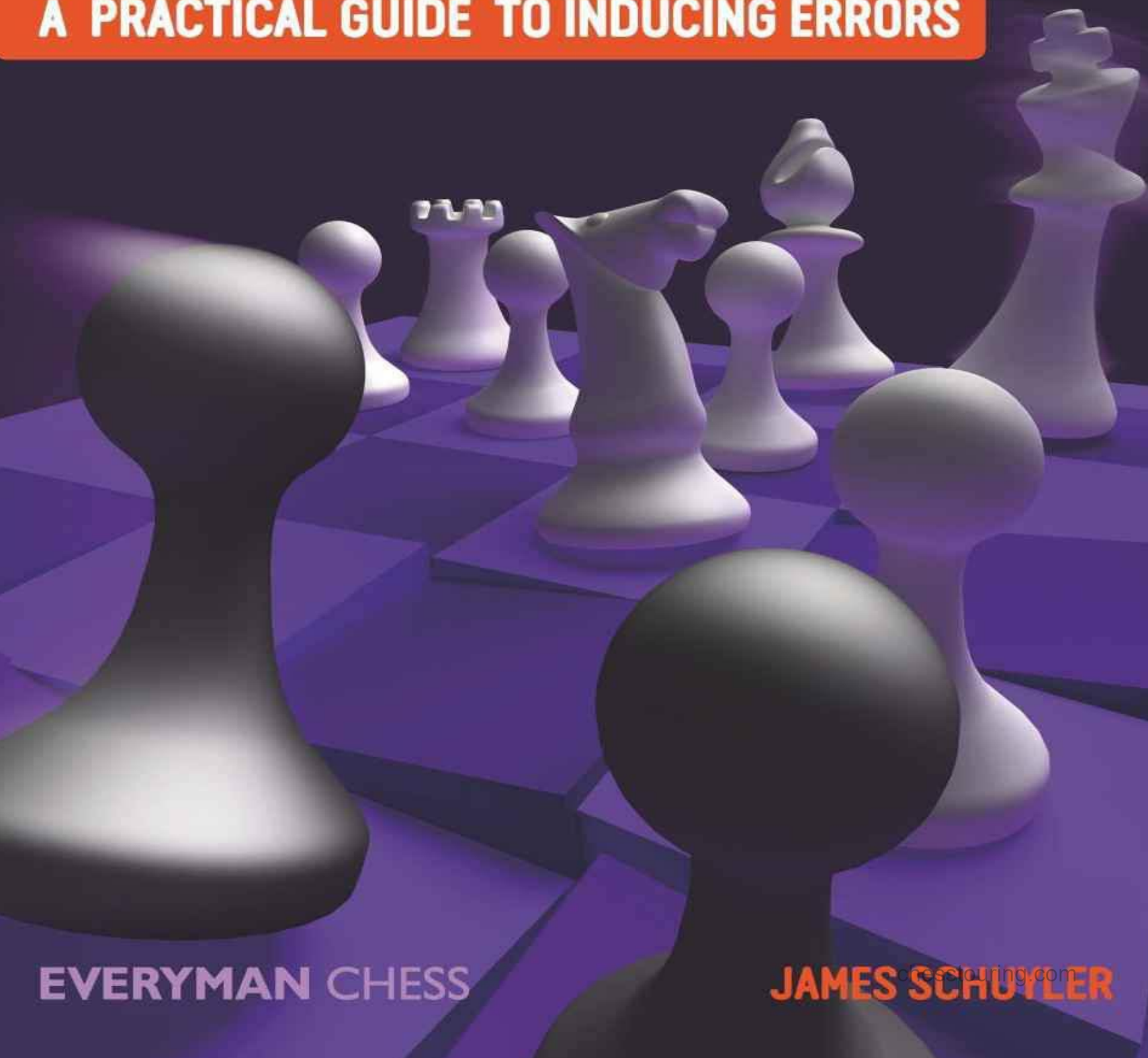


YOUR OPPONENT IS OVERRATED

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO INDUCING ERRORS



EVERYMAN CHESS

JAMES SCHUYLER chesswriting.com

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James Schuyler is a FIDE Master. He was Nevada State Champion in 2007 and won the Virginia State Championship in both 2011 and 2012. He has been teaching chess for over 25 years.

Also by the Author:

The Dark Knight System

This book is dedicated to my wife Caroline. Her support has been essential to all my successes, but for this book she went above and beyond.

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Introduction

The Problem

We all play about as well as we can manage, given the amount of effort we can spare for chess. We have our ratings and a certain average percentage of wins (plus draws divided by two) that we can expect depending on the level of our opposition. We read books to improve, and study openings, but after a certain point this doesn't seem to have any impact. *Perhaps this is because our study is generally based on the premise that the only road to improving our results is to improve our accuracy.* Some of us may need to think about chess in a much different way.

Your Opponent

We have a fallible opponent. He's messing up every game. Even when he stumbles upon the right moves, it's often for the wrong reasons. I'd even go so far as to say he's overrated. And yet if we play our "normal best" game those errors may not appear frequently, and they may not be severe. Surely there is some way to expose his ignorance. But he's familiar with the common tricks and traps. We'll need to be subtle. Cagey. Persistent. Overwhelming. So we will not merely go about our business – we will at times go out of our way and actively induce errors in our opponent's play. Right?

No Draw!

The originally intended title for this book was "No Draw!" As it turns out, avoiding draws and inducing errors generally amount to the same thing. There is no way to win otherwise drawn games without inducing errors, so it is really the same subject, and I believe I may use the phrases nearly interchangeably.

The benefits of avoiding draws are considerable, even if it does not improve a player's results overall. It is a very common occurrence in tournaments that we need to win a particular game. Perhaps there is money on the line, or a tournament title, or a Master title that depends on temporarily achieving a certain rating. Naturally, we want to play as well as we can, but there is an additional consideration because a draw may be worthless, or nearly worthless. Should we play our "normal best" game, or can we do better by playing differently to avoid a draw? Obviously, it is pointless to avoid draws if all those draws turn into losses, but if some of those draws (let's say about half) can be turned into wins, we increase our chances of achieving our goals. That is what this book is about, though as we go on, we may realize that it is about other things as well. Allow me to elaborate on this, since it helps explain why it might be so important to play fewer draws.

Imagine two players, "Mr. Draw" and "Ms. NoDraw". (See how progressive I am?) Mr. Draw makes the maximum percentage of draws. Therefore, if he plays a player of the same rating, the result is always a draw. If he plays a player in the next higher class, he will lose approximately half the time and draw half the time, while if he plays a player in the next lower class, he will win half the time and draw half the time. Whatever this player's skill level, he will never win a tournament unless he is vastly superior to the rest of the field, and he will have a hard time winning prize money, because he will

almost never have any exceptionally good results. (This is especially true for Swiss System tournaments, though it also holds true for round robin events.) For the same reasons, his extreme consistency will make it nearly impossible for him to earn the norms that are required for certain prestigious titles.

Ms. NoDraw has the same playing strength as Mr. Draw, but she never draws. Against players in her own class, she wins half and loses half. Against players in the next lower class, she wins 75% and loses 25%. She is not a “better” player than Mr. Draw, but she gets to win tournaments sometimes, and places in the money more often. If her playing strength is close to 2500 FIDE, Ms. NoDraw is a Grandmaster, while Mr. Draw is not. Ms. NoDraw is well known because of a few outstanding results. If it matters to her, she is also more popular with fans and spectators because her games are more exciting to watch. She gets invited to more tournaments. Maybe not all of these arguments apply to you, but there are additional benefits to playing fewer draws. With your fighting style, you learn more about what works and what doesn't. And since you rarely accept or offer draws, your games are longer, and you accumulate more experience, especially in endgames, a stage of the game in which many of your opponents are weak. Your opponents start to fear you, since every time they play you, they are stuck in the ring with you until there is only one of you left standing. You develop your fighting spirit, competitive instincts, and mental stamina while other players are sitting on the sidelines. Your attitude is of great benefit to you, and ultimately helps raise your standard of play.

“I don't need this book.”

Some players are, consciously or unconsciously, already using many of the ideas, techniques, and attitudes presented here. In my biased opinion, they probably still need this book. Players who are intuitively playing as combatively and competitively as possible need to bring their techniques into their conscious mind in order to gain better control over them. After all, there is a time and a place for everything, and *overuse is probably even more dangerous than underuse*. As for players who are using all their competitive tools consciously, there is still the danger that they will at some point have a bad result and lose faith, especially since their play will not be properly understood, even by many of their fellow chessplayers. I will present both examples and arguments to buck up the spirits of any disillusioned adventurers.

No Draws Ever?

Some people are very strongly anti-draw, and have even suggested changing the rules of chess to avoid or prohibit draws. I will right now make a distinction between a “win oriented” attitude, which can be valuable even in games where a win is not essential, and a “drawphobic” attitude, which can be detrimental even in games where a win is very desirable. I used to be drawphobic myself in my attitudes and play, but this is generally counterproductive. To try to squash draws out of existence or, alternatively, to deny how useful half-points can be to a player is to be at odds with reality, which is always a dangerous thing. Still, if my attitude was somewhat drawphobic, it did help me to develop strategies to avoid them. I firmly believe that it is not at all necessary to produce a large percentage of unwanted draws.

Draws are normal, right?

Everyone knows that a draw is the normal result of a well-played game. White's first move advantage is nowhere near enough to force a win. When strong players play each other, draws are extremely common,

in part because trying too hard for a win is often punished by a loss. For one player to win, it will require his opponent to make one, two, three, or even more mistakes, depending on their severity, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Well, that's one way of looking at things, and here's another. Mistakes are inevitable. In virtually every game, even at the very highest levels, your opponent will make enough mistakes so that it is possible for you to win. In those few cases where your opponent does not make enough mistakes for you to win, it is because you did not present him with enough opportunities to go wrong. The normal result of a game is a win.

Don't we make mistakes, too?

Yes, which is why we sometimes draw and sometimes lose. A draw is normally much better than a loss, and we will not help ourselves by berating ourselves for every draw, but neither should we cling to the delusion that our draws are the inevitable result of well-played games. On the contrary, they usually result from games that are played equally badly by both sides. (Some of such games may fairly be described as "well fought", or as good games in a sporting sense, but this is not the same thing.)

Terminology

To speak intelligently about the subject of inducing errors and avoiding draws, we need an appropriate vocabulary. The most important word for our subject is nettlesomeness which in a chess context is the degree to which a player or a move tends to induce errors in the opponent's play. I have to admit I had never heard of nettlesomeness until reading about the 2013 Anand-Carlsen World Championship match. As Carlsen started to pull ahead, articles appeared online attributing Carlsen's success to his "nettlesomeness", a term coined by International Master and computer scientist Dr. Kenneth W. Regan. Apparently, a player's average accuracy, as measured against the strongest computer programs, is not a constant, but is affected significantly by one's opponent (and not simply according to their rating). If we are playing about as well as we can, perhaps the best way to become more successful is to arrange to have our opponents play worse.

Hope Chess?

There is a type of chess practised by certain players where one tries to set traps for his opponent with little concern for the integrity of his own position. The classic example of this is the so-called "Scholar's Mate" (1 e4, 2 Bc4, 3 Qh5, 4 Qxf7 mate!). White is planning, or "hoping", for Black to overlook the threat, but he is not very well prepared for the scenario where Black turns out to be competent. This is often referred to derisively as "hope chess". You might think that hope chess is only practiced by beginners, but I have seen forms of it at most levels. But isn't nettlesomeness merely a kind of hope chess? I don't look at it that way. You could say that hope chess is a kind of nettlesomeness (to the degree that it works), but playing nettlesomely does not have to mean knowingly choosing inferior moves. We are constantly faced with choosing between approximately equal moves. If we can figure out which one is more likely to cause trouble for the opponent, certainly we should choose that one. And maybe we should be willing to make a small sacrifice of position to increase the likelihood of errors. In doing so, we start on the slippery slope towards "hope chess", but as long as our hopes are realistic, the average gain may be worth the cost (particularly if the position on the board is such that we have little to lose).

Without further ado, let's see how to go about demonstrating that our opponent is overrated.

By the way, thank you Daniel I. Miller for our many discussions relevant to this topic.

Chapter One

The Opening

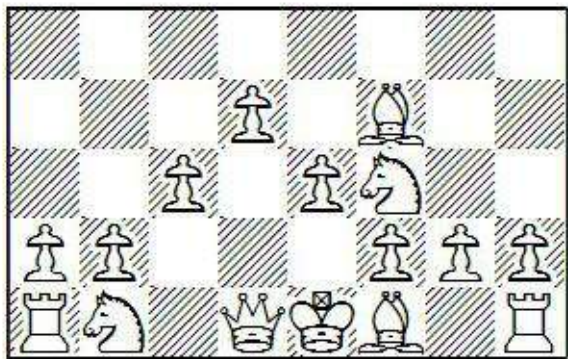
In search of decisive results it makes sense to start in the opening. There are a great variety of sound openings and “everyone knows” that certain openings are combative whereas other openings are drawish.

Openings known to be combative are the Sicilian (29.4% draws), Modern (28.2%), King’s Indian (29.6%), and Grünfeld (36.8%). We all know that the French (30.4% draws), Caro-Kann (32.7%), Slav (38.3%), and Queen’s Gambit Accepted (35.9%) are boring and drawish.

Admittedly, statistics can be misleading, but the first thing we notice in looking at the data is that some of the things “everyone knows” are not supported by the numbers, and even where they are, the differences are mostly tiny. The “boring” French is only 1% more drawish than the “dynamic” Sicilian, and the “combative” Grünfeld is more drawish than the “old man’s” Queen’s Gambit Accepted.

For the purpose of avoiding draws, I suggest we ignore database statistics almost entirely. Far more relevant are our personal statistics with certain openings.

For example, I often play the London System (1 d4, 2 Bf4, 3 e3, 4 c3, 5 Nf3, etc),



which does not have a reputation for generating decisive results, to say the least (it is often called “The Boring Opening”). I also know how to play 1 e4, so isn’t it obvious that I should open with the king’s pawn in any game where a win is important? Not necessarily, because this is a question about a person, not just about an opening. In approximately 50 London System tournament games, I have produced exactly zero unwanted draws. (Thrice I drew when it suited me, once against GM Khachiyan, once to help win a team tournament, and once when a decisive result was less important to me than getting home quickly.) At the risk of belabouring the obvious, *our personal results are surely more relevant to our opening choices than the rest of the chess world’s results or the opening’s reputation.*

Even more relevant are the types of positions we expect to reach with our opening; and most relevant of all are the positions we expect to reach against the particular opponent we are playing.

Yes, there is an opponent, and he has his input into the type of position as well. Even in generally wild openings, our opponent (especially if he is White) may have an opportunity to deaden the game. We can prepare the Botvinnik Semi-Slav only to have our opponent play the Exchange Slav. We can play the Göring Gambit (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 exd4 4 c3), but when our opponent declines with 4 ... d5 5 exd5 Qxd5 6 cxd4 Bg4 7 Be2 Bb4+ 8 Nc3 Bxf3 9 Bxf3 Qc4, we find ourselves in a tepid endgame after 10 Qe2+ Qxe2 11 Kxe2.

But all is not gloom and doom. Sometimes our knowledge of our opponent indicates that he will choose not to enter the most feared (dry) variation. Going into the third round of the 2009 Virginia Closed, I was 2-0 and due Black against Andrew Samuelson. He was not a player I could expect to beat routinely, but a win would dramatically increase my chances of winning the tournament, particularly since the first tie-break was cumulative (big reward for early points). At that time it was normal for me to play 1 e4 g6, but I knew he would be well prepared. On the other hand, I had substantial experience with the Caro-Kann as a young teenager, and he had no way of knowing this. The only problem was that I did not enjoy the positions reached after 1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3, particularly when I needed to win - in fact, that's why I gave up the opening. However, the database revealed that he only played 3 e5 and 3 f3, systems I felt particularly comfortable meeting. Furthermore, I took 3 f3 as an indication that he had trouble meeting the Caro-Kann. I was not right on every detail, but my general impressions were correct. He avoided the main lines and tried 3 exd5 cxd5 4 Bd3, but he did not know it well, and I had a large advantage by the time we reached the middlegame, and a winning advantage in the endgame. Alas, my technique was poor, and we nonetheless reached a draw. However, in this context the result is beside the point - which is that knowledge of an opponent can help you to correctly decide to use an opening that would not normally seem suitable for playing for a win.

Furthermore, it is not only our opponent who can play the role of opening spoiler. For instance, if our opponent looks forward to a quiet and drawish Petroff's Defence, we can foil him completely. Adithya Balasubramanian was faced with this situation in the last round of the 2008 Virginia Closed. A draw was not appealing to him since it opened up the possibility of being beaten on tie-breaks (by me, should I happen to win). Therefore he chose 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 Nxe5 d6 4 Nxf7!? (the Cochrane Gambit) - a variation that, as he wrote in the *Virginia Chess Newsletter*, "could not possibly lead to a draw". He produced this comment with a bit of irony since the game did, in fact, turn out to be a draw, but it was certainly not the fault of the opening.

Every game has an opening, and if we don't feel like we had good chances later, maybe we should have tried harder to make chances earlier. In games we must win, we cannot afford to let the opening pass without trying to create opportunities. If we cannot find an advantage, we should at least reach a position from which it seems realistic to play for a win.

The reader will at some point notice that this book is heavy with my own games. This is not because of their quality (which is mediocre) but because I have detailed first-hand knowledge of the circumstances under which they were played, and these details are very important for our discussions.

Game 1

M.Thurber-J.Schuyler

Las Vegas 2008

Blackmar-Diemer Gambit

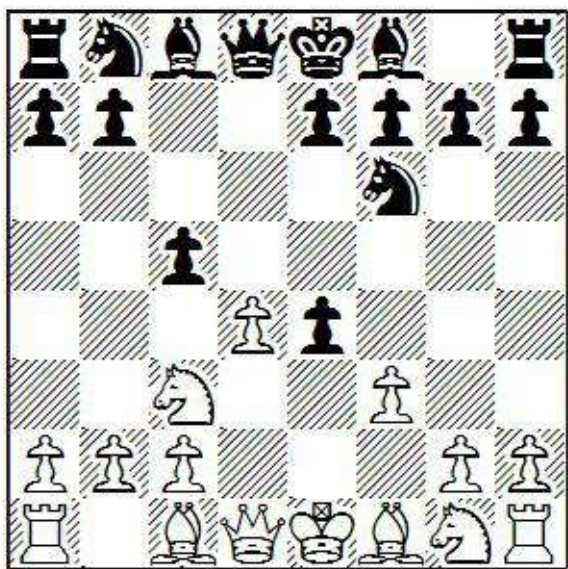
Since this is a chapter on openings, and it was my opponent who had the correct and successful opening strategy, he is the real hero of this game, even though he lost. However, as the opening comes to a close, we will spend more time considering my own point of view, in anticipation of certain ideas that come up later.

1 d4 d5 2 e4

What's this? The Blackmar-Diemer Gambit? "Everyone knows" that it is unsound, just like the Smith-Morra and the King's Gambit. Nevertheless, Thurber's decision is 100% correct, even and especially since he is outrated by 500 points. In the late Simon Webb's excellent book *Chess for Tigers*, his advice for playing stronger players is to get aggressive. "Play that unsound gambit," he urges. It is always

dangerous to try to hold a gambit pawn, especially in a less-familiar position. Knowing this, many strong players simply decline all gambits, even though in many cases the declining variations do not promise equality. I was not determined to remain a pawn ahead, but I had tried to develop a method of taking the initiative.

2 ... dxe4 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 f3 c5



This is the “Brombacher” variation, which I decided was practically a refutation of the Blackmar-Diemer. This assessment would have been highly optimistic, even had there been no holes in my analysis.

5 Bf4!

Thurber makes an excellent guess, selecting an even more obscure, more aggressive, and more unsound gambit continuation, offering a second pawn. Indeed, I had not studied this position at all - a recipe for disaster. I would have been more than willing to go back in time and play 2 ... c6.

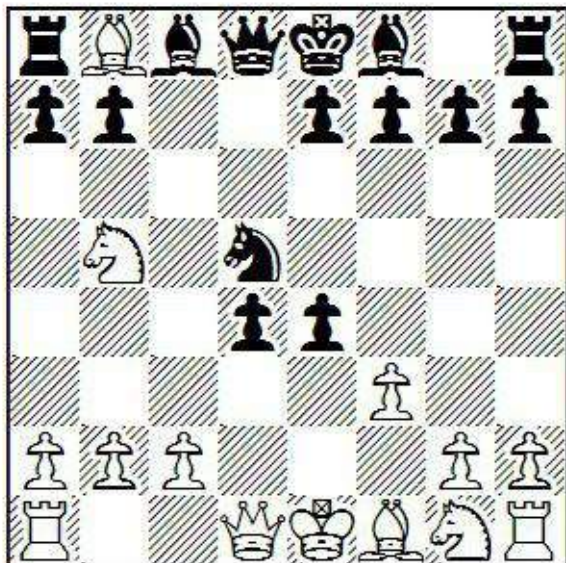
I had been anticipating 5 d5 Qa5 6 Bd2 e3 7 Bxe3 g6 and 8 ... Bg7, when I expected sooner or later to be punishing White on the dark squares, and perhaps rounding up the d-pawn with ... a7-a6, ... b7-b5, ... N8d7-b6, ... Bb7, ... Rd8, etc. Of course, White may be able to make some use of his turns as well. Also, he may have tried 6 fxe4 Nxe4 7 Qf3 Nxc3 8 Bd2 and 9 Bxc3 with good compensation for the pawn - the exact kind of situation I should have been trying to avoid.

5 ... cxd4! 6 Nb5 Nd5?

One good move and one bad move is about par for the course in a position like this. Instead, the simple 6 ... Na6 gains a big advantage. I should have kept the e4-square under control.

It is worth taking a minute to ask: what if Black had actually played 6 ... Na6 - ? Well, then White struggles and presumably loses, and then looks very foolish for his opening play. I may even mention the game to my friends: “Hey, I thought that guy would at least try to give me a game. Instead, he tried this ridiculous opening and went down without a fight. Pathetic!” In fact, I’m pretty sure I said that exact thing after somebody tried the Englund Gambit against me a while back. The fact is, you don’t beat better players without taking some risks, and if you take risks, you are probably going to wind up looking stupid when they don’t work. Playing gambits, sound or otherwise, is not the only way to take risks, and it is not the only way to play for a win, but there are often opportunities to unbalance the game in the opening, and you should be prepared to seize them.

7 Bxb8!



It was hard for me to believe White would play such an anti-positional, anti-attacking, anti-developing move, but it is necessary, and suddenly all the tactics (the ones I could see, anyway) work in White's favour.

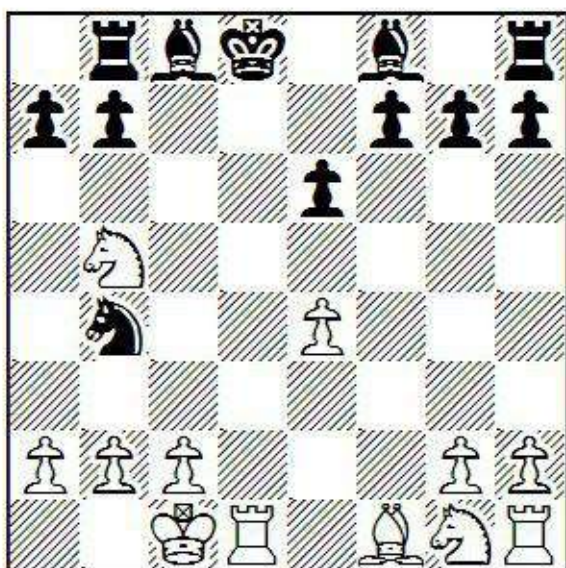
7 ... Rxb8?!

According to *Stockfish*, even this obvious recapture is incorrect. 7 ... d3! maintains the attack on the bishop while also threatening 8 ... Qa5+. An excellent example of the difficulty of playing such positions well.

8 Qxd4 e6 9 fxe4 Nb4?!

Here 9 ... Nb6 10 Qe5 Bd7 11 Nc7+ Ke7 is playable for Black. This is another example of something I was unlikely to figure out unless I was familiar with the position. After the text move, I was in a bit of trouble.

10 Qxd8+ Kxd8 11 0-0-0+



Let's switch points of view for a minute, and consider my predicament. I am about to be stuck in a pawn-down endgame against a player I would have expected to beat routinely had the game proceeded in any "normal" kind of way. Putting aside my regrets, what should my attitude be at this point? Am I trying to salvage a draw? No, no, no! This is so crystal clear that I don't think it is possible to construct a

reasonable counter-argument. Under these circumstances, Black needs to be trying to figure out how to win. The details of how to do this are less important than the initial attitude - that initial decision and determination that starts the ball rolling.

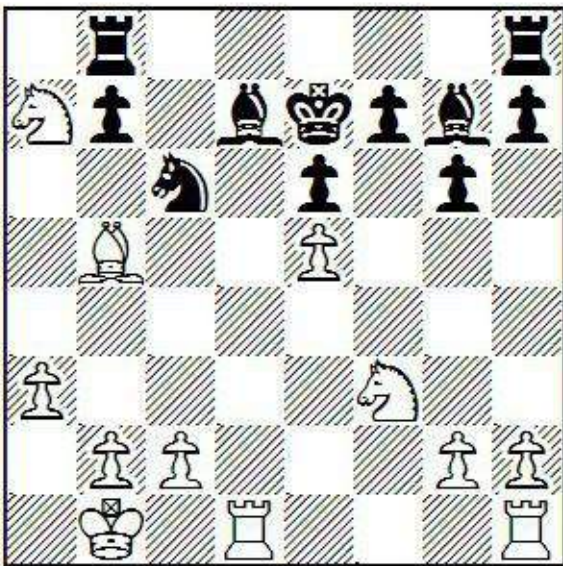
11 ... Ke7!

Considering that I need to activate my bishops in order to get counterplay, this was a bit counterintuitive to me at first. However, aside from blocking the f8-bishop, my king is perfectly placed on e7, safe from bishops, knights, and rooks. The bishop will just need to find some other way out. 11 ... Ke8 is no more efficient anyway because it blocks the h8-rook instead.

12 Nxa7 Bd7 13 a3 Nc6 14 Bb5 g6 15 Nf3 Bh6+ 16 Kb1 Bg7

By now I'm happy I was forced into fianchettoing this bishop. I assumed that 17 e5 was not playable for White - or that, even if it was playable, my opponent would assume it wasn't. This kind of guesswork is acceptable under the circumstances.

17 e5!?



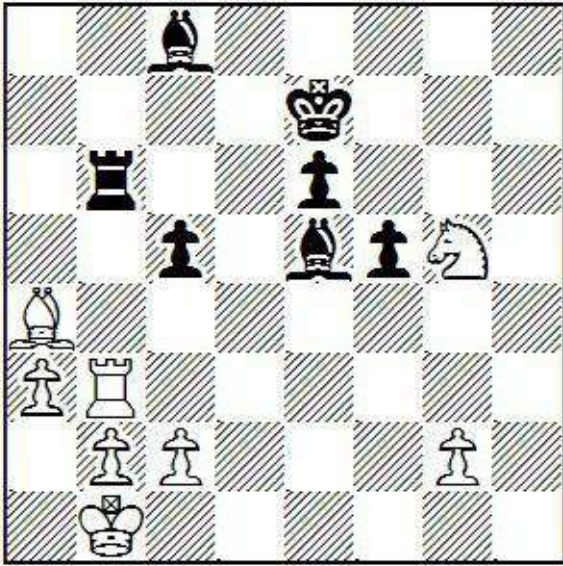
17 ... f5?!

Mobilizing my kingside majority. If 18 exf6, I reactivate my bishop and create a passed e-pawn. Only after the game did I realize I could have played 17 ... Nxe5!! 18 Nxe5 Bxb5 and if 19 Nxf7 then 19 ... Ba4!! (this was the idea I missed) 20 Nxb8 Ra8, trapping both knights to reach an endgame where Black is at least equal. This was exactly the kind of tactical shot I needed.

18 Nxc6+ bxc6 19 Bc4 Rb6 20 Rd3 Rhb8 21 Rb3 h6 22 h4 c5 23 Rd1 Bc8 24 Rdd3 Rxb3 25 Bxb3 Rb6?!

Much better is 25 ... g5! (I have been preparing this move, and the time is now) 26 hxg5 hxg5 27 Nxc5 Bxe5, which threatens 28 ... c4 and 29 ... Rxb2+.

26 Ba4! g5 27 hxg5 hxg5 28 Nxc5 Bxe5 29 Rb3 Rd6 30 Rd3 Rb6 31 Rb3



31 ... Rxb3!

At times, my incompetence in this game reached staggering proportions, but disdaining the repetition was absolutely correct. It is true that, with best play, the game should probably be a draw anyway, but this is barely worth mentioning - we all know best play is not going to occur. It is also true that there is some risk of losing, especially if I am unwilling to let go of the possibility of winning when that becomes necessary. Some risks are worth taking. Besides, why should I be pessimistic when I outrate my opponent?

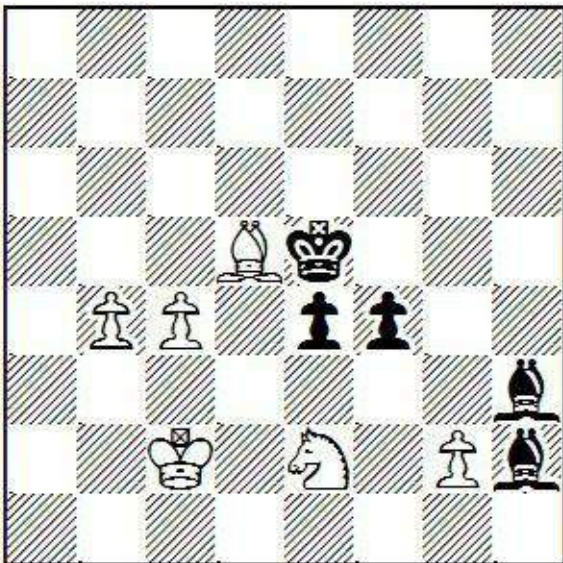
32 Bxb3 Bf4 33 Nf3 e5?!

My bishop should be heading for f1 to target White's weak pawn, hence 33 ... Ba6!. If White prevents this with 34 c4, his own bishop and, in fact, his whole queenside, become paralysed.

34 Bd5 e4 35 Ng1!

Other moves are already losing, which was one of the reasons I had headed for this position - it can be hard to find and play Ng1. Instead, 35 Nh4 (or 35 Ne1 Bd2) 35 ... Bg3 36 Ng6+ Kf6 37 Nf8 Bd6 traps the knight.

35 ... Kd6 36 c4 Ke5 37 Kc2 Bh2 38 Ne2 f4 39 b4 cxb4 40 axb4 Bh3!?



44 Ke2, I would probably have lost, regardless of the theoretical assessment.

41 Nxf4

I had overlooked this, though it is not as strong as it seems.

41 ... Bg4! 42 Bxe4?

White started to worry that he might be unable to stop the e-pawn after, for instance, 42 Ng6+ Kd4 43 Kd2??, but here White has the clever 43 Ne7 e3?? 44 Nc6 mate! I suppose White also figured that, with Black's last pawn off the board, he could not possibly lose. This is wrong on two counts. First of all, there are many traps for White to avoid. Secondly, there is the very real possibility of losing all the pawns and reaching an endgame with a knight vs. two bishops, which is theoretically lost. I should say that no less a player than author and IM Anthony Saily was undone by the same misconception in a 134-move marathon game against Walter Browne.

42 ... Kxe4

This last part of the game is conducted badly by both players, in part due to time trouble. We are playing mainly off the delay. Not to belabour the point, but when there is a time scramble, who wins? It should be profitable to bet on the higher-rated player, with little regard for the position.

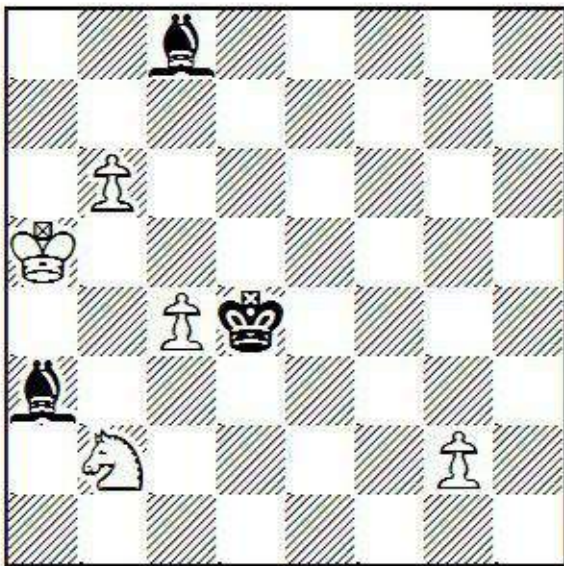
43 Nh3?

43 Nd5.

43 ... Kd4 44 Nf2 Bf5+ 45 Kb3 Bg3?

45 ... Be6.

46 Nd1 Be6 47 Nb2 Be1 48 b5 Ba5 49 Ka4 Bb6?! 50 Kb4 Bc5+ 51 Ka5 Ba3 52 b6 Bc8



53 Na4??

By now the game is a draw if White finds 53 Kb5! Bxb2 54 Kc6, but I had successfully predicted White's blunders in the time scramble.

53 ... Kxc4 54 g4??

White had to play 54 b7 Bxb7, when he soon loses his g-pawn as well, but I am far from guaranteed to be able to pull off a win with two bishops vs. knight.

54 ... Bb4 mate

The lesson is to believe in your opponents' incompetence, whether they are 1200, 1800, or 2400. Even players who are not very strong will not go far wrong unless they are presented with challenges, and the best place to start posing problems is as close as possible to move one.

Game 2

R. Young-J. Schuyler

New York 1989

Latvian Gambit

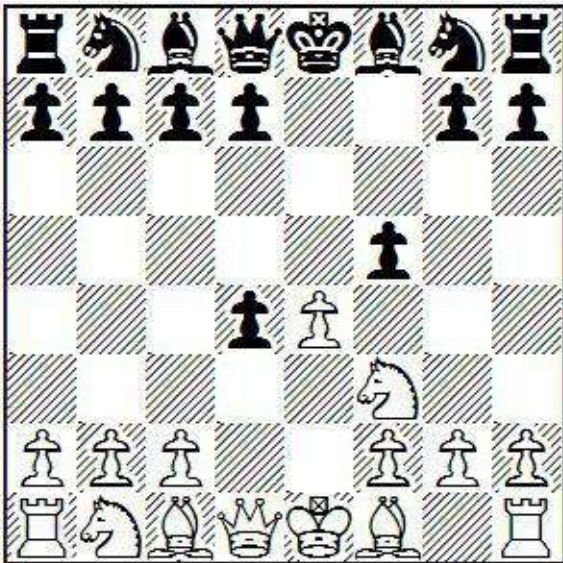
In this game from 1989, I really put Webb's (then unknown-to-me) advice ("play that unsound gambit") to the test. What could be more unsound than the Latvian? And yet at this point I had been playing it as my main weapon for years! This time I was against a senior master, but if it was suitable for weaker players, it was perhaps even more suitable for stronger players, who have more positional and opening knowledge to obliterate.

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 f5

What can I say? Of course this can't be any good "objectively", but it puts both real and psychological pressure on White immediately. I suppose a few people might have memorized an antidote to the Latvian, though I had surprises in store for them too.

3 d4 exd4!?

The regular Latvian might not be surprising enough so, just to be sure, a new move on move three (as far as I knew at the time). The main line goes 3 ... fxe4 4 Nxe5 Nf6 5 Nc3 d6 6 Bg5 dxe5 7 dxe5 Qxd1+ 8 Rxd1, when it looks like Black is in trouble. I was unaware that 8 ... h6 9 Bxf6 gxf6 10 Nd5 Kd7 11 Nb6+ Kc6 12 Nxa8 fxe5 gives Black a playable game, but I probably wouldn't have been interested in playing it anyway. I wanted to make use of all my weird home analysis.



4 Nxd4!

I see now that one relatively popular line runs 4 Bc4 fxe4 5 Ne5 d5 6 Qh5+ g6 7 Nxc6 Nf6 8 Qe5+ Be7 9 Nxe7 Qxe7 10 Qxe7+ Kxe7 11 Be2 Rg8 with a dominating position for Black. I was definitely prepared for this.

You might think a Falkbeer with an extra tempo would be a strong choice but, after 4 e5, I would have been happy to try to close the position with 4 ... d5, when White doesn't really have anything special; if 5 exd6?! Bxd6 6 Nxd4 Nf6 7 Bc4 Qe7+, Black is absolutely fine.

4 ... Nf6 5 exf5 c5 6 Nf3?!

White really needs to take the bull by the horns with 6 Nb5! d5 7 Bf4 Na6 8 g4!, when Black is in deep trouble. The thing is, when opponents are surprised, they rarely take the bull by the horns, instead

opting for “safer” continuations. In my defence, my analysis (done before the age of computers) had not indicated that Black could get into so much trouble. Anyway, the important thing is that I was able to analyse the moves that my opponents were actually likely to play.

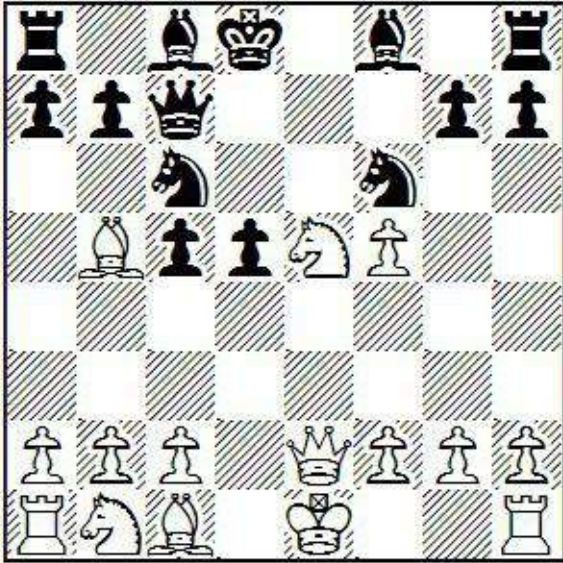
6 ... d5

6 ... Nc6 is safer, but Black is obviously not interested in safety.

7 Bb5+ Nc6 8 Ne5?!

This pseudo-aggressive move actually hands the initiative to Black. Do you see how difficult it is to react in a measured way to such a big surprise? White is first too conservative, and then too aggressive.

8 ... Qc7! 9 Qe2 Kd8!



I had foreseen this position in my home analysis, and correctly assessed it as good for Black, who has a big centre and will soon recover the gambit pawn.

10 Nf3 Bd6 11 0-0 Re8 12 Qd1 Bxf5 13 Bg5 a6 14 Bd3 Bg4 15 h3 Bh5

White has recovered from his shock and has started to play sensibly. Nonetheless, the opening has taken its toll on his nerves, and he now tries to “punish” me with a move that turns out to be way too greedy.

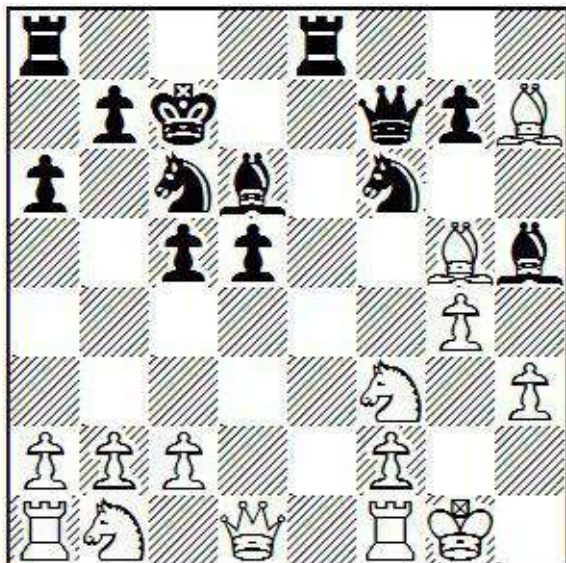
16 Bxh7? Qf7?

Transferring the queen to the kingside while preparing 17 ... Kc7!. However, this idea could have been implemented much more accurately by 16 ... Qd7!, which takes g4 under control and threatens 17 ... Nd4! (when 18 g4? loses to 18 ... Bxg4) .

17 g4?

Positional hara-kiri. The tactics White is trying to set in motion don't actually work.

17 ... Kc7!



18 Bxf6?!

18 Bf5 is preferable.

18 ... gxf6 19 Nc3?!

19 Bf5 is again better, though White is probably losing anyway.

19 ... Ne7?!

19 ... d4! just wins.

20 Bd3?!

20 Qd3!? might be tried.

20 ... Rh8?!

20 ... Rg8 was stronger.

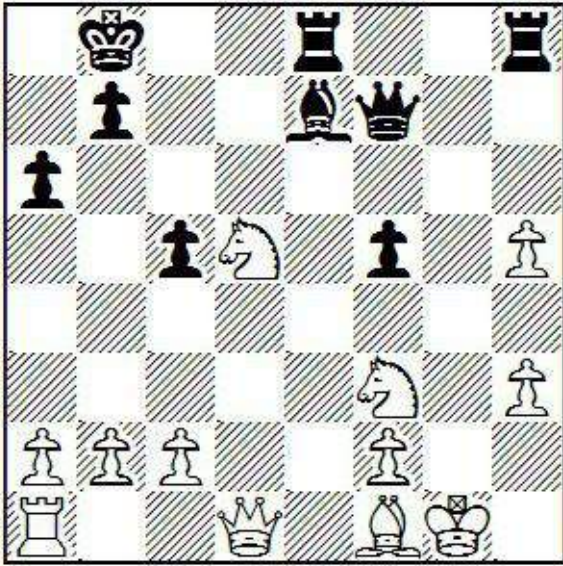
21 Re1 Rae8?

Absolute nonsense. I have no idea what I could have been thinking. After 21 ... Rag8, White is still in serious trouble.

22 Bf1 f5??

Completely unsound, and not in a way that poses real challenges to White. Just because a move is crazy and aggressive does not mean it's nettlesome.

23 Rxe7+ Bxe7 24 Nxd5+ Kb8 25 gxf5



White is winning by now, but the preceding play has taken more toll on his nerves, as well as his clock. His resources turned out to be insufficient to finish the game.

25 ... Reg8+ 26 Bg2 Bd6 27 Nb6?

The knight is already perfectly placed. This excursion makes no sense.

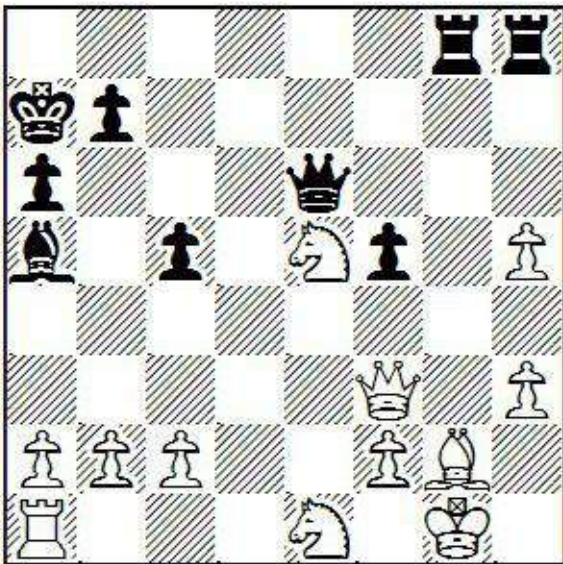
27 ... Bc7 28 Nd7+ Ka7 29 Ne1? Ba5?

This threatens 30 ... Bxe1 and 31 ... Qxd7, but I have missed a legitimate opportunity to get back in the game with 29 ... Rxd7+ 30 Nxd7 Rd8.

30 Ne5 Qe6

My computer keeps trying to tell me to take White's extra h-pawn, whereas from a practical standpoint, I felt it was much more important to keep my queen centralized.

31 Qf3?



31 ... Rh7!?

My second opportunity to win back two pieces for a rook: 31 ... Rxd7+ 32 Kxd7 Qxe5 seems like the way to go. This time I made a decision to keep more tension in the position, and it did ultimately pay off.

32 Ng6?? Bxe1

chesstouring.com

Did I say ultimately? How about immediately? If you want to know how objectively lost I was before

my opponent hung his knight, consider that *Stockfish* still calls this position equal. However, from a practical standpoint, I don't think either one of us thought White could escape from his downward spiral.

33 Kf1 Ba5 34 Nf4 Qe5 35 Nd3 Qh2 36 b4??

This despairing move cannot possibly work in White's favour, no matter how optimistically one looks at his position. It is directly, almost consciously, suicidal.

36 ... cxb4 37 Nf4?? Rxc2! 38 Qxc2 Qxf4 39 Rd1 Bb6 40 Rd3 Rg7 0-1

Other moves win more quickly, but this is the last move of the time control, and it is quite sufficient.

What is the lesson here? Opponents play terribly in sharp, unfamiliar positions, especially in the opening, when most players are used to recycling memorized variations rather than thinking for themselves.

Game 3

K.Polok-V.Malaniuk

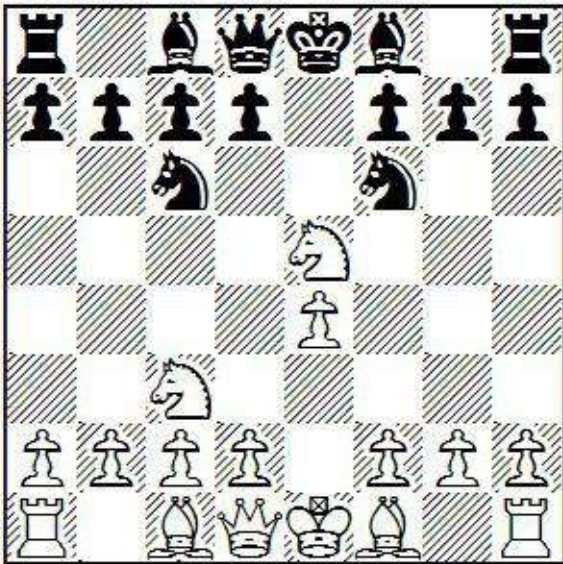
Szklarska Poreba 2012

Four Knights Game

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6

Oh, how boring - the Four Knights.

4 Nxe5



This deranged move initiates the "Halloween Gambit". If Black defends correctly, he is close to winning, according to various sources, as well as *Stockfish 5*. Yet somehow, when the gambit is actually played, the statistics are 44%-44%, with 12% draws. But the gambit could not possibly be successful against a strong player ... right?! Polok is outrated by nearly 400 points!

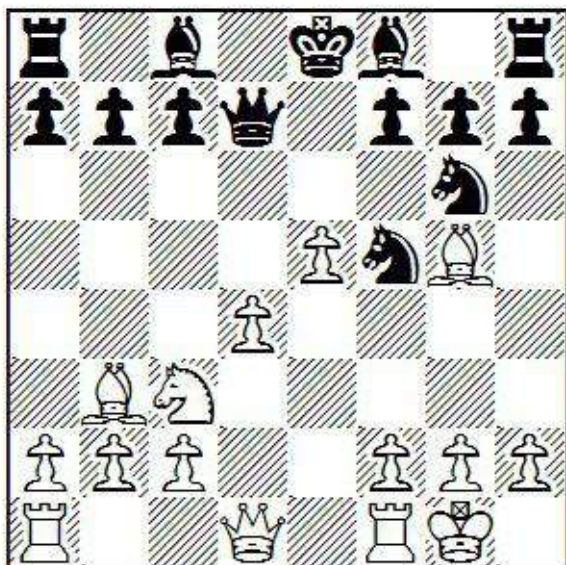
4 ... Nxe5 5 d4 Ng6 6 e5 Ng8 7 Bc4 d5 8 Bxd5

So far, Black has followed the formula recommended in many sources. Has he actually studied this?

8 ... N8e7

This should be fine, though 8 ... c6 (as recommended by Max Euwe) has been more successful in practice.

9 Bg5 Qd7 10 Bb3 Nf5 11 0-0?!



This should not work, but it has the merit of being a new move, removing the last vestiges of the GM's preparation. This immediately starts to pay dividends.

11 ... Bb4?

Safety first? Malaniuk develops and prepares to castle. In fact, it was safe to grab the d-pawn with 11 ... Nxd4! (not 11 ... Qxd4?? 12 Nb5). Perhaps Black was trying to lure White into playing 12 e6, but obviously White does not have to cooperate (even if 12 e6 may be the best move).

12 Be3

White declines an interesting opportunity in 12 e6!? fxe6 13 Bxe6, when Black is best advised to part with his queen: 13 ... Qxe6 14 Re1 Bxc3 15 Rxe6+ Bxe6 16 bxc3 0-0. Although this is playable for White, I have to imagine that the GM would have triumphed from here.

12 ... 0-0 13 Ne4

I do not even slightly understand the next two moves by either player. Very likely they are errors in the database.

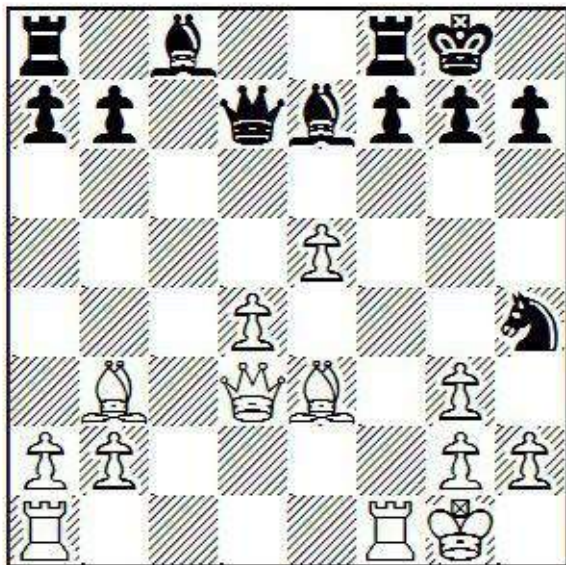
13 ... Rb8 14 Nc3 Ra8 15 Ne4 Be7 16 c3 c5 17 Ng3 cxd4 18 cxd4 Ngh4?!

It is time for Black to address his backward development with 18 ... Qb5 19 Rc1 Be6.

19 Qd3 Nxc3?!

It is hard to play accurately in an unfamiliar position, even for a Grandmaster.

20 fxg3!



Black would have been expecting 20 hxg3 Nf5, when the position is simplifying favourably for him. The text move opens the f-file for White, setting up a small trap, as well as some long-term pressure.

20 ... Ng6

The trap was 20 ... Nf5?? 21 e6! fxe6 22 Rxf5.

21 Rad1!

Here 21 Rxf7 Rxf7 22 e6 is interesting, except that after 22 ... Qxe6 23 Bxe6 Bxe6, by parting with his queen again, Black absorbs White's initiative and maintains a small, but clear advantage. Ultimately, White's move was far more dangerous to Black.

21 ... Bd8 22 h4?!

22 Rf2 was much more logical, intending to build up pressure on the open f-file.

22 ... Qg4 23 Bd2?!

Tucking the king away with 23 Kh2 is more accurate, though admittedly White's move proves effective by setting up another tiny trap.

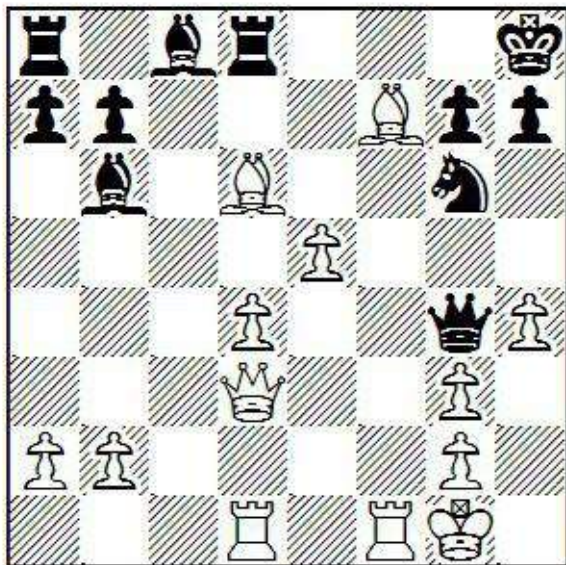
23 ... Bb6?

Black had to relieve the pressure against f7 via 23 ... Be6, when 24 d5 can be met by 24 ... Bb6+ 25 Kh2 Nxe5 26 Qc3 Bd4 27 Qc2 Rac8 and Black is close to winning.

24 Bb4 Rd8?!

It was time to shed some material with 24 ... Be6. It is a small amount of material really, since White's second bishop is part of a working bishop pair, while Black's second rook is less valuable (see Chapter Six), particularly in this position. Furthermore, the alternative is to give up the important f-pawn.

25 Bxf7+ Kh8 26 Bd6



White's position is by now much easier to play.

26 ... Be6 27 Kh2 Bxf7 28 Rxf7 Rd7 29 Rxd7 Qxd7 30 Qf3 Ne7?

According to *Stockfish*, Black must suffer passively after 30 ... Rd8 31 d5 Kg8 32 Re1 a5 33 Qe4 Kh8. Humans are less willing to grovel in such a fashion, but Black's attempt to centralize his knight loses by force.

31 Qf7 Qg4 32 Rf1 Ng8 33 e6?

The sword has two edges. In other words, "we" can make errors in complex positions just like our opponents. Nevertheless, if we choose the position well and have made some effort to understand it ahead of time, the odds should shift in our favour. Here White should play 33 Rf4! Qg6 and only then 34 e6 Nh6 35 Qxg6 hxg6 36 g4 Ng8 37 g5, when Black suffers horribly.

33 ... Qxd4 34 Bf8?!

34 Qxb7 forces Black return the exchange, resulting in an approximately equal position.

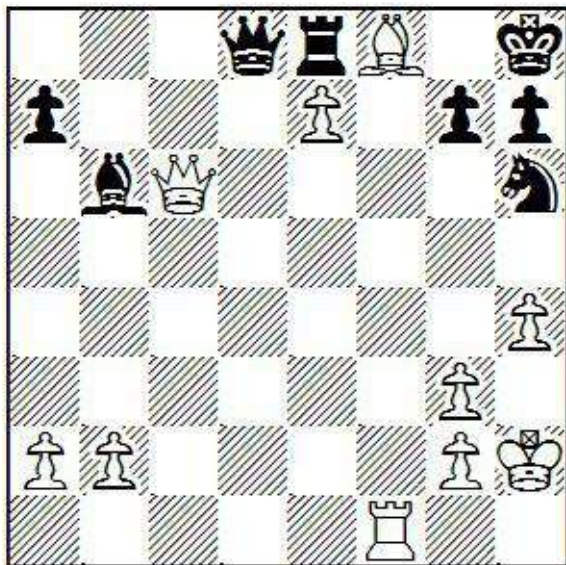
34 ... Nh6

Safer is 34 ... Rxf8! 35 Qxf8 Bc7, which allows Black to pick up White's e-pawn by combining threats against his king.

35 Qxb7 Re8 36 Qc6 Qd8

There is an amusing perpetual here with 36 ... Qg1+ 37 Rxc1 Ng4+ 38 Kh3 Nf2+ 39 Kh2 Ng4+ etc. It is not clear to me whether Black overlooked that or whether he is engaged in a suicidal attempt to win.

37 e7



37 ... Qc8??

Black has one last chance to salvage a draw: 37 ... Ng4+! 38 Kh3 Qd3! 39 Qxe8 Qxf1 40 Kxg4 Qd1+ and the white king will be unable to escape the checks.

38 Bxg7+!

Suddenly the position is absolutely hopeless for Black.

38 ... Kxg7 39 Qf6+ Kg8 40 Qg5+ Kh8 41 Qxh6 Bc5 42 Rf7 1-0

By the end of this book the reader could be excused for thinking my argument is that everyone should play the Latvian, which would be incorrect. My point is that if you are serious about generating wins, you cannot afford to let the opening phase pass without trying to pose problems for your opponent.

Why not simply play your opening carefully and try to reach a rich middlegame? This is a valid approach, but in my experience the kinds of mistakes people make in the opening phase, when deprived of their book knowledge, are gargantuan and catastrophic.

I would not want anyone to get the wrong idea. Playing nettlesomely in the opening does not have to involve crazy-looking moves or unsound sacrifices (even if they make clear and dramatic examples). However, you should always be on the lookout to force your opponent out of his preparation and counter his intentions, even if his plans are not inherently all that dangerous.

For instance, when an opponent plays Bird's Opening (1 f4), he intends to control the e5-square and eventually station a knight there. If you want to make the game difficult for him, perhaps the common moves 1 ... d5 and 2 ... Nf6 (ceding control over e5) are not the way to go. Indeed, the most successful defence statistically is 1 ... g6!, which preserves the option to control the e5-square with the d-pawn. The rapid ... Bg7 also makes it difficult for White to execute another typical Bird's idea, which is to fianchetto the queen's bishop. All other things being equal, the moves that are the most effective are the ones that get in the opponent's way.

Game 4

Pe. Yu-J. Schuyler

Washington 1989

English Defence

1 c4

I suppose I should say I knew that Peter Yu always played the English and that, like most English players, he regularly followed up by fianchettoing his king's bishop, reaching dry positions he knew well. That would pretty much be lying - all I really knew was that he had sat down across from me and moved his c-pawn two spaces. I decided to guess the rest, and I guessed correctly. An educated guess is better than nothing. I pictured the impending boredom in my mind: 2 Nc3, 3 g3, 4 Bg2, 5 Nf3, etc and opted for a very early course correction.

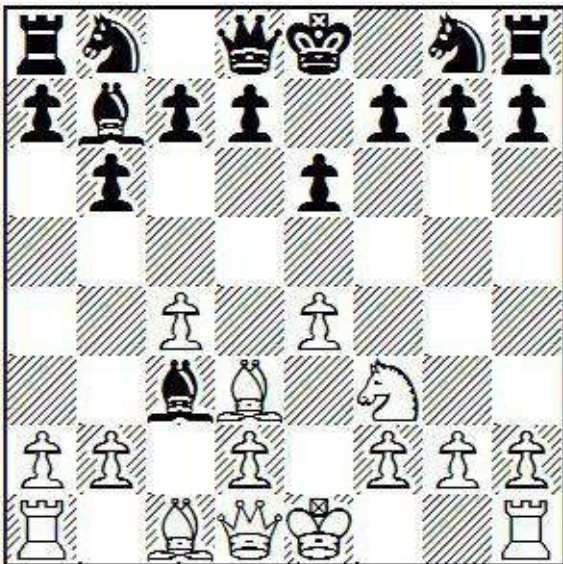
1 ... b6!

For the reasons already given, I would recommend this move to anyone. I hope that by now the reader will not be surprised to hear that 1 ... b6! is the most successful statistically of any defence to 1 c4. While I am the first to admit that statistics can be misleading, here they merely confirm what should already be clear: don't give your opponent what he wants.

2 Nc3 Bb7 3 e4 e6

Morozevich and Short have tried 3 ... e5, aiming to clamp down on White's weak dark squares, whereas Shabalov and Bauer have preferred the text move. It seems to me that, after 3 ... e5, Black's light-squared bishop has few prospects.

4 Nf3 Bb4 5 Bd3 Bxc3!?



This practically forces White to capture away from the centre. Since White will have no d-pawn (on d3 or d5, for instance) my remaining bishop should have good prospects.

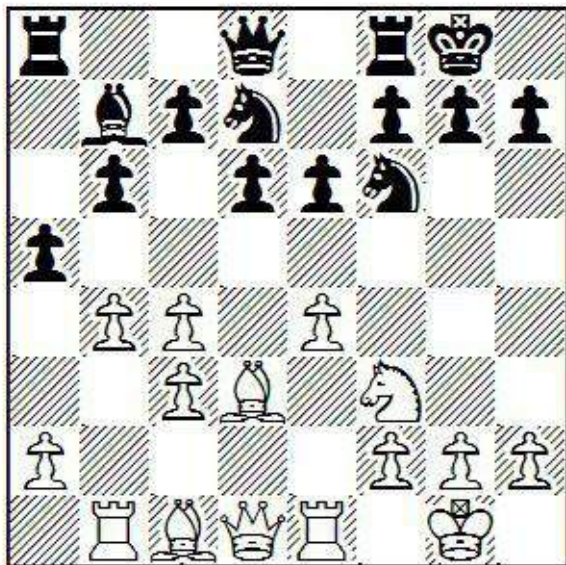
6 dxc3 d6 7 0-0 Nf6?! 8 Re1?!

I was not worried about 8 e5! at the time, though it makes sense for White to free his light-squared bishop.

8 ... Nbd7 9 b4?!

White stops me from playing ... Nc5, which was indeed on my agenda; but this cure is worse than the disease - now White's whole queenside becomes a target.

9 ... 0-0 10 Rb1?! a5!



Of course. White can never capture this or push past, as his remaining pawn structure (not to mention the c5-square) would become hopelessly weak; so he is consigned to waiting for me to find the best moment to open the a-file.

11 Rb2?! Ne5?!

I was proud of this idea at the time, and the game went exactly according to plan afterwards, though I could have paid for compromising my structure.

12 Nxe5 dxe5 13 Bg5?!

This allows me to force a very favourable exchange. Instead, 13 f3! would place a firm barrier in my bishop's path.

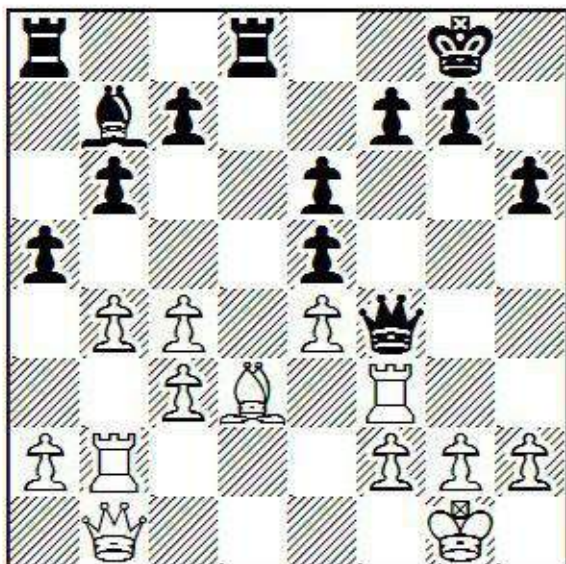
13 ... h6 14 Bxf6 Qxf6 15 Re3?!

White wants to harass my queen, but this weakens the back rank and leaves his army badly uncoordinated.

15 ... Rfd8 16 Qb1 Qg5!?

Perhaps I can play ... f7-f5 soon, though the main motivation for this move was to set a nasty trap.

17 Rg3 Qf4 18 Rf3?!



White's 15th move telegraphed his intentions, so I had predicted his last two moves and prepared a

rude shock.

18 ... Rxd3!

There are some lengthy variations and, as it turns out, things are not entirely clear, but the basic idea is that White's back rank is incredibly weak.

19 Rxf4

Forced. If 19 Qxd3? Qc1+ 20 Qf1 Qxb2 and Black is up a bishop; while after 19 Rxd3? Bxe4 20 g3 Bxd3 21 gxf4 Bxb1 22 Rxb1 axb4 23 cxb4 exf4, the two extra pawns should be sufficient.

