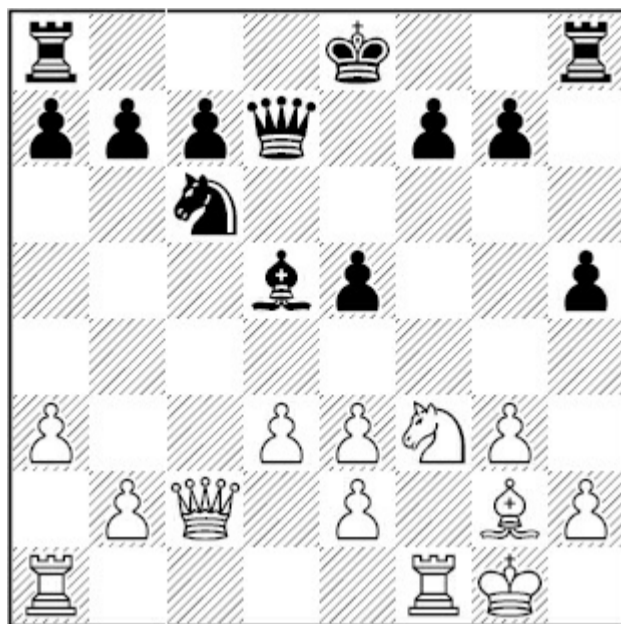
11...

♖b6 50:43

12. ♖d2? 39:30

...

Here the computer thinks that the best move is the thematic 12. ♖e3. Many amateur players would not even think of playing this move, as after 12... ♖xe3 13.fx3:



Black to play after 13.fxe3 (analysis)

they are stranded with the dreaded “doubled pawns” (oh no!).

However, unlike backward and isolated pawns – which usually range from annoying to weak – doubled pawns can actually be helpful in some situations. In the diagram position, the extra pawn guarding central squares and the semi-open f-file for the rook make White’s position quite acceptable. So much so, in fact, that *Houdini* suggests that after 12. ♔e3 Black should not double White’s pawns, but instead play 12...O-O-O with a small plus.

But in the game White played passively, so Black’s advantage is growing and he proceeds aggressively with...

12... ♔xf3! 50:09

Removing the guard of h4. Black could immediately play 12...h4, as 13. ♖xh4 is dangerous due to 13... ♗d4 14. ♔d1 ♔xg2 15. ♔xg2 O-O-O with probably a winning attack, e.g. 16. ♔h1 ♗e6 17.a4 e4 when the computer calculates that Black wins in all variations.

13. ♔xf3 36:26 ...

Sensing danger, White slows down. The alternative, 13.exf3, would mess up White’s pawns immediately, but avoid 13. ♔xf3 ♗d4 doing similar damage while also eliminating White’s light-squared bishop. The computer suggests 13.exf3 is the better hope to save the game.

When a move is forced, then you should play it quickly, using the time earlier (to avoid danger) or later (when the moves are not forced, and you might need the time to find the best defense). One thing you should not do in chess is play quickly until you get into trouble and then slow down trying to get out of it. Much better is to use a little more time earlier to avoid trouble. Some players are so worried that they will get into trouble that they play way too slowly early in the game and get into unnecessary time trouble, and this can be a problem just as big or even bigger than playing too slow! Like

Goldilocks, it's better to strive for "just right!"

13...

h4? 50:48

This may seem consistent, but forking the queen and bishop first with 13... ♖d4 14. ♔c4 ♖xf3+ 15.exf3 O-O-O should give Black a stronger attack. Black only took six seconds (!) on this move, so he hardly followed the famous principle, "*When you see a good move, look for a better one – you are trying to find the best one you can in a reasonable amount of time.*"

14. ♕g2 28:13

...

White has slowed down considerably. *Houdini* thinks 14.e3= is more accurate, but it is unfair to criticize minor positional misjudgments that I, too, would make frequently. *Houdini* is rated 1000 points higher than I am, so "normal" master moves under its scrutiny often look like small mistakes (which add up!). That's one reason why I would not win 1 game out of 100 if I played a match against it.

14...

hxg3 51:14

15.hxg3 28:34

...

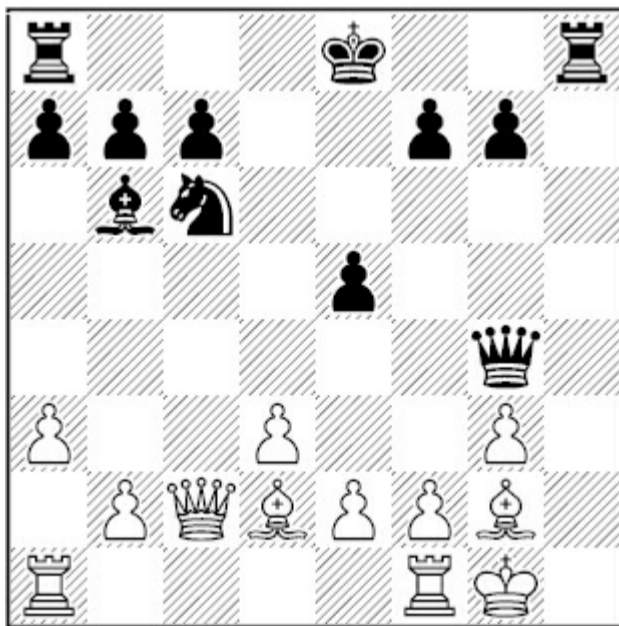
This opens the h-file, but my "board vision" tells me that 15.fxg3 is illegal!

15...

♔g4?

Better is the simple 15...O-O-O with a good attack. Even though in that continuation the computer rates Black's game as only slightly better, it is also much easier to play Black – the danger mostly resides around White's king.

But now Black is aiming for a pattern he hopes White will miss: 16... ♔xg3...



White to play after 15... ♔g4

Black threatens the “sneaky pin” tactic 16... ♖xg3

...taking advantage of what Charles Hertan (in his excellent *Power Chess for Kids*) dubs “the sneaky pin.” A *sneaky pin* tactic is one that, instead of pressuring the pinned piece, takes advantage of squares that the pinned piece is no longer guarding. Here the f-pawn is pinned, so it is on the resulting vulnerability of the g-pawn that Black is “pinning” his hopes. Will White “see” it? *You can’t play what you don’t see...*

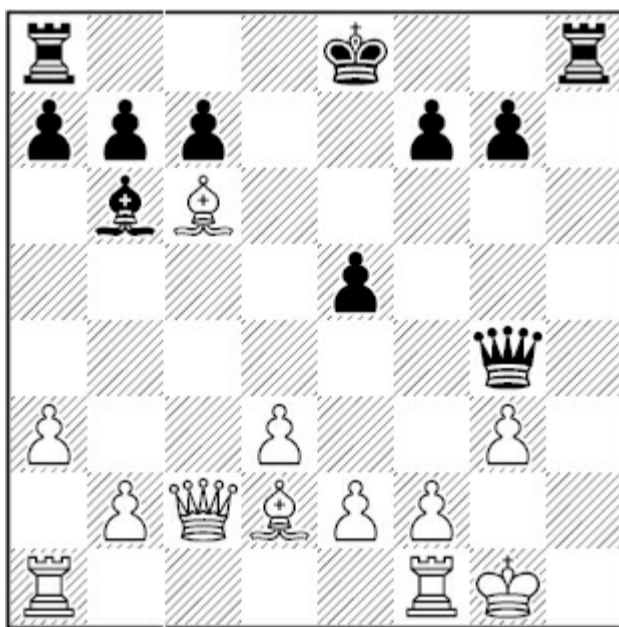
You can’t play what you don’t see...

The problem with this easily met threat is that by making it, Black forfeits his chance to make a better move. If White avoids the trap, he gets back in the game. So Black has something to gain, but a lot to lose when the competition is alert. It’s not a gamble good players would generally make unless they were desperate.

16. ♖xc6+!

...

Giving up his “good” bishop but taking advantage of the tactic on c6.



Black to play after 16. ♖xc6+

16...

♔d8? 49:54

It’s true that Black can’t play the “obvious” 16...bxc6? 17. ♖xc6+ ♔e7? to guard the rook on a8, because 18. ♖b4+ forces the king to the back rank anyway. If instead 16...bxc6? 17. ♖xc6+ ♔f8 18. ♖xa8+ ♔e7, then 19. ♖xh8 ♖xg3+ 20. ♔h1, when the queen on h8 guards the threats along the h-file and White wins.

However, if Black is going to anticipate White’s defending against the threat on g3, it would be better to have the king on f8 to allow the a8-rook to come into play later, e.g. 16...♔f8! 17.e3!

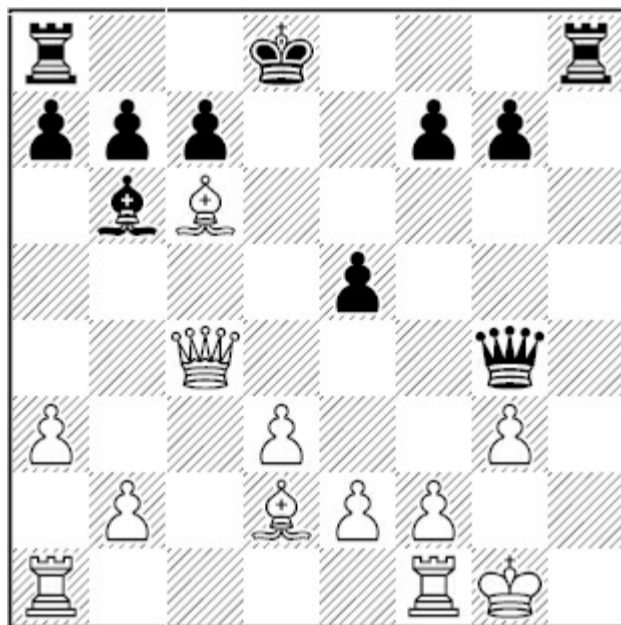
(defending the threat on g3 by blocking the diagonal; saving the bishop on c6 allows the threat: 17. ♔g2? ♚xg3 18. ♖fc1 – else mate on h2 – 18... ♚xf2#) 17... bxc6 18. ♚xc6 ♖d8 19. ♖fd1, and White is only slightly better.

With the move played, 16... ♔d8?, the same line is not as good for Black: 17.e3! bxc6 (17... ♚h3 18. ♖fe1 now works – a good defensive pattern to know) 18. ♚xc6 and, now that the threat on g3 is stopped, the black queen rook is attacked and must play passively, e.g. 18... ♖b8. Then White has chances for winning after moves like 19. ♖ac1 or 19. ♚d5+.

17. ♚c4?? 24:55

...

Oops! White misses the one-trick pony! So Black's gamble pays off, due more to his risk-taking than to his good play. As mentioned in the previous note, 17.e3! gives White a good game.



Black to play after 17. ♚c4??

17...

♚xg3+ 50:34

0-1

It's mate after 18. ♔g2 ♚h2#. The winner had five more minutes on his clock than he did at the start of the game! This time fast play was not punished – but you won't find international players playing that way!

GAME 25: WHITE 1466 – BLACK 1374

Internet Chess Club 2011

45 minutes with a 45-second increment

Caro-Kann Defense, Panov-Botvinnik Attack

1.e4 0:45:31

c6 0:45:39

2.d4 0:46:09

d5 0:46:05

3.exd5 0:46:48 ...

The major alternatives are 3. ♖c3 and 3.e5.

3... **cxd5** 0:46:45
4.c4 0:47:29 ...

The Panov-Botvinnik Attack. 4. ♕d3 is the Exchange Variation.

4... **dx c4** 0:46:51

This is the first unusual move of the game. Black usually develops with 4... ♗f6, 4... ♗c6, or 4...e6. When there is a pawn break with c2-c4 (for White) or ...c7-c5 (for Black) and the break pawn is guarded only by an undeveloped bishop at f1 or f8, then immediately capturing, allowing the bishop to develop in one move, is usually incorrect. The players sometimes instead play a little game of “cat and mouse” where the defender delays developing the bishop and the attacker delays capturing the break pawn. This occurs regularly in several openings, such as here in the Caro-Kann and the Queen’s Gambit Declined.

5. ♕xc4 0:47:34 **e6** 0:47:15

Many players avoid this move, afraid of “blocking in their bishop,” but there are several reasons why the computer rates it as highly as any other move:

- It helps Black to get out his king bishop and castle;
- It fights for control of the d5 square;
- It blocks the diagonal of the bishop on c4;
- White can delay playing a move like ♗f3 or avoid it with ♗e2, so ... ♕g4 may not be available if Black waits; and
- The queen bishop on c8 is not so bad; in the early opening it helps guard the fragile light squares on the queenside and, after castling, it may find a good home after ...b7-b6 and ... ♕b7.

6. ♗f3 0:48:02 **♗f6** 0:47:46

Both sides develop logically. Many students complain to me that they play reasonably for a while and then “fall apart.” There are many possible reasons for this, but one is simply that the more critical moves are less likely early in the game, where both sides are more properly focusing on activating their army and putting their king in safety. This game is no exception. The players make reasonable moves for quite a while but, when the pieces begin clashing, there are some fascinating, instructive, and surprising mistakes!

7. ♖c3 0:48:18 7

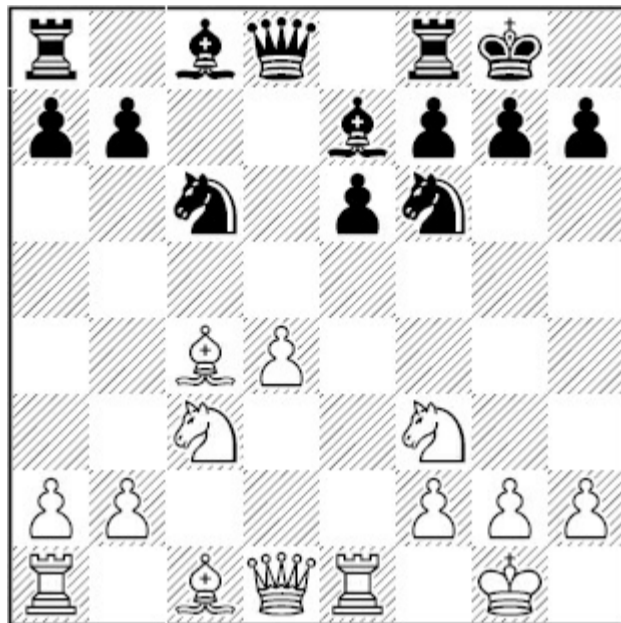
8. O-O 0:46:51

9. ♖e1 0:43:12

♙e7 0:46:24

O-O 0:46:56

♘c6 0:45:56



White to play after 9... ♘c6

Many students complain to me that they play reasonably for a while and then “fall apart.” There are many possible reasons for this, but one is simply that the more critical moves are less likely early in the game.

We have reached a typical isolated queen’s pawn (IQP) position where White is ahead a tempo due to Black’s capturing on c4 before the bishop moved from f1. Similar, if not identical, positions can result from other openings, such as the Tarrasch Defense.

10. ♙g5 0:41:05

...

While the bishop is often developed to this square in IQP positions (one idea is to harass the defenders of d5), here *Houdini* had a fairly strong preference for the “freer” 10. ♙f4 or even the prophylactic 10.a3.

10...

♙d7 0:44:52

11. ♘e5= 0:36:07

...

This is a good square for this knight, as White often adopts the setup ♙e2, ♖fd1, ♘e5. However, by moving the knight first, ♙e2 becomes problematic due to the necessity of guarding against ... ♘xd4. Therefore, White has the right idea but the wrong move order. Again, *Houdini* thinks that the waiting 11.a3± is best, followed by the second choice 11. ♙d2.

11...

♖c8 0:41:37

If this game were a story, we would not have even introduced the villains yet! There is a gentle irony about the reasonable way the players are playing, versus what happens much later!

12. ♗b3 0:33:18

...

A good idea! Tactics don't just happen and Loose Pieces Drop Off (LPDO = Nunn's Dictum, named after GM John Nunn). Allowing this bishop to stand unguarded with a possible discovery by the black rook on c8 is dangerous. *Houdini* thinks this is best, with the developing 12. ♗d3 second.

12...

♖b4 0:37:17

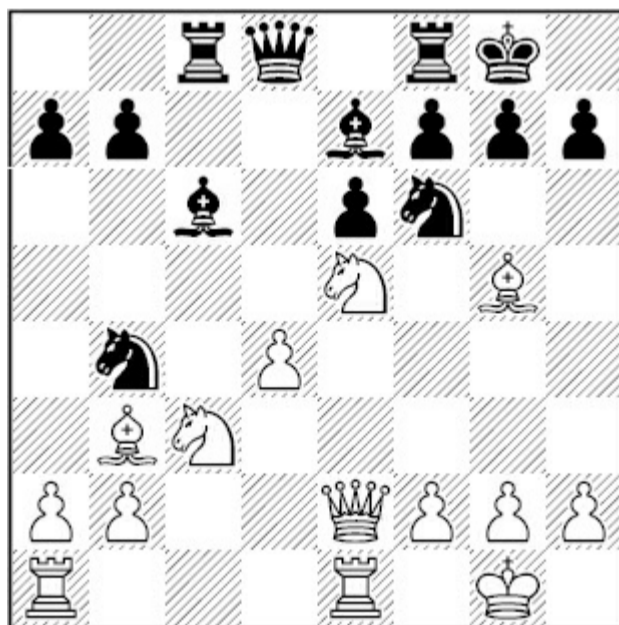
Getting a knight to d5 to blockade the IQP is a very common theme, and this is one way to do it. The computer prefers the direct 12... ♗d5 with about an even game.

13. ♗xd7 0:30:48

...

It's always tempting to grab the bishop pair (you have two bishops and the opponent does not). Not many amateurs realize that having the bishop pair is usually more valuable than your opponent having a weak (doubled, isolated, backward) pawn. However, in this situation the bishop was not going anywhere and the knight is a linchpin of White's position. If you play over a multitude of annotated master games, you will see many positions similar to this one, but in hardly any of them will you see White capturing the bishop. That's one way to learn! *Houdini* suggests 13. ♗e2 is the best way to punish Black's previous inaccuracy. That would head toward White's "ideal" position. For example, Black might fall into a common tactical pattern after 13. ♗e2 ♗c6?:

Question: What should White play?



White to play after 13... ♗c6? (analysis)

The thematic attack is 14. ♗xf7! (a good idea to remember if presented with a similar

opportunity) and White wins, e.g. 14... ♖xf7 15. ♗xe6 ♕e8 16. ♗xe7+.

13... ♖xd7? 0:36:53

Another inaccuracy. Better is 13... ♗xd7=, keeping an eye on d5.

14. ♕xe7 0:31:11 ♗xe7 0:37:19

15.d5 0:31:39 ...

To eliminate the IQP. This is a good idea, but premature. *Houdini* suggests waiting with 15.a3 ♖c6 (the idea is that 15... ♗d5?? loses a piece to 16. ♗xd5) and then 16.d5±.

15... ♗c5! (0:34:21)

This is the only move to maintain the balance. Bravo! Black puts his finger on the problem with White's move order. Black simultaneously puts another defender on e6 and attacks an attacker of both d5 and e6.

Time management check: Botvinnik's Rule would have both sides with more than 36 minutes left here. White is playing a little slow, but not bad. Black is almost right on track. You don't find both players moving at such reasonable speeds in many amateur games!

16.dxe6 0:31:24 ...

Again White chooses a reasonable continuation, trying to saddle Black with an isolated e-pawn. *Houdini* considers 16. ♗e2 slightly more accurate, with a minor pull. When I review my games with top computers, I am quite happy if it doesn't find too many major improvements!

16... ♗xe6 0:34:09

Putting his piece in a pin. That's rarely correct, and it also takes the knight off its attack on b3. Therefore, better is 16... fxe6 with a slight edge to White after 17. ♗g4.

17.a3 0:28:01 ...

As *Houdini* noted, this move was useful when the knight could not retreat to d5 due to the pin on the e-file, but now it has somewhat less value. It rates White with a solid edge after 17. ♗g4 due to that e-file pin and the slightly more active arrangement of his pieces. The PV is 17. ♗g4 ♖cd8 18. ♖e3 ♗c5 19. ♕xe6 ♗c2 20. ♖g3 ♗e5 21. ♕xf7+ ♖xf7 22. ♖f1.

17... ♖cd8! 0:33:47

18. ♗f3 0:27:58 ♗d3?! 0:32:50

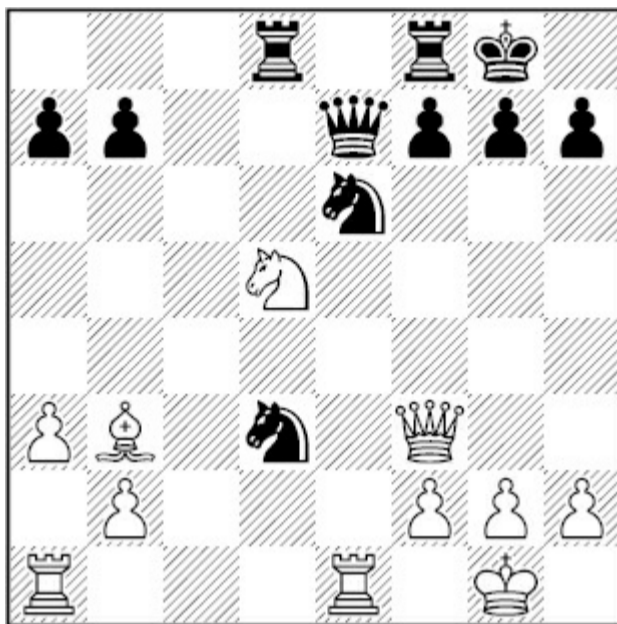
Allowing White a shot, which he does not miss. More solid is 18... ♗c6 when White has a slight

advantage.

19. ♖d5! 0:27:04

...

By interfering with the rook's defense of the knight while simultaneously attacking the queen, White forces a favorable sequence.



Black to play after 19. ♖d5!

19...

♜xd5 0:28:17

I am not sure why Black took five minutes for this forced move. Once you determine that a move is clearly best, taking time to see what is going to happen afterwards may be interesting, but it's also mostly wasted time. Just make the move and see what happens – you'll have more information (your opponent's move) and better visualization on the next move to determine what's best to do next. Your goal is to find the best move you can in a reasonable amount of time; if you are lucky enough to prove which move is best, then determining exactly how good it is, is usually counterproductive.

