

NEW IN CHIESS



JESUS
DE LA VILLA

**50
Mistakes
You Should
Know**

Valuable Lessons for
Every Chess Player

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Introduction

Learn from the errors of others. You can't live long enough to make them all yourself. (Eleanor Roosevelt)

There is nothing shameful in not knowing something; what is shameful is to know that you need to learn something, but not learn it. (Various sources)

This is a book for all chess players, and it is about how they can learn from their errors. It is divided into sections showing games played by amateurs and it aims to shed light on their worst moves.

I have already used Eleanor Roosevelt's saying given above in the past, so I cannot hide the fact that it is one of my golden rules. However, I need to use it once again here, because it goes hand in glove with the aim of this book.

Even before playing chess, we heard pearls of popular wisdom about the importance of errors in learning processes, such as the classic saying: 'The human being is the only animal that trips over the same stone twice.' Its origin is unknown, but we can be sure that the first person to say it was not a chess player, because if he had been, he would have replaced 'twice' with a bigger number. We chess players have soon discovered that making the same error twice is not enough for us to learn the lesson; perhaps two dozen is closer to reality.

No matter how many times an error has to be made, the lesson can be learnt, and it will be learnt much sooner if we stop protecting our ego by making excuses and blaming our defeats on bad luck.

In the world of chess, we are often advised to analyse our games and to find out what errors we are making. Good advice, that some forget and others try to follow, but it would be more effective if it came accompanied by a method. Neither would it do any harm if the errors were classified and if all the books we read about them were consistent.

Most of the books we study consist of model games and brilliant combinations. But should we learn from (other people's) successes or from (our own) errors? And if it is more effective to learn from our own (and if possible other people's) errors, how do we do that? **In our own games, there are excellent examples to help us improve, just as many as in the books or the games of the great chess players of history. And in the games of our fellow club players, there are as many again, which we usually overlook. If we put all this experience together, we shall soon gain more insight.**

Learning based on our errors is the most effective because it engages our intelligence... and our emotions. Was that not maybe the route taken by AlphaZero? And isn't artificial intelligence maybe a reflection (with improvements) of our own intelligence? But as our opening quotation says, learning just from our own errors will not be enough because there are many errors to make, and we have little time. Therefore, it is sensible and necessary to pay attention to other people's errors, although in order to learn from them, it would be useful to engage our emotions in the same way that we already do this automatically with our own errors.

We could even say that errors are the basic units of learning, which form the foundations on which the edifice of our knowledge is built.

Our games are full of errors. But if we exclude errors committed in theoretical positions in the opening or the endgame, we will not reproduce the exact positions of other players' errors. (Perhaps that is why we spend so much time studying openings, where specific errors can be eliminated.) Repeating an error in a basic ending or falling into the same trap in opening theory is '**reprehensible behaviour**', which can be corrected, even quite easily, if one is prepared to take the basic step of adopting an attitude that includes self-criticism, attention and curiosity.

However, the errors which are really important for us to avoid are the others – the ones which are not repeated in the same way, and that requires not only the right attitude but also good tools, although a great attitude is capable of creating such tools. For this, it is fundamental to be able to detect the errors. Formerly, that was a difficult task for anyone who did not have a trainer or a fellow club member of a higher level, but now it is easy because all we need to do is run through our games with an analysis engine. The advent of engines with a high strategic level has been a crucial step in the availability of effective training tools, even though those with a high tactical level were already sufficient to detect most errors.

For detecting errors, I propose the following routine, which works for players of all levels:

The first step is to analyse our games and find an average number of errors – let's say five. In other words, five positions where the evaluation has worsened after your move. If one of your games fails to produce five such errors, it is either one of your very good games,

or else you do not need to read this book. Once a reasonable number of games have been analysed, you can establish what level of errors you are making and adjust to looking for those errors. In the future, the errors you find will be less serious, or at least that is what we hope 😊.

The second step, which is also very important, is to classify the errors. And this is where the origin and objective of this book lie. I have been training players for over thirty years. In the last twelve years, while the Spanish age-group championships have been taking place throughout the month of July in Salobreña (Granada), I have been following them live, developing training tasks and analyses. It is there that I have become most aware of how players repeat the same errors, both generally and individually, and I realized that it could be very useful to classify them.

In other words, all players repeat the same errors, and a specific player will repeat his or her ‘favourite’ errors more often.

The third step, once individual errors have been detected and classified, is the work of correcting them. And in error-based learning, that step towards a solution starts to be made as soon as the problem is identified.

Almost all the errors studied here are also made by great players, except that they make them in more difficult positions and in conditions of greater weakness: time trouble, tiredness, demotivation, etc. Throughout the book, I shall make reference to some high-level games to demonstrate this and to make comparisons.

The causes of errors
Postulates, automatic reactions and poor technique

*We are the hollow men, we are the stuffed men, leaning together,
headpiece filled with straw... (T.S. Eliot)*

I do not know what T.S. Eliot had in mind, more than a century ago now, when he wrote his (now immortal) poem *The Hollow Men*, but I remember what I thought when I heard it recited by Marlon Brando in the closing scenes of the film *Apocalypse Now* and years later I began to perceive a relationship in chess praxis with the over-use of postulates.

Mistakes arising from a lack of theoretical knowledge are important, but do not interest us in this analysis. Neither do errors that are due to serious carelessness, although these cause many games to be lost. I want to investigate more deeply into the causes of the other errors, the ones which can be classified and probably corrected.

Almost all the errors in this group have a psychological component (the only exceptions are errors caused by some extreme difficulty relating to the player's strength). Laziness, fear, extreme optimism, overconfidence, excessive respect for the opponent and other emotions all distort the decision-making process and produce bad moves, while we are capable of making better ones. I have asked a number of players whose games figure as examples in this book about their feelings during the games, and they always mention their opponent's level and the competitive situation. Nevertheless, I do not intend to write a book about psychology, although comments about its influence are inevitable.

Regarding the purely chess-related component, poor technique, in the case of tactics, and adhering too closely to postulates which are false or poorly understood, in the case of strategy, are mainly responsible.

I have shown many of the examples in the book, in lectures and in private conversations, to different types of players, and I have been

able to verify that many of them would have made the same error as in the game. So, there is a sort of bias involved, an attraction that is difficult to avoid, and has deep-rooted causes.

The topic of postulates deserves rather more thought. We seek rules to guide us in every situation, and when we find them we cling to them with too much enthusiasm (or maybe it is insecurity), leading us to automatic reactions. We need to be more flexible. Many chess postulates are debatable, even those which are regarded as ‘common knowledge’. In explaining some of the errors, we shall challenge some of them.

The key thing is that some of the rules that we have learnt are applicable to fewer positions than we first thought. The rules are not wrong, but we apply them badly because we do so in too many positions. We need to discover other rules of more limited application but then understand them better.

I suspect certain errors would be different (at least in their frequency) with different model games, basic books and postulates.

Experience helps us discover rules (rules of thumb), which must be consistent with the original postulates. When this is not the case, we must replace them.

The material employed and its presentation

After analysing several hundred games from the Spanish Junior Championships in Salobreña every year and noticing how errors were often repeated, I thought that it might be possible to find them all in a small number of games, and I decided to set myself some approximate limits, as an experiment, in order to check it. And so the games I have chosen as examples come largely from Salobreña,

almost all from the 21st century, most of them between players rated between 1400 and 2200 and very few above 2300.

I suspect it would be possible to extract all the different kinds of errors from a single tournament, one with many participants, in which thousands of games are played. But that may be an experiment for a future occasion.

Most of the examples presented here begin with the main error, which gives its name to the section of the book. I consider a few alternatives, and continue the analysis for a few moves. I have decided not to analyse the games to the very end in order to avoid accumulating too much material and because I think that in order to understand the error, the moves closest to it are sufficient. Only in a few cases, when the continuation is interesting or very short, or if there are other examples of the same error, have I continued further into the game and, in a very few cases, gone on to the very end. In this way, I have been able to present many examples, but it is possible that in some cases, this might not have allowed me to be convincing. I invite the reader to check over the positions from his point of view, thanks to the fact that at the present time everyone has access to the support of an analysis engine, to such an extent that even Elon Musk's telephone plays better than the World Champion. I invite the reader to look for himself, but I advise him not to decide beforehand what he wants to find.

There are also some examples, albeit a minority, where the error is not a move but is the product of a long process, which implies a mistaken approach. Errors of this kind are hard to correct if one is not aware of them, but once they have been detected they can be tackled, as we shall explain when such cases arise.

In almost all the examples, there is more than one interesting error, which may even be on the same move, so that in some cases, the same game reappears in a different section. In other cases, I have preferred to continue a little further and refer to the other type of

error involved. I hope that readers will understand this rather personal method of organisation.

As the curious reader will easily be able to confirm, some of the players featured in the examples have been making progress. Some of them now have international titles and would not now make those same errors, although they will now also be busy correcting others. Perhaps this will inspire the reader to face up to the task at hand.

How to use this book

Each chapter begins with a series of diagrams (these are not the usual tactical puzzles), so if you wish, you can try to test yourself and decide which move you would make in these positions, taking the average thinking time used in games (3 minutes on average; between 1 and 5 minutes). This will help you understand the nature of the error in question and the extent of your own tendency to make it. In the chapter itself, you will see how the games continued from these positions. This will form a part of your self-diagnosis, but the main element must come from analysing your own games.

Next come the examples, which I recommend that you view calmly and with curiosity, maybe with a little smile now and then, trying to learn from other people's errors, which is much more satisfying than doing so from your own. You can try to discover the errors which you identify with, and only afterwards read the advice.

If your rating is below 2200, it is very likely that at least 25 of the 50 errors described here will form part of your play. If you identify them and minimise them (it is naive to think you can already eliminate them in this first stage), it is to be expected that your play will show a marked improvement. If your rating is above 2200, the number of errors you will recognise in your own play will be smaller, but you might discover a few things that you had perhaps not thought about before.

This book cannot be a manual for any of the topics it covers, neither on strategy, nor on prophylaxis, nor on traps, because that is not the objective, nor is there room for it. However, it will touch on ideas related to all those topics, and I will recommend some more specific manuals.

We should not suppose that it is equally easy to correct errors and make progress at the age of 15 as at the age of 45. Chess is a language which our mind adopts, and the younger we are, the more flexible our mind is. It is, however, just as easy to learn the concepts if we are prepared to break postulates, although it may be more difficult to turn them into Elo points.

After each error (in some cases, several are grouped together), I make some recommendations on how to avoid them. It is interesting to observe that these can all be grouped into one of five types which I have put into the following list in order of increasing difficulty:

Types of advice

- Read books;
- Solve exercises;
- Analyse the positions in your own games (and those of close colleagues);
- Avoid biases and postulates;
- Overcome laziness and fears and take decisions objectively.

In the advice on how to correct errors, I suggest books that I consider useful. Although I look at quite a lot of books throughout the year, there will be many that will go unnoticed, or perhaps I will not evaluate them correctly. If any reader finds other books which address the problems caused by his errors and uses them, he will be on the right track in the search for a solution to the problem. Naturally, he should find some that are better than the ones I recommend.

A word about using engines

We have mentioned the use of engines earlier. For quite some time now, the engines have been playing better than the experts, but they have not attained the same level of effectiveness as trainers – not yet anyway. Nonetheless, if used intelligently, they can help a player improve in almost all aspects of the game.

The most obvious use, and the one I recommend above all, is in reviewing your games. When doing this, there is only one indispensable rule: *you must understand every time the difference between the engine's preference and your own moves.*

It is possible (indeed, it occurs frequently) that the engine will suggest an incomprehensible move. This situation can be a source of confusion, but also an opportunity to learn something. When it happens, an extra effort is advisable, trying out moves back and forth and looking carefully to discover the reason. You will often find that the engine's move was not so strange after all.

Another useful application is the art of comparison as a learning strategy. This involves looking at the engine's evaluation of slight variations in the position: removing some pieces or changing the position of a few pawns or pieces. In some examples, you will see what I call **the Stockfish evaluation table**.

But I will allow myself to give an important piece of advice: never use the engine to follow live games in an ongoing tournament. It will restrict your search and cause you to think that some moves, which you would have found if you had looked deeper on your own, are inhuman decisions. You cannot imagine how much more you will learn if you search for the moves on your own!

Some concepts used in the book

In the book, I refer several times to some concepts that might be confusing for the reader, so I think it will be useful to give short

definitions of them here. In that way, they will move from being mysterious expressions to being aids to understanding.

Irreversible moves: These are moves from which there is no going back. There are three types, of which the third is the least forceful conceptually, although just as definitive in practice: **pawn advances, piece exchanges and castling.**

Forcefulness scale: This is a way of classifying the moves that we should consider when calculating, based on their ability to **force** our rival's responses. This is essential for the 'pre-selection' of candidate moves. I propose a scale with four levels:

- 1) The highest level is the check, because it necessarily forces your opponent to defend;
- 2) Next are threats of mate;
- 3) Then come captures;
- 4) Last come threats to gain material.

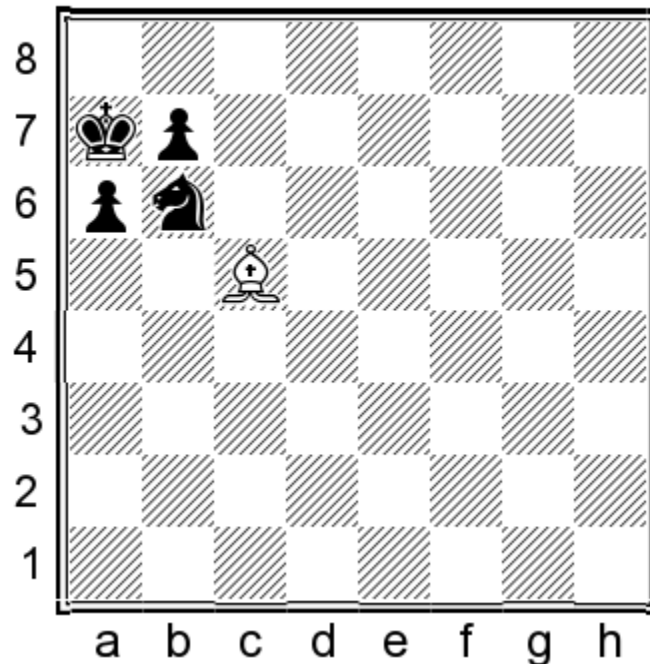
It is interesting to note that in most positions, the second level is empty, while the fourth is insufficiently forcing and does not usually facilitate (or make reliable) a long calculation, so that in many positions, 1 and 3 can be used as an abbreviated scale.