19 ... Rad8 20 Kf1?

Here 20 Qf1! exf4 21 Re2 e5 22 bxa5 bxa5 23 Re1 offered White some chances, though Black is in great shape after 23 ... Ba6 24 c5 Bc4 25 Ra1 Rxc3 26 Qe1 Rc2.

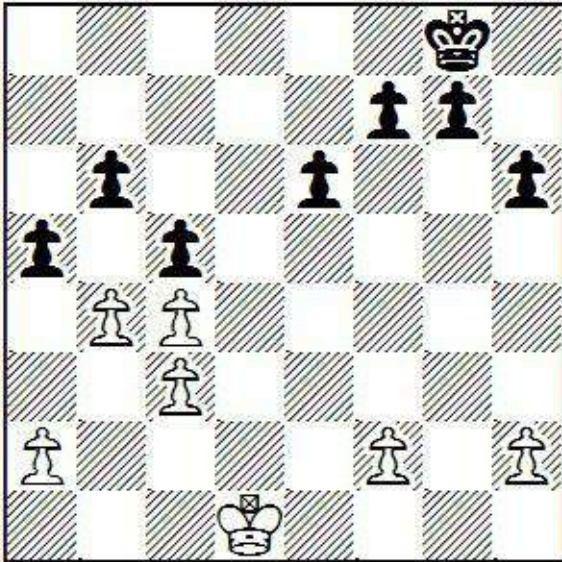
20 ... exf4 21 Ke1 Bxe4 22 Qc1 Bxg2!

By clearing away the last guardian of the light squares, Black's bishop ensures itself an important role in the attack.

23 Qxf4?

23 f3 is much more stubborn.

23 ... Bf3 24 Rd2 Rxd2 25 Qxf3 Rd1+ 26 Qxd1 Rxd1+ 27 Kxd1 c5



The king and pawn endgame is hopeless for White.

28 Kc2 e5 29 Kb3 e4 30 Ka4 f5 31 Kb5 f4 32 Kxb6 axb4 33 cxb4 e3 34 fxe3 fxe3 35 Kxc5 e2 36 a4 e1Q 37 a5 Qe5+ 38 Kb6 Qb8+ 39 Kc5 Kf7 40 a6 Ke6 0-1

There is no way to go back in time and see what would have happened if Black had not started with 1 ... b6, but it is overwhelmingly unlikely that White would have piled up inaccuracies on moves 8-15 in a normal English Opening. The opportunities to go wrong are simply not there, particularly for someone with experience in the positions.

Opponents of all levels play badly when deprived of their standard opening moves and plans. It is a shame to let the opening phase pass without trying to exploit this fact, particularly if you have any designs on winning.

Chapter Two

The Middlegame

Each of the many typical middlegame positions has certain plans associated with it for each colour. For instance, in the Modern Benoni, White tries to find a way to play e4-e5 effectively, while Black tries to find a way to get in the ... b7-b5 advance. In the Classical King's Indian, White storms the queenside starting with c4-c5, while Black storms the kingside with ... f7-f5 and then, usually, ... f5-f4 and ... g6-g5-g4. In some positions, the plans are a little more vague; for instance, in the Ruy Lopez Berlin Wall, it is hard to put one's finger on what Black is trying to do besides "survive to utilize the two bishops".

Regardless of what the typical plan is, if we are looking for decisive results, one particular plan is ideal: checkmate. If it works, we have achieved our goal immediately. If it fails, there will (hopefully) be other opportunities in what remains of the game. Because the end of the attack does not always mean the end of the game, or the end of our winning chances, kingside aggression should not normally be thought of as an all-or-nothing endeavour. The decision to attack the enemy king in an ordinary position is rarely looked upon favourably by the top computer programs, but such attacks do tend to elicit errors from the opponent, so we should look at these as a form of nettlesomeness.

Any player can fall victim to a direct kingside attack, even when it is the standard plan in a position (and should therefore come as no surprise).

Game 5

A.Sherzer-H.Olafsson

Philadelphia 1991

Sicilian Defence

Alex Sherzer is not the strongest grandmaster in the world. He is, in fact, no longer active in chess. However, there is something about his games that I feel makes high-level play appear accessible. Perhaps this is an illusion, but it is a useful one for a student. Part of the accessibility is in seeing what he does to some of his high-level opponents. Here GM Helgi Olafsson loses to a checkmating attack right out of the opening in an apparently ordinary position, and without obtaining even a shred of counterplay.

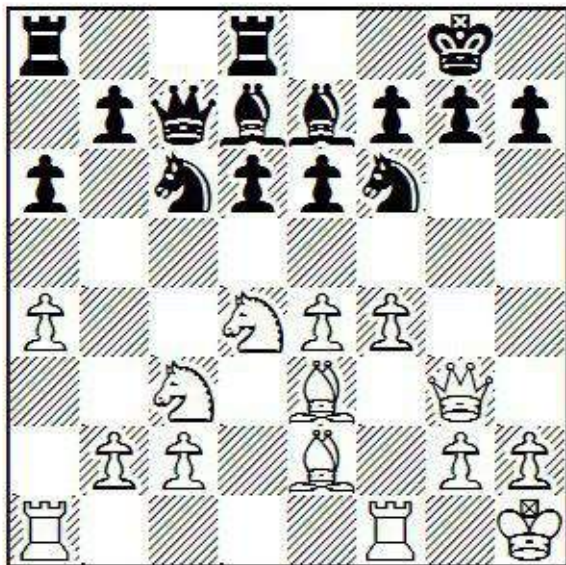
1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 a6 6 Be3 e6 7 a4

This is not a popular move order, and it looks more positional than aggressive. All the same, this is the Open Sicilian, so a kingside attack is always possible for White.

7 ... Nc6 8 Be2 Be7 9 0-0 0-0 10 f4 Qc7 11 Kh1 Rd8 12 Qe1 Bd7

This is a reasonable move, but 12 ... Nxd4 is vastly more popular, presumably because of the kind of thing that happened to Black in this game. The exchange of knights would have weakened White's attack.

13 Qg3!



What could be more natural than to bring the queen to the g-file where Black's king resides? In principle, White does not have much advantage, but Black now needs to be careful, and the cost of further inaccuracies is high.

13 ... Bf8 14 Rad1

"Relax," says White, "I'm just playing in the centre."

14 ... Rac8

"This is a Sicilian, so I'll play on the half-open c-file."

15 Nf3

This innocent-looking retreat may have been misconstrued as simply another move to control the d5-square.

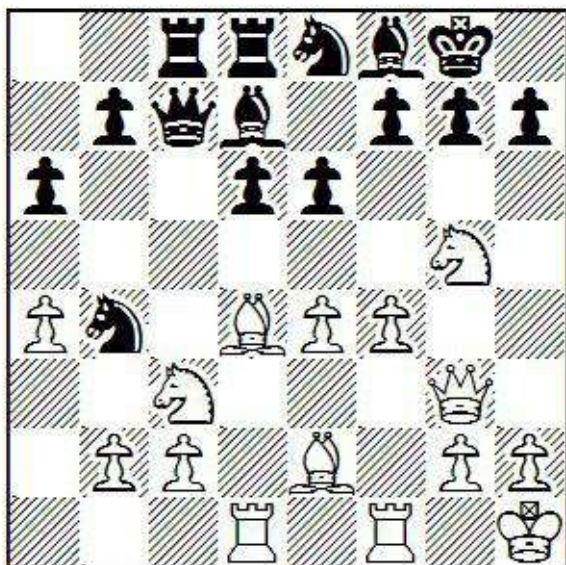
15 ... Nb4?!

Black is not yet in serious trouble, but 15 ... d5! is his last chance to meet White's initiative on equal terms. The idea of striking in the centre is hardly shocking, and it works tactically because White's queenside is vulnerable; e.g. 16 e5 Ne4 17 Nxe4 dxe4 18 Ng5 Ne7 19 Qg4 h6 20 Nxe4 Bxa4 with approximate equality.

16 Bd4! Ne8??

Maybe the double-query is a bit harsh. This move does lead to a forced loss, but even if *Stockfish* takes a minute to realize why. Black had to play 16 ... Be7, which is met by 17 e5 dxe5 18 Bxe5, when White will continue his attack with Ne4 and/or Nfg5.

17 Ng5!



The h7- and f7-squares are vulnerable.

17 ... h6

Not the best try, but almost all moves are met by:

18 Bh5!

Winning.

18 ... hxc5 19 fxc5 g6 20 Bxc6! fxc6 21 Rxf8+

This is the most appropriate finish to the game, even if everything wins by now.

21 ... Kxf8 22 Qf3+ Kg8 23 Rf1 Nf6 24 Qxf6 e5 25 Qxg6+ 1-0

Mate follows after 25 ... Kh8 26 Rf7.

Don't get me wrong; I'm not saying that anyone can do this to a Grandmaster. However, anyone can bring their pieces towards the opposing king and hope that their opponent can't handle the problems. This is not nearly as naïve as it sounds. It can work even if your opponent is higher rated than you, and I can promise you that it is not what he wants to be facing. But note that this strategy is not feasible in some positions, so it makes sense to make sure your opening repertoire has aggressive options in it.

In the following game, Sherzer happens to be the "victim" and I am the "hero", since I am the one who launches the attack, which is set up in large part by my choice of opening. It would be no good if I feared to be aggressive simply because my opponent is higher rated. In fact, attacking and other risk taking is more justified when "playing up".

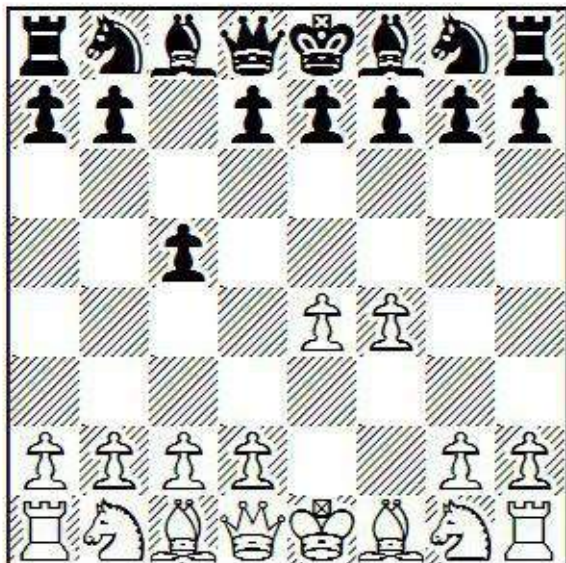
Game 6

J.Schuyler-A.Sherzer

Washington 1989

Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 f4



Theory disapproves of 2 f4 because of Tal's gambit (2 ... d5 3 exd5 Nf6 4 c4 e6 5 dxe6 Bxe6), but I have always done fine with my extra pawn. Sherzer was uninterested in testing this out.

2 ... g6 3 Nf3 Bg7 4 g3

Unable to tempt Black into 3 ... Nc6 4 Bb5, I abandon my plan to play a Grand Prix Attack, instead opting for a modified King's Indian Attack with an early f2-f4.

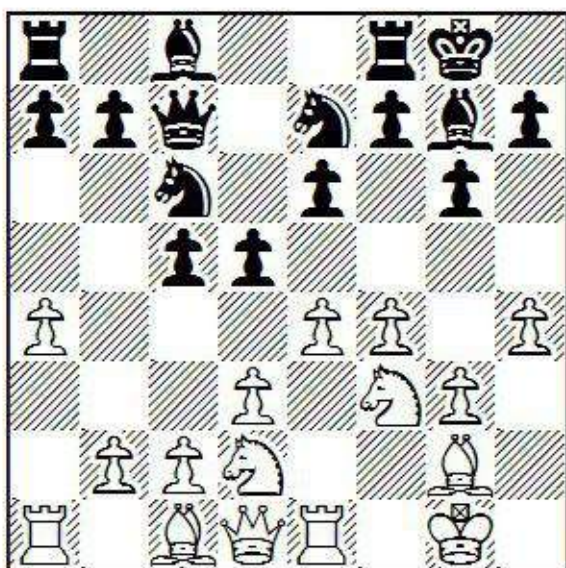
4 ... Nc6 5 Bg2 d6 6 0-0 e6 7 d3 Nge7 8 Nbd2 0-0 9 a4 d5

Black strikes in the centre, not worrying about the tempo loss. The ability to change gears like this is a hallmark of a strong player. It also makes a player harder to predict.

10 Re1

This is as good as anything. At the moment, it's hard to see how the "aggressive" pawn on f4 is going to help spearhead an initiative.

10 ... Qc7 11 h4!



Such a move can hardly be "correct", but fortune favours those willing to venture things. After this game, Alex told me that I was difficult to play against. As he described it, I spend the early part of the game putting him to sleep, and then suddenly go crazy attacking. I never thought to look at my chess that way, but a sudden switch in style in the middle of a game is no doubt a challenge to deal with. This move

may have woken him up. If so, he later falls asleep again.

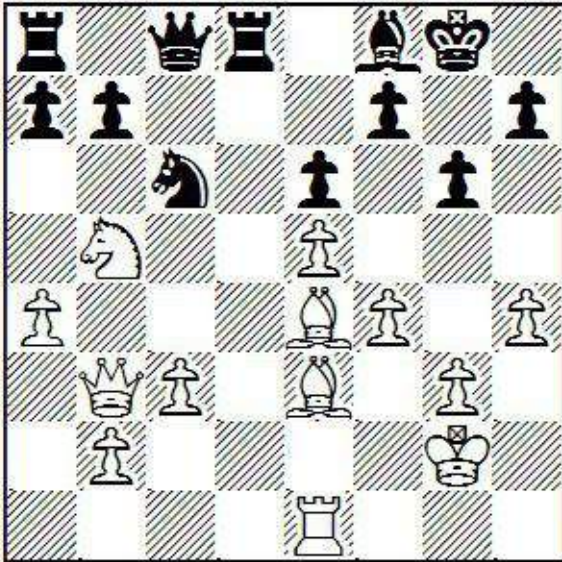
11 ... Bd7 12 c3

This is the flexible move I should, perhaps, have played on my last turn. Nonetheless, it is still useful, and such a tame continuation may have lulled him back into complacency.

12 ... dxe4 13 dxe4 Na5 14 e5 c4 15 Ne4 Nb3 16 Ra3 Bc6 17 Nd4

I am eager to play Be3.

17 ... Bxe4 18 Bxe4 Rfd8 19 Be3 Bf8 20 Rxb3 cxb3 21 Qxb3 Nc6 22 Nb5 Qc8 23 Kg2



Now comes a series of aggressive-looking moves by Black which actually drive my army towards his kingside. In practice, my opponent was unable to resist creating so many consecutive threats.

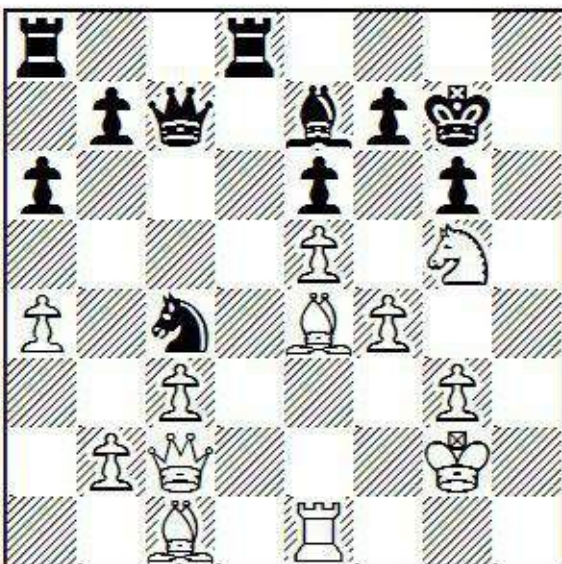
23 ... Na5 24 Qc2 Nc4 25 Bc1 a6 26 Nd4 Bc5 27 Nf3 Qc7 28 h5

Finally! Seventeen moves have passed since I advanced this pawn to h4. Suddenly White has a big advantage.

28 ... Kg7 29 hxg6 hxg6 30 Ng5

The threat of 31 Bxg6 fxe6? 32 Nxe6+ is hard to defend against.

30 ... Be7



31 Nxf7!

An extremely obvious sacrifice - and in addition to being objectively strong, it gives me practical chances even if something goes wrong. The quality of play from both sides plummets after this move, based on the complexities and material imbalances. A perfect way to play for a win, especially against a stronger opponent.

31 ... Kxf7 32 Bxg6+ Kg7 33 b3?

Unfortunately, this position calls for some finesse, and I've never had any. According to Sherzer himself, 33 Bh5 is what I should have played, when he was expecting to lose. As it turns out 33 ... Qc6+! 34 Kh3 Kh8 35 Qg6 Rd7 36 Qh6+ Kg8 37 Bg4 Bf6! 38 Qg6+ Rg7 39 Qe4! Rxc4! is not so clear, but we would have had to find all those moves, and we haven't been playing all that accurately so far. The point is, I would have had my chances. 33 Bh7 is also a serious threat to Black's survival, when he must find 33 ... Qc6+ 34 Be4 Qd7 35 Qe2 Qd2 36 Bxd2 Rxd2 just to bail out into a difficult endgame.

33 ... Na3!

I was naïvely expecting something like 33 ... Nb6?!

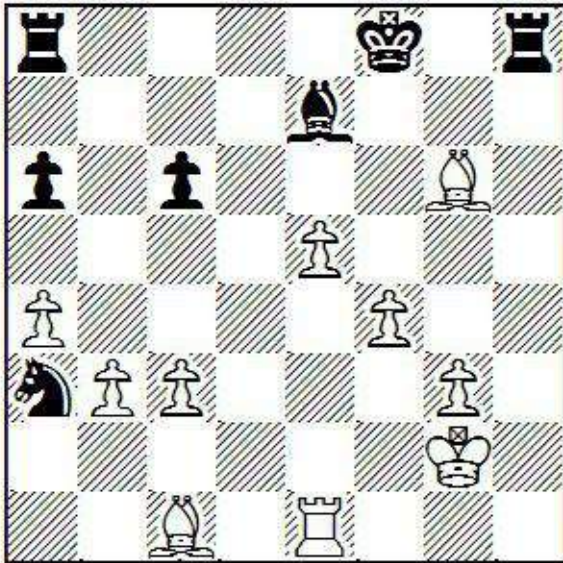
34 Qe2! Rh8?!

34 ... Kxg6 is better, leading to Black's advantage, though the position remains complicated after 35 Qg4+ Kf7 36 Qh5+ Kg7 37 f5 Qc6+ 38 Kf2 Rh8 39 f6+ Bxf6 40 exf6+ Kxf6.

35 Qg4 Kf8?

Here 35 ... Qxc3! is necessary, when 36 Qxe6 Qc6+ 37 Qxc6 bxc6 38 Be4 is unclear.

36 Qxe6 Qc6+ 37 Qxc6 bxc6



With four pawns for the rook, and both of Black's minors tied down, White should be winning, though it requires some more of that "finesse" stuff I've been hearing so much about.

38 Bd3?

Terrible. The bishop did not need to be relocated, and its new location is not secure. Good moves are 38 Rd1, 38 g4 and 38 f5.

38 ... Rd8 39 Re3?!

I must have been planning 39 Bxa6, but then chickened out when I realized Black's knight could escape with 39 ... Nb1. Nonetheless, this would have been best, as I can't keep the knight corralled anyway.

39 ... Nb1!

An example of a concept very important in later chapters: endgames are tactical!

40 f5

If 40 Bxb1, the skewer 40 ... Rd1 regains the piece.

40 ... Bg5

The last move of the time control. The clock played some role in the recent mistakes.

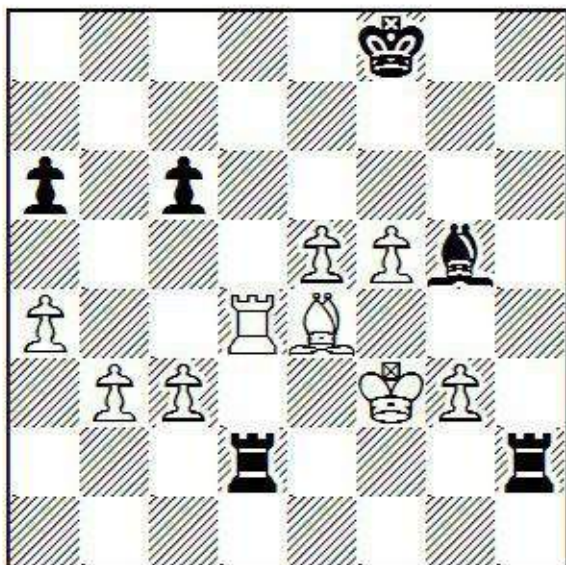
41 Bxb1 Rd1 42 Be4?!

This could have led to disaster. 42 Ba3+ Ke8 43 Re4 Rxb1 44 Rb4 is still approximately equal.

42 ... Rxc1 43 Rd3 Rc2+?

The right idea (trading rooks) but the wrong implementation - it is certainly not useful to Black to drive my king forward. Instead, 43 ... Rhh1 threatens ... Rhd1 while getting the second rook active.

44 Kf3 Rd2 45 Rd4! Rhh2



46 Bxc6?

46 Bd3! is much better, taking advantage of the opportunity to avoid a rook trade. White's single rook is normally going to be substantially more useful than Black's second, "redundant" rook (see Chapter Six). The extreme material imbalance is making the position difficult to play for both of us.

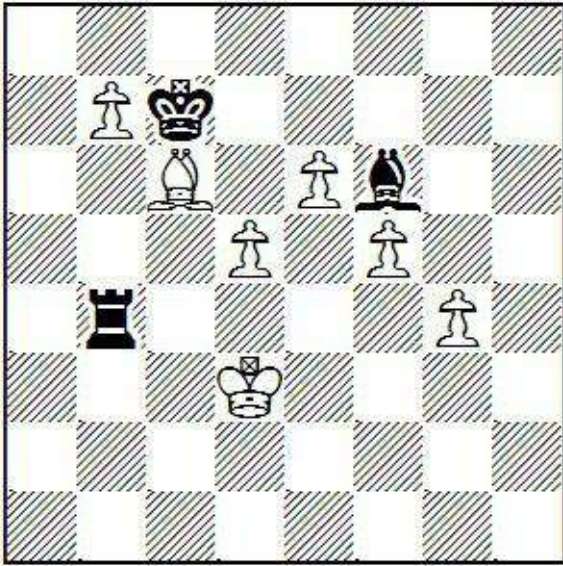
46 ... Rhf2+ 47 Kg4 Rxd4+ 48 cxd4 Be3! 49 d5 Bd4! 50 e6 Ke7?!

With almost all my pawns immobilized, Black can hope to win. However, 50 ... Bc5!, stopping my b-pawn as well, was much stronger.

51 Kg5 Rh2?

After this move, Black no longer has any winning chances. His rook is actually quite restricted since ... Rg2 or ... Rh1 will lose to d5-d6+. Instead, 51 ... Rf1!, intending 52 ... Rg1, puts White in an annoying kind of zugzwang, which soon forces a king retreat. White can still hold (I think) but he remains under some pressure.

52 g4 Rh8 53 Kf4 Bf6 54 b4 Kd6 55 b5 axb5 56 axb5 Rh1 57 b6 Rf1+ 58 Ke4 Rb1 59 b7 Rb4+ 60 Kd3 Kc7 ½-½



With White's pawns so far advanced, it certainly seems there is no possible way for Black to make progress, so Sherzer cuts off the white king and offers a draw. With careful play, Black could have forced the win of the g- and f-pawns, but the game would still have ended peacefully; e.g. 61 Ke2 Rb3 62 Kd2 Kd6 63 Kc2 Rb6 64 Kd3 Rb4 65 Ke3 Ke5 66 Kd3 Be7 67 Ke3 Bd6 68 Kf3 Kf6 69 Kf2 Rxc4 70 Ke1 Rb4 71 Kf2 Kxf5 72 Ke2 Ke5 73 Kd3. With two of Black's pieces stationed to stop the dangerous passed pawns, he does not have enough freedom of action to successfully corner White's king.

So it was a draw in spite of everything, but I had my chances and nothing works 100% of the time. There is also the fact that, had the game proceeded more calmly, I would probably have scored zero instead of a half.

Game 7

A.Sherzer-M.Ginsburg

New York 1990

Sicilian Defence

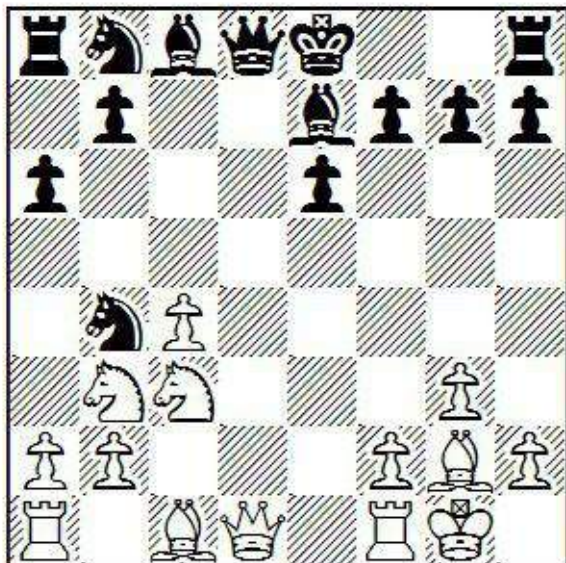
1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 a6 5 g3

Sherzer shows he is willing to play both theoretical and non-theoretical Sicilians.

5 ... Nf6

I would like to know what he had planned against 5 ... d5, which has scored extremely well for Black. The lightly tested 6 Nb3 is *Stockfish's* recommendation, and if 6 ... dxe4 then 7 Qxd8+ Kxd8 8 N1d2 f5 9 f3 exf3 10 Nxf3 with compensation due to Black's poor structure and loose king.

6 Bg2 d5?! 7 exd5 Nxd5 8 0-0 Bc5 9 Nb3 Be7 10 c4 Nb4 11 Nc3!



Black's position is already very unpleasant. Now White has offered him a difficult choice: to play with queens or increase White's lead in development after 11 ... Qxd1 12 Rxd1.

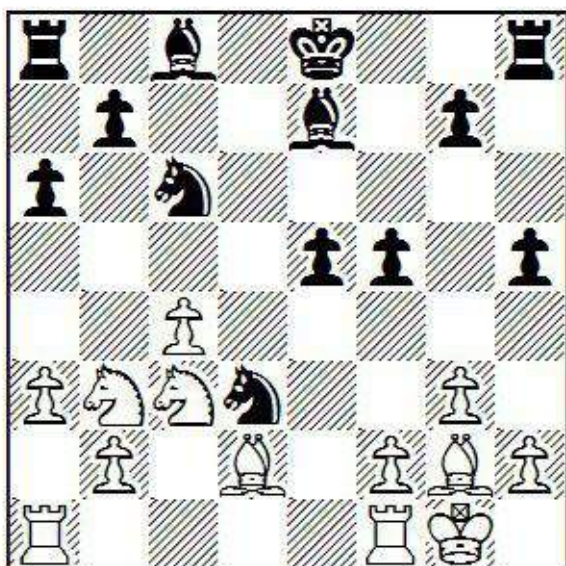
11 ... N8c6 12 Qg4

This is not a very strong move "objectively", but it is the point at which Black starts to go seriously wrong. I don't think this is a coincidence, especially since it is White's first queen move, and a very active one. My theory is that active queen moves in the middlegame (similarly to active king moves in the endgame), regardless of their objective merit, tend to induce error. They are nettlesome.

12 ... h5 13 Qe4 Qd3?!

The immediate 13 ... f5 keeps Black well in the game.

14 a3 f5 15 Qf4 e5 16 Qd2 Qxd2 17 Bxd2 Nd3

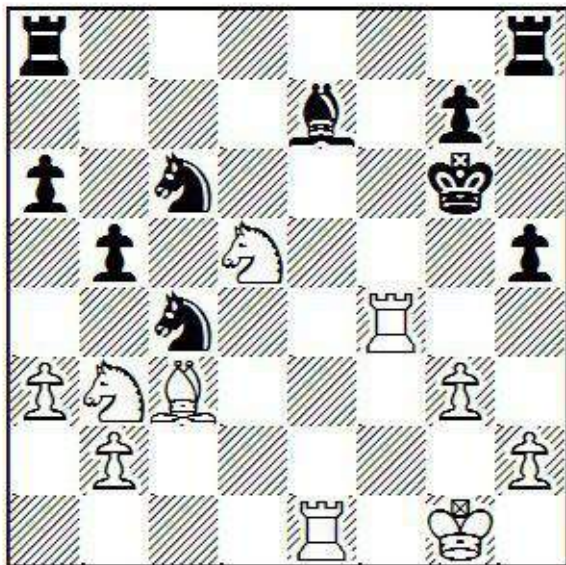


In the process of chasing back White's queen, Black has exposed a large collection of weak squares, including b6, c7, d6, d5, g6 and g5.

18 Nd5 Kf7 19 Bc3 Be6?!

19 ... Bd8! will not strike fear in the heart of the enemy, nor is it enough by itself to rescue Black's position, but it does guard his weaknesses, and presents White with difficulties in making progress.

20 Rad1 e4 21 f3 exf3 22 Bxf3 Nde5 23 Be4 Nxc4 24 Bxf5 Bxf5 25 Rxf5+ Kg6 26 Rf4 b5 27 Re1!



The exchange of light-squared bishops has uncovered other weaknesses in Black's position, in particular the e6-square.

27 ... Bg5 28 Re6+ Kh7 29 Rxc6 Bxf4 30 Nxf4 Rhc8 31 Rg6 Ra7 32 Rg5 Nxb2 33 Bxb2 Rc2 34 Bd4 Re7 35 Rxh5+ Kg8 36 Re5 Rxe5 37 Bxe5 Kf7 38 h4 Ra2 39 Bd6 Rb2 40 Na5 g6 41 Nc6 Rb3 42 Kg2 Kf6 43 Kh3 Rb1 44 Kg4 Rd1 45 Bb4 Rc1 46 Nb8 1-0

Game 8

A.Sherzer-G.Burgess

Prestwich 1990

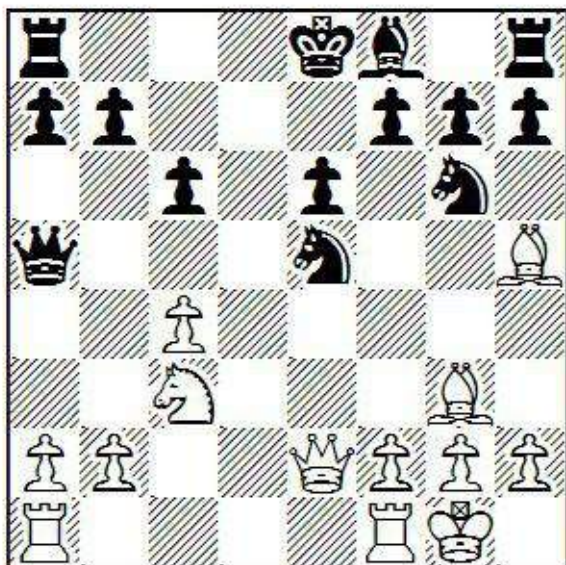
Alekhine's Defence

1 e4 Nf6 2 e5 Nd5 3 d4 d6 4 Nf3 Bg4 5 Be2 c6 6 0-0 Bxf3 7 Bxf3 dxe5 8 dxe5 e6 9 c4 Ne7 10 Qe2 Nd7 11 Nc3!

“Normally White defends the e-pawn with 11 b3, 11 Bg4, 11 Bd2, or 11 Bf4. White had reasonable compensation for the pawn in the game.” - Daniel King.

GM King's dry remarks, while true, do not do justice to Sherzer's idea. With space, development, and the bishop pair, why should White allow himself to play even one slightly inconvenient move in order to guard a pawn that, if captured, will only open more lines for his pieces?

11 ... Qa5 12 Bf4 Ng6 13 Bg3 Ndx5 14 Bh5!



A wonderful computer-like move, played before the age of computers. White keeps his bishop alive, while leaving Black to solve the problem of his awkward knights.

14 ... 0-0-0 15 f4!?

Stockfish doesn't like this very much, but Sherzer predicts that his opponent will be drawn into the complications. It certainly helps to know your opponents. The default reaction of many players is to grab material.

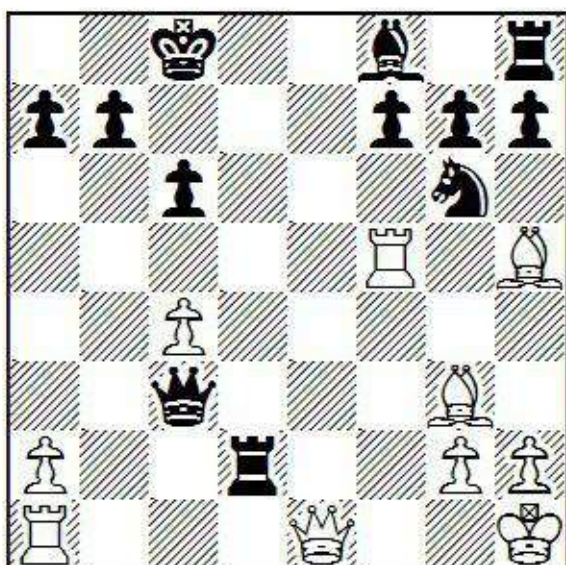
15 ... Qc5+ 16 Kh1 Nxc4 17 f5!

Sherzer successfully predicts another, bigger mistake.

17 ... Rd2? 18 Qe1 exf5

Now Black's back rank is exposed and his king has nowhere to run to - at best a very precarious situation.

19 b3! Qe3 20 bxc4 Qxc3 21 Rxf5



Believe it or not, there is no escape. Black has no satisfactory way to deal with the coming Bg4, after which his king is fried.

21 ... Qd4? 22 Rd5!! 1-0

Interference; White threatens 23 Qe8 mate.

A creative and aggressive game, made possible by Sherzer's 11 Nc3!. If your opening is chosen well, you can be aggressive without sacrificing much accuracy.

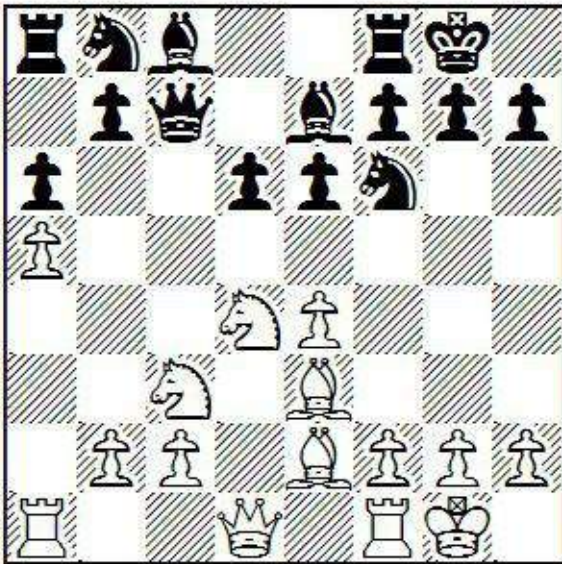
Game 9

N.Short-J.Van der Wiel

Biel Interzonal 1985

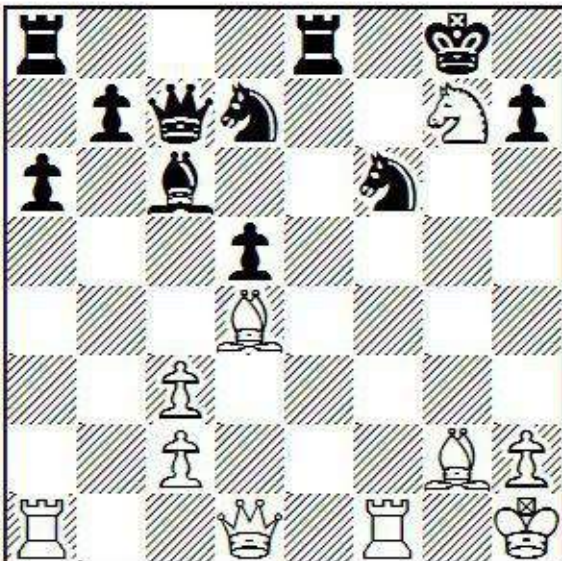
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 a6 6 Be2 e6 7 0-0 Be7 8 a4 0-0 9 Be3 Qc7 10 a5



This position has been reached a hundred times, and Black is holding his own statistically. After all, he has a central pawn majority to compensate for his space disadvantage. Furthermore, White's plan is quite transparent - he will be shoving the f- and g-pawns forward in a crude coffee-house attack. Anyone with experience on the black side of the Sicilian knows how to deal with this. Right?

10 ... Bd7 11 f4 Bc6 12 Bf3 Re8 13 g4 d5 14 e5 Nfd7 15 Kh1 Bb4 16 Bg2 Bxa5 17 f5 Bxc3 18 bxc3 exf5 19 e6 fxe6 20 gxf5 exf5 21 Nxf5 Nf6 22 Bd4 Nbd7 23 Nxg7!



23 ... Re5

23 ... Kxg7 is a forced win for White, the main line being 24 Qg4+ Kf7 25 Bxf6 Nxf6 26 Rxf6+! Kxf6 27 Rf1+ Ke7 28 Qh4+ Kd6 29 Rf6+ Re6 30 Qf4+ Kd7 31 Rf7+ Re7 32 Rxe7+ Kxe7 33 Qxc7+.

24 Nf5 Rf8 25 Qd2 Kh8 26 Qh6 Rf7 27 Rae1 Bb5 28 c4 Bxc4 29 Rxe5 Nxe5 30 Re1 1-0

I don't mean to minimize the complexities of the attack, but the Big Picture Capsule Summary is that White shoved all his pawns and pieces at Black's kingside and Black couldn't deal with it, even though he was fully expecting it. By the way, do you know how Black should have defended? I certainly do not.

You may have noticed that the attacker in all the above games was the player with the White pieces. Naturally, this is not a coincidence. In these games White adopted what Jonathan Rowson refers to as a "serve and volley" approach (borrowing the expression from tennis). Black does not usually have enough control over the position to launch an attack right out of the opening, and is more reliant on other techniques. Other chapters in this book are heavy with Black games.

Chapter Three

Material Imbalances

It is, perhaps, self-evident that material sacrifices (assuming they are sound) lead to double-edged positions. It is hard for one player to defend, and often equally hard for the other player continuously to maintain compensation. But why is it that two armies of equal power should produce a double-edged situation merely because the armies have a different make-up? I think there are two reasons for this. Firstly, most players have less experience playing with material imbalances than playing “normal” positions. Inexperience leads to mistakes, which leads to a lack of draws. Also, there are fewer equal trades available to the players, so the struggle is likely to remain richer for a longer period of time. For instance, if two players have two rooks and two knights each, the knights and rooks are easily exchanged, which might lead to a simple draw. If, on the other hand, one player has two knights and a bishop and the other two rooks, it is much more difficult for either to arrange any equal trades. The game can go on and on, providing more opportunities for mistakes.

I have to say that not all positions with material imbalances appear to lead to a low draw percentage. When looking for games for this chapter, I assumed I would be able to use the Ruy Lopez Dilworth Variation (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Nxe4 6 d4 b5 7 Bb3 d5 8 dxe5 Be6 9 c3 Bc5 10 Nbd2 0-0 11 Bc2 Nxf2) as an example, but even very complex and imbalanced positions don't necessarily retain their mystery forever. Mistakes and wins were likely when the variation was being developed (only one draw in the first seventeen games in the database, from 1924 to 1963), whereas now it's almost as likely to produce a draw as any typical middlegame. However, certain other positions are more difficult to get a handle on, no matter how many times they are played. According to my database, the position we are going to look at (from the Modern Defence) produces a draw only one game in six. My advice: if you want to fight, play this type of position whenever possible, and play it with both colours.

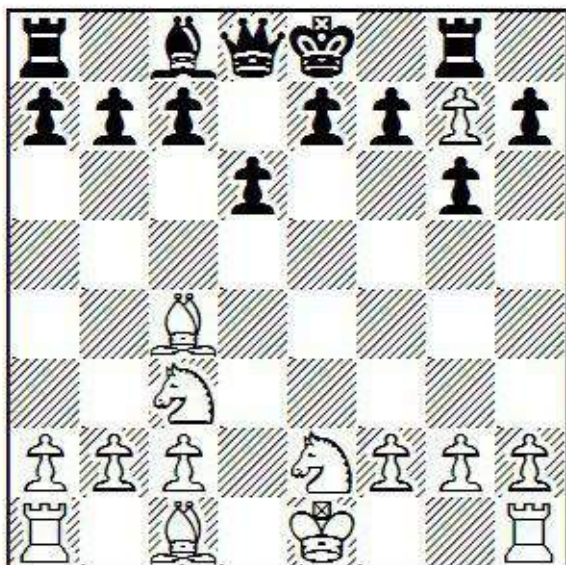
Game 10

P.Katzourakis-A.Stefanova

Paleochora 2009

Modern Defence

1 e4 g6 2 d4 Bg7 3 Nc3 d6 4 Bc4 Nf6 5 Qe2 Nc6 6 e5 Nxd4 7 exf6 Nxe2 8 fxe7 Rg8 9 Ngxe2



White has three minor pieces for a queen and (shortly) two pawns. This material imbalance is extremely difficult for most people to play in tournament time controls, especially for the player holding the queen. Confusion leads to mistakes, which lead to wins and losses, and few draws. The reason White has been more successful is that his strategy is easier to understand - develop, attack, and watch for tactics. It's what everyone does automatically, and White is the one with more tactics in the starting position. Watch a grandmaster get abused by a candidate master.

9 ... c6?!

Black has no intention of allowing White to hold onto the g7-pawn; but by delaying its capture, Black makes more work for herself.

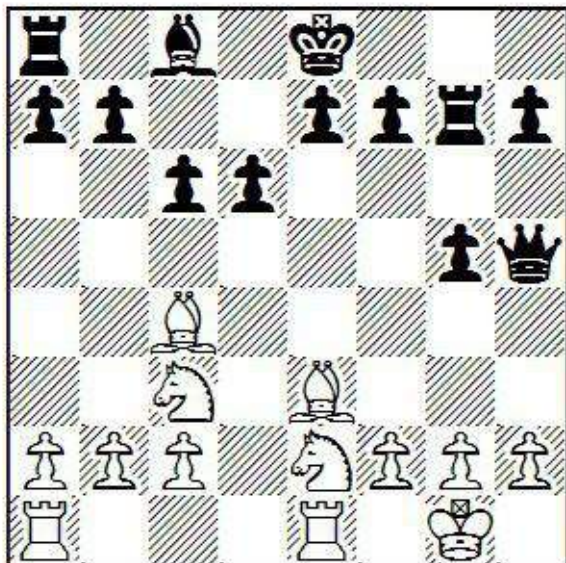
10 Bh6 Qa5 11 0-0!?

White normally castles long in this variation in order to place a rook directly in the centre, and usually plans to launch the h-pawn. However, Katzourakis's interpretation has the seal of approval from my computer. Perhaps Stefanova was unprepared for this move.

11 ... Qh5 12 Be3 Rxc7

The player with the queen (and pawns) must make use of her pawns. If they are not advancing, seizing squares, and dislodging enemy pieces, they turn into obstructions and targets. On the other hand, Black must also be extremely careful because her queen is running short on squares; for example, 12 ... d5 13 Nf4 Qe5 14 Nfxd5! cxd5 15 Nxd5 is too difficult for Black, with her king caught in the centre.

13 Rfe1 g5!



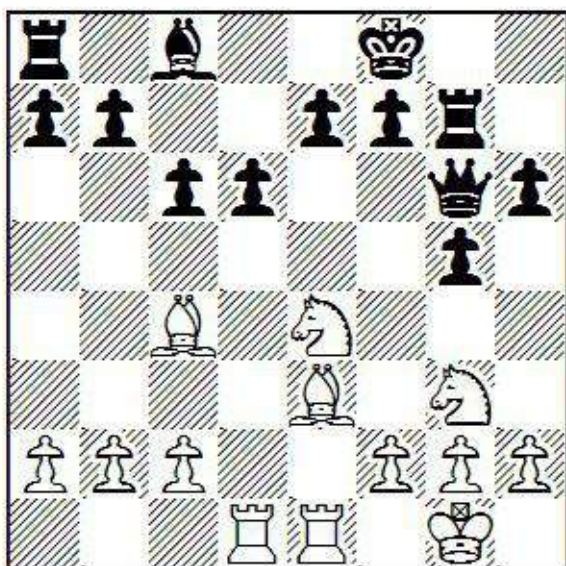
Stefanova steals the f4-square from White's knight and bishop, while clearing g6 for her rook and queen. This is how pawns must be used. Nonetheless, her position is still very tricky because she can't achieve ... d6-d5 without allowing a favourable sacrifice, and it's very hard to get her king out of the centre without dropping pawns.

14 Ng3 Qg6 15 Rad1 Kf8?

The best move is 15 ... f5!, stopping Ne4.

16 Nce4 h6?

Only 16 ... Be6 seems to hold Black's position together.



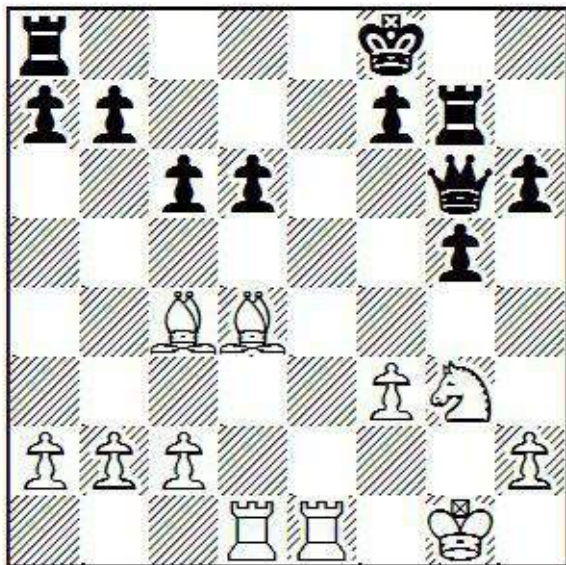
17 Nxd6!! Bg4!

Stefanova correctly declines the sacrifice. After 17 ... exd6? 18 Bc5 Be6 19 Rxd6 Kg8 20 Bd3 Qf6 21 Bd4 Qf4 22 Rdx6 fxe6 23 Bxg7, the bishop is immune because of the fork on h5.

18 f3 Bxf3!

The right idea. Every white pawn is important, as they lend support to his multitude of pieces.

19 gxf3 exd6 20 Bd4



20 ... Qxc2!

Black continues her policy of pawn-grabbing. The fact that it is the right idea strategically does not mean that it is correct in every case, and here it is indeed very dangerous, but it is still the best chance. 20 ... Rg8? fails completely after 21 Bd3 f5 22 Bxf5 Qf7 23 Re6.

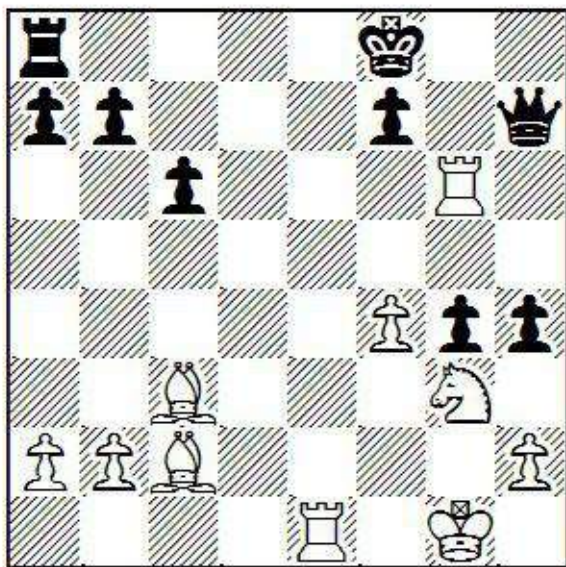
21 Bb3 Qg6?

The wrong retreat. 21 ... Qh7! is not a happy move, but it keeps Black alive.

22 Rd2!

Now the threat of 23 Bc2 is extremely difficult to meet.

22 ... g4 23 f4! Qh7 24 Bc2 Rg6 25 Bc3 h5 26 Rxd6 h4 27 Rxc6



White's performance has been absolutely stunning. Of course, it is not only the player with the queen who is likely to make mistakes, especially when the position becomes lopsided, but you wouldn't know that from this game!

27 ... fxg6 28 Bb4+ Kg8 29 Bb3+ Kg7 30 Re7+ Kh6 31 Rxh7+ Kxh7 32 Ne4 Kh6 33 Nf6 g3 34 hxg3 hxg3 35 Kg2 a5 36 Bc3 a4 37 Bc2 b5 38 Ng4+ Kh5 39 Kxc3 g5 40 Nf6+ Kh6 41 Ng4+ Kh5 42 f5 c5 43 Bg7 1-0

After seeing that carnage (and I could show you plenty more like it), you might wonder why anyone would play the black pieces here. I think Black can be successful, if only by keeping in mind the rule which applies to nearly all material imbalances: *The player with fewer pieces must target the enemy pawns through captures and trades.*

The goal is to sow chaos in the enemy camp by removing the support points from the opposing pieces. It is often worth a material or positional sacrifice in order to do this, and the opponent certainly may have the appearance of counterplay, but do not forget that it is the player with more pieces who needs to worry about the position getting “out of control”.

Since we now have an idea how to approach it, why should we not be attracted to a position where we have two centre pawns and the opponent has none, even if it contains a few other negative features? Two extra pawns means that it is not hard to give one up for the right price; and Black’s mass of pawns is well suited to exclude White’s knights from the battle.

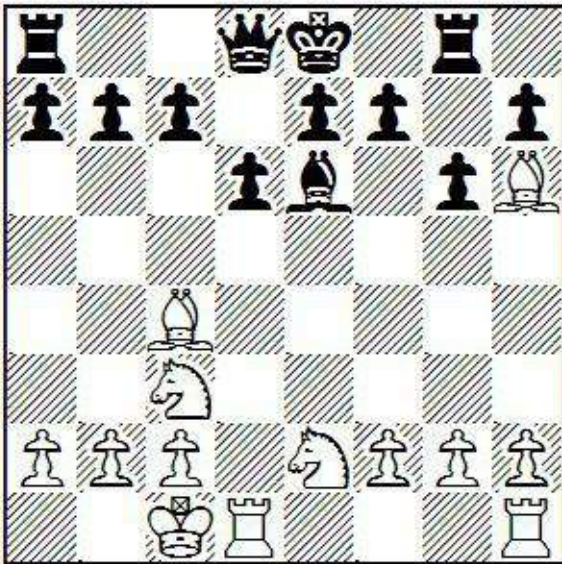
Game 11

M.Harkins-S.Mackenzie

Correspondence 1995

Modern Defence

1 e4 d6 2 d4 Nf6 3 Nc3 g6 4 Bc4 Bg7 5 Qe2 Nc6 6 e5 Nxd4 7 exf6 Nxe2 8 fxg7 Rg8 9 Ngxe2 Rxc7 10 Bh6 Rg8 11 0-0-0 Be6!



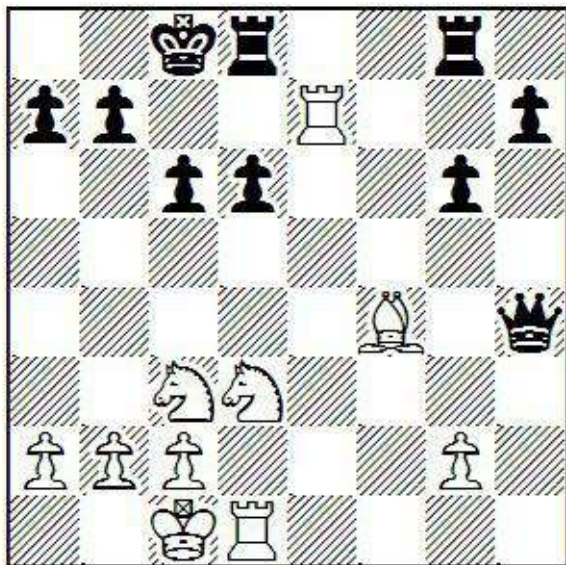
All other things being equal, Black would prefer not to trade off his last minor piece, but he needs to develop one way or another, and the extra e-pawn clogs up the centre, making his king much safer. In any case, White’s bishop pair did have some extra value.

12 Bxe6 fxe6 13 h4 c6!

Much stronger than 13 ... Qd7 14 Rhe1 0-0-0 15 Nf4! e5 16 Rxe5 dxe5?! (16 ... Qg4!? is a better try, as in D.Genocchio-P.Vezzosi, Italian Championship, Montecatini Terme 2002) 17 Rxd7 Rxd7 18 Nd3 with a long and unpleasant endgame ahead for Black.

14 Nf4 e5 15 Ne6?

Correct was 15 Nd3 Qa5 16 Rhe1 0-0-0 17 f4 exf4 18 Rxe7 Qh5 19 Bxf4 Qxh4.



What's going on here? Pawns are being traded and things are getting a bit out of control. That's easy - it's good for Black! The fact that Black has lost a pawn is not the critical factor in the position. Note that White's knights have not found a way to enter the game.

15 ... Qa5?

Missing 15 ... Qc8! 16 Ng5 Qg4!, which gives Black what he wants immediately: a chance to harass White's loose pieces and pawns. The g-pawn is very tasty and will greatly disrupt White's position, if it falls. I think these manoeuvres are hard to spot because we learn early on in our chess careers that it's bad policy to run around with our queen to grab little bits of material. Well, rules have many exceptions, and this is one situation where we need to think in a completely different way. After all, Black does not have a large army to deploy, so development is not time-consuming. Here 17 f3 Qh5 (17 ... Qxg2 is fine too) 18 Nf7 g5! wins for Black (not 18 ... Kxf7??, as 19 Bg5! and 20 g4 traps the queen).

The text move is not nearly as good, though it is instructive in its own way.

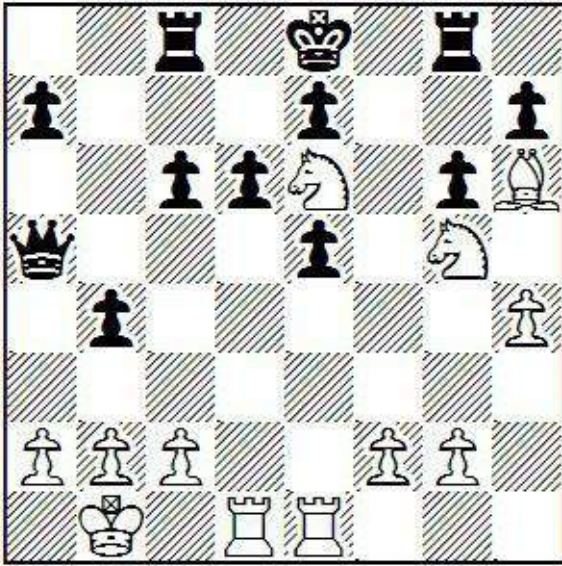
16 Rhe1 b5?!

Black's pawns should advance, but first he must prepare to evacuate his king from the centre: 16 ... Kd7! 17 Ng5 Rae8 and Black is on track.

17 Kb1 b4! 18 Ne4 Rc8

This is too passive. *Houdini* likes the odd manoeuvre 18 ... Rb8, followed by 19 ... Rb5, from where it supports Black's centre, discouraging White's sacrifices and/or pawn breaks. This makes sense, as rooks need to be willing to act on both files and ranks to be effective.

19 N4g5?!

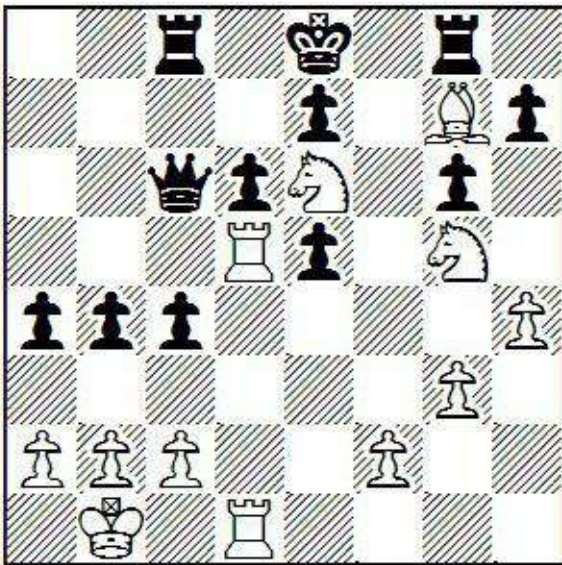


On this and on almost every move for the rest of the game, White should play f2-f4, trying to get at Black's king. The fact that this move is available for White mars an otherwise nearly model game by Black.

19 ... Qb5 20 Rd3 a5! 21 g3 c5! 22 Rd5 a4!

Black's pawns take on the roles of the minor pieces that he doesn't have: as shock troops and attackers. This is one of the hallmarks of effective play by the queen.

23 Bg7 Qc6 24 Red1 c4!



Black has reached his ideal position and is now winning. White will only be able to liquidate part of the attacking pawn wave, and at the cost of his king protection.

25 c3 bxc3 26 bxc3 Qb6+ 27 Kc1 Qxf2

Yum! By this point all moves win, but grabbing the f-pawn is the "principled" choice.

28 Bxe5 h6 29 Bg7 0-1

A little joke at the end? White resigns without seeing his opponent's reply.

Earlier I said that one of the goals for the player with the queen (or major pieces) is to "induce chaos". What exactly does that mean? Basically, it means creating positions where many captures and

threats are possible. Who will come out on top? Why, the player with the smaller, more manoeuvrable army, the one that presents fewer targets for the opponent; i.e. the one with the queen.

Game 12

J.G.Gallagher-J.Emms

Nottingham 1987

Pirc Defence

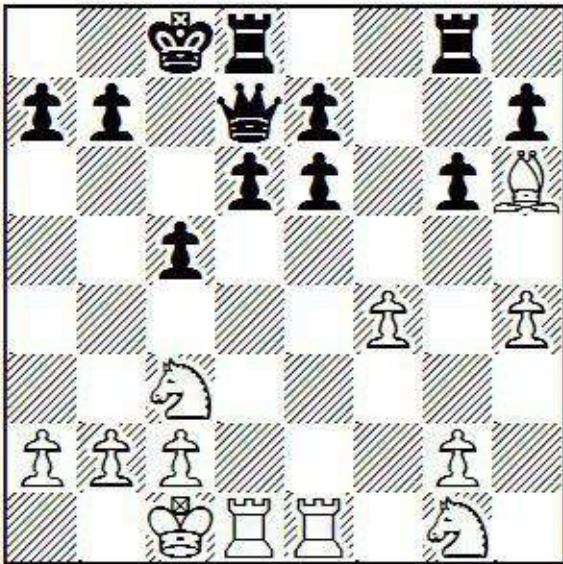
**1 e4 d6 2 d4 Nf6 3 Nc3 g6 4 Bc4 Bg7 5 Qe2 Nc6 6 e5 Nxd4 7 exf6 Nxe2 8 fxg7 Rg8 9 Ngxe2 Rxc7
10 Bh6 Rg8 11 0-0-0 Be6! 12 Bxe6 fxe6 13 h4 Qd7**

I still don't think this is quite correct, but given the way the game continued, I don't doubt that Emms intended to play 14 Rhe1 0-0-0 15 Nf4! e5 16 Rxe5 Qg4, as in Genocchio-Vezzosi.

14 Rhe1 0-0-0 15 f4 c5!

Black must prevent Nd4.

16 Ng1



16 ... e5!?

Not surprisingly, the computer doubts this sacrifice; but when the board catches fire, the person with the most queens wins! An interesting (and conceptually similar) idea of *Houdini's* is 16 ... g5 17 Bxg5 h6 18 Bxh6 Rxc7, pitching a pawn to open up the position and activate one of Black's rooks.

17 Nd5 Kb8 18 fxe5 Qa4!

Suddenly Mrs. Q steps out the door to scold all the naughty children in her backyard.

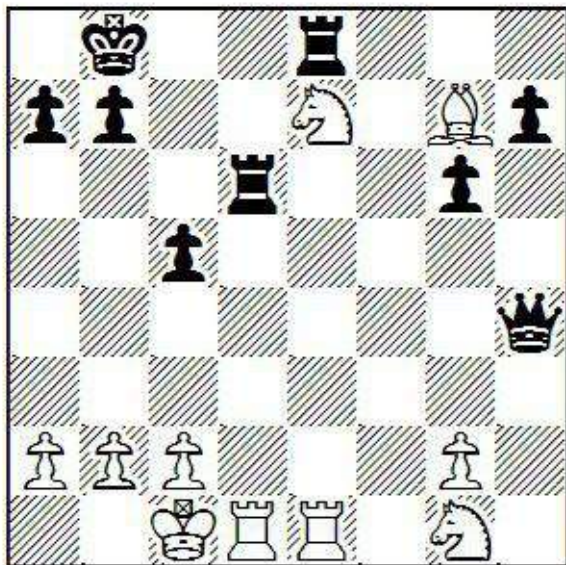
19 Nxe7 Rge8 20 exd6 Qxh4

Here 20 ... Qxa2 21 Bf4 Ka8 is probably better. The computer says it's equal, and can prove it analytically, but I like Black's chances.

21 Bg7??

Instead, 21 Bd2! Ka8 22 Nf3 holds, and even leads to some advantage for White (with accurate play, of course). A sceptic might see that and dismiss Black's play, noting that it could or should have failed. I reject the notion that White's blunder was lucky for Black - I think it was part of Black's big-picture, capital-C Calculation. Importantly, White would still have plenty of problems to solve, even after 21 Bd2!.

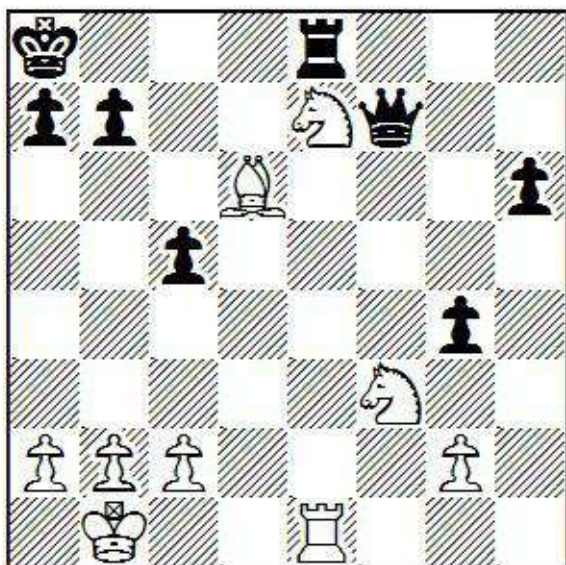
21 ... Rxd6!



22 Nf3

Obviously White can't play 22 Rxd6 Qxe1+; while 22 Nc6+ fails to 22 ... Kc7!!, when 23 Rxe8 Qf4+ mates in a few. However, even after the text, White has too many loose pieces lying around to survive. Black finds a lovely sequence to finish the game.