20. ♙xd5 0:27:22

♞xe1 0:28:37

21. ♜xe1 0:28:00

b6 0:29:03

Moving the b-pawn to protect against 22. ♙xb7 appears forced, but *Houdini* points out that 21... ♜d8 is possible, when 22. ♙xb7 ♜b8 skewers the bishop and b-pawn. The smoke has cleared and White has a nice position, but Black should be able to hold with solid defense. Black might end up with an isolated pawn on e6, but that one weakness should not be sufficient to cost him the game.

22. ♙b3 0:26:33

...

White can isolate Black's e-pawn with 22. ♙xe6, but he prefers to add pressure.

22...

♜e8 0:26:45

23.g3 0:25:33

...

When looking for forcing sequences, consider both sides' checks, captures, and threats.

Creating *Luft* for the king in positions with major pieces is often helpful. *Houdini*, which never gets back-rank mated, rates 23.g3 second best and suggests creating the isolani with 23. ♖xe6.

23...

♔d7 0:25:17

24. ♖c4 0:24:34

♔d6 0:23:22

I wonder if the players realized that the attractive 24... ♗d4?? loses to the nice 25. ♖xf7+! when 25... ♖xf7 allows 26. ♖xe8#. When looking for forcing sequences, consider both sides' checks, captures, and threats.

25. ♖b5 0:21:53

...

White doesn't wish to "cash in" with 25. ♖xe6 (no longer the computer's top move; 25. ♖a4 is), but continues to poke and probe.

25...

♔e7 0:23:20

26. ♖d1 0:17:39

♔e5 0:19:01

Things are a little quiet. Both players are making good moves. Maybe someone will liven things up...

27. ♖f3?? 0:14:58

...

Uh-oh! This move is bad livening. White decides to sacrifice his bishop in the hopes of a back-rank mate, or it's remotely possible he missed that 26... ♖e5 attacked the bishop. He did take more than three minutes, so it's less likely he missed the easy attack along the fifth rank.

27...

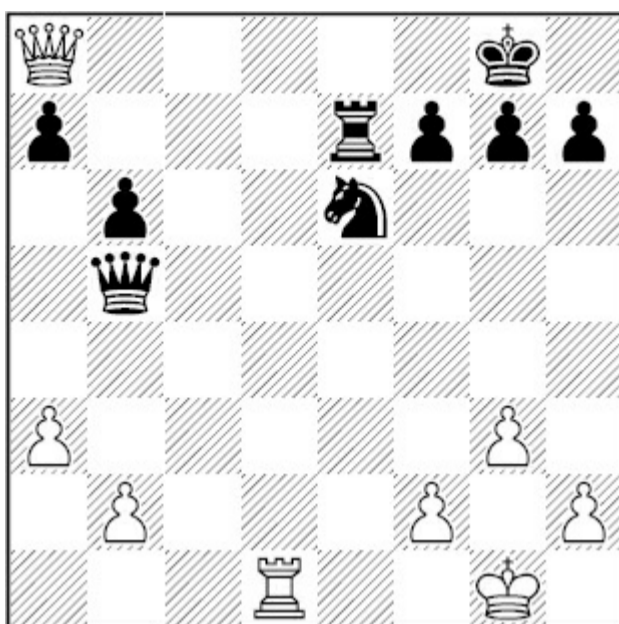
♔xb5 0:15:07

Black cautiously takes four minutes to make sure capturing the piece is safe. If so, he should be able to win easily with 15 minutes remaining and a 45-second increment safety net.

28. ♖a8+ 0:14:19

...

Question: In this position, what would you play for Black?



Black to play after 28. ♔a8+

Black has three safe moves. However, since they all win, it's not a question of which is best, but which one allows a human to win most easily.

28...

♖f8?! 0:15:37

The computer rates this move as second best, but it's the trickiest of the three so, unless you wish to work out the details, it's probably the one to avoid. Ironically, I would have played the move the computer rates lowest, 28... ♔e8, because if 29. ♖d8? does not work, then nothing does and Black is just ahead a piece. *Houdini* thinks 28... ♖e8 is best, when 29. ♔xa7 allows the tricky 29... ♗g5!. But who needs to find that line?

29. ♖d8!? 0:14:21

Why not? This is a case where one side is losing badly so, rather than choosing the best move, he chooses the one that gives him the best chance of getting back in the game, i.e., the move that gives the opponent the best chance to go wrong.

Black just needs to find a couple of good (not great) moves and the game is over!

29...

♖e1+! 0:15:38

Not difficult to find, but still absolutely necessary.

30. ♔g2 0:14:18

♔f1+ 0:16:17

Now that Black's rook is off the a3-f8 diagonal, he could guard the knight with 30... ♖c5 and win, but this move is much clearer.

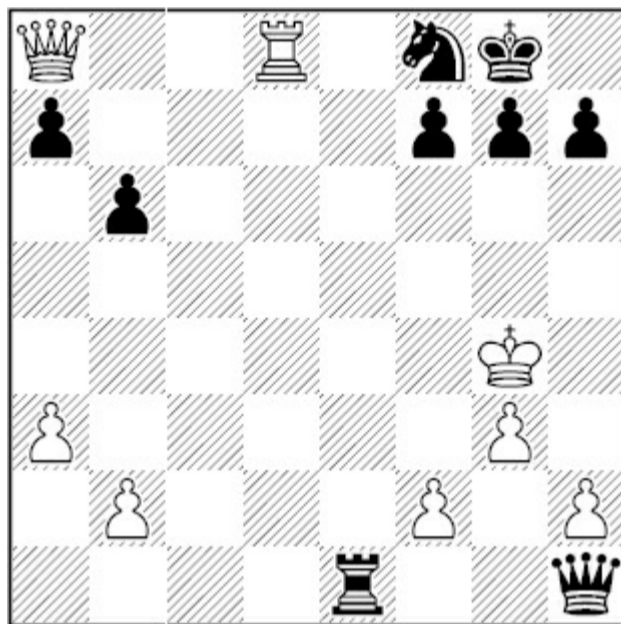
31. ♔f3 0:14:57

♔h1+ 0:16:52

At this point a bunch of players were following the game on the ICC and I whispered (told the other spectators without informing the players), “That’s it. 32. ♔g4 moves 32... ♟xa8 33. ♖xa8 ♜e7 followed by ...f6 and ... ♔f7 and Black wins easily.”

32. ♔g4 0:15:18 ...

But here, instead of taking a bit of time and trading queens into an easy endgame with an extra piece, Black fell into a long think! This was a very bad sign. Was he really considering playing something else? This was definitely a case of where if you see an easily winning move, it’s sometimes acceptable to look for an even better one (like mate in one rather than trading into a winning endgame). But, in this position, was there anything else worth risking an easy win?



Black to play after 32. ♔g4

32... ♜e4+?? 0:14:51

Oh! This hit like a shot, but a bad one. The spectators could not believe it. Instead of trading off into an easy endgame win, Black is playing for mate! He’d better have a simple one, or this risk was not worth it.

33. f4 0:14:18 ...

The only move. Did Black expect this? I certainly hope so.

33... h5+ 0:14:29

34. ♔f5? 0:12:34 ...

White returns the favor! After 34. ♔xh5 the best Black has is a draw after 34... ♟xh2+ 35. ♔g4 ♟e2+ 36. ♔h4. Even White’s second-best choice 34. ♔g5 f6+ 35. ♔xh5 ♟xh2+ 36. ♔g4 ♟e2+ 37. ♔h3 ♔h7 38. ♖xf8 ♟h5+, which gives Black chances, is better than the move played. I guess White was afraid of allowing ... ♟xh2+ but he’s now out of the frying pan and into the fryer!

After 34. ♔f5? Black is winning again, but only at the risk of a line that might look losing! The spectators were having a field day.

34...

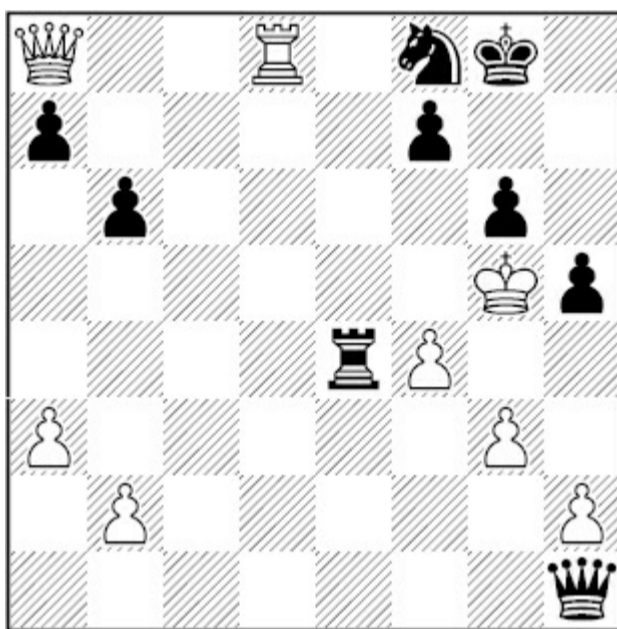
g6+! 0:11:52

He found the first move. At first this line looks risky, but if he can find the second move...

35. ♔g5 0:12:27

...

Now Black goes into a loooooong think – at least really long at this time limit. But the time is fully justified. Black's best move wins and his second-best move loses. Doesn't get any more critical than that!



Black to play after 35. ♔g5

35...

♔g7! 0:04:42

He found it! Kudos to Black for recognizing the criticality, taking the necessary time to find the best move, and then finding it! To do less here would be “acquiescing” – giving in quickly to a situation that looks bad, but isn't really with the correct insight. 35...f6+ loses to 36. ♔h6! with eventual mate for White, while 36. ♔xf6? loses to 36... ♖e6+ with a discovered attack along the long h1-a8 squares forcing a queen trade – as he should have done on move 32.

36. ♖xf8 0:10:46

...

White has to try this.

36...

f6+ 0:04:56

Although the pawn can be captured, this necessary deflection of the rook off the eighth rank wins the queen.

37. ♖xf6 0:09:13 ...

White has no choice as 37. ♔h4 ♕xh2 is mate (this time!).

37... ♖e5+ 0:05:17

The point! White had to see back on move 35 (at the latest) that this discovered attack will win.

38.fxe5 0:08:47 ♕xa8 0:05:58

The smoke has cleared and Black is ahead a queen for a rook and a pawn or two. That should be about it, right?

39. ♖xg6+ 0:09:22

♔f7 0:06:20

40.e6+ 0:10:00

♔e7 0:07:01

41. ♔xh5 0:07:59

♕d5+ 0:07:39

42. ♔h6 0:08:25

♕d2+! 0:07:48

43. ♔g7 0:07:25

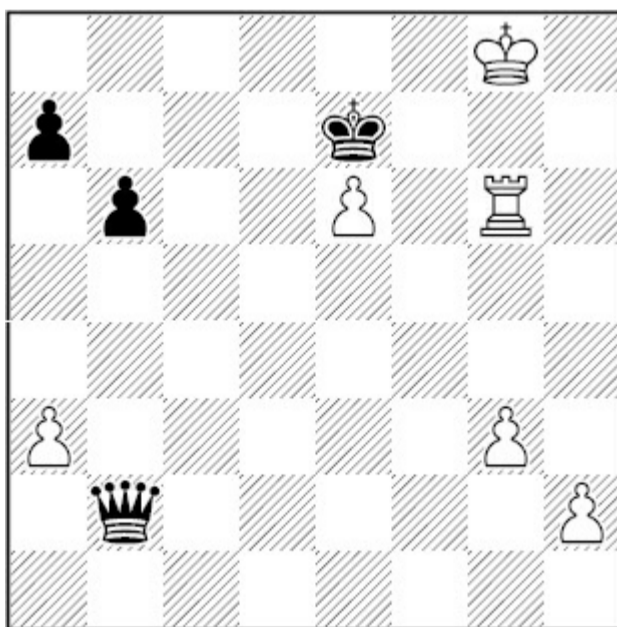
♕xb2+! 0:08:22

Black is showing good technique, but he is playing scarily fast. On this move he took only 11 seconds and his clock is rising rather unnecessarily. *The more you are winning, the more you have to lose*, so this is not the time to get overconfident. *Houdini* now has Black ahead almost 8 pawns.

The more you are winning, the more you have to lose.

44. ♔g8 0:07:52 ...

Question: What would you play here for Black?



Black to play after 44. ♔g8

44...

♚xa3? 0:07:51

Black did slow down (a little) but does not follow the “technique” principle: “*When way ahead and mopping up, always take the most dangerous pawns first.*” After the game Black said he wanted the connected passed pawns. Instead, he should “Think Defense First”: when way ahead, capture the dangerous h-pawn with 44... ♚xh2, and the rest should not be a sweat. After 44... ♚xa3 Black is still winning easily, but he might have to think, and we all know that can be dangerous, even when it’s necessary! ☺

45.h4 0:08:18

...

Of course! What did Black expect? The white king is perfectly placed to help make his connected passed pawns dangerous. Black has to return to his “being careful” mode, which he does.

45...

a5 0:07:07

Better count the race carefully before making this move! Still, *Houdini* says it is best, but that assumes you see almost everything, as it does!

When way ahead and mopping up, always take the most dangerous pawns first.

46.h5 0:08:57

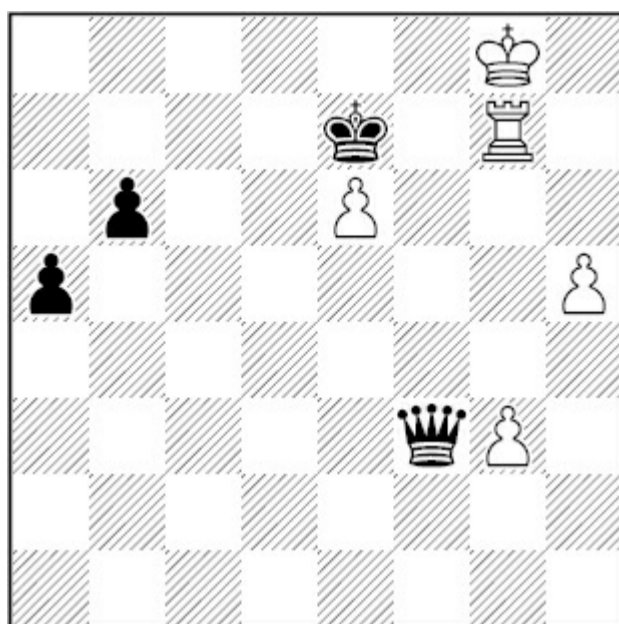
♚f3 0:07:02

Probably with an eye to play to f8 right away, or to answer 47.h6 a4 48.h7?? with 48... ♚f8#.

47. ♚g7+ 0:07:49

...

Everyone expected the obvious 47... ♔xe6, winning...



Black to play after 47. ♖g7+

47...

♔f6?? 6:40

The first thing that went through my mind was, “mouse-slip?” (when an online player accidentally places a piece on the wrong square). Heartbreaking.

48. ♖f7+ 0:08:28

...

Winning the queen. Another turnaround!

48...

♔xe6 0:07:13

49. ♖xf3 0:09:10

♔d6 0:07:56

50. h6 0:09:52

♔c5 0:08:41

51. h7 0:10:34

b5 0:09:25

52. h8 ♚ 0:11:13

♔b4 0:10:10

1-0

After the game Black confirmed that 47... ♔f6 was indeed a mouse-slip. I suggested that he set his ICC “Move input” control to turn off “Drag” for serious slow games. That makes a mouse-slip much less likely, but it does slow down your speed games, so it should be turned back on for blitz. In any event, it was too late to save this game. Unforgettable.

GAME 26: WHITE 1551 – BLACK 1596

Internet Chess Club 2011

45 minutes with a 45-second increment

King’s Indian Defense, Sämisch Variation

1.d4 0:45:28
2.c4 0:46:05
3.♖c3 0:46:35
4.e4 0:47:04
5.f3 0:47:40

♗f6 0:45:21
g6 0:46:00
♕g7 0:46:40
d6 0:47:16
...

The characteristic move of the Sämisch Variation. White generally wants to castle queenside and throw his king-side pawns at Black, so that makes this the queen's pawn equivalent of the Yugoslav Attack against the Dragon Sicilian. Currently neither the Sämisch against the King's Indian nor the Dragon Variation are in vogue among top grandmasters, although current World #1 Magnus Carlsen occasionally has fun in a Dragon.

Ironically, this lack of popularity at the highest levels is for opposite reasons: the Sämisch has not been doing that well for White while the Dragon hasn't been doing that well for Black. However, at amateur level these openings remain rightly popular for their lively play, which is more important than whether the top grandmasters currently find the line fashionable.

5...
6.♕d3?! 0:48:12

O-O 0:47:35
...

This is rare at the grandmaster level; 6.♕e3 is most common and 6.♕g5 is played. For the fun of it, I let *Houdini* (without its opening book) think for a while and it rated 6.♕d3 second best behind 6.♕e3 at 23 ply. In similar positions White usually wishes to keep communication between his queen and the d4-pawn, especially since the king knight is not guarding d4.

6...

e5 0:47:46

This is a normal, reasonable reply. *Houdini* likes a maneuver that one often sees in grandmaster games, but amateurs rarely consider (and for good reason): 6...♗fd7!?

7.d5!? 0:47:50

...

White makes the committal decision to close the center. This is often a matter of style – he could play 7.♗ge2 – but it turns out *Houdini* also prefers 7.d5.

Using the Pointing Rule, White's d- and e-pawns are pointing toward the queenside, so his break move is c4-c5 and he should attack queenside. Black's pawns are pointing kingside, so he should break with ...f7-f5 and attack kingside.

Another helpful principle is that *in locked positions tempos are not quite as important*, so it is quite acceptable for Black to move his knight away from f6 so he can break with ...f7-f5 as soon as possible.

7...

♗h5 0:47:29

Apparently Black is aware: 7... ♖h5 is *Houdini's* top move here.

8. ♖ge2 0:47:50 ...

The computer thinks 8. ♖e3 is slightly more accurate – see the next note.

8... f5 0:46:25

The thematic break move, but White's move order has allowed an interesting equalizing possibility: 8... ♖h4+! 9.g3 ♖h3 10. ♖f2=. This would have been avoided if White had played 8. ♖e3.

9. ♖e3 0:48:14 ...

Normally, White's capturing the break pawn with 9.exf5 is discouraged because "Every Russian Schoolboy Knows" that Black should recapture with ...gxf5 and his pawns control the center.

But one of the reasons why chess is fun – and difficult – is that principles like this are just that: principles, and not rules. It turns out that here White should capture the pawn (I thank *Houdini* for that – I merely do the explaining!). *Houdini* likes 9.exf5! and if 9...gxf5 10.O-O±. It also thinks that Black's best recapture is 9... ♖xf5 and after 10. ♖xf5 gxf5 11.O-O. Sometimes you can't trust the computer's positional judgment but they are getting better at evaluation, if for no other reason than that they are faster and look ahead further to see if something really works. There is enough difference in the computer's evaluation (between 9. ♖e3 and 9.exf5) to make me believe this difference is real.

9... f4 0:44:41

Like White's decision to play 7.d5, Black makes the committal decision to take the pressure off the center and attack on the kingside – even though White's king is not there yet! The close alternative is 9... ♖f4, returning the knight from the rim.

The lines are irrevocably drawn: we will be seeing a clash on the flanks – White attacks queenside, Black king-side. There are some positions with similar pawn structures where White attempts to attack kingside by playing an early g2-g4, but this does not look like one of them.

10. ♖f2 0:48:48 ...

Keeping the bishop on the diagonal, where it supports the break move c4-c5 while simultaneously keeping an eye on g3 and h4, is clearly best.

10... ♖d7 0:44:33

Continuing development, but *Houdini* suggests the unusual move 10... ♖g5. Normally Black attacks with his pawns first: ...g6-g5 and ...h7-h5 supporting a later break ...g5-g4, but here the computer violates that by blocking the g-pawn with the queen. I don't see grandmasters doing this in

similar positions, but I have never seen a grandmaster play this exact position! We'll give the grandmasters the benefit of the doubt since they often see how a normal-looking position is not quite normal and calls for unique treatment.

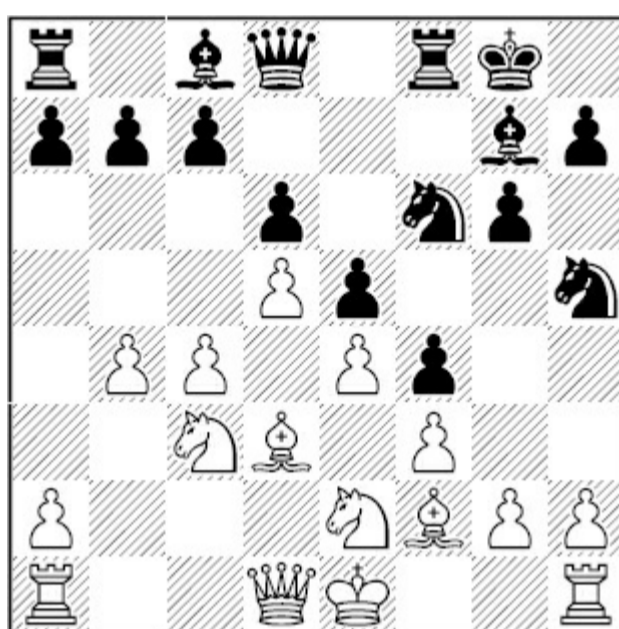
11.b4 0:48:36

...

Logically supporting the later break on c5. Like many of the games in this book, the amateurs are not playing like beginners, but understand the general strategies in the position; they just don't execute the details (especially the safety issues) nearly as well. That's one reason a book like this can be so instructive – amateurs make mistakes from which we can all learn.

11...

df6 0:42:27



White to play after 11... **df6**

This move leaves the knights uncoordinated. According to GM Larry Kaufman, one reason the bishop pair is so strong is that they never get in each other's way. However, knights easily can; weaker players have a tendency to think that knights that guard each other are strong, but often they are weak because they interfere with each other's activity. That leads to Larry's (and other GMs') suggestion that if knights guard each other, it's probably not correct for the opponent to exchange off one, and it is correct for the player with the knights to trade one off.