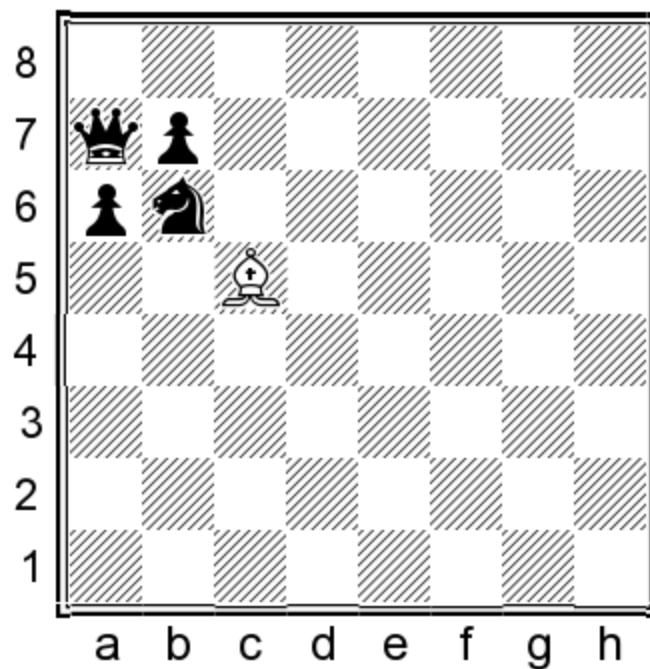
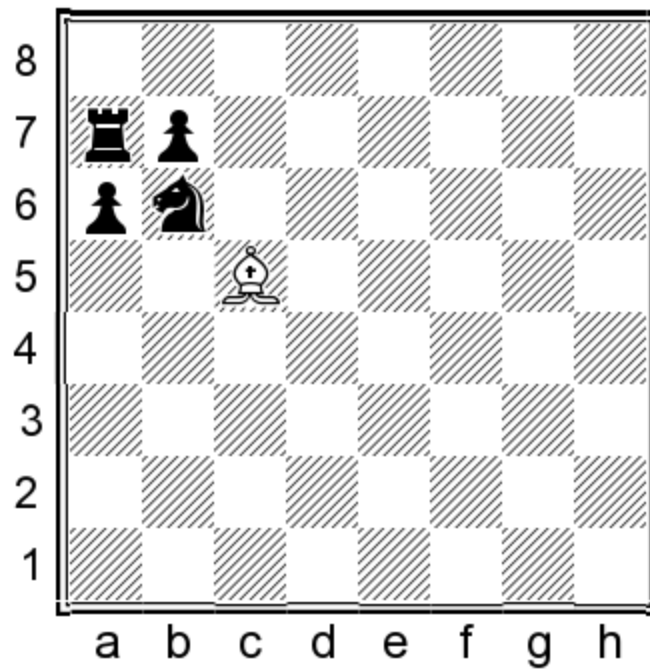
Calculation by objectives: This is a suggestion that can help in calculating when there are few pieces left, and the forcefulness scale is not so useful for pre-selecting candidate moves. It consists of defining an objective and calculating with that as a guide. It is closely related to the concept of **Division of Labour.**

Temptation: This is an immediately attractive objective, capable of making us lose control of the calculating process and making it difficult for us to come up with logical options.

Temptation is a powerful force which can change the course of our thinking. From the moment a player ‘feels tempted’ to achieve something, it is very likely that he will not manage to stay in control and calculate coolly.

False pin: This is the name we shall give to a type of pin in which the piece being shielded moves in the same way as the (enemy) pinning piece, which might enable a discovered attack. Its importance lies in the frequency with which it leads to errors, perhaps caused by the excessive power of the pin postulate. See the following sequence, which explains this concept graphically:





These three part-diagrams represent three different types of pins. The first two are, respectively, examples of an absolute pin and a relative pin. The third is also a case of a relative pin, of course, but it has a special ingredient in that the queen can move in the same way as the bishop, meaning that the situation is dangerous for both sides,

which has led me to call this a **false pin**. Naturally, the knight should not move, leaving the queen defenceless, unless it does so forcefully. But this scenario is not all that unusual.

Division of labour: This consists of mentally assigning a task to each piece in order to calculate based on a plan (in that case, the calculation is guided by consideration not of the forcefulness scale but of the objectives). It becomes a more effective procedure as there are fewer pieces left on the board.

Automatic exchange: This is what we shall call an exchange of pieces which is made without any specific objective and merely as a compulsive response to the need to reduce tension/danger.

Candidates or candidate moves: Each of the moves that justify a plan in a specific position, from which an analysis is initiated. This concept was coined by Alexander Kotov in his book *Think like a Grandmaster*, although subsequently it has been subject to multiple refinements and corrections.

Unnatural candidate: A move with which a branch of our analysis could begin but which is hidden from our search because it contains some element which is suspicious (or unusual for a sound move). It might be on the first move of a variation or among the following moves. It is the basis of most errors in calculation.

Analytical compulsion: The tendency to keep delving deeper into the process of calculating, which can go beyond the limits that make it effective.

Prophylaxis: Prophylaxis consists of preventing the opponent's moves, plans or intentions before they represent a threat.

This is a subtle concept that implies a particular way of considering the position. Its application, from the viewpoint of the errors related to it, will be analysed in Chapters 11 and 12.

New or emerging tactic: A tactic for the opponent that appears as a consequence of our last move. See Errors 44 and 49.

Dubious move (indicated by ‘?!’): This use is traditional, but it has always been a dubious concept. I am referring to it here to clarify how I use it in this book. It usually applies to a bad move, but sometimes I apply it either to a move that offers an easier solution to the opponent (even if the position is already a bad one with best possible play), or else to a move that does not actually throw away the win but which makes it more difficult to achieve.

Silent defence: A move that appears to do nothing, because it does not actually prevent a threat, but eliminates its effects. It is a surprising case of an *unnatural candidate*.

Unopposed piece: This always refers to a minor piece. It is an extension of the concept of a piece posted in a forepost/outpost. It is a piece that cannot be expelled or exchanged for a piece of the same value. Its valuation should be assessed as between 4 and 5 points since the only way to eliminate it is to exchange it for a rook (whether or not it also captures a pawn).

Basic-level strategy: The body of doctrine that brings together the most elementary postulates (the value of the pieces, the need for castling, development, etc.), which we learn very early and which are necessary, but which are also at the root of rigidity of thought and are the cause of most of the strategic errors made at the amateur level.

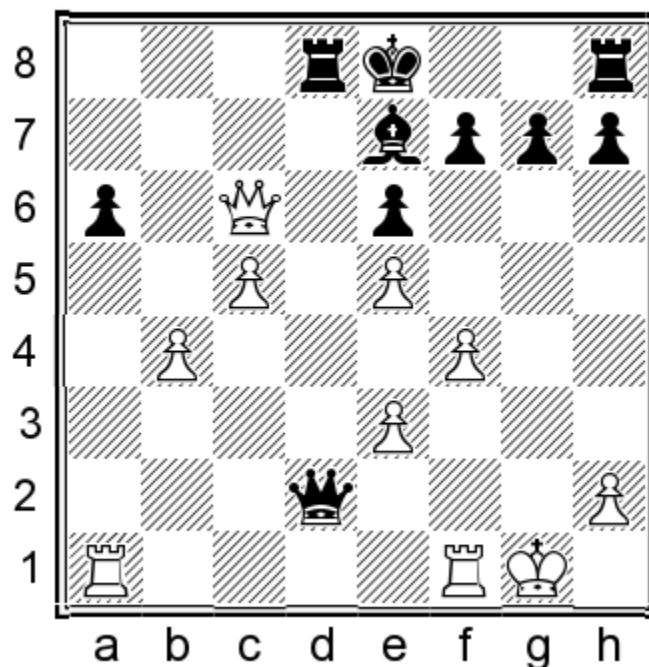
Classical strategy: The one recognised as official, following the theories of Steinitz and the books published in the first half of the twentieth century (by Tarrasch, Réti, Nimzowitsch, Pachman and others).

Chapter 1

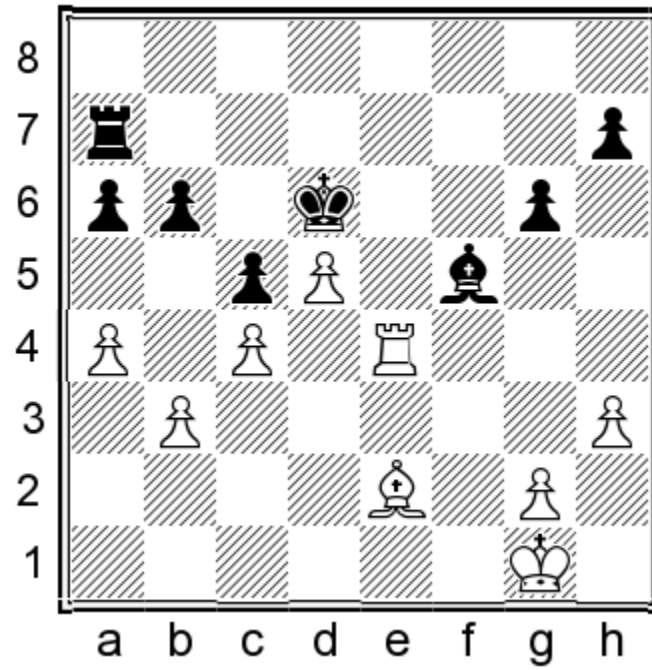
Exchanging pieces

- Error 1 - Exchanging queens with a material advantage
- Error 2 - Exchanging queens and abandoning the attack
- Error 3 - Exchanging a more active piece for a less active one
- Error 4 - Exchanging pieces and worsening the structure
- Error 5 - Exchanging unfavourably with miscellaneous material
- Error 6 - Exchanging major pieces in positions with opposite-coloured bishops
- Error 7 - Simplifying to an endgame which is not winning
- Error 8 - Rejecting favourable exchanges