22 ... Rxd1+ 23 Kxd1 Rd8+ 24 Kc1 Qf4+ 25 Kb1 Qf7 26 Bh6 Re8 27 Bg5 h6 28 Bh4 g5 29 Bg3+ Ka8 30 Bd6 g4



31 Nh4

31 Ne5 is more stubborn, but then 31 ... Qf2 32 Nd3 Qxg2 leaves White's army all tied up with no way to stop Black's passed pawns.

31 ... Qf6 32 Nh5 Qxf5 33 b4 Qf2 34 Rd1 Qe2 0-1

Before the chapter ends, I want to mention that material imbalance is a relative thing. The positions we looked at were extremely imbalanced, but even as simple an imbalance as knight vs. bishop, while relatively tame, can give a player something to work with - it might not be much, but it's much better than nothing. Also, I want to state explicitly that imbalances do not need to be inherently favourable in order to provide practical chances.

Chapter Four

Harassment

From a practical standpoint, it may be difficult for your opponent to formulate plans and coordinate his pieces when he doesn't know where they are going to be from move to move. For this reason, it is occasionally useful to harass opposing pieces, even with apparently trivial one-move threats. This is annoying to your opponent and may leave him a little unsettled, until he is able to resume playing without interference. Even then it may take him a while to get his bearings in a new position.

Of course, if you can drive your opponent's pieces to inferior squares, you should be happy to do so, regardless of how it may affect your opponent's thinking. On the other hand, if you drive your opponent's pieces to more active squares, that will probably not be disturbing to him at all. What I am talking about here is relatively neutral repositionings of your opponents' pieces that may force him to rethink and re-evaluate. Perhaps the positional ideas he was considering are no longer valid and he has to adjust to a new reality. More likely certain tactics have become important while others have disappeared. This discussion will be much more interesting with examples:

Game 13

A.Sherzer-R.Blumenfeld

New York 1991

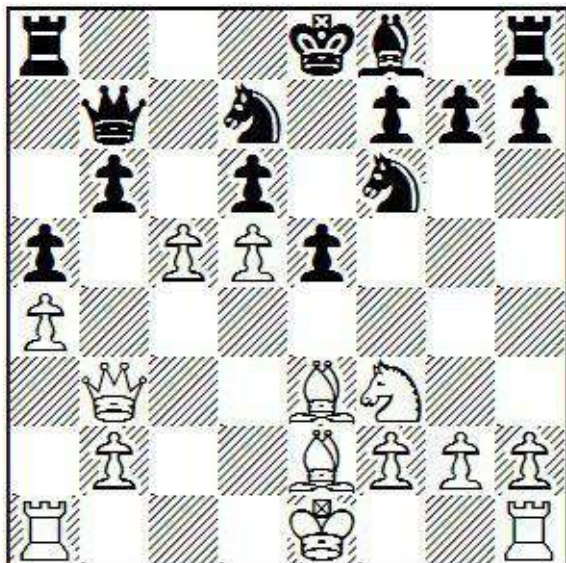
Sicilian Defence

A game about harassment should perhaps have fourteen harassing moves that wear the opponent down (in fact, that's what happens next game), but it is more typical for there to be just a few such moves, which turn out to be effective, as here.

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 a6 6 Be3 e5 7 Nf3 Qc7 8 a4 b6 9 Be2 Bb7 10 Nd5 Bxd5?!

Even though Black's b7-bishop is not active, it is still costly to surrender the bishop pair, especially while Black still has his "knight pair".

11 exd5 Qb7 12 c4 a5 13 Qb3 Nbd7 14 c5!?



Sherzer devises a radical method to activate his unopposed light-squared bishop. The computer does not entirely agree with this, but it presents Black with considerable difficulties. It is a nettlesome move.

14 ... dxc5 15 Bb5 Qc7

White threatens both 16 Bc6 and 16 Nxe5, so Black's move seems forced. However, he could have solved most of his problems with 15 ... c4 16 Qxc4 Bb4+ 17 Bd2 Bxd2+ 18 Nxd2 Rc8.

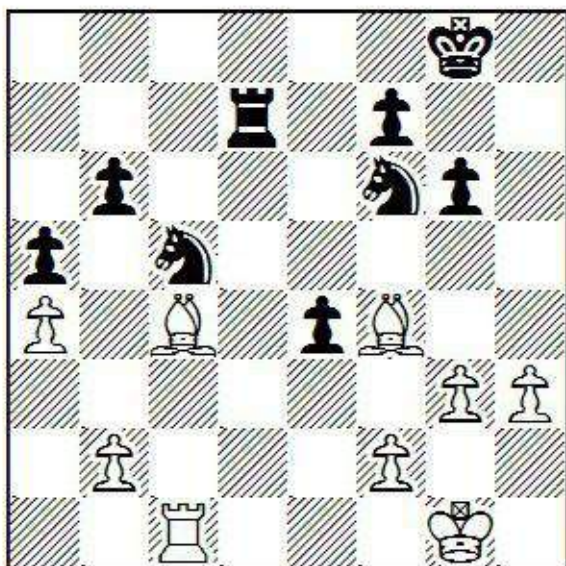
16 Ng5 c4

We certainly are seeing a lot of clearance sacrifices this game! But that is not really what we are here to talk about. Incidentally, 17 d6!? is interesting too.

17 Bxc4 Bd6 18 0-0 h6 19 Nf3 0-0 20 Nh4 e4 21 h3 Nc5 22 Qb5 Rfd8 23 Rfd1 Rab8 24 Rac1 Bf8 25 g3 Qd7 26 Qxd7 Rxd7 27 Nf5 Rbd8 28 d6! g6

Not 28 ... Bxd6?, since 29 Bb5 gains material.

29 Nxh6+ Bxh6 30 Bxh6 Rxd6 31 Rxd6 Rxd6 32 Bf4 Rd7



At last we have reached the critical position, at least as it relates to this discussion. With two bishops raking the board, White must be better, but it is not clear how to make progress. So Sherzer embarks on a "plan" of harassment that makes it difficult for Black to get his bearings.

33 Bb5!

As far as our silicon friend is concerned, 33 Be3 is just as good, but it is not at all irritating and allows Black to proceed with the game.

33 ... Rd5

The only good reply, but now the rook is subject to further attack from either 34 Bc6 or 34 Bc4. By the way, is it obvious that 34 Bc6 is not strong? Black was forced to calculate this harassing move and come to the correct decision before playing 33 ... Rd5. White did not need to do these calculations unless he felt like it.

34 Bc4 Rd7

Black is forced to repeat, but White is not. Bluffing a repetition as Sherzer did here is a kind of harassment, and it enhances Black's feeling that he is not in control of the game. Most strong players who have anything to say on the subject recommend always using repetitions when available. I think you have to be on the receiving end of this treatment to understand how annoying it is. I agree wholeheartedly with the use of repetitions as harassment.

35 Be5 Nd5?

35 ... Ne8 is best, but nobody likes to play such moves. Maybe Black would have played 35 ... Nd5? anyway, though it is also possible that Black centralized his knight because he was "tired of being pushed around" by White and his bishops.

Why am I spending so much time talking about how certain moves make the opponent *feel*? Because even the most robot-like players get feedback from their emotions when making decisions. Some moves "feel" right and some moves "feel" wrong. How many players do you suppose try to get by without intuition (which is a preconscious feeling trying to push its way into our conscious mind)? That many? Are you sure? Well, whoever these guys are, they can't be very good. As imperfect as intuition is, it is essential to strong play. A lot of what we talk about in this book comes down to reaching positions where the opponent's intuition has no value or is counterproductive. Much of the rest has to do with short-circuiting the opponent's intuition by causing feelings that wind up impacting his decision-making, even when they really shouldn't.

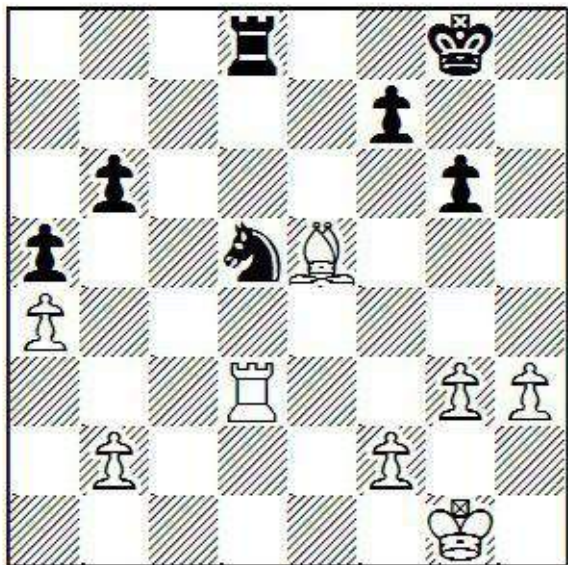
36 Bb5

This is not a harassing move as I have defined it, because it is a genuinely strong move that forces Black's rook to a poor square. Nonetheless, it was set up by the previous harassment. Moreover, since Black has survived Bb5 twice already, perhaps he got complacent concerning the move. *It is extremely difficult to keep recalculating similar but slightly different variations every turn.*

36 ... Rd8

After 36 ... Ra7 37 Bd6 Ne6 38 Rd1 Nb4 39 Be5 Kf8 40 Rd6 Rb7 41 Bf6, Black is very tied down - a stark contrast to White's extremely active pieces. It is not worth the time it would take to prove, but Black is lost.

37 Rd1 Nd3 38 Bxd3 exd3 39 Rxd3



Black has sacrificed a pawn to relieve White of his bishop pair. Naturally, this is not correct, but the bishops were so much “in Black’s face”, it may have *felt* like the lesser evil. I think it was the harassment that led directly to this error in judgment.

39 ... Rd7 40 h4 f6 41 Bf4 Kf7 42 Be3 Ke6 43 Rb3 Rb7 44 Bd4 Kd6 45 Kg2 Kc6 46 Rf3 Rf7 47 g4 Kd6 48 g5 f5 49 h5 f4 50 h6 Ke6 51 Bg7 1-0

Game 14

A.Sherzer-I.Polovodin

Phildadelphia 1991

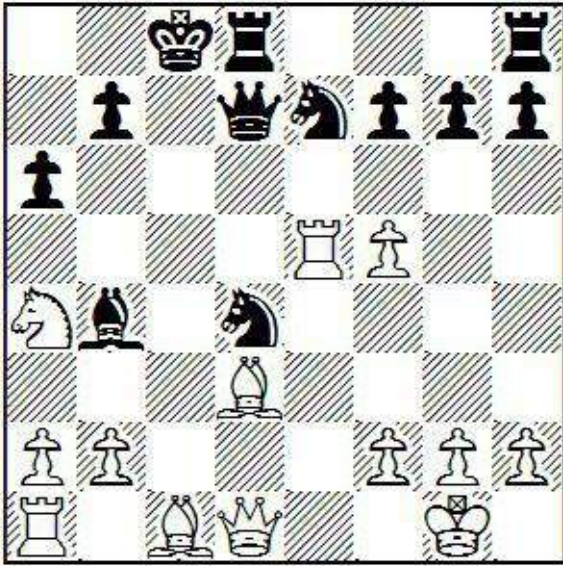
Sicilian Defence

Last game we saw two bishops harassing a rook. In this wonderful game the object of harassment is the king, which gets no rest. The individual threats are for the most part simple to deal with, but also tedious, annoying, and ultimately extremely nettlesome.

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 a6 3 c4 Nc6 4 d4 cxd4 5 Nxd4 e5 6 Nf5 d5 7 cxd5 Bxf5 8 exf5 Nd4 9 Nc3 Bb4

9 ... Ne7!? is an option here.

10 Bd3 Qxd5 11 0-0 Qd7 12 Re1 0-0-0 13 Rxe5 Ne7 14 Na4*



I'm putting an asterisk next to all White's annoying one-move threats. I should mention that, according to *Stockfish*, the immediate 14 Bf4 is much stronger.

14 ... Kb8 15 Bf4* Ka7

Incidentally, Black cannot halt the harassment with 15 ... Bd6 because of 16 Be4!, intending 16 ... Bxe5 17 Bxe5+ Ka7 18 Nc5 Qc8 19 Bxd4 and wins.

16 Be3*

This time the threats are a little more subtle, but it is still clear that Black cannot afford to let White maintain the pin.

16 ... Kb8 17 Bf4*

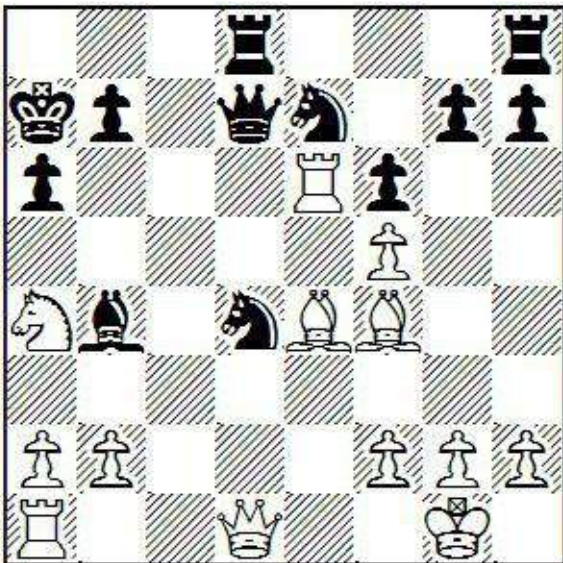
I can already imagine Black yelling in frustration: "Leave me the @\$%& alone!"

17 ... Ka7 18 Be4

Having harassed Black's king as much as possible on the dark squares, White prepares to exert pressure on the light squares as well, should it later try to hide on a8.

18 ... f6 19 Re6?!

Very creative - and it works great if, as in the game, Black munches the rook.



19 ... Nxe6?!

This is one of many examples of both players suffering from the same misconception. If you are diligent in your calculations, you are likely to survive even if there is a hole in your analysis. 19 ... Nxf5! 20 Rb6 looks like curtains for Black, but he has a resource in 20 ... Rhe8!, with the idea 21 Rxb7+ Qxb7 22 Bxb7 Ne2+, winning back the queen and smelling like a rose.

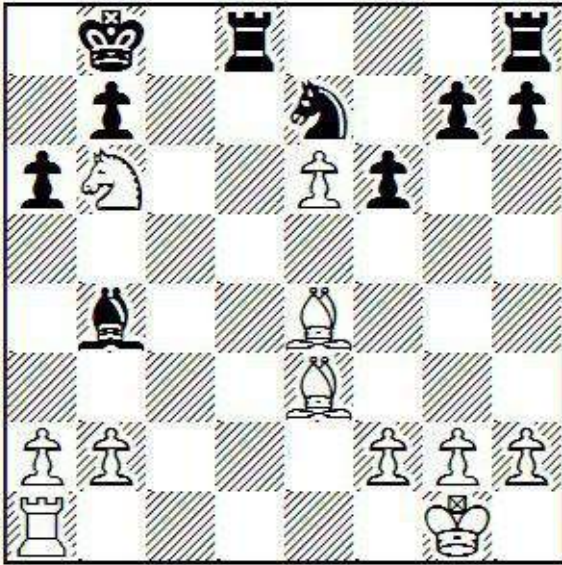
20 Qxd7

Sacrifice and then trade queens? One of the reasons Sherzer was so dangerous in the endgame is that he understood that endgames can be just as tactical as any other phase of the game, and include both deep combinations and brutal attacks against the king.

20 ... Rxd7 21 fxe6 Rdd8

If we take into account the bishop pair and the redundancy factor of Black's rooks (see Chapter Six), White is not behind material - we might even consider him slightly ahead. And the harassment rages on.

22 Be3+* Kb8 23 Nb6*



White's minor pieces are incredibly annoying. Black should be looking for an opportunity to sacrifice a rook for any piece plus the e6-pawn.

23 ... Nc8?!

All things considered, Black has defended very well up until this point, but he quite understandably starts wearing down around here.

24 Nd7+* Ka8

The black king can't be happy trapped in the corner, but the alternative is far worse: 24 ... Kc7 actually gets checkmated after 25 Bf4+ Nd6 26 Rc1+ etc.

25 Rc1 Nd6 26 Bd5 Ba5

The point of this retreat is that White is threatening to trap this piece with 27 a3 Ba5 28 b4.

27 Rc5*

White has run out of harassing moves against Black's king, so he starts giving Black's bishop a hard time.

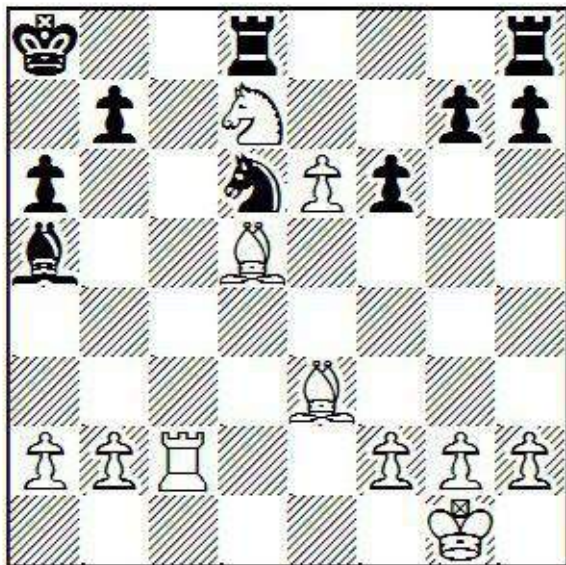
27 ... Bb4 28 Rc1* Ba5 29 Rc5*

Bluffing a repetition, as in the previous game. This is standard operating procedure.

29 ... Bb4 30 Rc2*

Still threatening a2-a3 and b2-b4.

30 ... Ba5



“Please, make it stop!!”

31 b4!* Bxb4 32 Rb2* Ba5

More challenging is 32 ... a5, though Black should still lose after 33 a3! Bxa3 34 Rb6! (threatening 35 Ra6 mate) 34 ... Rxd7 35 exd7 Rd8 36 Ra6+ Kb8 37 Rxa5 Bb4 38 Ra4 Bc3 39 Ra3 Bb4 40 Rb3 Ba5 41 Bf4 Rxd7 42 Bc6 Kc7 43 Bxd7 Kxd7 44 Bxd6 Kxd6 45 Rxb7.

33 Bc5* Rc8 34 g3 Rxc5 35 Nxc5 Ka7 36 Nxb7 Bc3 37 Nxd6 Bxb2 38 e7 1-0

Overall, a very strong game by White, based largely on a relentless campaign of harassment.

Chapter Five

The Unexpected

“Ultimately, what separates a winner from a loser at the grandmaster level is the willingness to do the unthinkable. A brilliant strategy is, certainly, a matter of intelligence, but intelligence without audaciousness is not enough. Given the opportunity, I must have the guts to explode the game, to up-end my opponent’s thinking and, in doing so, unnerve him. So it is in business: One does not succeed by sticking to convention. When your opponent can easily anticipate every move you make, your strategy deteriorates and becomes commoditized.” - Garry Kasparov

A great deal has been written about surprise in the opening, both here and in other books, so I will not be discussing that specifically in this chapter. But unexpected moves can happen at any point in a game.

What is so great about unexpected moves? First of all, they attack the nerves of the opponent. It is much more pleasant to play against predicted moves than unexpected moves. There can be a moment of panic, as in “what did I miss?” Even if the move played is not stronger than the one anticipated, the opponent can experience a crisis of confidence, such as: “I did not even consider that. What if I overlook a stronger move next time?” After a few such psychological blows in a game (or over a series of games) your opponent is likely to adjust his thinking to accommodate your style of play. This will almost always be to his detriment. If he fears your non-standard moves, he will overburden his thought process trying to predict them. If he does not fear your deviations, he may give up trying to predict you and start to play on “general principles”, rather than concrete calculation. Both of these adjustments will lower his standard of play.

The 1986 book, *Budapest Gambit*, by Otto Borik contains a remarkable game that clearly illustrates the power of the unexpected:

Game 15

D.Laszlo-L.Alfoldy

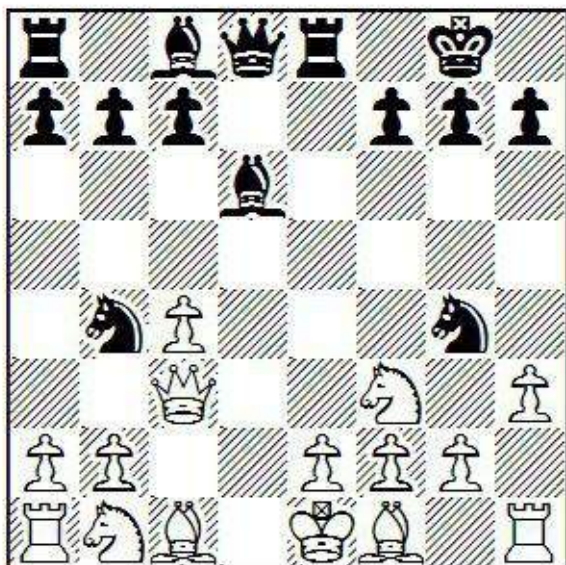
Budapest 1933

Budapest Gambit

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e5 3 dxe5 Ng4 4 Qd4?! d6 5 exd6 Bxd6 6 Nf3 0-0 7 h3?!

The simplest way for White to survive is 7 e3 Nc6 8 Qd1, although Black has more than enough compensation for the pawn.

7 ... Nc6 8 Qe4? Re8 9 Qc2 Nb4 10 Qc3



To be honest, if I were White, I would be fully expecting to die here regardless of what my calculations had told me, and there are indeed several ways for Black to win. Instead, Black “decides to win brilliantly”.

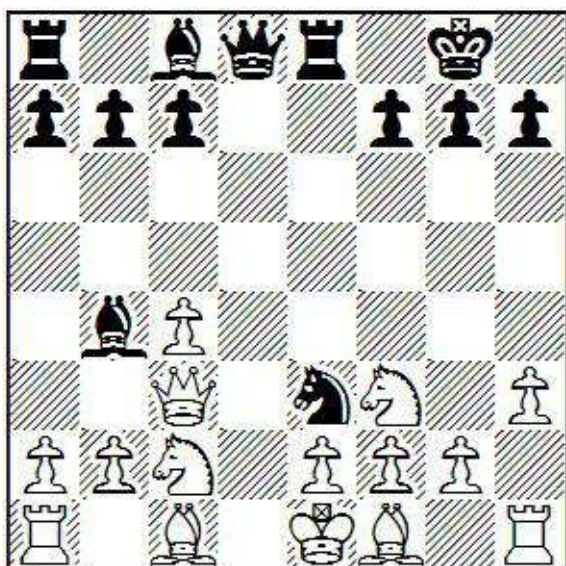
10 ... Ne3?

The most powerful continuation is 10 ... Bf5 11 hxg4 Nd3+ 12 Kd2 Bf4+ 13 e3 Nxf2+ 14 Ke2 Nxc4, followed by ... Nxe3 and wins.

11 Na3 Nbc2+

This undeniably consistent move is not best either. Instead, 11 ... Be5 12 Qd2 Qxd2+ 13 Kxd2 Nxf1+ 14 Rxf1 Bf6 is still very good for Black.

12 Nxc2 Bb4 0-1!



Otto Borik’s comment: “The great bluff has worked. Clearly demoralized by a series of unexpected moves, White resigns. He could still have fought on with 13 Nxe3 Bxc3+ 14 bxc3.” - an understatement. Not only could White have fought on, I think many modern players would prefer White’s position.

So what was so demoralizing for White? He simply became convinced that Black was seeing everything and he was seeing nothing. He appears to have made no attempt to evaluate the resulting

position. You might wonder, what good is it to adopt a strategy that depends on this level of incompetence from the opponent? Furthermore, you might say (and I would agree) that these days players are a little tougher - they are both harder to surprise and more resilient in the face of difficulties. But that does not mean they can't become shell-shocked or demoralized.

If we fill our thoughts during study and play only with what *should* work against perfect play, we are thinking of chess only as an academic exercise, and we are out of touch with chess as a competitive endeavour. The reality is that Alfoldy won this chess game by playing moves that his opponent did not realize were possible.

Any look through Kasparov's famous games finds countless examples of him playing impossible-looking moves successfully. In fact, many of them are more than just impossible-looking, they are *actually* impossible, at least in theory. In other words, they are speculative sacrifices of the type that Tal was famous for, which depend for their success on the errors of the opponent and ultimately don't hold up under analysis. One might guess that Kasparov should be more eager to play such moves against weaker players, but there are plenty of examples of speculative sacrifices against Karpov and other elite players.

One could do worse than to learn from Garry Kasparov. He is not as famous as a risk-taker as, for instance, Mikhail Tal, but he realized that he would not become World Champion without taking some chances. What kind of chances is a world championship contender willing to take, and what kinds of risks are actually likely to pay off against a reigning World Champion like Karpov? Let's see. (When I present Kasparov's opinions, they are based on his comments on the DVD *Right of Passage*.)

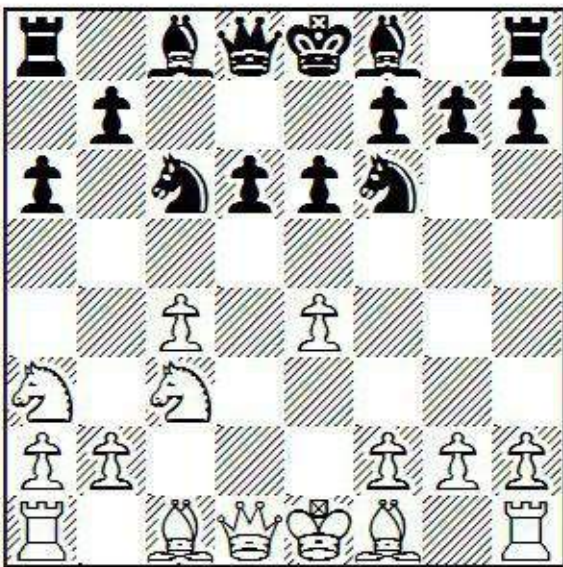
Game 16

A.Karpov-G.Kasparov

World Championship (16th matchgame), Moscow 1985

Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nc6 5 Nb5 d6 6 c4 Nf6 7 N1c3 a6 8 Na3

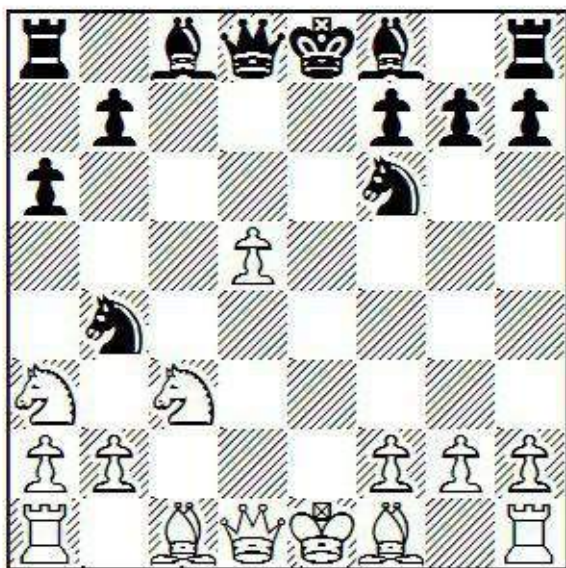


Karpov sets up a "Maróczy Bind", taking measures against ... b7-b5 and especially ... d6-d5. Kasparov says that this position is objectively equal, but is the type of position that Karpov enjoys and plays well. He fails to remind us that he experienced this first hand in the 31st game of their first world championship match in 1984, losing brutally to Karpov in this variation. It is obvious he would not have entered this line again without a plan to dramatically change the nature of the struggle.

8 ... d5!

Kasparov plays an “impossible” move. Black spends a tempo to sacrifice a pawn, leaving himself without any pawns in the centre. At the same time, this freeing move, releasing the caged bishops, is what Black would most like to play if it were possible, so it has a certain logic to it. But what about soundness? According to my database, Black is already a slight statistical favourite with the “normal” moves, whereas this sacrifice tips the scales back in White’s favour. My computer engine agrees this is a serious inaccuracy, handing White about three tenths of a pawn in equity. Can it make sense to expect to recover this equity against the best player in the world? To answer this definitively is impossible, since it would require running a controlled experiment involving, among other things, a working time machine. However, we know that Kasparov’s gamble worked, and we can further guess that it is worth paying close attention to Kasparov’s judgment about chess matters.

9 cxd5 exd5 10 exd5 Nb4



How surprised is Karpov at this point? Less than he might be, since this position was also reached in the twelfth game. He and his team have had almost two weeks to prepare for Kasparov’s idea, even if they might have thought it unlikely Kasparov would repeat such an audacious gambit. In game twelve, Karpov played 11 Bc4 and quickly reached a dull, equal middlegame following 11 ... Bg4! 12 Be2 (12 f3 may have been a better try “objectively”, but Karpov would not play such a move, and Kasparov would have been happy to reach this type of position) 12 ... Bxe2 13 Qxe2+ Qe7 14 Be3 Nbx d5 and was soon agreed drawn.

11 Be2

This was Karpov’s improvement, offering the pawn back. Now Kasparov is faced with a dilemma: recover the pawn and allow a slight advantage for White, or refuse the pawn to retain the complications even though Black does not really have enough for it. Except it’s not really a dilemma. The point of 8 ... d5 was to draw Karpov into complications. It would make no sense to allow him an easy escape to a simple, riskless position. Kasparov also believed that, given enough opportunities, Karpov would eventually attempt to keep the extra pawn, even if it was not the right decision. Therefore, Kasparov’s plan was deeper and more specific than “I’ll force a strange position and Karpov will mess up.” He had an idea of the type of error Karpov was likely to commit, and had even taken into consideration specific moves that he thought were probable.

11 ... Bc5!? 12 0-0?!

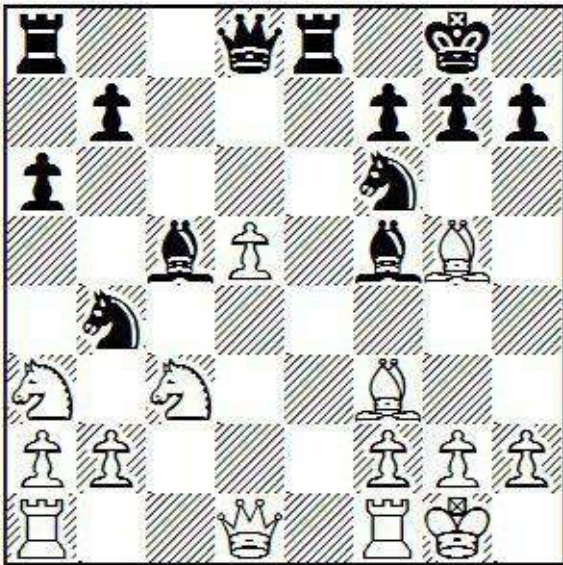
Kasparov’s last was even riskier than the original gambit since, had White found 12 Be3! Bxe3 13

Qa4+ Bd7 14 Qxb4, Black would have needed to bail out into a worse endgame with 14 ... Qb6 15 Qxb6 Bxb6. Kasparov says that he would have held the position, but obviously he cannot know this for sure, and it would have represented a failure of his opening strategy, being forced into a defensive role, and allowing Karpov a position where he could be fully expected to play at his best. It is even possible that the whole match could have hinged upon Karpov's failure to play 12 Be3. Then again, Kasparov would have had his opportunity to adjust to a different result, presumably uncorking other risky moves in an attempt to gamble more successfully.

12 ... 0-0 13 Bf3?!

Karpov takes another step down a dangerous path, announcing his intention to hold the pawn, at the cost of weakening the d3-square in the process.

13 ... Bf5 14 Bg5 Re8



15 Qd2?!

According to Kasparov, this is an excellent opportunity for White to return the pawn and reach a normal position after 15 d6!.

Alternatively, 15 Nc4 does not look playable but it is, according to the computer engines. 15 ... Bd3 is met by 16 Ne3! Bxf1 17 Kxf1, when White even has some advantage because he has rescued his a3-knight from obscurity and is threatening to win Black's knight on b4, which currently has no escape squares. This goes to show you that, even at the very top level, your opponent is likely to agree with your misconceptions.

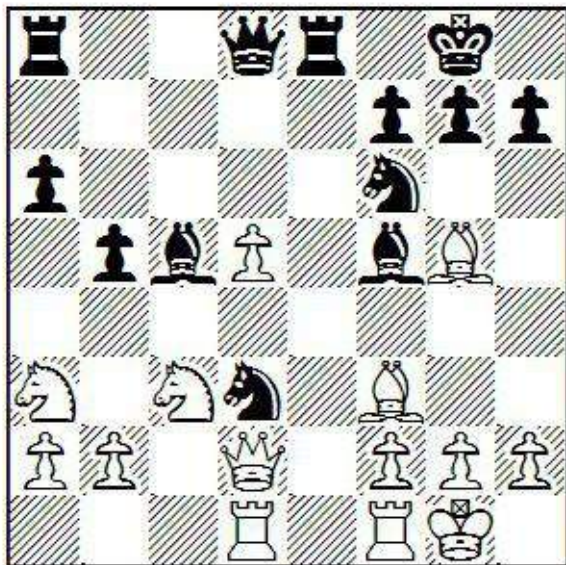
15 ... b5!

The a3-knight never re-enters the game.

16 Rad1?!

And this is the very last good chance for 16 d6!.

16 ... Nd3



The knight is untouchable, as the rest of the game proves. The defending World Champion has committed four inaccuracies in six moves after accepting the gambit pawn. Kasparov's assessment of the nettlesomeness of 8 ... d5 has been fully justified. With Kasparov sitting behind the black pieces, the game is already decided.

17 Nab1 h6 18 Bh4 b4 19 Na4 Bd6 20 Bg3 Rc8 21 b3 g5 22 Bxd6 Qxd6 23 g3 Nd7 24 Bg2 Qf6 25 a3 a5 26 axb4 axb4 27 Qa2 Bg6 28 d6 g4 29 Qd2 Kg7 30 f3 Qxd6 31 fxc4 Qd4+ 32 Kh1 Nf6 33 Rf4 Ne4 34 Qxd3 Nf2+ 35 Rxf2 Bxd3 36 Rfd2 Qe3 37 Rxd3 Rc1 38 Nb2 Qf2 39 Nd2 Rxd1+ 40 Nxd1 Re1+ 0-1

One of the most common ways to play an unexpected move (if it is possible to make such an oxymoronic statement) is to take the king for a little walk. Cross-the-board king walks have been written about occasionally, and they are very dramatic, but it is really the *first* king move that is the shocker - after it has moved once or twice, I'd have to think the surprise has worn off. In the following game I am playing Jay Bonin, a very experienced and creative IM, also known for some offbeat openings. He is not easy to shock.

Game 17

J.Bonin-J.Schuyler

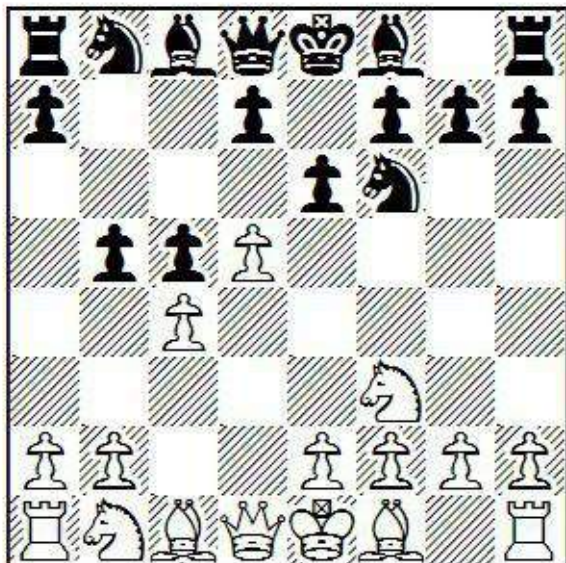
New York 1989

Blumenfeld Gambit

1 Nf3 Nf6 2 d4 c5! 3 d5 e6

In retrospect, my play from 1989 was pretty outlandish. My main goal in the opening was to get my opponent into a bizarre or unfamiliar position. I spent no effort worrying whether I myself would be able to get my bearings, and I wound up hoist with my own petard often enough, but I did generate some upsets and certainly decisive results. Here I was headed for a Blumenfeld Gambit, which I knew just a little about. Optimistically, I assumed my opponent would know even less. And if my opponent had crossed this plan with 4 Nc3, I would have been completely on my own, making things up starting from move four.

4 c4 b5!



The punctuation has more to do with how I felt about playing the move than its actual merits. If you're going to play the Blumenfeld, you should be excited about it. I should point out that the Blumenfeld's reputation at that time was even worse than it is now.

5 Bg5 exd5 6 cxd5 Qa5+ 7 Nc3 Ne4

This position was somewhat familiar to me. Part of the reason it appealed is Black's ability to continue to make weird anti-positional moves such as ... f7-f6.

8 Qd3 Nxc3?!

I had reached this position more than once, not realizing it was completely wrong according to theory. Nobody decent has ever played this move. Instead, 8 ... Nxc3 9 Nxc3 Be7 is equal in practice, and also according to my computer. One interesting variation is 10 d6? Bxc3 11 Qe4+ Kd8 12 Qxa8 Nc6 13 e3 Bf6 14 0-0-0 Bxc3 15 bxc3 Qxc3+ 16 Kb1 Re8 with a very strong (probably winning) initiative for Black.

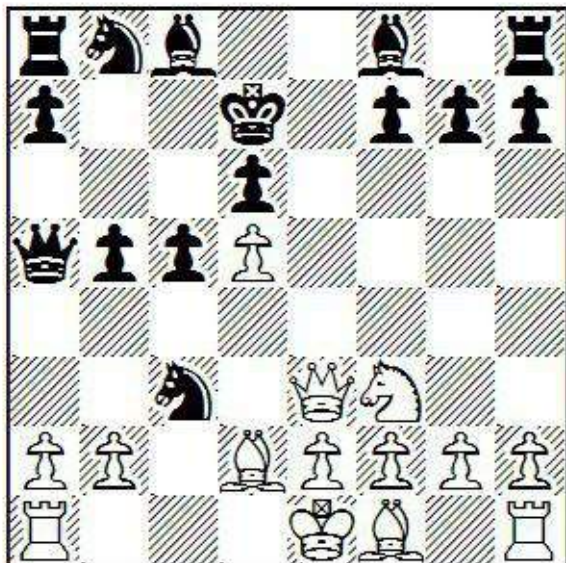
9 Bd2

On 9 bxc3, I was in fact planning 9 ... f6 10 Qe3+ Kf7 with an exciting, double-edged game. But White does not have to play 10 Qe3+ here; after simply 10 Bd2, he has a large advantage. Such are the pitfalls of home analysis. The good news is that, if you try hard to analyse and still suffer from blindness in certain areas, there is a good chance your opponent will suffer from the same delusions. I myself was surprised by the game move, which I had never considered, but I still managed to figure out how to avoid castling!

9 ... d6 10 Qe3+

This forces me to move my king, since 10 ... Be7 11 Bxc3 b4 12 Bxc3 is horrible for Black.

10 ... Kd7



Objectively, this position cannot be recommended for Black, but it is not so easy for White to play. The way I figured it, his queen is awful on e3. The fact that it blocks the e-pawn makes it very difficult for White to act on the queenside, which is where the action should be taking place.

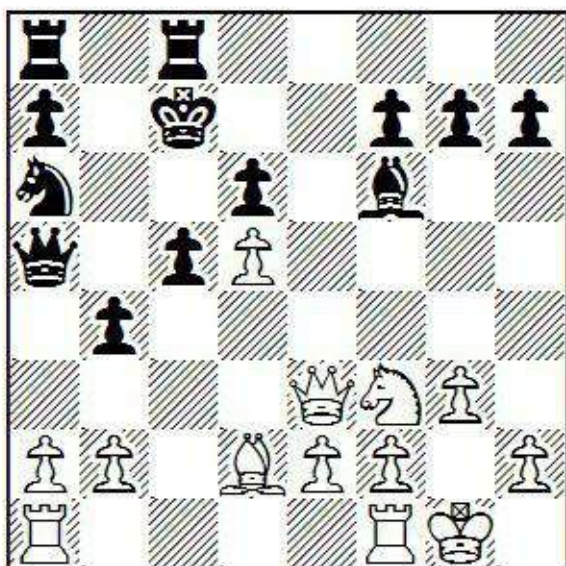
11 Bxc3

11 Ng5 (another move I'd overlooked) is also very interesting.

11 ... b4 12 Bd2 Be7 13 g3 Bf6 14 Bh3+?

This time 14 Ng5 makes life very difficult for Black.

14 ... Kc7 15 Bxc8 Rxc8 16 0-0 Na6



Another bizarre move. Instead of moving the knight to d7 where it controls the centre and shields the king, it goes to the edge, where it has zero movement. However, I anticipated White's attack against my queenside pawn chain, and I wanted the extra support for the b4-pawn. My computer wants me to play the insane 16 ... Bxb2, opening the queenside and allowing 17 Qe7+.

17 a3 Qb5 18 axb4?!

White has some interesting ideas in mind, but it is a little cooperative to allow Black's knight off the edge.

18 ... Nxb4 19 Bxb4 Qxb4 20 Ra6

A menacing move, targeting c6 and d6.

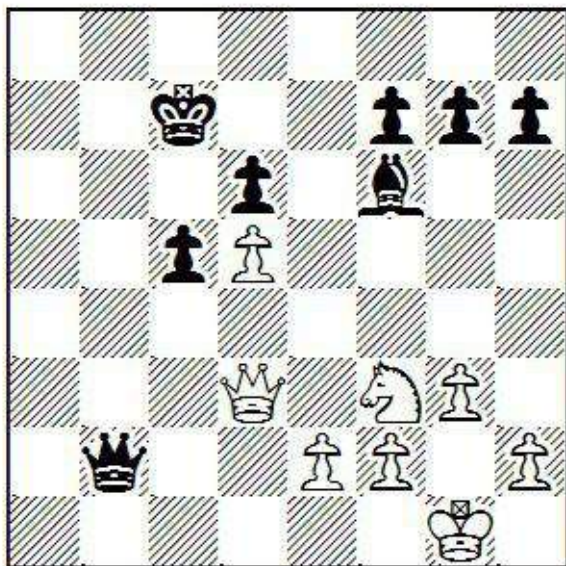
20 ... Rcb8

“Do come in,” says Black politely. Amazingly, a white rook on c6 has nothing to coordinate with.

21 Rfa1 Rb6 22 Rxa7+ Rxa7 23 Rxa7+ Rb7 24 Rxb7+?

Correct is 24 Ra8! Rb8 25 Rxb8 Qxb8 26 b3 and White remains a pawn ahead.

24 ... Qxb7 25 Qd3 Qxb2



According to rumour, a queen and knight are superior to a queen and bishop, but according to GM Larry Kaufmann, an expert in computer assessment, this wisdom cannot be demonstrated by any amount of chess data. In any case, Black's bishop is certainly pulling its weight in this position - and what a position! It sits on f6 for 25 moves, strongly influencing the action.

26 e3

26 Nd2 Qd4 is equal, but White is still trying to win. Unfortunately, his best chances are past, and pressing only leads him to a loss.

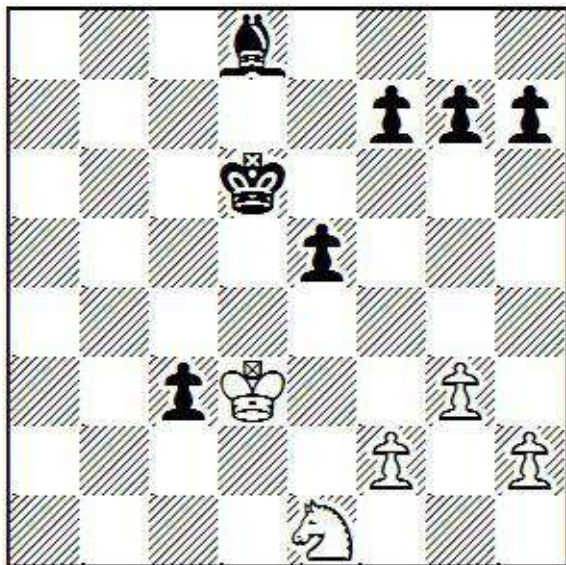
26 ... Qc1+ 27 Kg2 c4 28 Qe4 c3 29 Qc4+ Kd8 30 Qc6 Qa3 31 e4 Qb4!

The final provocation, tempting White to continue with his aggressive plan.

32 e5 dxe5 33 d6?!

A scary-looking move that leads nowhere.

33 ... Qb8 34 Ne1 Qc8 35 Qxc8+ Kxc8 36 Kf3 Kd7 37 Ke4 Kxd6 38 Kd3 Bd8!

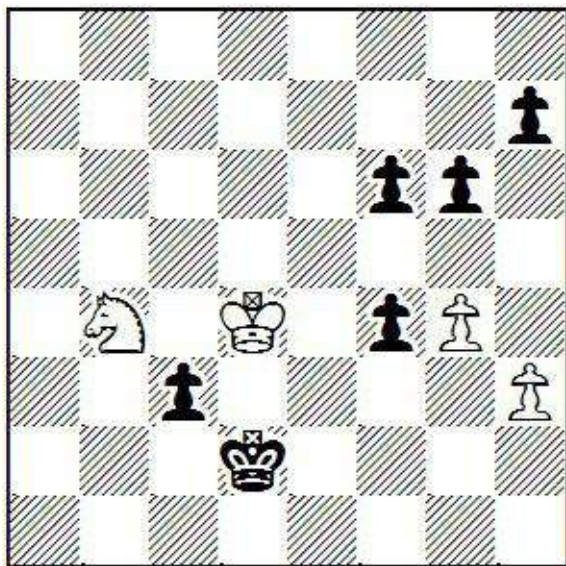


A nuance, enabling Black to keep both his extra pawns.

39 Nc2 Bb6

A second nuance, allowing Black's bishop to stay active.

40 f3 Bd4 41 g4 Kc5 42 h3 f6 43 Ne1 Kb4 44 Nc2+ Kb3 45 Ne1 g6 46 Nc2 Kb2 47 Nb4 Kc1 48 f4 exf4 49 Kxd4 Kd2 0-1



If 50 Ke4 then 50 ... g5 and 51 ... c2 wins.

So what just happened? There are a few possible interpretations, but I think White lost mainly because my king on d7 wasn't as bad as he thought it should be. In addition to being unexpected, this game is also an excellent example of **provocativeness** (see Chapter Nine).

My opponent in the next game is International Master Walter Shipman, formerly one of the top players in the United States. He is an "old lion", but one who will be happy to bite my head off. My record against seniors is not all that good - I have been on the receiving end of severe beatings from both Arthur Bisguier and Arnold Denker.

J.Schuyler-W.Shipman

New York 1989

Ruy Lopez

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3

Despite being a lifelong king's pawn player, this was the first time I had reached this position. After losing a few too many King's Gambit games against 2200s, my teacher finally convinced me to try something a bit more conventional, but it still felt very uncomfortable for me to block my f-pawn so early.

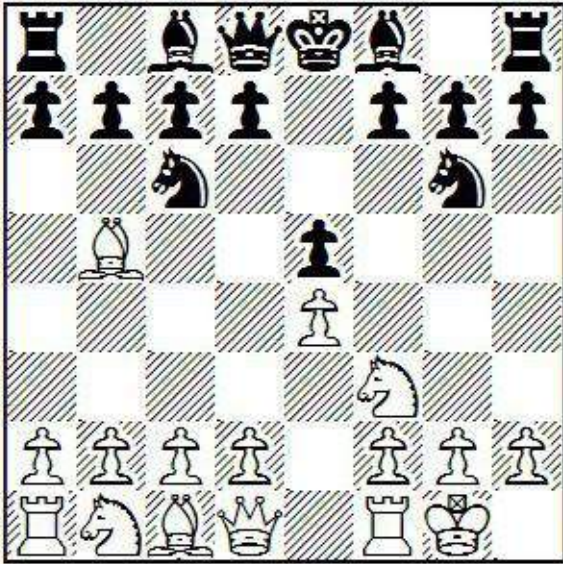
2 ... Nc6 3 Bb5 Nge7

At the time, I assumed he played this move to take me out of my preparation, an idea I found funny since I had so little preparation in any case. Checking my database, however, I see that this was his regular answer to the Ruy Lopez.

4 0-0

I was dimly aware that, after 4 c3, Black would be able to play 4 ... d5!?, a sharp answer I did not want to have to deal with under the circumstances.

4 ... Ng6



I was happy to see this. Why move the knight to g6 in two turns when it can go to f6 in one? Also, the fact that Black cannot play ... g7-g6 may make it more difficult for him to defend his kingside. Of course, that's not all there is to the story (4 ... Ng6 has been fairly successful in practice), but it is always important to note the downsides to your opponents' moves (especially the odd-looking ones). It gives you confidence and prepares you, both analytically and psychologically, to take advantage of any further weaknesses that may appear in their positions.

5 c3 d6

As it turns out, 5 ... d5 is possible even here. Two years later, Shipman tried it in J.Kossak-W.Shipman, New York 1991, a game he went on to win.

6 d4 Bd7 7 Re1 Be7 8 Nbd2 0-0 9 a4

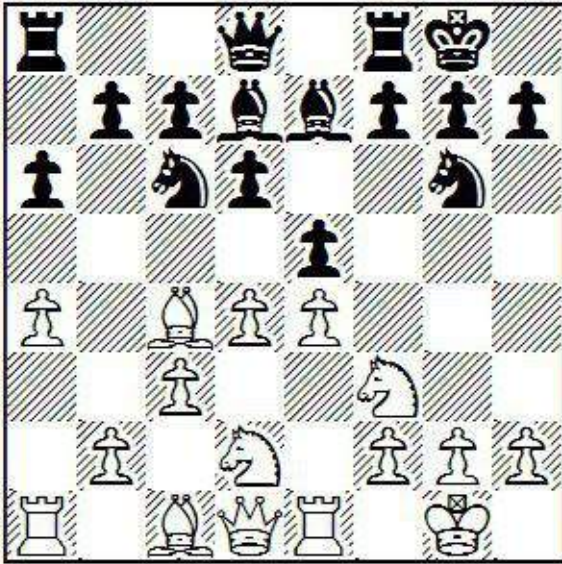
I was very satisfied with this move, which nips Black's potential queenside expansion in the bud and opens up the a2-square for my bishop. If I don't do this, perhaps play will continue 9 Nf1 a6 10 Ba4 b5 11 Bb3 Na5 12 Bc2 and I don't get to keep my bishop on the a2-g8 diagonal.

9 ... a6

Apparently my opponent has misconstrued my purpose - he saw 9 a4 as preparation for 10 d5, when I

would have gotten a jump on my queenside pawn storm. All the same, this is not a bad move if it is followed up properly.

10 Bc4



10 ... Nh4

Better is 10 ... exd4 11 cxd4, which opens up a hole on the b4-square, a happy home for Black's unhappy c6-horse. After 11 ... Nb4, Black threatens ... b7-b5, ... c7-c5, and ... d6-d5, the last of which shuts out my powerful bishop.

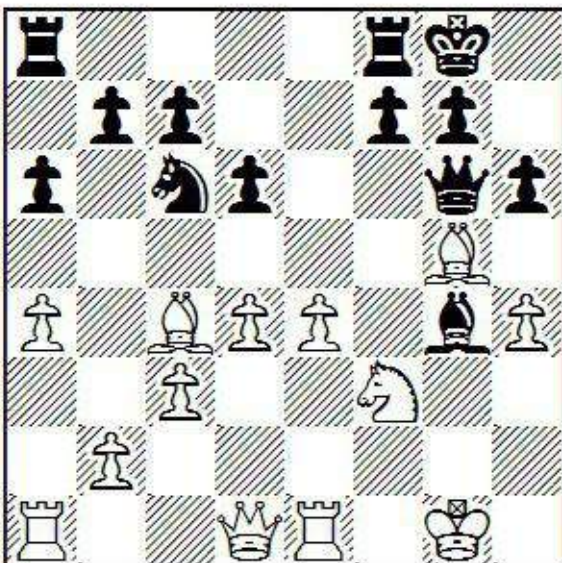
11 Nxh4 Bxh4 12 g3 Bg5 13 f4

It was with great relief that I finally played this move. My computer is not all that enamoured of it, but it poses Black some real challenges.

13 ... exf4 14 Nf3 Bg4 15 gxf4 Bxf4

I had overlooked this, so it is lucky, perhaps, that I am not just losing. It is important to take your time in such a situation, and recover emotionally before playing more moves.

16 Bxf4 Qf6 17 Bg5 Qg6 18 h4 h6



The recipe for surprising your opponent is fairly simple really. All you need is to be willing to seriously consider some counterintuitive moves. If one of them holds up under close analysis, you have

your shocker. Then again, you should also have the discipline to refuse to make the counterintuitive move unless it really is a lot stronger than it at first appears.

19 Kf2!

According to the silicon monster, 19 Qd3 is at least as good. However, I am convinced that my success in this game was due to the dangerous-looking text. In addition to the surprise of moving my king towards the centre, 19 Kf2 has many objective merits: It steps out of the pin on the g-file; it guards my knight on f3; it clears the first rank so that I can get a rook (or rooks) to g1 or h1; and it starts to evacuate my king from an area of the board that is soon to be devoid of pawn cover.

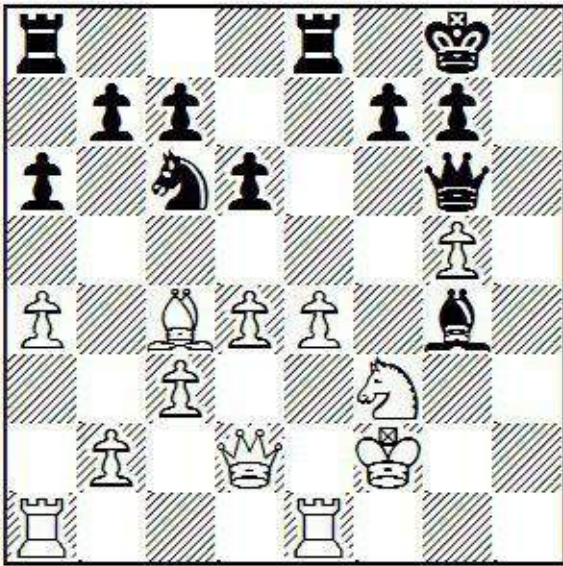
What made 19 Kf2 so counterintuitive to me, at least on the surface, was that I was moving onto a file where Black already has a rook. After considering some variations, though, I could not figure out how Black could use this to his advantage. After all, his f-pawn is currently pinned, and since the h-file is going to open soon, he will not be able to play ... Kh8 in order to unpin it.

Whether it was the psychology of the move, or the difficulty of trying to calculate methods of attack against my insane king, Black, who had been playing very well until this point, almost immediately started to make mistakes.

19 ... hxg5 20 hxg5 Rfe8?!

The obvious problem with this move is that it leaves the f7-pawn more vulnerable. 20 ... Rae8 is better, though it is a difficult move to play since it bottles up Black's king, leaving no means of escape should anything untoward happen on the h-file.

21 Qd2



My g-pawn is a thorn for Black, so I want to keep it, as well as setting a nasty trap.

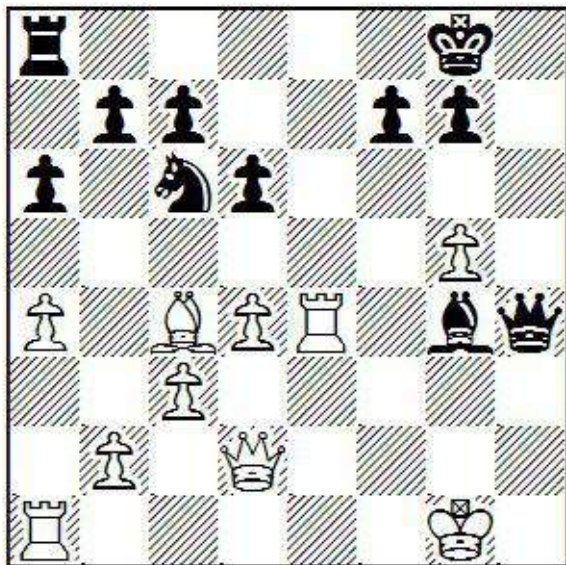
21 ... Rxe4??

“Breaking through to punish the king on f2,” is how Black’s internal commentary must be running. The variations don’t work, but he is not in the right state of mind to believe this.

22 Nh4! Qh5

22 ... Qh7 23 Bxf7+ is no good for Black either.

23 Rxe4 Qxh4+ 24 Kg1



The “attack” has already fizzled out, even if there are a few minor aftershocks.

24 ... Qh5 25 Qf4!?

Naturally, there is more than one way to win, but by offering Black a few more checks, White finishes the game quickly.

25 ... Bf3?!

It is hardly possible for Black to resist this move, which offers an illusion of counterplay.

26 Rf1! Qh1+ 27 Kf2 Qg2+ 28 Ke1 Bxe4 29 Bxf7+ Kh8 30 Qh4+ Bh7 31 g6 1-0

So both Bonin and Shipman were shocked and offended by my king placement, eventually launching unsound attacks, only to find that a king can be a very slippery and resilient piece. Of course there are many other ways to play unexpected moves, many of which are dealt with in separate chapters. Here I will present one more example of an “impossible” move:

Game 19

“Lucky52”-”Malachi1971”

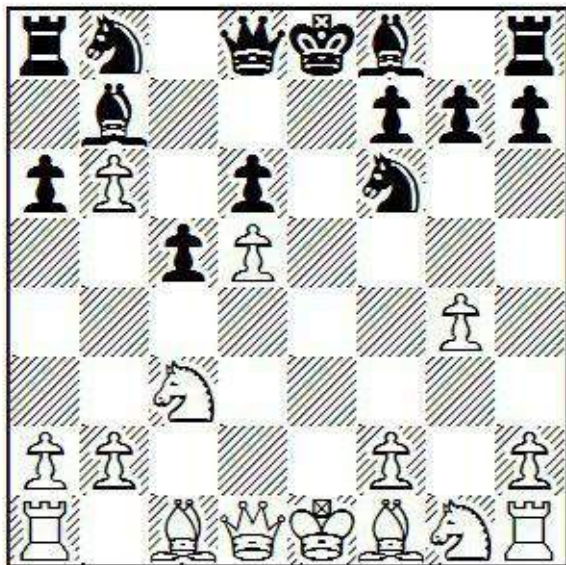
Internet 2015

Benko Gambit

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5

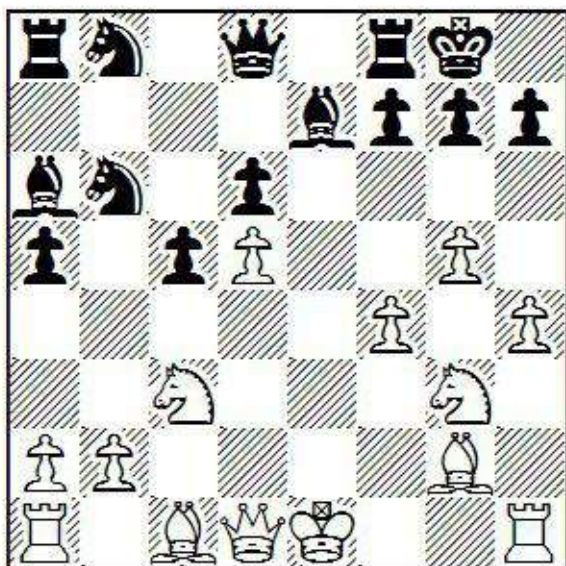
This game was played in an online thematic correspondence tournament with all the games starting from this position. (“Malachi1971” is me, by the way.) You might think that with a three-day time control a player would be able to recover from an unexpected move, but here even that time turned out to be insufficient.

4 cxb5 a6 5 b6 e6 6 Nc3 Bb7 7 e4 exd5 8 exd5 d6 9 g4!



In the battle of unexpectedness, White lands the first blow. This has been played only five times in 150 games, though it has been generally effective, scoring 80%. It is not hard to see why, especially as the game progresses. Even before g2-g4, Black is short on space, so he may suffer greatly from any further cramping.

9 ... Be7 10 Bg2 0-0 11 g5 Nfd7 12 h4 Nxb6 13 Nge2 a5 14 Ng3 Ba6 15 f4



So far we are following the game B.Esen-S.Rouhouse, European Cup, Kemer 2007, which was won convincingly by White. Here Rouhouse played 15 ... Qe8, which bottles up the queen and rook, and does not inconvenience White since his king will go to f2 soon in any case.

15 ... f5

Stopping the further advance of the white pawns and guarding the e4-square against all of White's minor pieces. I have to hope that I won't regret weakening the e6-square.

16 Kf2!

To be honest, this was not very unexpected here, but it was still frustrating to see White step forward with impunity. How can I take advantage of his king if I have no open lines and no squares for my pieces?

16 ... N8d7 17 b3

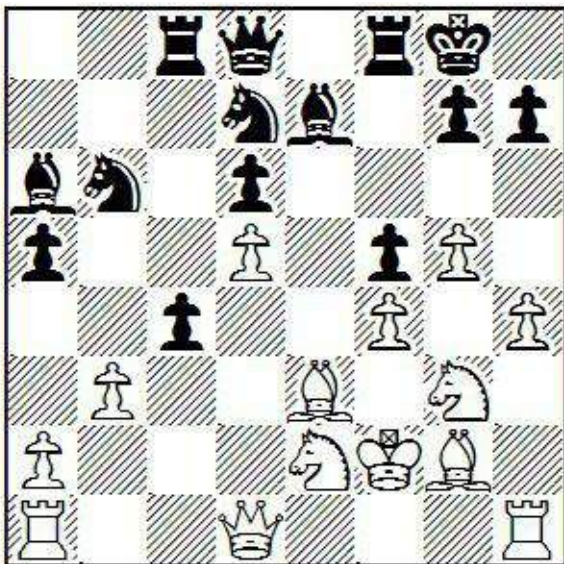
White is hoping to get a Bb2/Qc3 battery going in order to checkmate me on g7. This is how Esen

dismantled Rouchouse in the previously mentioned game.

17 ... c4 18 Be3?!

Already it is not possible for White to continue his plan; for instance, 18 Bb2 cxb3 19 axb3 is met by 19 ... Nc4! 20 bxc4 Qb6+ 21 Kf3 Qxb2. However, 18 Bh3 is better than the text move. For one, it opens up a decent escape square for the king. Also, the attack on the f-pawn is difficult for Black to deal with since 18 ... g6 weakens the king too much.

18 ... Rc8 19 Nce2



I am not even slightly happy here. The e7-bishop and b6-knight are particularly wretched, and the queen and f8-rook are doing nothing either. Meanwhile, White's e2-knight is only two steps away from settling on e6. I started looking at practically every legal move in an attempt to drastically alter the play. As it turns out, there is such a possibility. Can you find it?

19 ... Ne5!

A real shocker for my opponent, but it has a great deal of logic to it - if White accepts the sacrifice, it will activate all my worst pieces and also expose his king. As it turns out, it is not even a real sacrifice since I will be able to recover the material in any case, but leaving the knight alive means allowing it to get to g4, where it is a nuisance.