Houdini suggests 11... **f6** (to support g5 and h4 and evacuate the g-file for the rook) over its second best, 11... **b6**, which slows down White's c4-c5 break.

12. **b3** 0:46:43

...

White can –and should – play his break 12.c5 right away. I call providing additional, unnecessary pieces to guard a square “over-preparation” – either a move is safe and good or it's not. However, I don't think 12. **b3** is over-preparation. It's simply not as good as 12.c5 because Black can try a monkey-wrench like 12... **a5!**?. With the white queen's rook unguarded, the desirable and smooth

reply 13.a3 is not helpful since after 13...axb4 the reply 14.axb4?? is not possible due to 14... ♖xa1+. This is an example of seeing how a general idea can be applied, both positively and negatively, to a particular position.

12...

b6(?) ± 0:40:11

Sometimes a preventive move like this is worth a tempo, as it slows down the attack. In other cases, it is either a waste of time or, worse, a weakening in the area where the opponent wishes to attack. I don't think 12...b6 is a ridiculous move here, but it's much weaker than the aforementioned 12...a5± or even the attacking 12...g5. After 12...b6, *Houdini* evaluates White's game as almost winning.

13.O-O 0:44:44

...

Second best. The break 13.c5 was correct, e.g. 13...bxc5 14.bxc5 g5 15.h3± and, with White's king absent from the kingside, Black's attack has less punch. Now that White's king has committed to the kingside, it makes sense for Black to switch all his attention there. To be fair, in most King's Indian positions similar to this, the white king has long since castled kingside, so to have it there may be dangerous, but it's not unusual.

13...

g5 0:38:47

Black sets his sights on the white king. A fun game is in store, but it's usually a short and violent one, so it would make sense that at this point the players would be playing very slowly, looking for that critical edge, knowing that each tempo is vital. The possibility of a short, violent game indicates that saving too much time for later (especially with a 45-second increment) may not constitute optimal use of one's time.

Despite the time and board situation, White (and to a lesser extent, Black) is continuing to play much too quickly. That's much more common among inexperienced and weaker players. It's no coincidence that, if you go to a big tournament with players of all levels, the weaker players – the ones who really need the time to think and find safe moves consistently – are usually the ones who finish first. It's no exception here, as both sides are playing too quickly.

14.c5 0:44:24

...

Ironically, at first *Houdini* suggests the prophylactic 14.h3. Moving pawns in front of a castled king with an opponent's pawn storm in front is usually justified only if it closes the position – not the case here. 14.h3 does take advantage of the awkward knights, since the black knight on h5 is unable to retreat easily for the purpose of allowing ...h7-h5 to support a break on g4. However, upon deeper inspection, *Houdini* comes to its senses and calculates that the move played in the game was correct.

14...

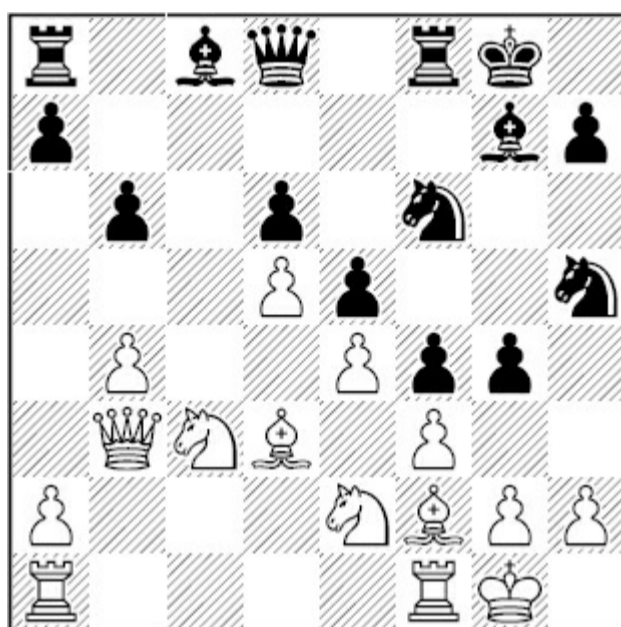
g4 0:39:12

The race continues. Although, from a theoretical aspect, the computer indicates that White's

chances are just slightly better, human practice in similar unbalanced positions has shown that an exact evaluation is not as big an issue as it would be in a more placid position. Since both sides have strong attacks on opposite sides, usually what happens is that the player who conducts his attack better (or whose opponent defends the attack worse) usually wins!

15.cxd6 0:43:41

cx d6 0:37:26



White to play after 15...cxd6

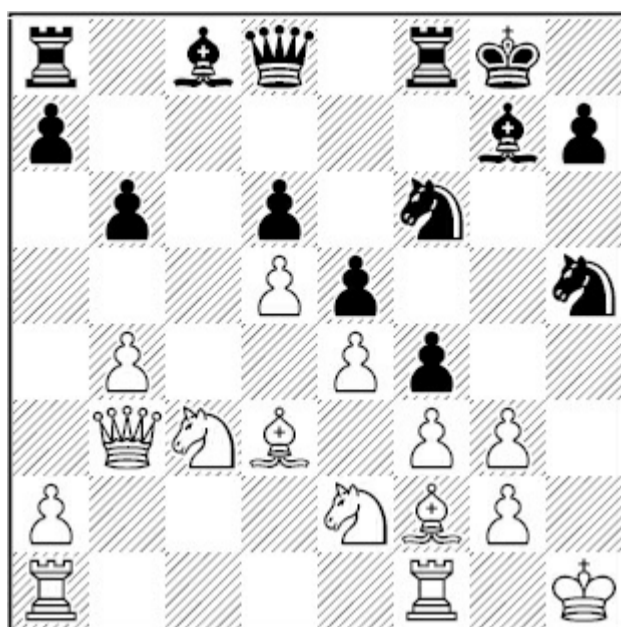
So far, so good. Either side could get through first. Accurate play is required and it might not take much to tip the scales.

16. ♖b5? 0:43:39

...

This move is often delayed until White has rooks controlling the c-file, so that penetration to c7 is a threat. However, in this position the rooks are not yet deployed that way; therefore, White should anticipate the opening of the g-file with ...gxf3, and take defensive steps. It's not surprising that White is making a mistake in this complex position: he has almost as much time as he did when the game started and took only 47 seconds on this move, even though a longer think may have been wise.

Houdini thought initially that White should sidestep first with 16. ♔h1 but, upon further search, it found that this is dangerous due to 16... g3, e.g. 17.hxg3:



Black to play after 17.hxg3 (analysis)

17... ♗g4!. For a strong player, this would be a typical sacrifice in this type of position, but still one requiring long and careful calculation. Black has a menacing attack, e.g. 18.fxg4 (*just because a sacrifice is sound and good does not mean it shouldn't be accepted! The alternative could be worse!*) 18... fxg3! 19. ♗xg3 ♜h4+ 20. ♔g1 ♗xg3 21. ♙xg3 ♜xg3 and Black has won back his piece with further threats, such as ... ♜xd3 and ... ♙xg4. White should survive with best play, but it's Black with all the chances.

The computer suggests the curious move 16. ♙h4 instead. I guess the idea is to discourage queen access to h4 after possible lines with ...g4-g3. The computer then evaluates the chances as roughly even, but the dynamic play would continue.

When first reviewing this game afterwards, it was around this point that I cautioned my student (who was White), "You have to be careful! At some point if he opens the g-file he may have a sacrifice like ... ♗xe4 allowing ... ♜g5+." This proved quite prophetic, as the game continued...

16...	gxf3 0:36:02
17.gxf3 0:44:03	♙h3 0:35:50

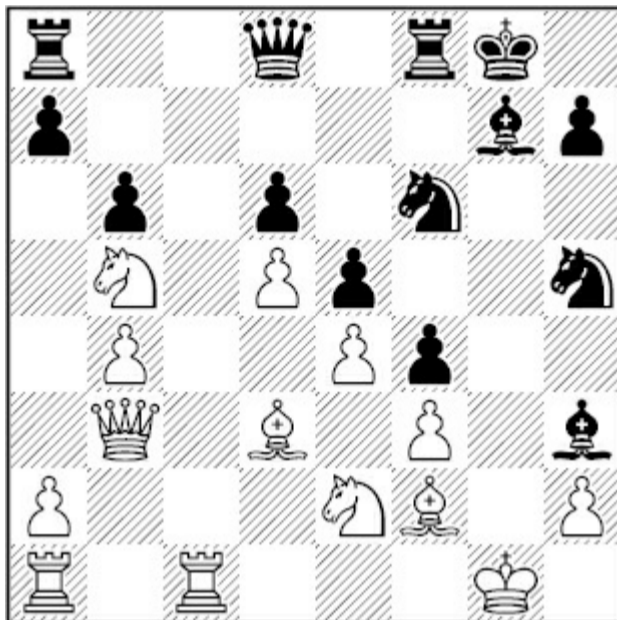
Now that g2 is controlled by Black, the sacrifice I mentioned is "on."

Therefore, White needs to look ahead one move and minimize the damage with 18. ♔h1, the only move to (possibly) save the game. But weaker players, understandably, are loath to give up material, although here the exchange (rook for bishop) is not worth that much since the h3-bishop is so powerful. After 18. ♔h1 the game should continue 18... ♙xf1 19. ♖xf1 a6 20. ♗bc3 ♗d7 21. ♗a4, when White's queenside play gives him some chances of saving the game, and Black could easily go wrong.

18. ♖fc1? 0:43:43 ...

Just because a sacrifice is sound and good does not mean it shouldn't be accepted! The alternative could be worse!

Not surprisingly, White moves the rook away. The idea of routinely sacrificing the exchange in double-edged positions to obtain other considerations is much better understood by stronger players. As mentioned in the previous note, 18. ♔h1 is best. After saving the rook, White's game goes down in flames...



Black to play after 18. ♔f1?

18...

Cxe4! 0:34:49

Told you! After White captures, Black will get it all back and more with the devastating 19... ♔g5+.

19. ♔xe4 0:33:54

...

Obviously 19. ♔h1 ♔xf2+ doesn't work; it turns out nothing does. Sometimes if you wait until your opponent makes threats (i.e. play "Hope Chess" as White did here with his previous fast play), there's just no defense.

One of the biggest lessons one can learn from this game would be what could be deduced by noting that White took over 10 minutes on *this* move, looking for a defense. That's far longer than he took on any previous move of the game, including the one(s) that got him into trouble. Playing too fast, getting into trouble, followed by thinking "uh-oh!" and only then slowing down is not good time management, and a likely recipe for disaster.

When I started out in serious competition, someone advised me that, "The difference between experts and masters is that experts think a long time after they get into trouble and masters think a long time to avoid trouble." It turns out that was not quite correct, but if you substitute "intermediate players" for "experts," and "strong players" for "masters," then it's pretty close! The moral of the

story: take time to look ahead and see if your moves are safe. Don't wait until they are not and try to figure out a defense. Very often your opponent can make a move for which there is no longer a defense, so saving your time for such situations is a big mistake!

19... ♔g5+ 0:33:42
20. ♖g3 0:33:15 ...

White's position falls apart, but there's nothing to be done.

20... fxg3 0:33:38
21. ♖xd6 0:27:52 ...

White continues to take time and search, but saving time for these desperate positions rarely works; it's hopeless. For example, if 21. ♖e3 gxh2+ 22. ♔f2 ♖g2+ 23. ♔e1 h1 ♖+ -+.

21... gxh2+ 0:29:04

It's mate on g2 next.

0-1

GAME 27: WHITE 1642 – BLACK 2127

Internet Chess Club 2011

45 minutes with a 45-second increment

Sicilian Defense, Grand Prix Variation

Black is considerably stronger than the average player in this book. According to White, Black was an FM (FIDE Master). That might not qualify a game by him for inclusion here, but his ICC rating was below our arbitrary limit of about 2300 ICC for "amateur" and, more importantly, the game is fun and instructive. I recall asking White if this game was played as part of a simultaneous exhibition by Black, and White said "no." I could have figured that out after I noticed Black's quick play; it could not be a simultaneous or he would have had no time to play the other boards! So away we go...

1.e4 0:45:40 ...

Note the weird time management for both players in this game. I guess Black did not take the game too seriously, but that ended up being good for the reader, as it made for an unexpectedly competitive game.

1... c5 0:45:42
2. ♖c3 0:46:12 ...

As noted in Game 2, White has three possible "main" ideas in mind with this move:

- Play 3.g3, the Closed Variation (as in the game);
- Play 3.f4, the Grand Prix Attack; or
- Play a Sicilian Chameleon with a move like 3. ♖ge2 and possible transposition into an Open Sicilian via a later d2-d4.

2... **d6** 0:46:24

Black usually plays 2... ♖c6 against 2. ♖c3, but hard-core Najdorf and Dragon players who don't want to acquiesce to ... ♖c6 often resort to the also-reasonable 2...d6 in hopes of transposing to their favorite line.

3.f4 0:46:05 ...

This is the trademark of the Grand Prix Attack. Among amateurs, this is a popular alternative to allowing Open Sicilians with 2. ♖f3 and 3.d4.

3... ♖c6 0:47:06
4. ♗b5 0:45:29 ...

The most aggressive square for the bishop. 4. ♗c4 is also playable after Black plays ...d7-d6 (as he did here) but not so advisable if he doesn't, because then ...e7-e6 and ...d7-d5 is possible without Black's losing a tempo.

4... ♗d7 0:47:49

There are many reasonable defenses here and this is one of them.

5. ♖f3 0:45:01 **g6** 0:48:30
6.d3 0:45:28 ♗g7 0:49:13
7.O-O 0:46:06 **e6** 0:49:21

For the first time Black slows down (a little) and has some choices. *Houdini* prefers 7... ♖f6=.

8. ♖e1 0:46:42 ...

The computer thinks the aggressive 8.f5 and 8.e5 are better. As a rough general guide, be careful about playing ♖d1-e1 too soon in similar positions if Black's queen knight can successfully attack c2. Also, ♖e1 works a lot better when Black has already committed his king knight to f6 because ♖e1-h4 is possible and would better attack the dark squares f6 and h6 that were weakened by ...g7-g6 and ...e7-e6. With the black knight on g8, it has the option to play ... ♖ge7, when moving the f-pawn will allow the rook to guard f6 and ...f7-f5 will block a possible f4-f5.

8...

♖d4 0:49:26

The alternative is the solid 8... **♗ge7=**.

9. **♙xd7+** 0:47:24

...

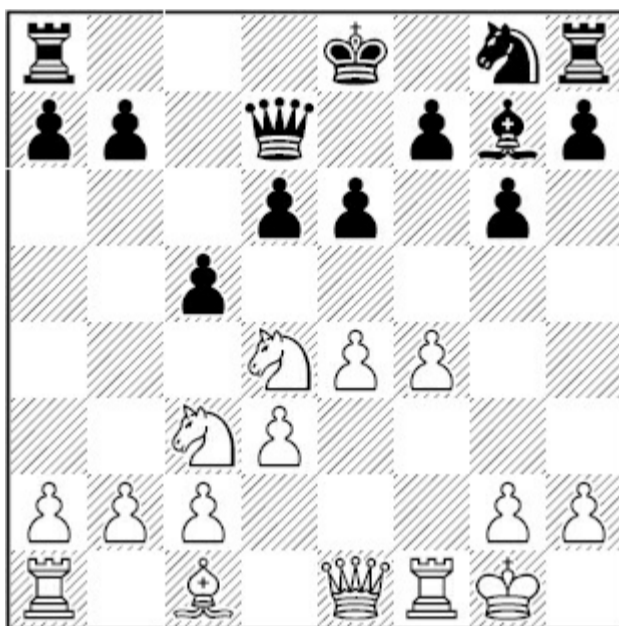
There's nowhere for this bishop to go, e.g. 9. **♙c4 ♖xc2-+**.

9...

♙xd7 0:50:10

10. **♗xd4** 0:48:07

...



Black to play after 10. ♗xd4

Many inexperienced players would automatically play the “obvious” 10... **♙xd4+** here. That move avoids doubled pawns, activates the bishop, and puts White in check. What could be better? Unfortunately it's not correct – in this case the computer agrees with the “master” recapture...

10...

cxd4 0:50:51

Chess is not a game where you “turn it on” and “turn it off.” Play with only two gears – try your best or resign.

...by a fairly wide margin. Black's pawn on d4 attacks the knight, cramps White's position a bit, gives Black a welcome extra pawn in the center, leaves the c-file half-open for the black rooks, and makes the white c-pawn slightly backward. All this add ups to about a third of a pawn's preference. Black took only four seconds for this standard idea, although later he moved pretty quickly in some very critical positions so this may not be as good an indicator as it normally is.

Black probably never dreamed this game would do anything but find its way into the historical

scrap heap, but a good player would not use that excuse for not trying his best. Chess is not a game where you “turn it on” and “turn it off.” Play with only two gears – try your best or resign. To make a basketball analogy, treat practice more like Michael Jordan did than Allen Iverson (“We’re talking about practice here...”).

Try to take almost all your time in each game; if you want to play faster, start with a shorter time limit! This is one of the most important ideas for timed games; using almost all your time is one of the few indications we have that you are trying your best.

11. ♖e2 0:48:49

♗e7 0:51:29

Interestingly, *Houdini* thinks that this move, which is probably the one I would play even if I thought longer than Black’s seven seconds (!), is much less accurate than the immediate 11... ♖c8. I guess the computer does not want to give White additional time to figure out what to do with the c-pawn, e.g. 11... ♖c8 12.c4 dxc3 13. ♖xc3 ♗f6=.

12. f5?! 0:41:18

...

An interesting, aggressive idea. However, the computer suggests that prefacing it with 12. ♗f2, to force the black knight off the defense of f5, is better: 12. ♗f2 ♗c6 13. f5±.

12...

gxf5 0:51:19

In similar positions, Black is often forced to accept the sacrificed pawn. Leaving it on f5 just gives White too many ways to proceed. Giving your opponent more flexibility is often very dangerous!

13. exf5?! 0:40:35

...

The alternative, and the computer’s strongest move, is 13. ♗g5. White is in no hurry to undouble Black’s pawns and bring the knight into play.

13...

♖xf5 0:51:05

14. ♖g3? 0:39:43

...

Switching to passive mode. In for a penny, in for a pound, so White’s best is to continue the aggression with the logical 14. ♖xf5, messing up Black’s pawns and forcing a discovered attack. 14...exf5 is forced, when White can try 15. ♖xd4+ ♗d8 (15... ♗e7? 16. ♗xe7 ♗xe7 17. ♖xf5+ ♗f6 18. ♖xd6 and White is back to equal) 16. ♗e3, with decent compensation for the exchange. After the game continuation, White is down a pawn with little to show for it.

14...

♖xg3! 0:50:09

Again, Black gives it some thought and comes up with the right idea. It’s not just defending against a capture on f5 –it’s also doing so without wasting time.

15. ♔xg3 0:40:22

♕e5 0:50:52

Now that he is comfortably ahead a pawn, Black switches back to super-fast mode and plays this inferior move in two seconds! Of course if he had played more slowly he probably would not have caught his plane. ☺

Houdini prefers the dangerous-looking 15...f5, guarding the bishop with the queen. Black is getting ready to get his pawn roller going with ...e6-e5 and ...O-O-O. *When you are ahead a pawn, find where that extra pawn resides and, if you can get it rolling, that is likely the right plan – or at least a very good one.*

16. ♕f4= 0:31:45

...

It's not so easy for Black to find a place for his king now, so slowing down might be a good idea, but...

When you are ahead a pawn, find where that extra pawn resides and, if you can get it rolling, that is likely the right plan – or at least a very good one.

16...

f6? 0:50:38

16... ♕xf4 17. ♔xf4 e5 18. ♖ae1=. After 16...f6?, Black's problems start for real.

17. ♕xe5! 0:31:00

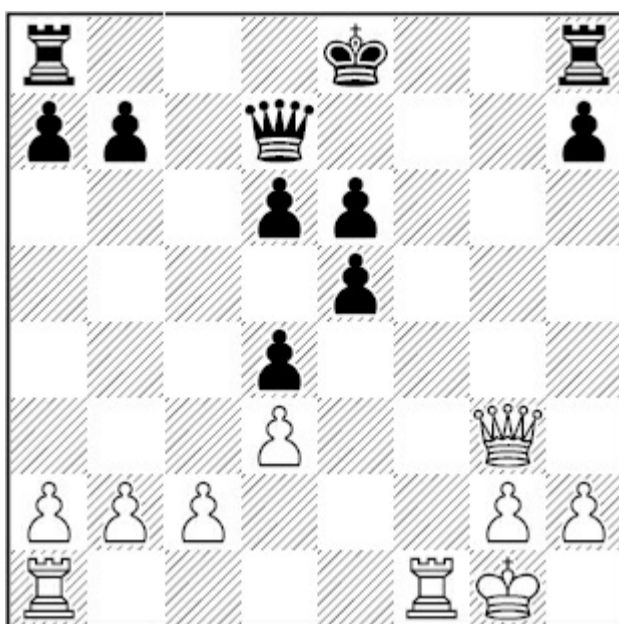
...

Kudos to the lower-rated player for finding the right plan. The computer thinks White is already winning but his margin for error is still small (evaluation +1.3).

17...

fxe5? 0:51:23

If the time stamping is correct, Black played this move instantly! I guess he feels he can't allow 17...dxe5 18. ♖xf6, but the computer thinks that is better for Black than what occurs in the game.



White to play after 17...fxe5?

18. ♔g5!+- 0:27:44 ...

Wow! The lower-rated player took 4 minutes and found the right quiet move. That is often enough for the opponent to reach for the “Computer cheat claim” button, at least figuratively. But 18. ♔g5! is not that difficult to find, and no other move gives White any advantage at all (after 18. ♔g5! the evaluation is +5.5 pawns at 23 ply search depth!), so we would hope most decent players would find it.

Black just can't get his king out of the center and will get caught in a crossfire of the white queen and rooks.

18...

♚e7 0:50:40

Black slows down a little, but it's too late (where have we heard that before?). What else can he play? Would you trade queens here for White?

When you have your opponent trapped in the center, you want to keep the heavy forces buzzing around it until you can collect some real benefit.

19. ♔h5+! 0:27:07

...

Of course not; trading queens would be a beginner's mistake, losing almost seven pawns' worth by the computer's reckoning. *When you have your opponent trapped in the center, you want to keep the heavy forces buzzing around it until you can collect some real benefit.*

19...