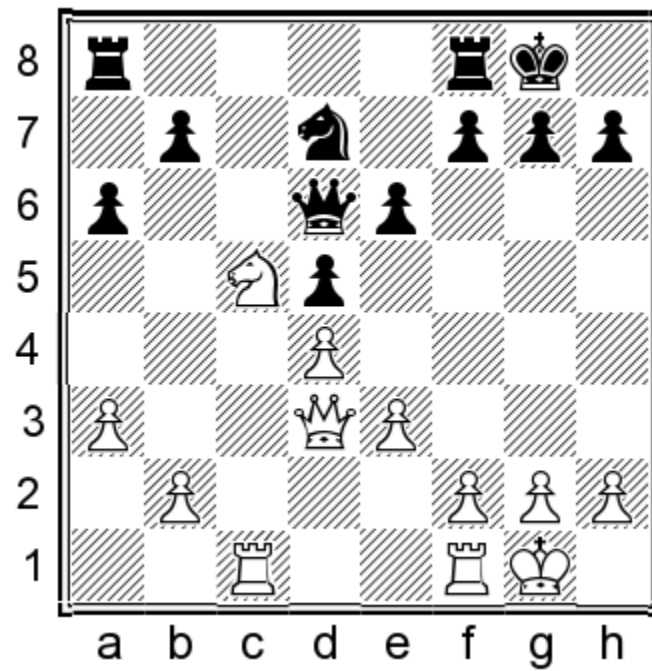
Exercises for Chapter 1



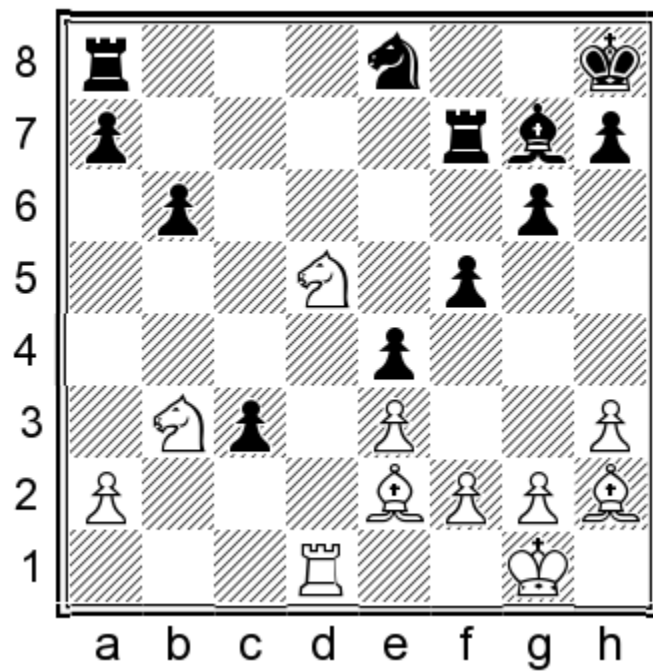
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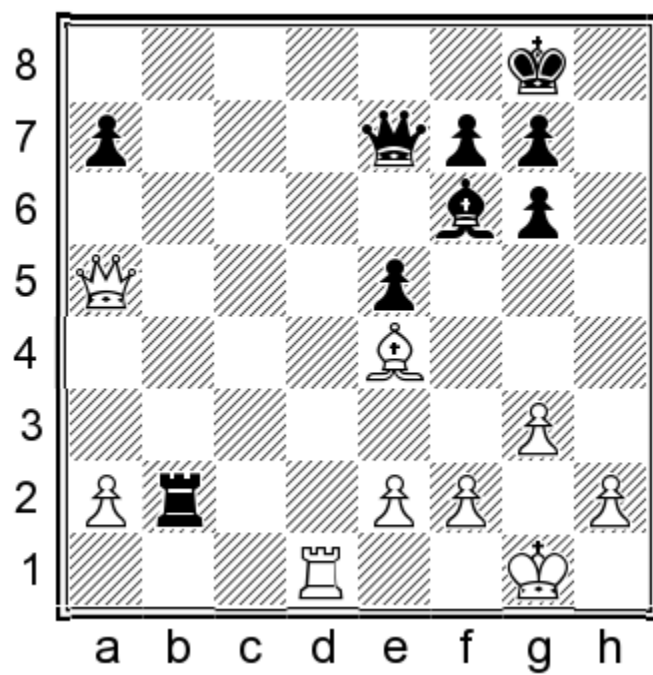
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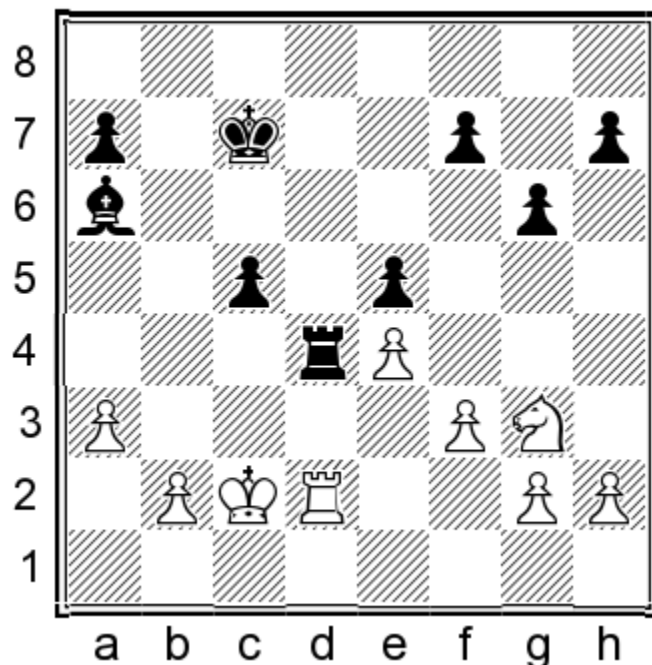
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4



5



6

It is not because of any arbitrary decision that exchanging pieces is the subject of the first chapter of this book. The reason is that I consider it to be of great importance, and in the following paragraphs, I shall try to explain why.

A piece exchange is one of the three kinds of **irreversible moves**. When I was studying chess using books, I used to think that the moves which caused the most errors were pawn advances (another type of irreversible move which is made several times in every game), but after I started to work as a trainer, when analysing my students' games, I realised that they made a lot of errors when exchanging pieces. Next, I began to classify these and to examine them more carefully, and it seemed to me that there were even more of them than I had thought; in some games even, all the errors involved piece exchanges, so I felt forced to think about this.

A tendency to simplify is natural to all players because it makes it easier to understand the position, and we all seek clarity. In addition, it limits the danger (an exchanged piece cannot mate you), and thus our fears and laziness unite to make us decide to exchange, which is often a mistaken decision. The first conclusion is that we must be able to resist this tendency and to decide coolly what is in our best interest.

Although some of the pieces have similar value, a piece exchange is rarely completely innocuous; it almost always benefits one side or the other, even if only to a small extent. So it is always necessary to determine who it favours and to take a decision on that basis.

An exchange of pieces is usually a strategic decision, and therefore it could have been given a section (or indeed several) in Chapter 5, on strategy, but in my experience, it is the most common strategic error. Therefore, I have decided to place it in the first chapter and to break it down into several sections in order to make a clear classification.

We shall start with the most important piece exchange, and the one that has the greatest influence on the development of the game: the exchange of queens.

Error 1 - Exchanging queens with a material advantage

One of the most powerful postulates in what we call **basic-level strategy** is that when we have won material, we should exchange pieces (especially the queens) in order to reach a stage of technical conversion of the material advantage. This is what all the coaches tell us, starting when we are very small... but it is a half-truth. As we have already explained in the Introduction, it is not a question of rejecting the rules but of establishing more clearly the situation in

which they are applicable. In this case, we can become accustomed to exchanging queens because this avoids tactical dangers, even when in doing so we lose some of our advantage. What is ‘bad’ is that it often works for us. This mixture of practicality and laziness is dangerous, and in some cases it can lead us to disaster.

We should be very conscious of the fact that exchanging queens has very serious implications for the rest of the game. It can change the nature of the position and the strategy to be followed, and therefore it is not a decision to be taken lightly. We are going to suggest some rules for deciding when it would be appropriate to exchange queens, and then we are going to look at its application in a few examples of this error and the next one.

Rules for deciding when to exchange queens:

1) The first and most important criterion is the situation of the king. The player whose king is in a more open position should seek to exchange queens, whereas his opponent should avoid doing so.

2) The second is material advantage. This applies if the kings are not exposed, or not seriously exposed. The side with an advantage in pawns should seek to exchange queens. The side with an advantage in pieces (as opposed to pawns) should avoid doing so.

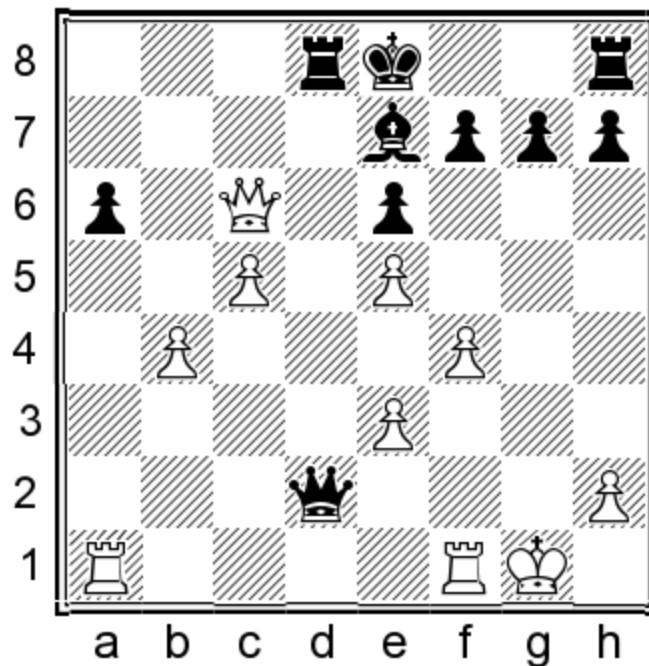
3) This will apply if 1 and 2 above fail to provide a clear answer. See which queen is the more active (bearing in mind, however, that what matters is not whether the queen is more active in its present position but whether it will be so in the resulting position).

Let us now move on to look at the first example in this book.

Martin Forsberg Conde (2094)

Alejandro Bernal Gómez (1896)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2013



Exercise 1

White has lost a piece but can capture a second pawn in return. In a case like this, the side that has won a piece for several pawns usually should not (!) exchange queens. In this way, we can exploit our advantage in force to win a pawn or two before moving on to the technical stage. We should remember that pawns increase in value as fewer pieces remain on the board.

The rule is:

With extra pawns, exchange pieces, but with an extra piece (for one or more pawns), keep attacking until you have at least recaptured the pawn(s).

25...♔d7?

This reaction to winning the piece, trying to exchange queens, is a serious error, but a very common one, because it follows the old postulate. Black needs to retain the queens in order to create

problems for the white king and to benefit from the extra piece.

25...♔f8! was best. This move might have an ugly appearance, because it hinders the communication of the rooks, but it allows a very quick victory because the black queen is very active and the h8-rook can be rapidly activated by means of artificial castling with ...g6 and ...♔g7, or the ...h5/...♖h6 manoeuvre, or the ...g5 break: 26.♖f3 (26.♕e4 g6 27.♖xa6 ♔g7 28.♖a7 ♖he8–+) 26...g6 27.♕xa6 ♔g7, in both cases bringing all the pieces into play and preparing the immediate attack with ...♕xb4 or ...♕e2.

25...♖d7?? was not an option due to 26.♖ad1 and White wins.

26.♖xa6!

White wins another pawn without allowing Black to change his mind about the exchange of queens. 26.♕xa6? would have allowed 26...0-0!, followed by keeping the queens on the board.

26...♕xc6

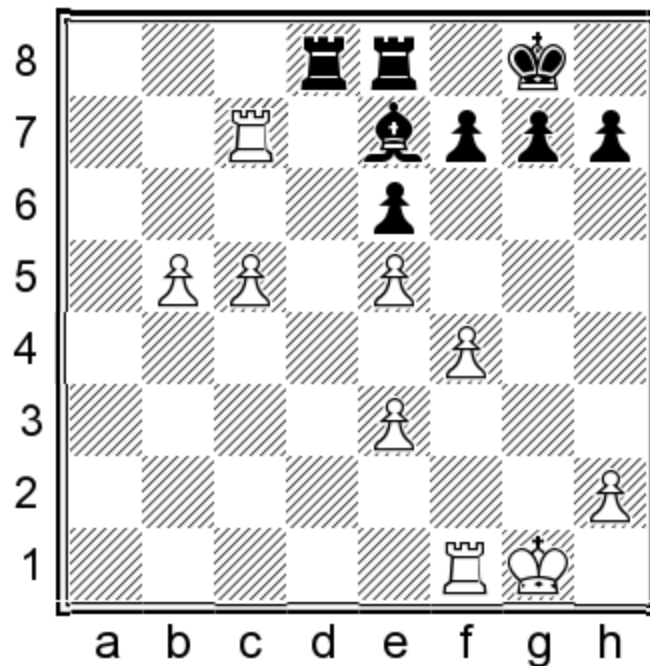
Perhaps the immediate 26...0-0 was slightly more precise.

27.♖xc6 0-0

Once the queens have been exchanged, the king becomes a useful piece for fighting against passed pawns, so the moves ...f6 and ...g5 are natural, but connecting the rooks is also a desirable objective, and this move is just as correct.

27...♖b8 also leads to equality: 28.b5! ♖xb5 29.♖c8+ ♔d8 30.♖d1 ♔e7 31.c6 ♖d5 32.♖xd5 exd5 33.♔f2 ♖e8 34.c7 ♔d7.

28.♖c7! ♖fe8 29.b5



29...♖b8!?

At this point, it is already obvious that the queen exchange has not given Black the result he wanted, and the two passed pawns are indestructible and dangerous.

29...♖c8!? attacks the pawns more energetically but exchanges a piece. One variation might be 30.♖xc8 ♖xc8 31.c6 ♗c5 32.♔f2 ♔f8 33.♖a1 ♔e8 34.♖a6 ♖b8 35.c7 ♖c8 36.b6=, forcing the exchange of the extra bishop for the two pawns.

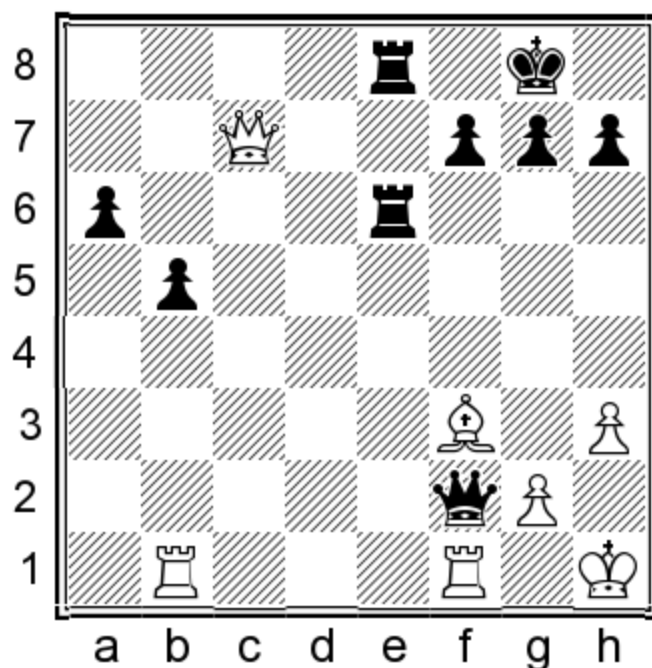
30.♖b1 ♗d8 31.♖d7 ♖e7! 32.♖d6

Black faced a tough battle against the pawns and ended up losing.

Aitor Funes Ostos (1993)

Ángel Fuentes Guinot (1777)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2021



White is a piece up for three pawns, a scenario we have already discussed, along with its relationship with the exchange of queens. Black has an interest in exchanging them (although he would continue to be worse) whereas White has an interest in retaining them.

We are going to insert here a small table with the Stockfish evaluation of this position and of some variations on it, as we proceed to remove pieces:

It is worthwhile thinking about this table. As we remove pieces, the situation of the side with the pawns improves. Certainly, many readers will think: ‘That’s obvious, I knew that already’. But if we know that, why then do we exchange the pieces when we are a piece up? This question, which seems rhetorical, also has an answer: we exchange pieces because we think that the harm to our position is small and that the technical exploitation will be easier without pieces. That is what the evaluation table flatly denies.

Other questions arise: for instance, in other positions, does the evaluation also change as much as pieces are removed? Possibly not as much, but I suggest that we check it for ourselves in each case, and continue to draw conclusions.

39...♔d4?

The best move is 39...♔b6!, which allows Black to gain a tempo for organising the defence as well as tempting White to exchange.