I should point out that I did not play 19 ... Ne5 for its shock value; I played it because I was desperate to change the course of the game. However, the shock of the move immediately elicited a blunder.

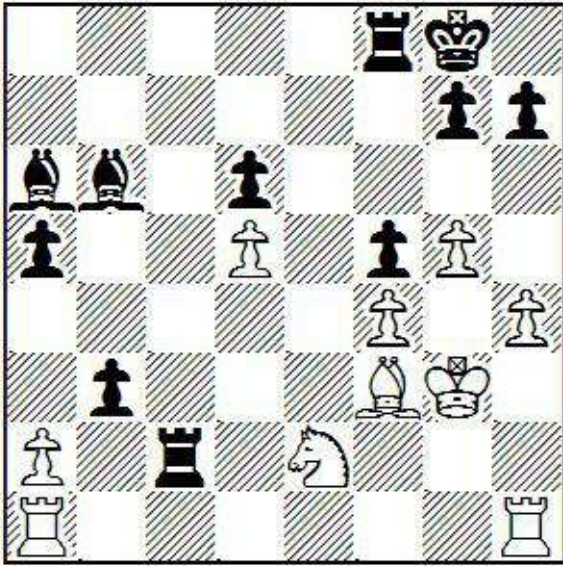
20 Bxb6??

My opponent has correctly realized that he should not accept the sacrifice; e.g. 20 fxe5? dxe5! 21 Kg1 c3! 22 d6 Bxd6 23 Bf2 c2 24 Qd2 f4 25 Ne4 f3 26 Qxd6 fxg2 27 Kxg2 Bxe2 and Black is winning. But White must preserve his dark-squared bishop if he hopes to survive. He can in fact maintain a good position with 20 Kg1 Ng4 21 Bd4, when I have made some improvement, even if most of my army is still inactive.

20 ... Qxb6+ 21 Qd4 Ng4+ 22 Kg1 Bd8!

White probably overlooked this extremely effective manoeuvre in his analyses (though his position cannot be recommended in any case). My awful bishop turns into a monster. The rest is completely brutal.

23 Bf3 Qxd4+ 24 Nxd4 Bb6 25 Nge2 cxb3 26 Kg2 Ne3+ 27 Kg3 Nc2 28 Nxc2 Rxc2 0-1



One possible finish is 29 Rhe1 Bxe2 30 Rxe2 Rxe2 31 Bxe2 Bd4 32 Rd1 bxa2, when White must give his rook for the front a-pawn.

I will reiterate: the shock of an unexpected move can trigger an immediate crisis of confidence, where a player loses faith in his ability to foresee the course of the game. The player who starts relying only on intuition is greatly handicapped, and if that intuition is furthermore coloured by anxiety and fear, a loss can hardly be avoided almost regardless of the position on the board.

Chapter Six

Unusual Ideas

In the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries, we see players who excelled because they developed and used ideas with which their opponents were less familiar or even unfamiliar. Paul Morphy, for instance, was successful, at least in part, because he fully understood the value of development and how it helped to set up tactics. Philidor was successful because he understood how important it was to maintain the mobility of pawns. These ideas worked well, not only because of their inherent power, but because opponents were unable to appreciate when they were having problems on the board and why. These days, any chessplayer can go online and have easy access to the great wealth of chess ideas, so it is very difficult to pursue objectives that your opponent does not understand. However, if you *could* use an idea your opponent does not understand, it would be extremely effective, like throwing an invisible punch. Are there still any such ideas?

Redundancy

In my opinion, the idea of piece redundancy is still very much underappreciated. GM Larry Kaufman wrote a lengthy article for *Chess Life* in 1999, and GM Andrew Soltis talks about it in his 2004 book *Rethinking the Chess Pieces*, but I don't think the ideas have worked their way into the minds of most chessplayers. If you Google "chess redundancy" you will turn up only a handful of relevant results, whereas "chess development" will turn up millions.

Understanding piece redundancy in chess starts with the observation that most pieces get in each other's way to some extent, and can prevent each other from reaching their full potential. How many times have you had a good knight on e5, but it was blocking your rook action on the e-file? How many times have you had to retreat a perfectly good bishop from d3 to f1 in order to stop obstructing your queen or rook? Since almost all pieces can step on each other's toes, it is, for most piece combinations, acceptable to ignore this effect and assume it will come out in the wash. However, a few piece combinations are especially good or bad.

Most people realize the bishop pair is good. That is because they cannot get in each other's way, not even slightly. If our first bishop is $3\frac{1}{4}$, our second is worth about $3\frac{3}{4}$. (Incidentally, the reason the difference is not even greater is that it is also inconvenient to have two bishops on the board which must be continually safeguarded against being traded off for the opponent's minor pieces. If the opponent happens to have no minors, the bishop pair is worth more than half a point.)

In contrast, most people do not think about the special redundancy of rooks and knights. For instance, if you have an open file, one rook can probably reach it relatively easily, but the other one will have to work harder to become a doubled rook on the same file. Furthermore, the doubled rook may not be necessary. If you have two knights, one of them will find the best square - perhaps there is a powerful outpost - whereas the second knight has to settle for the second-best square. The difference may be small or it may be large, but on average it is worth something. If your first knight is worth $3\frac{1}{4}$, your second knight might only be worth $2\frac{3}{4}$. If your first rook is 5, then your second rook might only be $4\frac{1}{2}$. Lastly, although you may enjoy having two queens, you should understand that the second one is less valuable than the first. This might not come up often, but when it does, the effect is very noticeable.

Redundancy and non-redundancy can also be understood by considering your opponent's problems. If you have a knight, your opponent has to be concerned about limiting its activity and trying to avoid

creating holes in his position. If you have two knights, many of the measures he takes will be effective against two pieces at once - some of his moves may be doubly effective. On the other hand, if you have one bishop, your opponent arranges his pawns to restrict it (or, sometimes, to deprive it of targets); and if you have two bishops, your opponent will usually have to free one of them if he wants to restrict the other.

So who does fully appreciate redundancy? Maybe Garry Kasparov?

In Larry Kaufman's excellent article from 1999, he mentions a game in which Kasparov believed himself to be winning early on, simply by trading knight for bishop. Winning the bishop pair is hardly a revolutionary idea, but here Kasparov turns down an opportunity to win a pawn in order to do it. As we will see, what he gains is more than just the bishop pair.

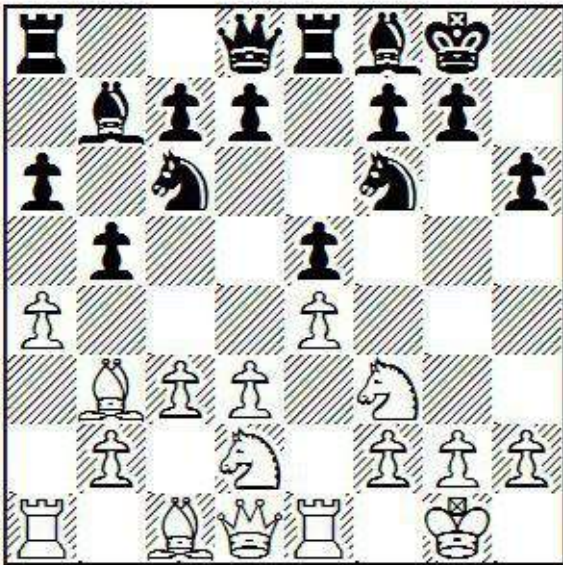
Game 20

G.Kasparov-N.Short

PCA World Championship (3rd matchgame), London 1993

Ruy Lopez

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 0-0 8 a4 Bb7 9 d3 Re8 10 Nbd2 Bf8 11 c3 h6



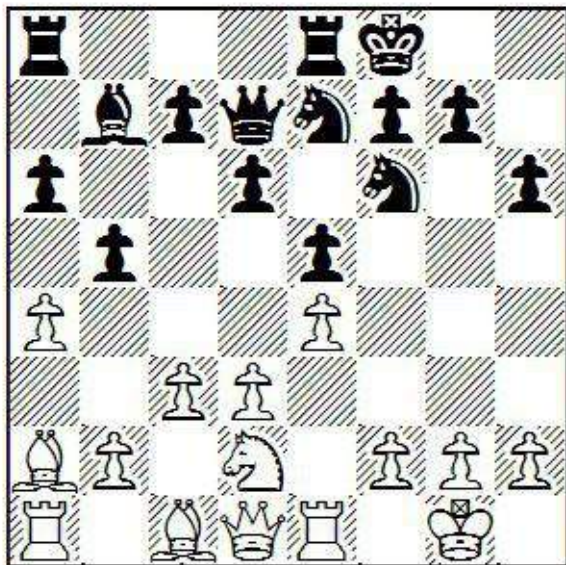
12 Ba2!

A new move at the time, and a very strong one.

12 ... d6 13 Nh4!?

Garry could have played 13 axb5 axb5 14 Qb3, winning the b-pawn. The computer wholeheartedly agrees with the greedy option, although Black has partial compensation after 14 ... d5 15 Qxb5 Na5.

13 ... Qd7 14 Ng6 Ne7 15 Nxf8 Kxf8



This is the position Kasparov believes he is already winning. At first glance, it is approximately equal, with White having a small advantage based on the bishop pair. Plus half a point, right?

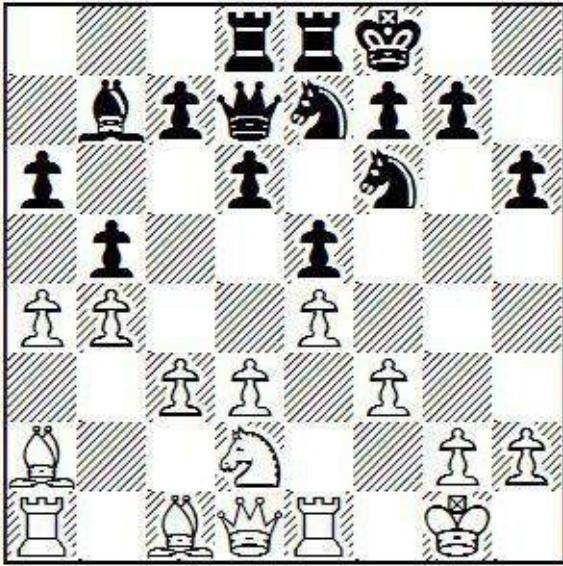
Actually, things may be much more serious for Black than that, mainly because he has the knight pair. It is bad enough to have one bad knight; here White will arrange his pawn structure to control both knights at once. Very soon the impotence of these pieces will also be obvious to Black, and he will be looking for an opportunity to sacrifice one of them, even for what would normally be considered inadequate compensation. Adding the knight redundancy to the bishop pair, White's advantage is arguably worth an entire pawn. And let's recall that the half-point value for the bishop pair is based on Black having some reasonable chances to trade one of them off. White's bishops are particularly secure here, so we may choose to add one or two tenths of a pawn to our evaluation. If this is true, we start to understand, with little intuition and no analysis, why Kasparov felt he was winning.

The course of the game appears to justify this, though Black's play also leaves something to be desired. Short's mistake, which wound up costing him the game, was his unwillingness to advance pawns. Presumably, he left them back in order to avoid pawn trades that would activate Kasparov's bishops. If this was his reasoning or intuition, there are many problems with it. First of all, there is the cost of allowing an opponent to grab space unchallenged. Secondly, there is the fact that the pawn trades will happen anyway, just later on in the game and under less favourable circumstances. Thirdly, even knights sometimes need pawn exchanges in order to make it possible to find good squares. Such is the case in this position. Lastly (and most relevant to the topic in question), *Black needs the position to open up somewhat in order to create opportunities to trade minor pieces, since all minor piece trades will be in Black's favour.*

16 f3! Rad8?

Short does not appreciate the danger. 16 ... c5! stakes a claim to some territory, which is what Black needs to do. It would give him the ability to open the position at his own discretion; for instance, with 17 d4 exd4 18 cxd4. Now Black has no weak pawns, and White has only one active bishop; while if White makes any further pawn moves, he will open up squares for Black's knights.

17 b4!

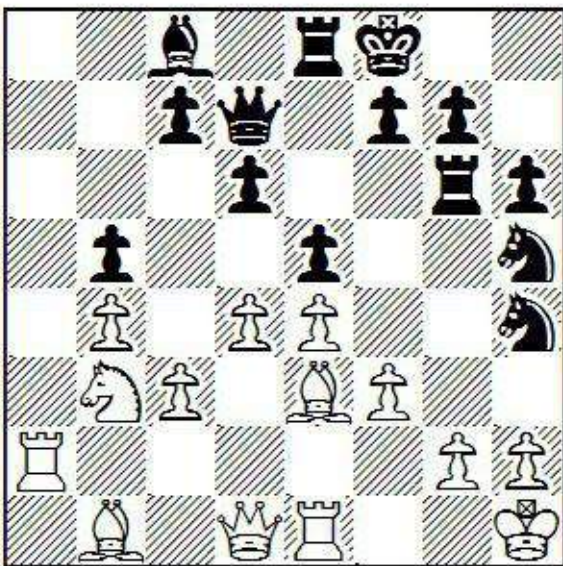


Kasparov clamps down immediately. It has already become extremely difficult for Black to challenge White's space advantage; for example, after 17 ... c5 18 axb5 axb5 19 Qb3 Ng6 20 c4! Bc6 21 cxb5 Bxb5 22 bxc5 dxc5 23 Nc4 Kg8 24 Be3, White's bishops really are coming into their own, finding activity and targets, whereas Black's knights (especially the one on f6) are bystanders.

17 ... Ng6 18 Nb3 Bc8 19 Bb1 Nh5

By now Black's only hope is a kamikaze mission with his knights against White's kingside. As we will see, this desperation attack is nettlesome, and eventually leads to a real opportunity for Short. In fact, it is possible to argue that, in terms of this book, Short's recent play has been correct because of the practical chances it generates. My only answer to this is that, in my own judgment, Short's practical chances are low, and I consider Kasparov's subsequent errors to be atypical, low-probability events. There is no way for this to be proven or disproven.

20 axb5 axb5 21 Be3 Nh4 22 Ra2 Re6 23 d4 Rg6 24 Kh1 Re8



Black's pieces are charging towards the enemy kingside, but with the second rank open White's defensive resources are great.

25 dxe5 Rxe5 26 g4?!

GM Ftacnik adorns this with an exclamation mark, but I find it ironic that he loves (and Kasparov

plays) this computer-like move, while *Stockfish 5* prefers the more “human” 26 Nd4, bringing in the reserves. Given that even Garry Kasparov is human, and given that White is winning barring calamity, he should not have exposed his king.

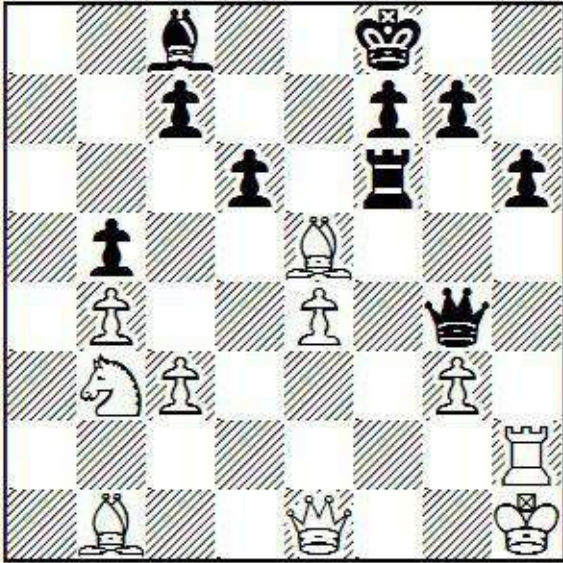
26 ... Rf6!

White cannot take the knight (27 gxh5?? Nxf3 is too strong), so this gives Short a practical chance.

27 Bd4?

This is an extremely complex position, so in some sense White’s error is understandable. What’s less understandable is that he’s the one who chose to enter the complications!

27 ... Ng3+! 28 hxg3 Nxf3 29 Bxe5 Qxg4 30 Rh2 Nxe1! 31 Qxe1



31 ... dxe5?

The knife cuts both ways and, finally, Short also goes astray. His queen belongs on the very active square f3, and if he doesn’t play her there now, she won’t get there at all. Kasparov gives 31 ... Qf3+! 32 Kg1 dxe5 33 Rd2 (or 33 Nd2 Qxc3) 33 ... Bh3 34 Nc5 Rg6 35 Kh2 Qh5! 36 Bc2 Kg8! “with counterplay”. *Stockfish* agrees, and considers the position dead equal.

After the game continuation, there is still some chess to be played, but Short’s moment has passed.

32 Nd2 Rd6 33 Bc2 Be6 34 Kg1 Kg8 35 Nf1 Qg5 36 Qe3 Qd8? 37 Rd2 c6 38 Rxd6 Qxd6 39 Qc5?! Qxc5+ 40 bxc5 h5 41 Nd2 Kf8 42 Kf2 Ke7 43 Bb3 Bd7 44 Nf3 Kf6 45 c4! bxc4 46 Bxc4 Be6 47 Be2 Bg4 48 Bd1 g6 49 Ba4 Bd7 50 Ne1 Ke6 51 Bb3+ Ke7 52 Nd3 f6 53 Nb4 f5 54 Ba4 fxe4 55 Bxc6 Bxc6 56 Nxc6+ Ke6 57 Ke3 g5 58 Kxe4 h4 59 gxh4 1-0

By the time of the following game, I was already FM-level (I had qualified, though not yet applied for the title), but it was one of the first occasions I felt the bishop pair to be a powerful advantage in a game I was playing. Soon after winning the bishops, everything starts working in my favour, almost magically. Although I was not aware of it then, I also possessed the advantage of playing against a knight pair. This was the invisible force that made the game easy. Like many players before and since, my strategy was to gain space with pawns while making sure not to open holes for his knights.

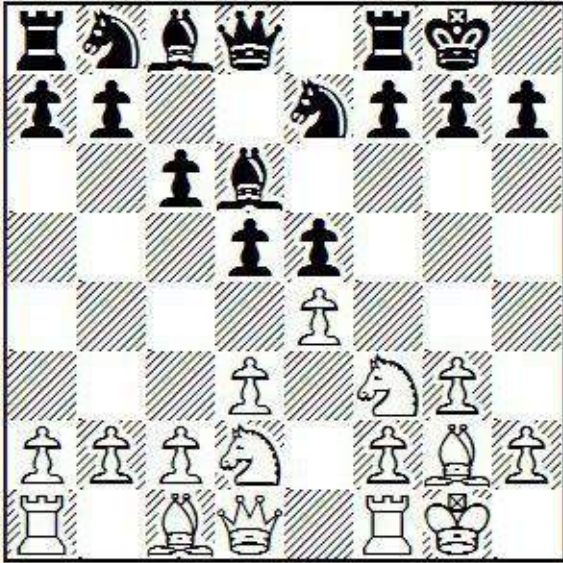
Game 21

J.Schuyler-P.Song

Chicago 1989

Caro-Kann Defence

1 e4 c6 2 d3 e5 3 Nd2 d5 4 Ngf3 Bd6 5 g3 Ne7 6 Bg2 0-0 7 0-0



The King's Indian Attack (KIA) has never been highly regarded as a weapon against the Caro-Kann, and there are some good reasons why. Black has a few sound set-ups, and his c6-pawn is properly placed to obstruct the g2-bishop. Also, Black's e-pawn reaches e5 in one turn, unlike in the KIA versus the French. On the other hand, the Caro-Kann player often does not have a lot of experience against the KIA, and I find that Caro-Kann players are not comfortable with so much space.

7 ... f6?!

Incomprehensibly, the computer does not object to this weakening move. Black leaves himself vulnerable in the event the position opens up.

8 a3?!

The immediate 8 d4! is the way to try to exploit Black's mistake.

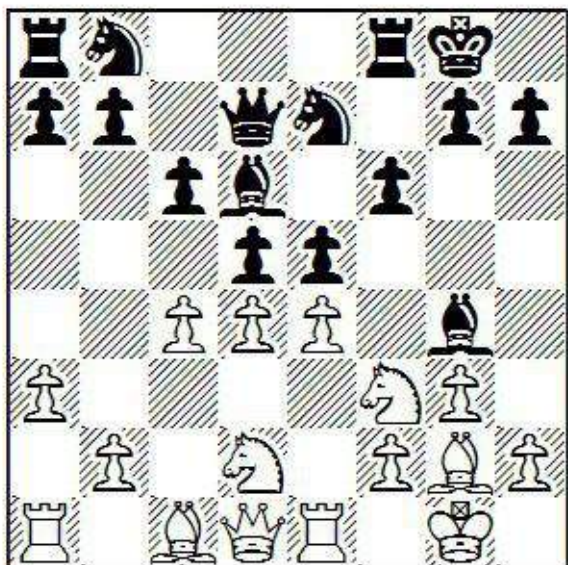
8 ... Be6 9 Re1?! Qd7?!

By now Black is better after 9 ... d4, when my Re1 no longer makes sense.

10 d4!

Better late than never. In fact, with both of Black's bishops in the line of fire, this is even more effective than it would have been earlier.

10 ... Bg4 11 c4!



Both strong and nettlesome, as it is hard for Black to find a satisfactory way to resolve all the tensions. With his light-squared-bishop vacationing on the kingside, Black has problems on both the a2-g8 diagonal and the h1-a8 diagonal.

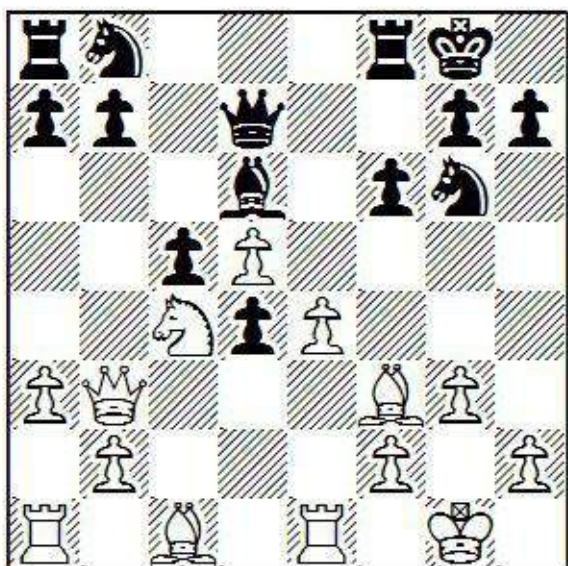
11 ... exd4 12 cxd5 c5 13 Qb3 Ng6 14 Nc4

A battle commences for the e5-square, since if I can get e4-e5 in, the game is essentially over.

14 ... Bxf3

Necessary, in order to fight for e5. However, the bishop pair advantage is significant even with so many pawns on the board, especially since the centre pawns are mobile.

15 Bxf3



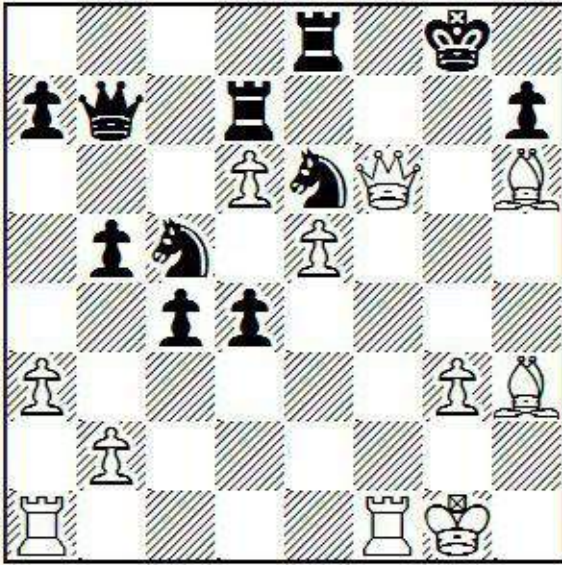
An important moment; Black's reply will either keep him in the game or herald the end of the game. My opponent is a master, but he is not aware (as I was not aware) of the idea that it is fundamentally useful for Black to liquidate his knight pair. Maybe he should figure to play 15 ... Ne5 anyway because otherwise my c4-knight is strong, but wouldn't it be much easier to follow a simple rule about which exchanges are favourable?

15 ... b6?

Now White's pawns roll. There is not enough room for all of Black's pieces. After 15 ... Ne5! 16 Bg2

Nxc4 17 Qxc4 Qc7 18 f4 Nd7, White is clearly better - but there would be, from my perspective, a disturbingly large amount of chess remaining in the position.

16 Bg2 Kh8 17 f4 Re8 18 h4 b5 19 Nxd6 Qxd6 20 h5 Nf8 21 e5 Qb6 22 d6 c4 23 Qf3 Nbd7 24 Qd5 fxe5 25 fxe5 Ne6 26 h6 gxh6 27 Bxh6 Rad8 28 Bh3 Ndc5 29 Qf3 Qb7 30 Qf6+ Kg8 31 Rf1 Rd7



Allowing a fun finish, which probably suited both of us by this point - Black's position is absolutely dreadful.

32 Bxe6+ Nxe6 33 Qxe6+ 1-0

I do not wish to devote pages to providing examples of every kind of redundancy, but I will give a sample of some interesting ramifications of redundancy theory:

A sacrifice of rook for bishop in the opening costs only $\frac{3}{4}$ of a point ($4\frac{1}{2}-3\frac{3}{4}$).

The Cochrane Gambit sacrifices only $\frac{1}{2}$ point of material ($2\frac{3}{4}-2\frac{1}{4}$).

Rook and pawn equal two knights. Deep in the endgame, rook and pawn are usually better than two knights. Most players are reluctant to trade any two minors, even for rook and two pawns.

Redundancy on Steroids

My friend Dan Miller makes use of redundancy constantly, looking to sacrifice redundant pieces for what might otherwise be considered inadequate compensation. I have sometimes accused him of trying to play moves that are “not as bad as they look”, rather than trying to play the best moves. Nevertheless, it is indeed nettlesome to be in any position that is better than your opponent thinks it is, regardless of its objective merits.

Dan also extends redundancy theory to a couple of additional situations that, as far as I know, have never been discussed in writing. He considers doubled pawns to be properly understood as a case of redundancy. As with the rook pair or knight pair, he subtracts $\frac{1}{2}$ point for doubled pawns (and a full point for tripled pawns). By this way of thinking, the main problem of doubled pawns is that they are capable of controlling the same squares. (Not at the same time, obviously.) In contrast, the conventional wisdom considers the problems to be mainly mobility and vulnerability. It may seem like six of one, half a dozen of the other, but it is valuable to have multiple points of view on chess matters. Sometimes we find ourselves in situations where one point of view makes sense out the position, while a similar one does not.

Dan has also discussed with me the idea of *partial* redundancy. This helps explain why pawns belong on the opposite colour from one's bishop, but it has other ramifications as well. For example, white pawns on e3 and c3 are partially redundant, both controlling d4, which may be overkill. Indeed, it is standard operating procedure to advance one of these pawns as soon as it is convenient, but probably not both, as white pawns on e4 and c4 may leave holes on surrounding squares. This is explained partially by the fact that they only control three squares (b5, d5, f5), while pawns on e4 and b4 control four (a5, c5, d5, f5). Similarly, if you are White and have castled kingside, would you rather your king be guarded by pawns on h3 and f3, or h3 and e3? Neither is very appealing, but the e-pawn, despite being farther from your king, controls f4 and d4, which might make it harder for enemy pieces to settle in your part of the board. Pawns on h2 and f2, on the other hand, are clearly bad as defenders, and the f-pawn dreams of being sent to f3 to control more squares.

“Bad” Bishops?

Igor Glek has an unusual idea that he discusses at some length in *Secrets of Opening Surprises Vol.9*. His opinion is that in the Stonewall Dutch, where all of Black's centre pawns are on light squares and all of White's centre pawns are on dark squares, Black's “good” dark-squared bishop is *not* more valuable than White's “bad” dark-squared bishop, and in several games he has intentionally traded them early on. For a classically-trained chessplayer such as myself, this is an odd, almost heretical notion. Glek does not spend any time trying to explain the underlying logic of his idea, but gives many examples of games where he quickly reaches a good position, often going on to win with Black. Let's look at two of them:

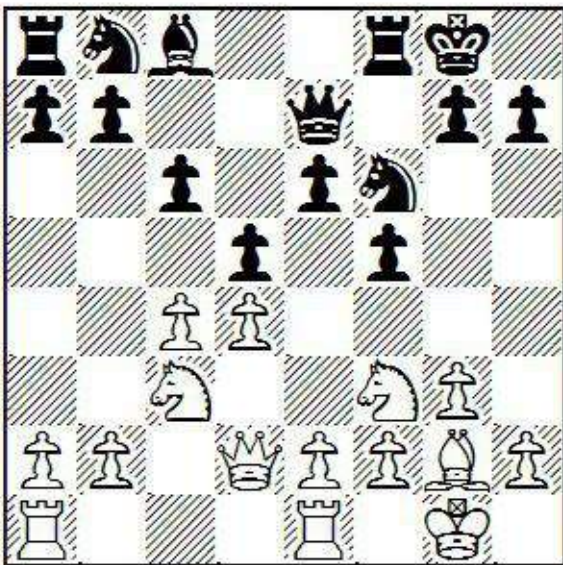
Game 22

K.Nikolaidis-I.Glek

Corinth 2000

Dutch Defence

1 d4 e6 2 c4 f5 3 g3 Nf6 4 Bg2 Bb4+ 5 Bd2 Bxd2+ 6 Qxd2 0-0 7 Nf3 d6 8 Nc3 Qe7 9 0-0 c6 10 Rfe1 d5



Now this is necessary to prevent White's e2-e4 advance. In some later games, Glek plays ... d7-d5 on move seven. What we have in either case is a Stonewall Dutch with no dark-squared bishops. Some teachers and authors recommend comparing the pieces that were actually traded, whereas others insist

that you should only look at the pieces that remain. I believe that (as is so often the case) the truth is in between. Either method might give the best answer depending on the position.

Here, if we compare an imaginary black bishop on d6 with a white bishop on b2, neither has much in the way of movement or targets. The main difference is that Black's bishop could at some point exchange itself for a powerful white knight on e5. This option is not as useful as it might be, though, since it will often lead to a weak colour complex on the dark squares.

If we compare the pieces remaining after the trade, we are concerned especially with the light-squared-bishops on g2 and c8. The considerations are similar. Neither bishop has activity or targets - the main difference is in the g2-bishop's ability to control Black's knight outposts - the one on e4, or any others that might appear, since they will always appear on light squares. If White trades his bishop, though, he will often find himself too weak on the light squares, especially since his bishop is covering the light-squared holes around his king. Can Black's light-squared bishop actually be better? This should be extremely unlikely because if it finds a strong diagonal it will soon be challenged by White's bishop. But if White suffers from the delusion that he has a significant advantage based on the superior bishop, he will have a hard time finding the appropriate moves. I believe that this is a big risk for White: unrealistic expectations based on a dogmatic assessment of the position and the relative value of the remaining bishops.

11 Qc2 Ne4 12 Rab1 Nd7 13 b4

White has prepared this advance, and it is logical to try to play b4-b5 to open the position, but it will not succeed. Meanwhile, White has weakened the c4-square, and his bishop is a few moves away from being able to control it.

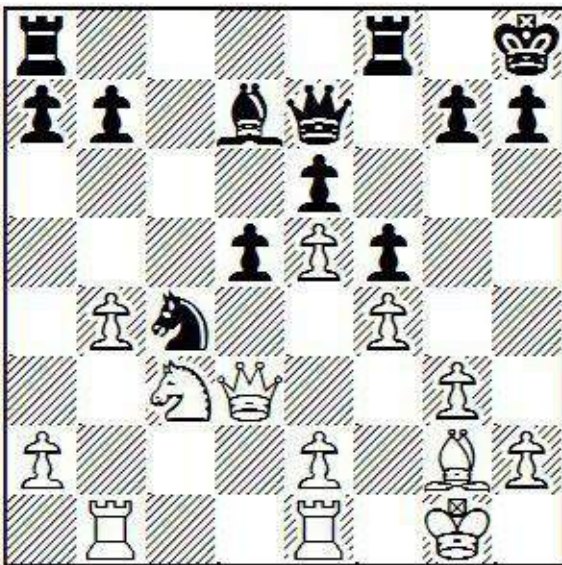
13 ... Nd6 14 cxd5 cxd5 15 Ne5 Kh8

Glek appears to be aiming to step out of tactics, but he allows White an interesting possibility.

16 f4?!

A positional mistake, weakening more light squares unnecessarily. Instead, 16 Bxd5 exd5 17 Nxd5 Qd8 18 Nc7 Nb6 19 Nxa8 Nxa8 deserved serious consideration, and looks particularly good when compared to the game continuation. (Notice Black's redundant knights!)

16 ... Nxe5 17 dxe5 Nc4 18 Qd3 Bd7



Glek's comment: "As so often in the Stonewall, White's 'good' bishop is not better than Black's 'bad' one." I agree with both the general sentiment and with how it applies to this position. Notice that White's bishop is not in range to eliminate Black's knight on c4; and also that White's knight no longer has the

possibility of reaching e5, where it would be happy to thumb its nose at Black's bishop. It even takes the knight at least three moves to reach d4, which is not such a powerful outpost anyway. What all this means is that the little details that would normally make White's bishop more useful than Black's are absent.

19 e4 fxe4 20 Nxe4 Be8!

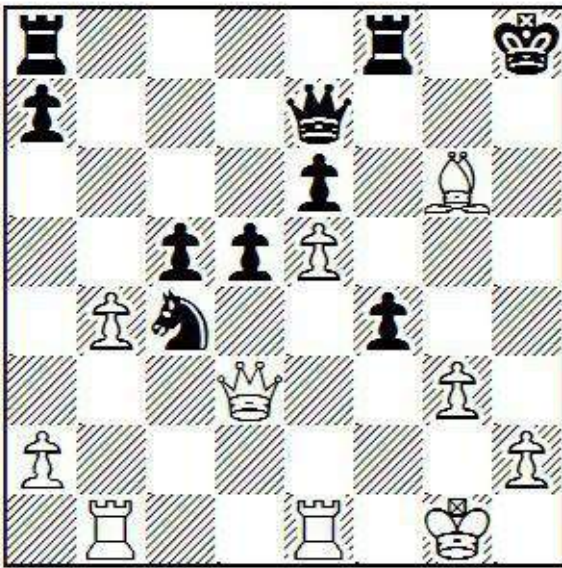
In the Stonewall and French, the bad bishop often uses this route to turn into a monster. I never get tired of it.

21 Nc5 Bg6 22 Be4

The positional battle turns tactical, and Black has the upper hand. White can no longer delude himself into thinking that his bishop is better.

22 ... b6 23 Bxg6 bxc5! 24 Bxh7 g5! 25 Bg6 gxf4

Apparently White can survive here with computer-like moves, but his army looks extremely disorganized to me. The game does not last long.



26 bxc5 f3 27 Rf1 Qxc5+ 28 Kh1 Qe3 29 Rbe1 Qg5 30 g4 Qxg4 31 Rf2 Qh4 32 Qc2 Rab8 33 Ref1 Ne3 34 Qd2 Nxf1 35 Rxf1 Rg8 36 Bc2 Rg2 0-1

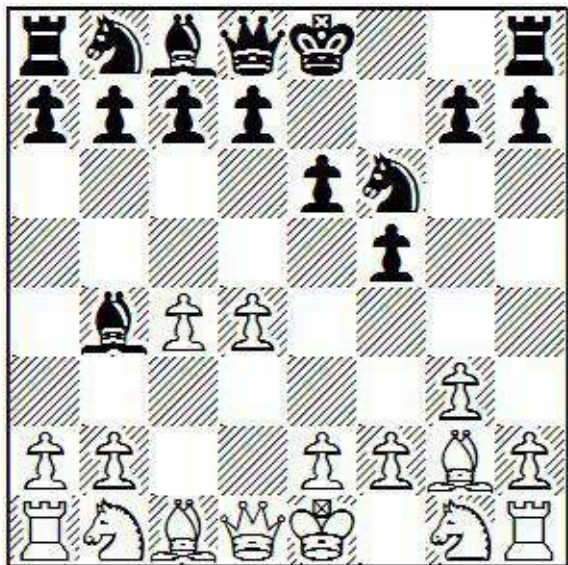
Game 23

L.E.Johannessen-I.Glek

European Cup, Kemer 2007

Dutch Defence

1 d4 e6 2 c4 f5 3 g3 Nf6 4 Bg2 Bb4+



5 Nd2

This is how the strongest White players have been tending to block lately, which implies that they are not all that eager either for the exchange of dark-squared-bishops. Perhaps there has been a slight shift in thinking since Glek's article appeared. If 5 Bd2, Glek of course intends 5 ... Bxd2+ 6 Qxd2 d5, more easily reaching the type of position from this game.

5 ... 0-0?!

5 ... d5 6 Ngf3 c6 7 0-0 0-0 is a more accurate execution of Black's idea.

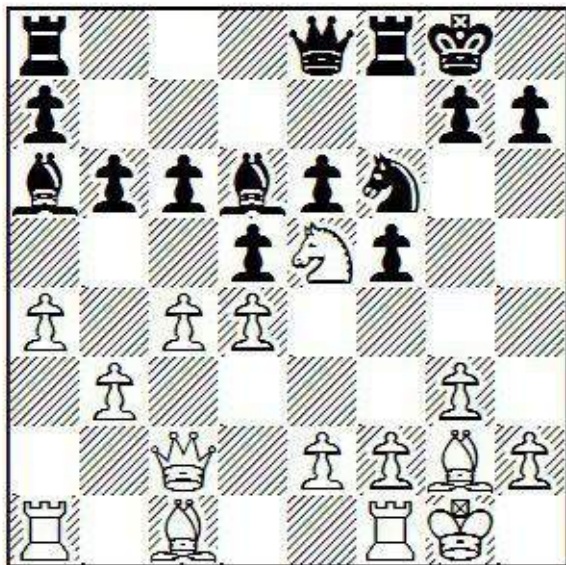
6 Ngf3

The problem with Black's move order is 6 a3!, when the b4-bishop no longer has its proper retreat square available (d6); while after 6 ... Bxd2+ 7 Qxd2, White has every reason to think he will be able to utilize the bishop pair, especially his unopposed dark-squared bishop. White has almost always won this position.

6 ... d5 7 0-0 c6 8 Ne5 Nbd7 9 Ndf3 Nxe5

Glek points out that "The exchange of knights frees Black's game." This would not have been possible had Black's bishop already been on d6 (since 10 dxe5 would be a fork). So even here Black's bishop excursion has a (tactical) point.

10 Nxe5 Bd6 11 b3 Qe8 12 Qc2 b6 13 a4 Ba6



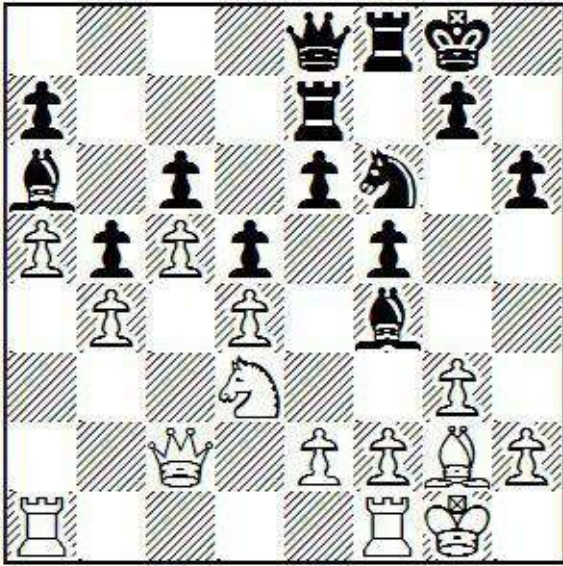
Black is fully deployed and has approximately equal space, his only problem being the hole on e5, which is not so serious. White soon embarks on a plan to block the queenside and trade the dark-squared bishops. If this can be accomplished with magic, it will be desirable, but it does require effort and the movement of pieces.

This brings me to what I think is the main reason why Glek's idea is effective: *A player who believes he has a positional advantage will pursue it with positional thinking and positional moves, and is vulnerable to losing track of the dynamics of chess; i.e. tactics, initiative, et cetera.* A strong player who appears to be simultaneously thinking tactically and positionally is still really just switching back and forth and struggling to integrate the parts. Only a Karpov or Petrosian is going to be able to navigate this process reliably. The rest of the world, even a GM like Johannessen, becomes vulnerable tactically while trying to exploit positional advantages. Therefore Glek's idea is nettlesome. And if the positional advantage is not nearly as great as White thinks it is, it is a recipe for disaster.

14 a5 b5 15 Bb2 Rc8 16 c5 Bb8 17 Nd3 Rc7 18 Bc1 Re7 19 b4 h6

White has yet to encounter any problems, but he is committed mentally to the exchange of the dark-squared bishops. It is much less useful positionally than White expects, and there is furthermore a dynamic cost to be paid for the exchange.

20 Bf4?! Bxf4



21 Nxf4

The alternative 21 gxf4 keeps control of e5 for now, but allows 21 ... g5!, exerting unpleasant pressure on White's pawn structure. As an aside, when pawns come into contact with each other (this is known as a "pawn lever" or just "lever"), it is the player with useful options who gains from the lever. Here Black may be able to play ... g5-g4 or ... g5xf4 usefully, or else sit and wait. White just has to sit and wait, since exchanging pawns on g5 improves Black's position too much, opening the h-file for him.

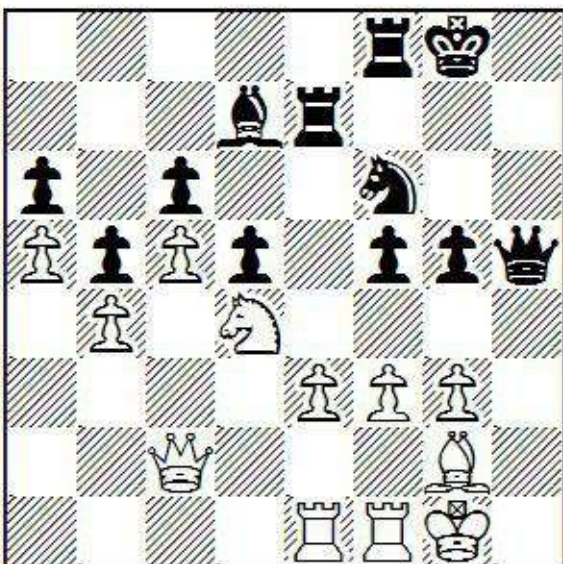
21 ... e5!

After this, Black becomes very active and he no longer needs to worry about the hole on e5, which was his main positional problem. Moreover, White is having troubles with the clock - apparently he chewed up a lot of time attempting to utilize his positional advantages and still failed.

22 dxe5 Rxe5 23 e3 Bc8

The rest of the game shows that, in this case, White's "good" bishop is indeed not better than Black's "bad" one.

24 Ne2 a6 25 Nd4 Bd7 26 Rae1 Re7 27 Qc3 Ng4 28 Nf3 g5 29 Rd1 Nf6 30 Nd4 h5 31 Rde1 h4 32 f3 Qh5 33 Qc2 hxg3 34 hxg3 0-1



White's flag fell, but his position is already wretched. Glek gives as the main line 34 ... Rh7 35 Rf2

Qh2+ 36 Kf1 Qxg3 37 Nxf5 Bxf5 38 Qxf5 Kg7 39 Ree2 Rh4, which should certainly win for Black.

I think that both of these ideas - piece redundancy and Glek's unconventional assessment of good vs. bad bishops - are valuable. I am sure there are more unusual ideas out there that are under-utilized, misunderstood, or even completely unknown. To some extent, this whole book is full of them. And of course there will be many ideas of which I am as yet unaware, so keep your eyes open for them.

Chapter Seven

Hating Your Opponent

“Think of your opponent as being beneath you - as being unworthy of being in the same room with you,” says Bruce Pandolfini.

“I don’t feel that,” says Josh Waitzkin.

“Well, you’d better start. Because if you don’t think it’s a part of winning, you’re wrong. You *have* to have contempt for your opponents. You have to hate them,” Bruce insists.

If you want to be a stickler about it, Josh and Bruce never actually had that conversation, or anything resembling it, but their characters (played by Max Pomeranc and Ben Kingsley) did in the 1993 movie *Searching for Bobby Fischer*.

When I saw the movie originally, I thought the whole thing was silly. Like Josh, I did not believe I hated my opponents - in fact, many of my best friends were my past and future opponents. However, as the years passed, I started to pay closer attention to what was going on in my head at tournaments. I could be there with my good friend (let’s just call him John) who maybe gave me a ride to the tournament, and we were hanging out, going out for meals together, maybe sharing a hotel room, but when the pairings went up and I saw John’s name, we would gradually stop talking, and by the time I sat down across the board from him, he would look different, with his ridiculous greasy black hair and preposterously visible nostrils, his mouth that he can’t seem to keep quite closed when he writes. *Didn’t he refuse to share his pretzels with me once a few years ago? He’s so clumsy and scattered, I’m surprised he doesn’t trip when he’s walking ... well, you get the idea.*

Why might it be important to “hate” or to feel contempt your opponent? There are a lot of possible reasons:

- You can think of chess as a debate between two people about the merits of their moves. A feeling of contempt for the player leads to a contempt for their moves, which leads to the proper competitive mindset, which is: “I need to prove that my opponent is making mistakes.” Which, in general, he is.

- We have already discussed the dangers of facing unexpected moves. If you are contemptuous of your opponent, you are less likely to experience a crisis of confidence and more likely to greet an unexpected move with an expectation to refute it. In the words of Savielly Tartakower: “In chess, there is only one mistake: over-estimation of your opponent. All else is either bad luck or weakness.”

- Players often get tired at tournaments, sometimes even in the early rounds. Hostility can keep your energy up. (It facilitates the flow of adrenalin.)

- Hating your opponent helps remind you that you’re in a fight. It makes you feel that the result is very important. You are not simply engaged in an abstract intellectual exercise.

- If you are in a difficult position, contempt gives you hope - it helps you believe that mistakes are coming if only you can put up enough resistance. Likewise, it gives you hope to win when the position seems like a clear draw.

- Contempt makes us ready psychologically to uncover our opponent’s blunders. How many times have we overlooked something because we had implicit confidence that our opponent would not have made a trivial mistake?

No two people think exactly alike, so presumably not everybody hates their opponents. However, I have talked to many people about this, and I think the vast majority of chessplayers have, consciously or unconsciously, developed the habit of maintaining a hostile mindset towards their opponents while the game is going on in order to keep a competitive edge.

For the most part, I say to each his own and whatever works. But as chessplayers, your mind is your tool and your weapon, so regardless of what is happening in your mind, it pays to be aware of it. Know thyself. The cost of ignorance is high. After all, there are also dangers to being contemptuous of your opponent:

- A close and honest examination of your opponent's move will sometimes force you to the conclusion that it is in fact a strong one. If you are not willing to believe this when you need to, it can lead to a very quick loss.

- You cannot allow your contempt to lead you to the point of expecting unrealistic errors from your opponent. This is only for emergency.

- Players who draw energy from hating their opponents are in danger as the game comes to a close. When things go wrong for a player who is on the verge of a win, they are often told that they have "relaxed too early" or "gotten overconfident". That is probably true, though it is a slight oversimplification. I think that in most cases what has happened is that the player has started (prematurely) to transition mentally from hating his opponent to a feeling of post-game camaraderie. After all, when the game is over, we are expected to treat our opponent in a friendly and sporting way, and this is not as easy as simply flipping a switch. What can I say? Try to keep your competitive edge throughout, and be careful of switching off too soon, particularly if you are playing a child or a friend.

We will make do for now without the usual example games. This subject is discussed further in Chapter Thirteen on **Ploys**.

Chapter Eight

Manoeuvring

According to Mark Dvoretsky, strong players sometimes do something called “manoeuvring”. There are many possible definitions for this word in chess, but let’s use the same one he does, which is *relatively neutral repositionings of your own pieces in order to give your opponent a different set of problems* (or to make it seem like you have). It is like harassment, except you do it with your own pieces instead of your opponent’s. On to the manoeuvring!

In the following game, after achieving a dominating position out of the opening, White manoeuvres endlessly in order to wear down his opponent.

Game 24

A.Grovets-Pu.Wang

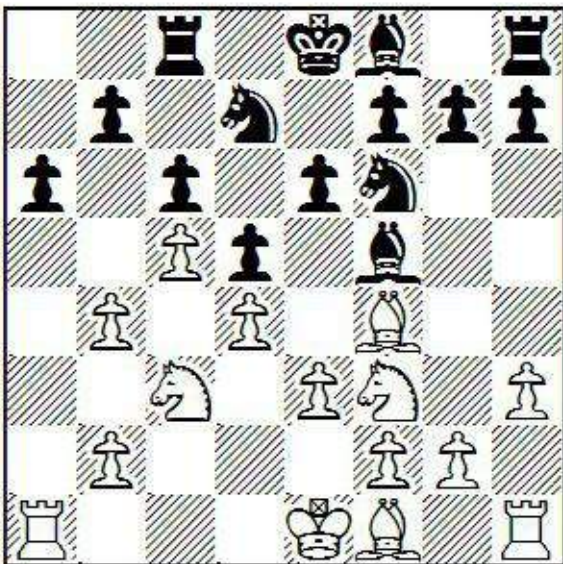
San Francisco 2015

London System

1 d4 d5 2 Bf4 Nf6 3 e3 Bf5

As an aside, I will say it surprises me very much that Black allowed himself to enter such a dismal variation when there are several reliable counters to the London System. Grovets himself gives 3 ... c5 4 Nc3 cxd4 5 exd4 a6 6 Nf3 Bg4, though I do not agree that Black has achieved a comfortable equality after 7 h3 Bxf3 8 Qxf3.

4 c4 c6 5 Qb3 Qb6 6 Nc3 Nbd7 7 Nf3 e6 8 c5 Qxb3 9 axb3 a6 10 b4 Rc8 11 h3

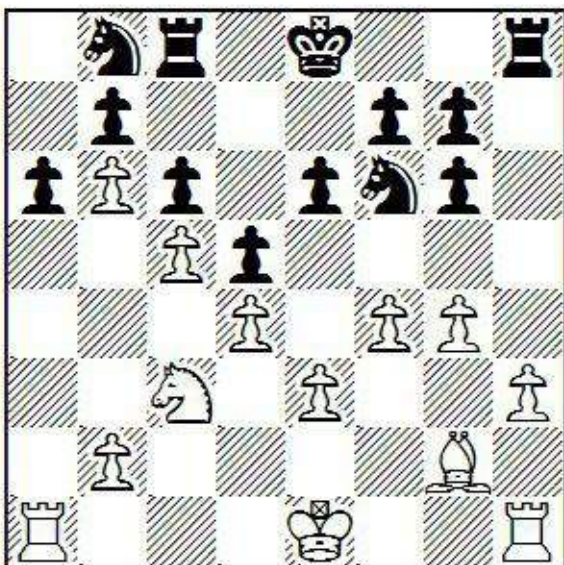


I have reached this position many times in blitz games and it is as bad for Black as its reputation. It may look as if the queenside is too closed for White to break through, but it almost always happens eventually one way or another.

11 ... Be7 12 g4 Bg6 13 Nh4 Bd8 14 Nxg6 hxg6 15 Bg2 Bc7? 16 Bxc7 Rxc7 17 b5!

This is possible tactically because of Black's weak back rank; i.e. 17 ... cxb5?! 18 Nxb5 axb5? 19 Ra8+ wins.

17 ... Nb8 18 b6 Rc8 19 f4



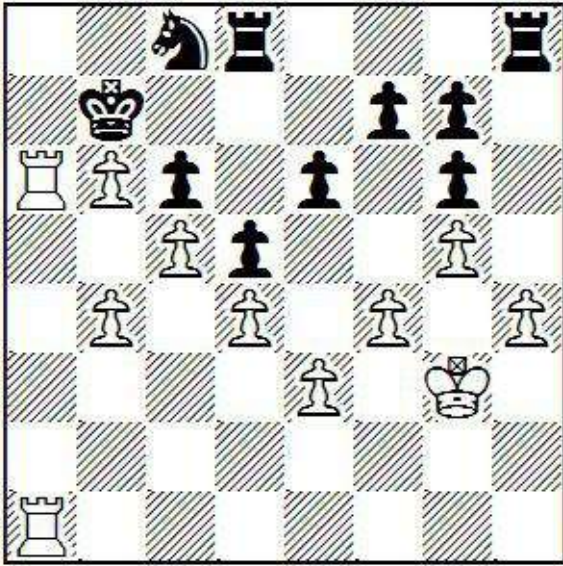
White's position is extremely pleasant since he has a huge space advantage and Black has almost no prospects for counterplay; the only problem is that the board is very blocked. Black's problems are more severe: he has to figure out how to deal with White's inevitable breakthrough.

Which is the most effective plan for White, and how does Black deal with it? If Black can figure out what his opponent's plan is, he will only have to defend against that, regardless of whether it is the best one for White. Instead of executing a plan, though, White bluffs over and over, only pretending to do things until Black essentially falls asleep.

There is an alternate explanation for White's manoeuvring, which is that he can't make up his mind, or that he is trying to figure out the best plan as he goes along. I will proceed on the assumption that White understood the position all along, and was manoeuvring in order to wear his opponent down, not in order to discover things about the position. All the same, manoeuvring in order to help stimulate your own ideas is also a completely sensible thing to do when your opponent has no counterplay and you are having a hard time devising something.

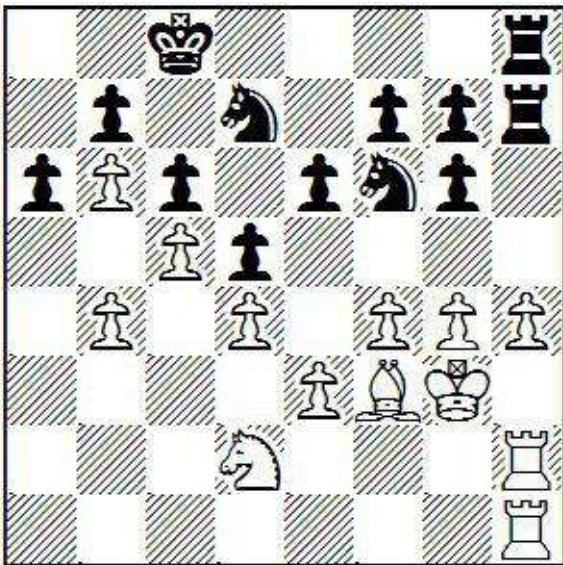
19 ... Kd7 20 Kf2 Rh4 21 Nb1 Rf8 22 Nd2 Kc8 23 Kg3 Rhh8 24 b4 Rd8 25 Ra2 Rd7 26 Bf3 Rdd8 27 Rh2

Later on we will find out what White's real plan is. Not to spoil the surprise, but let's see what would have happened if White had played it directly instead of fiddling around for thirty moves first: 27 Nb3 Rde8 28 Rha1 Nbd7 29 Na5 Nb8 30 h4 Rd8 31 g5 Ng8 32 Be2 Ne7 33 Nxb7 Kxb7 34 Bxa6+ Nxa6 35 Rxa6 Nc8



and the problem is the knight on c8 which guards a7, which means White can't conclude his attack. Black may not have found this defence anyway, but he is much more likely to be alert in the initial stages than after dozens of tedious moves.

27 ... Rdf8 28 Ra1 Rd8 29 Rah1 Rh7 30 Rf2 Nbd7 31 Rff1 Rdh8 32 h4 Nb8 33 Rh2 Nbd7 34 Rfh1



Now it appears that White is going to try to break through on the kingside, perhaps with 35 h5 gxh5 36 g5 Ng8 37 Rxh5. Personally, I don't think White ever had any intention of doing this - it is just another false alarm. White will continue to "cry wolf" until the villagers lose their vigilance.

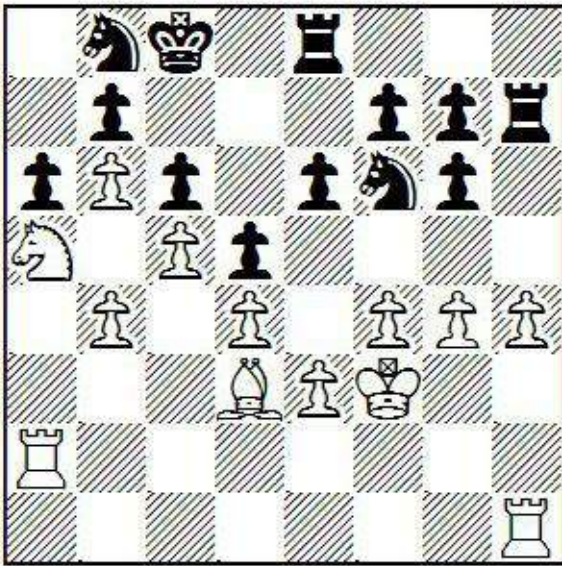
34 ... Kd8 35 Rh3 Kc8 36 Kg2

There now follows a long series of repositioning moves, some of which are meaningless decoys, whereas others are logical attempts to improve White's position. White eventually wants his bishop on d3 and his knight on a5, but he would prefer to keep the e4-square inaccessible for Black while he does it.

36 ... Kd8 37 Kf2 Kc8 38 Ke2 Kd8 39 Kd3 Kc8 40 Nb3 Nb8 41 Na5 Nbd7 42 R3h2 Nb8 43 Nb3

Interesting. As we will eventually see, White does want his knight on a5, but this time he has manoeuvred it there only to retreat it again. The psychological point is to convince Black that the Na5 manoeuvre is harmless, that it is not White's real plan. In this way, the next time White brings his knight to a5, Black will not suspect anything.

43 ... Nbd7 44 Nd2 Kd8 45 Nb1 Kc8 46 Nc3 Kd8 47 Nd1 Kc8 48 Nf2 Kd8 49 Bd1 Kc8 50 Bc2 Rf8
 51 Ke2 Rfh8 52 Kf3 Kd8 53 Bd3 Kc8 54 Nd1 Nb8 55 Nc3 Nbd7 56 Ne2 Kd8 57 Nc1 Kc8 58 Nb3 Nb8
 59 Na5 Re8 60 Ra2



60 ... Re7?

I tend to think White would have won eventually anyway, but technically this is the losing move because it blocks ... Ng8-e7-c8, covering the a7-square.

61 g5 Ng8 62 Rha1

There is no way to stop what's coming, and the h-pawn is no longer relevant.

62 ... Kd8 63 Nxb7+ Rxb7 64 Bxa6 Rd7 65 Bf1 Ne7 66 Ra8 Rb7 67 Ba6 1-0

In the previous example, the purpose of all the manoeuvring was relatively obvious, and it is also clear that Black was helpless to punish White for dilly-dallying. Manoeuvring in more open positions is trickier, but some players manage to do it anyway.

The games of Hikaru Nakamura, even those from many years ago, before he would have been considered a world-class grandmaster, are filled with manoeuvring. Nakamura has a deserved reputation for being a brilliant tactician and an incredible fighter. His draw percentage is one of the lowest of any top player. So you might expect that he would be attacking constantly, trying to create threats, and playing games that are over quickly. It is indeed possible to find many such games, but there are also countless ones where Nakamura stabilizes the position, slows down the play, and starts manoeuvring, often while there are still many pieces on the board. (Sometimes he even does this when he is down on material, a situation where a typical player would feel some urgency.) This is what some commentators might call "cat and mouse", though I would never consider using such a clichéd and pejorative expression, especially when I have a Dvoretskian alternative.

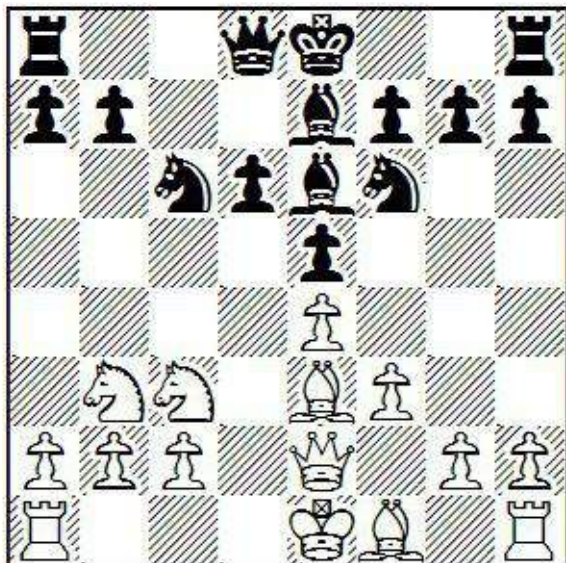
Game 25

H.Nakamura-Ch.Bauer

Biel 2005

Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 d6 6 f3 e5 7 Nb3 Be6 8 Be3 Be7 9 Qe2



This odd-looking move is nettlesome in two ways. First of all, it is very rare, played only a few times before this game. Secondly, it is a queen move making possible other active queen moves, as we will see. Interestingly, it has the blessing of *Stockfish*. One of its technical merits is that, when White castles long, Black's d-pawn will be pinned (allowing Nc5). As for blocking White's f1-bishop, it didn't have a good square anyway. Besides, you will often see strong players leave one bishop back, castle the other way, and continue the game as if their development is complete.

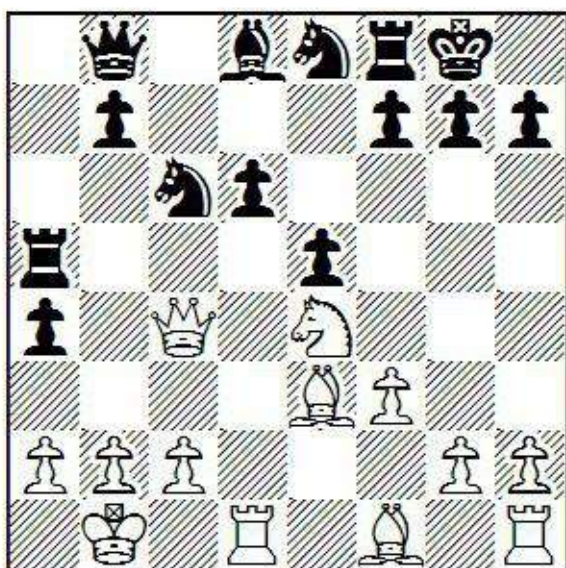
9 ... a5 10 Qb5

An extremely annoying move. Will White's queen disturb Black's coordination or will it become a target? That depends on who makes the first mistake.

10 ... 0-0 11 0-0-0 Qb8 12 Na4 Ra6 13 Kb1 Ne8 14 Nb6 a4 15 Nd2 Bd8 16 Nd5

So far Black is handling the position well, so Nakamura stirs the pot with a pawn sacrifice.

16 ... Ra5 17 Qe2 Bxd5 18 exd5 Rxd5 19 Qc4?! Ra5 20 Ne4



As compensation for the pawn, White has the bishop pair and some useful space and squares. This will be enough if Black's centre pawns remain immobile, but here Black misses an opportunity to force the d-pawn forward with 20 ... Ne7! 21 Nc3 Nf6 22 Qd3 d5, which would have left White in some trouble.

20 ... Be7?! 21 Be2 a3 22 b3 Nf6 23 Bb6

Mainly a harassing move. White's bishop was already on the right square (e3).