♚d8 0:51:23

Played in two seconds, but forced. 19... ♔d7? 20. ♖f7 and White bags the queen.

20. ♖f7 0:27:46 ...

Anyway. Black can neither get his king to safety nor activate his rooks. Yechh! If this were a serious game against a strong opponent, I can guarantee Black might think about the need to resign soon. An evaluation deficit of +7.5 or so will do that to you.

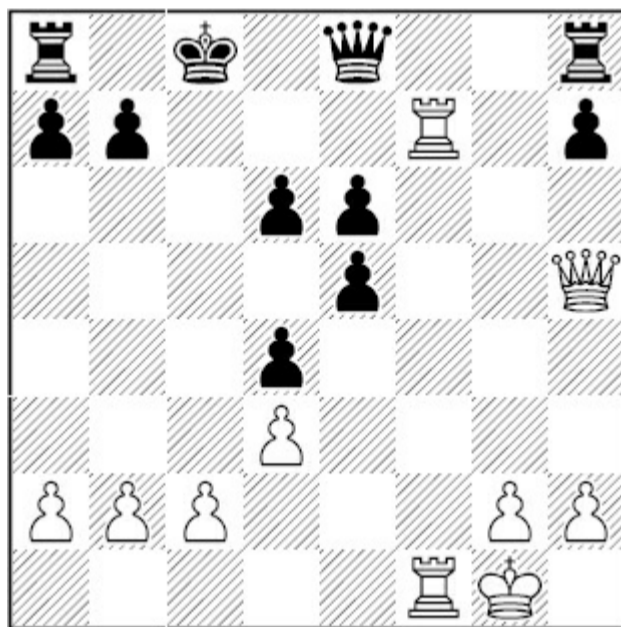
White can afford to play a little slower here – and definitely should – since with a few more accurate moves the game won't last a lot longer!

20... ♔e8 0:52:07

21. ♖af1 0:28:16 ...

The best move, but played a bit quickly. White can afford to play a little slower here – and definitely should – since with a few more accurate moves the game won't last a lot longer!

21... ♔c8 0:52:23



White to play after 21... ♔c8

This would be a great time for a longer think. White has over 28 minutes remaining and being especially careful here offers a wonderful cost/benefit ratio. In real life the more valuable thing you are protecting, the more careful you should be. In chess it's the same idea: the more easily you are winning, the more you have to lose! So be careful...

22. ♔f3 0:28:46 ...

This is a good natural move which retains a big winning advantage, but *Houdini* only rates it as

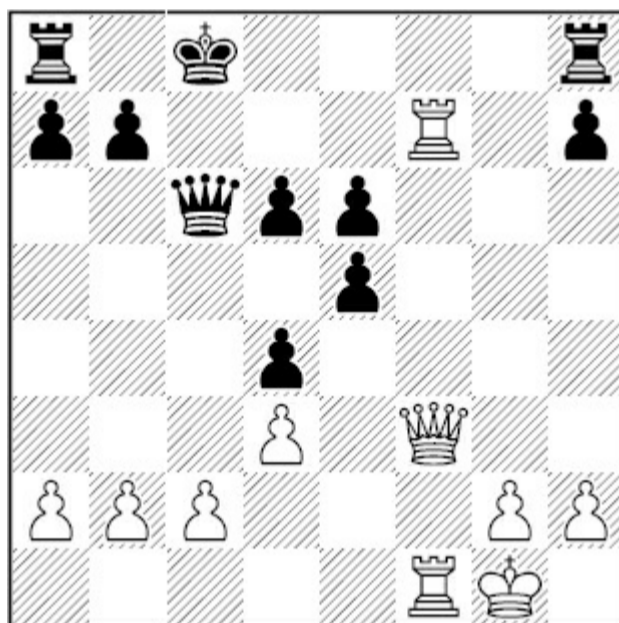
the seventh-best move. If you are winning this easily – with a chance to beat a player hundreds of points higher than you, *taking 15 seconds for a move when you have such juicy choices when you have 28 minutes left and a 45-second time delay is fairly insane*. I don't think I have played this way ever – not even when I was a beginner and had no idea what I was doing. If I had to play this way, it would take all the fun out of slow games (in speed games that would be the point – to play fast and see what happens) since I want to be in control of what will happen. *In real life, it's usually bad to be a control freak but in chess it's an absolutely wonderful attribute* (but don't play too slow...). White is winning, but the seeds for his destruction have been planted if he doesn't change his evil ways, baby.

For the record, *Houdini* favors 22. ♔h6, threatening the unstoppable 23. ♖f8, e.g. 22... ♔c6 23. ♖xh7 and the rout is on.

22...

♔c6 0:52:59

If instead 22... ♖b8, then White should switch gears with 23. ♔f6+.



White to play after 22... ♔c6

In real life, it's usually bad to be a control freak, but in chess it's an absolutely wonderful attribute.

23. ♖f8+??= 0:29:13 ...

Aaghhh! Played in 18 seconds with 29 minutes on his clock!! There are not much bigger combined time-management/tactical miscalculation errors than this. After the game White told me that he thought 23... ♖xf8?? was forced, allowing 24. ♔xf8+ skewering and winning a rook.

In their fun book *Chess Rules of Thumb*, Alburtt and Lawrence write that *if you see a move that you think wins, that makes it a critical move*. They go on to state that *a critical move is one about which you should think long and hard*.

The logic is very simple. There are only two possibilities if you see a move that seems to win: you are either correct and the move is winning, or you are wrong and it is not.

But if the move is winning and you have lots of time on your clock (especially with a big increment), then waiting to be sure before you play the move will not hurt you. The reason it won't hurt is that winning an easily won game is usually less time-demanding than trying to do your best in positions where you are not easily winning, since in the former case your margin for error is high and finding the absolute best ideas is usually not that necessary.

However, if your “winning” move is not winning the way you suppose, the reason could be that your move is really not that good at all! If this move is instead a mistake, that is certainly worth taking quite a bit of time to determine. In other words, the risk/reward ratio on a seemingly winning move goes way up, and any reasonable time taken is usually beneficial.

In this case 23. ♖f8+ is not in *Houdini's* top ten moves, much less an “obvious” 18-second move. When White spotted his “tactic,” a big red flag should have gone off with the message, “Hey, I might be winning – let's take some time and be absolutely sure.”

After the game, White said that he got really excited when he saw he was winning and that translated into speeding up. That was his biggest mistake of the game, since it led to more than one sub-optimal move when even close to optimal ones would have put the game away. *In order to improve, this “I'm winning” adrenaline should be translated into, “Take a deep breath, calm down, and look at the situation with a slow, objective eye...”*

Don't let White's mistake happen to you! It's not very wise...

Instead of this lemon, *Houdini* suggests the murderous 23. ♖f6. After 23... ♖e8 24. ♖xh7 White has a continuing big attack and is about to win lots more material.

23...

♖c7 0:53:43

This is the move, protecting both rooks, which White did not take the time to look for. The damage is done. Now Black is simply ahead a pawn but White still has some chances...

24. ♖xc6+? 0:27:59

...

In order to improve, this “I'm winning” adrenaline should be translated into, “Take a deep breath, calm down, and look at the situation with a slow, objective eye...”

White slows down when he realizes the enormity of his error. Too late! Slowing down only after you make a mistake is itself a big mistake. That's the type of error you should only make once in your career – after a single disaster you should learn your lesson. *Getting better at chess is often more about not repeating big mistakes over and over than it is about learning new opening moves.*

White's second error is that he should not want to trade queens because Black's king is still the more exposed, and White is behind material. As an alternative the computer suggests 24. ♖f7+ ♔b6 25. ♗f6 or 25. ♗f2 and White still has enough play for his pawn.

24...

♔xc6 0:51:58

Getting the king off the vulnerable seventh rank. But Black took almost two minutes for this move, one of his longest thinks of the game. Maybe he got up to get a glass of water, thirsty from the long game?

25. ♖xa8 0:28:39

...

Another questionable move played in 5 seconds! One of the worst things you can do is to trade down when you are losing, although *trading from a two-rook (for each side) endgame into a one-rook endgame when you are down a pawn is often a good idea*. However, because White made the move so quickly, that thought likely did not cross his mind. I would keep the rooks on the board with a move like 25. ♖8f7, when White has decent compensation for his pawn deficit, such as his 2-1 kingside majority. White is upset, but it is a common mistake to play quickly when you are not thinking clearly. White should take a walk and calm down so he can do his best in this upcoming endgame. If you don't want to try your best, why not just resign?

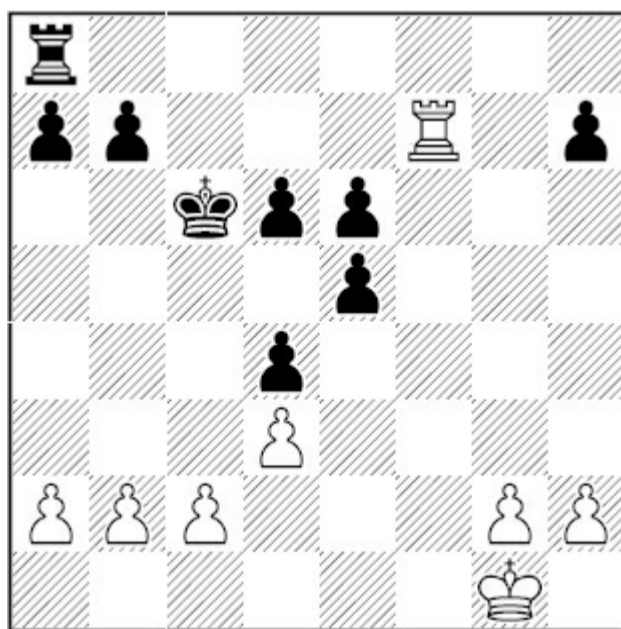
25...

♖xa8 0:52:39

26. ♖f7 0:29:19

...

Five seconds again. We can see where this is heading. White, who at least was taking his time until he threw away the win, is going to blitz out the game against his higher-rated opponent, virtually guaranteeing he will also throw away the draw! If you want to accentuate the difference between stronger and weaker players, have the weaker player play fast! In this case, it is unfortunately voluntary.



Black to play after 26. ♖f7

Getting better at chess is often more about not repeating big mistakes over and over than it is about learning new opening moves.

26...

h5! 0:52:39

An interesting and good decision. It will be difficult for Black to make progress if he passively defends the pawn with 26... ♖h8. Then White can activate his king with 27. ♔f2 and Black will have some difficulty trying to support both the central pawn majority and the queenside pawns. Instead Black plays actively, forcing the white rook to chase the h-pawn while Black activates his forces to support the central majority and attack the vulnerable pawn on c2. Although computers are very materialistic, *Houdini* can see far enough ahead to rate 26...h5 as best.

27. ♖h7 0:29:58

...

White has nothing better, but six seconds? His clock is going up and up with the increment.

27...

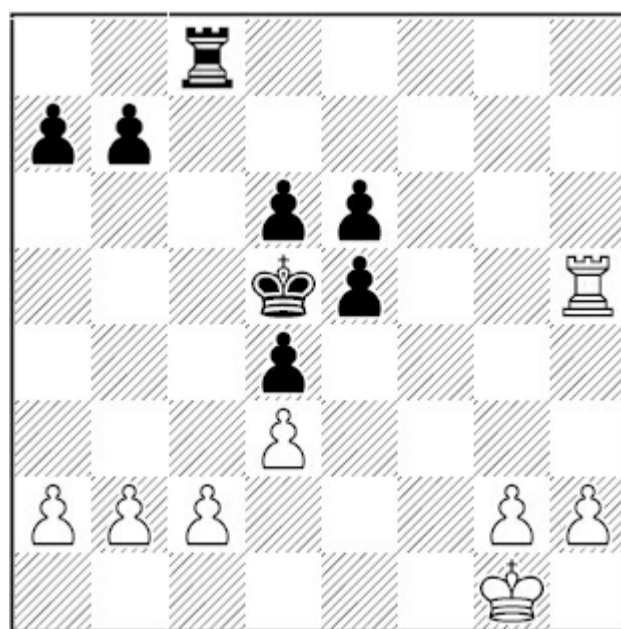
c8 0:53:10

Played in only 14 seconds. This is consistent with his previous move. The computer calculates 27...d5! as even more accurate.

28. ♖xh5 0:30:40

d5 0:53:54

Black readies his central majority but he takes one second to move. I guess he has to catch that plane. A good alternative was 28... ♔b6. White needs to play very accurately in the upcoming endgame and *Houdini* rates the chances equal if he does. Doing so might require some long thinks, but White has almost 31 minutes to try to figure it out.



White to play after 28... ♔d5

29. ♖h6?? 0:31:22

...

Played in 3 seconds! Why play a 45 45 game if you're in such a rush? White should have taken time to try to find 29.g4 when the race is on, e.g. 29.g4! ♜xc2 30.g5 ♜c1+! 31.♔g2 ♜c2+ 32.♔h3 (avoiding a repetition with 32.♔g1) 32... ♜c1 (to get access to g1) 33. ♜h4 (to meet a later ... ♜g1 with ♜g4) and now *Houdini* proposes the enigmatic 33...e4!? expecting a draw. But all this potential excitement is negated by White's playing as if things are hopeless in what is actually a non-hopeless position.

29...

♜xc2 0:54:36

30. ♖h7 0:31:57

...

This is way too sluggish. White's last three moves were 28. ♜xh5 29. ♖h6, and 30. ♖h7, wasting away in Margaritaville.

Although 30.g4 is too late, it was worth a try since Black has to play accurately: 30.g4 e4!. A key move. Now if 31.dxe4+ ♔e5! 32.g5 d3! and Black wins prosaically, e.g. 33. ♜h3 d2 34. ♜d3 ♜c1+ 35.♔f2 d1 ♕, etc.

30...

e4! 0:55:19

If you want to be a good player, you consistently fight your hardest. It's tough enough becoming a good player by working hard on every move. It's pretty much impossible if you don't.

Black plays quickly but accurately. If he weren't an FM, we could suspect him of computer use, but White's play in the past few moves is deserving of defeat no matter the strength of the opponent.

31.dxe4+ 0:32:41

♔xe4 0:56:00

No further cleverness required on Black's part. All the hard work is done.

32. ♜xb7 0:33:23

d3 0:56:43

0-1

After the game, White admitted that he had no one to blame but himself. He saw what he thought was a winning line and he jumped at it without looking both ways twice. Then, after blowing the easy win, he proceeded to play extremely quickly, putting up little resistance as he game slipped from better to drawing to worse to lost.

I don't play chess that way. *If you want to be a good player, you consistently fight your hardest. It's tough enough becoming a good player by working hard on every move. It's pretty much impossible if you don't.*

GAME 28: WHITE 1940 – BLACK 1646
Liberty Bell Open, Philadelphia 1968
48 moves in 2 hours (followed by 24/1, etc)
French Defense, Winawer Variation

This upper-level amateur game features a distinctly lower-level finish!

1.e4 **e6**
2.d4 **d5**
3.♘c3 ...

For an overview of the alternatives, see Game 1.

3... ♙b4
4.e5 ...

Closing the center is by far the most popular way to save the pawn. According to the *Chess Tempo Chess Database*, the most popular alternative lines are 4.♘e2 4.exd5, 4.♙d3, and 4.a3.

4... **c5**

Black breaks up White's pawn structure by attacking the base of the central chain. Game 20 featured the Advance Variation, when after 1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 Black almost inevitably plays 3...c5.

5.a3 ...

White wishes to resolve the pin situation and possibly win the bishop pair. *It is usually not good to spend a tempo to play moves like a2-a3 before the bishop reaches b4 to prevent moves like ... ♙b4, but it is quite another idea to attack a piece once it gets there, since that does not cost the same tempo due to Black's obligation to save the bishop.*

5... ♙xc3+

The "logical" retreat 5... ♙a5 has long been known as suspect after 6.b4! (6.♙g4 is also strong), which is safe since 6...cxb4 7.♘b5! leaves Black in a quandary, e.g. 7...bxa3+ 8.c3 threatens 9.♘d6+ and if 8... ♙c7 then 9.♙g4±, 9.♙d3±, and the thematic 9.♙xa3± all give White very good play. If instead Black tries 6.b4 cxd4 (better), he still stands awkwardly after 7.♙g4, *Houdini's* clear choice.

It's eventually learning opening ideas like this that augment your knowledge of the main lines (*tabiyas*). *One great way to learn is to play speed games and, if Black plays a move like 5... ♙a5 and you don't know what to do, after the game look up the opening in a book or give it to the computer or a strong player to find out why it's not the main line, and what you should do next*

time it occurs in a game. This advice alone, if followed consistently, could be worth the price of this book. When two-time U.S. Women's Champion Jennifer Shahade visited our Main Line Chess Club to give a talk, she answered a question about the merits of speed chess with almost this exact same advice – I just sat there and smiled. ☺

6.bxc3

...

Let's quickly summarize the pros and cons of the previous exchange from White's standpoint:

Pros: Bishop pair, another pawn toward the center, semi-open b-file.

Cons: Doubled c-pawns, isolated a-pawn, doubled pawns are somewhat backward to the black d-pawn.

The bottom line is fairly neutral, but World Champion Bobby Fischer clearly felt that it favored White. On the other hand, he was notoriously unsuccessful in proving it!

One great way to learn is to play speed games and, if Black plays a move like 5... ♖a5 and you don't know what to do, after the game look up the opening in a book or give it to the computer or a strong player to find out why it's not the main line, and what you should do next time it occurs in a game.

6...

♗e7

This is the main line. The other line is 6... ♗c7, which is often answered by 7. ♗g4 f5 (7... ♗e7!? is an interesting transpositional try and *Houdini's* top move at 21 ply without its opening book, but 7...f5 is a close second) 8. ♗g3 ♗e7 9. ♗xg7 ♖g8 with complicated play.

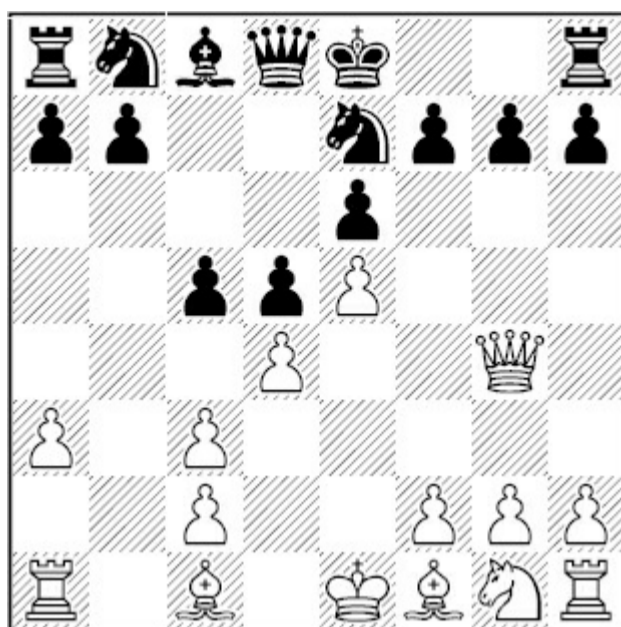
After 6... ♗e7 White has three main tries: 7. ♗g4, 7. ♗f3, and 7.a4. The last of these was often played by Fischer but is now no longer that popular. 7. ♗f3 is considered the solid positional choice. 7. ♗g4 can get wild but is the computer's top choice (+0.11) at 24 ply.

7. ♗g4

...

A very common position. At the time (and possibly still today), this is most often met by 7... ♗c7 with complicated play after 8. ♗xg7 ♖g8 9. ♗xh7 cxd4 and a famous *tabiya* sequence is in progress. The other line, practically unknown at the time of this game, is the dangerous-looking 7...O-O. Grandmaster practice over the past 30 years has shown this line to be not as dangerous for Black as previously thought.

However, before this game was played Black had recently been studying this opening and, although he was aware of 7... ♗c7 as the main line, he did some original thinking (sometimes a dangerous thing, but not discouraged!). He decided there was no reason not to play a slightly different move order, and so he tried:



Black to play after 7. ♖g4

7... cxd4!?

Now White can – and should – transpose into the main line with 8. ♖xg7. But instead White made the “automatic” recapture and lost his advantage after...

8.cxd4(?) ♖c7

Black’s dual threats of 9... ♖xc2 and 9... ♖c3+ are difficult to meet and he is at least equal, but with the initiative. The opening books at that time had listed 9. ♖d1 as unclear, but today we have better tools and (at 21 ply) *Houdini* suggests that White’s best move is 9. ♖a2.

9. ♖d2 ...

Credit to White! He thinks for a while and finds a line which *Houdini* also thinks is better than 9. ♖d1. After 9. ♖d1 it gives 9...O-O with a very nice almost half-pawn advantage to Black.

9... ♖xc2=

Also best. The equal sign is conservative as the computer rates Black’s game as slightly better, but not enough to merit “+”.

10. ♖xg7 ...

Thematic, but *Houdini* rates 10. ♖f3 as a likely improvement. Then, after 10... ♖g6 11. ♖xg6 hxg6 Black retains his extra pawn with a 2-1 queenside majority, but White has the bishop pair and a slight lead in development and space.

10... ♖g8

Now h7 is guarded and 11. ♖f6 is met by 11... ♗f5, so...

11. ♖h6

♗bc6!±

Again best and Black maintains pressure. Black is playing very well against his higher-rated opponent. I can state with almost certainty that Black was not afraid of him despite the 300-point rating difference.

12. ♗f3

...

The alternatives were 12. ♗e2 and 12. ♖c1. *Houdini* rates them all about the same, with Black retaining his slight edge.

12...

♖b2

Playing this first or 12... ♗xd4 transposes. So both are tied for “best.”