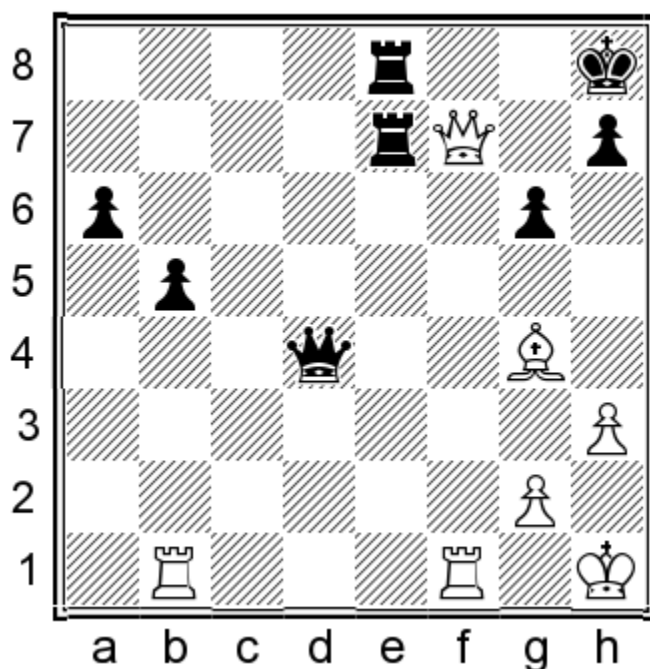
Instead, White should play 40.♔c2! g6 41.♙d5 ♖f6± .

40.♙h5?!

This move is not bad, but there is a much stronger one: 40.♙d5!.

With an extra piece the attack is usually unstoppable. 40...♖8e7 (40...♖6e7?! 41.♙xf7+) 41.♔c8+ ♖e8 42.♔b7 ♖8e7 43.♖bc1 h6 (43...g6 44.♖xf7!) 44.♔c8+ ♔h7 45.♙xe6 and White wins.

40...g6 41.♔xf7+ ♔h8 42.♙g4 ♖6e7



As a result of 39...♔d4, Black has lost one of his three pawns. Perhaps the moment to exchange queens has arrived?

43.♔f6+?

The temptation to make things clearer appears again. The exchange of queens keeps a big advantage for White, but it is a serious error. It is much easier to exploit the advantage of an extra piece with the queens present: 43.♔a2 (attacking a6) 43...♖a7 44.♖bd1 ♔g7 45.♖d6 a5 46.♔d5 a4 47.♙d7 ♖e5 48.♖f8+ , winning.

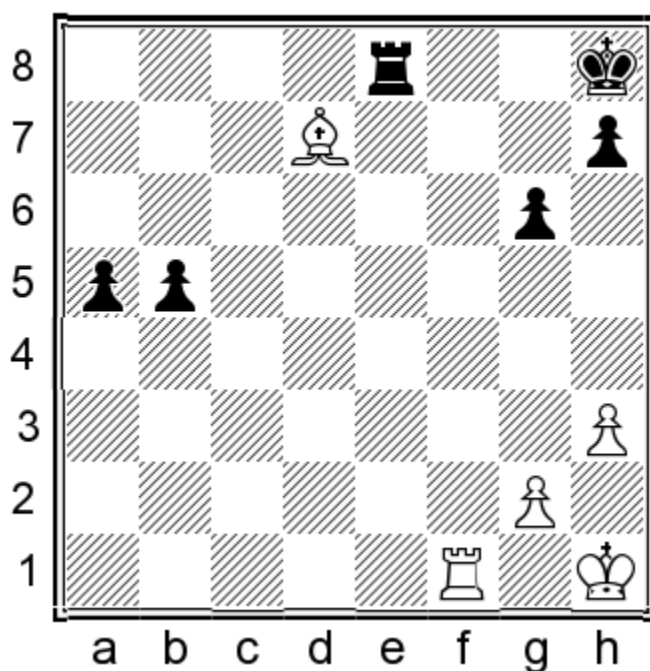
43...♔xf6 44.♖xf6 ♖e1+!

Black realises that it is in his interest to exchange major pieces, even though he is still lost. 44...♖a7?! 45.♖b6! is much easier for White, because the pawns remain frozen and the three white pieces will soon create threats.

45.♖f1?

One rook had to be exchanged, but in this way the other one remains very passive. 45.♖xe1! keeps the advantage decisive: 45...♖xe1+ 46.♔h2 a5 47.♖b6 ♖b1 48.♖b8+ ♔g7 49.♖b7+ ♔g8 50.♖a7 ♖a1 (50...a4 51.♖a5 and the pawns fall) 51.♙e6+ ♔h8 52.♔g3! b4 53.♔f4 a4 54.♔g5 with a very quick mate.

45...♖xf1+ 46.♖xf1 a5 47.♙d7



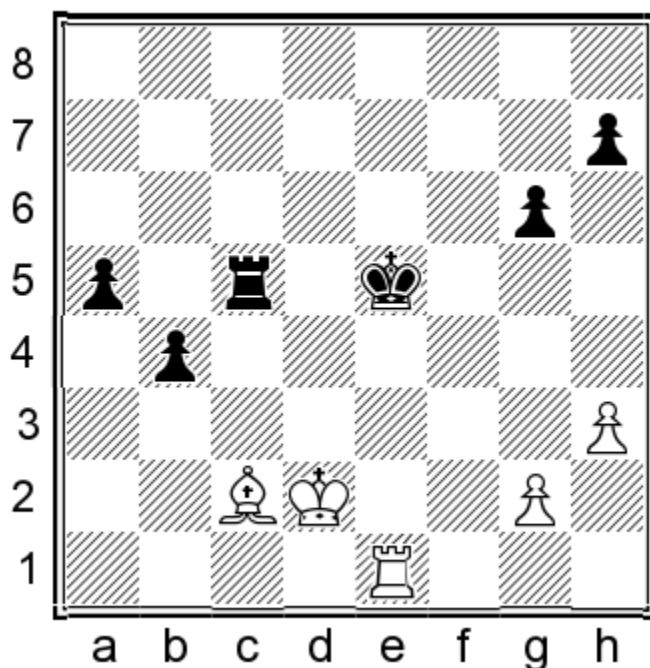
47...♖e5?

The rook defends the pawns from here, but does not support their advance. Black could have done this with 47...♜b8!, when with correct play he should not lose; for example, 48.♜b1 b4 49.♙a4 ♔g7 50.♔g1 ♔f6 51.♔f2 ♔e5 52.♔e3 ♜c8!, intending ...♜c8-c3-a3.

48.♜b1?!

48.♜f6! a4 (48...b4 49.♜b6 is similar) 49.♜a6 and the pawns are not lost but Black's game is now very restricted, whereas White can make progress on the kingside and should win.

48...b4 49.♔g1 ♔g7 50.♔f2 ♔f6 51.♜d1 ♜c5! 52.♙a4 ♜c3 53.♜a1 ♜c5 54.♔e3 ♔e5 55.♔d2 ♜c3 56.♙c2 ♜c5 57.♜e1+



Now, instead of 57...♔f6?, after which Black eventually lost, he could have held the position with:

57...♔f4!

Black maintains a solid position and has sufficient counterplay.

58.♜e7 ♜g5 59.g4

59.♜xh7 ♜xg2+ 60.♔c1 ♜h2=.

59...h5 60.♖e4+ ♔g3 61.♖e3+ ♔h4

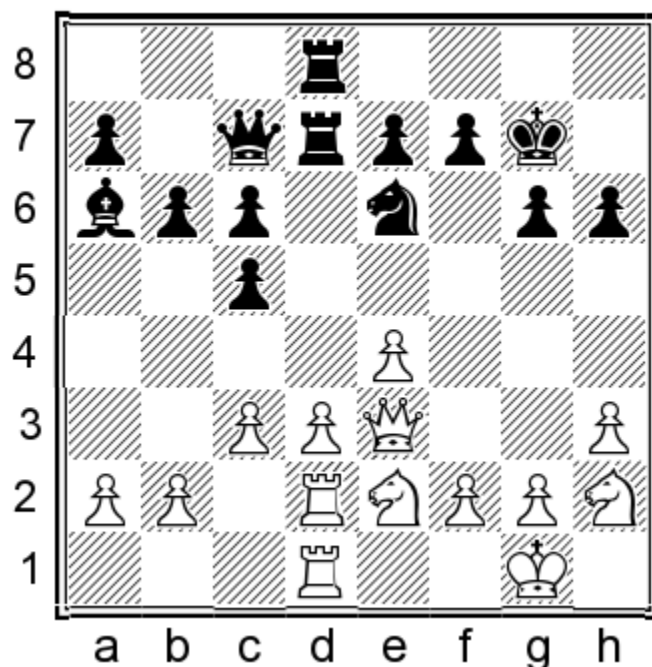
And a draw seems inevitable.

The final example of this section could also be included in the next one, because it gives up the attack at the same time as it gains material.

Eihartze Buiza Prieto

Mikel Ortega López

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2015



Although it is perhaps not very obvious, due to the pressure on d3, Black has a very bad position, due to the distance of his pieces from the kingside. Now his castled position is about to come under a strong attack with the f2-f4-f5 advance and the participation of White's knights (♘g4, for example).

19...♔e5??!

The move in the game is not good objectively, as it fails to stop White's attack, and even strengthens it. But it might be an interesting trap, provoking what is going to happen. There is no attractive defence for Black.

20. ♔xh6+?

This time the queen exchange is accompanied by a gain in material, but Black is quite well compensated for the pawn because his remaining pieces are very active. On the other hand, if the queens remained on the board, White's attack would have been unstoppable:

A) 20. ♖g4!?, resisting the temptation of material gain and continuing the attack: 20... ♔h5 (20... ♔g5 21.f4+-) 21.f4 and the threats of breaching the king's defence and trapping the queen put Black beyond all salvation;

B) 20.f4! is more logical and even stronger; for example, 20... ♔c7 (20... ♔h5?! 21. ♖f3! and the threat of trapping the queen with ♖g3 forces Black to surrender material) 21.f5 ♖g5 22.h4 ♖h7 23.fxg6 fxg6 24. ♖f4 ♖f8 25. ♖g4 and White's threats (for example ♖e6+ and/or ♖xh6) are unstoppable.

20... ♔xh6 21. ♖g4+ ♔g7 22. ♖xe5 ♖d6

White has won a pawn and stands better, but his attack has disappeared and he has a backward pawn on d3, which forces him, if he wants to win, to give a good display of technique. The game ended in a draw.

Error 2 - Exchanging queens and abandoning the attack

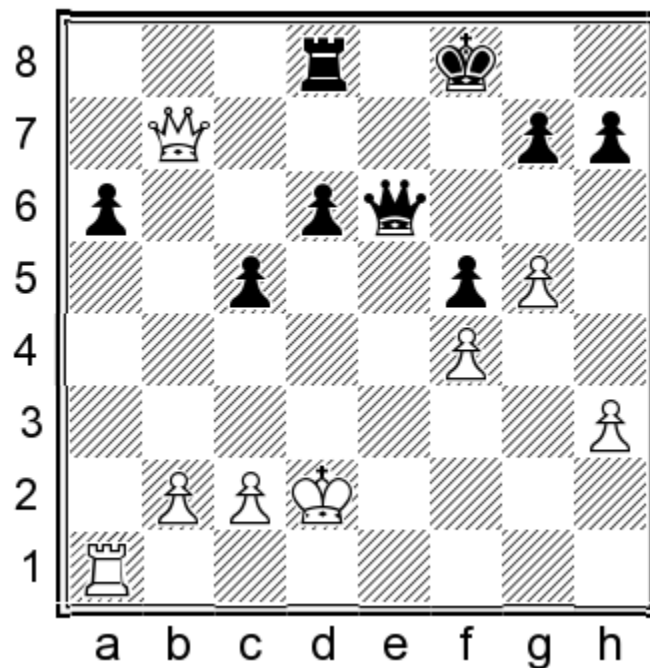
This section is strongly related to the previous one and in some examples the circumstances overlap. What we are concerned with now are positions in which a player has good attacking possibilities, in spite of which he decides to exchange queens and does so even

though he has no material advantage. Why is such a decision taken? Sometimes the player hopes to gain material in the process (calculation error) and at other times it is simply a matter of reducing the tension (an error of a psychological nature). In all cases the basic error happens because of failure to follow clear criteria to decide when to exchange queens.

Samuel Sánchez Morales (1469)

Mario Antoñanzas Fernández (1122)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U12. 2021



In this first example, the white king is more exposed, and therefore Black should not exchange queens.

29...♔e4?

29...♔c4! was a decisive attacking move. White does not have a good way of defending the f4-pawn, which will be taken with check; if 30.♔f3 ♔d4+ 31.♔c1 ♖e8! and the white king is in an indefensible position.

30. ♔xe4 fxe4 31. ♖xa6

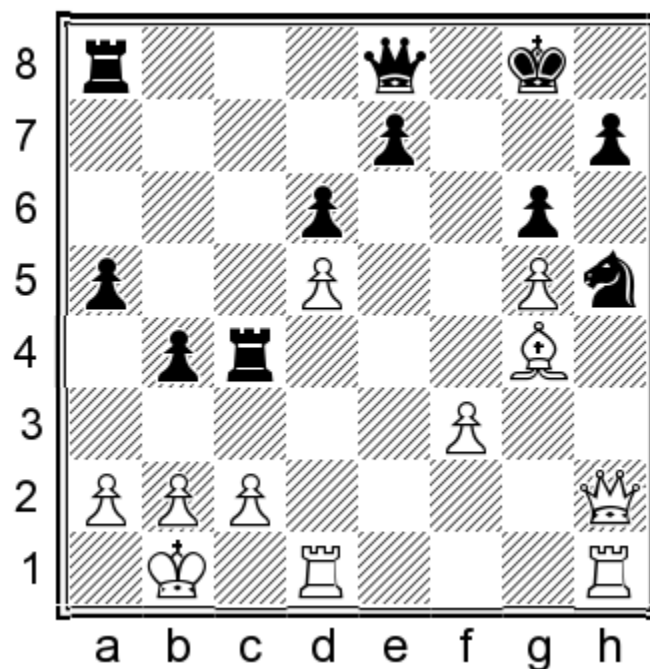
White has recovered the pawn and taken over the advantage. In the end, he won the game.

Now, we shall see another example where the attacking player exchanges queens in order to win a pawn.

Álvaro Sobrino Forte (1922)

Oscar Torcal Miguel (2142)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2018



White has a decisive advantage. The main reason is the weak position of the black king.

25. ♕xh5?

When the advantage is the position of the king, it is not likely that exchanging pieces to win a pawn is the best option.