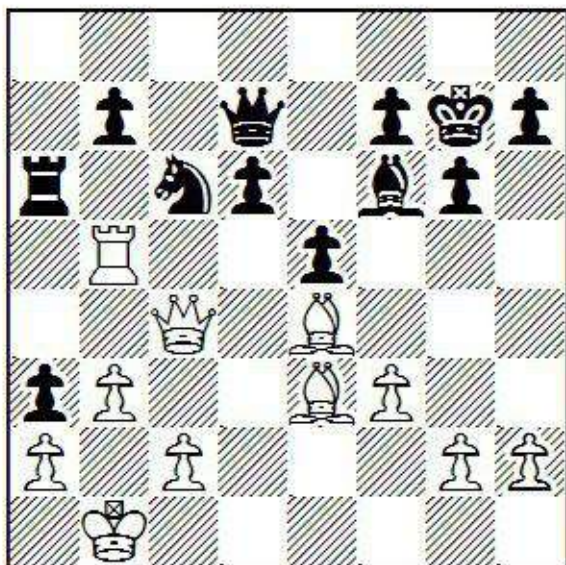
23 ... Ra6 24 Bf2 Qc7

It would have been interesting to see whether Nakamura would have allowed a draw with 24 ... Ra5 25 Bb6 Ra6 26 Bf2 etc. However, I think both players were playing for a win at this stage.

25 Nxf6+ Bxf6 26 Rd5 Ra5 27 Rhd1

Not only is White playing without any urgency after his pawn sacrifice, he is apparently unconcerned about the fact that pieces are being traded.

27 ... Rxd5 28 Rxd5 Rc8 29 Bd3 g6 30 Be4 Kg7 31 Be3 Qe7 32 Bc1 Ra8 33 Rb5 Ra6 34 Be3 Qd7



White has improved his pieces to the maximum, but how will he make progress? In practice, *all that proved necessary was some manoeuvring: the opponent could not stand to be doing nothing*, even though White was doing nothing.

35 Qd3 Qc7 36 c3 Ra8 37 Qc4

White might be threatening 38 Rxb7 Qxb7 39 Bxc6 and 40 Bxa8.

37 ... Rc8?!

The rook is needed on the a-file to guard the a-pawn.

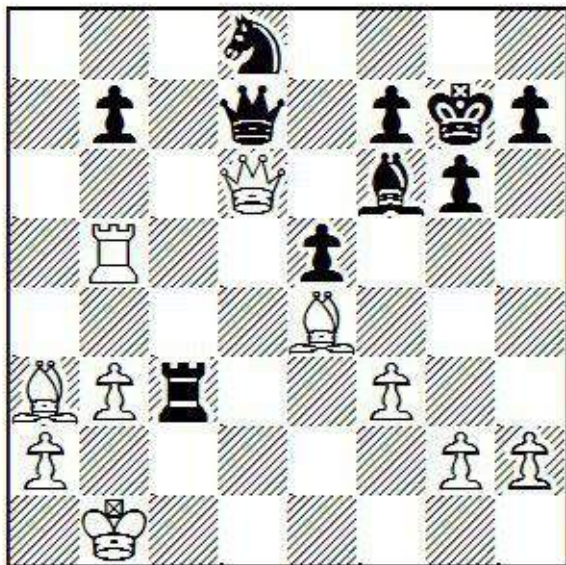
38 Bc1 Qd7?!

Even now, 38 ... Ra8 is the lesser evil.

39 Bxa3

Not only has White recovered the pawn, his bishop stands well on a3, targeting Black's d6-pawn.

39 ... Nd8 40 Qd5 Rxc3 41 Qxd6



41 ... Qe8?!

According to *Stockfish*, 41 ... Qxd6 42 Bxd6 Re3 is much better, but Black is still in trouble, and I still doubt very much that Bauer could have altered the momentum of the game.

42 Rb6 Ne6 43 Rxb7 h5 44 Rb8 Rc8 45 Rxc8 Qxc8 46 Bb2 Nd4 47 Qb4 Qa6 48 Qe1 h4 49 Qd1 Qb5 50 f4 Qb6 51 fxe5 Bxe5 52 a4 f6 53 Ka2 Ne6 54 Qd7+ Kh6 55 Bc1+ Bf4 56 Bxf4+ Nxf4 57 Qd2 g5 58 g3 Qe6 59 Bf3 Ng6 60 a5 Ne5 61 Bb7 hxg3 62 hxg3 Qe7 63 Be4 Qc5 64 a6 f5 65 Bxf5 Nc6 66 Qh2+ Kg7 67 Qh7+ Kf6 68 Qg6+ Ke7 69 Qe6+ Kf8 70 Qf6+ Ke8 71 Bg6+ Kd7 72 Qf5+ Qxf5 73 Bxf5+ Kc7 74 Ka3 Kb6 75 Bd3 Ne5 76 Be2 Nc6 77 g4 Nd4 78 Bd3 1-0

When the next game was played, Gonzalez was well on his way to earning his GM title. Here he has the misfortune to run into an inspired Hikaru Nakamura. Is he inspired positionally? Tactically? No, he is inspired to do nothing! A sitzkrieg on the chessboard.

Game 26

H.Nakamura-Re.Gonzalez

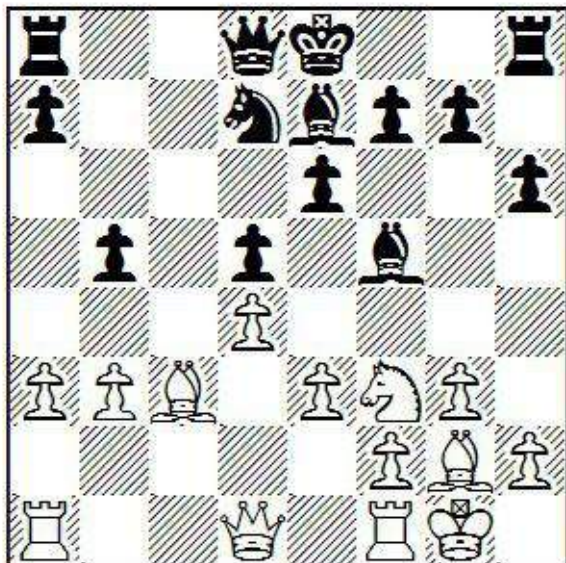
Las Vegas 2007

Slav Defence

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 e3 Bf5 4 Nf3 e6 5 Nc3 Nd7 6 g3

Unsurprisingly, this move has never been played before or since. It certainly makes for a slow manoeuvring game, and creates a position in which Black will have a hard time playing by rote.

6 ... h6 7 b3 Ngf6 8 Bb2 Ne4 9 a3 Be7 10 Bg2 b5 11 cxd5 Nxc3 12 Bxc3 cxd5 13 0-0

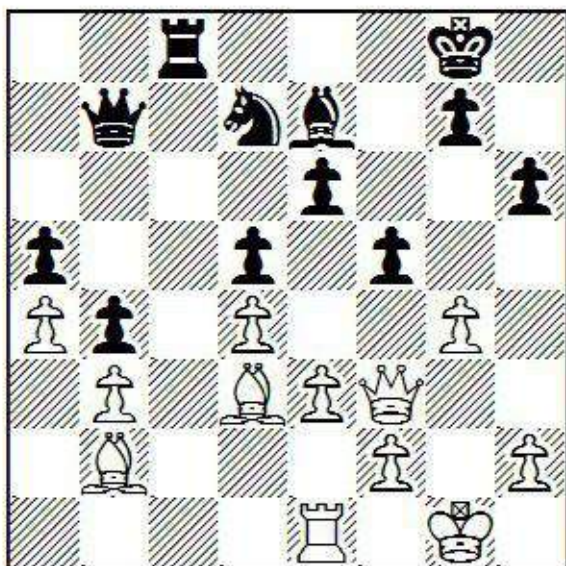


Despite all his pawn moves and fianchettoes, White still gets castled first. Black's development is not as efficient as it looks.

13 ... 0-0 14 Qd2 a5 15 Rfc1 Be4 16 Qe2 Qb6 17 Bb2 Rfc8 18 Bf1 Bxf3?!

Not a good exchange; White will enjoy his manoeuvring more if he has the bishop pair.

19 Qxf3 b4 20 a4 Qb7 21 Bd3 Rxc1+ 22 Rxc1 Rc8 23 Re1 f5 24 g4

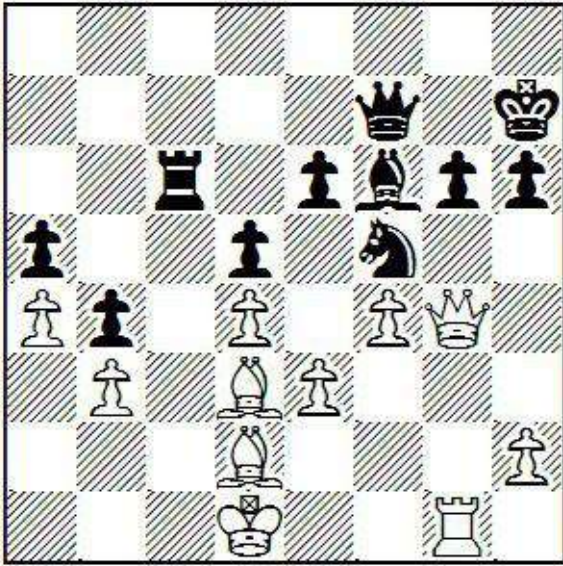


Wait, this looks aggressive. Is White going to switch gears and play for mate?

24 ... fxc4 25 Qxc4 Qb6 26 Kh1 Bf6 27 Rg1 Nf8 28 f4 Rc7 29 Qh5 Kh8 30 Qe8 Kg8 31 Rf1 Qb7 32 Qh5 Qb6 33 Bc1 Rc3 34 Qd1

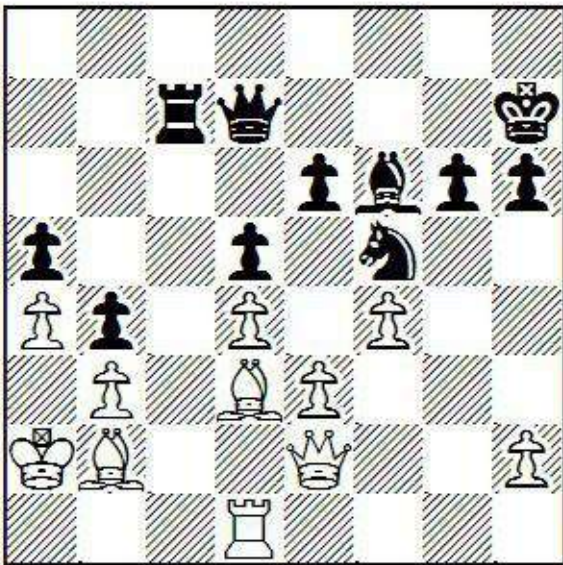
No, not really.

34 ... Qd6 35 Bb5 Ng6 36 Bd2 Rc8 37 Bd3 Ne7 38 Qh5 Qd7 39 Rg1 Kf8 40 Rf1 Kg8 41 Qh3 Rc7 42 Kg1 Nf5 43 Kf2 g6 44 Rg1 Kh7 45 Qg4 Qf7 46 Ke2 Rc6 47 Kd1?



If enough moves are played, Black will eventually make a mistake - so goes the theory, anyway. But of course it is not impossible for White to make a mistake first, and had Black found 47 ... Rc3!, White would have been in serious trouble (48 Bxc3?? Nxe3+ is not at all satisfactory). However, I think it is very difficult for Black to stay tactically alert enough to find such a move when the game has been proceeding so uneventfully for so long. It may also be that Black has implicit trust that White will not make a mistake.

47 ... Rc7? 48 Qe2 Bd8 49 Bc2 Qf6 50 Qa6 Qe7 51 Kc1 Ra7 52 Qe2 Rc7 53 Kb1 Qf7 54 Bd3 Qf6 55 Bc1 Qf7 56 Bb2 Bf6 57 Ka2 Qd7 58 Bb1 Qc6 59 Qg2 Qe8 60 Bd3 Qf7 61 Qe2 Qd7 62 Rd1



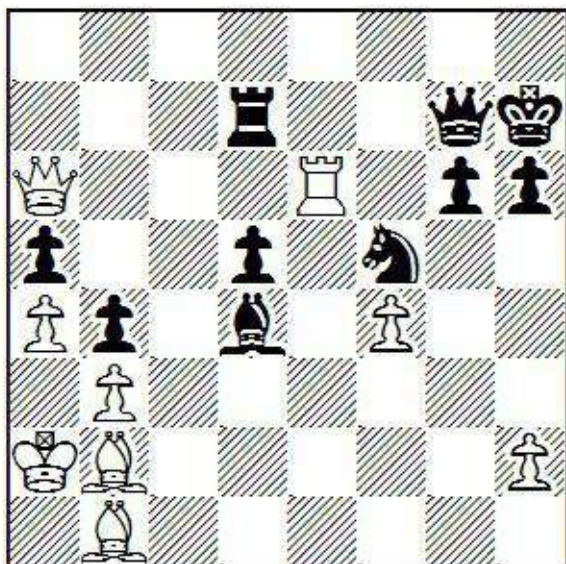
62 ... Qg7?

Oops! Black has been lulled to sleep by the gentle rocking motion of White's pieces. This is already a serious mistake, allowing 63 Bxf5 and 64 Qa6 or 64 Qb5, winning a pawn. Oddly, Nakamura does not pounce on this; fortunately, the opportunity does not go away.

63 Bb1? Rd7? 64 Qa6

According to *Stockfish*, White does not yet have a decisive advantage, but he does win a pawn and Nakamura is in his element in this (messy) type of position. It is also hard for Black to switch gears. The game is effectively decided.

64 ... Nxe3? 65 Re1 Nf5 66 Rxe6 Bxd4?



Now it's raining mistakes. Black is probably lost no matter what he does, but this makes things relatively easy for White.

67 Bxf5! gxf5 68 Bxd4 Qxd4 69 Rxe6+ Kg7 70 Qg6+ Kf8 71 Qxf5+ Ke8 72 Re6+ Kd8 73 Qf8+ Kc7 74 Re2 Kb7 75 Qe8 Qg7 76 Rc2 Ka7 77 Qc8 Qe7 78 f5 Rb7 79 Qc6 Qd8 80 Qc5+ Ka6 81 Re2 Rb6 82 Re7 Qb8 83 Qf2 Rb7 84 Re6+ 1-0

Manoeuvring wears away the opponent's energy and vigilance - but like many of the techniques in this book, it can also demand energy of the player utilizing it. You'd better hit the gym. Yes, really. Do it.

Chapter Nine

Provocativeness

Chess moves or chessplayers are sometimes described as “provocative”. Assuming that the provocativeness is intentional, what exactly is the player trying to provoke, and what is the ultimate goal of playing provocatively?

In the awful movie *Rocky III*, Rocky Balboa is in a difficult fight against James “Clubber” Lang, and paradoxically decides to allow Clubber to hit him hard so that he can taunt Clubber for his inability to knock Rocky out. It is difficult for Rocky to survive these punches, but once he does, Clubber becomes enraged, swinging wildly in the hopes of connecting for an even bigger punch to finally finish the job. By now, Rocky is dodging instead of standing still, and Clubber becomes so exhausted that he is unable to defend himself against Rocky’s eventual counter-attack.

Awesome, right? Except first of all, that is boxing, not chess. Secondly, that is fiction, not reality. Thirdly, just because something has some non-zero chance of working does not make it a good strategy. Can it really make sense to play “provocatively”?

I have often heard Miles’s play described as provocative. The basic idea is to make your opponent overestimate his chances, inducing him into an unsound attack or sacrifice. Ideally, the provocative move or moves are perfectly sound, but are likely to appear weird or “off” to your opponent. If you are good enough at this strategy, you may be willing to make some somewhat questionable moves to get the ball rolling. Miles was a master of this.

One of the common effects of provoking your opponent is that he decides early in the game that he is expecting to win. If he does that, it normally becomes unnecessary for you to go out of your way to create winning chances for yourself - your chances will simply appear as your opponent attacks, sacrifices, or otherwise presses for victory.

Game 27

S.Galdunts-A.Miles

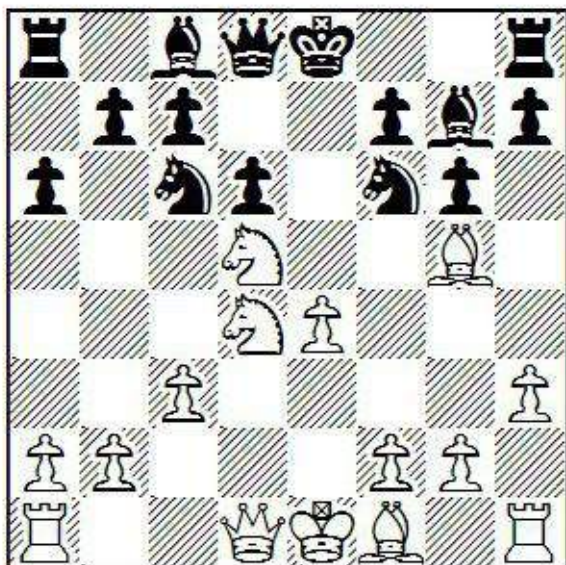
Bad Wörishofen 1995

Nimzowitsch Defence

1 e4 Nc6

Some opponents find Black’s very first move to be provocative, and already expect to “punish” 1 ... Nc6 in some fashion. It is pleasant to play against someone whose thinking is so narrow that they are affronted by the slightest deviation. Most players need a lot more provocation than that, though you can be sure that Miles is up to the task.

2 Nf3 d6 3 h3 Nf6 4 Nc3 e5 5 d4 exd4 6 Nxd4 g6 7 Bg5 Bg7 8 Nd5 a6 9 c3



If White was surprised by anything that has happened so far, he has nonetheless managed his position well, and is somewhat more comfortable. According to *Stockfish*, Black should play 9 ... h6 here, but I can imagine that Miles was not very excited by the sterile position that would result after 10 Nxf6+ Bxf6 11 Nxc6 bxc6 12 Bxf6 Qxf6 13 Qd4. Black may have little to worry about there, but if he has any designs on winning, that is not the place to be. Even the most powerful endgame wizard needs something to work with.

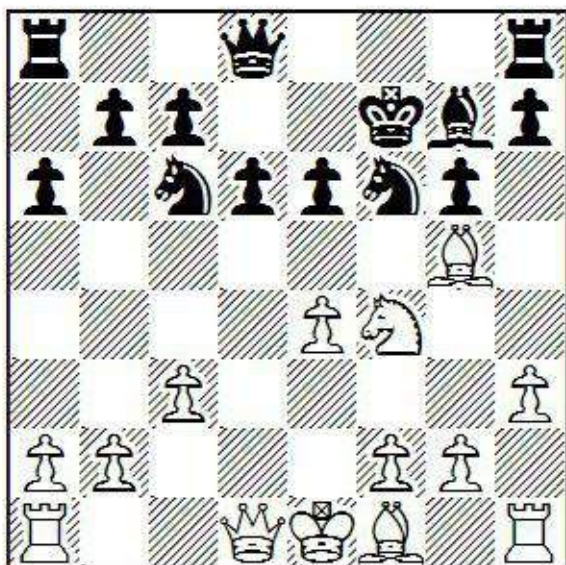
9 ... Be6!?

Handing White the bishop pair, and seemingly taking on some additional problems as well. However, like any good provocative move, there are some points in its favour as well. After all, if White captures the bishop, he will be unable to keep his powerful knights in the centre.

10 Nxe6 fxe6 11 Nf4

Isn't this attack against the weak e6-pawn a problem for Black?

11 ... Kf7!



Naturally, Miles had foreseen this position and calculated that White would not be able to reach his king in a timely way. This is the provocative consequence of Miles's provocative ninth move. White may feel that he has "forced" this "concession", but if he tries to press home this "advantage", he is setting

himself up for trouble; on the other hand, if he allows Black to “get away with it”, he will have the nagging feeling that he overlooked something important. As we have seen, and will continue to see, king moves are often both nettlesome and provocative.

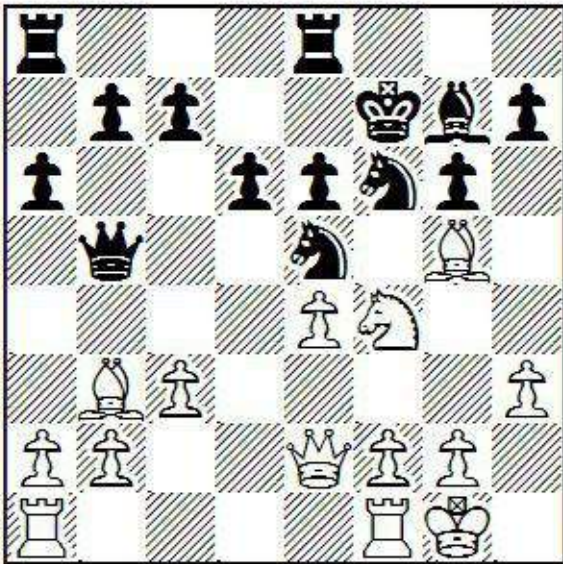
12 Bc4 Re8 13 0-0

White resists further provocation for the time being. Surely Miles would have been happy to induce 13 Nxe6 Rxe6 14 Bxe6+ Kxe6 15 f4 with a highly unclear position.

13 ... Qd7 14 Qe2?!

White has to do something about the e-pawn, but this exposes his queen to Black’s next manoeuvre.

14 ... Ne5 15 Bb3 Qb5



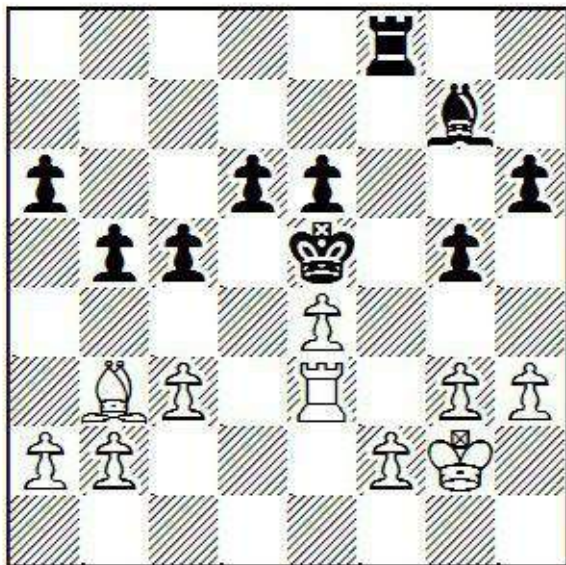
16 Rae1?!

White has realized that the black king is much safer than it looks, but that does not mean he should agree to the queen trade, which turns Black’s king position from a small liability into a small asset. Notice that these inaccuracies are coming right on the heels of Miles’s annoying king move.

16 ... Qxe2 17 Rxe2 h6 18 Bxf6 Kxf6 19 Rd1 Rad8 20 Nd3 g5! 21 g3 Nxd3 22 Rxd3 Ke5!

Although this position does not resemble a win for Black, the centralized king will provide White with ways to go wrong. I can picture the black monarch blowing raspberries and taunting his foes.

23 Rf3 Rf8 24 Ree3 b5 25 Kg2 c5 26 Rxf8 Rxf8



27 f4+?

Nobody likes to wait passively while their opponent makes small improvements to their position, but that is exactly what White needs to do. Black cannot make enough progress without assistance from his opponent.

27 ... gxf4 28 gxf4+ Rxf4 29 Rg3 Bf6 30 Bc2 c4 31 Rf3 Bg5 32 Kf2 Rxf3+ 33 Kxf3 Bc1 34 b3 Bd2 35 a4 Bxc3 36 axb5 axb5 37 bxc4 bxc4 38 Ba4 Bd2 39 Bd7 Bg5 40 Ke2 d5 41 exd5 exd5 42 Bb5 Kd4 43 Bc6 Kc5 0-1

Game 28

R.Bellin-M.Sharif

French Team Championship 1988

Latvian Gambit

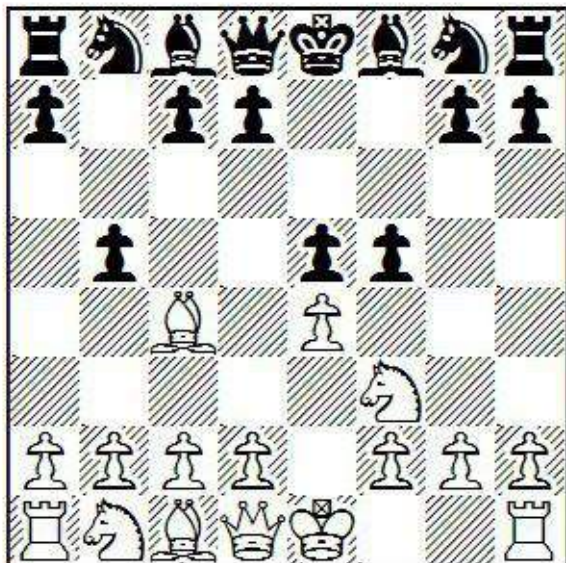
1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 f5

Sharif and Bellin are both IMs. Bellin is co-author of the very fine book *Test Your Positional Play* and many others. Sharif chooses a pointedly anti-positional opening. One would expect that the Latvian would be provocative enough. If we check with our computer, we see that White's position is nearly winning already, but somehow things don't tend to work out that way in real life, which is what we should be more concerned with.

3 Bc4?!

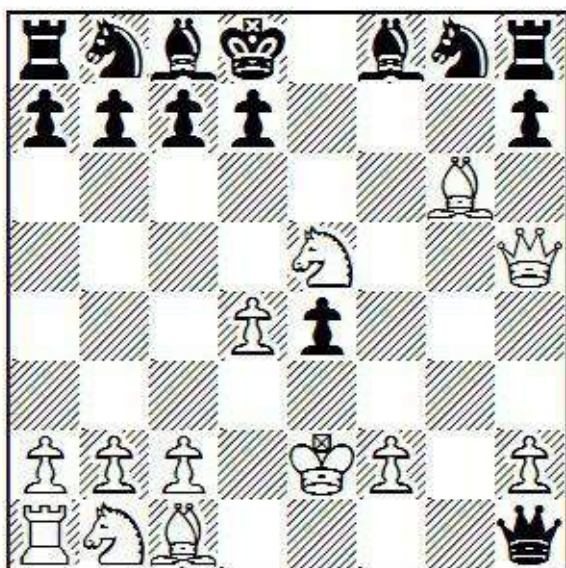
If White wants to refute the Latvian, he must start with 3 Nxe5. Instead, Bellin chooses a very impractical move that is weaker both objectively and practically, giving Black the choice of several wild variations.

3 ... b5



A wonderfully deranged idea that also sets a sophisticated trap. Naturally, the computer hates this move, though it scores 50% in my database. Can you say nettlesome?

3 ... fxe4 4 Nxe5 Qg5 (Svedenborg's 4 ... d5! was not yet understood to be strong) 5 d4 Qxg2 6 Qh5+ g6 7 Bf7+ Kd8 8 Bxg6 Qxh1+ 9 Ke2



is one of the main variations, and it has sometimes been considered to be winning for White, although it probably isn't, and White has had plenty of trouble trying to prove the win even when he "should". Nonetheless, this is what he was hoping for, as we will see.

4 Bb3

Taking the b-pawn is very weak: after 4 Bxb5? fxe4 5 Nxe5 Qg5 6 d4 Qxg2 7 Rf1 c6, Black is just better. 4 Bxg8 Rxg8 5 exf5 is the simple way to a clear advantage, though it has only been played once.

4 ... fxe4 5 Nxe5

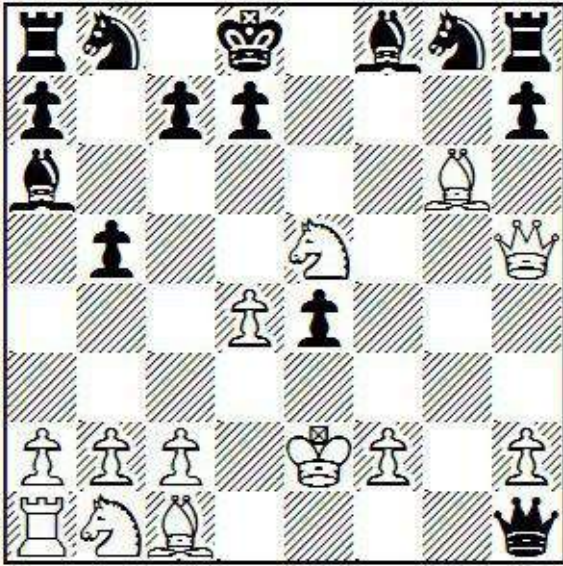
White starts down the road to disaster, and is already unlikely to escape. Instead, 5 d3 is strong (or 5 d4), since 5 ... exf3? 6 Qxf3 threatens both checkmate and Black's exposed a8-rook.

5 ... Qg5 6 d4 Qxg2 7 Qh5+ g6 8 Bf7+ Kd8 9 Bxg6??

White plays as if the moves 3 ... b5 and 4 Bb3 never happened, heading for the "main variation". Of the nineteen games in *MegaBase* starting with 3 ... b5, four reached this position!

Even at this late point, White could have bailed out with 9 Qg5+, and has some advantage in the coming endgame. The problem is, White is still trying to “punish” Black rather than thinking calmly about the position on the board. He feels like he “deserves” more than an endgame advantage, and is looking to confirm this view rather than disprove it - the confirmation bias in action.

9 ... Qxh1+ 10 Ke2 Ba6!



The free 3 ... b5 proves its worth, allowing this monster move that simultaneously attacks and defends by opening up an escape route for Black's king. The game is over already, since White's initiative is not stronger than Black's, yet he is down a rook. The rest of the game is like watching a master against an 1100 player.

11 Bg5+ Kc8 12 Nd2 b4+ 13 Ke3 Qxa1 14 Bxe4 Qe1+ 15 Kf4 Nf6 16 Bxf6 Bh6+ 17 Kf5 Qxd2 18 Qh4 Rf8 19 Bxa8 Bf1 20 Bf3 Bh3+! 21 Ke4 Qxc2+ 0-1

You would expect that, if it is so dangerous to be provoked, your opponents might simply *refuse* to be provoked. Indeed, many of them do. However, it can also be dangerous to *not* be provoked. One of the reasons I was able to use the Latvian Gambit successfully in tournaments for so long was that most of my opponents would back away from complications, refuse to try to refute the opening, and look for a simple, safe edge. That led to many, many games like the following:

Game 29

P.Thiel-J.Schuyler

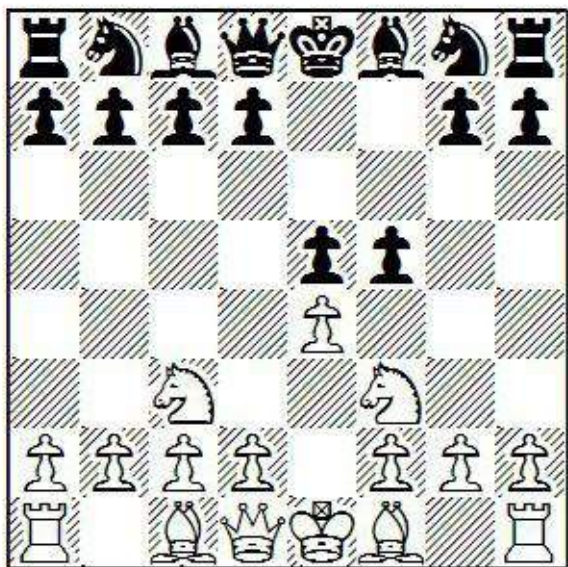
Las Vegas 1997

Latvian Gambit

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 f5

Perhaps this is taking things a bit far. Indeed, I don't play this anymore. After all, what if the mistakes you are anticipating from your opponent never materialize? Yet the reality is that they do, at least on average. My online *MegaBase* indicates that the Latvian is only slightly (1.7%) less successful than Petroff's Defence (2 ... Nf6) and slightly (1.6%) more successful than Philidor's Defence (2 ... d6). If we believe this opening is “objectively” terrible, then the statistics prove absolutely how nettlesome it is for the opponent. *White's expected mistakes neutralize all but his normal advantage.*

3 Nc3?!



This is not too common in my database, but people frequently played it against me - perhaps because it looks “safe” (it is the only sensible move that guards the e-pawn), or because it is the traditional main response to the Schliemann (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 f5!? 4 Nc3).

As an aside, when I was in my mid-twenties I trained for a short time with IM Larry D. Evans. Upon seeing that my main defence(!) was the Latvian he urged me to, at the very least, “wait for White to play one non-classical move” before embarking upon my f-pawn adventure. Just to be clear, the non-classical move he was suggesting I wait for was 3 Bb5, and he was recommending that I upgrade from the Latvian to the Schliemann. At the time I was unwilling to take this sensible advice, for two reasons. Firstly, I was under the mistaken impression that the Schliemann allowed White to force an early draw if he was so inclined. Indeed, that was the conventional wisdom at the time, a myth propagated in, among other places, the 1991 book *Winning with the Schliemann*, by GM Mikhail Tseitlin. It is hard to understand this mistake since at least two strong non-drawing lines were played as early as 1905, with another being unearthed in 1965 (and one more in 2008; I hope to return to this subject in a future book). Secondly, I could see that the Schliemann, albeit aggressive, had accumulated a large amount of theory. I have never had a head for memorization and, furthermore, saw little point in posing difficult problems for the opponent if they were likely to have memorized the solutions in advance. Such is modern chess. Nevertheless, the Schliemann does have a high win percentage for Black, and a low draw percentage, and there is little doubt that it is sound - no matter how much White memorizes, there is no way to guarantee a comfortable advantage.

3 ... Nf6?!

The main move is 3 ... fxe4, but I always played the text, keeping all the tension, continuing to try to provoke. Also, picking the fourth most common move further erodes the possibility that White will have a pre-programmed response.

4 Nxe5?!

White declines a second opportunity to try to refute the opening with 4 exf5!. The text move leads, at best, to a normal advantage for White.

4 ... d6 5 Nc4?!

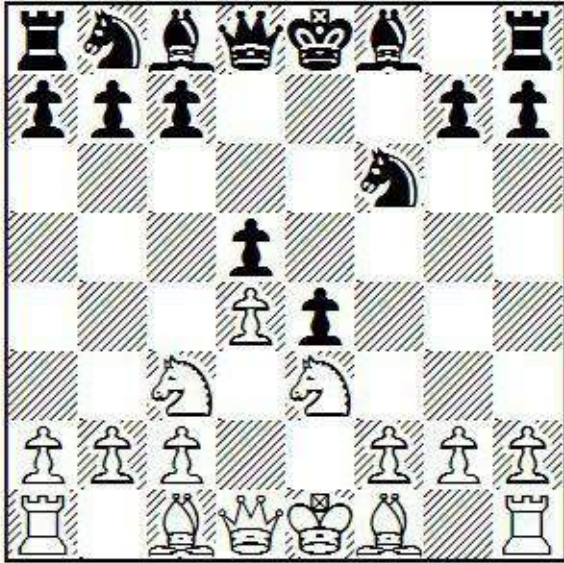
Now White has no trace of an advantage. In his defence, the best move (5 Nd3!) has never been played.

5 ... fxe4 6 d4?!

Here too the best move is almost never played. 6 Ne3 prevents 6 ... d5? because of 7 Nexd5! Nxd5 8

Qh5+ etc.

6 ... d5 7 Ne3?!



By now White is clearly worse. The only good thing about his position is that he is again threatening 8 Nxd5, a trap I managed to fall for in a couple of blitz games.

7 ... **Be6** 8 **Be2**?!

White needs to strike back in the centre with 8 f3 before Black takes over the game completely with his massive centre.

8 ... **c5**

The pressure against d4 is extremely unpleasant for White because of the unfortunate position of his knights (i.e. 9 dxc5? d4).

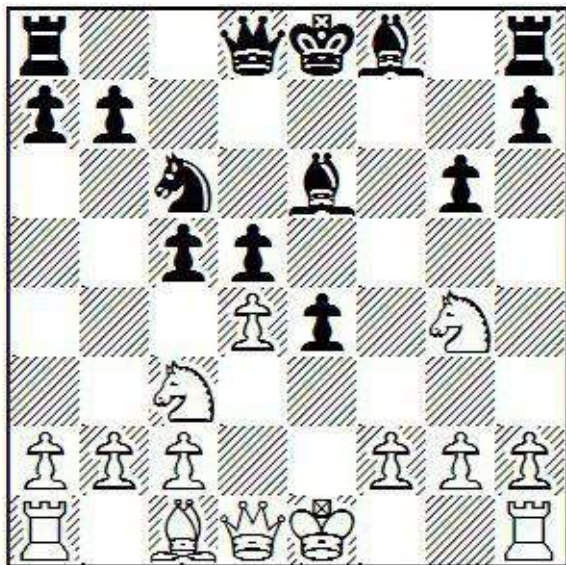
9 **Bh5**+?

The provocative 2 ... f5 has now been followed by seven mistakes in a row by White. Obviously this is not his best game ever, but Thiel is a National Master, and he is not going to make these kinds of mistakes, even on his worst day, unless he is under some kind of stress. That is the point of exerting pressure starting on move two, even at considerable risk.

9 ... **g6** 10 **Bg4**

10 Be2 Nc6 11 Bb5 cxd4 12 Qxd4 Bg7 is just as bad.

10 ... **Nxg4** 11 **Nxg4** Nc6



12 0-0?!

12 dxc5 is a better try, though 12 ... Bxc5 13 h3 h5 14 Ne3 Bxe3 is still winning for Black.

12 ... cxd4 13 Nb5 h5

White's knight is trapped. The game lasted twenty more moves, but the result was never in doubt.

14 Nxd4 Bxg4 15 Nxc6 bxc6 16 Qd4 Rh7 17 f3 exf3 18 gxf3 Bf5 19 Kg2 Kf7 20 h4 Qf6 21 Qa4 Kg8 22 Bg5 Qxb2 23 Rac1 Qb5 24 Qf4 Re8 25 c4 Re2+ 26 Rf2 Rxf2+ 27 Kxf2 Qc5+ 28 Kg2 d4 29 Rd1 d3 30 Re1 Rf7 31 Qb8 Qd6 32 Re8 Qxb8 33 Rxb8 Kg7 0-1

And one more example of a player who refuses to be provoked:

Game 30

J.Schuyler-S.Reeves

New York 1987

Latvian Gambit

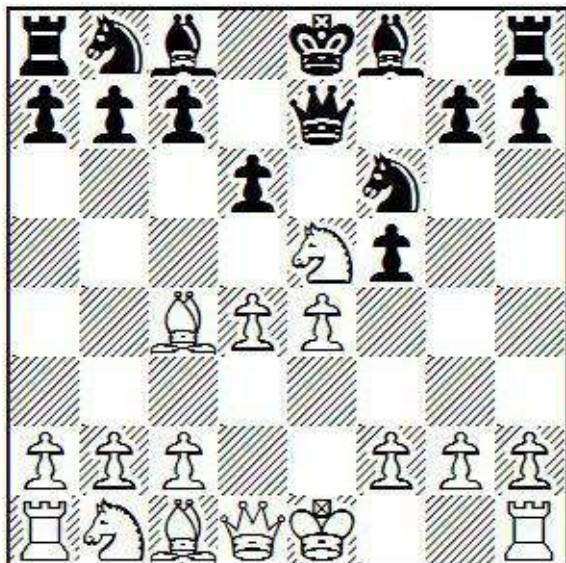
1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 f5 3 Nxe5 Nf6 4 Bc4

My opponent has played the principled move on move three, but here he gets nervous and declines the second pawn. After all, why be greedy? Why not develop with a threat? Almost all my opponents played this same way.

4 ... Qe7

The only move, but it is tricky to deal with.

5 d4 d6



6 Nf3?

Unwilling or unable to sort through the complications of 6 Nf7 or 6 Bf7+, my opponent makes a pathetic retreat. Of course I was well prepared analytically for an invasion, even if I was not guaranteed a good position.

6 ... fxe4 7 Ng5

This can't be good, but it is already hard to give advice to White. I think my opponent played this forward move in order to try to redeem himself for his last overly passive one.

7 ... h6 8 Nh3 d5 9 Be2 g5

I do not want White's awful knight re-entering the game via the f4-square.

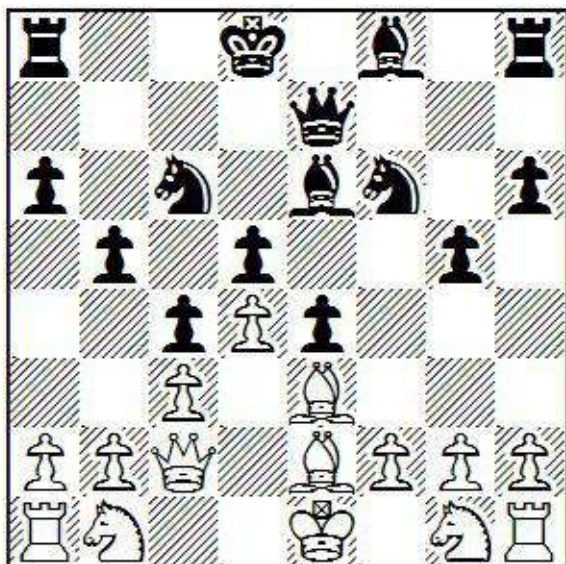
10 Bh5+ Kd8

This does not bother me in the slightest. White's last is a further loss of time that he cannot afford.

11 Be2 c5

It can't be right to allow White to open the d-file with my king on d8, but I felt my opponent was completely pacified by now, and I correctly predicted his response.

12 c3? Nc6 13 Be3 Be6 14 Na3 a6 15 Ng1 c4 16 Qc2 b5 17 Nb1



This is an old game, and this is all I remember, except for his post-game comment, in which he drily

stated: “I’ve never been crushed so badly in my entire life.” I should hope not. I have not bothered to point out most of his specific errors - nearly every move was a mistake, and they were mostly motivated by a desire to play safe and avoid complications.

Whether you realize it or not, you play against people like this all the time. If you know who they are, you can take great liberties. If you don’t know your opponents so well, you can think of your provocative play as a calculated risk, and remember that it can work whether or not your opponent is willing to be provoked.

Chapter Ten

Lost Positions

No matter how strong a player you are, you will sometimes find yourself in lost positions. Although this book is not specifically geared towards lost positions, most of the ideas presented here are especially valuable when things are going badly. After all, that is when you are in most dire need of mistakes by the opponent.

Game 31

S.Jacobi-J.Schuyler

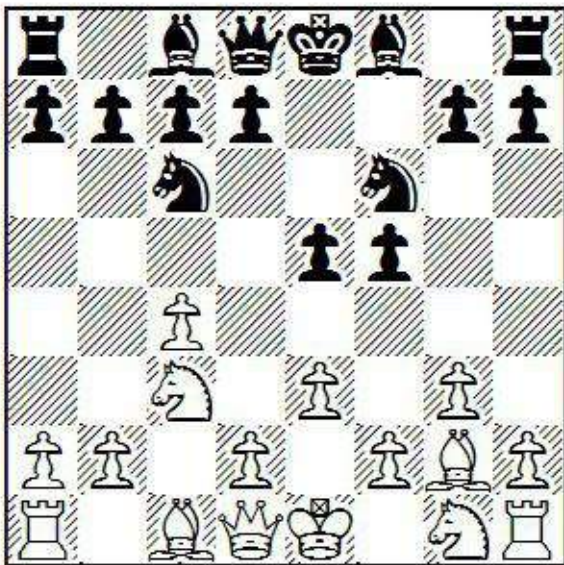
Concord 1995

English Opening

1 c4 e5 2 g3 Nc6 3 Bg2 f5?!

This punctuation is subjective. As a matter of fact, the reversed Grand Prix Attack is fine for Black, but at the time I believed it to be bad, and yet played it anyway, with unrealistic hopes for certain mistakes. It is one thing to hope for unlikely mistakes when it is necessary, and quite another for it to be “Plan A”, especially against a strong player.

4 Nc3 Nf6 5 e3



5 ... Bc5?

This is objectively bad, and there is little doubt that I will be punished. Instead, 5 ... d5!? is quite playable. Black offers a gambit, though the pawn is too dangerous for White to try to hold anyway.

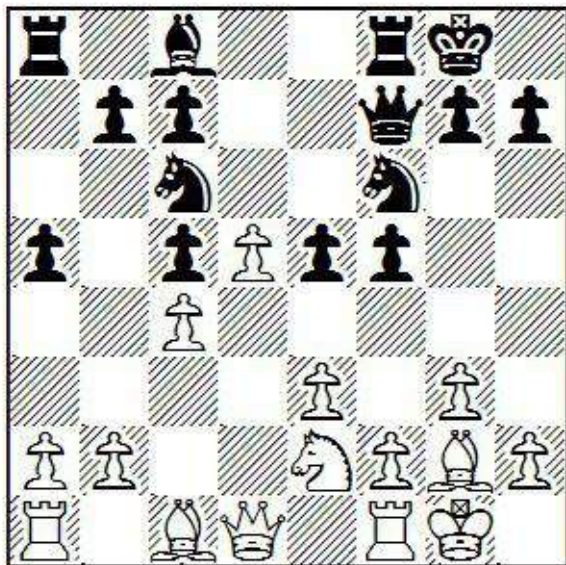
6 d3?!

Why not play 6 Nge2 and try to achieve d2-d4 in one move?

6 ... d6 7 Nge2 0-0 8 0-0 Qe8

My hack attack with 9 ... Qh5, 10 ... f4, 11 ... Bh3 etc will only work if White is deeply asleep.

9 Na4 a5 10 Nxc5 dxc5 11 d4 Qf7 12 d5



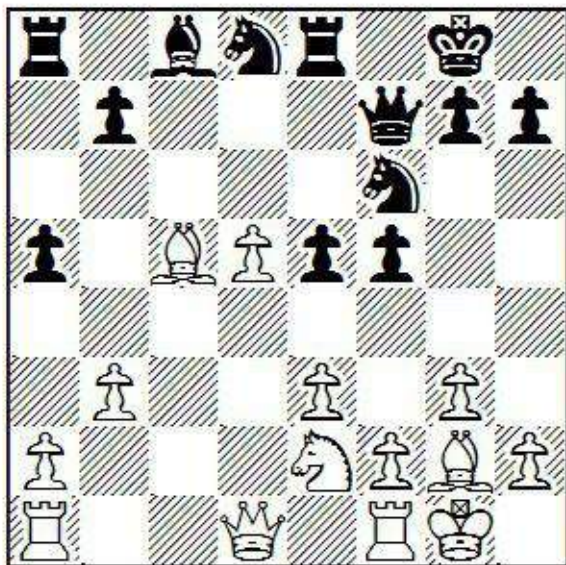
12 ... Nd8?!

This knight is going nowhere for a long time. 12 ... Ne7 is a better try.

13 b3 c6?

Really, anything is better than this. It's time to solidify and develop. Counter-attacking without active pieces is only in case of emergency. 13 ... Qe7 is one way to proceed, intending ... Nf7-d6 with excellent chances of survival.

14 Ba3 cxd5 15 Bxc5 Re8 16 cxd5



Could my position be any worse? Now that I think of it, there is one somewhat twisted advantage to playing "hope chess" from the beginning. When the game inevitably turns against you, you are already in the right state of mind: desperately hoping for mistakes. Of course, as a fighting chessplayer, you must do a bit more than just hope. As Joshua Trundle says (and sings) in the 1974 animated Christmas special *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*, "Even a miracle needs a hand." What sort of hand? Well, in my experience, *opponents are not going to make serious mistakes in a good position until they are worried about their king safety.*

16 ... e4! 17 Nc3 h5!

Under different circumstances, this would be a laughable attempt to drum up counterplay. What

possible justification does Black have for a kingside attack? That's the wrong question, because this move follows *the rule*, which is thus: "In a lost position, play the most aggressive move you can think of that is not obviously bad." In fact, as your position gets worse, so does the rule, which becomes: "Play the most aggressive move you can think of, even if it is obviously bad, unless there is also an obvious refutation." Note that even in terrible positions, you should make some effort to refute your own garbage ahead of time, because your opponent certainly will. However, if you can't prove analytically that your move is bad, there is a good chance that your opponent won't be able to either.

18 Rc1 Bd7 19 a4 h4! 20 gxh4 Ng4

It isn't much yet, but a little is a lot better than nothing.

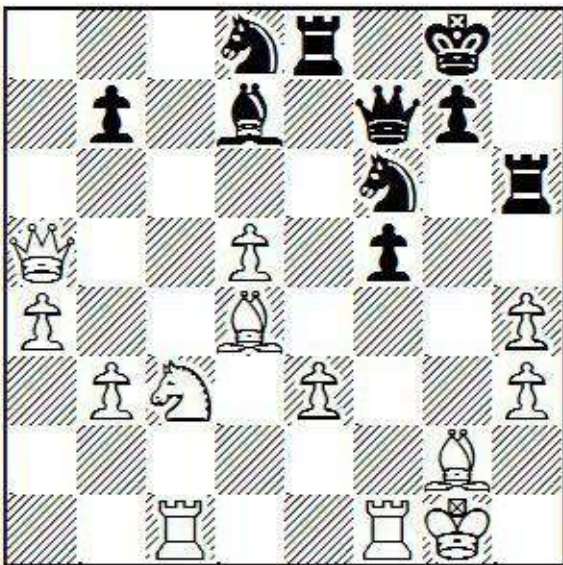
21 Bd4 Ra6!

Even if d8-knight is still hopeless, I can at least get the rest of my pieces active.

22 f3 exf3 23 Qxf3 Rh6 24 Qg3 Qh5 25 Qc7

Unfortunately for me, he can get away with this since 25 ... Qxh4 26 h3 is good enough for White.

25 ... Qf7 26 h3 Nf6 27 Qxa5?!

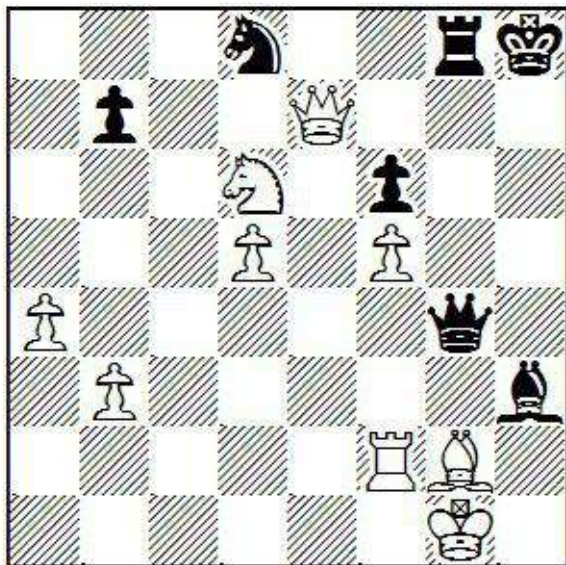


An impractical move under the circumstances. With White's queen out of play my initiative will cause some difficult problems. It is also around here that my aggression becomes menacing enough that White starts using too much time.

27 ... Rxh4 28 Nb5 Qg6 29 Bxf6?!

White snaps off the knight before it can hop to e4 or h5, at the cost of opening the g-file for my use, while also opening up my second rank for defensive use. My rooks start doing double duty.

29 ... gxf6 30 Nd6 Rf8 31 Rc7 Rh7 32 Rf2 f4 33 exf4 Bxh3 34 Rxh7 Kxh7 35 f5 Qg4 36 Qc7+ Kh8 37 Qe7 Rg8!



After intentionally throwing a lot of garbage at my opponent, we have finally reached the critical stage. With three moves left until the time control, and just a minute or two on White's clock, it is the perfect time to calculate deeply in the hopes of predicting a specific mistake by the opponent. Incidentally, I also have only a minute or two, which is actually very useful to me because it helps me "sell" the idea that I've simply made a mistake. Adrenalin has helped me see farther than my opponent is expecting.

38 Qxf6+

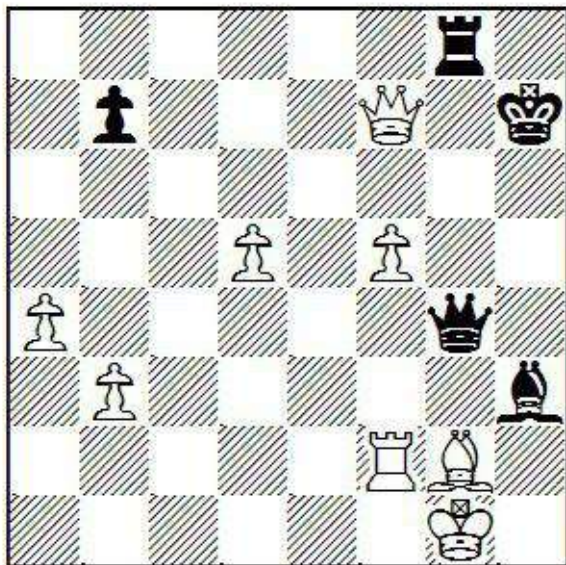
It is hard to resist capturing with check, especially when you see that you can follow with a mate threat and another check. Unfortunately, this sets White up for a huge blunder.

38 ... Kh7 39 Nf7??

Threatening 40 Qh6 mate. Upon inspection this is a clearly losing blunder, so why had I steered towards this position and expected it? Short on time, I thought my opponent was likely to choose his first candidate move - go with his intuition - and the first candidates are always checks, captures, and strong threats. I thought he would be further drawn in by the promise of an additional trade (the knights), which in general would simplify the win. Ah, the devil is in the details.

The simplest way for White to win is 39 Qe7+ Rg7 40 Qe4, whereas the computer prefers 39 Re2 and if 39 ... Qxe2 then 40 Qh4+ Kg7 41 f6+ Kg6 42 Be4+ etc.

39 ... Nxf7 40 Qxf7+



This second capture with check brings White to the time control, which is presumably as far as he'd seen. He now has all the time in the world to think about the fact that his position is lost.

40 ... Rg7 41 Qxg7+ Kxg7 42 f6+ Kf7 43 d6 Bxg2 44 Rxg2 Qd1+ 45 Kf2 Qc2+ 46 Kf1 Qb1+ 47 Ke2 Qxb3 48 Rg7+ Kxf6 49 Rc7 Qxa4 50 Ke3 Qa3+ 51 Kf2 Qxd6 52 Rxb7 Qf4+ 0-1

After 53 Kg1 Qg3+ 54 Kh1 (or 54 Kf1) 54 ... Qf3+, Black picks up the wayward rook.

Game 32

J.Burgess-J.Schuyler

Richmond, Virginia 2013

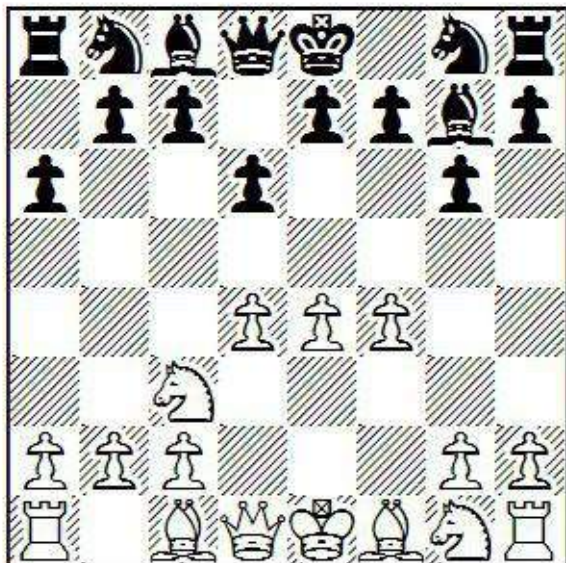
Modern Defence

My opponent is cast as the hero this time, and we will switch to his point of view at the critical moments, but there are a few things to talk about from my point of view as well.

1 e4 g6

A very successful move in practice - it makes little sense that the Modern is less popular than the Caro-Kann, Pirc, or Scandinavian.

2 d4 Bg7 3 Nc3 d6 4 f4 a6

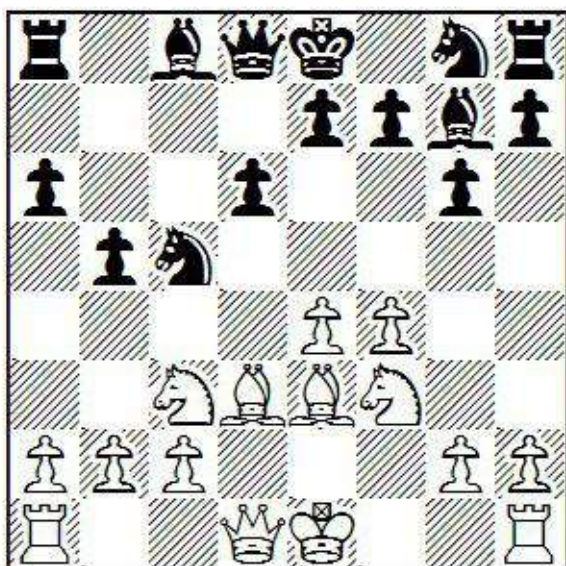


Depending on how you look at it, this move is slow, aggressive, or provocative. It has been used by top players including Kasparov, and is a frequent choice of GM Tiger Hillarp Persson. Black is not yet behind in development, but once he plays the intended ... b7-b5 and ... c7-c5, he will have to very careful not to fall victim to a tactic or breakthrough.

5 Be3 Nd7 6 Nf3 b5 7 Bd3 c5?!

Apparently this move order is not accurate, despite it having been used by many GMs. 7 ... Bb7 is correct.

8 dxc5! Nxc5



9 Bxd4?

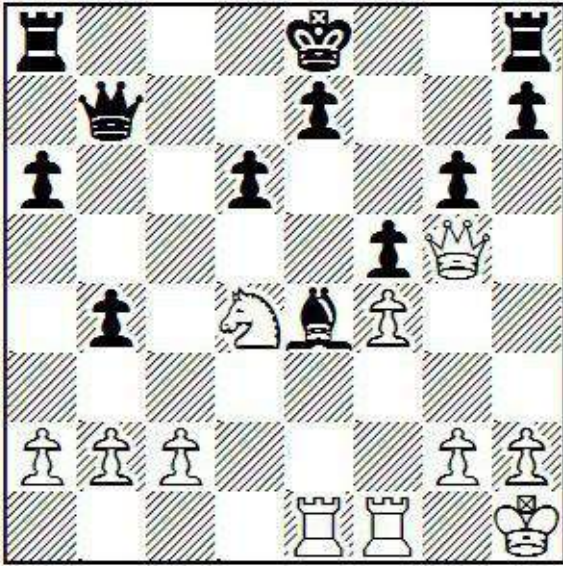
This loses time and pulls White's knight to a vulnerable square. The Modern has already worked its magic, and White is in trouble.

The critical continuation is 9 Bxc5! dxc5 (9 ... Bxc3+ is a small improvement) 10 e5, when White's central space and development are much more useful than Black's queenside bluff and inactive bishops. White has 8 wins, 0 draws and 0 losses in my database.

9 ... Bxd4 10 Nxd4 Nf6 11 0-0 Bb7 12 Qf3 Qb6 13 Kh1 b4 14 Nd5 Nxd5 15 exd5 Nxd3 16 Qxd3 Bxd5 17 Rae1 Qb7 18 Qg3 f5!?

I was worried about White's f4-f5 advance, so I played this radical move, which also gives me the means to block the e-file with ... Be4. It certainly should have worked out well, but "should" is a dangerous word in chess. We can imagine that I might wind up paying for opening up weaknesses, even if I "should" not have to.

19 Qg5 Be4!



This is correct in any case, but I also imagined that White might be tempted to play 20 Ne6?, which stops me from castling. Since my king belongs on f7 anyway, that would only be a loss of time for White, and the game would have been effectively over. My opponent told me later that he was indeed tempted, but then he saw a possible trap. This is not happenstance, inspiration, intuition, or any other such thing. On every turn, especially in bad positions, my opponent calculates as much as he can in order to see whether he has any immediate tactics and also whether there are any tactics on the horizon. One move he was specifically concerned about was 20 ... Qd5, with an apparently powerful centralized queen. So he checked to see whether there was any way to anticipate this, and there was.

20 Rf2!! Qd5?

Had I played the move I was intending to play, namely 20 ... Kf7, there would have been no problem. However, at the last moment I was seduced by the possibility of centralizing my queen. This had been the winning strategy in my game two rounds earlier, so the concept was already in my head. In fact, *the strongest and most difficult move of that game had been ... Qd5*. "How interesting," I said to myself. "... Qd5 wins my last two Black games."

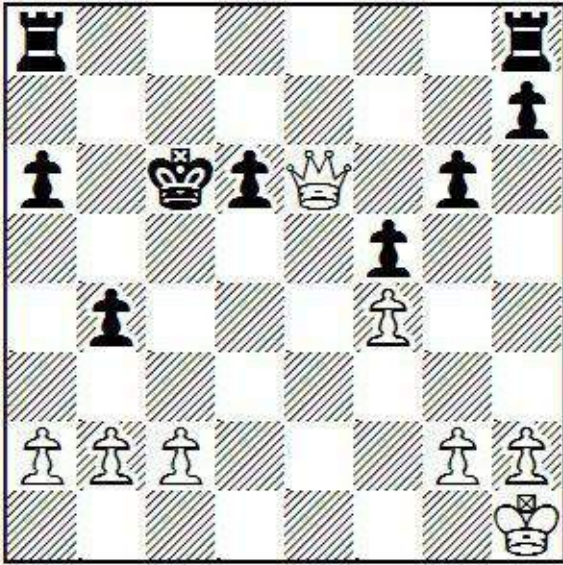
Of course it makes sense to try to carry forward one's knowledge and experience from previous games, but recent experience sometimes leaves too powerful a residue. I had, in that moment at least, what amounts to a superstitious attachment to a particular move. It should be obvious that that is counterproductive. My thinking was counterproductive too, because I was producing a narrative concerning the game. A chess game usually turns out to be a story, but one that should only be written after the game is over. The logic of the story is often clear only in hindsight, so it forms a dangerous basis for decision-making. Furthermore, telling the story as if it were over helped take me out of the game mentally. Although this was only for a few moments, it turned out to be important because my opponent had set a trap. (As usual, the success of nettlesomeness, in this case the trap, depends on factors under both players' control.)

21 Rxe4! Qxe4?!

Maybe I should just be grateful I'm not losing this position, but 21 ... e5! is a much better winning try,

when White has to find 22 Re1 Qxd4 23 Qf6 Qxf2 24 Qe6+ and Black cannot escape the checks. It is easy to say that White “should” find this variation, when we all know what “should” is worth in chess. Or we should know. Har!

22 Re2 Qb7 23 Nc6 Kd7 24 Rxe7+ Kxc6 25 Rxb7 Kxb7 26 Qe7+ Kc6 27 Qe6 ½-½



My opponent offered a draw, and I did not see how I could possibly win here against someone who wanted a draw. In any case, the cost of losing was much higher than the reward for winning - a draw was enough to keep me in first place in the tournament, which I eventually won. As for my opponent, perhaps he should have played on. His situation was the opposite of mine, with a big reward for winning, which would have given him excellent chances to win the tournament himself. Naturally, the position on the board is relevant too, but Black has a few questions to answer, such as “how can I coordinate my rooks?” and “where can my king find shelter?”