13. ♖c1

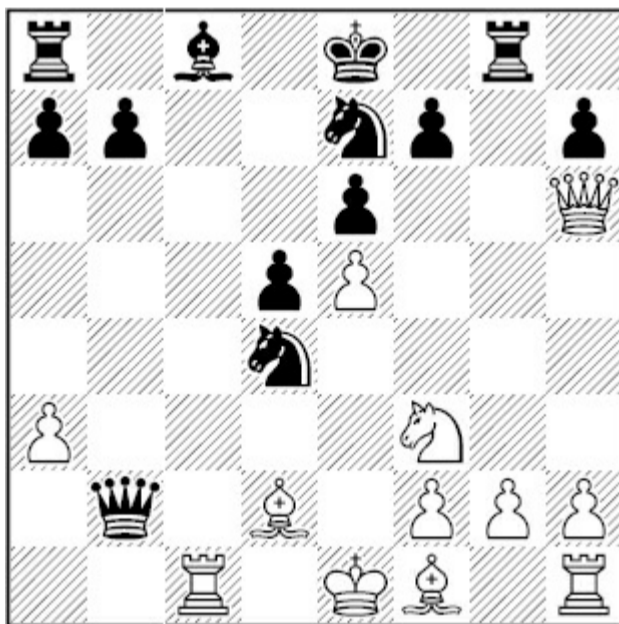
...

Also the best defense. White is defending well but Black has the initiative, i.e., White is forced to respond to Black’s pressure and threats.

13...

♗xd4

Question: How would you defend here as White?



White to play after 13... ♗xd4

The best defense is 14. ♗xd4: Black’s advantage is held in check after 14... ♗xd4, when White should continue 15.f4!? or 15. ♖e3±. White is loath to trade queens when he is down a pawn against a lower-rated opponent, but the bishop pair and a slight lead in development is about the best he can

achieve. Instead he decides to complicate – which, objectively, is a bad decision.

14. ♖g5(?) ...

This would work great, except for Black's next move.

14... ♖b3!–+

Thus far Black is playing a terrific game, well above his rating. This threat is much better than the insipid 14... ♖c2+ 15. ♔d1 ♖xa3 16. ♖xh7±, when the threat of 17. ♖f6+ means Black will lose his castling privileges and the white knight will be quite potent.

15. ♖xf7!? ...

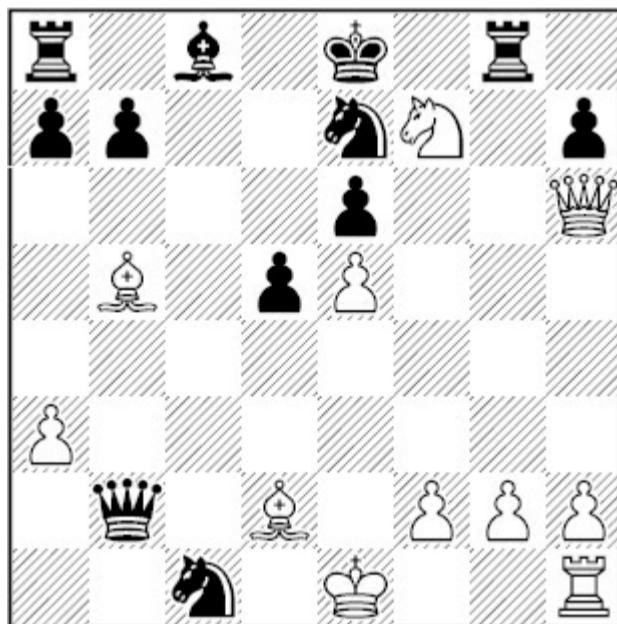
White has nothing better. In for a penny, in for a pound. He just has to hope Black will revert to his rating and start messing up in the complications.

15... ♖xc1

Clearly best. Also good is 15... ♔xf7 16. ♖f6+ ♔e8 17. ♖b5+ ♔d8 18. ♖g5 ♖xa3, but 15... ♖xc1 is much better.

16. ♖b5+ ...

Question: What would you play for Black?



Black to play after 16. ♖b5+

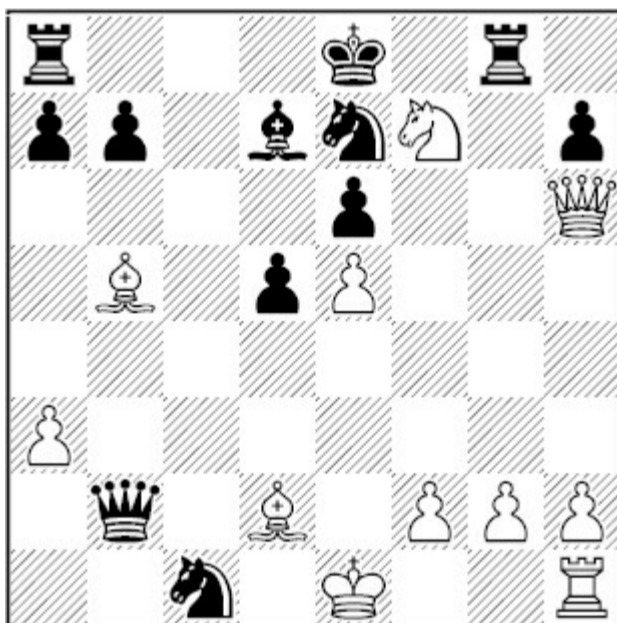
Many of the past few moves were critical, but this one is the most critical. Black recognized this and went into a very long think. He has four candidate moves, but he eliminated two of them immediately:

- 16... ♔xf7?? 17. ♚f6#;
- 16... ♚xb5?? 17. ♗d6+ wins the queen. That left only two possibilities –
- 16... ♗c6;
- 16... ♕d7.

Black first analyzed 16... ♗c6 and was suspicious. Especially dangerous seemed 17. ♗d6+, or first 17. ♕xc6+ bxc6 and now 18. ♗d6+.

After 17. ♕xc6+ bxc6 18. ♗d6+, Black could not go to the seventh rank with his king because then 19. ♚xh7+ would win the rook, e.g. 18... ♔e7? 19. ♚xh7+ and now guarding the rook with 19... ♔f8?? allows 20. ♚f7#; while if 18. ♗d6+ ♔d8 then White had all kinds of dangerous moves since Black's immediate threats are not all that great. It turns out that the killer is 19. ♕a5+, which is an easy move to miss but it ends all resistance. In any case, this was enough to convince Black that if there was a safer alternative in 16... ♕d7, he would take it.

However, Black could not simply deduce that because 16... ♔xf7, 16... ♚xb5, and 16... ♗c6 were insufficient, he could play 16... ♕d7. That would be bad logic since 16... ♕d7 might also be easily refuted. In that case Black should choose the line that gives White the greatest chances to go wrong, and that might have turned out to be 16... ♗c6. But Black understood this logic and rolled up his sleeves to calculate 16... ♕d7:



Position after 16... ♕d7 (analysis)

Now White has 17. ♕xd7+, 17. ♚xe6, or 17. ♗d6+:

- 17. ♕xd7+ ♔xd7 (17... ♔f7?? 18. ♚f6#) seems safe;
- 17. ♚xe6 ♕xb5 18. ♗d6+ ♔d8 19. ♗xb7+ ♔c7 20. ♚xe7+ might be OK, so look for something better. Maybe 17... ♗d3+ since 18. ♕xd3 allows 18... ♕xe6 (it turns out *Houdini* thinks 17...

♠d3+ is clearly best, but Black did not know that – it was complicated!);

- 17. ♠d6+ is the key line. Then 17... ♔f8?? 18. ♚f6#, so 17... ♔d8 is forced. So far, so good. But does White have any forcing lines here?

- a. 18. ♠f7+ ♔c7 seems OK. 19. ♕a5+ is now possible, but then at least one of either 19...b6 or 19... ♔b8 should be OK;

- b. 18. ♕xc1 ♚xe5+ and 19... ♚xd6 seems safe;

- c. 18. ♠xb7+ ♔c7, and now neither 19. ♕xd7 nor 19. ♕xc1 looks like enough, but it was tough to see clearly what had to be played. But was that necessary?

At this point (I am not sure exactly how far into the above Black got in his first pass), Black was pretty tired and it was not clear how good, if at all, 16... ♕d7 was. *But it was clearly the best try.* If Black had been aware that *the main goal of a move is to find the best move possible in a reasonable amount of time*, and not to figure out how good the best move is, he should have then:

- Taken a brief walk to get a glass of water and clear his head;
- Reviewed the main lines very briefly to make sure 16... ♕d7 is clearly the best; and then
- Played 16... ♕d7.

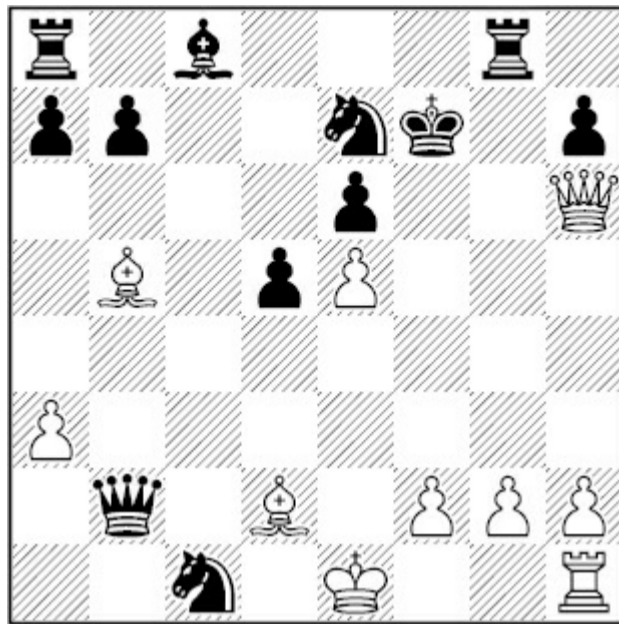
Instead, Black made the biggest mistake of the game: he wanted to know how good 16... ♕d7 was, and not just determine that it was the best move. Therefore, despite being a little weary from calculating the complications, he went back and tried to review all the 16... ♕d7 lines trying to determine if he could prove that 16... ♕d7 won. That was neither necessary nor wise.

Black delved back into the complications, taking about half an hour for the move and becoming completely exhausted. Finally, he tried to recap why the other moves were clearly bad but, in his weakened state, he couldn't think clearly. What was wrong with the simple 16... ♔xf7? He couldn't remember or find the refutation!

In his confusion, he decided maybe he was wrong all along and played...

16...

♔xf7???



Position after 16... ♔xf7???

The third question mark is for the finality of the error. Of course White replied...

17. ♔f6#

1-0

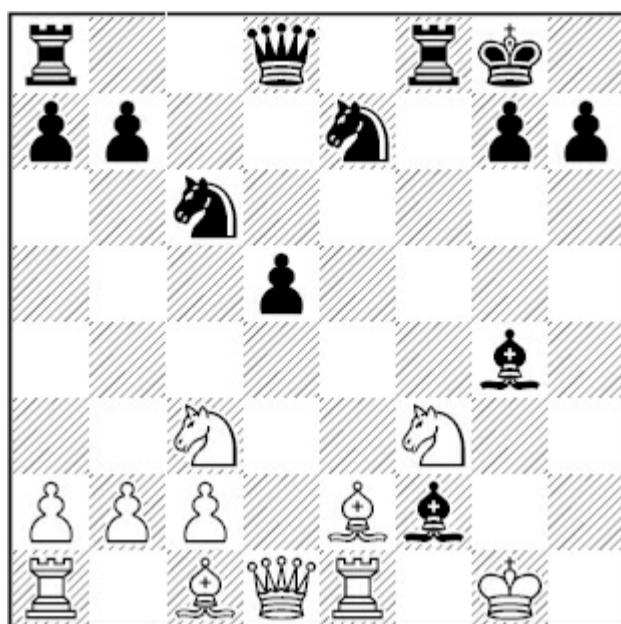
By this point you have probably guessed that I was playing Black. The shock was greater than the pain. Next time someone suggests I only publish my wins, here's a great counter-example! Most of my analysis may have been of the "later-he-became-a-master" quality, but my final blunder is pure amateur.

Surprisingly, the pain of this sudden loss is not as enduring, or at least as continually hurtful, as some other lessons I learned 44 years ago. Live and learn.

P.S. The next time I played this same opponent, six months later, I beat him nicely in an even more complex contest. That became the first game I had published in *Chess Life* magazine:

Yehl, John (1951) – Heisman, Dan (1716) Keystone State Open 1968

1.e4 c5 2.d4 e6 3.♘f3 d5 4.dxc5 ♘xc5 5.exd5 exd5 6.♙b5+ ♘c6 7.O-O ♘ge7 8.♘c3 ♙g4 9.♚e1 O-O 10.♙d3 f5 11.h3 ♙h5 12.g4? fxg4 13.hxg4 ♙xg4 14.♙e2 ♙xf2+!?:



White to play after 14... ♖xf2+!?

(14... ♖c7! is simpler) 15. ♔xf2 ♘e5 16. ♙g5 (the best try) 16... ♖b6+! (16... ♙xf3! is computer good, too) 17. ♙e3 ♖f6! 18. ♖h1 ♙xf3 19. ♙xf3 ♘g4+! 20. ♔e1 ♘xe3 21. ♙xd5 ♘7xd5 22. ♙xd5+ ♔h8 23. ♔d2 ♘xd5 24. ♔xd5 ♖f2+ 25. ♔d1 ♖ad8 0-1

GAME 29: WHITE 1373 – BLACK 1398

Internet Chess Club 2011

45 minutes with a 45-second increment

Alekhine's Defense

This game features one player taking his time against another playing as fast as possible. Will justice prevail and the thoughtful player win? It sometimes happens that way but... not always.

1.e4 0:45:37

♞f6 0:45:42

2.e5 0:46:12

♞d5 0:46:26

3.d4 0:46:44

d6 0:47:08

4.c4 0:47:08

...

4. ♞f3 is currently the most popular move, but 4.c4 is the clear second.

4...

♞b6 0:47:49

When you first start to play, you don't need to memorize a ton of opening lines – there are so many possibilities that you will be taken out of your book in every game anyway. However, learning *tabiya* (main line) ideas like 2... ♞d5 (instead of 2... ♞e4?) and 4... ♞b6 is very helpful, if not essential, if you want to play an opening like the Alekhine.

5.exd6 0:47:46

...

The Exchange Variation. More aggressive, but not necessarily better, is 5.f4, the Four Pawns' Attack. 5.♖f3 is still possible. Without its book, *Houdini* at 22 ply had 5.♖f3 and 5.exd6 in a flat-footed tie due to an expected transposition. 5.f4 was a distant third, with only equality.

5...

cx d6 0:48:27

This asymmetrical way of recapturing is the more aggressive and popular. Another 21 ply computer search found the decision very close, with the more drawish 5...exd6 getting a very small edge over 5...cx d6.

IM Tim Taylor (who grew up a few miles away from me in the northern suburbs of Philadelphia) highly recommends 5...exd6 in his book, *Alekhine Alert*.

6.♖f3 0:48:18

...

Tim suggests a very strong (and complex – outside the scope of this book) line for White starting with 6.♖c3 where the development of White's kingside is delayed – very advanced stuff, but worth mentioning. If you are interested in the theory of Alekhine's Defense, I do recommend Tim's book!

The *Chess Tempo Chess Database* (<http://chesstempo.com/game-database.html>) shows that 6.♖c3 is preferred over 6.♖f3 by more than a 10-1 margin, and White scores better, as would be expected.

6...

♖g4 0:49:03

The traditional way to “get things going” in the Alekhine has been either ...g7-g6 or ...♖g4. *Houdini* suggests that the appropriate response here is 6...g6 (preferred in the database also by an 8-1 margin), but 6...♖g4 is also logical and in practice outscores 6...g6.

7.♖e3 0:48:57

...

There is no hurry to protect d4, say from the “threat” of ...♖xf3 ♗xf3 removing both of its defenders, but there's nothing wrong with preparing for it in this case.

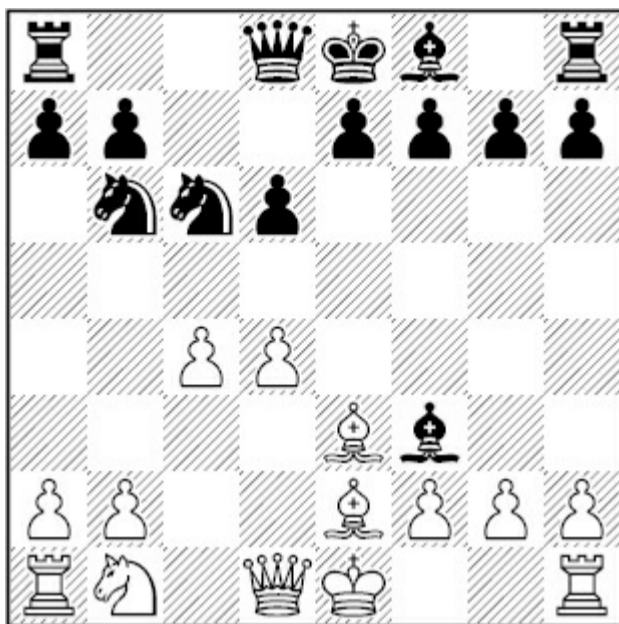
7...

♖c6 0:49:11

8.♖e2 0:49:35

...

Houdini calculates that 8.♖bd2 or 8.h3 or 8.♖c3 are all slightly better. The problem with 8.♖e2 in this and similar positions is simply 8...♖xf3:



White to play after 8... ♙xf3 (analysis)

The bishop on e2 is overworked. It can't guard both f3 and c4, so Black simply asks it to do one so it can't do the other. Now if 9.gxf3 White's kingside is very ugly as the f-pawns are doubled *and* isolated – not enough compensation in the bishop pair. Therefore White has to go for 9. ♙xf3 ♘xc4, when White might have enough compensation for the pawn, but Black is very happy with his opening.

8... g6 0:46:08

Too late. Black misses the 8... ♙xf3 idea of the above diagram and, in a sense, mixes up the lines.

9. ♗bd2 0:47:43 ...

There are pros and cons to playing 9.d5 – similar decisions are never easy. Beginners like to jump on moves that “gain space” and “gain a tempo” by attacking the knight on c6, but it's not quite that simple. When White plays d4-d5, he weakens c5 and e5, both important squares, plus he may push the black knight on c6 to a more active square. In addition, his c-pawn cannot as easily advance to c5 later in the game. Decisions, decisions! At 25 ply, *Houdini* rates White's chosen move 9. ♗bd2 and 9.d5 almost the same, both “±”.

9... ♙g7 0:46:09

10. ♗h4? 0:47:44 ...

One benefit of playing over thousands of annotated master games – you learn the typical maneuvers strong players use in common positions. That knowledge would be helpful here, as you would almost never see a grandmaster play a move like this in a similar position. That does not necessarily make it bad, though! Sometimes these “rare” moves are very good, especially since each position is unique. But being aware of the lack of grandmaster “seal of approval” should at least cause you to question your idea. When you have decisions such as the one about playing 10. ♗h4, answering the question of whether decentralizing the knight is good often requires less strategic expertise because the safety issue dominates. The current question is a simple Counting problem (I

define *Counting* as being able to determine if any sequence of captures leads to material gain or loss), which goes like this:

Before 10. ♖h4? the white d-pawn is guarded twice and attacked twice.

After 10. ♖h4? White has voluntarily “removed the guard” and his d-pawn is no longer safe. It’s as simple as that.

White, who apparently is a very quick player, made this move in about the increment (44 seconds), but he obviously was either not emphasizing the most basic issue, “Is It Safe?” or, if he was, he wasn’t Counting well. *It is my opinion that Counting is the most basic and most important tactical idea.*

Instead of surrendering the important d-pawn, White should simply have continued development with 10.O-O. Even the “aggressive” 10.d5 is just as good.

10...	♙xe2 0:46:39
11. ♖xe2 0:48:23	♘xd4 0:47:06
12. ♙xd4 0:48:31	♙xd4 0:47:12
13. ♖b1 0:49:10	O-O 0:43:44

Black finally slows down, but it probably wasn’t necessary to take more than four minutes to castle. Taking stock at this point is a good idea, so Black has the time to step back and figure out how he is going to complete his development. After completing his development, he can concentrate on how to make use of his extra pawn.

14.O-O 0:49:51	e6 0:40:15
----------------	------------

You should be reluctant to make moves that create a weak-square complex and, after 14...e6, *Black is weak on the kingside dark squares. But that is usually tolerable if you have a bishop on that color and your opponent does not.* Here Black has a dark-squared bishop and White does not, so ...e7-e6 is OK – it even has the good idea of getting the extra central pawn going with a later ...d6-d5. Still, I prefer another one of *Houdini’s* top moves – 14... ♖c8, activating the rook onto the semi-open file. I would rather mobilize *all* my forces, if possible, before undertaking more specific action. Many of my students, who are typical of players at their level, neglect to mobilize all their forces consistently, inadvertently violating the guideline, *Don’t play the opening like the middlegame.*

15. ♖hf3 0:50:26	♙g7 0:38:45
16.b3 0:50:22	d5 0:36:41

As noted above, this break to get the extra pawn rolling is very reasonable (and *Houdini’s* #1, to Black’s credit), but the idea of 16... ♖c8 first still attracts.

It is my opinion that Counting is the most basic and most important tactical idea.

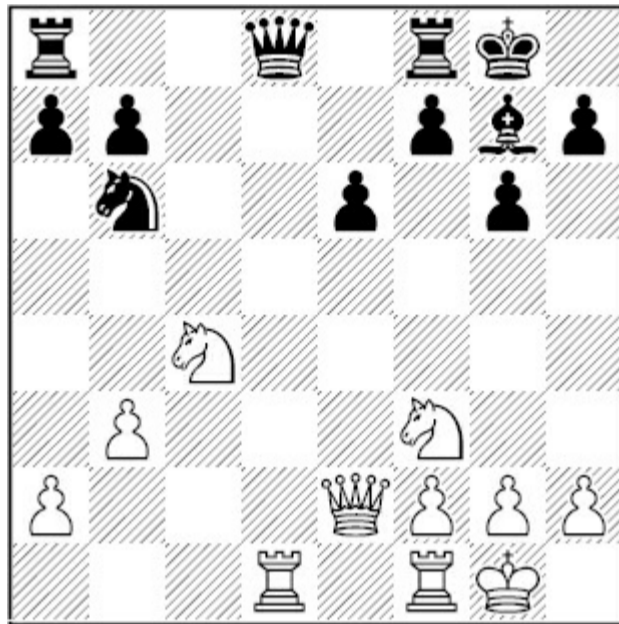
17. ♖bd1 0:50:43

♙xc4 0:31:39

Not bad, but there's no hurry. *Houdini* thinks developing the queen first to e7 or d6 is slightly preferable.