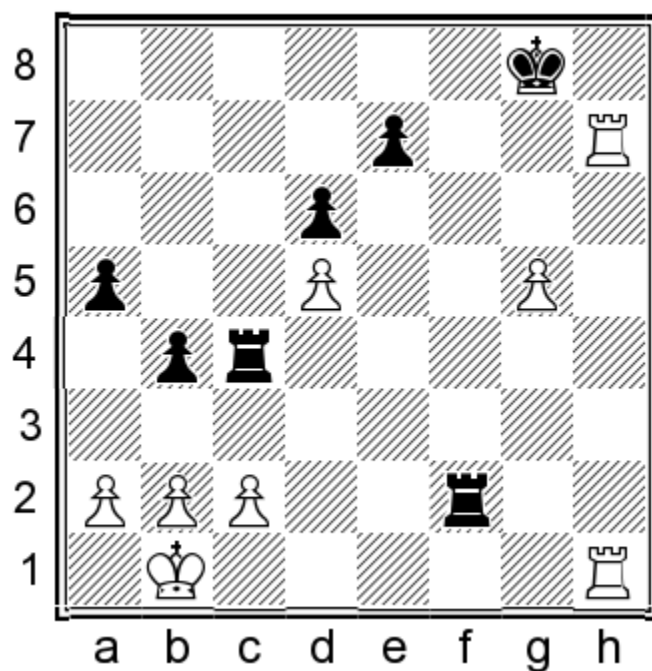
A good and energetic continuation, although not the only winning one, was 25.f4! ♖a7 (25...a4 is too slow: 26. ♕e6+ ♔g7 27.f5 b3

28.cxb3 axb3 29.axb3 ♖e4 30.♔c2+-) 26.♙e6+ ♕g7 27.f5 ♜ac7
 28.f6+ exf6 29.gxf6+ ♞xf6 30.♔h6+ ♕h8 31.♞df1 ♜e7 32.♔xg6.

25...gxh5 26.♔xh5 ♜xh5 27.♞xh5 ♞f8

With the black rooks so active and the white king having difficulty leaving the first rank, Black has no problems and in fact could have won.

28.♞dh1 ♞xf3 29.♞xh7 ♞f2



30.♞xe7?

White should have begun to think about a draw; allowing both enemy rooks to invade the second rank is not a good idea.

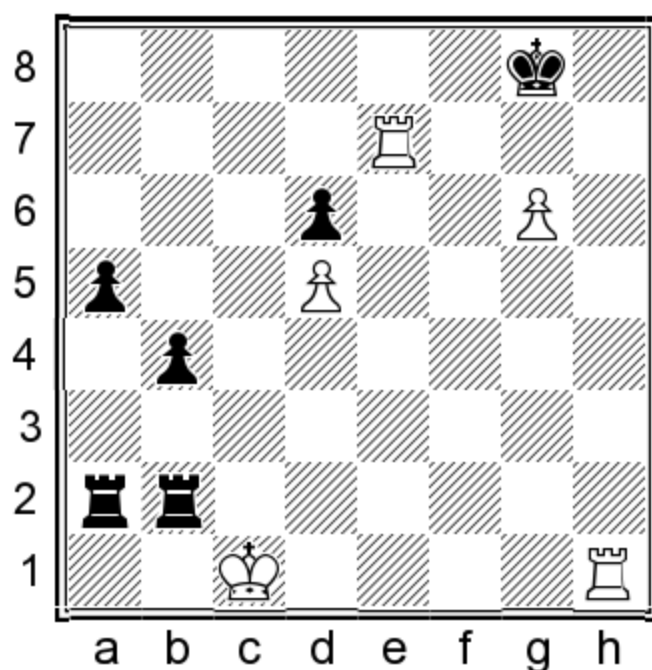
30.c3! bxc3 31.bxc3 ♜xc3 32.♞xe7 ♜cc2 33.♞b7 was equal.

30...♞cxc2 31.g6?

It seems to be the case that 31.a4 keeps White alive, but for a human player, in the middle of the game, it is not easy to believe:

31...♞xb2+ 32.♔a1.

**31...♞xb2+ 32.♔a1 ♞xa2+ 33.♔b1 ♞fb2+ 34.♔c1 ♞c2+ 35.♔b1
 ♞cb2+ 36.♔c1**



36...♖g2?

Black fails to find a way to use his two rooks on the second and settles for an ending that gives him some practical chances.

Curiously, the solution now was to exchange pieces; paradoxical solutions also exist: 36...♖e2! 37.♖xe2 ♖xe2 38.♖h7 ♖e5! was winning for Black.

Giving up two rooks on the seventh rank is startling, but for winning purposes the two queenside passed pawns are enough. In contrast, after the move in the game, White can defend his king for now and when the black rooks capture some pawn or other White will have enough counterplay to draw.

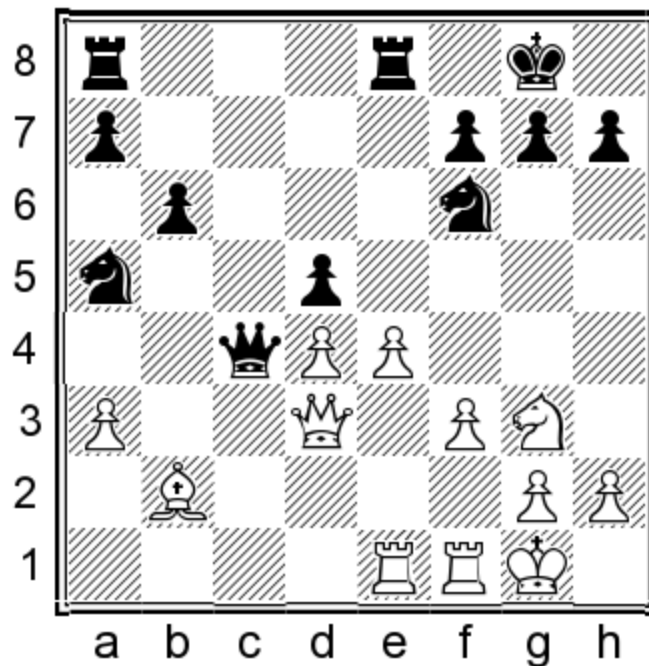
37.♙b1 ♖ab2+ 38.♙a1

In our third example, White abandons an attack in its early stages, which is even more common.

Juan Plazuelo Pascual (2247)

Guerau Masagué Artero (2137)

Spanish Rapid Championship U18 2018



As some readers may guess – at least those who have been classically trained – this position is taken from a famous plan that was first presented ‘in high society’ in the game Botvinnik-Capablanca in the 1938 AVRO Tournament.

White has expanded his centre, as a first step towards the attack on Black’s king, and Black has just played 17... ♔c4, trying to exchange queens in order to prevent it.

18. ♔xc4?

White should not exchange queens, since his advantage consists of the danger that his pawn majority is going to create for Black’s castled position. Without queens on the board, there will be no attack and Black will even have the better structure.

18. ♔d2! is the strongest move, but other retreats of the queen also maintain the advantage: 18... ♘b3 19. ♔f2 g6 20. e5 ♘d7 21. f4 (21. h4!?) 21... f5 22. exf6?! (22. e6! is stronger: 22... ♘f6 23. ♘xf5 gxf5 24. ♔h4 leads to a decisive attack; for example, 24... ♘e4 25. ♖xe4! fxe4 26. ♔g5+ ♔h8 27. ♔e5+ ♔g8 28. f5 ♘d2 29. ♖e1

followed by f6) 22...♘xf6 23.f5 ♖xe1 24.♖xe1 ♜f8 25.fxg6 hxg6 26.♞e6± Chojnacki-Luch, Trzcianka rapid 2022.

18...♘xc4 19.♙c1 a5

19...b5 is more natural but no better: 20.e5 ♘d7 21.f4 a5 with an unclear position, Vázquez López-Lavigne López, Santiago de Cuba 2018.

20.a4 dxe4?!

This is the moment when Black gave up his winning chances, which he could have retained with 20...b5! 21.axb5 ♜eb8±.

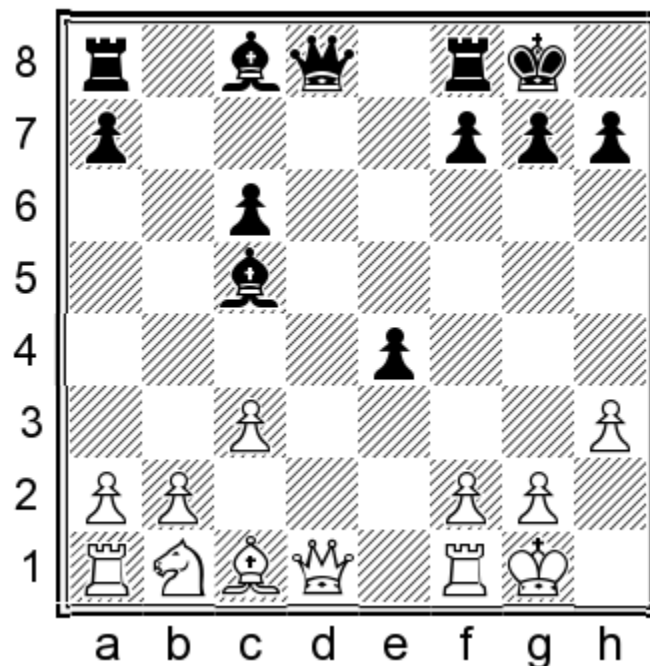
21.fxe4 ♜ad8 22.d5 ♘d7 23.♖f3 ♘c5 24.♜c3 ½-½

This error also has a mirror image. This would be where the side which is going to be attacked prefers to retain the queens. In the next example, both of these situations apply.

Daniel Díaz Mino (2182)

Hugo Garijo Perez (1924)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2022



Here, we have another example in which the attack has not started yet. But which of the two sides can attack the enemy king? Black is better placed for this because of his kingside pawn majority.

13. ♔h5

White makes an active move and attacks the bishop, but Black's position is far superior, thanks to his pair of bishops and his mobile majority on the kingside. It would have been much better to exchange queens and limit the disadvantage with 13. ♔xd8 ♖xd8 14. ♖e1.

13... ♔d5?

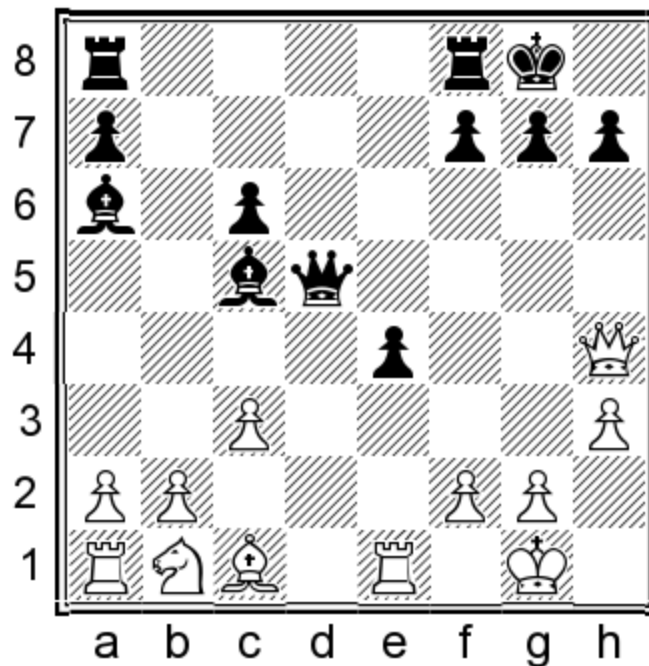
Black's decision to exchange queens is very pessimistic. Black is much better with at least two moves: 13... ♗a6! 14. ♖e1 (14. ♔xc5 ♗xf1—+) 14... ♔b6 15. ♔h4 e3 16. fxe3 ♖ae8, with a tremendous initiative; or the simple 13...f5!.

14. ♔h4?

But White again rejects the generous offer that has been made to him, which would have enabled him to avoid the attack and achieve almost complete equality. Sometimes exchanging decisions are determined not by the position but by the players' ratings. White gives his opponent a fresh opportunity to attack, and this time, he is going to seize it.

14. ♔xd5! cxd5 15. ♗e3!±.

14... ♗a6! 15. ♖e1



15...♗d3

Black installs a ‘super-bishop’, although it was not necessary, and he could have speeded up his attack with 15...♖ae8!.

16.♘d2 ♖fe8

Here too it seems better to play 16...f5 right away, followed by ...f4 and deploying the other rook to the kingside (...♖ae8).

17.♘f1 f5 18.♙g3 ♖e6!

Finally, Black takes heart and launches his pieces into the attack.

19.♘e3 ♙d7!

Now Black is even willing to give up a pawn in order to avoid the exchange of queens.

20.♘xf5 ♖f8 21.♙g5 ♖g6

All Black’s pieces are attacking. It is too late to give White any good advice.

22.♘h6+ gxh6 23.♙xc5 ♙xh3 24.♗g5 ♙g4 25.g3 ♙xg5 26.♙xa7 h5 27.♖e3 ♙f4 28.♖ee1 h4 0-1

How to avoid Errors 1 and 2

All the mistakes in this chapter have a certain psychological element, and these first two rather more than the others, because a queen exchange is more ‘relaxing’.

The first piece of advice is to carry out some prior work: analyse your own games and determine whether you fall into the 90% who make this error, and to what extent (about 10% of players are more likely to make the opposite error of always keeping their queens).

The second piece of advice is to be aware of this bias and consciously fight against it during your games.

The way to do this is to always respect the rules for exchanging queens. If the ones given above do not convince you, you can adapt them to your own specific case, according to your style and ability, but once you have adapted them, follow them and do not look for an excuse to backslide. Otherwise, your bias will reassert itself and lead you to the wrong decision.

Do not take your opponent’s rating into account. Make your decision according to the position.

Recommended books: there are not many books that deal with this topic. I recommend the chapters on simplification in ChessCafe Puzzle Book 2 by Karsten Müller.