Winning (or sometimes drawing) a lost position requires resisting the opponent’s plans to simplify, prolonging the game enough to be able to generate some counterplay (or at least frustration) and, most importantly, *successfully predicting a specific error*. Sometimes the move your opponent most wants to play will be a serious mistake. You will have calculated further. This usually demands a lot of energy, but why should it be easy to win a lost position?

Here a dramatic example in an internet blitz (5-minute) game. I should warn you, this is atrocious chess, barely worthy of the name:

Game 33

“Malachi1971”-N.N.

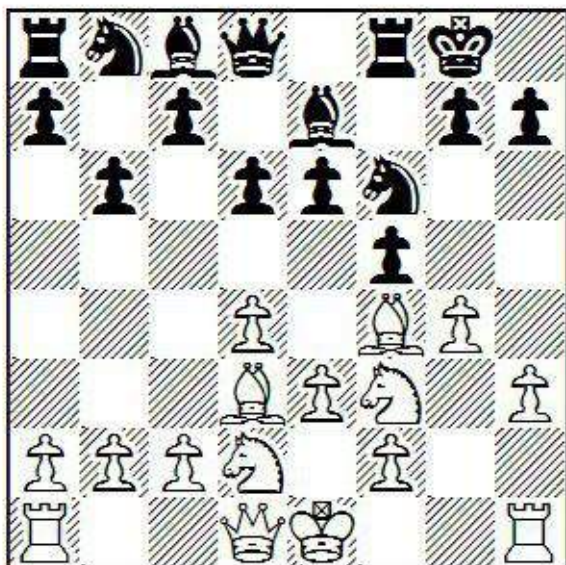
Internet (blitz) 2013

Dutch Defence

1 d4 f5

In case you’ve forgotten, “Malachi1971” is me. My opponent is quite a bit lower rated - about 1900, as opposed to my 2300 blitz rating at the site we were playing on - so I queue up my favourite anti-Dutch system, expecting a fairly routine win.

2 Bf4 Nf6 3 e3 e6 4 Bd3 Be7 5 Nf3 0-0 6 Nbd2 d6 7 h3 b6 8 g4



I have had good luck with this system against most Dutch variations (not so much against the Leningrad), especially in blitz games.

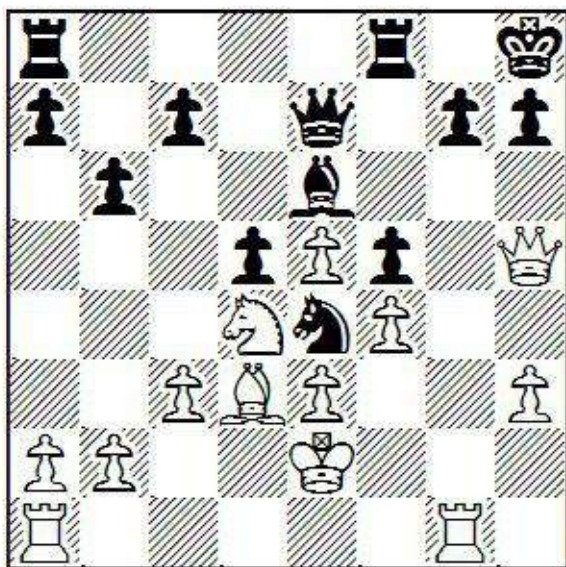
8 ... Nc6 9 gxf5 exf5 10 c3 d5?!

Black closes the diagonal to his king, at the cost of weakening e5.

11 Ne5 Nxe5 12 Bxe5 Ne4 13 Rg1 Bf6 14 Qh5 Bxe5 15 dxe5 Qe7 16 f4 Qc5 17 Ke2

It appears that the centre will stay closed, so my king position does not bother me.

17 ... Be6 18 Nf3 Kh8 19 Nd4 Qe7



I have built up what I thought was a menacing position, but it is not clear how to make progress. Presumably Black will soon start advancing on the queenside to reach my king.

20 Rg6??

Cute, right? It fails against Black's obvious reply.

20 ... Bf7

"Not so good," I thought, "but being down an exchange is not such a big deal. I have good minor pieces."

21 Rag1 Bxg6 22 Rxg6 Qf7

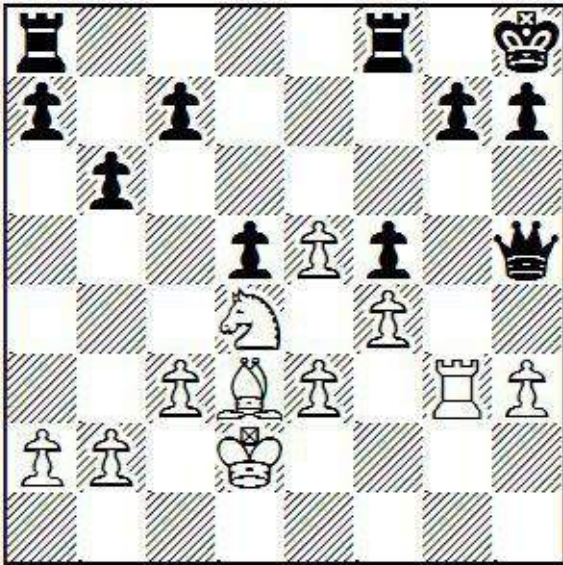
"Uh-oh. Now I have to give up a second exchange. Maybe I still have play, though. His rooks are

inactive.”

23 Rg5 Ng3+

Oops! Unfortunately for me he realized he didn't have to play 23 ... Nxc5?. Nevertheless, as crazy as it sounds, maybe Black should have preferred 23 ... Qxh5+ 24 Rxc5 Ng3+ 25 Kf3 Nxc5. The text move “should” win easily too, but with more material on the board, there is more that can go wrong.

24 Rxc5 Qxh5+ 25 Kd2!



There are two possible traps for White in this position. The first one is resigning, which would be inappropriate under the circumstances. To avoid losing here is not a one-in-a-million shot, it's more like a one-in-thirty. The second trap would be to keep playing moves but give up mentally. *Even a little resistance is annoying for the opponent, who is expecting none.* The text move is essential to guard against 25 ... Qd1, which would finish the game quickly, as would any queen intrusion.

25 ... c5?!

Black could have made progress with 25 ... Qh4. I think he realizes this a second too late.

26 Ne6

A bluff. If I take the rook, *the cost of simplification is greater than the gain in material.* I need to win a rook for free somehow. Once again, 26 ... Qh4 is simplest.

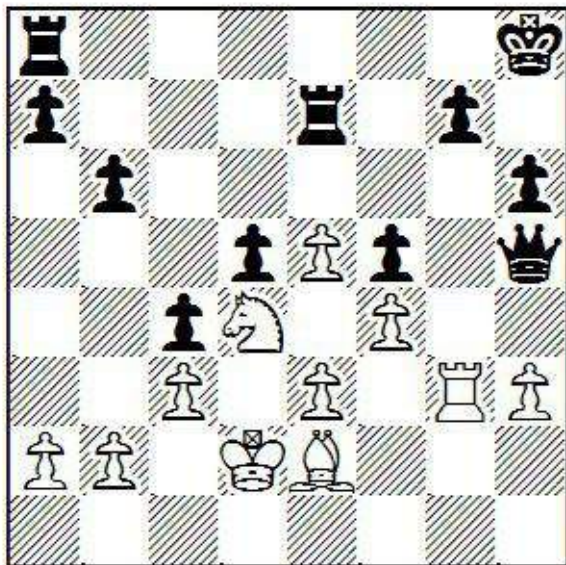
26 ... Rf7?! 27 Ng5 h6!

This time he calls my bluff. It is crystal clear I should not take the rook. To have a chance I have to be more optimistic than that.

28 Nf3!

Taking the h4-square under control. He can't do anything with his queen right now. If he can't win fairly directly, the clock will become a big factor.

28 ... c4 29 Be2 Re7 30 Nd4!



I anticipated the specific danger Black was in, and made sure to get this move played instantly before he had a chance to realize anything about the position. All he had time to notice was that the h4-square was finally unguarded again.

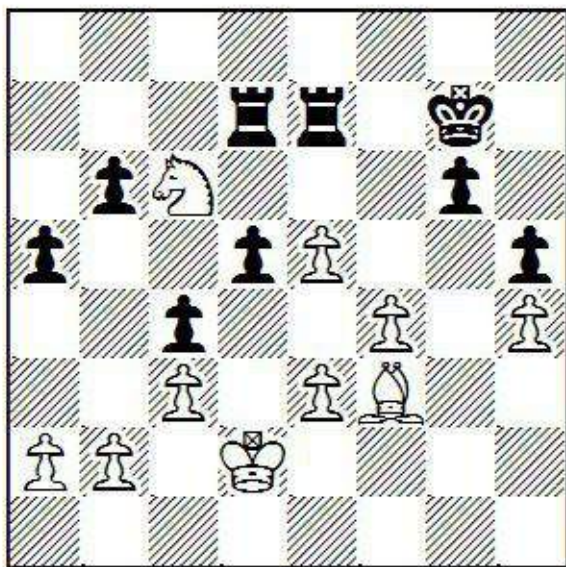
30 ... Qh4?? 31 Nxf5

Not just a fork - the queen is trapped.

31 ... Qxg3 32 Nxf5

Black is still nominally ahead on points, but the momentum is greatly in my favour, and I felt sure I would win.

32 ... g6 33 Bf3 Rd8 34 h4 h5 35 Ne2 a5 36 Nd4 Kg7? 37 Nc6 Rdd???



Dropping the d-pawn as well, which practically decides the game.

38 Nxe7 Rxe7 39 Bxd5 Rc7 40 e4 b5 41 a3 Kf8 42 Ke3 Ke7 43 f5 g5 44 f6+ Kf8 45 hxg5 h4 46 e6 h3 47 e7+ Ke8 48 g6 h2 49 e5 Rc5 50 Bf7+ 1-0

Coming back against stronger players at slow time controls is more work, but it can be done, even at the highest level. In nearly every case, there is the necessity to place obstacles between your opponent and the win, to create counterplay, and to see farther than the opponent in a critical variation.

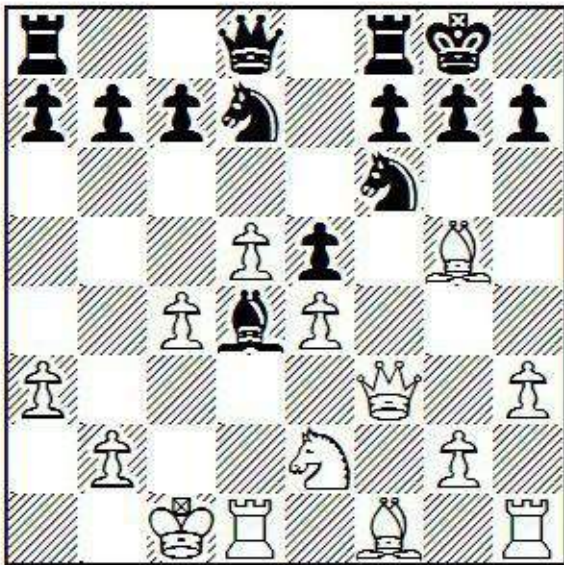
Game 34

H.Nakamura-Ma.Carlsen

Zürich 2014

Nimzo-Indian Defence

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 f3 d5 5 a3 Be7 6 e4 dxe4 7 fxe4 e5 8 d5 Bc5 9 Bg5 0-0 10 Nf3 Bg4 11 h3 Bxf3 12 Qxf3 Nbd7 13 0-0-0 Bd4 14 Ne2



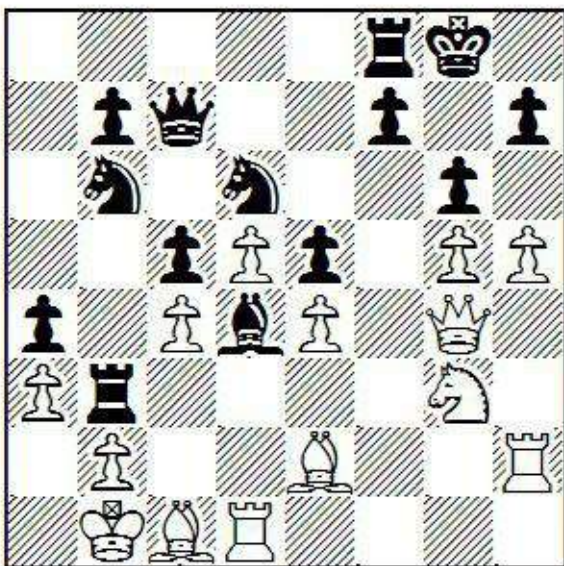
14 ... c5?!

So far, the play of both players has been both enterprising and accurate, but with opposite-side castling it is dangerous for Black to close the centre. Nakamura's attack will be faster.

15 g4 a5 16 Kb1 Ra6 17 Ng3 g6?

Carlsen is understandably worried about the white knight coming to f5 or h5, but the cure is worse than the disease - White will easily open the h-file.

18 h4 a4 19 Rh2 Qa5 20 Bd2 Qc7 21 g5 Ne8 22 h5 Rb6 23 Bc1 Rb3 24 Qg4 Nb6 25 Be2 Nd6



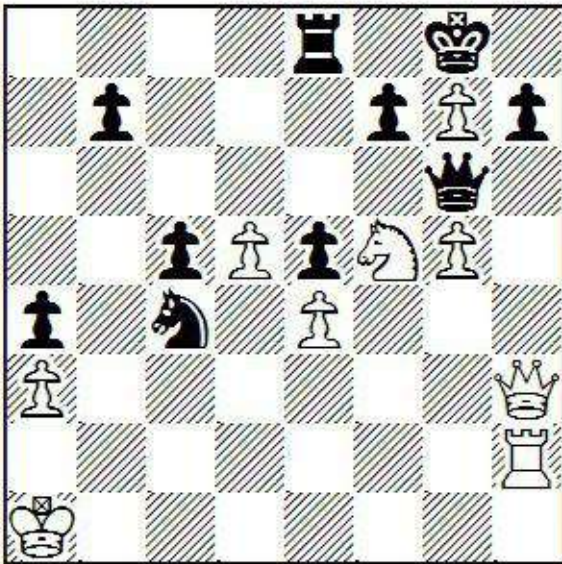
26 Rdh1

A winning move, though *Stockfish* informs me that the most direct and reliable way to the goal is 26 hxg6 fxg6 27 Rdh1 Rf7 28 Qe6 Kf8 29 Nf5! (threatening 30 Qxg6!) and if 29 ... gxf5 then 30 g6 etc.

26 ... Bxb2 27 Bxb2 Nbxç4 28 Bxc4 Nxc4 29 hxg6 Qb6 30 g7 Rd8 31 Qh4 Rxb2+ 32 Ka1 Rxh2 33 Rxh2 Qg6 34 Nf5

We can assume that Magnus Carlsen is always calculating deeply, but I would guess that it is around here that he started to sniff out an opportunity for a plausible blunder by White. That would have informed his decision about whether to play 34 ... Re8 or 34 ... Rd7.

34 ... Re8! 35 Qg4 Qb6 36 Qh3 Qg6



One ingredient of the swindle is that Carlsen is defending doggedly. Not only does that avoid a quick loss, it can also exert a lot of psychological pressure on the opponent seeking to make progress.

37 d6??

This “wins” material, but it opens up the floodgates for Black’s rook and allows a huge wave of counterplay.

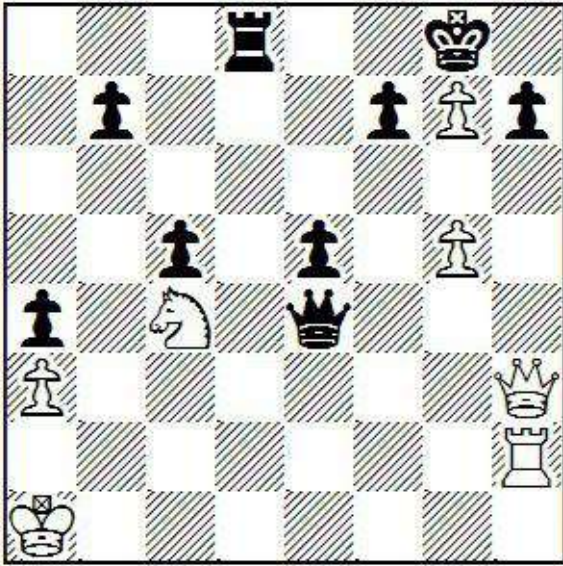
37 ... Nxd6! 38 Nxd6

By now Nakamura must have realized what was happening - too late. Too late to maintain a winning position anyway. It is certainly not too late to avoid a loss, but *the momentum is with Carlsen so the danger of further mistakes is great.*

38 ... Rd8! 39 Nc4

39 Nf5?? is no good because of Rd1+ 40 Ka2 Qe6+ 41 Kb2 Qb6+ 42 Kc2 Qb1+ 43 Kc3 Qb3 mate.

39 ... Qxe4



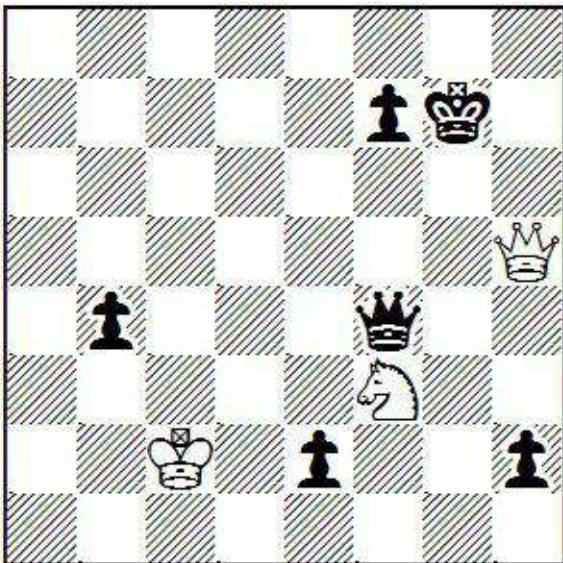
40 Qh5??

Not an easy position under any circumstances, to be sure, but this loses by force. White's best now was 40 Ne3 Qd3 41 Nf5 Qd1+ 42 Ka2 Rd2+ 43 Rxd2 Qxd2+ with a draw by repetition.

40 ... Rd3 41 Rh4 Qf5 42 Qe2 b5 43 Nd2 Qxg5

Why not grab the a-pawn? 43 ... Rxa3+ 44 Kb2 Rg3 was more straightforward. Then again, five pawns for the knight is quite enough.

44 Qxd3 Qxh4 45 Ne4 Kxg7 46 Qf3 Qf4 47 Qg2+ Kf8 48 Kb2 h5 49 Nd2 h4 50 Kc2 b4 51 axb4 cxb4 52 Qa8+ Kg7 53 Qxa4 h3 54 Qb3 h2 55 Qd5 e4 56 Qh5 e3 57 Nf3 e2



58 Kb3 f6 59 Ne1 Qg3+ 60 Ka4 Qg1 61 Qxe2 Qa7+ 0-1

There is no reason to give up mentally just because you have a lost position, but the game will not turn around by itself. You will probably need to calculate twenty or more "dead end" variations before you find one that contains a likely trap for your opponent.

If you just can't get enough of this topic, two more examples of recovering from lost positions can be found in Chapter Thirteen on **Ploys**.

Chapter Eleven

The Clock

Many chess games are lost because of bad clock management. What's worse, players who lose games because of the clock typically lose many, many games because of the exact same time management mistakes, even though in most cases they are aware of what those mistakes are.

Fortunately, you are not one of those players. You do not have tunnel vision when you are examining the position on the board; you do not value your attempts to learn "the truth" or create "chess beauty" higher than the objective achievement of scoring points on the wall chart. You are not addicted to the adrenalin rush of time pressure - or if you are, you get your fix in blitz games, not when your tournament results are at stake. Furthermore, if you are no good in time trouble, you take extra care to make sure that you have ample time for each stage of the game. After all, *there is no such thing as a winning position unless it is accompanied by enough time on the clock for you, personally, to win it.*

Phew! Now that we have cleared that up, let's talk about how to use the clock as a weapon against your opponent.

In the third round of the 2009 Virginia Closed, I played Andrew Samuelson. I have already talked about this game and my choice of the Caro-Kann Defence (see the beginning of Chapter One). What I have not talked about is Samuelson's use of the clock. He always plays very quickly, often using only 20-30 minutes to reach the first time control, which means that he is playing 3-4 times faster than necessary. Certainly, I have seen players play quickly in the early part of the game in order to use their time later, but in Samuelson's case, the huge stockpile of minutes is rarely touched at all. For the record, let's see this game now:

Game 35

A.Samuelson-J.Schuyler

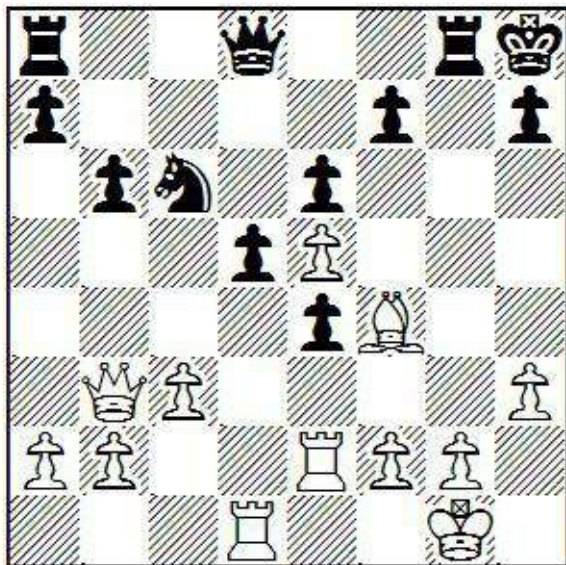
Richmond, Virginia 2009

Caro-Kann Defence

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 Bd3 Nc6 5 c3 Nf6 6 Bf4 g6 7 h3 Bg7 8 Nf3 0-0 9 0-0 Bf5 10 Bxf5 gxf5 11 Re1 e6 12 Qb3 b6

This move was my first instinct, but I spent several minutes considering 12 ... Na5, 12 ... Qd7, and just generally whether I might regret leaving my knight unprotected. That was typical of my time management for this game and this tournament. It is hard to be sure without thought what decisions might turn out to be important, though I think the time would have been better spent in another position. The time might even have been better unused.

13 Nbd2 Ne4 14 Rad1 Kh8 15 Re2 Rg8 16 Nf1 Bf6 17 Ng3 Ng5 18 Ne5 Bxe5 19 dxe5 Ne4 20 Nxe4 fxe4



21 Qa4?!

It was better to play 21 Rxe4 Qh4 22 Ra4, even though it places White's rook on an extremely awkward square. Here I figured that 22 ... Qxh3 23 Bg3 Rxc3?! 24 fxc3 Qxc3 would work out well for me with White's forces on their queenside vacation, but 25 c4! would have set me on my heels. Naturally, I might have reconsidered and just played 23 ... Qh5 with a slightly more comfortable game.

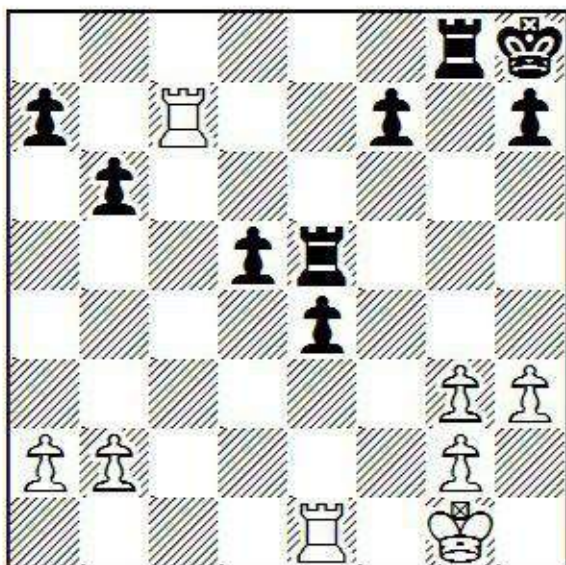
21 ... Qh4!

If I did not have this zwischenzug, I would indeed have regretted leaving my knight unprotected.

22 Bg3 Qh5 23 Rde1 Ne7?!

Stockfish just wants me to cash out and grab the e5-pawn now, but I thought the activity of my knight (and the inactivity of his bishop) were more important. Of course the engine is correct, since White gets some counterplay in any case.

24 c4! Nf5 25 cxd5 exd5 26 Qc6 Nxc3 27 Qf6+ Rg7 28 fxc3 Re8 29 Rc2 Qxe5 30 Qxe5 Rxe5 31 Rc8+ Rg8 32 Rc7



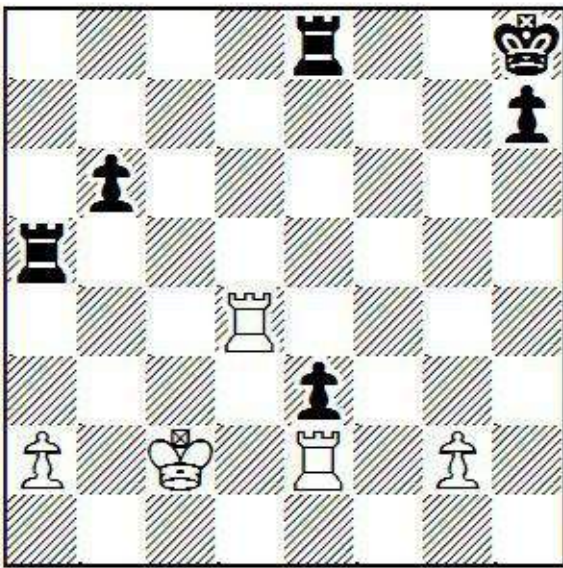
Up until this point I could hardly have been happier with my play. However, as the game wore on, decisions had become more and more difficult, not because of any great complexities in the position but because of the fact that it was relentlessly my turn. I had managed my own clock well enough, and had

adequate time for the endgame; what I did not have was the energy to continue to make accurate decisions, whether based on calculation or intuition. In particular, I was not sure whether my king was in danger, or how to fix the problem if it was, and I floundered between 32 ... d4, 32 ... Kg7, 32 ... f5, and 32 ... Rxc3. I started chewing up time without productive thought.

32 ... Rxc3?

My king is not in any special danger and should be content to remain a spectator for the foreseeable future. The move I played does not help to activate my king anyway. The best continuation lends important support to my strong pawns: 32 ... f5! 33 Kf2 Rd8! and White's game is in its last throes. The correct moves are not hard to find, even without much calculation; for example, 34 Rxa7 d4 35 Rc7 e3+ 36 Ke2 d3+ 37 Kd1 d2 38 Re2 f4! (okay, this one is a little difficult - it allows Black to break through to the first rank) 39 gxf4 Re4 40 g3 (or 40 Rf7 Rc4) 40 ... Rg8 41 Rg2 Rxf4 and wins.

33 Rxf7 Reg5 34 Re2 Rg7 35 Rf8+ Rg8 36 Rf7 Rxh3?! 37 Rxa7 Rh5 38 Rd7 Rhg5 39 Kf1 Re8 40 b4 e3 41 b5 Rf5+ 42 Ke1 Rh5 43 Kd1 d4 44 Rxd4 Rxb5 45 Kc2 Ra5 ½-½



Looking at this position now, especially as I write a book entitled “No Draw!”, I have to question why I didn't keep trying to win the game. While I have no doubt that White can hold with best play, it would surely be worth testing him, especially since there is no risk of losing for Black. Right? It is embarrassing to admit that I rated my chances of losing to be higher than my chances of winning, and even more embarrassing to admit that my assessment was probably correct. By this point in the game I had a legitimate shortage of time and a serious lack of energy, and I have never been any good at rook and pawn endgames.

After our game, Andrew conceded that he would probably be better off taking more time to think. “Of course,” I said, and proceeded to remind him of some of the reasons why. After all, it is not so hard to overlook something in haste. Spending more time also means developing a better feel for the position. Even if the move played is the same, ideas can be developed during a think that may be carried forward and used later in the game. In fact, hard thought develops ideas that can be carried forward to other games. Ultimately, rushing through tournament games will stunt your growth as a chessplayer since your bank of thoughts and ideas does not grow in size and complexity the way it should.

It's hard to argue with any of that, and I would say the last point is especially relevant. Nonetheless, not long after my little speech, I realized it was intellectually lazy to fail to consider the advantages of his approach. After all, although I did achieve a winning position on the board, I did not actually wind up

winning the game. In part this was because of fatigue. Chess always demands a lot of energy, but this particular game demanded more. It is normally possible to relax during the opponent's turn, whereas I had little opportunity to do that. It is also nice to be able to use the opponent's time in order to plan, or even to "dream" about the position. Unstructured thought can point the way to important ideas that may have otherwise escaped one's attention.

Also, as far as our energy reserves go, we usually have an entire tournament of games to worry about. It is worth noting that in the round following the Samuelson game, I made an uncharacteristic blunder. Perhaps this was just a coincidence? What about the previous year's tournament, in which I won the first four rounds and then collapsed, losing the last two? Had I been able to win those four games with less energy, that disaster would probably have been avoided.

How do I know this? It's hard to be completely sure, but the next time I played the Virginia Closed, I decided to use the Samuelson time management approach. My opponents did not enjoy this at all, and I stayed fresh throughout the tournament. There were individual moves that I was not especially proud of, but overall the wins came more easily than in previous years, and I had the tournament locked up with one round to go.

Here is one of my games from 2011:

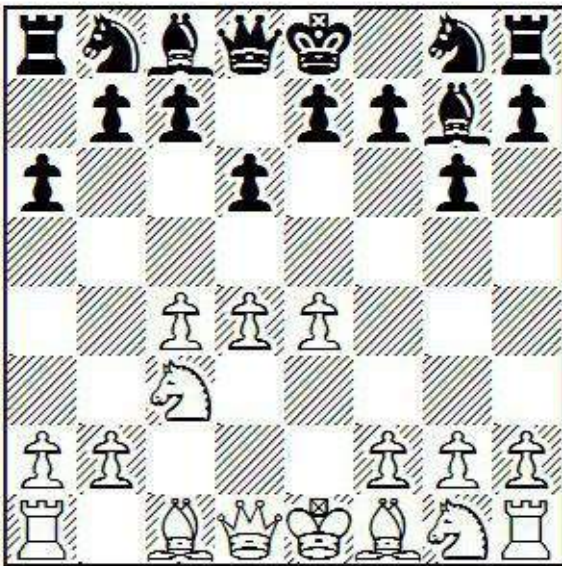
Game 36

L.Larkins-J.Schuyler

Richmond, Virginia 2011

Modern Defence

1 d4 g6 2 c4 Bg7 3 Nc3 d6 4 e4 a6

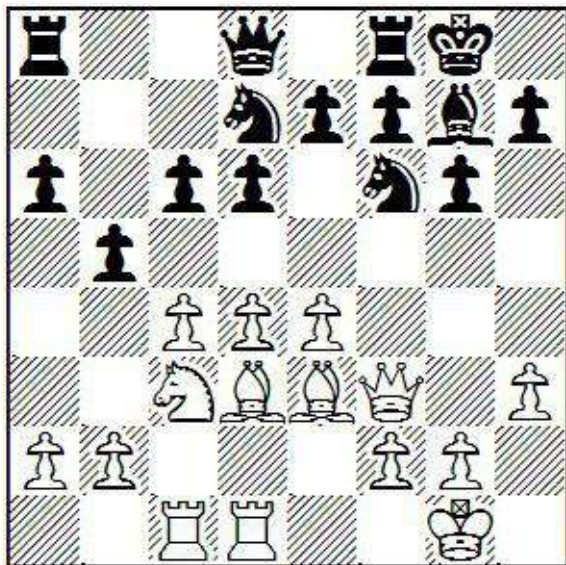


Recommended in Nigel Davies' *Starting Out: The Modern*. Yes, masters read Starting Out books too! All the same, I'm not so sure about this move, which has been unsuccessful in practice overall; whereas after 4 ... e5, White has no (statistical) advantage.

5 Be3 c6 6 Bd3 b5 7 Nf3

The best move, and now I am out of (Nigel's) book. Davies only considers 7 Nge2.

7 ... Nf6 8 0-0 0-0 9 Rc1 Bg4 10 h3 Bxf3 11 Qxf3 Nbd7 12 Rfd1



My opponent is “only” 2150, but he has built up an impressive position with simple moves. His rooks are particularly intimidating, and make striking back in the centre very dangerous for Black. However, this opponent is especially prone to time pressure, and my fast play is doing its job(s). It is not just that his clock is ticking its way inexorably towards zeroes; I will also have the energy to deal with any problems that arise on the board. Equalizing would be nice, perhaps, but it is even more important to maintain the complexity of the position. In this case the complexity comes from the pawn structure, which is stubbornly unresolved. Every turn we have to deal with the possibility of White’s c4-c5, d4-d5, and e4-e5 advances, not to mention Black’s ... e7-e5, ... d6-d5, ... c6-c5, ... b5-b4, or ... b5xc4 moves. Maintaining all the tensions is demanding. Incidentally, this is why the Modern Defence is a good opening for Black to use when he is trying to win.

12 ... Qa5 13 cxb5?!

Perhaps this inaccuracy is explained by White’s understandable desire to reduce his mental workload. 13 a3 b4 14 axb4 Qxb4 15 Qe2 is better, though Black has counterplay in any case.

13 ... axb5 14 Bb1 Rfc8 15 Bf4

Certainly something needs to be done about 16 e5 now.

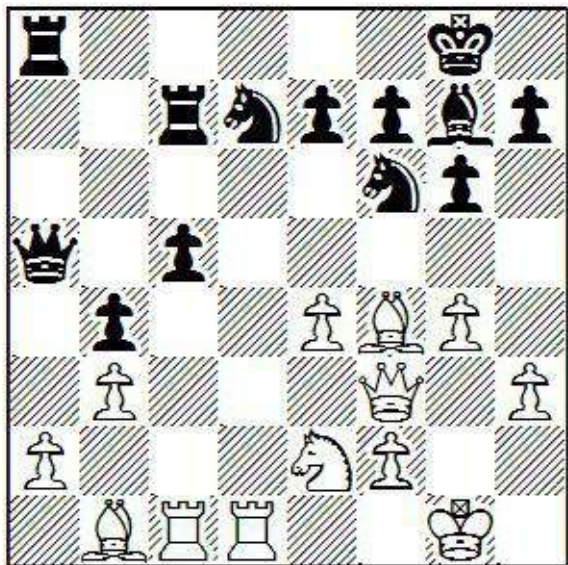
15 ... Nh5

15 ... e5 was also an option, but I preferred to activate my g7-bishop.

16 Be3 b4 17 Ne2 c5 18 g4 Nhf6?!

According to *Houdini 3*, Black equalizes with 18 ... cxd4 19 Nxd4 Bxd4 20 Bxd4 Ng7. The text move could have led to some difficulties because of 19 e5!.

19 b3 Rc7 20 dxc5 dxc5 21 Bf4?!



There is no legitimate strategic reason for White to go out of his way to close the position. Black will have an easier time using the hole on d4 than White will using the matching one on d5. I think that this is once again an attempt by White to simplify his thought process - closed positions normally require less tactical alertness. White is starting to use too much time.

21 ... e5 22 Be3 Nf8

Towards d4 at every available opportunity.

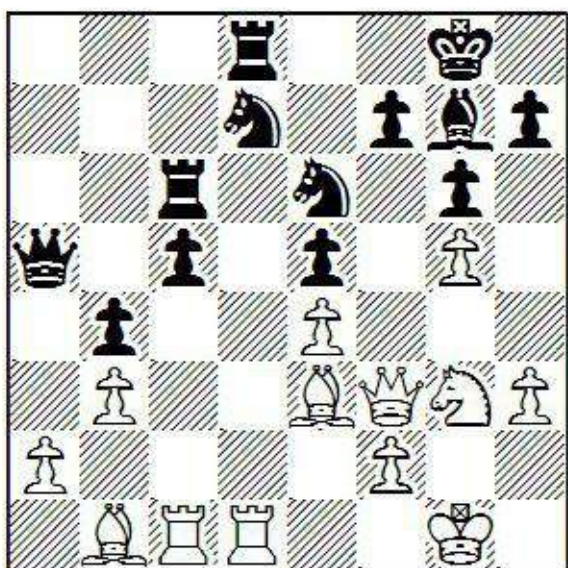
23 Bg5 Rc6 24 Ng3?

Towards d5, but it is a long journey with too many snags along the way. Incidentally, Black is not better until this mistake.

24 ... Ne6! 25 Be3

25 Bxf6 is unattractive because of 25 ... Nd4, and if 26 Rxd4 then 26 ... Rxf6.

25 ... Rd8 26 g5 Nd7



27 Bd3?!

This move makes sense, but we have both missed an opportunity for White: 27 Nf5!, intending 27 ... gxf5?? 28 exf5 Rcc8 29 fxe6 fxe6 30 h4, when White's activity and Black's weak kingside mean that White's attack will win the game. Instead, I should defend with 27 ... Bf8, but after 28 Nh6+ Bxh6 29

gxh6, the lingering threat of Qf6 and Qg7 mate will distract my pieces (and my mind) from other objectives.

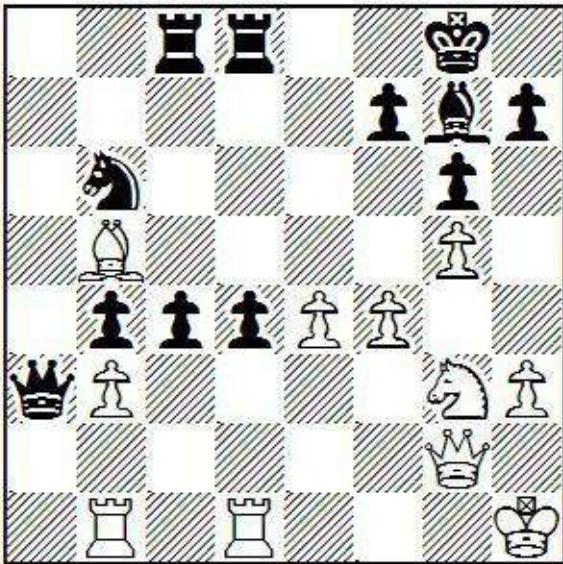
27 ... Nd4 28 Qg2 Qxa2

It is only move 28 (the time control is at 40), but the clock has already taken its toll on White. It will also ease the conversion of my advantage.

29 Bxd4 exd4 30 Bc4 Qa7 31 f4 Nb6 32 Bb5?

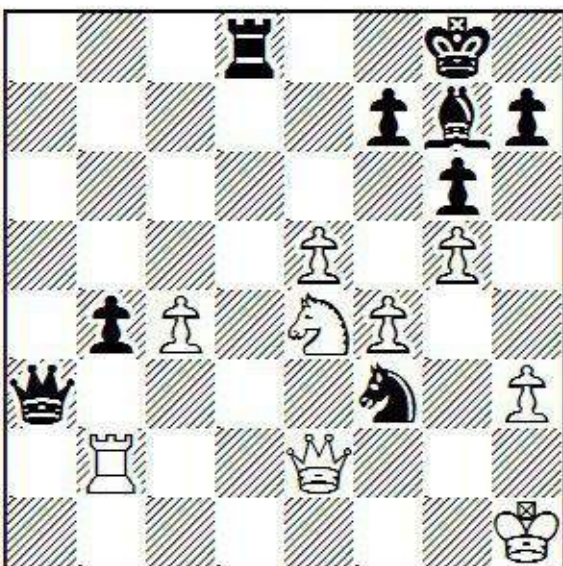
The bishop is only strong if it is on the c4-square, so there is no point moving it to preserve it. Instead, 32 e5 and Black still has quite a bit of work to do.

32 ... Rcc8 33 Kh1?! Qa3 34 Rb1 c4!



This is the last important move of the game. Obvious though it might be, I calculated many variations before I was satisfied in allowing my pawns to become isolated.

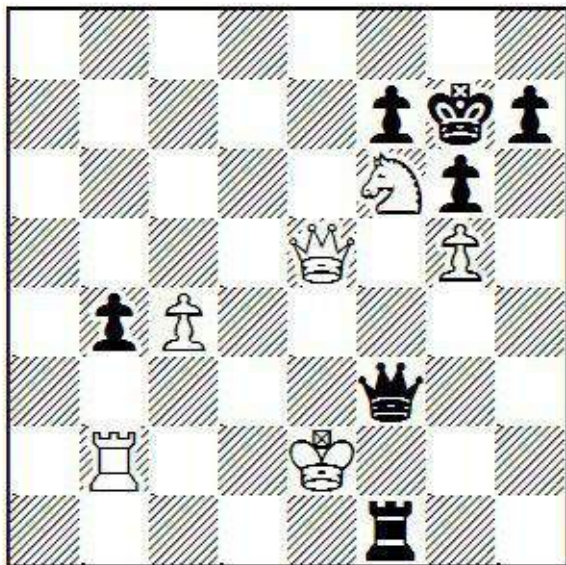
35 e5 Nd5 36 Rxd4 Nc3 37 Rxd8+ Rxd8 38 Rb2 Nxb5 39 bxc4 Nd4 40 Ne4 Nf3 41 Qe2



41 ... Nxe5!

Really, Black has many ways to win by now, and *Stockfish* doesn't like this any better than 41 ... Qa1 or 41 ... Rd3, but the simplifying combination makes good use of all my remaining pieces.

42 fxe5 Qxh3+ 43 Kg1 Bxe5 44 Nf6+ Kg7 45 Qxe5 Rd1+ 46 Kf2 Rf1+ 47 Ke2 Qf3+ 0-1



In view of 48 Kd2 Rd1+ 49 Kc2 Qd3 mate.

I certainly did not play the best chess ever. I simply made sure that the conditions were right to bring out my opponent's predisposition towards time trouble. Then he made small mistakes when he had small worries about the clock, and big mistakes when he had big worries about the clock.

There is one more aspect of clock management that I would like to mention. Sometimes your opponent has run so low on time that you are in a position to win a game with the help of the clock that would not normally be plausible for you to win on the board only.

For instance, you may have king and rook's pawn vs. king, or king and rook vs. king and rook. Perhaps you have king and pawn vs. king and bishop, or vice versa. I know that there is no popular consensus about the ethics of these kinds of situations, but things are clear to me: it is your legal and ethical right to play for the maximum result. After all (to paraphrase myself), *there is no such thing as a drawn position unless it is accompanied by enough time on the clock to draw it*. If your opponent loses on time, or through a blunder, these are just chess results like any other, in this case a consequence of his earlier time use (over which he had full voluntary control).

This is a good time to borrow from Alekhine: "The fact that a player is very short of time is, to my mind, as little to be considered as an excuse as, for instance, the statement of the law-breaker that he was drunk at the time he committed the crime."

Chapter Twelve

The Endgame

When I was a junior player, I was invited a few times to the US Junior Invitational (under 21). On a couple of occasions the future-GM Alex Sherzer was also playing. By his own estimation, he was not very intelligent, but he made a habit of studying endgame positions, one by one, until he understood them absolutely. They were not necessarily the kinds of positions one would find in an endgame book (though I'm sure he understood all the common book positions as well). One time he told me he would give us each five minutes on the clock, set up a simple endgame position, beat me with White, set up the exact same position, turn the board around, and then draw with Black. Well, he had 200 rating points on me (around 2550 vs. 2350) but the stakes were only one dollar, so I decided it was worth seeing. As I recall, the position he set up was rook and two pawns vs. rook. He won without difficulty, but when it was my turn, he had a number of tricks up his sleeve, including some stalemating motifs. I did not come close to winning, and I handed him a well-earned dollar.

Sherzer then said he had a position he could do four times. In other words, he would win with White, draw with Black, then win with White again and draw with Black again. Therefore, whatever techniques he was planning on using, I would be able to observe them and then have a chance to use them against him. This time, the position was king and three pawns vs. king and two pawns, all connected on the same side of the board. It was hard for me to believe that the position concealed all that many secrets. Nonetheless, there were at least two different winning tries for White, neither of which I could figure out how to defend against, but when I used them, he had the answers ready. I handed him another dollar.

It should be possible to guess what happened next. Alex said he had a position he could do six times. By now I did not doubt that he would be able to do exactly as he said, but I was curious and I didn't have anything better to do, so nearly an hour later, after playing the next trivial-looking position six times, I handed him a third dollar. I forget what his next offer was, but I figured I'd been humiliated enough by that point.

You would expect that, if he had been a better businessman, Sherzer could have extracted a higher hourly rate, but it was nonetheless an impressive demonstration. It is also possible to suspect that his knowledge would be less useful in actual games, but that guess would be wrong. In game after game, his endgame expertise would turn losses into draws, draws into wins, even losses into wins sometimes. Soon his junior opponents started referring to this as "Sherzer Endgame Magic", or S.E.M. for short. Witnessing the sometimes awful positions he would take into the endgame, the question was often asked, "is S.E.M. enough?" Sherzer Endgame Magic seemed, on average, to be worth at least a pawn, and sometimes two against his 2450-ish opponents. Two pawns!

That was a fun story. The point of it is that your opponents are very, very bad at endgames, and they can be counted on to make plenty of mistakes if you can give them any sort of problems to solve.

If "Plan A" is to confuse your opponent in the opening, and "Plan B" is to overwhelm your opponent in the middlegame, then winning the endgame must be "Plan C". Obviously we would rather have three chances than one, so it may be a little disappointing to reach the last stage without having made any progress, but the endgame is still rich with opportunities. Even left to his own devices, our opponent may self-destruct, but if we can exert a little pressure, our chances improve dramatically. The following game is a case in point. The balance is not disturbed until almost all the pieces have been exchanged, at which

point the level of incompetence by the players skyrockets. Naturally, I am responsible for my own mistakes. I am also going to claim credit for my opponent's.

Game 37

J.Schuyler-M.Shibut

Richmond, Virginia 2014

Pirc Defence (by transposition)

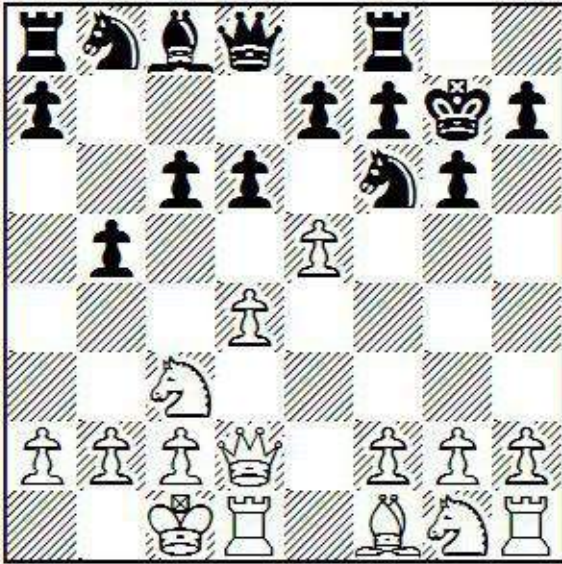
1 d4 Nf6 2 Bf4 g6 3 Nc3!

I have played the London System (3 e3, 4 Nf3, 5 Be2, etc) against this player twice before, so it is time to throw him a curve ball. I have had good results with this aggressive move.

3 ... Bg7!

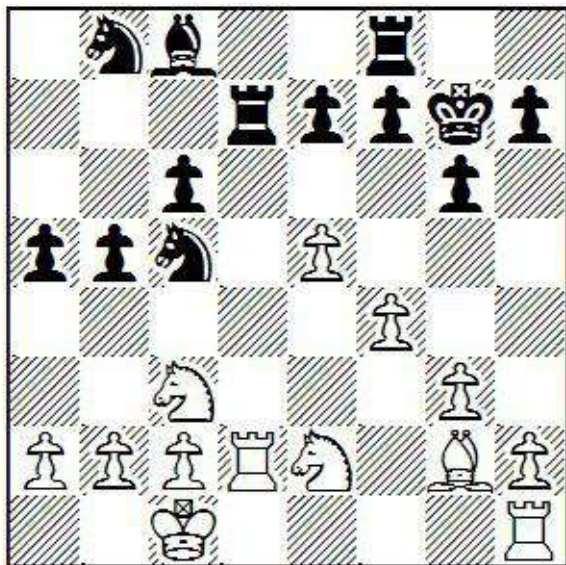
Shibut makes a good guess, allowing a transposition to a Pirc. Most Black players feel that they have to play 3 ... d5 (to stop 4 e4), but that clears the h2-b8 diagonal for my bishop, as well as leaving the e5-square weak, so it fits in with my attacking plans.

4 Qd2 d6 5 e4 0-0 6 0-0-0 c6 7 Bh6 b5 8 Bxg7 Kxg7 9 e5!



According to my computer, this leads nowhere, but the database statistics are very favourable for White. While database statistics are not always reliable, they have a strong tendency to point the way to nettlesome moves. 9 Bd3 is a good alternative, but I realized I did not know how to play the resulting positions. I would be entering a position that was nettlesome to myself! The common 9 f3?! is too slow.

9 ... dxe5 10 dxe5 Qxd2+ 11 Rxd2 Nfd7 12 f4 Nc5 13 g3 a5 14 Bg2 Ra7 15 Nge2 Rd7



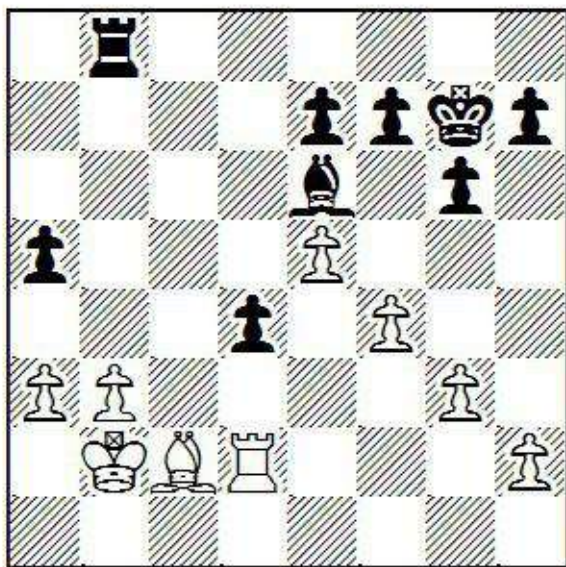
16 Rhd1 b4 17 Ne4 Rxd2 18 Rxd2 Nxe4 19 Bxe4 c5 20 c3! Be6 21 b3 Rc8 22 Kb2 Nc6 23 a3 bxc3+ 24 Kxc3 Nd4 25 Nxd4 cxd4+ 26 Kb2

I did not know whether this move could bring me any advantage, but it keeps the game more lively than 26 Kxd4 Bxb3. I also didn't like the way my king would be cut off from the queenside. Here I can hope to utilize my king.

26 ... Rd8 27 Bd3

Getting ready to play 28 Bc4. If the bishops are traded, my king will sneak to a4 or d3, whereas if he avoids the trade, I can advance my b-pawn.

27 ... Rb8 28 Bc2



28 ... Bxb3?

This is one of those mistakes I am taking credit for. Black has been under moderate pressure for the whole game, and rushes to simplify, hoping to make a draw soon. The patient 28 ... Rd8 challenges me to make progress.

29 Bxb3 a4 30 Rd3?

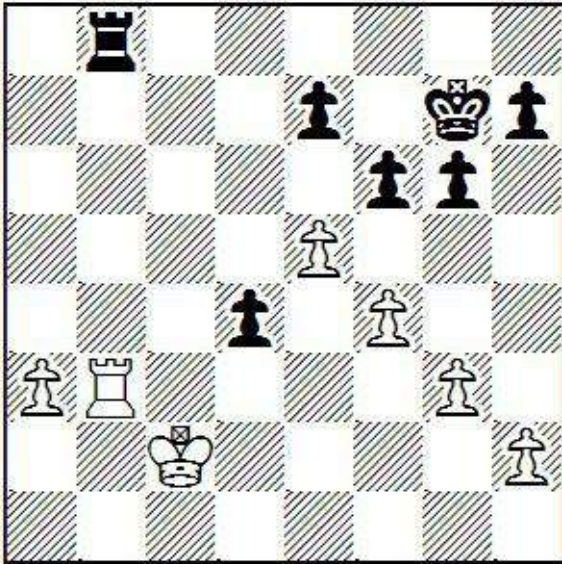
I played this with little thought, rejecting the promising 30 Rxd4 Rxb3+ 31 Ka2 Re3 32 Rxa4 Re2+ 33 Kb3 Rxh2 34 Rc4 for no apparent reason. Although it was the last move of the time control, I was not

under time pressure.

30 ... f6 31 Kc2?!

This time I failed to even consider the best move, which is 31 Kc1!, presenting some challenges to Black after 31 ... axb3 32 exf6+ Kxf6 33 Rxd4.

31 ... axb3+ 32 Rxb3



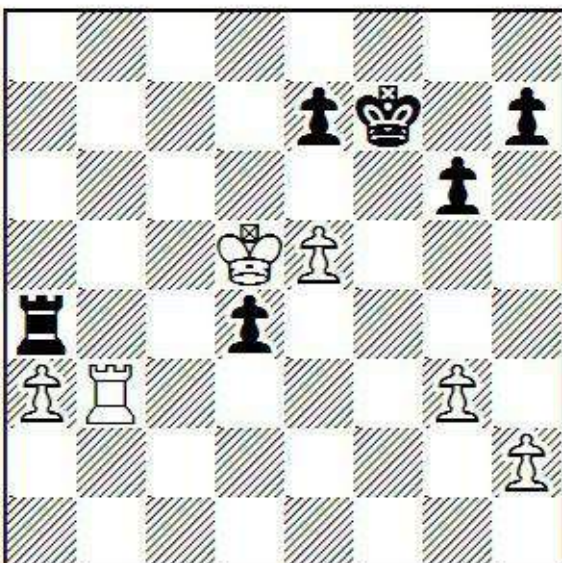
I have to admit that I almost offered a draw here. First of all, the position is definitely a draw with best play and, secondly, I have always been bad at rook and pawn endings. Except that a draw would have been quite bad for my tournament situation, so I eventually found a plan that, while certainly not winning, posed certain challenges to Black.

A simple rule for how to be nettlesome in the endgame may seem like a pipe dream, but I believe there is such a rule: *An active king is not just good endgame technique - it is a recipe for inducing errors from the opponent.*

32 ... Ra8 33 Kd3! fxe5 34 fxe5 Ra4 35 Ke4! Kf7

One move my computer is interested in playing is 35 ... d3+. The pawn is difficult to hold in any case, and this way White's king is driven back and cut off after 36 Kxd3.

36 Kd5!



All of a sudden, Black has to worry about 37 e6+, which is going to drive his king to a very uncomfortable position.

36 ... Ra5+

36 ... e6+ is not a very good solution: 37 Kd6 Ra6+ 38 Kc5 Ra4 39 Kb5! Ra8 40 a4 allows White's king to show his full range, chasing the rook and then supporting the a-pawn's advance. What a menace!

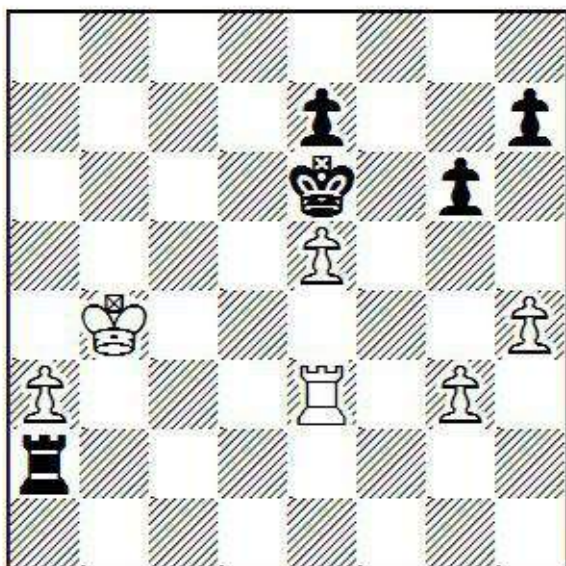
37 Kxd4 Ke6 38 Re3

This secures White's whole position, freeing my king to rampage further.

38 ... Rd5+?!

Black manoeuvres to get his rook behind the passed pawn, but with White's a-pawn so far from queening, the best position for the rook is in front of it. Hence 38 ... Ra8 is simplest, with a likely draw.

39 Kc4 Rd2 40 h4 Ra2 41 Kb4!?



According to *Stockfish*, 41 Kb3 is best, followed by 42 a4. Instead, I continue to toy around with the position, hoping to increase my advantage before making any committal decisions. Whether or not this is justifiable objectively, it is the most unpleasant for the opponent.

41 ... Rb2+ 42 Kc5 Ra2 43 Kc6!?

Bluffing an end run. If I can sneak around to g7, the win will become simple. As it turns out, this plan can't work for a couple of reasons, but it is difficult and tiring trying to figure out every turn whether your opponent is joking or whether he is serious about executing his plans. By "crying wolf" it is possible to wear down your opponent's vigilance.

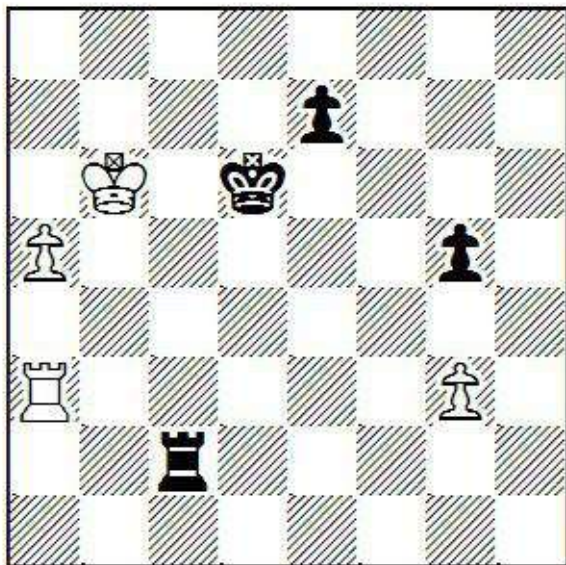
43 ... h6

Simply 43 ... Rc2+ 44 Kb6 Rb2+ 45 Kc7 Rc2+ 46 Kd8 Rc4 is one way to demonstrate that White's plan is bogus.

44 Kb5 g5 45 hxg5 hxg5 46 a4 Rb2+?!

The shouldering move 46 ... Kd5 offers better chances to hold the position.

47 Kc5 Ra2 48 Kb4 Rb2+ 49 Rb3 Ra2 50 a5 Kxe5 51 Ra3 Rb2+ 52 Kc5 Rc2+ 53 Kb6 Kd6



54 Kb7?

Here 54 Rd3+ Ke5 55 Rb3 Kd4 56 a6 e5 57 a7 Ra2 58 Rb5 Rxa7 59 Kxa7 e4 60 Rxc5 e3 61 Rg8 e2 62 Re8 Kd3 63 g4 is crystal clear. I did not manage to calculate that far, so I continued to mess around. Obviously there is a point at which it is appropriate to stop the shenanigans and head directly towards the win, but I fail to identify it. All the same, it is interesting to note that the aggressive king walk continues to induce errors from the opponent.

54 ... Rb2+ 55 Kc8 Rc2+ 56 Kd8 Rb2?!

The immediate 56 ... e5 was more accurate.

57 Ke8 e5??

Now this is just a blunder. Instead, after 57 ... Ke6 58 Kf8 Kf6, et cetera, either my king remains stuck on the edge, or I have to remove my rook from its ideal location in order to facilitate the king's escape.

The rest is easy:

58 a6 Rb8+ 59 Kf7 e4 60 Kf6 Kd5 61 a7 Ra8 62 Kxc5 Kd4 63 Kf4 Rf8+ 64 Kg4 Ra8 65 Kh3 e3 66 Kg2 Ke4 67 g4 Kd4 68 Kf3 Rf8+ 69 Ke2 Ra8 70 Ra4+ Kc5 71 Kxe3 Kb6 72 g5 Kb7 73 g6 Re8+ 74 Kf4 Ka8 75 Kg5 Re1 76 g7 Re8 77 Kg6 1-0

So you get an active king in the endgame and your opponent makes mistakes? Is it really that simple? What if your opponent is very strong?

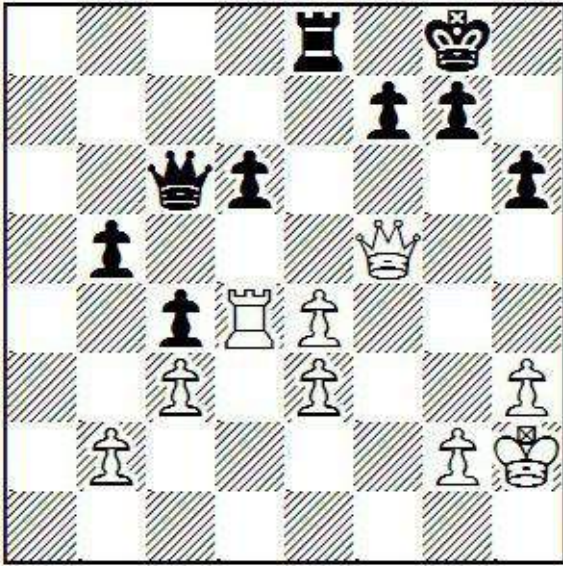
Game 38

V.Anand-Ma.Carlsen

World Championship (6th matchgame), Chennai 2013

Ruy Lopez

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 d3 Bc5 5 c3 0-0 6 0-0 Re8 7 Re1 a6 8 Ba4 b5 9 Bb3 d6 10 Bg5 Be6 11 Nbd2 h6 12 Bh4 Bxb3 13 axb3 Nb8 14 h3 Nbd7 15 Nh2 Qe7 16 Ndf1 Bb6 17 Ne3 Qe6 18 b4 a5 19 bxa5 Bxa5 20 Nhg4 Bb6 21 Bxf6 Nxf6 22 Nxf6+ Qxf6 23 Qg4 Bxe3 24 fxe3 Qe7 25 Rf1 c5 26 Kh2 c4 27 d4 Rxa1 28 Rxa1 Qb7 29 Rd1 Qc6 30 Qf5 exd4 31 Rxd4

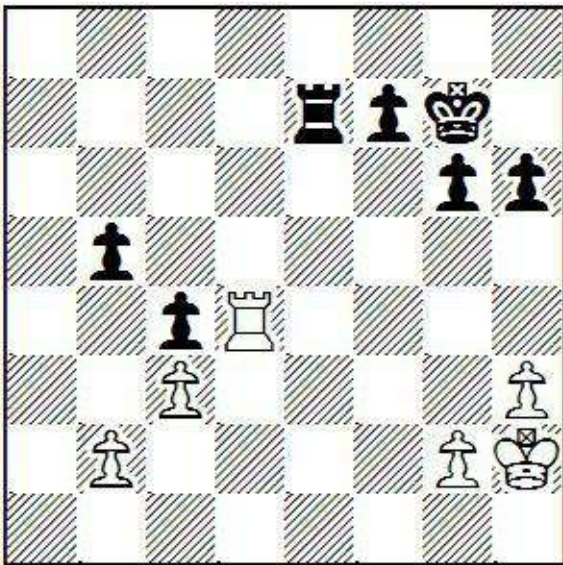


Anand's structure is compromised, but this surely isn't enough for Black to win when the position is so simplified. Carlsen starts manoeuvring, a process that will go on forever if Anand allows it.