18. ♘xc4 0:51:23

...



Black to play after 18. ♘xc4

18...

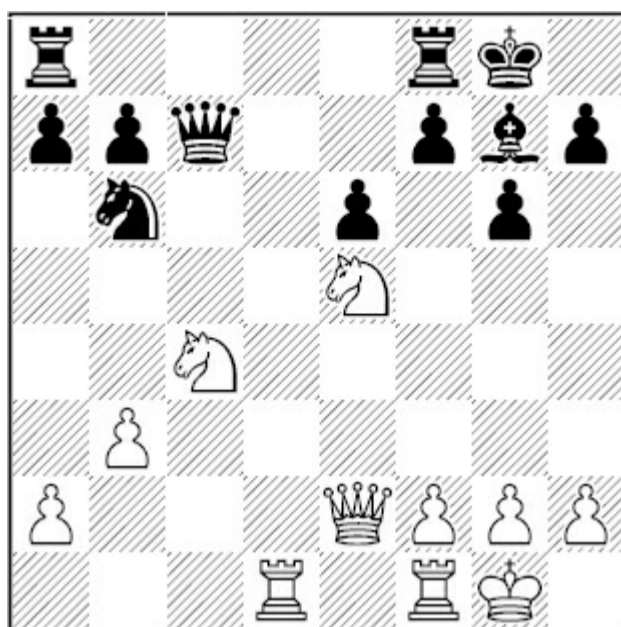
♙c7 0:30:50

Normally one doesn't move into pins, but here 18... ♘d5 would be guarded, and the temporary queen shield is helpful. Black's choice is not bad, either, although *Houdini* doesn't think it retains the full advantage, probably due to the loss of control on the d-file.

19. ♘fe5(?) 0:48:40

...

One also doesn't want to trade pieces when down material, although a deficit of a single pawn has a special place in the "barely losing" category. *Houdini* calculates that the most that White can get out of the position is with 19. ♘xb6 ♙xb6 20.g3. Not sure I would have found that... but the move actually played has a slight problem:



Black to play after 19. ♖fe5(?)

19...

♖xc4 0:29:50

Missing a tactic, but it wasn't trivial. Black can play 19... ♖d5! when the dual threats of 20... ♖c3 (fork) and 20... b5 (removal of the guard on the knight at e5) cannot both easily be met. Black wins material, e.g. 19... ♖d5 20. ♖de1 (the move that seems to stop both threats, but...) 20... b5 21. ♖d2 ♖c3 (anyway) 22. ♖e3 ♖xa2 and White's game is becoming a mess.

20. ♖xc4 0:48:33

b5 0:26:16

Black just doesn't want to activate those rooks! How deep into the game will he go before making a rook move? It's not a coincidence that the computer's top two moves are to deploy one of the rooks to d8. Black's choice loses about one-third of his advantage (from roughly 1 pawn down to 2/3).

21. ♖d6 0:48:56

a6 0:26:11

22. ♖e4(?) 0:49:21

...

White should instead fortify his central pressure by doubling rooks behind his advanced knight with 22. ♖d3. The move 22. ♖e4 blocks the knight's only safe retreat, thus making it easier for Black to pressure the stallion.

White is still playing very quickly and Black is playing at about the right speed – so far.

22...

♖fd8 0:23:26

Black finally gets the hint and puts White in an awkward situation. Even more accurate is 22... ♖ad8 since 22... ♖fd8 overworks that rook and renders the "threat" of 23... ♖xd6 useless due to 24. ♖xa8+. These tactical factors are not that difficult to spot – if you take the time to look for them.

23. ♖b7 0:49:56

...

White must offer the trade of queens now, else Black will attack the knight with the bishop and things could get bad, e.g. 23. ♖f3 ♗e5! with a double attack on the knight and h2, winning another pawn.

23... ♖xb7 0:22:48
24. ♗xb7 0:50:40 ♗xd1 0:22:43

Not forced; 24... ♗db8 was the alternative. It looks a little cramped in the upper left corner for Black after that, but it's *Houdini's* #1 move.

When you have a reduced-material position with material either even or featuring a small advantage, a possibly long endgame might be in store. Therefore, in a sudden-death time control (all the moves in the initial period of time) you don't want to run your clock too low, even with a 45-second increment. Black speeds up a little, which is good.

25. ♗xd1 0:51:23 ♗c8 0:19:38
26. ♗d8+!? 0:51:53 ...

An interesting decision, to trade into a knight-vs.-bishop endgame down a pawn. Normally, bishops are superior to knights in endings with pawns on both sides of the board. Maybe White thought that the black queenside pawns were vulnerable to the knight, or White could not find a better way to stop 26... ♗c2 (the computer agrees that White's move may be best), or maybe White just took fifteen seconds on his move and really didn't care that much...

26... ♗xd8 0:20:14
27. ♗xd8 0:52:37 ♗f8! 0:19:33

The king's fighting value is equivalent to more than four pawns. It's now the best fighter on the board, so the priority to get it into the action would be second only to ensuring that first there is no tactic.

28. a4?--+ 0:53:13 ...


Making things easier for Black as the remaining queenside pawn will be closer to the black king. Better was 28. ♗c6 or 28. ♗f1, with White facing a difficult struggle to draw.





28... bxa4 0:17:48
29. bxa4 0:53:55 ♗e5(?) 0:17:35

Trying to constrain the knight, but the straightforward 29... ♗e7 30. ♗c6+ ♗d7 31. ♗b4 a5 saves the pawn and gets the king closer with tempo(s). The move played jeopardizes the win.


30. ♗c6 0:54:38 ♗c7 0:18:00

35...







b6 0:19:36

Black attacks the knight and the f-pawn behind it. He could also switch plans with 35...e5 36. c2 e4+ 37. c3 a5+! 38. b3 f5! when, instead of going after the formerly vulnerable a-pawn, Black is mobilizing his kingside majority to create a decisive passed pawn on the e-file.


When you are ahead a pawn, especially in an endgame (but often in the middlegame, too), often the right idea is to ask, “Where is my extra pawn?”, find it, and create a plan to get it rolling and create a passed pawn. In this position Black’s extra pawn is on the e-file, so the computer’s idea of ...e5-e4 (push the potential passed pawn first) followed by ...f7-f5 and later a properly supported ...f5-f4 and ...e4-e3 will create the passed pawn.

36. b3? 0:58:46

...

With this lazy three-second move, we can officially pronounce White as “not even trying.” Instead of listlessly losing a pawn to the skewer, he could counterattack with 36. c2, when 36... xf2 at least loses a pawn back with 37. b4+ c5 38. xa6+ b6. In this line Black is still winning, but at least it’s a fight. But White did not even attempt to find it.

36...

xf2 0:20:02

37.g4 0:59:17

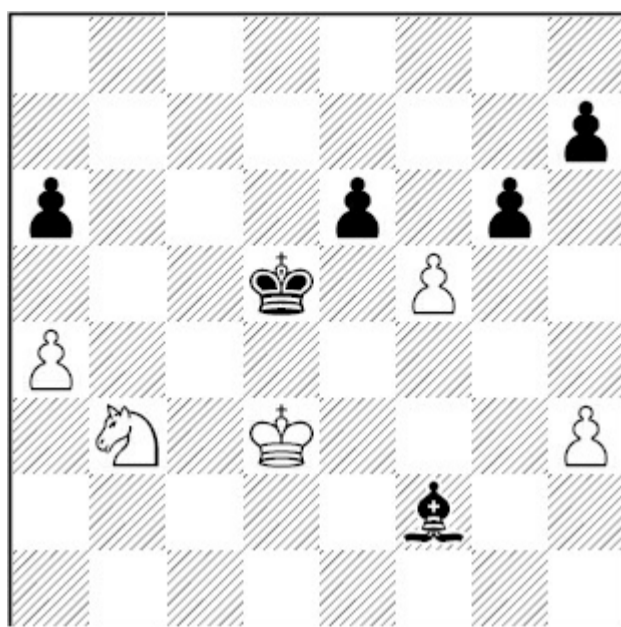
f5 0:19:21

Black slowed down on this move, a good sign. If he kept playing fast, disaster might still strike. I tell my students, “The more you are winning, the more you have to lose. It’s like carrying money – the more you have, the more careful you should be.” Think how badly Black would feel if he drew (or lost!) the game at this point. Positions where you are clearly winning are the worst times to play fast and sloppy. Many students and friends have lamented, “I was winning easily but I got overconfident, stopped checking for my opponent’s threats, and then...”

38.gxf5 0:59:55

...

Question: Which way should Black recapture?



Black to play after 38.gxf5

38...

exf5 0:19:45

A quick decision which is quite sufficient, but better was 38...gxf5 when the connected pawns are already both passed and supported by the king. Following 38...gxf5, Black would mainly have to be careful to avoid a blockade on the light squares, which would be White's only chance for resistance.

39. ♖ d2 0:59:52

f4 0:16:58

When you are ahead a pawn, especially in an endgame (but often in the middlegame, too), often the right idea is to ask, "Where is my extra pawn?", find it, and create a plan to get it rolling and create a passed pawn.

It makes more sense to keep the pawns together and control e4 a little longer with 39...g5. Black has definitely slowed down – whether that is just being careful or he doesn't know what to do is not clear, but slower is better here.

40. ♖ f3 1:00:28

...

Trying for that light-square blockade.

40...

h6 0:16:48

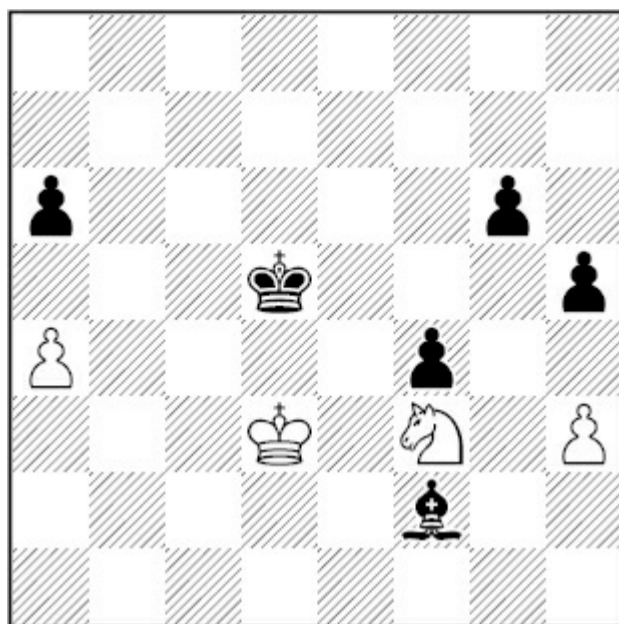
41. ♖ h2 1:00:53

h5 0:14:25

Houdini likes this move, which keeps the knight out of g4. However, the drawback is that after White's next move Black will have to reposition his bishop to guard g5 so that the pawn majority can continue to march.

42. ♖f3 1:01:31

...



Black to play after 42. ♖f3

42...

♔c5 0:09:50

Black seems a little baffled, since he took about a third of his time for this move. The computer likes the maneuver 42... ♔c5 and then 43... ♔e7 to guard g5, as mentioned on the previous note (sometimes I do get good ideas without computer support).

To find the correct plan, Black should ask why his pawn majority can't move forward and see it's because the knight is guarding g5. At that point, he should realize that g5 is a square of the same color as his bishop, so that guarding it would eventually enable him to make progress.

43. ♔c3 1:02:02

♔b6 0:09:41

Consistent, but *Houdini* thinks Black should admit his mistake with 43... ♔d5 and then 44... ♔c5 as in the previous note, or try 43... a5. Sometimes it is best to repeat a position and admit your mistake. That's one reason the rules wait for a position to be repeated three times for a draw and not two, so that you can reset and try something else.

44. ♔c4 1:02:22

♔a5 0:08:38

Houdini's top move, but the only purpose is to tie down the white king so that the bishop can eventually guard g5 and get the pawns rolling, an idea Black would have put in motion a few moves ago if he had seen it.

45. ♔b3 1:03:04

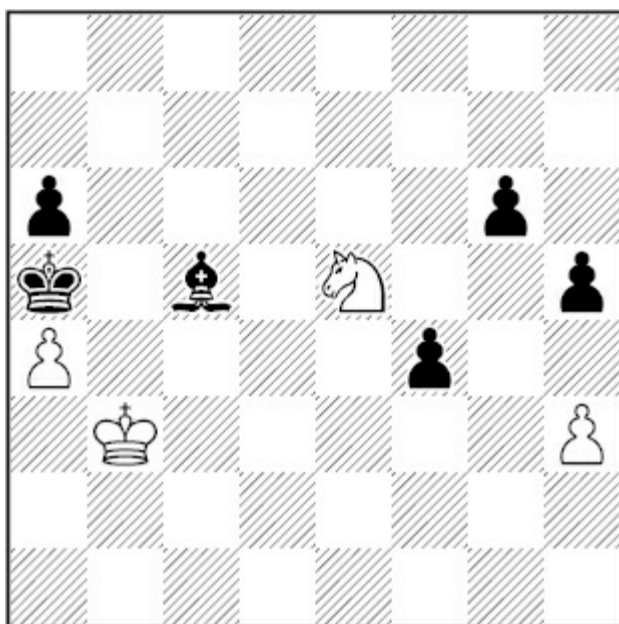
♔c5? 0:07:21

The computer suggests 45... ♔e3 as more accurate, predicting 46. ♖g5 ♔d4

47. ♖f3 ♗g7 48. ♖g5 ♗f6 49. ♖e4 ♗d8 50. ♖d6 ♔b6—+ when Black can finally make some progress. However, missing the right idea of simply guarding g5 a few moves ago has made the easy win clearly more difficult.

46. ♖e5 1:03:46 ...

Black now sees the attack on the g-pawn but, as usual, the key question to ask was, “*What are all the things my opponent’s last move does?*” Further, before you make a move, you need to ask, “*Is my move safe? Does my opponent have a check, capture, or threat I cannot meet?*” It only takes one thing to miss...

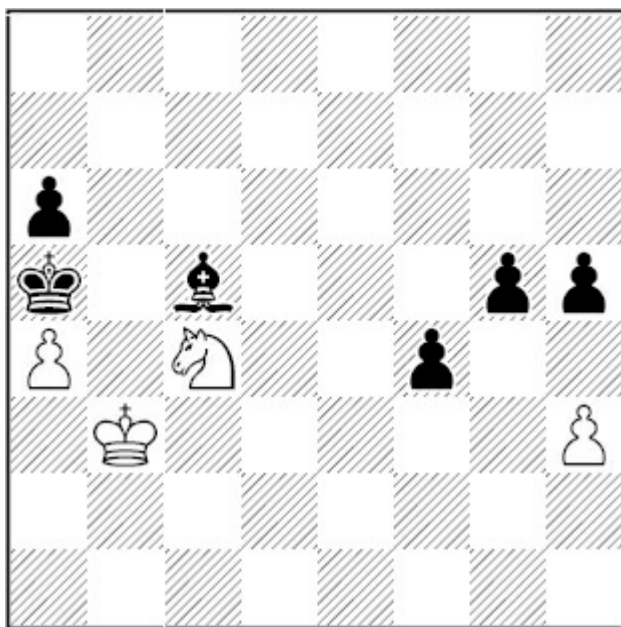


Black to play after 46. ♖e5

46... g5??? 0:07:13

A third question mark, for a helpmate in an otherwise good position, seems justified.

47. ♖c4# 1:04:27 1-0

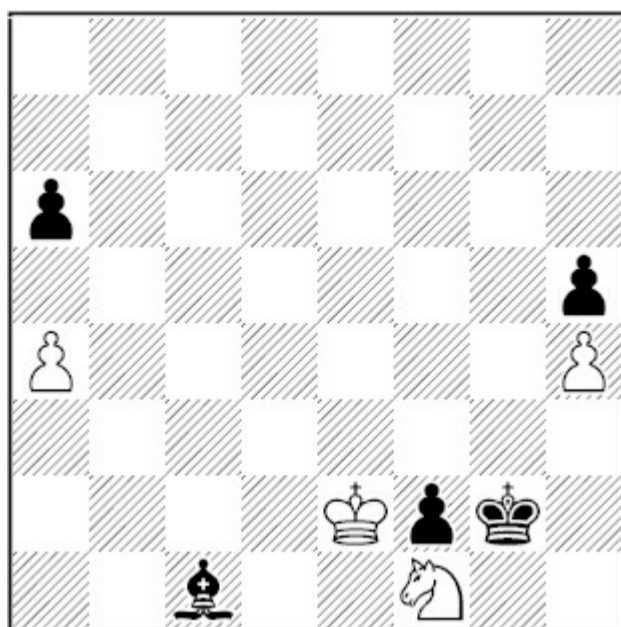


Final position after 47. ♖c4#

A shocker! Black, who was winning virtually the entire game, throws it all away by allowing a mate in one with very little material left on the board. After the game, Black (still in shock) admitted that his sense of danger was minimized by White's reduced material. He was not aware that he could help himself get mated on the edge of the board. Black could still have won (eventually) with the only move to stop mate, 46... ♔b6.

Ironically, had Black made his only safe move, taking the g-pawn was not White's best resistance: 46... ♔b6 47. ♖xg6?!. We will take this instructive move as the main line even though better is 47. ♔c4, threatening both 48. ♖d7+ winning the bishop and 48. ♖xg6, when Black should play 47... ♕d6, to answer 48. ♖xg6 with 48... ♔a5 and Black is winning. 47... f3 48. ♖e5!.

The only way to try to stop the pawn. 48... f2 49. ♖c4+ ♔c6 50. ♖d2 ♔d5 51. ♔c3 ♕e3 52. ♖f1 ♔e4 53. ♔c4 ♕h6 54. h4 ♔f3 55. ♔d3 ♔g2 56. ♔e2 ♕c1:



White to play after 56... ♕c1 (analysis)

White is almost in *Zugzwang*.

57.a5 ♔f4!. Black dominates White's knight and king, winning immediately.

The fact that Black, including the increment, took 53 seconds on his 46th move was a bad sign. If he had asked about his opponent's checks and seen that 47. ♗c4# was threatened, he would have realized he only had one safe move and probably played it more quickly. Whenever a weaker player has an "easily" forced move and does not play it after a while, as a spectator I begin to worry that maybe they are playing Hope Chess and not seeing what the opponent is forcing them to do.

GAME 30: WHITE – BLACK

Oneonta Chess Club 2010

No clock

Sicilian Defense, Wing Gambit

Non-tournament chess is often played without a clock. I call that type of chess "skittles" (a designation certainly not shared by all) and I believe it to be less sporting, since the clock adds that needed dimension to control thinking time and ensure that resources are equal for both players.

Consider it this way: "If you see a good move, don't play it, look for a better one" would be quite different advice without a clock. If followed, your search could, literally, go on indefinitely.

1.e4

c5

A fighting opening – the Sicilian Defense!

2.b4

...

A rare bird – the Wing Gambit. At the master level this is played much less than (to borrow a phrase from '60s Philadelphia Eagles coach Joe Kuharich) its "rare but not unusual" cousin, the Morra Gambit (2.d4).

2...

cxb4

Accepting the gambit is the main way to proceed, although I have always had a strong fondness for muddying the waters by delaying acceptance with 2...d5!?, an idea I read over forty years ago in *The Sicilian Defense* by GMs Gligorić and Sokolov.

3.d4

...

This is a side variation, although it looks rather logical. By far the lion's share of Wing Gambits proceed with 3.a3. Without its book, *Houdini's* top three moves, in descending order at 26 ply, are 3. ♗f3, 3.a3, and 3. ♕b2. According to the *Chess Tempo Chess Database*, 3.d4, although not in *Houdini's* top three, is the second most common move among masters, occurring about twice as often

as 3. ♖b2.

Long-time Philadelphia master Ross Nickel, who has a strong fondness for offbeat openings, taught all his disciples to continue after 3.a3 with the weird and wacky 3...bxa3 4. ♖xa3?!

The main line is 3.a3 d5 (*Houdini* suggests the rare 3...e5!?) 4.exd5 ♖xd5 5. ♖f3 (5.axb4?? ♖e5+ snags the rook on a1) 5...e5, which scores 76.5% for Black in the database.

3... e6

We have now reached a line that was played 85 times, and in 75 the player with White responded...

4. ♖f3 d5
5. ♖d3?! ...

In all 79 database games which reached the position after 4...d5 (there were quite a few transpositions), the master playing White played 5.e5. So why did they all avoid 5. ♖d3, as chosen in this game?

The general rule is that *you don't usually allow pieces to be attacked by pieces of lesser value, if in doing so the lesser piece gets to go to a better square*. After 5. ♖d3, if Black plays 5...dxe4 6. ♖xe4 ♖f6+ he will either win the bishop pair or a tempo, and both are significant. This idea occurs in many openings, such as the French when White defends e4 with a piece other than the knight on the third move after 1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5, so it's a very good idea to understand.

Interestingly, *Houdini* disagrees with all the masters, preferring 5.exd5 exd5 (5... ♖xd5 6.a3= or 6. ♖d3=) 6. ♖d3 when White is almost equal.

5... ♖e7

Black doesn't know about the standard idea 5...dxe4 6. ♖xe4 ♖f6, which the computer confirms as best.

6.O-O= ♖ec6?!

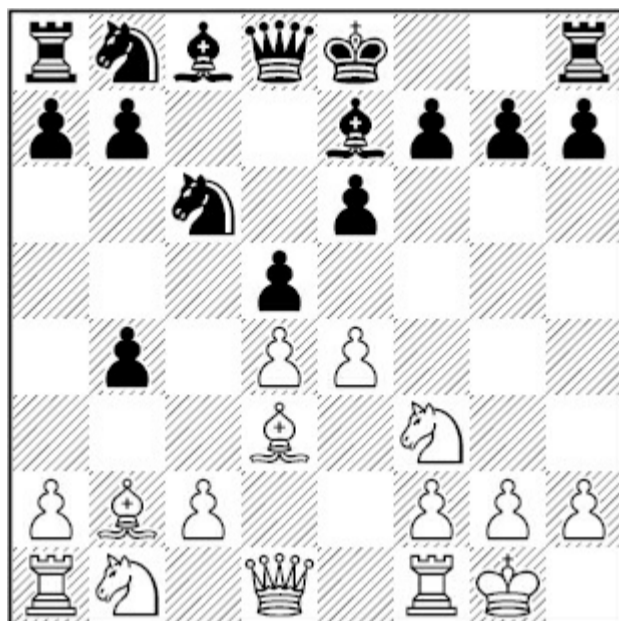
You don't usually allow pieces to be attacked by pieces of lesser value, if in doing so the lesser piece gets to go to a better square.