Error 3 - Exchanging a more active piece for a less active one

Many unfavourable piece exchanges which happen are unfavourable because a more active piece is exchanged for a less active one. We shall look at many examples of this topic, and try to understand the causes.

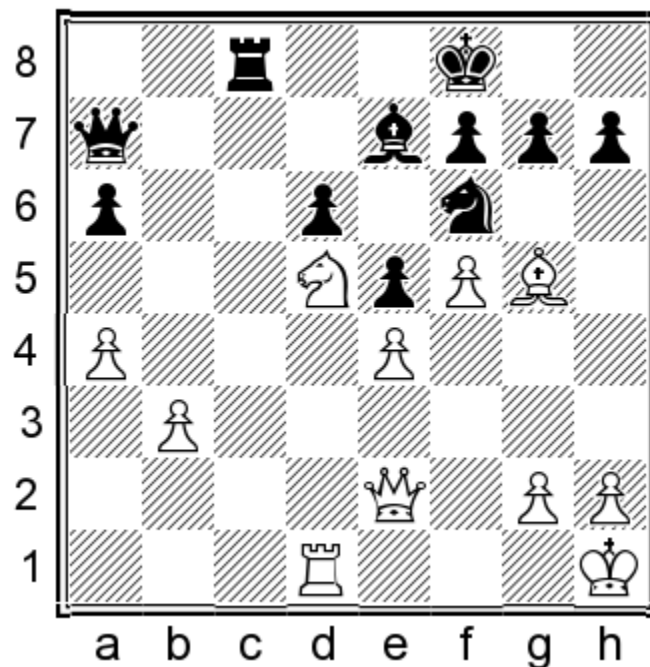
I propose the following rule: when we have doubts about exchanging a piece, let us start by considering which of the two

pieces is the more active. We should almost never exchange the more active piece for one that is less active, even though ultimately the deciding factor should be the resulting position and not the present position, which sometimes leads to brilliant paradoxes. Remember that this third rule is connected to the first two about exchanging queens. A piece exchange does not usually have such strong implications as a queen exchange, and so the first two rules are not so important with other pieces, and the third rule will suffice here.

Santiago García Giménez (2044)

Marcos Lianes García (2221)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2016



In this case, the most active minor piece of the four on the board is the knight on d5. Therefore, the correct exchange is for the white bishop to take the knight on f6, in order to convert the d5-knight into an **unopposed piece**.

27. ♞xe7?

It is often difficult to understand what leads a strong player to make such a decision, exchanging his best piece for his opponent's worst one, but in this case there are some clues: the weakness at d6 seems more serious and the black king more exposed.

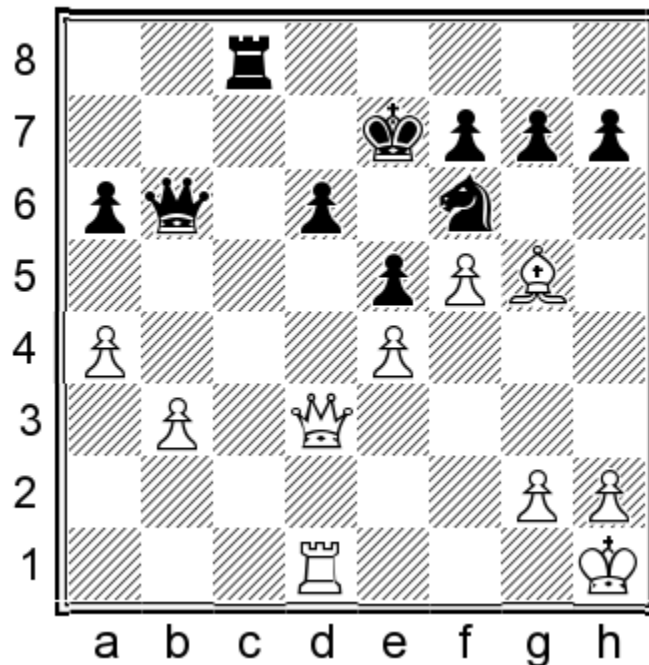
27.♙xf6 ♜xf6 28.b4 gives White an advantage which can be considered decisive. The knight cannot be challenged and, in addition, White has a strong passed pawn, which, at the very least, will keep the black pieces busy while White prepares other blows.

27...♔xe7!

White was not expecting this, or else he underestimated it. Now, Black's king is left rather exposed, but he defends the weakness (d6), and his counterplay on the c-file compensates almost completely.

Instead, 27...♔xe7? simply failed to 28.♔xa6!.

28.♔d3 ♜b6



29.h3

29.b4 is not dangerous now, for example 29...h6! (29...♔xb4 is also playable) and White has to make a decision about his bishop: 30.♗h4 (after 30.♗xf6+ gxf6 Black's active major pieces compensate for the weaknesses, the main ones being defended by the king) 30...♕d4 31.♕e2 ♖c4 and Black has the initiative. White must be alert to maintain the equilibrium, avoiding fresh piece exchanges: 32.♗d2! ♕d4 with equality.

29...♖c6!

An excellent decision, liberating the queen. Black has no problems. 29...h6 was again also correct: 30.♗xf6+ gxf6 with equal play.

30.♕b1 ♕b4 31.♖c1 ♖xc1+ 32.♕xc1

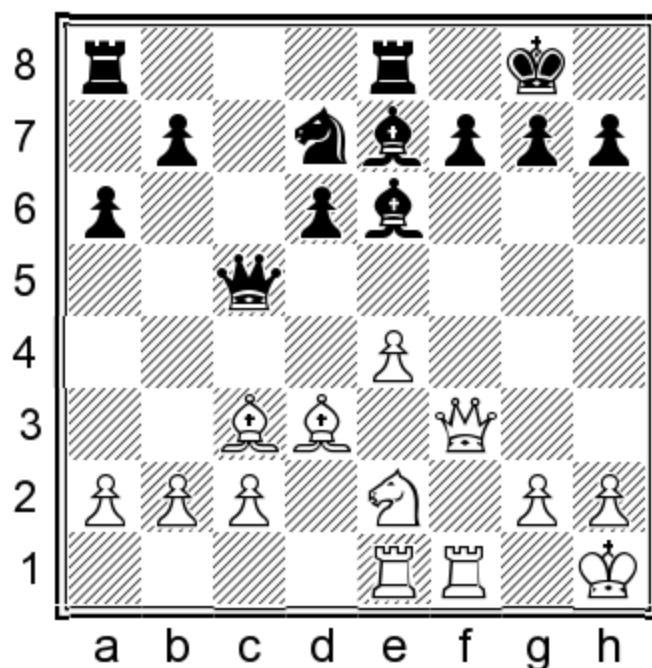
Again, Black has no problems.

The next example is very instructive for our topic because both players, within a few moves, have to think about a series of piece exchanges, and their play is a mixture of good moves and errors.

Mikel Ortega López (2088)

Oriol Panadés Catarineu (1828)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2014



In the struggle for key squares, exchanging the appropriate pieces can be the main tool.

19...♔g5?

It seems that Black thought he was worse, but he should have reasoned like this: White's best piece is the c3-bishop. Black should exchange it with 19...♘f6!±, also gaining control of the e5-square for his knight: 20.♙xf6 (20.♔g3?! is worse due to 20...♘e5!, taking further advantage of the exchanging operation; Black provokes not only a favourable piece exchange but also a favourable transformation of the pawn structure after 21.♙xe5 dxe5±) 20...♘xf6 (if Black had an extra tempo he could seriously consolidate his advantage with another exchange: ...♙e6-g4xe2, and then install the proud knight on e5) 21.h3! (the immediate 21.e5? does not work due to 21...dxe5 22.♔xb7?? ♘d5 and the queen is trapped) and now Black has various plans to consolidate a small advantage: pressure on the e4-pawn with 21...♙d7! or occupation of the e5-square with the knight or a major piece.

In any case, observing the bishop on d3 is sufficient to understand that it is Black who stands a little better.

20. ♖f4!

Now, on the other hand, White threatens to exchange the e6-bishop, leaving the light squares in the black camp weak.

20... ♗e5

20... ♖f8 21. ♖xe6 fxe6 22. ♔h3± , attacking the weak light squares.

20... ♗f6 21. ♖xe6 fxe6 22.e5! ♖xe5 23. ♔xb7± .

21. ♗xe5!

Black's knight was his most active piece. It was correct to exchange it, after checking that Black could not improve his structure by taking with the pawn because of the other exchange.

21... ♔xe5

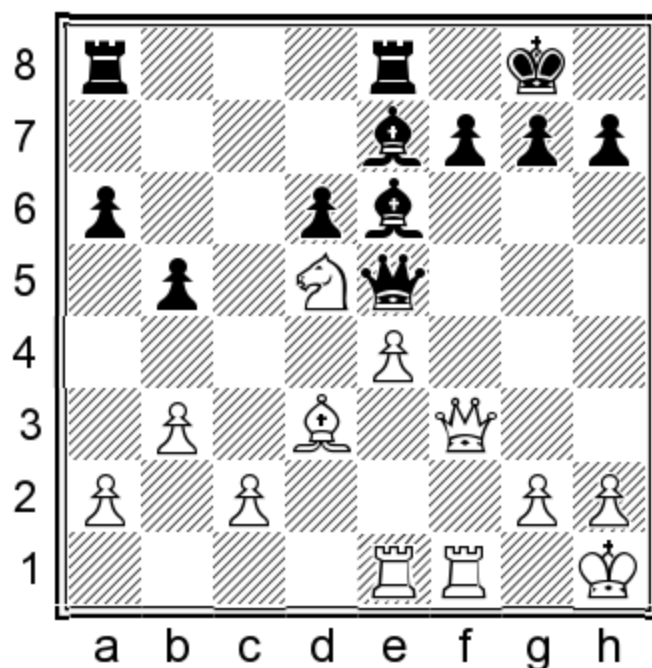
Not 21... dxe5?! 22. ♖xe6 fxe6 23. ♔f7+ with advantage to White.

22.b3?

White fails to complete his series of exchanges. 22. ♖xe6! would have led to a position with opposite-coloured bishops: 22... fxe6 (22... ♔xe6? 23.e5! – this move is difficult to see – 23... dxe5 24. ♔e4! g6 25. ♗c4 and White wins) 23. ♔f7+ ♔h8 24. ♖e3 and White creates various threats with this rook lift: 24... ♗f6 25. ♖h3 and it is impossible to prevent ♔g6.

22...b5 23. ♖d5?!

23. ♖xe6= remained the best option.



23...♗xd5?

Finally this piece exchange is the last and most serious error in this series. Although the d5-knight is White's strongest piece, with this exchange, Black loses the defender of f7 and radically activates the d3-bishop, which was White's most passive piece and is now unopposed on the light squares.

23...♗d8! was best, activating the bishop and threatening 24... ♗xd5; Black has no problems, for example 24.♖d1 ♗xd5 25.exd5 ♕e7, followed by 26...♗b6 with an edge.

24.exd5

Now there is no good defence of f7.

24...♕f6 25.♕h5?

Forgetting to pay attention to the opponent's resources (see Chapter 12), and allowing a move which lets Black continue his resistance.

25.♕h3! was much better, forcing 25...♕h6 26.♕d7 (26.♕xh6 is also quite good) 26...♖f8 27.♕c6 (threatening 28.♖xe7) 27...♕g5 28.♖f5 and wins.

25...g6! 26.♖xf6 gxh5 27.♖f5

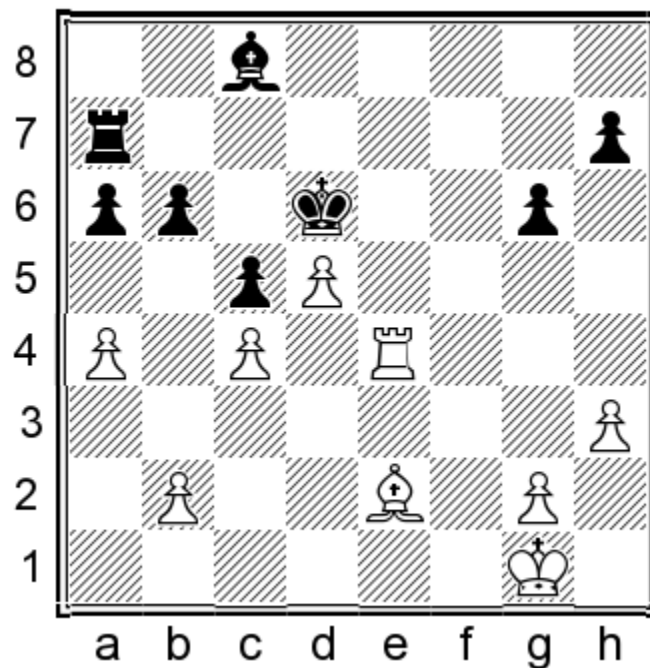
White still has a clear advantage.

When each player has only two pieces left, it is essential to be clear about which one it is appropriate to exchange. Sometimes, it might not matter, but it can also be decisive.

Gerard Anyo Pla (2182)

Markel Vesga Izeta (2114)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2022



This ending can be won in many ways, but in the coming moves, White's poor exchanging policy causes him to lose all chance of victory.

36.b3?

Sometimes prophylaxis or improvement of the structure is unnecessary. This move loses a tempo and allows Black to activate his bishop and save it from being exchanged by force. Taking into

account the colour of the squares of the blocked pawns, White should have exchanged the bishop. With only the rooks on the board, he would win easily: 36.♖g4! ♗xg4 37.hxg4 b5 38.b3.

36...♗f5!