31 ... Re5 32 Qf3 Qc7 33 Kh1 Qe7 34 Qg4 Kh7 35 Qf4 g6 36 Kh2 Kg7 37 Qf3 Re6 38 Qg3?

Anand pitches a pawn in order to put a stop to the manoeuvring phase of the game. Even though the resulting position is still probably not winning for Black, Anand's decision is far too cooperative, and represents the success of Black's manoeuvring strategy.

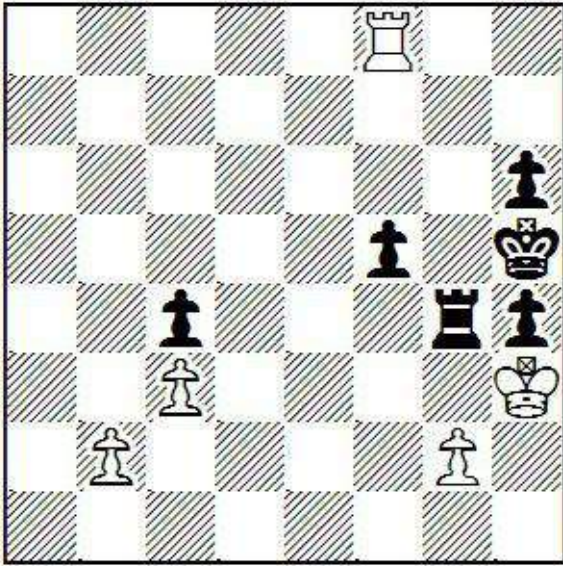
38 ... Rxe4 39 Qxd6 Rxe3 40 Qxe7 Rxe7



41 Rd5 Rb7 42 Rd6 f6 43 h4 Kf7 44 h5 gxh5 45 Rd5 Kg6 46 Kg3 Rb6 47 Rc5 f5 48 Kh4 Re6!

Sooner or later this rook needed to abandon its defensive role to give Black winning chances. This also facilitates Black activating his king, which will be the correct practical decision.

49 Rxb5 Re4+ 50 Kh3 Kg5 51 Rb8 h4 52 Rg8+ Kh5 53 Rf8 Rf4 54 Rc8 Rg4 55 Rf8



Apparently, commentators were expecting a draw agreement here. Indeed, the position is “objectively” a draw, but that doesn’t mean there is nothing for Black to try. How about activating the king?

55 ... Rg3+ 56 Kh2 Kg5 57 Rg8+ Kf4! 58 Rc8 Ke3! 59 Rxc4 f4 60 Ra4??

Anand tries to draw using side checks. Only 60 b4 keeps White alive.

60 ... h3 61 gxh3 Rg6 62 c4 f3 63 Ra3+ Ke2 64 b4 f2 65 Ra2+ Kf3 66 Ra3+ Kf4 67 Ra8

67 Ra1 Re6 is also hopeless; Black intends 68 ... Re1.

67 ... Rg1 0-1

Easy peasy.

Chapter Thirteen

Ploys

I'll state up front that I'm not comfortable with most of what is in this chapter. When I was speaking to a friend about this book, and about inducing errors, he said, "What about staring at the queenside when your threats are on the kingside? It works, you know." There are a few ploys of this type that, to my mind, belong more to the realm of poker than chess. They are (arguably) not illegal, and are occasionally capable of influencing the outcome of a game. As for ethics ... Well, I will give my opinions, but I realize I am not the final arbiter of such things, so I will leave that up to the reader. At the very least, you should be aware of ploys that your opponent could be trying to use against you.

Psychological Draw Offers

It may seem obvious that if you want to avoid draws, you should not offer draws. Sensible advice, but it does not apply to every situation. It is not that uncommon to reach a position, usually an endgame, that is objectively a draw, yet one player appears to have some small chances, some little advantage to work with. Naturally, if you are the player with that advantage, you will try to do what you can with it.

If you are the defender, you might as well offer a draw, even and especially if you have any hopes of somehow winning. Offer the draw right before your opponent has exhausted his winning tries. As long as there is anything to try, your opponent will not accept. In declining the draw, he takes on the burden of trying to win, to justify to himself and even to you, his decision to prolong the game. *A player who has been offered a draw overestimates his chances.* This is especially true after he decides to decline. He will continue the game even after he has exhausted his legitimate winning tries, vainly attacking without real ammunition until something starts to go wrong with his position. Part of his delusion is that, because you have previously offered a draw, you will continue to be amenable to a draw. He will be in for an unpleasant reality check.

Of course I exaggerate. There is no guarantee that things will go this way, but it gives you a chance where previously there was none. You will be surprised how often this works. Notice that if you offer the draw at the right time, there is no need to worry that your opponent will accept. If he accepts, then he is not vulnerable to the ploy, and you never had any chance to win anyway. If this reasoning does not apply, then you should not have offered the draw.

I should mention that this ploy is slightly impolite. From the standpoint of etiquette, it is the responsibility of the player with the apparently superior chances to offer the draw when he sees no need to continue. Even if your opponent is not consciously aware of the etiquette, he may feel slighted, which will not improve his chances of handling the situation well. Personally, I feel that this ploy is not unethical. Whereas repeated draw offers are openly rude, and are therefore, I believe, unethical.

Unfortunately, I cannot produce an example at this time. Fortunately, the concept is clear enough that an example is probably not necessary.

Misdirection

When we play chess, we look around the board at points of interest. Our opponent may notice where our attention is focused, and use that information as a clue to figure out our plans, awaken to our threats, or become aware of our areas of concern (perhaps our opponent has a combination that we are worried about, but he has not yet noticed). Should we simply ignore this? Should we wear dark sunglasses like

poker players? Or should we occasionally “stare at the queenside” to send our opponents misinformation? There is no way to analyse how effective this is, but I believe it has some non-zero chance of working, even against a strong player. After all, it is the most experienced players that would have best learned how to pick up on the cues of the opponent.

Is it fair? Actually, I think it is completely fair to try to mislead someone who is trying to get information by watching my eyes. Their action is somewhat invasive and the information gained must be “at their own risk”. In any case, it would not occur to me to try to mislead someone if I did not notice them looking at me.

As for your opponent’s eyes, go ahead and look if you want, but try not to make it obvious or your opponent may start putting on a show for you.

Body Language

Why would a chessplayer worry about body language? Isn’t all the relevant action taking place on the chess board? Not at all. A great deal of action is taking place in the players’ minds, and body language can reveal a player’s state of mind. *It is vastly easier to play against someone if you always know how they feel about their position.*

I would say that, if your body language is telegraphing your state of mind, it is costing you 50 or more rating points. After all, assessment (knowing how good or bad your position is) is one of the most important and difficult skills in chess. If you are always on hand to confirm or deny your opponent’s assessments, his job becomes easier. If, in addition, your state of mind tends towards pessimism rather than optimism, the information you are sending is costing you an additional 50 or more rating points. Now your opponent has both information and a confidence boost.

So how do you make sure you don’t give your opponent that information? The most straightforward way is to maintain a “poker face”. You always appear confident, or you always appear focused, or you always appear indifferent. This is particularly important if you have just made a blunder. Depending on the blunder, your opponent is likely to notice it regardless, but if you grimace, moan, or slap your forehead, there is no possibility of escape. Should you manage to stay calm, the chances of a “double-blunder” - of your opponent making the exact same oversight that you did - are surprisingly high. There is some tendency for human chessplayers to have the same blind spots as each other.

The other way to avoid handing your opponent useful information is to intentionally try to send him misinformation. You act confident when you are unsure, despondent when you have hopes, worried when you have things well in hand, etc. On the other hand, this is tedious and draws your own attention away from the game for nebulous benefits. Also, if you’re using this ploy continuously, your opponent will surely catch on, so I would suggest you only do it in case of emergency; i.e. when you have a lost position.

The late, great Simon Webb writes about this in some detail in *Chess for Tigers*. He suggests a posture of focus and alertness in lost positions without counterplay. This is intended to make your opponent unsure and cause him to use more clock time. Also, if you notice your opponent is getting ready to move (it is usually obvious) you can sit up real straight, eagerly awaiting his move - your opponent may reconsider it, costing him time and a little energy, helping to soften him up for later in the game when you have hopefully managed to generate some counterplay.

Webb further suggests a posture of despair in lost positions when you have tricks up your sleeve. Your opponent thinks you are helpless. He will hopefully not remain as alert. After all, that pathetic-looking guy sitting across from him looks as if he’s about to resign, not like he’s in the process of setting up a trap.

When I was a child and a teenager playing in tournaments, I used all of these ploys, and believed that they sometimes worked. As an adult, I am in the dubious position of being able to confirm that they sometimes work. I know for sure because they have sometimes worked on me.

Game 39

J.Schuyler-Anonymous

Somewhere, Some Year

King's Gambit

Although my opponent's strategy is the one we are concerned with for this chapter, I will take the opportunity to point out some of the early features of the game that are successful from my point of view.

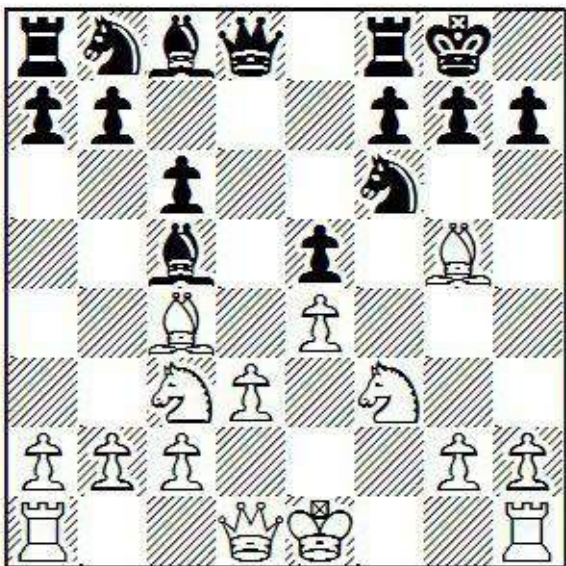
1 e4 e5 2 f4

My opponent is about ten years old and somewhat underrated at 1900. Naturally, I am planning on winning the game. It would be reasonable for me to play my regular London System, expecting him to hang himself. After all, shouldn't I be able to beat a 1900, even an underrated one, without risk? On the other hand, the London System is very popular in my area, particularly among young players, so I could expect my opponent to be relatively well prepared. I have done very well overall with the King's Gambit, and no longer consider it risky to play against non-masters.

2 ... Bc5 3 Nf3 d6 4 Nc3 Nf6 5 Bc4 0-0 6 d3 c6?!

I do not understand why this move is popular, as it does not give good results.

7 fxe5 dxe5 8 Bg5



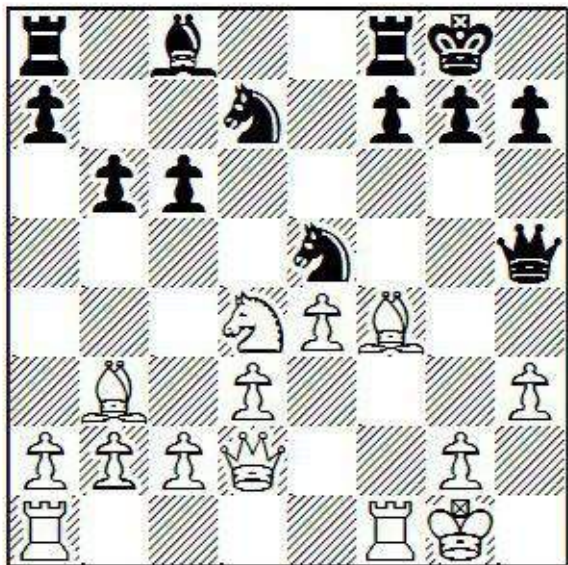
8 ... Bd4?

At this point, if not sooner, Black must have started having to think for himself. Maybe I could have gotten my opponent out of book by move eight in almost any opening, but since it is a King's Gambit, the position is already very sharp, and the cost of an error is high. The nettlesomeness does its job. Black spends a move to offer me his best minor piece. Maybe he miscalculated and thought I could not take it, though even in that case, I do not understand the point of the move.

9 Nxd4 exd4 10 Ne2 Qa5+? 11 Qd2

A queen trade leaves Black unable to deal with the dual threats of Nxd4 and Bxf6, so Black's last move was very bad. Black is already "lost".

11 ... Qe5 12 0-0 Ng4?! 13 Bf4 Qh5 14 h3 Ne5 15 Bb3 Nbd7 16 Nxd4 b6?!



I am already aware of how good my position is. Around here is where I notice how unhappy my opponent is. He is slumping and looking away from the board. When he plays his moves it is with a suggestion of a shrug, as if to say, “I don’t care anymore. Whatever.” This is a good way to work the ploy. If your opponent thinks you have given up mentally, he is likely to relax, even if he is aware that he shouldn’t. What is not so good from Black’s standpoint is the moves he is playing. He should not fall into his own trap and actually give up mentally when he is only supposed to be pretending.

17 Nf5 Kh8 18 Qc3 f6 19 d4

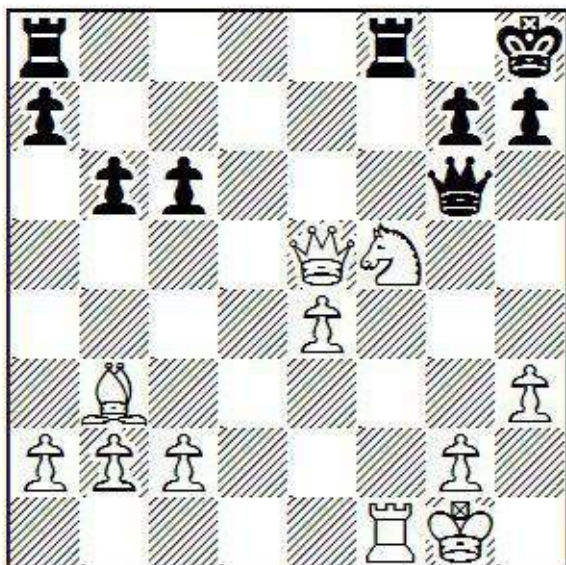
Now we see the problem with ... b7-b6. The c6-pawn is falling if the knight on e5 moves.

19 ... Ba6 20 dxe5 Bxf1 21 Rxf1 fxe5 22 Bxe5 Nxe5

My opponent has gotten even mopier. His air of “I don’t care” has been replaced by an air of “I will resign soon and then go cry.” Naturally, it will require little effort to adopt this posture because it resembles his actual feelings, but letting the feelings show as opposed to keeping them in is a conscious choice intended to elicit sympathy and lower the opponent’s alertness. How do I know this? Well, you see, I was also a ten-year-old chessplayer once.

My opponent’s magic is working. Alongside thoughts of how best to win the game are coming intrusive thoughts about what to say after the game to lessen the blow. “You really played well except for one or two moves”, or, “If you just study your openings a little deeper you’ll be a master in no time.” I am aware that these thoughts are inappropriate and counterproductive, but I am nonetheless unable to banish them completely. At the very least, I have lost my hostile edge. I imagine that Garry Kasparov is not at all susceptible to such thoughts, but most of us are only human. I also know that when I was a junior player, I was far less susceptible to such manipulations. Instead, they tended to make me angry. This is, of course, the appropriate reaction in a competitive situation.

23 Qxe5 Qg6



All moves win easily except for blunders. The simplest is probably 24 Qf4, followed by advancing the e-pawn. I had a long, unproductive think about how to make progress without allowing any counterplay. Fatigue from previous rounds was affecting me greatly, and *my opponent had diminished my adrenal response with his extremely submissive behaviour*. I even noticed at least once that the move I eventually played was a blunder, but this information didn't get stored properly.

24 Qg3??

The instant my hand left the piece my opponent sat up straight and, too quickly to see, his expression shifted, not to involuntary glee, but to the practiced neutrality that is his normal, conscious chess posture. The instant I pressed the clock he played his reply.

24 ... Rxf5

It is worth noting that the ploy would probably not have worked had other factors not been in my opponent's favour, especially my fatigue. However, opponents are often tired. In any case, I believe that the ploy played an essential role in eliciting the blunder. The blunder would not have happened without the ploy.

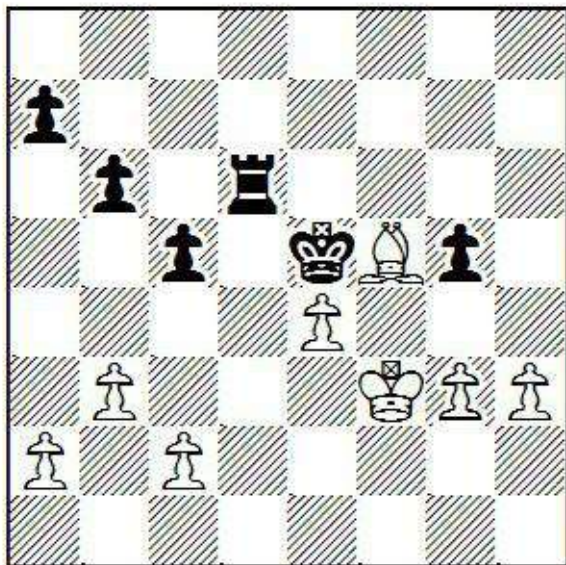
25 Qxg6 Rxf1+

Here my opponent offered a draw. Playing on is dangerous for me. It would be easy to get carried away trying to recover the half-point I blew. On the other hand, the position is probably not lost, and since my opponent is apparently amenable to a draw, he might still allow me to escape even if the position starts to turn against me.

26 Kxf1 hxg6 27 Ke2 g5 28 Ke3 Rd8 29 Bf7 g6

The computer does not like this, but I thought it was smart for Black to make sure his king gets into the game.

30 Bxg6 Kg7 31 Bh5 Kf6 32 Be2 Ke5 33 g3 Rh8 34 Bg4 Rf8 35 Bf5 Rd8 36 Ke2 Rd6 37 b3 c5 38 Kf3??



An awful attempt to win. This is why continuing was dangerous.

38 ... Rd2 39 Kg4 Rg2?

Here 39 ... Rxc2 40 Kxg5 b5 41 h4 c4 42 bxc4 bxc4 43 h5 c3 44 h6 Rh2 is a simple win for Black.

40 Kxg5 Rxc2 41 Bg4 Rc3 42 h4 Rxc2 43 a4 ½-½

And this is why continuing was not so dangerous. My opponent agrees to a draw in a winning position. In fact, he agrees instantly, despite having a substantial amount of time on the clock. After luring me in to a mental trap, he succumbs to one himself. After being gifted half a point, he has lost his own competitive edge.

I suppose that was awful enough, but unfortunately I have another example. Again, I am protecting the identity of my opponent. If only I could protect my own identity too!

Game 40

Anonymous-J.Schuyler

A place, A year

Nimzowitsch Defence

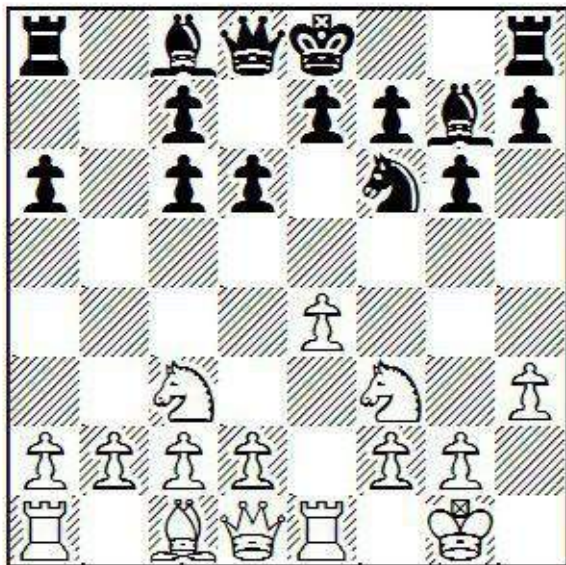
1 e4 Nc6

My main defence for the past several years. My opponent, a friend of mine, is well aware of this and has had time to prepare.

2 Nf3 d6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bb5 a6

4 ... Bg4 is a good alternative here because White has already committed his own bishop. Instead, I stuck with my standard "Dark Knight System" moves.

5 Bxc6+ bxc6 6 h3 g6 7 0-0 Bg7 8 Re1

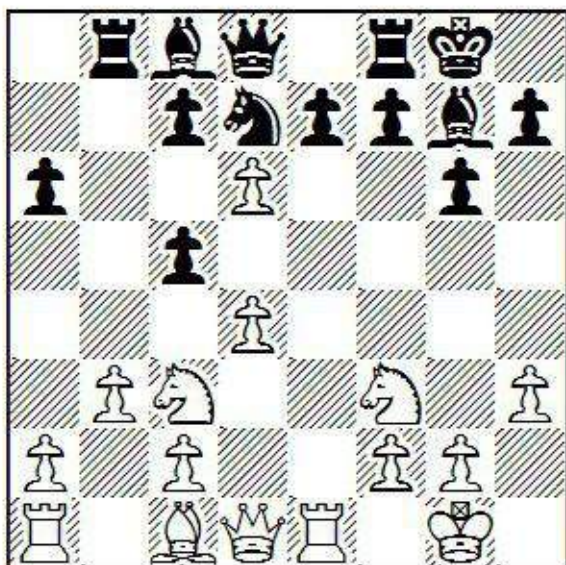


White appears to be trying to tempt me to play an early ... c6-c5. I was worried that this might put me too far behind in development, though according to *Stockfish*, 8 ... c5 is as good as anything else.

8 ... 0-0 9 d4 Rb8 10 b3 c5

I have easily gotten in this thematic break, which means I am fine theoretically, but I am still the one who needs to be more careful over the next several moves.

11 e5 Nd7 12 exd6



This is no good, according to the computer. After all, it can hardly make sense to trade the e5-pawn for the c7-pawn unless there is some concrete way to take advantage of the situation. On the other hand, White's series of moves forces me to think hard about his many possible threats. When I described this game to my wife (who is not a chessplayer), she decided that what my opponent was doing to me was similar to a baseball team who tries to fatigue the opposing pitcher by getting his pitch count up. This is an excellent analogy.

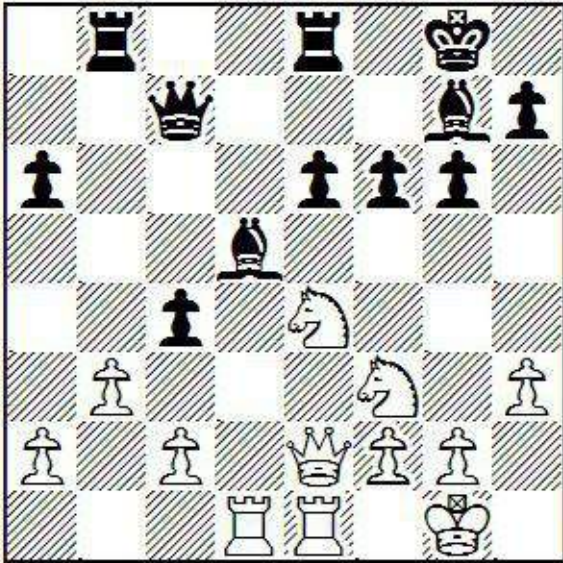
12 ... cxd6 13 Bg5 Re8 14 Nd5 f6

In inducing this "weakness", White is not repaid adequately for the effort it took him to accomplish it. At least, he is not repaid with a good position, but he is repaid with the effort it takes for me to have to evaluate counterintuitive moves like 14 ... f6 correctly.

15 Be3 e6?!

Better to develop with tempo with 15 ... Bb7, when Black has the advantage. At the time I was not willing to weaken the e6-square, although 16 Nf4(?!) 16 ... e5 is excellent for Black.

16 dxc5 Nxc5 17 Nc3 Bb7 18 Bxc5 dxc5 19 Qe2 Qc7 20 Rad1 c4 21 Ne4 Bd5

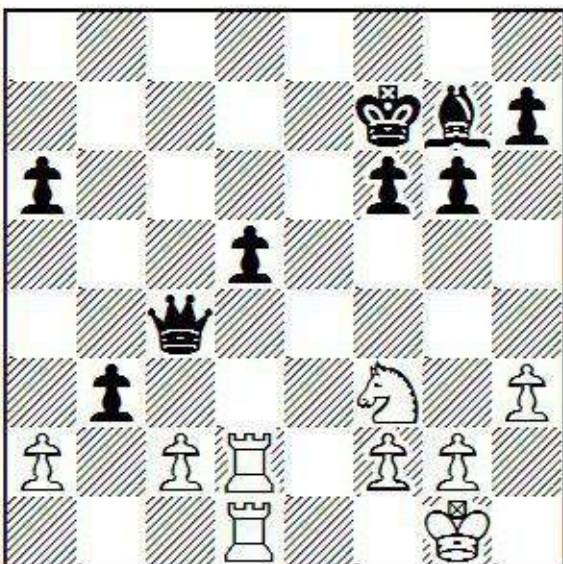


At this point in the game, it certainly appears that White's strategy of nettlesomeness has failed. His aggressive play in the centre has ultimately led to his centre disappearing. Also, Black's bishops have much more potential than White's knights. It is Black who has played more accurately so far in the complications, and it is even White who now commits an awful blunder. This doesn't tell the whole story, though, because Black's (my) "pitch count" is very high, and it is getting harder and harder to keep finding the right moves.

22 Nc3?? cxb3 23 Nxd5 exd5 24 Qxe8+

Hoping that the material imbalance will pose challenges for Black. This is desperate, but is nonetheless the correct choice. White also starts allowing his displeasure with his position to show. I will mention that White has been a frequent poker player in his spare time.

24 ... Rxe8 25 Rxe8+ Kf7 26 Re2 Qc4 27 Red2

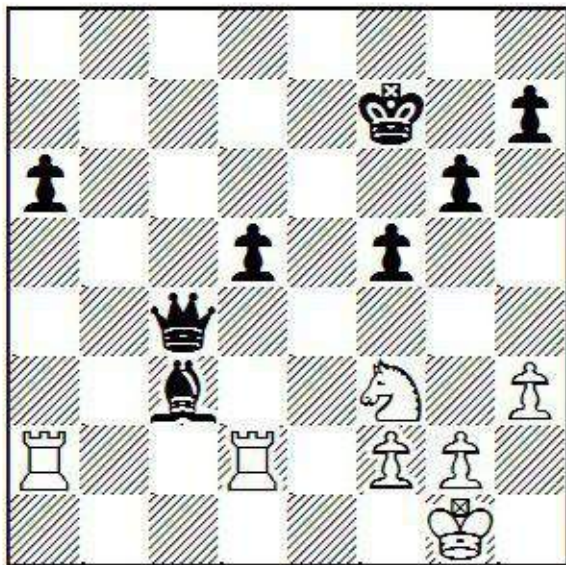


27 ... bxa2

This should win easily, even if 27 ... b2 28 Rb1 (or 28 a3 Qa2) 28 ... Qxa2 29 Rdd1 a5 30 Nd4 a4 31 Nb5 a3 is even easier.

It is around here that White stops projecting “a little discouraged” and goes into full-blown misery mode. He is leaning back instead of forward, sighing heavily, and looking down and away from the board. The reason: he has noticed a trap that I could fall into! It will require that, when I reach the critical position, I do not double-check my analysis, but this seems possible to him because it is late and we are both low on time. In any case, it is his only chance, so he takes it. Of the two of us, he is not the only experienced poker player, so I would not normally have missed the significance of his sudden attitude change, but I am fatigued from my day and from the game.

28 c3 f5 29 Ra1 Bxc3 30 Raxa2



30 ... Bxd2?? 31 Ne5+

Oops. I resigned shortly as there turns out to be no counterplay in the resulting endgame. Any move that did not drop the queen would have won easily, as White’s whole army would be engaged in a futile effort to stop Black’s passed pawns.

I do not think it is a coincidence that the example games are against a child and a friend. These players have a natural advantage when it comes to using the ploy I have been discussing. But is it kosher?

There is an argument to be made that, in a game, anything legal is ethical. That is basically the argument I put forth in Chapter Eleven when it comes to using the clock against the opponent, but I’m not sure that reasoning applies here, when the actions in question are off the “playing field”. Furthermore, it is not clear that play-acting is even legal. According to FIDE rule 11.5 “*It is forbidden to distract or annoy the opponent in any manner whatsoever.*” A vague rule to be sure, and difficult to enforce, but I consider it, at the very least, an ethical guidepost. Your opponent will never be able to prove that you are acting, let alone that you are doing it in order to influence him, but surely *you* know what you are doing and why. A special note to my two opponents - no hard feelings. I take responsibility for my own mistakes. As for you, dear reader, do what you like, but watch out for your opponents. Let us please move on to something else.

Chapter Fourteen

Stripping

One way to induce errors is to take off all of your clothes during the game. Opponents are likely to find this distracting. Furthermore, if successful, your story might be turned into a popular and inspiring independent film.

The remainder of this chapter will deal with the slightly less drastic strategy of stripping your opponent's king of its pawn protection. We all know (or should know) that kings fare better behind a wall of pawns. But are there practical difficulties for having a stripped king above and beyond the technical ones? Obviously there are, yet many players are reluctant to act on this information.

Game 41

P.De Vries-E.Cozic

Hengelo 1996

Italian Game

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 Nc3

The so-called "Giuoco Pianissimo" (very quiet game). Nonetheless, the games often get loud.

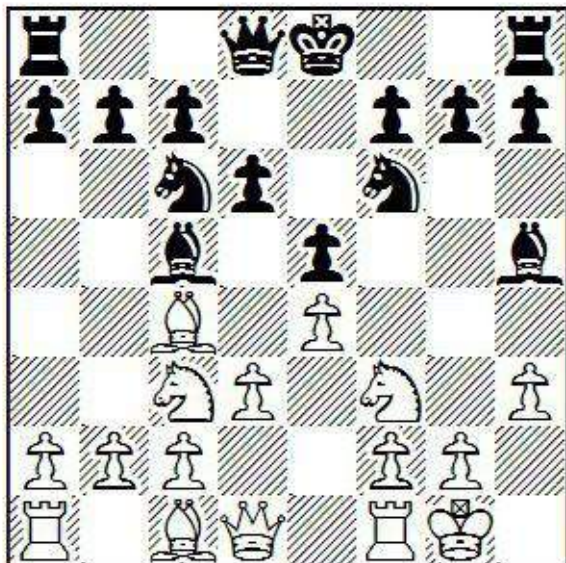
4 ... Nf6

Somehow, Black is a slight favourite in this symmetrical position. This is explained partially by the fact that "everyone knows" that 4 Nc3 is not ambitious enough, and there is therefore a tendency for White to be the lower-rated player. Also, there are dangers to having to act first in some positions. This one, for instance.

5 d3 d6 6 0-0?

See? "Everyone knows" that it is a mistake to castle in the Giuoco Pianissimo if the opponent can pin the king's knight. Except that some people don't know. By the way, White and Black are both close to 2100 FIDE.

6 ... Bg4 7 h3 Bh5



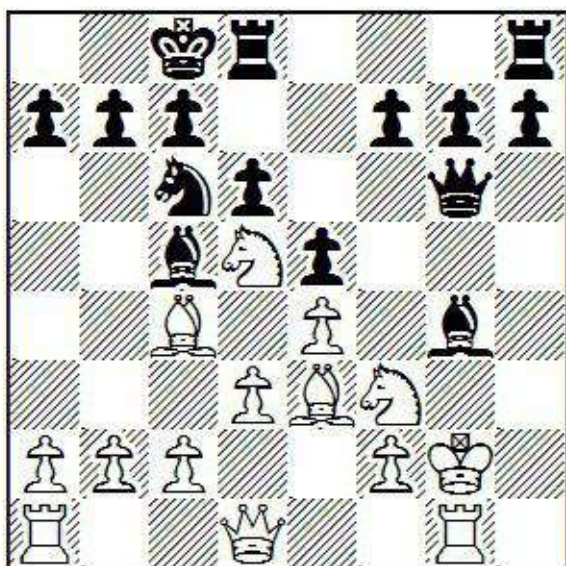
The engines all say White is better, whereas in my database Black is much better. So who's right? Neither and both, of course. The computer has no clue what the practical difficulties are of playing White. On the other hand, if White can learn a few tricks from the computer, maybe he can figure out how to play the position successfully. For now, though, the engines are wrong.

8 g4 Nxg4!

I wouldn't even bother with the exclamation mark for this extremely obvious move, except that somehow Black has retreated the bishop over 80% of the time! This is incomprehensible, and shows that most players are not properly appreciating the practical value of stripping the enemy king. By now I hope I don't need to remind you that *the practical value is the real value*.

Perhaps some players are unwilling to give up material because they don't see a forced win. This is far too pessimistic, especially since, in addition to long-term king problems, White also has to solve a very unpleasant pin. The only decent argument against the sacrifice is that Black still has a good position after the meek 8 ... Bg6, but the players who are willing to play the riskier-looking move are rewarded with an 86% win rate (no draws), while the retreaters get 60%.

9 hxg4 Bxg4 10 Be3 Qf6 11 Kg2 0-0-0 12 Nd5 Qg6 13 Rg1



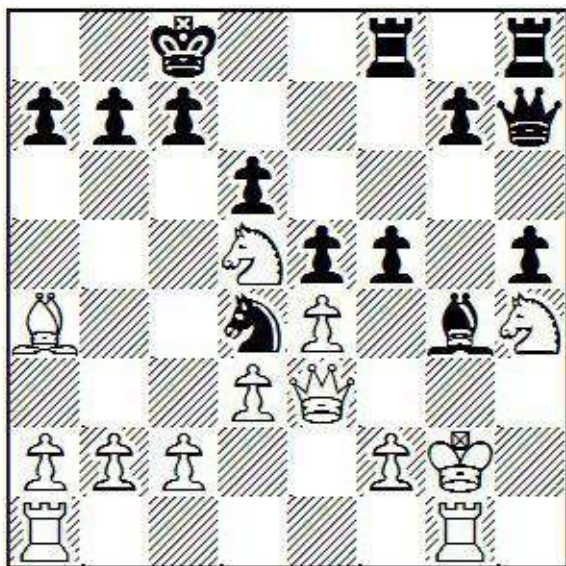
13 ... h5?

13 ... f5 makes more sense. In conjunction with the pin, an open f-file will be extremely useful for Black.

14 Nh4 Qh7 15 Qd2 Rdf8?!

Against the odds, White has played more accurately since the sacrifice, and is now “objectively” winning, but his position remains tricky to play. Also, if I were White, I would be starting to feel the strain of having to find strong moves while worrying about serious consequences.

16 Bb5?! Bxe3 17 Qxe3 Nd4 18 Ba4 f5!



Better late than never. As an example of the difficulties of White’s position, consider that *Stockfish*’s favourite move here is 19 f4, which would probably not even cross my mind in a serious game.

19 c3 f4 20 Qd2 f3+ 21 Kf1?!

Apparently 21 Kh2! is much better, whereas 21 Kh1? is much worse. Why? How would I know? If we play Black, it’s not our problem.

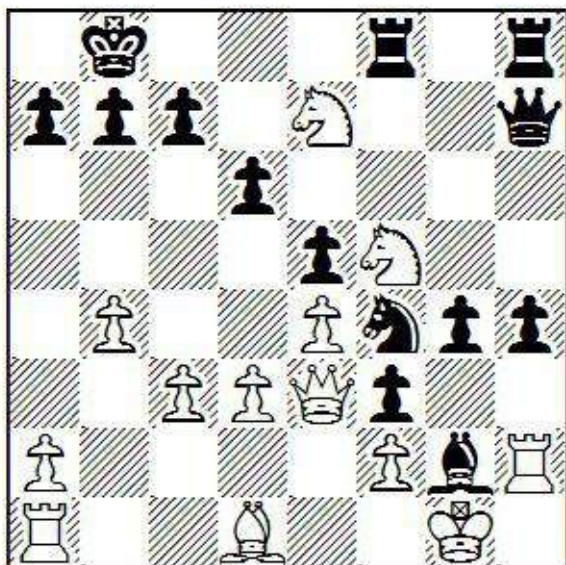
21 ... Ne2 22 Ne7+? Kb8 23 Rh1 Nf4 24 Bd1? g5 25 Nhf5 h4?

25 ... Rf7 26 Qe3 Rxe7 27 Nxe7 Qxe7 28 Bxf3 Bh3+ 29 Kg1 g4 leaves White in (more) dire straits.

26 Qe3 Bh3+ 27 Kg1? g4 28 b4 Bg2?!

28 ... Rf7! wins material.

29 Rh2



29 ... Nh3+?

29 ... g3 30 fxg3 hxg3 31 Rxh7 f2+ 32 Qxf2 gxf2+ 33 Kxf2 Rxh7 is a relatively simple win.

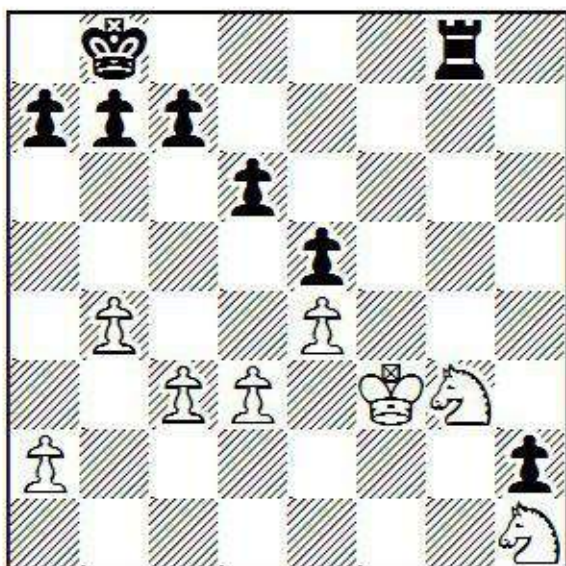
30 Rxh3 Bxh3 31 Qg5 Qh5 32 Qxh5 Rxh5 33 Ng7? Rh7 34 Nef5 Bg2 35 Ne6 Rg8 36 Bb3 g3 37 Nf4 gxf2+?!

37 ... h3 38 fxg3 h2+ 39 Kf2 Rgh8 40 Nxc2 fxc2 41 Kxc2 h1Q+ 42 Rxh1 Rxh1 is decisive.

38 Kxf2 Rg4 39 Nd5 Rh8?! 40 Nde3 Rg5 41 Bd1?? h3 42 Bxf3 Bxf3 43 Kxf3 h2 44 Rh1 Rg1 45 Ng3 Rf8+??

45 ... Rh3 wins heavy material.

46 Nef5 Rxh1 47 Nxc2 Rg8 48 Nfg3



Black has missed several easy wins, but he is still better, in part because of White's "redundant" knights, which limp around the board and have a hard time stopping Black's rim-pawns.

48 ... a5 49 b5 Ka7 50 a4 Kb6 51 d4 c6 52 bxc6 Kxc6 53 Nf2 b5 54 axb5+ Kxb5 55 Nd3 0-1

This blunder allows 55 ... Rxg3+ etc, though White was losing anyway.

A game riddled with errors, as many chess games are. Admittedly, there are many ways to look at this, but my impression is that Black had chance after chance after chance, and that that is a good thing,

regardless of the result. I think that for much of the game White played a lot of accurate moves, but his position never got easy, while Black's position never got hopeless, in spite of his errors.

The stripping sacrifice would not have been effective against a computer, but is almost guaranteed to work against a person, who will need to solve difficult problems, possibly for the entire rest of the game. This is both dangerous and tiring.

In the next game, I am an accomplice to the stripping of my own king. This is often more dangerous than it looks, especially against a lower-rated player. It may seem strange that this should be so, but if I misevaluate the dangers (or blunder) and lose 15% of the time against a player 400 points lower rated, that is far worse for my performance than blowing the game 15% of the time against a player of the same rating, which is in turn worse than losing 15% of the time against a much higher-rated player (since I would be losing most of that 15% anyway).

Game 42

H.Keskar-J.Schuyler

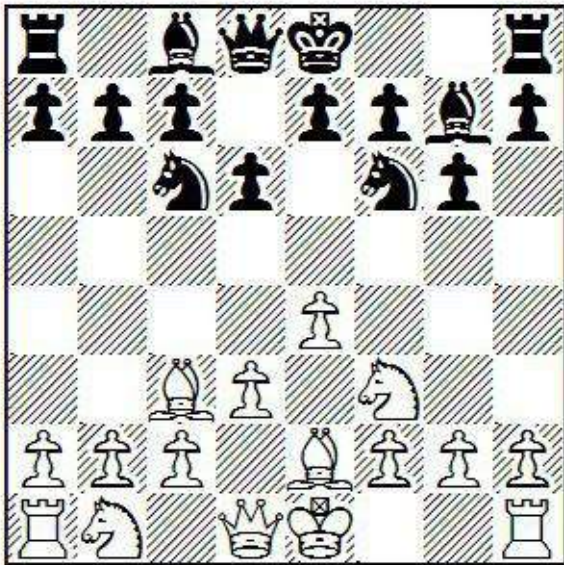
Virginia Beach 2015

Nimzowitsch Defence

I outrate my opponent by 400 points, and I have beaten him several times before, so there is no particular reason to expect problems. However, as I tell my students, *the biggest psychological mistake you can make is to hope or expect a game to be easy.*

Incidentally, the time control is to play the entire game in 75 minutes. Neither fast nor slow, I find this speed awkward. The game is being played on a Tuesday, after a long day of teaching. My tank is not starting full. The point of these observations is not to make excuses, but to try to understand the causal chain. One of the most fundamental ideas in this book is that *mistakes are not random.* If the preceding observations are relevant to the story, I have to take better control over them. If I do not like "game in 75", I do not have to play it. If Tuesdays are tiring, I do not have to join a Tuesday evening tournament. If I am depleted and find myself hoping for an easy game, I have to fix my attitude or I have no business at the board. Nobody said that chess was easy, and one difficult but valuable skill is honest self-assessment.

1 e4 Nc6 2 Nf3 d6 3 Be2 Nf6 4 d3!? g6 5 Bd2 Bg7 6 Bc3!?



Extremely unambitious play by White, but he has presented me with a position I have never seen before. On a good day, this might be exciting; on a bad day it is annoying to have to think for oneself so

early in the game.

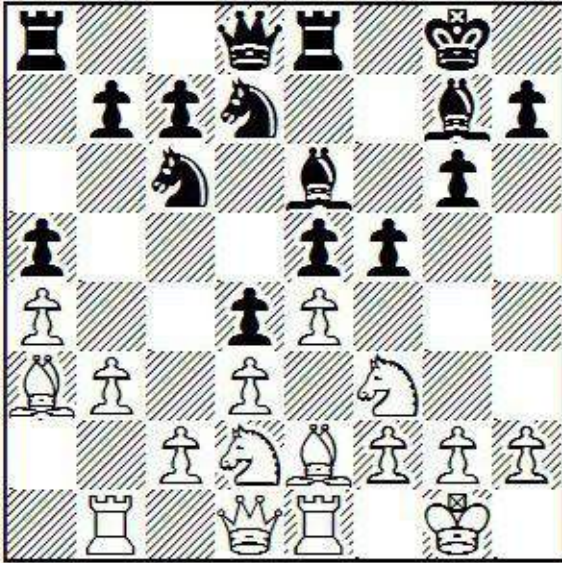
6 ... 0-0 7 0-0 e5 8 Nbd2 Re8 9 Re1 d5!

This central strike threatens to embarrass White's bishop on c3, which now finds itself awkwardly placed.

10 b3 d4 11 Bb2 Be6

There is not much to recommend in White's position, but the unfamiliarity of it has caused me to use more time than I normally would.

12 a4 a5 13 Ba3 Nd7 14 Rb1!? f5!?



A very difficult move to evaluate. This leads me to a winning position, but is also responsible for my eventual loss. It puts a lot of pressure on White, but gives me the responsibility to be careful of my king for the remainder of the game. Right or wrong, *I was less aware than I should have been of the dangers of this move.*

15 Nc4 Bf8?!

This one is definitely wrong and should not have been combined with my previous move. The fianchettoed dark-squared bishop is performing (to some degree) the function of a pawn, so this can be thought of as further stripping my king.

16 Bxf8 Rxf8 17 exf5 gxf5

One does not seriously consider recapturing with a piece in such a position (it would leave the e4-square weak), which is one reason why 15 ... f5 was risky. Perhaps there should not be any danger to Black's king here, but "should" is a dangerous word.

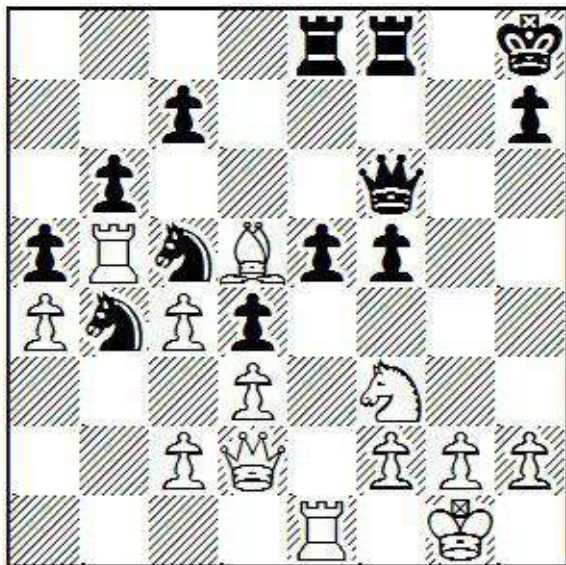
18 Qd2?!

The way for White to activate is 18 Nfd2 and 19 Bf3.

18 ... Bxc4 19 bxc4 Nc5 20 Rb5!? b6 21 Ng5 Qf6 22 Bf3 Rae8 23 Bd5+ Kh8 24 Nf3?

Black's structure is vulnerable if White can get f2-f4 played. Therefore 24 Bxc6 Qxc6 25 f4 is best, although 24 f4 is interesting too, and far better than the text move.

24 ... Nb4



White has not found a plan, and I now have an objectively decisive advantage. The course of the game so far appears to justify my previous decisions. However, there is still much more chess to be played, ten or twenty or thirty more moves for me to be concerned about my king or possibly suffer the consequences. It is only half right to take a snapshot of the board now and conclude that my play has been successful, that my errors must have happened later. In the Giuoco Pianissimo game we looked at previously, the player with the stripped king also went through a period of time when he had a winning position, before eventually losing. *I raised the degree of difficulty on myself. That is extremely relevant if I later fail to cope.*

25 Ng5!? c6?

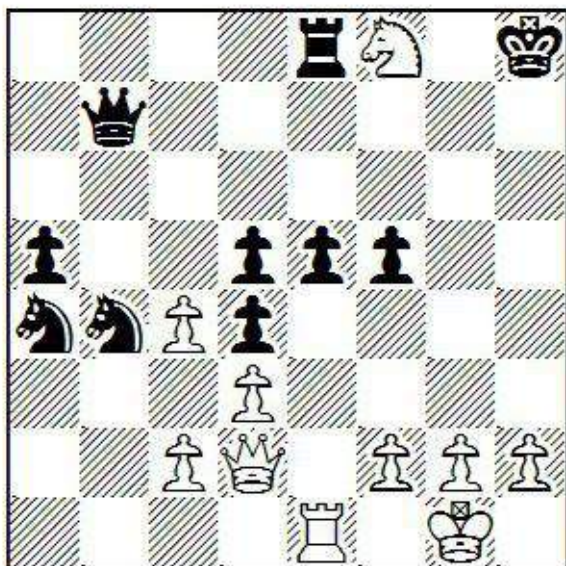
The most obvious move, but it doesn't work properly. It's easy to say I should not make this mistake, but the mistake would not be possible if it weren't for Black's weakened king.

Had I just shorn up with 25 ... Re7, or sent his knight home after 25 ... h6, White's position would have fallen under its own weight.

26 Rxb6 Nxa4?

26 ... Re7 and 26 ... h6 are still the best moves.

27 Rb7 cxd5 28 Nxb7 Qc6 29 Nxf8 Qxb7



To find myself in this fully stripped position is wrong both objectively and practically. My knights are particularly ugly on a4 and b4, given where the play is taking place. Okay, White's position is also difficult to play well, but as the lower-rated player he risks less in the chaos. This is the kind of position he should be happy to reach.

30 Ng6+ Kh7 31 Qg5?

31 Nxe5 is pretty much equal, according to the engines.

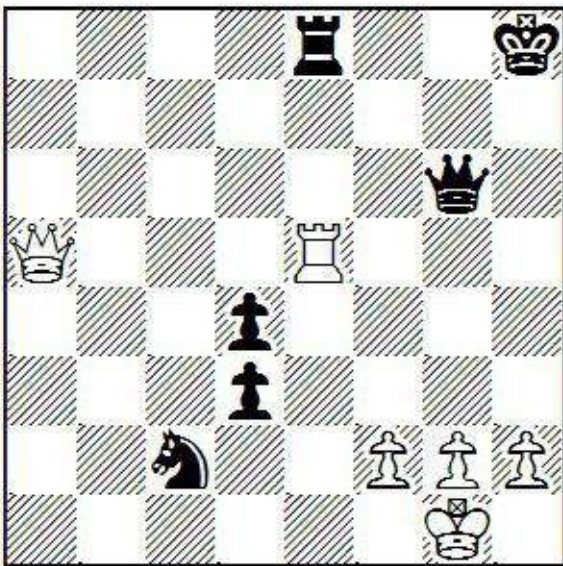
31 ... Qg7 32 Qxf5 Qxg6 33 Qd7+ Kh8 34 Qxa4

White has traded an excellent knight for a terrible one, and also sent his queen to the boonies. Black is winning again.

34 ... dxc4 35 Qxa5 Nxc2?

35 ... cxd3 36 Qxb4 dxc2 is by far the best and cleanest win. The black pawns are too far advanced for White to deal with, and he can no longer disturb Black's king.

36 Rxe5 cxd3



37 Rh5+?

After 37 h4!, it is not clear whether Black can force a win.

37 ... Kg7 38 h3 d2

Winning Black's queen for a rook will no longer be enough because of the promotable pawn.

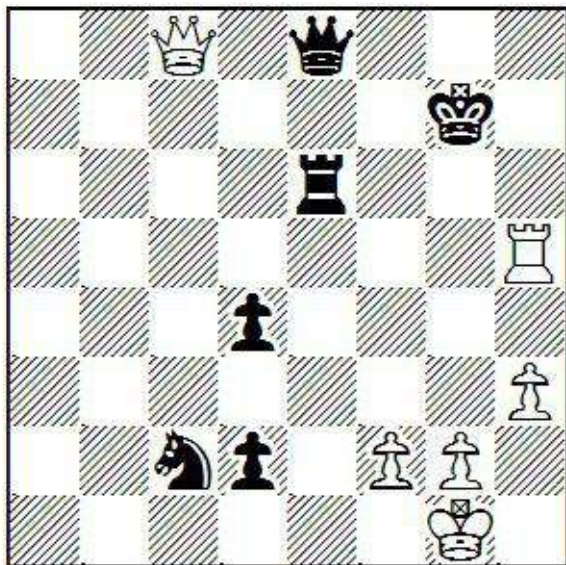
39 Qc7+

White is finally reduced to some number of spite checks. Even so, these positions demand accurate calculation for the defender to avoid a perpetual or worse. I'm down to about three minutes on the clock.

39 ... Kg8 40 Qc4+ Re6 41 Qc8+ Qe8

Ninety seconds. At least I had figured out how to deal with the coming series of frontal checks.

42 Rg5+ Kh8 43 Rh5+ Kg7



44 Qc7+

One minute left. After 44 Rg5+ Kh6, White is out of meaningful checks. I had seen a few moves earlier that the key idea was running towards the rook. Of course, White did not play 44 Rg5+, did he, but the defensive idea was already in my head.

44 ... Kg6 45 Qh7+

Oops! As it turns out, major pieces can move on files *or* ranks.

45 ... Kf6 46 Rf5 mate

Obviously I'm kicking myself about the game. But what exactly should I be kicking myself about? What really happened?

Story one: I played well enough for 43 moves and then made a stupid blunder that cost the game. I need to stay more alert and perhaps do some tactical drills on defending such positions.

Story two: Do I really need to repeat story two? It's the story I've been telling for the whole game. The blunder is not random, or even stupid, but the result of an accumulation of mental stresses, many of which I have control over. (My opponent also has control over some of them. The most important thing he does is to improvise an opening; while the moves he plays intended to raise my mental workload are marked with "!?". From his point of view, he deserves full credit for the win, but as the weaker player, he is less likely to be in control of the majority of my mental stresses.)

Let me be clear - story one is not ridiculous, and it has its uses, but if you are serious about chess as a competitive endeavour, you must understand story two as well.

Chapter Fifteen

Lasker

Emanuel Lasker was by any possible measure an incredibly strong player and was able to hold the world championship title for 27 years (1894-1921). The conventional wisdom for many years was that much of his superiority was “psychological”. Some of his opponents even said that he deliberately played bad moves to confound his opponents. More recent analysis by computers indicates that his play was in fact very accurate, which suggests that it was merely misunderstood by his contemporaries. That might refute the idea that he played bad moves on purpose, but it does not mean that he did not play “psychologically”; that is, play to his opponents’ psychological and technical vulnerabilities.

He is considered by many to be the first great endgame master, but he was also a great tactician, and his opening play was ahead of his time. That covers just about all of chess. One of the benefits to an all-round style is that you can choose to steer the game towards your opponents’ weaknesses, rather than feeling like you need to play to your own strengths. Many of Lasker’s opponents were attacking players, so he would attack them instead. Or he would simply trade pieces and (usually) win the endgame, even if he had little or no advantage to start. His world championship matches were mostly very one-sided.

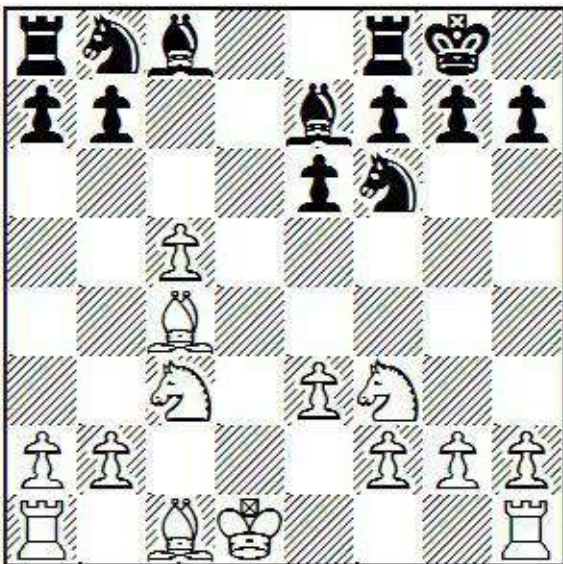
Game 43

Em.Lasker-W.Steinitz

World Championship (11th matchgame), Philadelphia 1894

Queen’s Gambit Declined

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Nf3 Be7 5 e3 0-0 6 Bd3 c5 7 dxc5 dxc4 8 Bxc4 Qxd1+ 9 Kxd1



The position is approximately equal according to engines, or even slightly better for Black. This is of little consequence to Lasker. The important thing is that he has traded queens, denying Steinitz the ability to show his attacking strength. According to IM Jack Peters, “Lasker had noticed signs of uncertainty in Steinitz’ handling of ‘simplified’ middlegames, without queens. Recognizing the champion’s superiority in

managing a full army of pieces, Lasker deliberately sought early queen exchanges.”

I don't agree that Steinitz was better than Lasker in managing a full army of pieces, but why would Lasker play to Steinitz's strength when he can play to an area of weakness? It is obvious to me that Steinitz should have refused to play this position. He had already lost a similar one in the tenth game. In case anyone is wondering, White's inability to castle is of no consequence here - his king will be well placed on e2. Perhaps this is something that Steinitz failed to appreciate.

9 ... Nc6?!

Already inaccurate. The most comfortable development for Black involves fianchettoing his queen's bishop, so Black's knight will belong on the d7-square. Let's imagine that White proceeds as in the game: 9 ... Bxc5 10 a3 b6 11 b4 Be7 12 Ke2 Bb7 13 Bb2 Rc8. Black is better here. White's king position is even starting to become an issue.

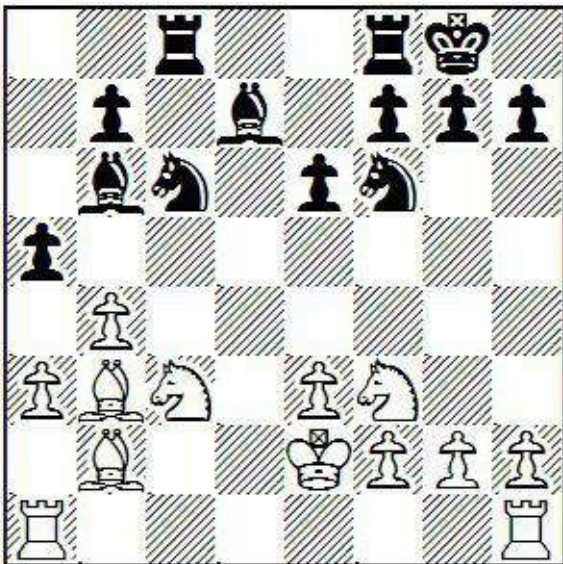
10 a3 Bxc5 11 b4 Bb6?!

Black's bishop has no prospects on this square and it is vulnerable to White's knights, while obstructing the b-pawn makes it difficult to challenge White's extra space.

12 Ke2 Bd7

By now Steinitz has no choice other than to put his bishop on this lame square.

13 Bb3 Rac8 14 Bb2 a5?!



By encouraging the c6-knight to be chased, Black loses control of the e5-square.

15 b5 Ne7 16 Ne5

A big problem for Black, who must surrender the bishop pair or make a pathetic retreat.

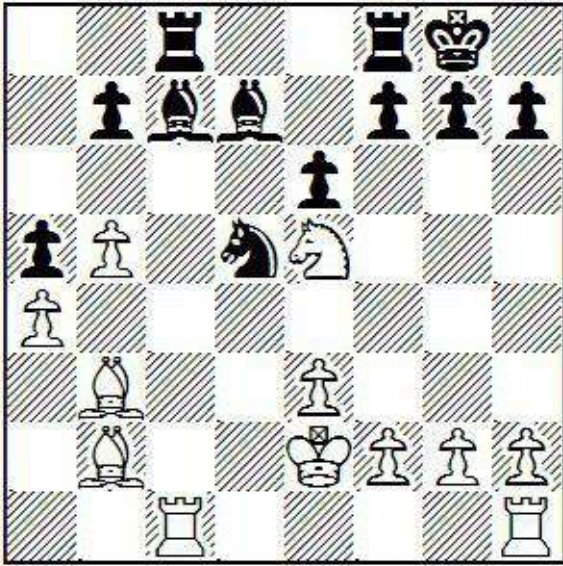
16 ... Be8?!

Giving up the bishop pair is the lesser evil, as it will happen soon anyway. Black's army will not be able to recover from its passivity.

17 a4 Bc7 18 Nc4 Bd7 19 Rac1 Ned5 20 Nxd5 Nxd5?!

20 ... exd5 is relatively better.

21 Ne5



Back to this square. If White plays accurately he is winning already, and this is no problem. We all know Lasker will play more accurately than Steinitz in such a position.

21 ... Bxe5 22 Bxe5 f6 23 e4 fxe5 24 exd5 Kf7 25 Rhd1?!

25 d6 Rxc1 26 Rxc1 Rc8 27 Rxc8 Bxc8 28 Ke3 is a more reliable route to the simplified winning endgame.

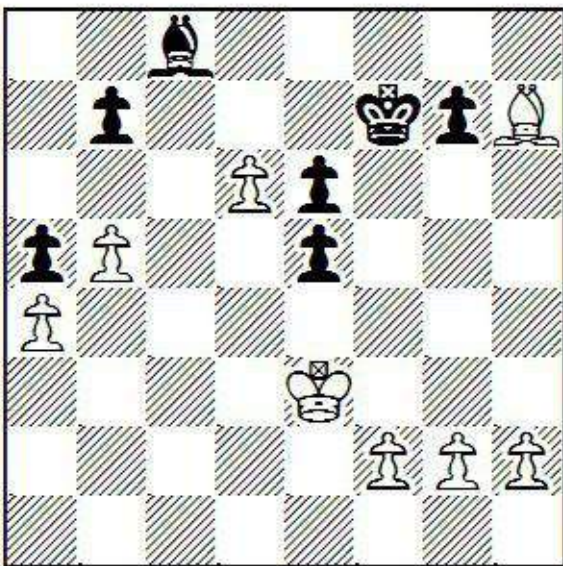
25 ... Ke7?

Steinitz has been presented with one last chance: 25 ... Rxc1 26 Rxc1 Rc8 is not a clear win for White (although I have no doubt that Lasker would have won anyway).

26 d6+ Kf6 27 Ke3!

Okay, very obvious, but White's king has been waiting patiently for this opportunity to demonstrate the advantages of not castling.

27 ... Rxc1 28 Rxc1 Rc8 29 Rxc8 Bxc8 30 Bc2 Kf7 31 Bxh7



Cute. 31 ... g6 32 Ke4 Kg7 33 Kxe5 Kxh7 34 Kf6 e5 35 Ke7 is completely winning - another proof of White's king power.

31 ... b6 32 Ke4 Kf6 33 g4 g5 34 Kf3 Kf7 35 Be4 Ke8 36 h4 Kd7 37 h5 Ke8 38 Ke3 1-0

Black certainly cannot stop both of White's pawns.

Steinitz's play after the queen trade? Not very good for a World Champion, but it was exactly as Lasker had expected. They could play the position after move nine over and over again and expect the same result. In fact, they did play it once more - the exact position was reached in game nineteen, the final game of the match. For Steinitz, this is an inexcusable lapse, showing very poor self-awareness.

Game 44

Em.Lasker-W.Steinitz

World Championship (19th matchgame), Montreal 1894

Queen's Gambit Declined

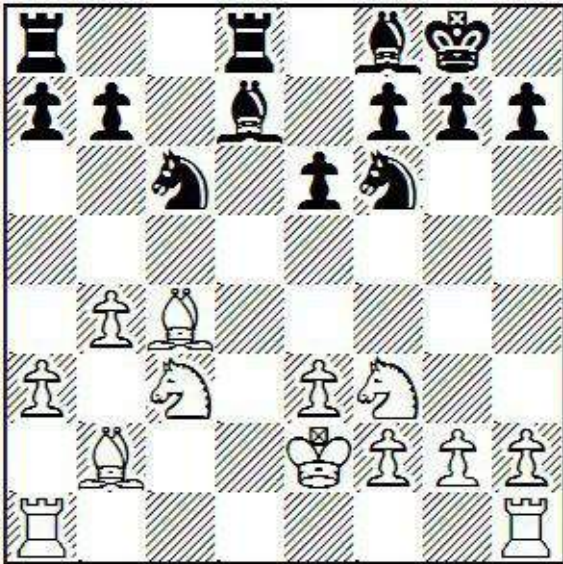
1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Nf3 Be7 5 e3 0-0 6 Bd3 c5 7 dxc5 dxc4 8 Bxc4 Qxd1+ 9 Kxd1 Nc6?!