Another avant-garde move. The straightforward 6... ♖bc6 is better – simple moves are often best in the opening. In Black's defense, the knight was blocking the bishop, so either it had to move again eventually, or Black would need to play the ugly ...g7-g6 (weakening dark squares) to get the bishop into the game with a fianchetto.

7. ♖b2 ...

Once again the thematic 7.exd5 ♙xd5 8.a3!± or 7.a3 is better.

7... ♗e7



White to play after 7... ♗e7

8.c4!?= ...

Gotta admire White's vigorous play here. When you gambit a pawn, you usually have to play actively to keep your lead in development. That's one reason why *gambits are good openings for inexperienced players* – it forces them to play aggressively and learn tactics. Another reason is that weaker opponents don't defend well, and even when they do, being down a pawn is not such a big deal against opponents who don't possess good technique.

8... ♗xc3

As good as anything. Other captures are also good, like 8...dxc4 or 8...dxe4, all roughly equal.

9. ♗xc3 ...

White has full compensation for his pawn, but no more than that.

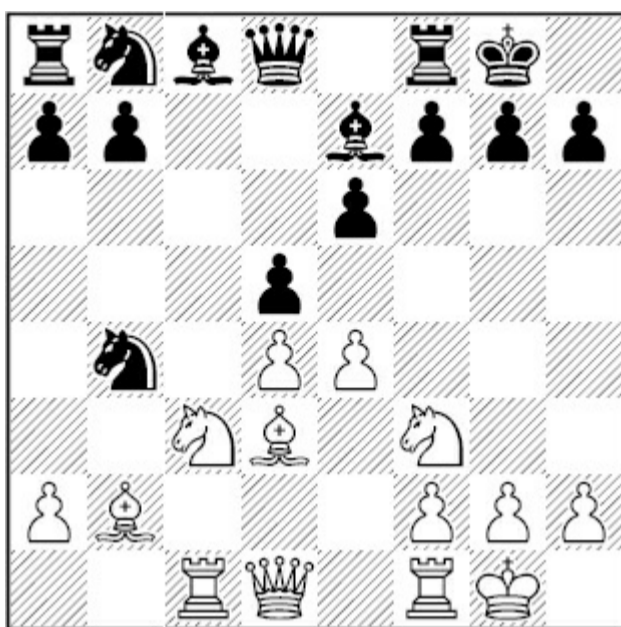
9... O-O

10. ♖c1 ...

Both sides are making reasonable developing moves.

10... ♗b4

If a master plays this move, you know he is planning something like 11. ♖b1 dxe4 12. ♗xe4 ♞d5 to post the knight on its ideal square in front of the isolated pawn, but let's see...



White to play after 10... ♗b4

Gambits are good openings for inexperienced players.

11. ♖b1 ...

Many inexperienced players refuse to make this move because it “retreats the bishop and loses time,” but good players do it automatically and *Houdini* confirms it is clearly best. The reason? Because allowing ... ♗xd3 would not only lose the bishop pair, but also greatly weaken White’s light squares for the rest of the game. The position is just too open to cavalierly give up the bishop so easily.

11... dxe4!

12. ♗xe4 ...

Houdini likes 12. ♖xe4 slightly better, with equality after 12... ♞8c6 13. ♕e1 ♞d5.

12... ♞d5

How about that! The knight moves three times but does end up in a strong position (that certainly is not always the case!). This maneuver makes the bishop on b2 look rather inactive.

13. ♕c2 ...

I guess White dreams of getting the knight off d5 and then playing ♞f6+ followed by ♖xh7# but that doesn’t justify breaking the principle, *don’t put your queen on an open file if an opponent’s rook*

can easily get to that file. Here it's not so easy for Black to get a rook to the file, but it still seems White's queen will be misplaced eventually. *Houdini* thinks e2 is the right square for the queen, but its best moves are 13. ♖e1 or 13. ♗c3, in either case with not quite enough compensation for the pawn.

13... ♗c6
14.a3 ...

White understandably feels the need to keep the black pieces off b4, although that's not 100% required. Alternatives include 14. ♖fe1 and 14. ♗c5.

14... f5

A committal move. Black need not block the diagonal yet, and the downside is that the e-pawn becomes backward on the semi-open file. Yet computers often suggest similar moves. This time *Houdini* is not all that enthusiastic and prefers to block the diagonal with 14... g6, or just to develop with 14... ♖e8 or 14... ♗b6.

15. ♗c5 ♗d6=

Clearly 15... ♗xc5 16.dxc5 is not attractive to Black as it activates the bishop on b2 and gives White the bishop pair. The interesting 15... ♗d6!? was the computer's choice.

16. ♖fe1 ...

Getting all the pieces into the game is often a great idea. The computer smells some trouble and suggests the odd-looking 16.g3=, which I must admit would not have been high on my list of candidates.

16... ♗f6

A reasonable move. The computer suggests that the most accurate is 16... ♗f4 17. ♖cd1 ♗d6, with a microscopic advantage to Black.

17. ♗a2= ...

Yet another reasonable move, rearranging the bishop off the blocked b1-h7 diagonal. Both sides are playing well, and any minor mistakes cancel each other out, keeping the chances about even. White is down a pawn but continues to enjoy decent compensation.

17... ♗ce7!

Black would like to complete his development, but there's currently no safe way to get the queen bishop in the game, e.g. 17...b6?? 18. ♗xe6 ♗xe6 19. ♗xc6+- as White gets much more than his

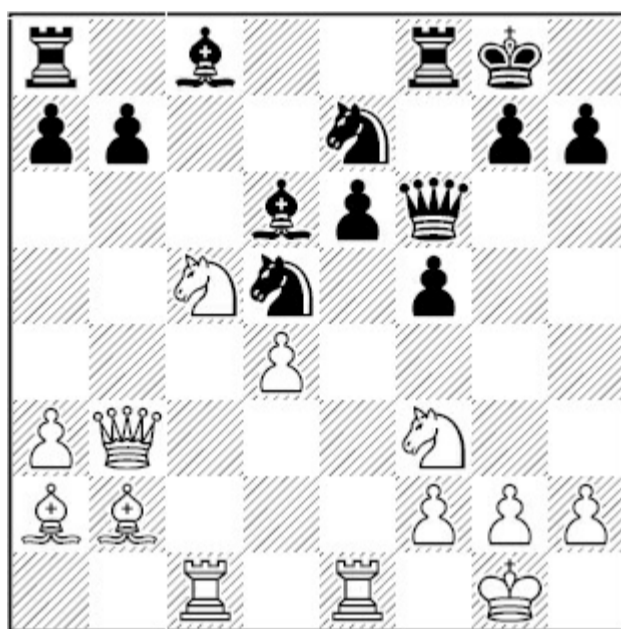
pawn back.

18. ♔b3

...

This is a strange move. I don't think White is really threatening 19. ♖xb7 when 19... ♜b8 is dangerous. He had at his disposal other possibilities, like 18. ♘d3 to get a knight into the weakened e5 square, 18. ♞e2 to pressure the e-file, or the computer's strange 18.h4, which it also claims is equal.

Question: Can Black take advantage of 18. ♔b3?



Black to play after 18. ♔b3

18...

b6!

Yes he can – and does. Now the game suddenly switches from a maneuvering game where White was trying to retard Black's development to a tactical one where both sides can easily err.

What should White do about his threatened knight?

19. ♘xe6??-+

...

The answer is he has to calmly retreat 19. ♘d3, or else find the computer-like 19. ♞c2, when 19... bxc5? 20.dxc5± hits both the bishop and queen so instead Black should play 19... ♜b8. Black is slightly better in both cases.

With 19. ♘xe6, White thinks he has a "big" combination on the light squares, which scores high on originality but low on actual quality...

19...

♘xe6

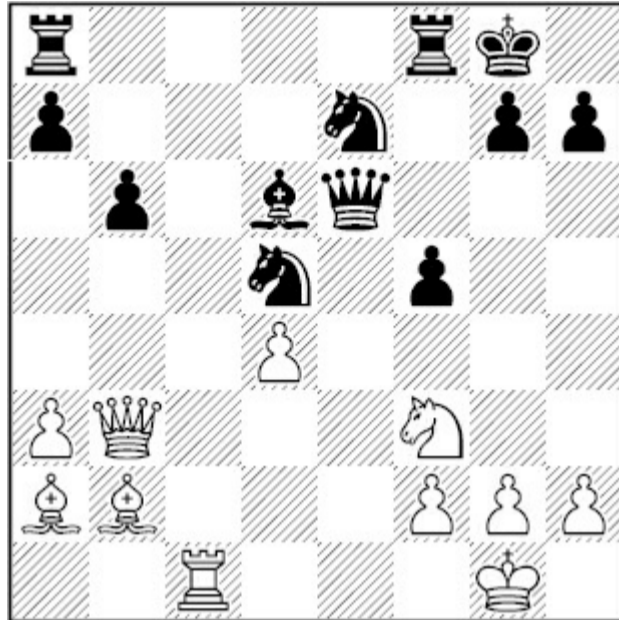
20. ♞xe6

...

Consistent – in for a penny, in for a pound.

20...

♙xe6



White to play after 20... ♙xe6

21. ♖e1

...

Trying to remove the guard on the d5-knight one way or another. It seems as though White did not carefully calculate this combination but used his Tal-like feel to sense “something was there.”

21...

♙f7

Best. 21... ♙d7 is also sufficient.

22. ♗g5

...

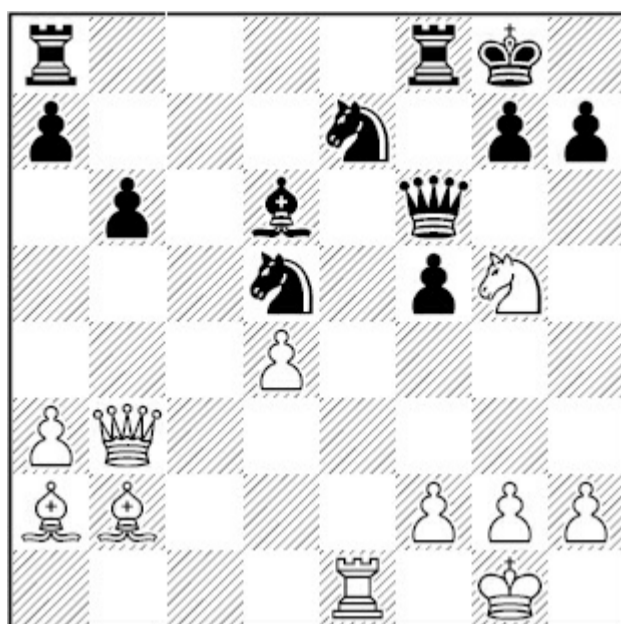
The attempts to remove the guard continue. To his credit, White has a consistent attacking theme, but so far Black’s moves have been mostly forced and he has defended well...

22...

♙f6?

...up ’til now! Instead 22... ♙h5 would pretty much wrap things up, since 23. ♖xe7 is met by the computer-like 23... ♙h8!! winning, but even the human-like 23... ♗xe7 24. ♙xd5+ ♙h8 is sufficient as White has sacrificed too much and won back too little. That does happen when the risk builds up and then the reward ends up not matching it.

Question: How can White take advantage of Black’s mistake to get back in the game?



White to play after 22... ♖f6

23.h4! ...

Kudos to White for finding clearly the best move in the position. He simply holds onto the strong knight and threatens an unstoppable invasion of e6.

23... ♔h8(?)

It's easy not to find the best moves here and unfair to criticize a player for not doing so, since even grandmasters often go astray when things get wild. It's nice to be a computer in situations like this (you don't have to pay taxes), and *Houdini* finds 23... ♕f4! when Black still retains a nice advantage after 24. ♖e6 ♔h8 25. ♗f3 (best) 25... ♕d2 26. ♖e2 ♗f4! 27. ♖xf4 ♕xf4 28. ♗xf4 ♗g6. The smoke has cleared somewhat: Black has returned some material but still rules.

24. ♖e6! ...

White is white-hot – the computer even rates him with a slight advantage now, assuming best play. The queen is trapped!

24... h6

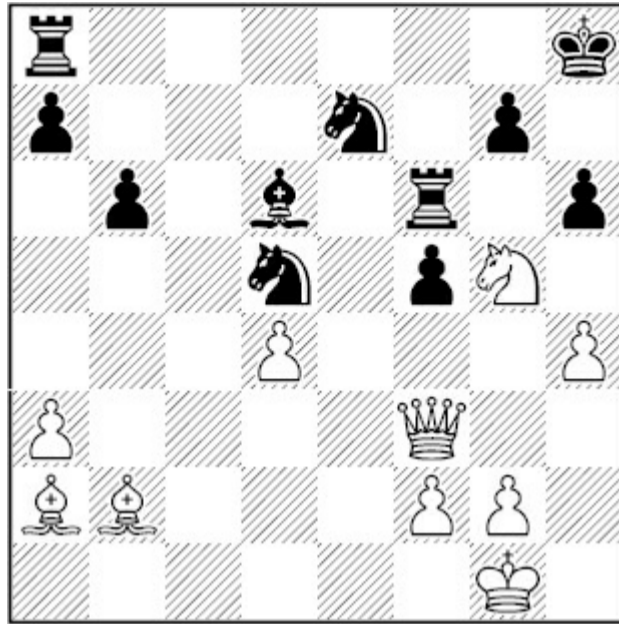
Black defends well, but he has nothing better. He could also try 24... ♗xe6 25. ♖xe6 ♖f6 26. ♗g5±.

25. ♖xf6 ♖xf6

26. ♗f3 ...

What's this? White has just gotten back in the game but he decides to unnecessarily continue with tricky play. Returning to normal with 26. ♗f3± is best.

Question: What is Black's only good move here?



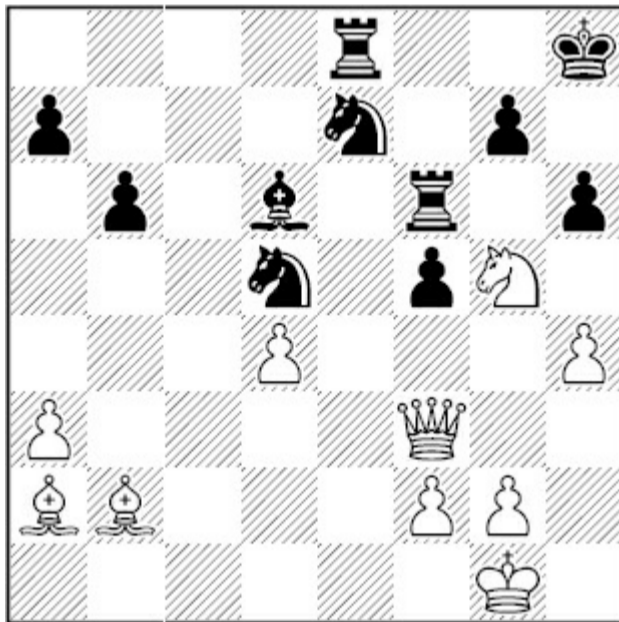
Black to play after 26. ♔f3

26...

♖e8?

Understandably, in the maze Black fails to find the only defense. He had to play 26... ♖d8, so that 27. ♕xd5 ♘xd5 28. ♔xd5?? loses to 28... ♕h2+ 29. ♔xh2 ♖xd5.

Question: How can White win? (Hint: it's not easy!)



White to play after 26... ♖e8?

27. ♕xd5

...

Missing a difficult win with 27.g3!! blocking the bishop's diagonal. After 27.g3 Black loses in all lines, e.g.:

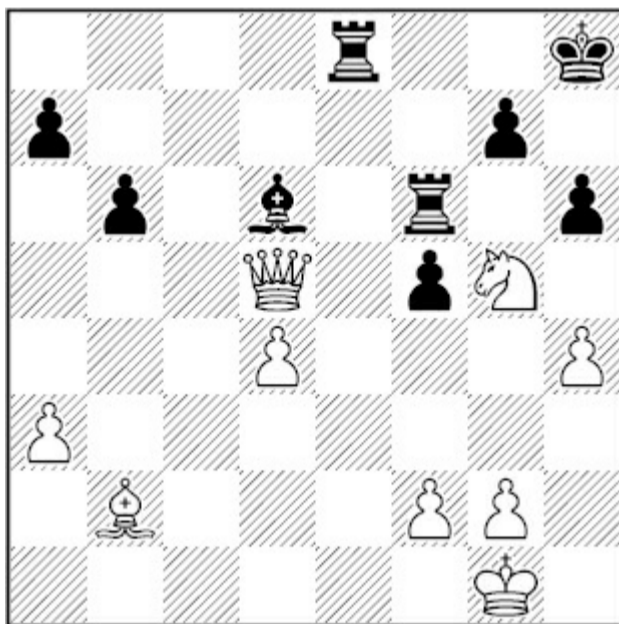
- 27...hxg5 28. ♖h5+ picks up the rook on e8;
- 27... ♖d8 now allows 28. ♙xd5 since there's no check on h2;
- 27... ♗c7 (to save the knight somehow) 28. ♗f7+ ♔h7 29.a4!!+- to minimize the activity of the knight on c7 for a later penetration by the queen to b7. Even a grandmaster would be proud to find this hidden idea;
- 27...f4 (relatively best) 28. ♙xd5 ♗xd5 29. ♖xd5 fxg3 30. ♗f7+ ♔h7 31.fxg3 ♙xg3 32. ♗e5+-.

Don't feel bad if you missed 27.g3 – I am positive most masters would miss it, too! In complications like this, all masters would recognize the criticality of the situation and take sufficient time, but finding a “quiet” move like 27.g3 is very difficult unless there is some deductive logic that would lead a human to suspect it. If you want to test my guess, try presenting this position to your local master (or expert) and see which move he/she chooses...

27... ♗xd5
 28. ♖xd5?? ...

Here we go again! White told me after the game that he was so happy to win a piece that he did not even take the time to see if the move was safe. Considering he was playing without a clock, it would not have been a big price to pay!

Instead White needed to play 28. ♔f1!, another difficult move to find (28.g3 is equal). Then his chances are better after 28... ♗f4 29.g3 ♗g6 30.d5!±.



Black to play after 28. ♖xd5??

28... ♖e1#
 0-1

It only takes one bad mistake to lose a game. This is not the only game in the book where the players made many reasonable and imaginative moves, only to have one player lose when he makes a gigantic mistake. If you walk along the edge of a cliff, it only takes one decision to jump and you're over the edge, so you have to be careful on every step, not just most of them.

BONUS DISASTER!

As I was reviewing the draft of this book, a game-ending sequence occurred at our chess club which was an absolute must to end the *Disaster Strikes* chapter.

Two players at our club had played a seesaw crazy game...

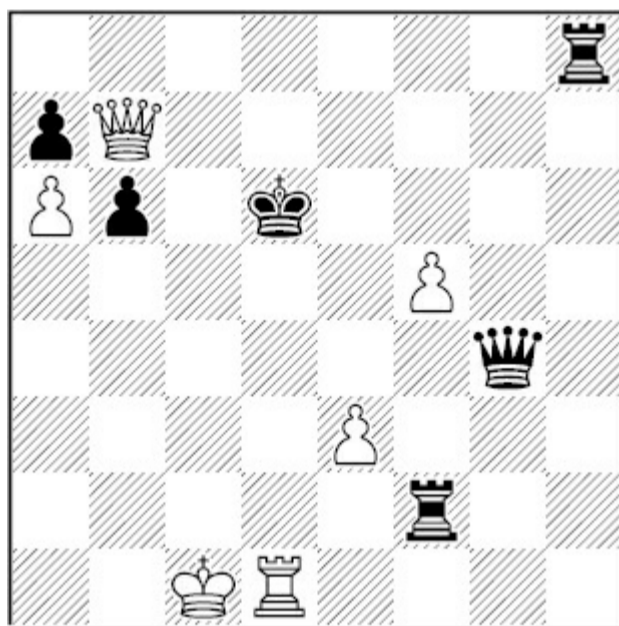
Bonus Game: White 1155 – Black 1302

Gladwyne 2012

55 minutes with 5-second time delay

Colle System

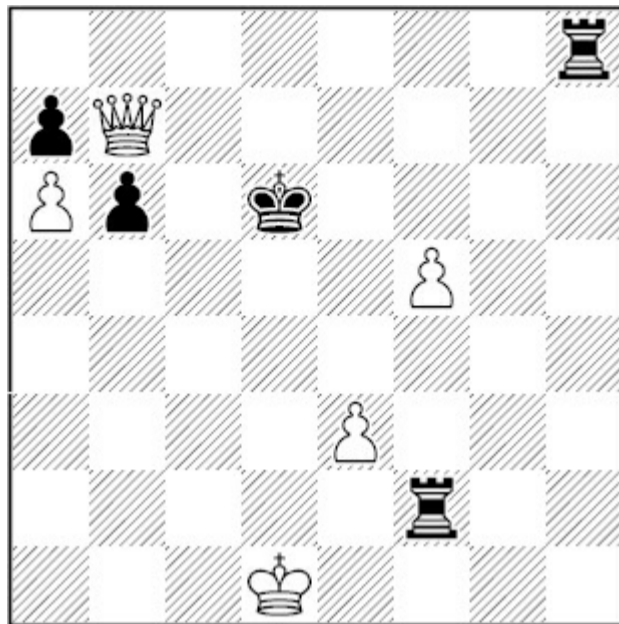
1.d4 e6 2.♘f3 c5 3.e3 ♘c6 4.c3 d5 5.♙d3 ♘f6 6.O-O cxd4 7.cxd4 ♙d7 8.a3 ♙d6 9.♚e1 O-O 10.b4 e5 11.dxe5 ♘xe5 12.♘xe5 ♙xe5 13.♚a2 ♙e6 14.f4 ♙c7 15.f5 ♙d7 16.♚f2 ♙b6 17.a4 ♚e8 18.a5 ♙c7 19.♘c3 b6 20.a6 ♚c8 21.b5 ♙xh2+ 22.♚xh2 ♚xc3 23.♙b2 ♘c7+ 24.g3 ♚c5 25.♙xf6 ♚c8 26.♙xg7 ♚xg7 27.♘g4+ ♚f8 28.♘h5 ♙xb5 29.♘h6+ ♚e8 30.♙xb5+ ♚xb5 31.♘h7 f6 32.♘g8+ ♚d7 33.♘e6+ ♚d8 34.♘xf6+ ♚e7 35.♘h8+ ♚d7 36.♘d4 ♘h7+ 37.♚g2 ♚h8 38.♘d3 ♘h3+ 39.♚f3 ♘h5+ 40.g4 ♘h3+ 41.♚f4 ♘h6+ 42.♚f3 ♘h3+ 43.♚e2 ♚b2+ 44.♚d1 ♘xg4+ 45.♚c1 ♚xf2 46.♘xd5+ ♚c7 47.♘b7+ ♚d6 48.♚d1+ ...reaching the following position:



Black to play after 48. ♚d1+

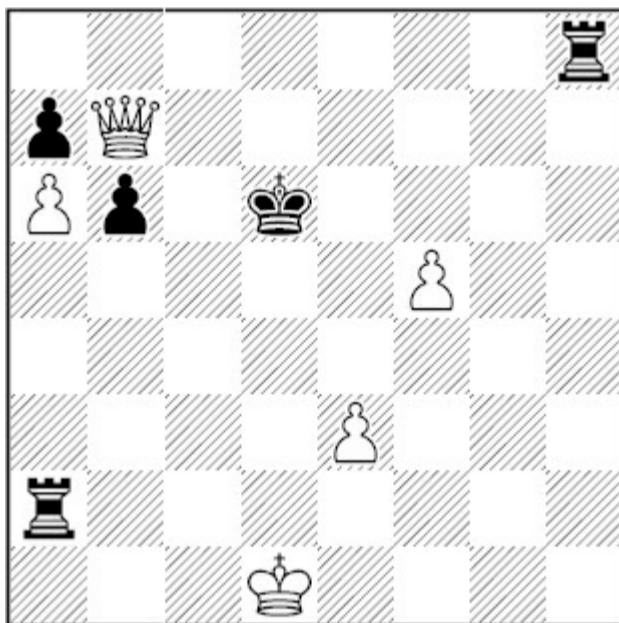
In this position, Black only has one move to save the game, and it wins with a very unexpected second move: 48... ♘xd1+! 49. ♚xd1:

Question: Black to play and win.