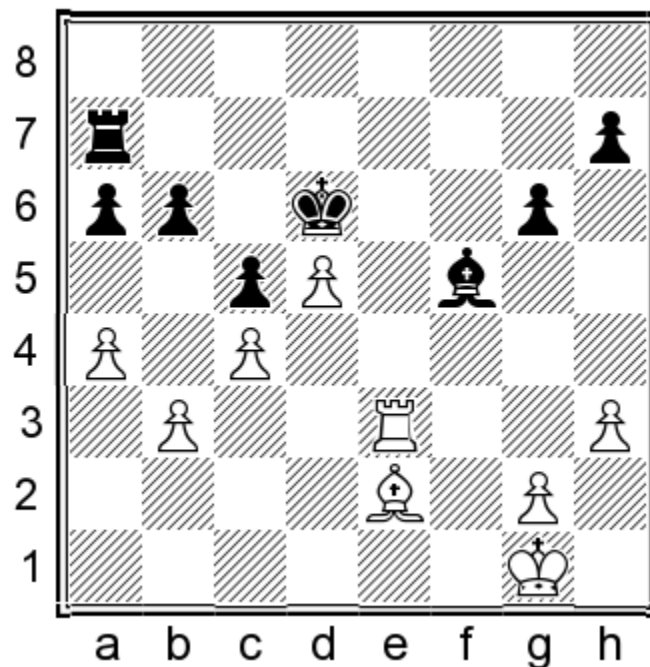
Now the black bishop will dodge the exchange and will create as much of a nuisance as possible.

The immediate 36...♖e7 would have been a serious error because after the exchange of rooks with 37.♖xe7 ♔xe7, White plays 38.♗g4!, forcing either the exchange or the eternal inactivity of the black bishop.

Now we have arrived at Exercise 2.

37.♖e3?

With this move, White completes his bad policy and is condemned to exchange rooks. Instead, 37.♖f4! avoided the rook exchange and kept an important advantage.



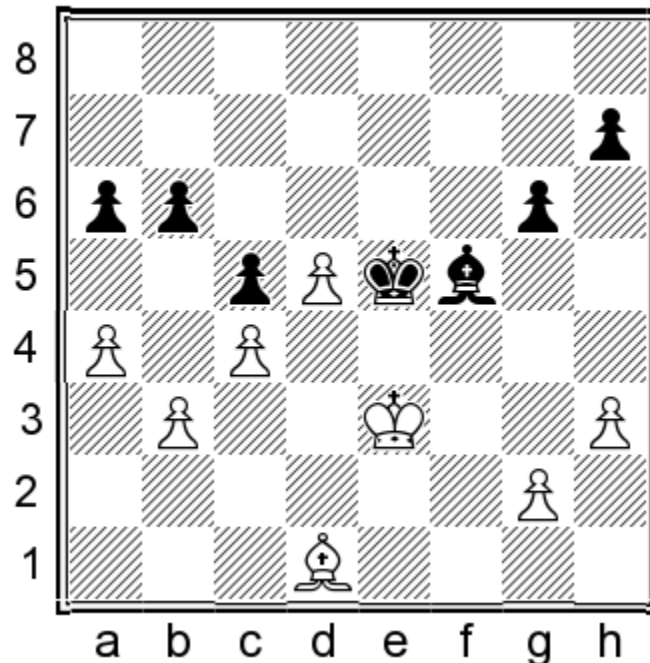
37...♖e7!

Black is attentive and forces the exchange of rooks.

38.♖xe7 ♔xe7

Now the passed pawn has little value because it cannot cross the dark squares. The white king will not find a way in because the black pieces are well coordinated and block the way through.

39.♙d1 ♔d6 40.♖f2 ♔e5 41.♖e3



41...g5!

Placing the kingside pawns on dark squares is unnecessary, but it makes everything more comfortable.

42.♔d2 h6 43.♙c2 ♙d7 44.♖e3 ♙c8 45.♙d3 ♙d7 46.♙e2 ♙f5 47.♖d2 a5!

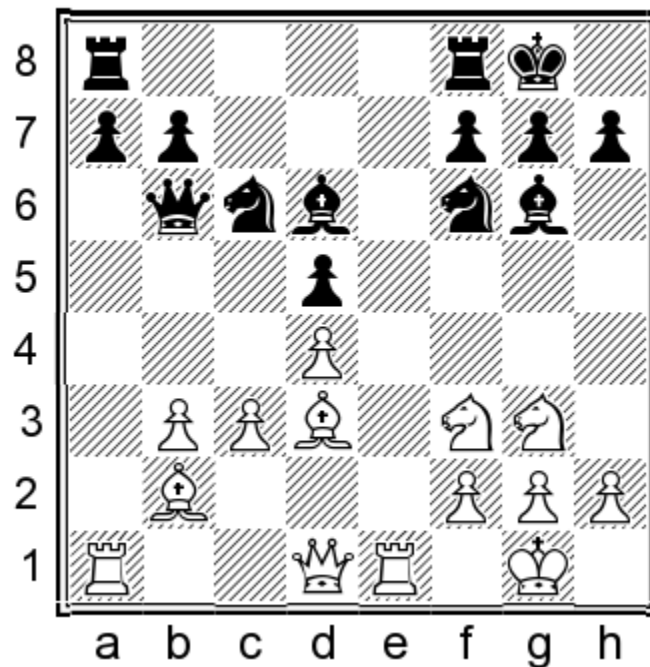
Correct; all Black's pawns are on dark squares, the bishop controls the light squares and the king is in the middle, blocking the way. The game went on for a further 60 moves but finished in a draw. In the next example, we are going to compare the activity of the pieces during the course of various exchange operations.

In the next example, we are going to compare the activity of the pieces during the course of various exchange operations.

Ana Redondo Benavente (1706)

Julio Suarez Gómez (2307)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2014



White is a little better, but a series of poor exchanging decisions now causes a gradual deterioration of her position:

16. ♖xg6?

This exchange only improves Black's options, as it limits the activity of the g3-knight. In contrast, 16. ♘f5! was the correct move, when Black cannot avoid the exchange of this knight for one of his bishops, for example:

- A) 16... ♖ad8? 17. ♘xd6 ♖xd6 18. ♕a3+-;
- B) 16... ♕c7? 17. ♕a3+-;
- C) 16... ♕xf5 17. ♕xf5±;

D) 16...♖fd8 17.♘3h4 ♘f8 18.♘xg6 hxg6 19.♘e3± . Now, the white pieces have improved their activity in comparison with the initial position.

16...hxg6!

The exchanged pieces were similar, but now the g3-knight is worse than before.

17.♘e5?

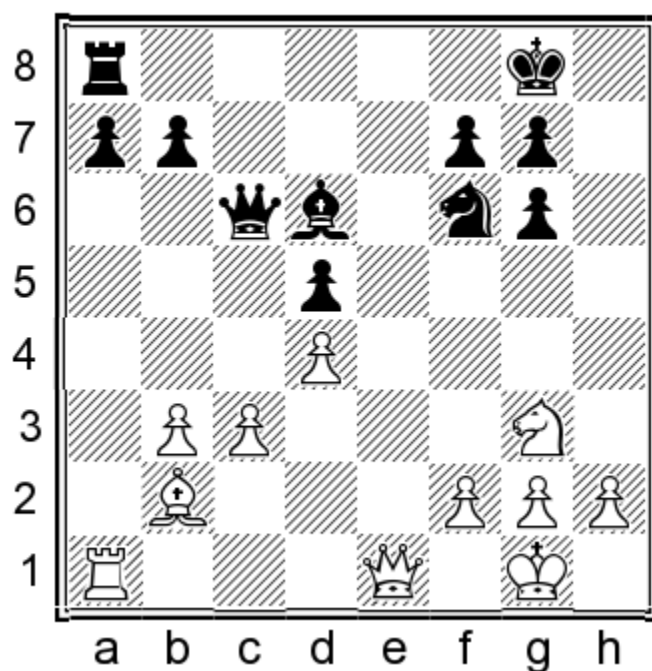
Preparing further exchanges is not favourable either. Instead, 17.♘f1!, relocating the knight (see **Error 26**), which has lost some activity as a result of the earlier exchange, keeps the balance.

17...♖fe8

Attacking the e5-point and more or less forcing the exchange.

18.♘xc6 ♖xe1+ 19.♙xe1 ♙xc6

Here 19...♙xb3! was interesting and perhaps even better, but that move is dependent on tactics.



White has exchanged three pieces, but they were her best ones, which are usually the easiest ones to exchange. It is worthwhile

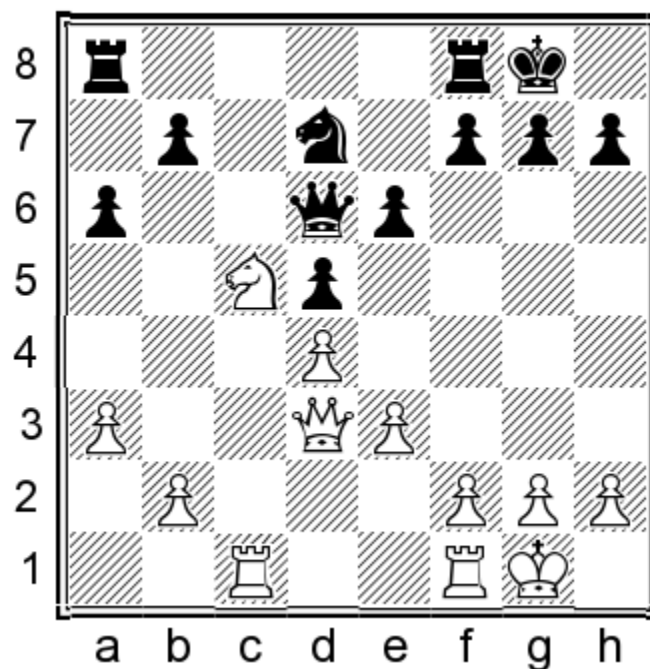
going back and looking at the position three moves earlier to confirm this. The evaluation of the position has gone from clearly favourable to White to clearly favourable to Black.

In the following example, Black seems to play well because he exchanges his opponent's most active piece, but it must be remembered that what is important when making a decision is the resulting position, not the present one.

Javier Habans Aguerrea (2181)

Darío Arce González (1371)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U12 2020



Exercise 3

White has a very small advantage, which Black can neutralise through careful play. But if he does not do so, his problems can rapidly increase. We could say White's threats are twofold: taking

the b7-pawn or dominating the c-file. Passive moves are ugly. If he can, Black should fight for the c-file without directly defending the b-pawn. We shall look at several possibilities:

17...♞xc5?

The knight exchange seems forced, but it concedes the file, making the white rooks more active, with a small advantage but one which is more difficult to eliminate.

Defending the pawn also seems to concede the file; for example, 17...♞ab8?! 18.♞c3 ♞fc8 19.♞fc1± .

17...♞fc8! was the correct way to contest the file and rely on the fact that after 18.♞xb7 ♞b6 Black will regain the pawn without any problems. Instead, after 18.♞c3 ♞xc5 19.♞c2 (applying some pressure) 19...b6 20.b4 ♞ab8 21.♞c1 a5 there seems to be no advantage for White, whichever way he recaptures on c5.

18.♞xc5 ♞ac8 19.♞fc1 ♞d7 20.♞c3 ♞xc5 21.♞xc5

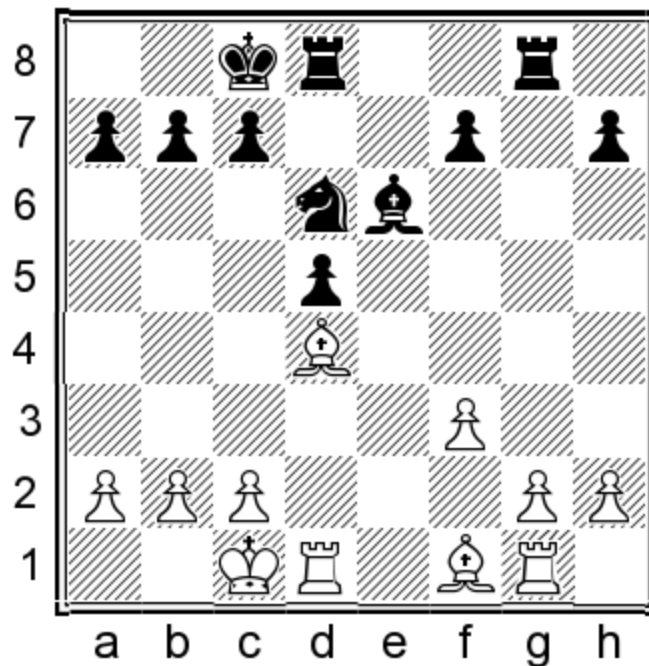
And White has taken complete control of the file, which he exploited to eventually win the game.

The topic of the pair of bishops can be approached as a question of material advantage; otherwise, the evaluation of its activity should be made with a long-term view.

Adrian Martínez Fernández (2381)

Ricardo Rodríguez Del Cerro (2041)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18. 2018



16. ♖d3

This is a quite logical move, although certainly not the best in view of our following analysis.

16... ♜f5

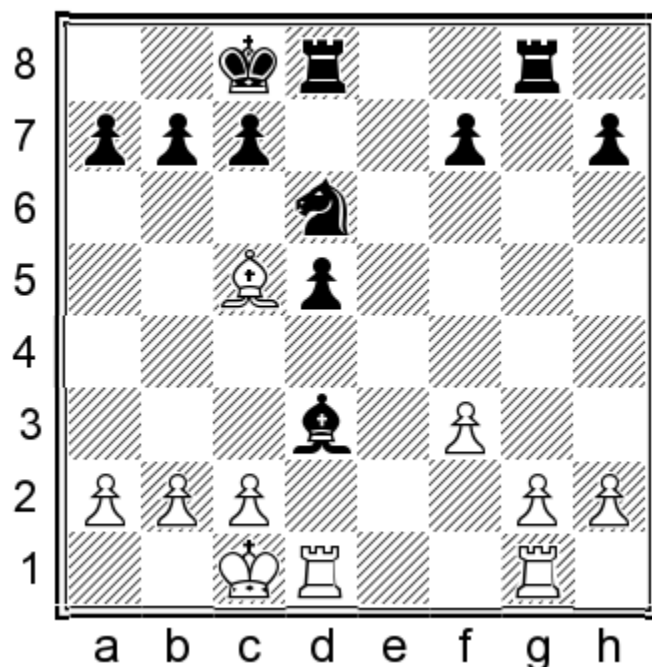
Black reacts logically too, trying to eliminate the pair of bishops and leave White a difficult decision to make.