Steinitz even repeats this mistake.

10 a3 Bxc5 11 b4 Rd8+ 12 Ke2 Bf8

Here he improves by not playing ... Bb6. If he thought this would be enough to change the result of the game, he has an appointment with disappointment.

13 Bb2 Bd7?!



Even with the c6-knight misplaced, it is still better to fianchetto this bishop after ... b7-b6, or ... a7-a6 and ... b7-b5. Where it stands, the bishop is both an obstruction and a target, just as in the previous game.

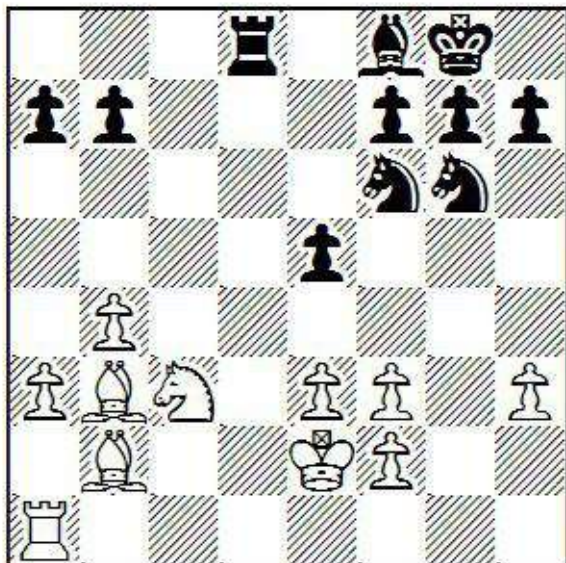
14 Rhd1 Rac8 15 Bb3 Ne7 16 Nd4?!

Surprisingly, Lasker does not repeat the 16 Ne5! idea.

16 ... Ng6 17 Rd2 e5?!

It is understandable that Steinitz wants to free his cramped position, but this just loosens it, giving him problems on e5, d5, and f5.

18 Nf3 Bg4 19 Rxd8 Rxd8 20 h3 Bxf3+ 21 gxf3

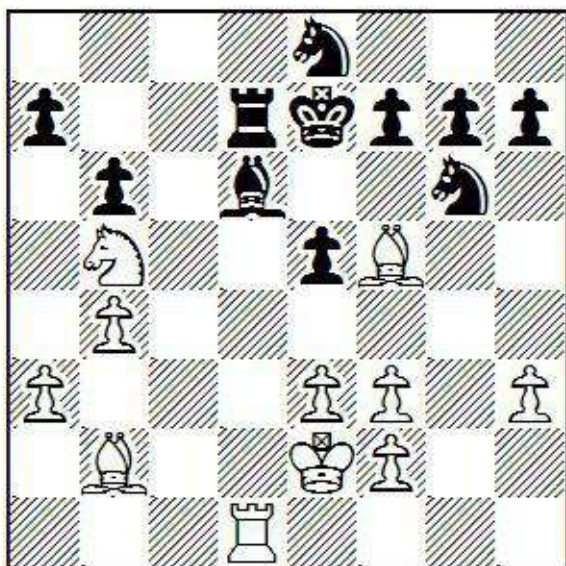


Lasker now has a chance to demonstrate the power of the bishop pair. There is absolutely no doubt that he will be successful.

21 ... Be7 22 Rc1 Kf8 23 Na4 b6 24 Nc3 Bd6 25 Rd1 Ne8 26 Nb5 Rd7?!

Not surprisingly, this self-pin hurts Black. The rook is also exposed to a creative manoeuvre.

27 Bc2!?! Ke7 28 Bf5!



Lasker is now completely winning. Black will be unable to hold onto both his rook and his queenside pawns.

28 ... a6

White wins easily after 28 ... Rd8 29 Nxa7 or 28 ... Rb7 29 Be4 Rd7 30 Bc6 Rd8 31 Bxe8 etc.

29 Bxd7 Kxd7 30 Nc3 f5 31 b5 axb5 32 Nxb5 Ke6 33 Bc3 Ne7 34 Nxd6 Nxd6 35 Bb4 Nd5 36 Rc1 Nf7 37 Bd2 Nd6 38 Kd3 Kd7 39 e4 Nf6 40 Be3 fxe4+ 41 fxe4 b5 42 f3 Nc4 43 Rc3 Ne8 44 Bc1 Ncd6 45 Rc5 Nc7 46 Rxe5 Ne6 47 Rh5 h6 48 Re5 g5 49 h4 gxh4 50 Rh5 Kc6 51 Rxh6 Nc5+ 52 Kc2 1-0

The point of these games is twofold. We can't all play like Lasker, but we can all play to our strengths and our opponents' weaknesses. In some cases, we may be able to reach an "objectively" equal position, and nonetheless have every expectation of winning should things proceed normally. Lasker was able to

play nettlesomely while simultaneously playing very accurately. That is why he was a dominant World Champion. I don't know about you, but I already play about as accurately as I can. If I want to emulate Lasker to a greater degree, I will have to play more nettlesomely.

Game 45

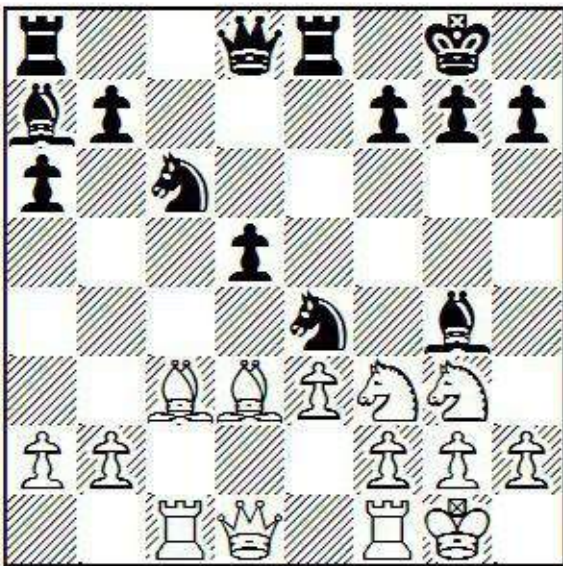
A. Burn-Em. Lasker

Hastings 1895

Tarrasch Defence

In the extremely strong Hastings tournament of 1895, Lasker is playing Amos Burn, who is regarded as an excellent defender. Burn does not mind cramped positions, and often winds up playing them.

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 Nc3 c5 5 e3 Nc6 6 cxd5 exd5 7 Bd3 a6 8 dxc5 Bxc5 9 0-0 0-0 10 Bd2 Re8 11 Rc1 Ba7 12 Ne2 Bg4 13 Bc3 Ne4 14 Ng3



Burn is perhaps taking his defensiveness a little too far. Lasker has an ideal isolated queen's pawn position. He can follow with 14 ... Qe7 and 15 ... Rad8, trying to build pressure. Probably this would have suited Burn, who likes to huddle.

14 ... Nxf2!

The most nettlesome choice of three roughly equal continuations. Lasker's calculations have not told him he is winning, but they have not found a comfortable way for White to relieve the pressure over the next several moves. Notice that there is a material imbalance, but there will be no material investment for Black - he will wind up with at least rook and two pawns for a bishop and a knight. A sacrifice that is not a sacrifice. The best kind!

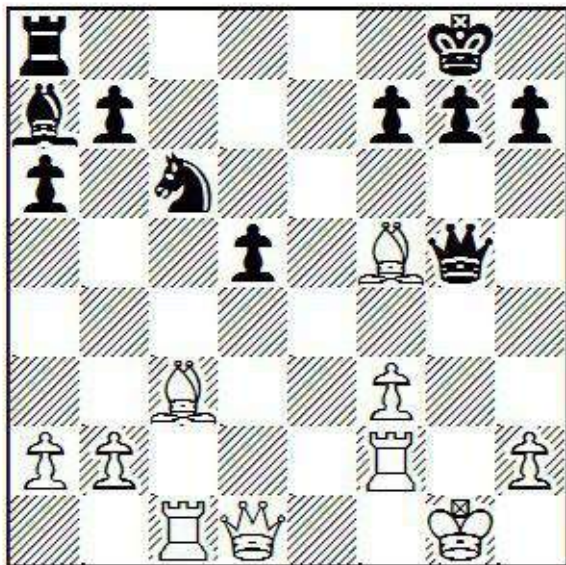
15 Rxf2 Rxe3!

Trickier than 15 ... Bxe3.

16 Nf5??

Defending a complicated position is hard, even when you are an excellent defender. Burn cracks immediately.

16 ... Rxf3 17 gxf3 Bxf5 18 Bxf5 Qg5+



White loses the bishop without saving the rook and will remain behind by two pawns or so.

19 Bg4 h5 20 Qd2?

White is lost anyway, but this loses even more material.

20 ... Be3 0-1

Game 46

Em.Lasker-D.Janowski

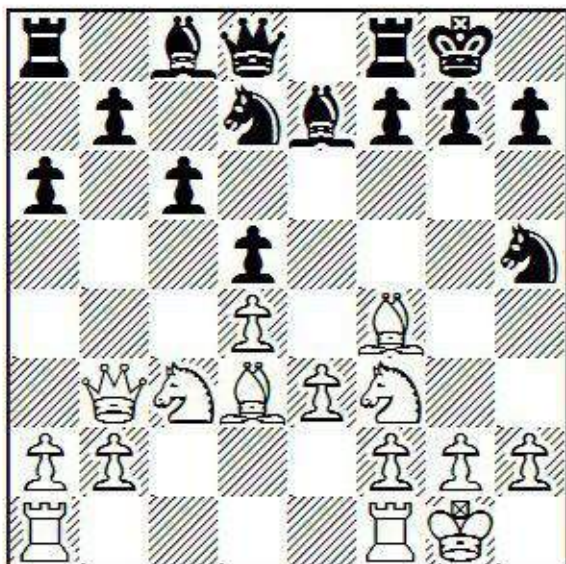
London 1899

Queen's Gambit Declined

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 a6

A modern-looking move that nevertheless has quite a pedigree. Janowski is the first to use it, and tried it eleven times, albeit without especially good results. Duras and Euwe also liked it, and in modern times, Epishin, though many strong players have taken it out for a spin.

4 cxd5 exd5 5 Qb3 c6 6 Nf3 Bd6 7 Bg5 Be7 8 Bf4 Nf6 9 e3 Nbd7 10 Bd3 0-0 11 0-0 Nh5



Lasker is naturally a little better, Janowski having indulged himself with a move like 3 ... a6. Black

would love to trade off White's active bishop without consequences.

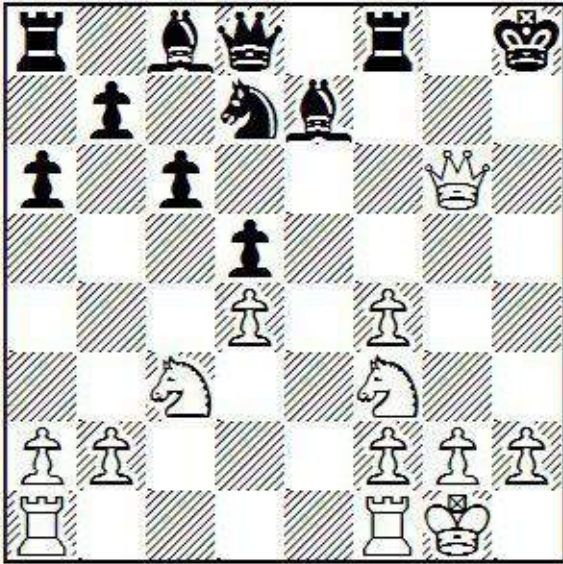
12 Qc2!

Lasker tempts Janowski to permit a stripping variation.

12 ... Nxf4!??

Taking the bull by the horns, as players tended to do in those days. It is principled, but very risky. Instead, 12 ... h6 is possible, though it looks (and is) meek and White retains some advantage.

13 Bxh7+ Kh8 14 exf4 g6 15 Bxg6 fxe6 16 Qxg6



So here we are. White has three pawns for the piece and Black's king is completely stripped. If we check with our silicon friends, Black is a little better, but how can this really be? The only assessment that has any value to the players should be the chances of Emanuel Lasker beating David Janowski from this position. The only disadvantage of thinking this way is that the chances can never be determined with certainty, but *we should not forget that it is the only thing that is truly important.*

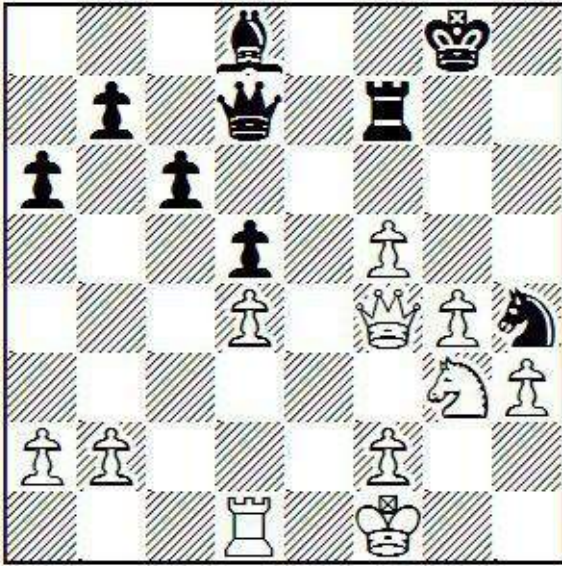
16 ... Rf6 17 Qh5+ Kg7 18 Ng5?!

18 f5 is more accurate. It is best for White to advance pawns in order to be more ready in case of an endgame. One of Black's big problems is that White's pawns can be dangerous with or without queens on the board.

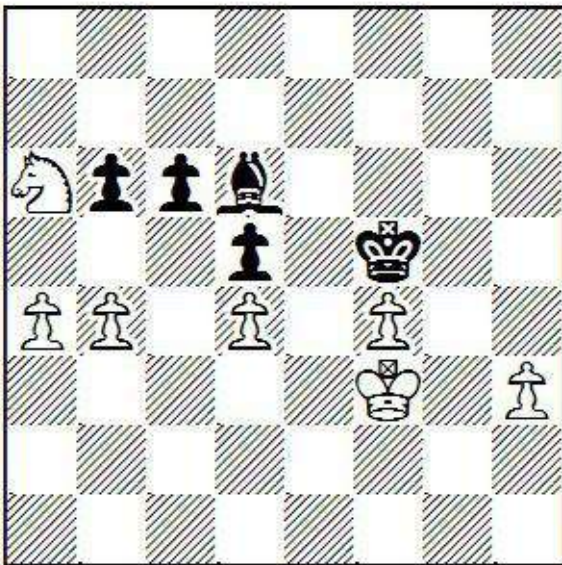
18 ... Nf8?!

Here 18 ... Qh8 is best, but Black is afraid to go into the endgame against Lasker, even when his king is exposed. Sometimes a player's reputation can be nettlesome! The fact is, Lasker probably would have out-manoeuvred Janowski, even from an inferior endgame. Janowski was indeed weak in the final phase.

19 g3 Bf5 20 Rfe1 Rg6 21 Nf7 Kxf7 22 Qxf5+ Bf6 23 Rad1 Qd6 24 g4 Kg8 25 Re3 Rd8 26 Ne2 Rd7 27 h3 Rf7 28 Qd3 Bh4 29 Re8 Rgg7 30 Kg2 Qd7 31 Qe3 Re7 32 Rxe7 Rxe7 33 Qf3 Ng6 34 Kf1 Rf7 35 f5 Bd8 36 Ng3 Nh4 37 Qf4



As in the previous chapter devoted to stripping, Black's problems are extremely long-lasting.
 37 ... Qe7 38 Qe3 Bc7 39 Re1 Qxe3 40 Rxe3 Bb6 41 Ne2 Bc7 42 f3 Kf8 43 Kf2 Re7 44 Rxe7
 Kxe7 45 f4 Ba5 46 Nc1 Bb6 47 Nb3 Kf6 48 Kg3 Nxf5+ 49 gxf5 Kxf5 50 Kf3 Bc7 51 Nc5 b6 52 Nxa6
 Bd6 53 a4 Ke6 54 b4 Kf5



55 Nc5!?
 This weird move is in my database. It seems to win, but only with some difficulty, whereas 55 a5 wins trivially.
55 ... Bxf4
 After 55 ... bxc5 56 dxc5 Bxf4 57 a5 Bb8 58 a6 Ke6 59 h4 Kd7 60 h5 Kc8 61 Kg4 Be5 62 Kf5 Bg7 63 b5, White is apparently winning, though it seems needlessly complex.
56 Nd7 1-0
 Again, this does not look like the most efficient way for White to win. Furthermore, I wonder why the extremely stubborn Janowski wouldn't have continued with 56 ... Bc7. I'm guessing that the database is corrupted. Suffice it to say, Lasker won around here.

In addition to the stripping sacrifice, which might be difficult for any player to handle, Lasker

exploited Janowski's fears of Lasker's endgame prowess and of Janowski's own endgame incompetence. *Driving the game towards your opponents' weaknesses can be effective whether he is aware of those weaknesses or not.* You may notice your opponent desperately avoiding certain kinds of positions, a tendency it is certainly possible to exploit.

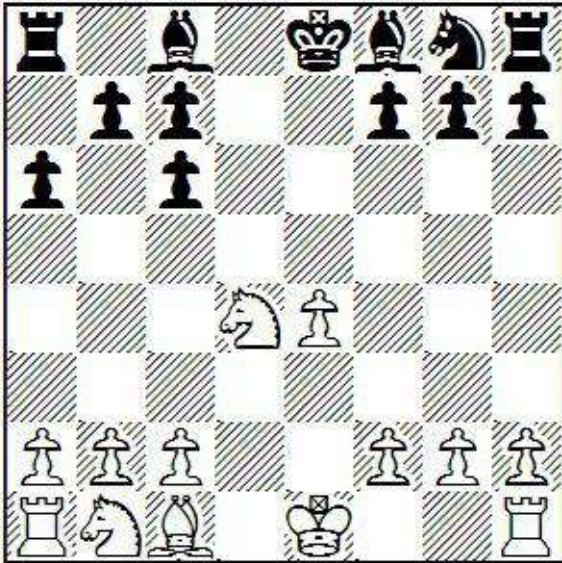
Game 47

Em.Lasker-S.Tarrasch

World Championship (1st matchgame), Düsseldorf 1908

Ruy Lopez

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Bxc6 dxc6 5 d4 exd4 6 Qxd4 Qxd4 7 Nxd4

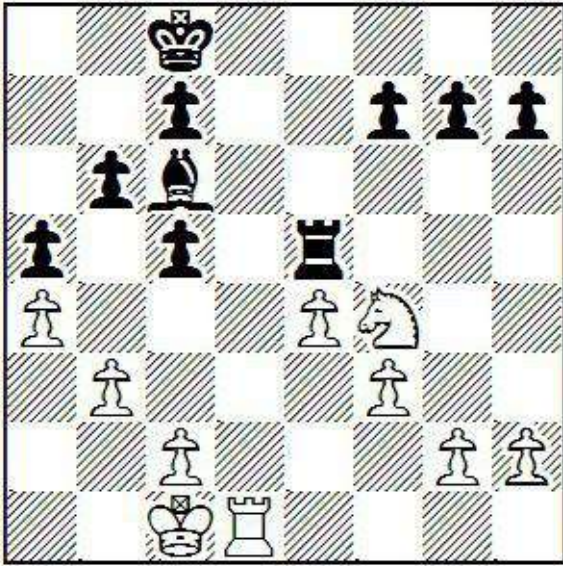


Black has the bishop pair, which is fair compensation for his crippled pawn majority on the queenside. But Lasker has his healthy pawn majority to work with, and the fact that he is an endgame maestro.

7 ... c5 8 Ne2 Bd7 9 b3 Bc6 10 f3 Be7 11 Bb2 Bf6 12 Bxf6 Nxf6

So far so good. Lasker has convinced Black to surrender his bishop pair. Now if he can only get rid of his own knight pair ...

13 Nd2 0-0-0 14 0-0-0 Rd7 15 Nf4 Re8 16 Nc4 b6 17 a4 a5 18 Rxd7 Nxd7 19 Rd1 Ne5 20 Nxe5 Rxe5

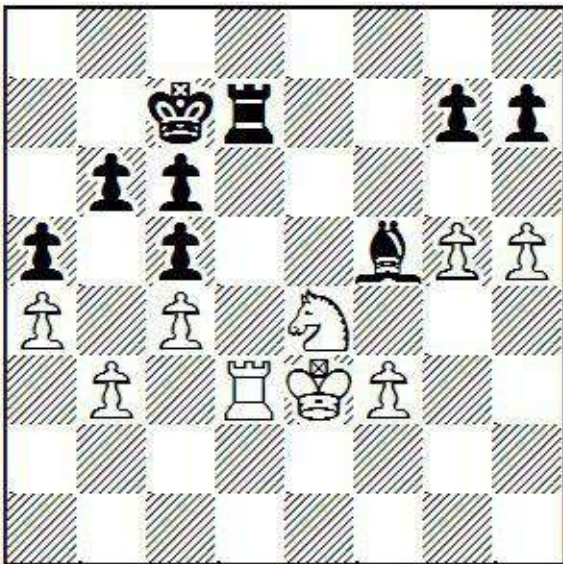


Second mission accomplished. Now if only he could reach a king and pawn endgame, he would be winning! (If this is not obvious to you, you should study the position until it is. This is a very important endgame.)

21 c4 Re8 22 Nh5 Rg8 23 Rd3 f6 24 Kd2 Be8 25 Ng3 Bd7 26 Ke3

In spite of White's progress, Black's position is currently completely defensible.

26 ... Re8 27 Nh5 Re7 28 g4 c6 29 h4 Kc7 30 g5?! f5 31 Ng3 fxe4 32 Nxe4 Bf5 33 h5 Rd7!



Tarrasch has realized that a rook exchange here will lead to an easy draw. Black's king will have access to the centre, and White's f-pawn has violated the rule "candidate first". If White's knight goes wandering, Black's bishop will start eating White's queenside.

34 Rc3!?!

What Tarrasch realizes, Lasker does too. If a rook trade is an easy draw, how about not trading rooks? Sometimes, if a win is the goal, we operate by process of elimination. The obvious objection is that White could suffer for surrendering the d-file and/or allowing Black's rook to penetrate, but Lasker's calculations have indicated otherwise. In fact, having Black's rook behind his lines makes Lasker's following manoeuvres easier.

34 ... Rd1 35 Kf4!

With no other chances, White starts charging forward with his king. As I mentioned in the chapter on endgames, this is not just good technique - it is very nettlesome. Black, who has been defending adequately so far, falls apart very quickly.

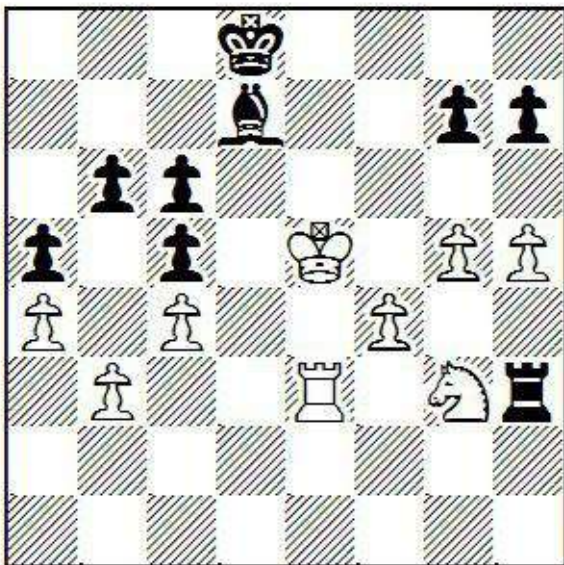
35 ... Bd7?

Instead, 35 ... Bxe4! allows Black's king access to the centre, with a fairly easy draw. After 36 fxe4 Kd6, White will not be winning a king and pawn endgame, even should he be able to reach one; e.g. 37 Rg3 Rf1+ 38 Rf3 Rxf3+ 39 Kxf3 g6.

36 Re3 Rh1?! 37 Ng3 Rh4+?!

Wrong way! Black feels like he is doing something worthwhile with his rook, but the most important feature of the position is White's strong king position.

38 Ke5 Rh3 39 f4 Kd8?



Black is probably lost already, but this is the final nail in the coffin. That's four mistakes in five moves since White threatened to cross the midline with his king, taking Black from an equal to a hopeless position. It's hard to ask more from a nettlesome move.

40 f5 Rh4 41 f6 gxf6+ 42 Kxf6 Be8 43 Nf5 Rf4

If 43 ... Rxb5 then 44 Rxe8+ Kxe8 45 Ng7+, forking.

44 g6 hxg6 45 hxg6 Rg4 46 Rxe8+ Kxe8 47 g7 Kd7 48 Nh4 Rxb7 49 Kxb7 Ke6 50 Nf3 Kf5 51 Kf7 Ke4 52 Ke6 Kd3 53 Kd6 Kc3 54 Kxc6 Kxb3 55 Kb5 1-0

There you have it, nettlesomeness a century ago. It is interesting to me that one of the consequences of playing nettlesomely, no matter how successful you are, or in what century, is to draw criticism from players and commentators. A great deal was made in Lasker's time about his "bad moves" even though he was the World Champion. I think a similar thing is happening today with Hikaru Nakamura.

Chapter Sixteen

Why Isn't This Working?

There are many ways in which a strategy that leans on nettlesomeness can fail. Worse yet, when it does fail, the reasons will often be unclear or even unknowable. Consider these possible reasons:

1. Your nettlesome moves were more costly than you realized. For instance, you tried playing the Porkchop (1 e4 f5? 2 exf5 Kf7), hoping to utilize the nettlesomenesses of unusual opening and early king moves. Your opponent made many poor moves as expected, but your position never fully recovered, because you started out too far in the hole.
2. *Another way of underestimating the cost of your unusual moves is to fail to consider that your own position may also be difficult to play well.*
3. Your nettlesome moves were less nettlesome than you realized. This can come in many forms:
 - a) The time control is not fast enough for what you are trying. A clear example of this would be to try 1 e4 b6 2 d4 Bb7 3 Bd3 f5?? in a correspondence game. Even if your opponent did not look up the solution, he would probably have enough time to figure out how to win.
 - b) Your opponent is too strong to be bothered by the level of strangeness you are using. For instance, you (let's pretend you're 1900) try the King's Gambit against a 2200 player without serious study. One problem with this situation is that the King's Gambit is not obscure enough - your opponent will actually know it, and probably better than you. (To make this work better, you might try 1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 Bc4!?)
 - c) Your opponent feeds on the kind of (attempted) nettlesomeness you are using. For instance, you decide to use the clock as a weapon against someone who handles time scrambles extremely well. Or you try an unusual opening against someone who is greatly excited and motivated by forays into the unknown. Or you launch a slightly unsound kingside attack against one of the rare players who actually enjoys defending.
4. You used the right strategy against the right opponent, but he found the right moves anyway. Sometimes our opponents, in the face of obstacles, and against the odds, just play well.

How can you tell the difference between reasons 1, 2, and 3? Often you can't. This is enough to discourage many players from sacrificing anything for the sake of nettlesomeness. Furthermore, when nettlesomeness fails, the player who tried usually looks like an idiot. He is subject to self-recriminations and recriminations from friends or commentators.

Consider this gem:

Game 48

J.Polgar-G.Kamsky

Monte Carlo (rapid) 1994

St. George's Defence

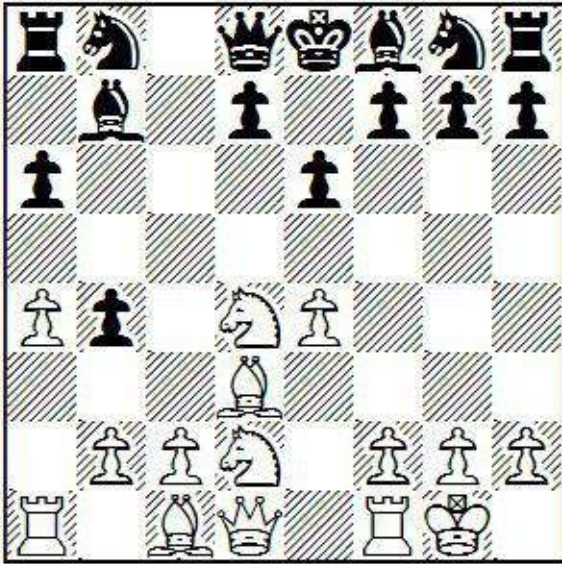
1 e4 a6?! 2 d4 b5?! 3 a4!

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Not exactly a refutation, but this makes it clear from the very beginning that White will not be

tolerating any nonsense. By fighting to take back Black's queenside space, Polgar nullifies Black's only asset.

3 ... b4 4 Nf3 Bb7 5 Bd3 e6 6 0-0 c5 7 Nbd2 cxd4 8 Nxd4

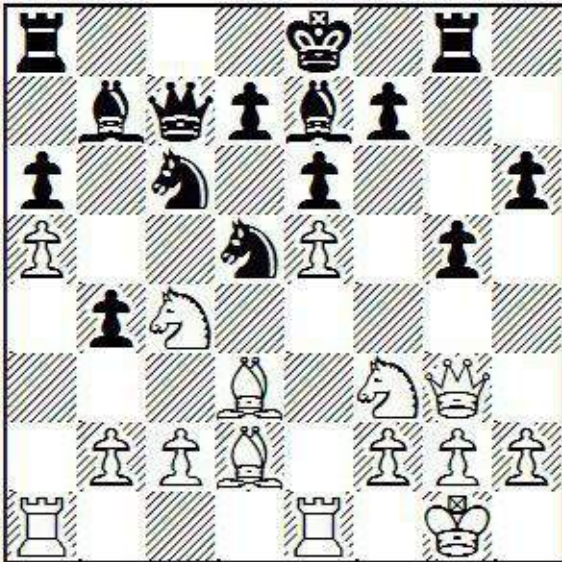


This is already a Sicilian gone wrong for Black. White's queen's knight is flexibly placed on d2, rather than stuck as a target on c3.

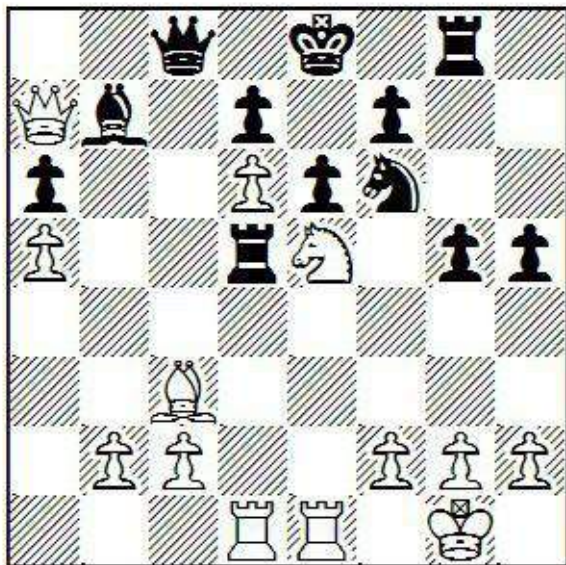
8 ... Nf6 9 e5 Nd5 10 Nc4 Qc7 11 Qg4 Nc6 12 Nf3 g6 13 Qg3 h6 14 a5

From the opening moves it could be predicted that White would have a central space advantage, but the fact that Black is also cramped on the queenside is extremely ironic.

14 ... Be7 15 Bd2 g5 16 Rfe1 Rg8



17 Nd6+! Bxd6 18 exd6 Qd8 19 Be4 Nf6 20 Bxc6 Bxc6 21 Ne5 Bd5 22 Bxb4 Rb8 23 Bc3 h5 24 Rad1 Rb5 25 Qd3 Bb7 26 Qd4 Rd5 27 Qa7 Qc8



28 Nc4?

Not at all the cleanest way to win, but that only emphasizes how terrible Black's position is.

28 ... Rxd1 29 Rxd1 Nd5 30 Rxd5 Bxd5 31 Qc7 Qd8 32 Nb6 Bc6 33 Qa7 f5 34 Qxa6 g4 35 Nc8 Qg5 36 Ne7 Bb7 37 Qf1 Rf8 38 a6 Be4 39 b4 f4 40 Qc4 Ba8 41 Qc8+ Kf7 42 Qxd7 f3 43 Nd5+ Kg8 44 Qxe6+ Kh7 45 Qe7+ Qxe7 46 dxe7 1-0

Is that the most pathetic thing you've ever seen in your life? Kamsky plays a ridiculous opening and receives his just desserts. He never even gets his pieces onto the board. Obviously he's an idiot. At the very least, he made an idiotic choice of opening.

Are things really that simple, though? After all, Miles famously beat Karpov with 1 e4 a6. Was Miles an idiot too, or is someone only an idiot when they try something that happens not to work? And if it works, does that mean a player is smart, or just lucky? I suppose that depends on your definition of lucky. It is obvious that Miles's success against Karpov was not a foregone conclusion, but 1 e4 a6 fares only 1% worse, on average, than the French or Caro-Kann, the same as 1 e4 d6, and better than 1 e4 e5. If we are to assume that 1 e4 a6 is incorrect, and "objectively" worse than those other openings, then logically it must make up for it with nettlesomeness. Incidentally, 1 d4 a6 scores significantly (3.5%) better than 1 d4 d5.

I have to admit, it's fun to watch horrible games, so let's see one more, this time by one of the most successfully nettlesome players of all time, Hikaru Nakamura.

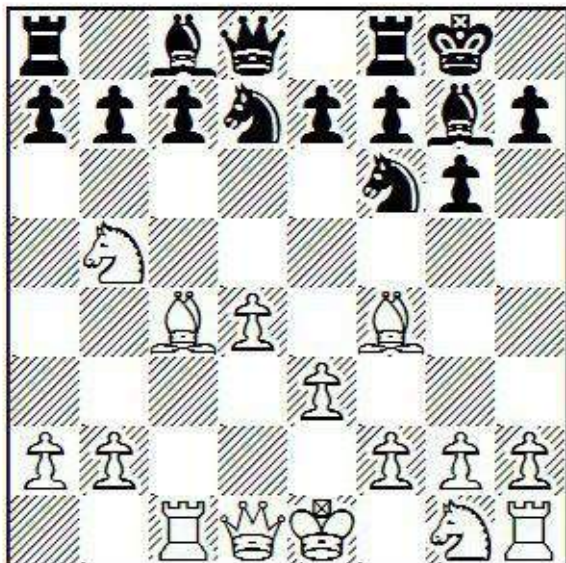
Game 49

H.Nakamura-V.Ivanchuk

Moscow 2011

Grünfeld Defence

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 d5 4 Bf4 Bg7 5 e3 0-0 6 Rc1 dxc4 7 Bxc4 Nbd7 8 Nb5?!

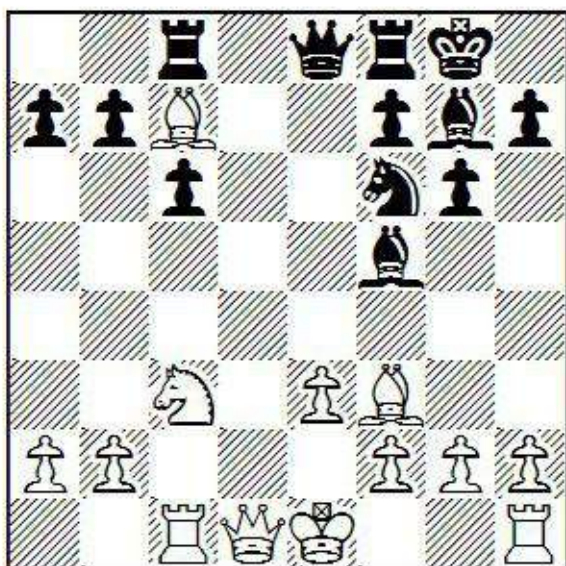


The Costa Rican grandmaster Alejandro Ramirez Alvarez is gently critical of this move in his *ChessBase* annotations. The rest of the in-game notes are taken directly from his.

8 ... c6 9 Bc7 Qe8 10 Nc3

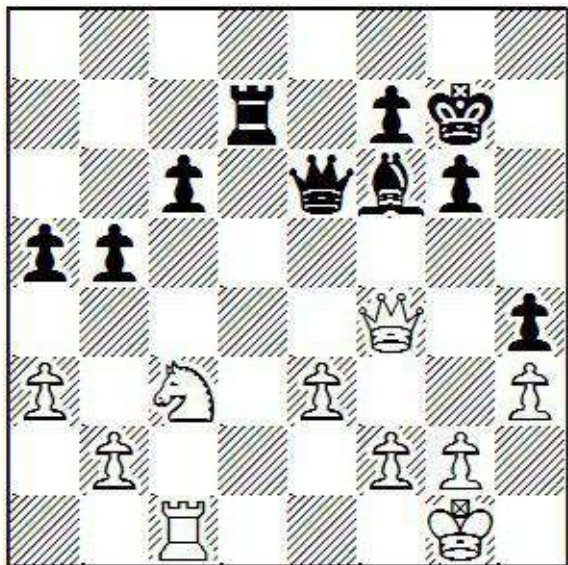
“Hikaru might have reached this position in his mind and thought that Black would have a hard time developing. If, for example, he decides to play 10 ... Nb6, he would lose control over both c5 and e5 making his breaks that much harder to achieve. He may have thought that 10 ... e5 lost to 11 Bd6, but Vassily disagreed.”

10 ... e5! 11 dxe5 Nxe5 12 Be2 Bf5 13 Nf3 Nxf3+ 14 Bxf3 Rc8



“Black has got a dream position out of the opening. His pieces are active and he is slightly better developed. Hikaru is only slightly worse, but having this situation after only 14 moves with White is very unpleasant.”

15 Bg3 Ne4 16 Bxe4 Bxe4 17 0-0 Rd8 18 Qa4 Bd3 19 Rfd1 b5 20 Qa5 Rd7 21 Rd2 Qe7 22 Rcd1 Rfd8 23 a3 h5 24 h3 h4 25 Bh2 Kh7?! 26 Bc7! Rxc7 27 Rxd3 Rxd3 28 Rxd3 Bf6 29 Rd2?! Rd7 30 Rc2 Qe6 31 Qb4 a5 32 Qf4 Kg7 33 Rc1



“Another strange move in a series of strange decisions. This allows the black rook access to the second rank.”

33 ... a4 34 Qb4 Rd3 35 Rc2?

“35 Kf1 was necessary to start trying to patch up some of the weaknesses. However, it is difficult to play this move, as it seems the king is simply getting weaker. 35 ... Be7 and Black is still better.”

35 ... Qb3 36 Qxb3 axb3 37 Rc1 Bxc3 38 bxc3 c5 39 Kf1 c4 40 Ke2 Rxc3 0-1

“Not Hikaru’s brightest game. Really marked by mistakes and Black never had a worry in the world.”

Naturally, I agree with (most of) the comments I’ve included.

So what really happened there? It is far too superficial simply to say that Nakamura played badly. 8 Nb5?! is a special kind of mistake, a failed attempt at nettlesomeness. Unlike the commentator, I doubt that this was based on a miscalculation, at least not in the traditional sense. Rather, the “miscalculation” was in his estimation of how difficult the move was to play against. Not surprisingly, the stronger your opponent is, the easier it is to make this mistake.

If we try to be combative and nettlesome, it is inevitable that we will sometimes fail. It is extremely important that we draw the right lessons from this; otherwise, not only will our results suffer, our development as chessplayers will come screeching to a halt.

Obviously it does no good to use openings and strategies that are nettlesome to players below 1600 when we are playing 1900s, no matter how much success we have had with them at the lower level. I believe this is one of the main reasons for a player to get stuck at a certain rating for an extended period of time.

On the other hand, we can’t make drastic changes to our play every time we have an unsuccessful game or two, and we should not give up on inducing errors just because our opponents have reached a level where they are no longer bothered by what we are doing - we simply need to adjust our methods to the next higher level.

Game 50

W.Browne-J.Schuyler

Chicago 1989

Modern Defence

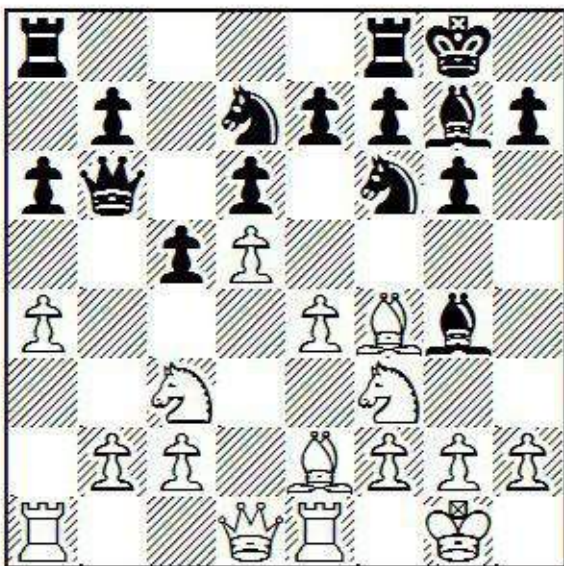
1 d4 g6

At the time I did not have enough faith to essay my standard reply 1 ... Nc6. This was probably a mistake, though I managed to improvise a reasonable opening.

2 e4 Bg7 3 Nc3 c5

These days this is sometimes called “The Sniper”, though it will usually transpose into some kind of Dragon or Benoni.

4 d5 d6 5 Be2 Nf6 6 Nf3 0-0 7 0-0 Bg4 8 Bf4 Nbd7 9 Re1 a6 10 a4 Qb6!?



We are now officially in uncharted territory, though as I mentioned, I had pretty much made up the opening on the fly. I hoped my queen sortie would be irritating, and I couldn't see any other way to make progress on the queenside.

11 Qc1 Qb4?! 12 a5 b5?!

A deranged idea - my queen has no exit. On the other hand, I am threatening White's e-pawn and he has no convenient way to guard it. I worked hard during the game to find a refutation for my idea, but I could not find one. Therefore it is not surprising that my opponent did not find one either.

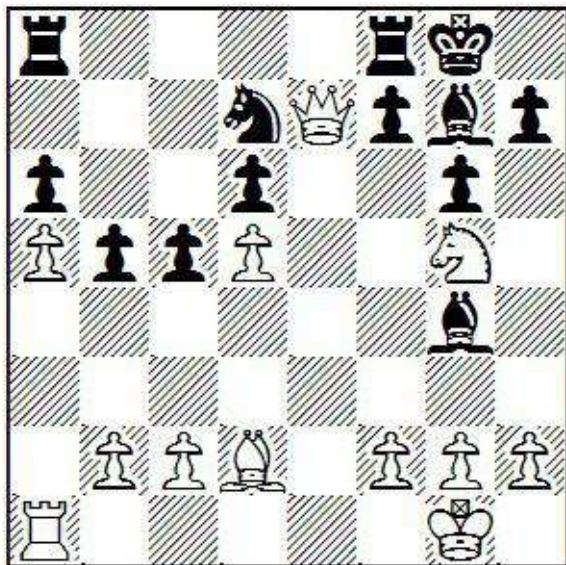
13 Bd2?

Only now, in the computer age, do I learn that 13 Nd2! c4 14 Be3! Nc5 15 Ra3 Bxe2 16 Na2 Qxa3 17 bxa3 leaves White with a large advantage.

13 ... Nxe4 14 Nxe4 Qxe4 15 Ng5 Qxe2

I thought this was forced (and there is nothing wrong with it), but as it turns out I have another interesting idea: 15 ... Qf5 16 f3 Bh5 17 g4 Qxd5 and if 18 gxh5 Bxb2 19 Qxb2 Qxd2 with an unclear position that would have suited me fine.

16 Rxe2 Bxe2 17 Qe1 Bg4 18 Qxe7



18 ... h6?

Correct is 18 ... Bf6!!, intending 19 Qxd6 Be5 20 Qc6 (20 Qe7?? Rae8 traps the queen) 20 ... Rfc8 21 Qb7 Rcb8 with a perpetual on the queen.

19 Ne6! fxe6 20 Qxd7 Rfd8 21 Qe7 exd5 22 Bxh6! Bxb2

After 22 ... Bxh6 23 Qh4, White recovers the bishop, netting a pawn.

23 Re1 Bf5 24 h4?! Re8 25 Qxe8+ Rxe8 26 Rxe8+ Kf7 27 Ra8 Bxc2 28 Rxa6 Ke6 29 Rb6 b4 30 a6 d4 31 f3 Bb3 32 Bf4 d3 33 Rxd6+ 1-0

Okay, what happened?

Story one: I played a questionable opening, tried a dubious queen sortie that fails against best play (and did not work out in the game either) and inevitably reached a lost endgame in which my experienced opponent did not allow me a shred of counterplay. Just a bad game by me.

Are we sure that's what happened?

Story two: I played an enterprising opening, a nettlesome queen sortie, and reached a complex and original position in which there were mutual chances. My opponent outplayed me, in part because he is a GM, but I used a logical grand strategy, showed the proper competitive attitudes including no fear, and correctly predicted that my opponent's position was difficult enough that, despite him being a strong player, he would make errors in the complications. It wasn't my day, but *I gave myself the best chance to for it to be my day.*

So which is it? There is no way to prove which view is correct. There is no answer key to look at. Yet deciding on the narrative that best fits is extremely important. If the first story is correct, I may need to make radical changes to my style and thinking, rein in my creative impulses and seek to play more accurately and conventionally.

If the second story is correct I should basically keep trying to play the way I've been playing, hoping for a little more luck now and then, and/or to improve my calculating ability until I am able to outplay stronger players in the complicated positions I am heading for.

In real life, when the game was played (and a few other similar ones) I decided story one was correct and that I needed to make significant changes to my play in order to improve. A style change demands a great deal of time and energy, and if it is unproductive or counterproductive, that is very discouraging to say the least. Also, if I had made the changes I suspected were necessary, I would have found myself playing a kind of chess that I did not find interesting. Since I did not want to make those changes, the result

was that within the next couple of years I stopped playing competitive chess almost entirely, only returning almost fifteen years later. A serious consequence for choosing a certain narrative! (I am certainly not the only chessplayer to have fallen into this trap; Josh Waitzkin, for instance, quit chess for substantially the same reason.)

A chess tragedy, if it is permissible to say such a thing. For the record, I now believe that the second story is a much better fit. It was not necessary to give up on unusual or semi-improvised openings, speculative ideas or sacrifices, bizarre material imbalances, or impossible-looking moves. It was only necessary to improve my execution and in some cases to modify the strategies so that they were appropriate to the level of competition I was facing.

I happen to be familiar with a player who did just this. The Iranian-American IM Kamran Shirazi has a deserved reputation for creativity and, let's not mince words, insanity on the chessboard. I have been on the receiving end of severe but irrational beatings. He was strong enough to earn his IM title in 1978 and later reach close to a 2500 rating. However, when he faced a high level of competition at the 1984 US Championship, his found his strategies were not nettlesome enough for that group of players.

Game 51

Y.Seirawan-K.Shirazi

US Championship, Berkeley 1984

Benoni Defence

1 d4 c5

An immediately combative defence favoured by some maverick players, most notably GM Zvjaginsev.

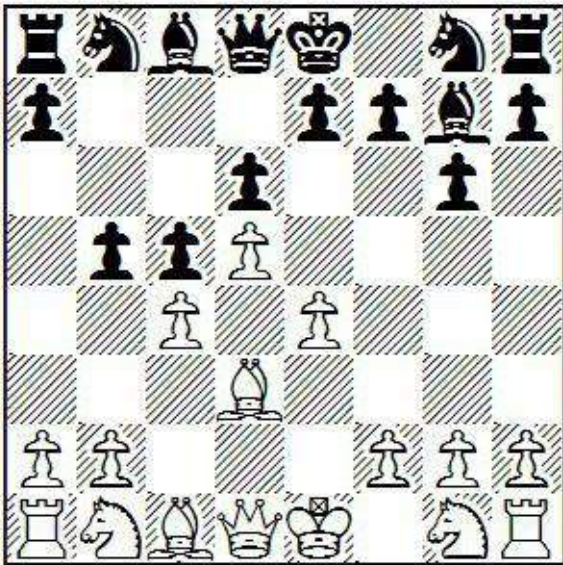
2 d5 d6 3 c4

An interesting choice by Seirawan. Most strong players prefer to keep the c4-square free for a knight. The solid text move soon provokes an unsound adventure.

3 ... g6 4 e4 Bg7 5 Bd3

I have to think that if White had played 5 Nc3, Shirazi would have unbalanced the game with 5 ... Bxc3+.

5 ... b5?



Shirazi already seeks complications and is willing to spend a pawn. The problem is that he is going to reach a bad version of a known opening (the Benko Gambit) so Seirawan should not lose his bearings.

6 cxb5 a6 7 Nc3 axb5 8 Bxb5+ Bd7 9 Be2?!

Nevertheless, Seirawan does start to lose his bearings. This is not yet a serious mistake, but just about any sensible move is better, including 9 Bc4, 9 Bd3 or 9 Nge2.

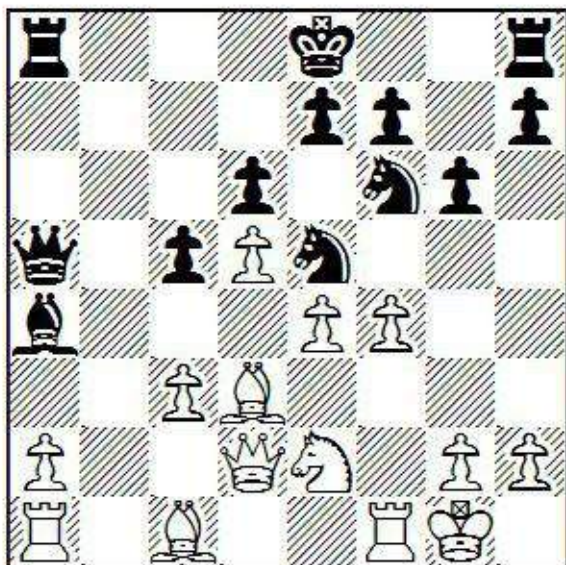
9 ... Bxc3+ 10 bxc3 Nf6 11 Bd3?!

Seirawan's fourth move with the bishop. This is getting kind of ridiculous. Black starts drumming up some counterplay.

11 ... Qa5 12 Ne2 Ba4

Shirazi is not the kind of player to turn down an opportunity to send a piece into the battle from an unusual angle.

13 Qd2 Nbd7 14 0-0 Ne5 15 f4



15 ... c4??

Against the odds (in my opinion), Shirazi's crazy play has worked. By now Black has full compensation if he plays normally with 15 ... Nxd3 16 Qxd3 c4 17 Qd4. He can even recover the pawn after 17 ... Bc2. Unfortunately (albeit typically, for the 1984 version of Shirazi), he can't leave well enough alone, and immediately embarks on another adventure, this one leading directly to a hopelessly lost position.

16 fxe5 Qc5+

16 ... cxd3 17 exf6 dxe2 18 Qxe2 exf6 19 Qf3 is no better.

17 Nd4 dxe5 18 Be2 Nxe4 19 Qe3 f5 20 Ne6 Qxe3+ 21 Bxe3 Nxc3 22 Bxc4 Rc8 23 Ba6 Nxd5 24 Bxc8 Nxe3 25 Rf3 f4 26 Nc5 Bc6 27 a4 Kf7 28 Bb7 1-0

To be fair, Shirazi did try to play more conventionally in a few of his games from that tournament, but overall his play was chock-full of bizarre openings, strange rook lifts, and unsound sacrifices. He scored only one draw in seventeen games. You heard right. Sixteen losses, one draw. I suppose that's a low draw percentage, har har!

It is wonderful to engage in creative thought, and fun to confound opponents, and exciting to play "impossible" moves, but *if you are interested in having good results, you have to have the discipline to reject most of your weird ideas. The concepts in this book are best used sparingly.*

Shirazi did not quit chess, nor did he remake his game from the ground up. He simply sought a better, more disciplined implementation of his ideas. He had a stronger performance in the 1985 US Championships - and by 1986, an excellent one, performing well above his rating.

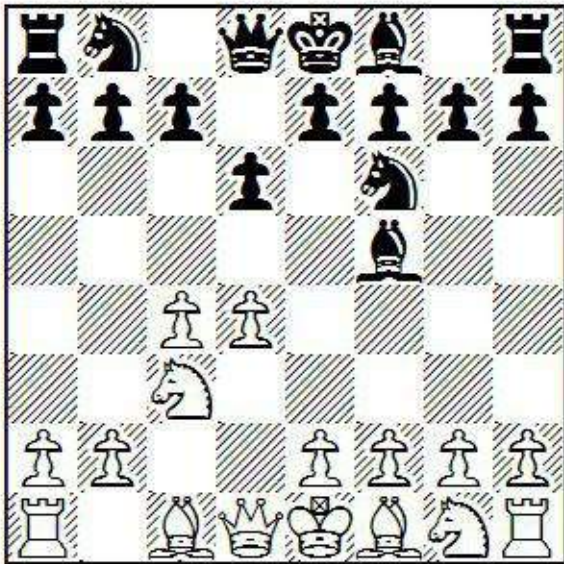
Game 52

B.Kogan-K.Shirazi

US Championship, Estes Park 1986

Old Indian Defence

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 d6 3 Nc3 Bf5!



Quite an unusual opening, leading to unique positions, but this time it is a logical developing move. Shirazi has also studied and tested the opening ahead of time. In my database this move is much more successful than the common 3 ... g6.

4 Nf3 g6!?

Shirazi is one of the first players to try this, whereas now it is the most popular move in this somewhat offbeat position. The g-pawn restricts the bishop, but also guards it. It is not so easy for White to take advantage.

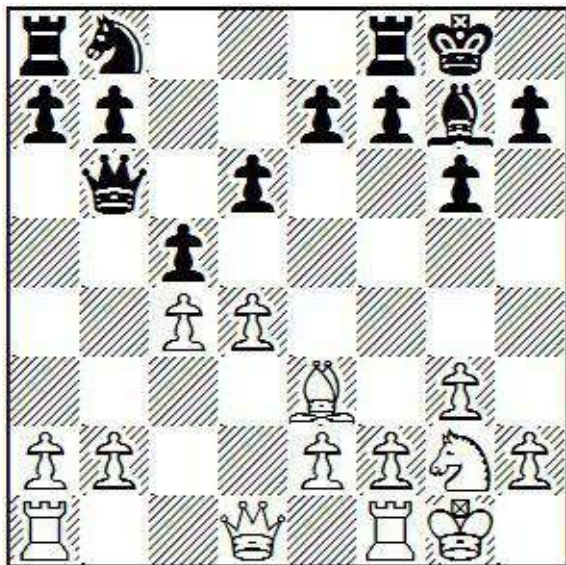
5 g3 Ne4!

Strange but strong! The occupation of e4 makes it hard for White to achieve the e2-e4 advance (which is what White most wants to accomplish).

6 Nxe4 Bxe4 7 Bg2

7 Bh3 is probably better, as after 7 Bg2, the inevitable exchange of light-squared bishops will be in Black's favour.

7 ... Bg7 8 0-0 0-0 9 Be3 c5 10 Nh4 Bxg2 11 Nxg2 Qb6!



Conventional thinking and intuition would suggest that it is imprudent to place the queen on the same diagonal as the enemy bishop, but Shirazi has calculated that it will not be a problem, and so decides to fight directly for the important d4-square.

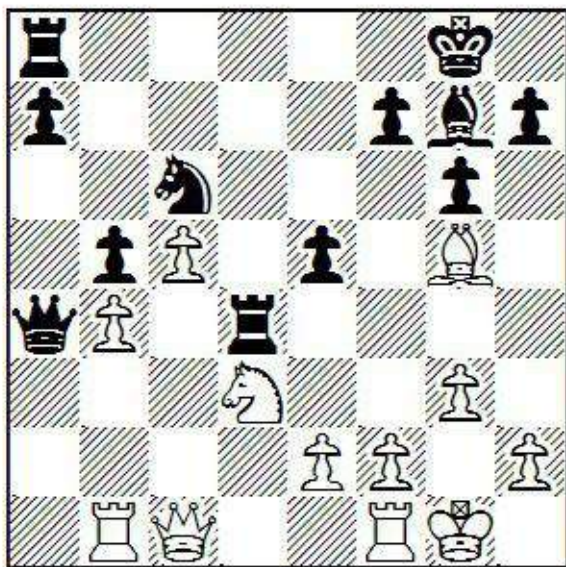
12 dxc5 dxc5 13 Rb1 Rd8 14 Qc1 Nc6 15 Nf4 Qa5

An extremely irritating attack against the stupid unguarded a-pawn.

16 a3 e6 17 b4 cxb4 18 axb4 Qa4 19 Nd3 b6 20 c5 b5!

Leaving White with a protected passed pawn might not seem like the most natural decision, but Shirazi's knight is already perfectly placed to deal with it.

21 Bf4 e5 22 Bg5 Rd4!



This was probably overlooked or underestimated by Kogan. Shirazi has no trouble moving his rooks forward. 23 Be3 is met by 23 ... Rc4!, wedging the rook in deeper. This manoeuvre is reminiscent of several of his 1984 games, with the important difference that it actually works!

23 Bh6 Qa2 24 Bxg7 Kxg7 25 Rb2 Qd5 26 Qb1 h5 27 h4 g5!?

Not the best, but it is much better than it looks. With such domination in the centre and White's pieces hugging the back row, Black can get away with a lot.

28 Ne1

28 hxg5 h4! is very effective.

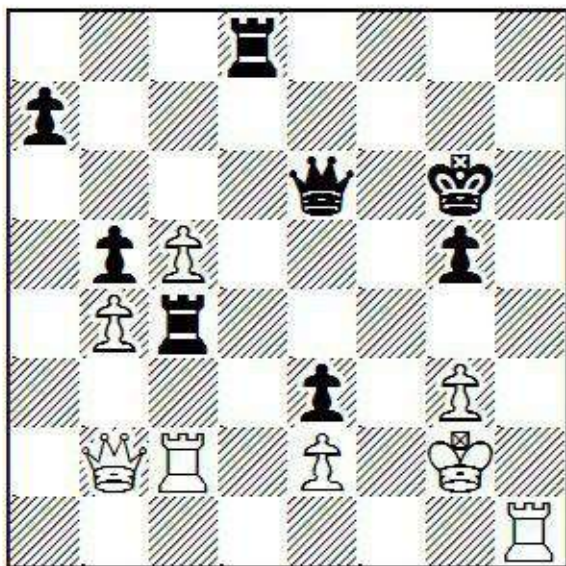
28 ... e4?!

This will fail against the best defence.

29 Ng2?!

29 Nc2! works much better, though I don't think it's worth going into all the variations. I suspect Shirazi would have had his chances anyway.

29 ... Rd8 30 Qc1 f6 31 Qc3 Kg6 32 hxg5 fxg5 33 Ne3 Qe6 34 Kg2 h4 35 Rh1 hxg3 36 fxg3 Ne5 37 Rc2 Nc4 38 Nxc4 Rxc4 39 Qb2 e3



So far White has defended very well, but he is under increasing pressure.

40 Rhc1??

40 Rxc4 is the only move that holds.

40 ... Qe4+ 41 Kg1 Rcd4 42 Qa1 Rh8 43 Qa6+ Kf5 44 Rf1+ Kg4

A lovely little king walk to finish the game.

45 Rf3 Rd1+ 46 Kg2 Rdh1 0-1

Not a very clean game, but that's not what Shirazi (or this book) is about. This time, though, his creativity, aggression, and optimism were tempered with reason and practicality.

Chapter Seventeen

Final Thoughts

The Randomness of Mistakes

One of the most important ideas in this book, which I mentioned in Chapter Fourteen, is that for the most part, *mistakes are not random*. They depend on factors under both players' control, which might make them seem more random than they are. Some days you might put a lot of pressure on your opponent but he doesn't crack, whereas on another day your opponent falls like a house of cards under the slightest puff. But on average, board pressure, psychological pressure, unfamiliar positions, and other unusual demands on your opponents' energies will produce errors.

To understand when your opponent is under pressure, you need to be able to put yourself in his shoes. Imagine his tournament situation, whether he is playing up or down, whether he feels comfortable or unsettled, fresh, tired, muddled, inspired, doomed, confident, paranoid. Sometimes his feelings are written all over his face; at other times his mental state should be pretty clear even if he has a good poker face. Considering your opponent's problems is indispensable to understanding chess. It is also a pleasant escape from your own problems.

As a slight digression, when I feel myself to be in a pessimistic state of mind, sometimes I get up from the board, walk to the other side of the table, and literally look at the position from my opponent's point of view. This is invariably enlightening. A dismal position from my side of the board looks only like a small advantage from his. I see problems and obstacles in my opponent's way. Sometimes I look at my own position and I can't figure out a way to break through for a win. A quick trip to the opposite side shows me that I don't need to - my opponent has no counterplay. Occasionally, I see the same thing from both sides of the board. That tells me that I am thinking clearly, so even in that case I can go back to my side of the board with renewed confidence. I recommend this wholeheartedly. Yes, you might feel self-conscious. Get over it.

Analysis of Games

Sometimes we chessplayers will look at games by other players in an opening variation in order to get a feel for the position, and to decide whether to play it. This is very sensible. Among other things, we like to see a good winning percentage in our database. Sometimes we look more closely at some of those wins, though, and find that the position out of the opening is not that good "objectively", offering no advantage for White or failing to equalize with Black according to our understanding and/or our computer engines. "Look here," we say, "In half of the games White won, it was only because of bad mistakes by Black." Maybe the variation isn't so good after all? I am not using the royal "we". Sometimes I think that way myself. But if mistakes are not random, we should not necessarily discard as outliers games that appear to have been won by White only because of bad play by Black. Maybe these are exactly the positions we should play as White.

The Assessment Bar

One view of chess that has always been fairly popular, and is even more so in the day and age of near-perfect computer programs, is that chess is all about choosing accurate moves. In this view there is an invisible assessment bar that you are always trying to push in one direction, while your opponent tries to push it in the opposite direction. Undoubtedly this is significant, but it is only part of what is going on.

There is a second struggle, which is the main focus of this book, wherein (according to the terms of this analogy) you start trying to push the bar at angles. This usually appears less “logical”, but your opponent may have a hard time countering. He may lose track of what direction he is pushing. He may lose track of which direction he is facing. He may lose his balance and fall over. You push the bar right past him. (Of course, the same things might happen to you.)

There is yet a third struggle, according to some, which I have devoted some attention to. Your opponent has an invisible fuel tank. When he gets low on energy, he gradually loses his ability to resist the movement of the bar. His “fuel tank”, by the way, represents some combination of his intellectual energy and the time remaining on his clock.

If you have experience with your opponent, you may know the capacity of his fuel tank. My friend Dan Miller makes use of this concept regularly, particularly against certain players. He will sometimes tell me before one of his games, “My goal is to make my opponent think six times. If I give him six difficult problems, he will either run out of time or blunder.” How interesting! The position on the board is only part of the struggle, and it might not even be the most important part.

Among other things, this helps clarify what it is to be a strong player. It is not just about skills, it is also about having a large fuel tank. So eat well. Exercise. You’ll need it.

Best wishes,
James Schuyler

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