Black to play after 49. ♔xd1 (analysis)

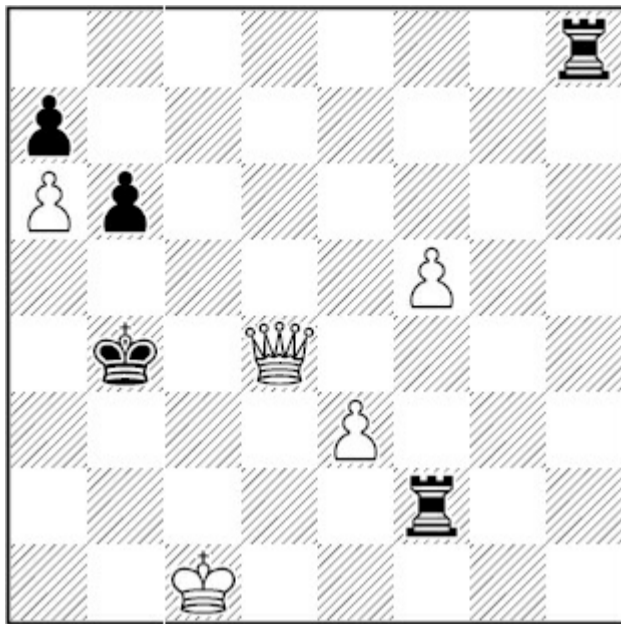
Clearly 49... ♖h1+?? fails to 50. ♗xh1 ♖a1. The solution is the brilliant 49... ♖a2!!:



White to play after 49... ♖a2!! (analysis)

– which threatens 50... ♖h1+! 51. ♗xh1 ♖a1+, winning the queen with a skewer. It's White's turn but, amazingly, he has no defense! Beautiful. But that's not even the good part! The game continued –

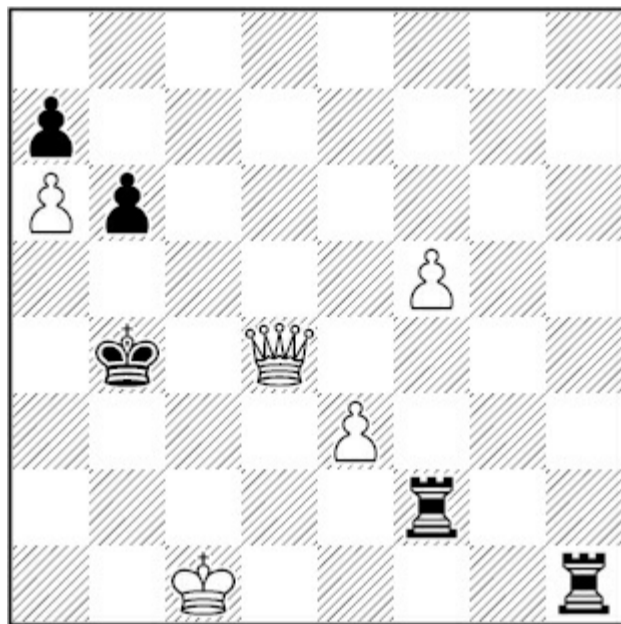
48... ♔c5?? 49. ♗d5+ ♔b4 50. ♖d4+ ♗xd4 51. ♗xd4+



Black to play after 51. ♖xd4+

Game over, right? Black now must get out of check and White will continue 52. ♖xh8, winning a rook and then the ending.

However, Black, out of desperation and not design, played the stunning **51... ♜h1+!?!?**:



White to play after 51... ♜h1+!?!?

51... ♜h1+, of course, is an *illegal move*: both sides are in check. Keep in mind this is an old-fashioned over-the-board game – this move would not be possible on the Internet where a chess server's interface software won't allow illegal moves. If Black had realized he was still in check and made this move on purpose, it would be quite devious, but I don't think he did.

At this point a U.S. Chess Federation tournament (USCF) director (TD) is allowed, but not required, to point out that the move is illegal. I am a USCF TD and, if the two players were both beginners, I certainly would consider interfering to help them learn the rules and look for checks. But with experienced players who know the rules (as they both were), normally the TD should let them

decide the game. White had plenty of time on his clock, so all he had to do was to stop the clock and claim an illegal move.

But instead of taking time to fully grasp what was happening (failing to do so was his biggest mistake!), White looked at his king's situation, thought that the only legal move to get out of check was to interpose the queen, and quickly played **52. ♕d1??!?**.

One of the many spectators at that point was so stunned he rolled his eyes and quietly covered his face. However, as a group the spectators did the right thing: no one said anything or interfered.

Black of course continued **52... ♖xd1+ and won the endgame easily**. After the game, we showed both players what happened. White took the undeserved loss more good-naturedly than most would have.

This stunning finish could have been included under *Too Fast*, but it's about as good example of *Disaster Strikes* as anything in the book.

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WEB PAGES

Chess Tempo Chess Database, <http://chesstempo.com/game-database.html>

“Improve Your Chess” video series for ICC and WCL,
<http://www.chessclub.com/chessfm/index/heisman/index.html>

“Novice Nook” at *Chess Café*, <http://www.chesscafe.com/archives/archives.htm#Novice Nook>

“The Evaluation of Material Imbalances,”

http://danheisman.home.comcast.net/~danheisman/Articles/evaluation_of_material_imbalance.f

GLOSSARY

Activity The positive actions a piece (or pieces) can take in a given position.

Acquiescing Allowing the opponent to execute a winning (or drawing) threat without taking a reasonable amount of time to make sure that the threat cannot be stopped.

Amateur In chess, a non-master. At the U.S. Amateur, masters cannot play. At the U.S. Amateur Team tournaments, the average rating of the team members must be below master. (Note: in chess, amateurs can win money, sometimes quite a bit at tournaments like the World Open.)

Analysis The part of the thought process where you generate the move tree, e.g., “If I go there, what would he do?”

Battery Lining up two pieces that move similarly on a line, e.g. a queen and rook, or queen and bishop.

Bishop pair (The advantage of...) When one player has two bishops and the other does not.

Board vision The ability to look at a chessboard and quickly see what all the pieces are doing (statically). For example, seeing that a bishop on a1 is attacking h8.

Blunder A bad move; primarily a move that turns a win into a loss or draw, or a draw into a loss. Note that *any* bad mistake is a blunder – not just a Counting mistake, or falling into another tactic.

Botvinnik's Rule A time-management principle, according to which in “normal” openings you want to use roughly 20% of your time for your first 15 moves.

Break move A pawn move attacking an opponent's fixed pawn (thus forcing the possible “breakup” of his pawn structure).

Calculation The part of analysis involving forced sequences.

Candidate (move) A move under consideration (during the thought process). Some specific types of candidates:

- King of the Hill – the best candidate found so far
- Initial Candidate – any move which does something positive
- Final Candidate – a candidate which is safe (cannot be easily defeated by a forcing move)

Checks, Captures, Threats The three types of forcing moves. Note that threats to checkmate are more forcing than captures and sometimes even more forcing than checks.

Closed file A file with pawns belonging to both sides.

Closed position A position without any open or semi-open files.

Complex

- Complicated (not necessarily chess)
- A set of squares of the same color in one part of the board, e.g., “White has a weak dark-square complex on the queenside”

Coordination The ability of various pieces to work together harmoniously to achieve a goal.

Counting Determining if pieces are safe from capturing sequences; analyzing to see if any forced sequence of captures on any square or squares will gain or lose material.

Critical move A move in a position where the best move (or moves) is (are) better enough than the second best to make a difference (win to draw or loss; draw to loss; easy win to difficult win). Critical moves include complicated decisions and strategic decisions with game-changing possibilities.

Criticality assessment The ability to differentiate the criticality of a move.

Deflection Forcing a piece away from a square where it is performing a critical defensive duty. For example, a check may force a piece to interpose and the interposing piece can't do functions it had been performing on its previous square, such as defending a piece or protecting against mate.

Desperado A piece that is going to be captured anyway, so it may be able to “sacrifice” itself at the highest cost.

Discovered attack An attack by a piece that was opened up as the result of another piece's move (also called a “Discovery”).

Discovered check A discovered attack in which the discovered piece gives check.

Domination A situation occurring:

- When a knight or bishop guards all of the other's potential moves
- When one move, compared to another, has all pros and no cons

Double attack An attack on two (or more) pieces by a single move.

Double check A discovered check where the discovering and the discovered piece both deliver check. In that case, the opposing king must move.

Doubled pawns Two pawns of the same color on the same file as a result of a capture.

Doubled rooks Two rooks forming a battery on a rank or file.

Draw Any game that ends without either player winning, e.g. Stalemate, Lack of Mating Material, Fifty-Move Rule, etc.

En passant The capture of a pawn that moved two squares by a pawn that could have captured it if the advancing pawn had only moved one space, on the next turn only.

En prise “On take” – able to be captured for free. A piece is *en prise* if it can be captured but is not guarded. Pronounced “aan-preez.”

Endgame The part of the game where the king should come out and fight (with fewer pieces left on the board).

Evaluation The part of the thought process performed at analysis nodes (moves that generate positions) which asks, “Who stands better, by how much, and why?”

Exchange, the Trading a bishop or knight for a rook is *winning the exchange*. Losing a rook for a bishop or knight is losing the exchange. *Not* the same as trading pieces.

Fianchetto To develop a bishop on a long diagonal behind a knight’s pawn (b2 or g2 for White; b7 or g7 for Black).

Fifty-Move Rule A type of draw where both players make 50 moves consecutively without either player advancing a pawn or making a capture.

File The rows of a chessboard going up and down, lettered a-h (lower case), with “a” always on White’s left (and Black’s right).

Flexibility The capability of a piece or entire army to do multiple good things. A lack of flexibility is rigid and generally very bad.

Floobly Something which allows a player to suddenly win/draw despite his opponent’s easily winning position, e.g., overlooking a checkmate, stalemate, winning on time.

Forcing moves Checks, captures, and threats or, more specifically, checks, threats of mate, captures, and other threats.

Fork A double attack, usually by a knight or pawn (thus forming a pattern like a “fork” in the road).

Gambit Sacrificing material (usually a pawn) in the opening for a lead in development, open lines, and/or attacking chances.

Hand-waving When one erroneously uses general principles to decide upon a move in an analytical position, when only careful analysis is required instead.

Hole An opponent’s weak square on his side of the board which possibly can be exploited/occupied by your forces.

Hope Chess Making a move without considering whether a possible reply by the opponent involving a check, capture, or threat can be met.

Houdini The highest-rated computer program in the world (2011-2012).

Increment Time (in seconds) added to your clock for each move. For example, in the Team 45 45

League the time control is 45/45, meaning that each player gets 45 minutes for the game plus 45 seconds added for each move. Compare to *time delay*.

Initiative When your opponent is constantly responding to your forcing moves (checks, captures, and threats).

Internet Chess Club (ICC) A leading chess server; owner of Chess.FM and another online chess server, World Chess Live (WCL).

Isolated pawns Pawns that have no other pawns of the same color on adjacent files.

King of the Hill The best candidate move found so far during analysis. The move which creates the position for which you are trying to find another move that creates a better position.

Lasker's Rule If you see a good move, look for a better one (because you are trying to find the best move you can in a reasonable amount of time).

LPDO Loose Pieces Drop Off (Nunn's Dictum).

Luft German for "air" – a square where the king can escape to prevent back-rank mate, created by moving a pawn.

Master Someone with a U.S. Chess Federation rating between 2200 and 2399 is a national master (NM). There are higher levels of master, both national and international.

Material Piece value – On the average, a knight and bishop can be assigned a value of 3.25 pawns, a rook 5 pawns, a queen 9.75 pawns, with the king having a fighting value of about 4 pawns. Give yourself a bonus of 0.5 pawns if you have the advantage of the bishop pair.

Mobility The number of moves a piece has. Sub-types:

- potential mobility – the number of moves a piece could make from a given square if the board were empty. For example, a queen's potential mobility on e4 is 27.
- actual mobility – the number of moves a piece can make in any given position. E.g., in the initial setup, each knight's actual mobility is 2.
- global mobility – the number of future squares a piece can land upon in any given position with multiple moves. E.g., a bishop's global mobility is only 32.

Notation The recorded moves of a game. Not used as a verb: you don't "notate" a game – you record it.

Novice Nook My column at *Chess Café* on how to improve at chess. *Not just for novices!*

Open file A file where there are no pawns of either color.

Open game A game with lots of open files, especially the d- and e-files. Alternatively, a game that begins 1.e4 e5.

Outpost A piece occupying a hole (see definition above) and guarded by a pawn.

Overpreparation Taking (wasting) tempos to continue to prepare a move which, if played immediately, would be safe and reasonable anyway.

Overworked piece Any piece that has multiple duties, such as guarding two different pieces, or guarding a piece and a checkmate threat. The opponent can take advantage of this by executing one of the activities (e.g., making a capture of one of the pieces), when the overworked piece usually cannot both make the recapture and still defend the second threat.

Pawn chain A series of pawns on contiguous files, usually where most of the pawns are protecting each other.

Pawn structure How the pawns for each side are currently arranged on the board.

Piece Three definitions, depending on the context:

- All the chessmen, as in “Get all the pieces out of the bag”
- The non-pawns, as in “You have to develop all your pieces”
- A bishop or knight, as in “I am up (ahead) a piece”

Pin An attack by a rook, bishop, or queen, on a piece that cannot/should not move because a piece behind the attacked piece along the line of attack is worth even more. If the piece behind the attacked piece is a king, this is called an “absolute” pin and the piece is not allowed to move, lest it put the king into check, which is illegal.

Ply A half-move, or the move of one player. When both players move, that is “two ply,” or one full move.

Promote What a pawn does when it reaches the other side of the board. The moving player replaces it with a queen, rook, bishop, or knight on the promoting square. So you can have nine queens, maximum.

Pseudo-sacrifice A move which gives up material but involves no risk since the player making the move will get back the material or more (or deliver checkmate) by force in the next few moves. Many basic combinations start with pseudo-sacrifices, which is why a player cannot reject a candidate move just because it gives up material in the initial sequence.

PV Principal Variation – the predicted best moves for both sides (usually used in conjunction with computer analysis).

Quiescence error The error of stopping analysis too soon (thinking that the resultant position is “quiet”) when there are further forcing moves which strongly affect the evaluation of the sequence.

Rank The rows of a chessboard going sideways, numbered first to eighth starting from the rank closest to White as the first rank.

Rating A quantitative measure of skill. USCF ratings are based on a formula originally postulated by the Hungarian mathematician Dr. Arpad Elo, and they range from roughly 100 for beginners to 3200 for the top computers.

Real Chess For every move, you consider whether a possible reply by the opponent involving a check, capture, or threat can be met.

Removal of the guard A chess tactic where the defender of a piece or square is captured or forced to move so that it is no longer defending it. Usually seen in the form of Deflection or Overworked Piece.

Retained image The analytical error that occurs deep in a line where a player visualizes a piece as still being on a specific square, when in earlier moves of that line it had moved off it.

Seeds of tactical destruction Aspects of a position that might allow the opponent to play a tactic, e.g., loose pieces, weak back rank, vulnerable king, pieces along a geometric line, overworked pieces, etc.

Semi-open file A file on which only one side has pawns. Also known as a half-open file.

Skewer/X-ray Tactical Motif: Sort of an inside-out pin. A move that attacks a piece of value, and there is a piece behind it along the line of attack (of equal or lesser value) that will be attacked anyway if the attacked piece moves.

Slow chess Chess played at long enough time controls where good moves are generally more important than the time remaining.

Stalemate When the player to move isn't in check, but none of his pieces may move. This is a type of draw (not all draws are stalemates!).

Sudden death "SD" – a time control in which all the moves must be played within a certain amount of time (on that player's clock).

Tabiya Arabic word originally meaning the opening setup of pieces, but now more commonly used to mean the standard moves of any opening, i.e. the real game starts after the players play the *tabiya*.

Tactical vision The ability to spot basic safety issues (motifs like pins, double attacks, removal of the guard, and counting) when first analyzing a position.

Tactics A forcing sequence of moves that involves piece safety and checkmating. This includes:

- *En prise* (can take a piece for free)
- Counting (is each piece safe for potential captures on its current square?)
- Motifs (pins, double attacks, removal of the guard, etc.)
- Non-sacrificial combinations of motifs
- Sacrificial combinations

Team 45 45 An online league which plays on the ICC and provides fun team play at the time control

of 45 minutes with a 45-second increment.

Tempo Italian word, used to indicate the “time” it takes for one of the players to make one move. A “turn.”

The exchange See “Exchange, the.”

Threat A move which can win material, checkmate, or make progress *next move* if the opponent does not stop it. Attacks on under-defended pieces are an example of a threat.

Threefold repetition of position A type of draw in which the same position is reached three times with the same player to move. Does not require the same moves and each instance can occur at any point in the game.

Time control How much time each player has for a whole game. “G” means all the moves and “SD” is sudden death (see “Sudden death”).

Time delay The amount of time a digital clock is programmed to wait before starting the “main” clock. For example, if the time delay is five seconds and a player has 90 seconds remaining, his clock will remain at 90 for the first five seconds of his move, and then count down 89, 88...

Time increment See “Increment.”

Time management The skill of taking care of your clock time, at two levels:

- To spend almost all of your time for the game (“macro time management”), and
- Where you spend more time on moves that require it (critical, complicated, etc.) – “micro time management”

Trap (Opening trap) A known opening sequence in which a player apparently follows good opening principles but the move is not tactically sound. (Compare to “Blunder.”)

Two bishops Short for “The advantage of the two bishops” (See “Bishop pair.”)

Two-way bishop A bishop that is strong on both of its diagonals.

Underpromotion When a pawn promotes, but the moving player chooses to get something other than a queen.

Unrated An *unrated player* is one who has never played a rated game, or one whose rating has not yet become official. An *unrated game* is one that will not be played for a rating.

USCF United States Chess Federation.

Visualization The ability to keep track in the mind’s eye of where the pieces have moved during lines of analysis.

Weak square A square which can no longer be guarded by a pawn.

Zugzwang German word indicating a situation when you have to make a move, but any move is bad for you. Note: Some contend it is not true *Zugzwang* unless your opponent could not win without this compulsion (in other words, if you could pass but your opponent can still win, then although any move is bad for you it is not a true *Zugzwang*).

Zwischenzug German for an in-between move. For example, after a capture, instead of recapturing, you give a check first. Sometimes called an “*intermezzo*.”

About the Author

Dan Heisman attended Caltech and Penn State, receiving a Master's degree in Engineering Science. In 1972, his team won the U.S. Amateur Team Championship. Mr. Heisman won the Philadelphia Closed Invitational Championship in 1973 and the Philadelphia Open Championships in 1971 and 1976. He holds the titles of National Master from the U.S. Chess Federation (USCF) and Candidate Master from FIDE, the international chess federation.

Since 1996, Mr. Heisman has been a full-time chess instructor and writer. He is the author of *Elements of Positional Evaluation*; *Everyone's 2nd Chess Book*; *A Parent's Guide to Chess*; *Looking for Trouble*; *Back to Basics: Tactics*; *The Improving Chess Thinker*; *A Guide to Chess Improvement*; *The Improving Annotator*; *The Traxler Counterattack*; and *The Computer Analyzes the Fried Liver/Lolli*.

The author's *Novice Nook* column on the Chess Café website has won numerous awards for Best Instruction from the Chess Journalists of America, and in 2005 it received the organization's prestigious Cramer Award for Outstanding Column in Any Media. In 2010, the CJA voted Mr. Heisman Chess Journalist of the Year. His weekly question-and-answer show on the Internet Chess Club's (ICC) Chess.FM radio station, which ran from 2001 to 2008, resumed on Chess.com in 2012. Mr. Heisman has recorded more than 160 instructional videos for the ICC.

Radio personality Howard Stern was one of his many students. Mr. Heisman currently lives with his wife Shelly in Wynnewood, Pennsylvania, and can be contacted via his website, www.danheisman.com.

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