17. ♜c5?

With this move, which results from an error in calculation, White loses the advantage. But in any case, it was difficult to undo the previous move, although it would be a little easier if we consider that losing the pair of bishops is the equivalent of losing material. The best move was 17. ♜f1!. One should rarely give up an active position in order to avoid an exchange, but in this case, White's main advantage is the pair of bishops, and White can assess correctly that his opponent's temporary activity will not create any problems for him and that his light-squared bishop will soon

become active again. All this reflection is based on the quite annoying threat to the black d5-pawn; for example, 17...♖de8 (17...b6? 18.♙f6 ♖de8 19.♖xd5; 17...♖d7 18.g4 ♙g6 19.h4 h6 20.♙h3±) 18.g4 ♙e6 (18...♙g6?! 19.♙f2, attacking d5) 19.♙d3±.

17...♙xd3



18.♖xd3

Now White realised that the planned 18.♙xd6? ♙xc2 19.♖xd5? would fail to 19...♙g6! and thus he needed to settle for equality. Nevertheless, he later won the game.

18...b6 19.♙f2 c6 20.♖e3 ♖de8 21.b3 ♖xe3 22.♙xe3 f5 23.g3 ♔d7 24.♔d2 h5 25.a4 ♞c8 26.a5 bxa5?

26...c5! was better.

27.♖a1

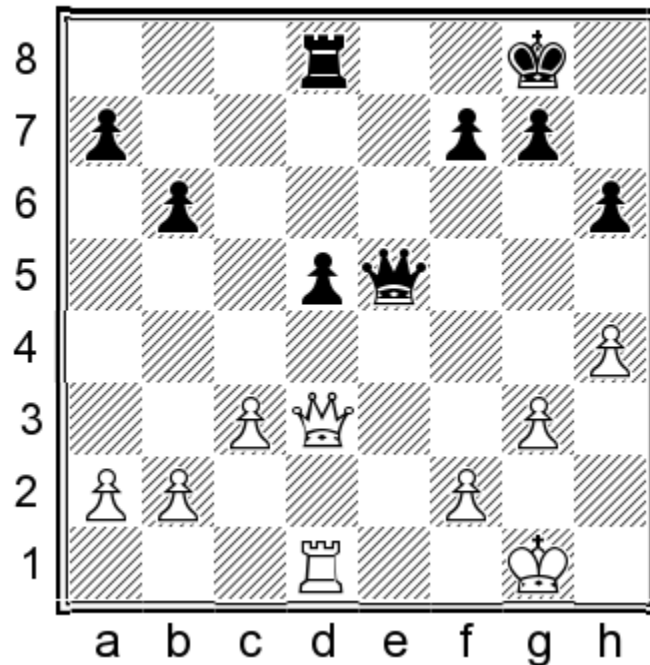
And White was the eventual winner.

Now, we are going to look at a key example of the idea that what matters is not what is exchanged but what remains on the board.

Pedro Ginés Esteo (2115)

Alejandro Cuellar Montes (1546)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U12. 2015

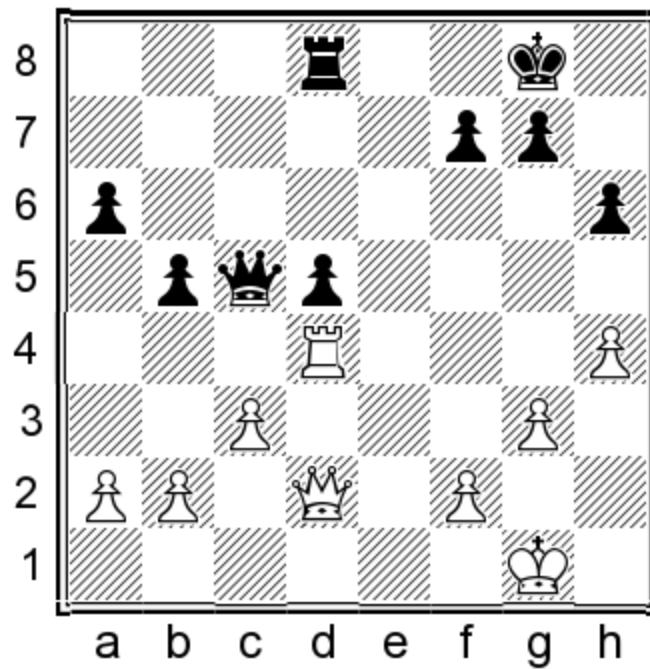


White has a comfortable advantage because of the isolated d-pawn.

32. ♔d4?

The typical error. White seeks to exchange pieces, but this makes Black's defence easier. It is a well-known principle that the best way to exploit an isolated pawn is with major pieces (with the queen present), because this permits a frontal attack and the use of pins and makes defending with the king more difficult (see Korchnoi-Karpov, Game 9 of their 1981 match in Merano).

32. ♔f3! is the natural move in order to continue with ♖d4, ♔d1 and eventually c4: 32... ♔d6 33. ♖d4 ♔c5 34. ♔d1 b5 35. ♔d2! (35.a4?! bxa4 (35...a6 36. ♔d2 ♔h8 37. axb5 axb5 38. b3±) 36. ♖xa4 ♖b8 with counterplay) 35...a6



analysis diagram

36.a4! ♔c6 (Black can do little more than wait and not facilitate White's initiative) 37.axb5 axb5 38.h5 ♖d7 39.b3 ♖c7 (if 39...♖d8, then 40.c4!, winning the isolated pawn) 40.♖xd5 ♔xc3 41.♔e2!.

The pawn is going to fall and the presence of the queens increases Black's problems in view of the weaker position of his king.

32.♔a6! was also good; for example, 32...♔c7 33.♖d4.

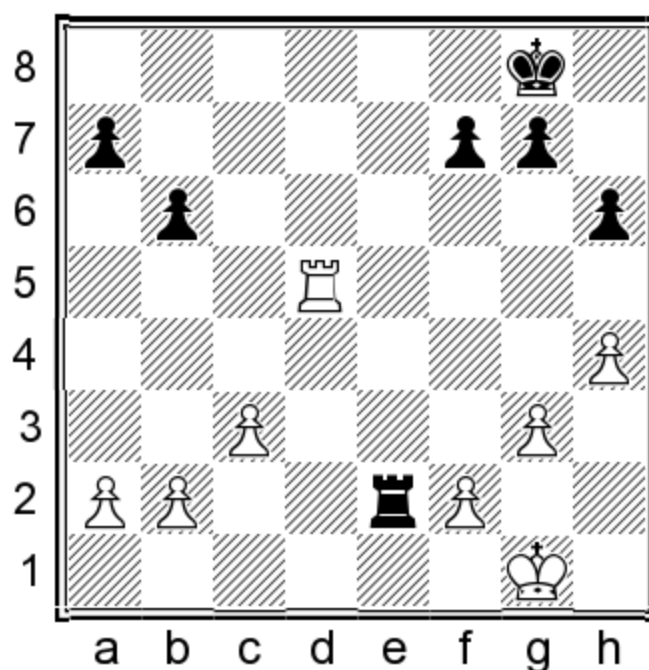
32...♖e8?

Black takes no advantage at all of the opportunity offered to him by the exchange of queens. After 32...♔xd4! 33.♖xd4 he could bring the king closer to the defence and would have had no problems:

33...♔f8 34.c4 ♔e7 35.cxd5 (35.♖xd5 ♖xd5 36.cxd5 ♔d6)

35...♔d6 and White's extra pawn has no value.

33.♔xd5 ♔xd5 34.♖xd5 ♖e2



35.♖b5!

And although Black is able to resist to some extent thanks to his active rook, in the end White won.

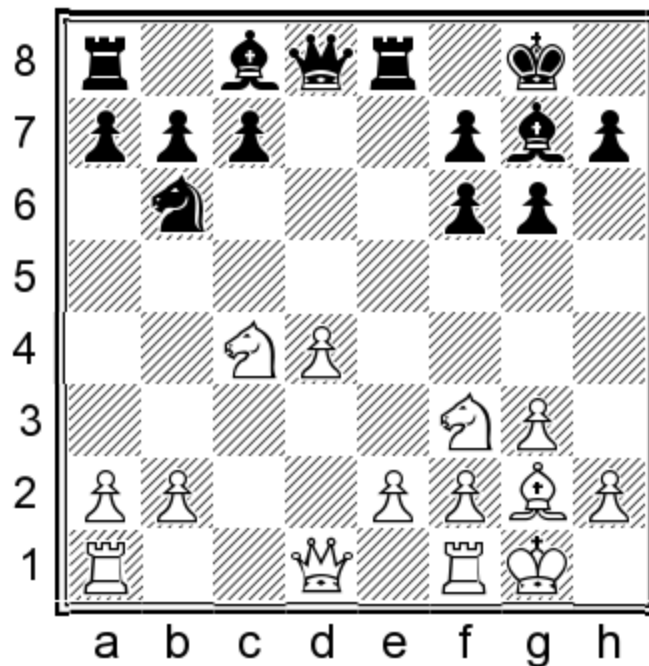
Error 4 - Exchanging pieces and worsening the structure

Another aspect that we need to be careful about when we exchange a piece is the structural change that takes place if the recapture is done by a pawn. In that case, two **irreversible** factors come together (a piece exchange and a pawn move), making the decision doubly important. In many cases, the two factors are in opposition (for example, activity is improved but the structure is worsened), making it more difficult for us to decide. There are also cases where both factors go against the exchange, but despite that, it goes ahead.

Francisco Orantes Taboada (2138)

Alexandre Ventura Bolet (2087)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16. 2015



The position is difficult to evaluate. Nevertheless, White has at least a momentary initiative.

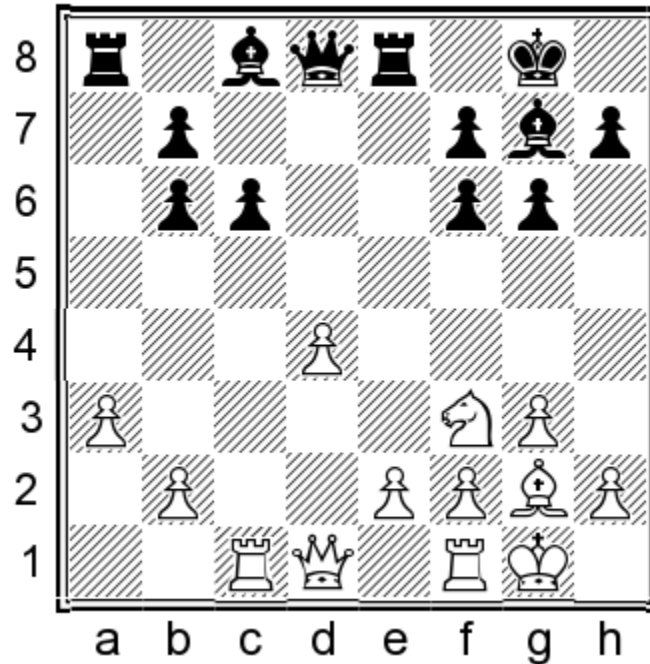
11. ♖xb6?!

The white knight was a little more active than the black one, but it was under attack. The main problem with this exchange is that it improves the black structure. The b6-pawn will control the c5-square and the a8-rook is activated at no cost. In general, it is good for a rook's pawn to move to the knight's file, because it controls two squares there. This causes some to consider that: **in the opening and in the middlegame, the rook's pawn is worth less than the others**; some authors value it as low as half a point, and by common consensus it is worth 0.7.

Instead, 11. ♞a5! would have kept the knight in a very active position.

11...axb6 12.a3 c6 13. ♖c1

Black has a rather more comfortable position, with several interesting moves, but the white position is solid and it would be too much to say that he is clearly worse.



13...f5

Better was 13...♘f8!+, with the idea of ...♘d6 and ...b6-b5-b4, a very flexible plan.

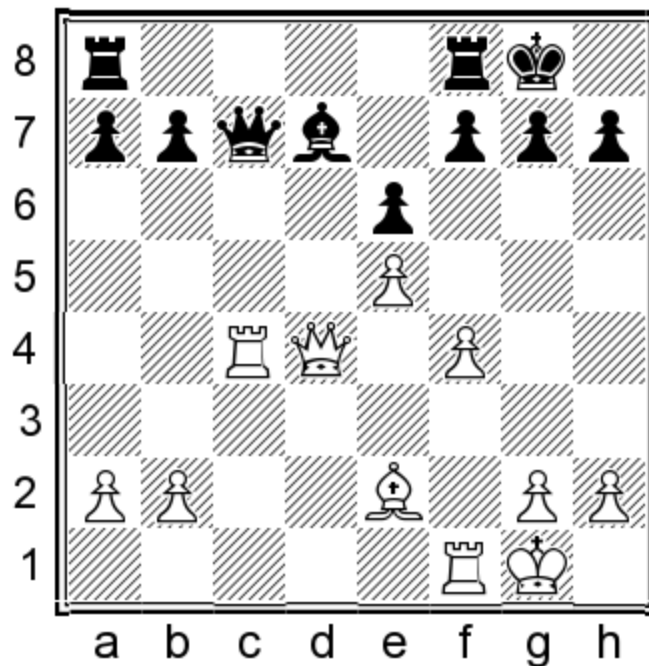
14.e3 ♘e6 15.♙c2

And once again, Black had an interesting plan beginning with 15...g5.

Marta García Martín (2166)

Mario Balbuena Fuentes (2265)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2015



18...♙b6?

The queen exchange is logical for Black, because White's queen is more active and his pawns are more advanced. The problem is that the structural change is not favourable for him.

18...♘c6! has the problem of the pin, but that is fairly easily solved: 19.♙f3 ♜fd8! 20.♙e3 ♙a5 21.♘xc6 bxc6 22.♜xc6 ♙xa2 with equality.

19.♙xb6 axb6

In this case, the pawn moving onto the b-file is not favourable, because the pawns are doubled and can be attacked frontally.

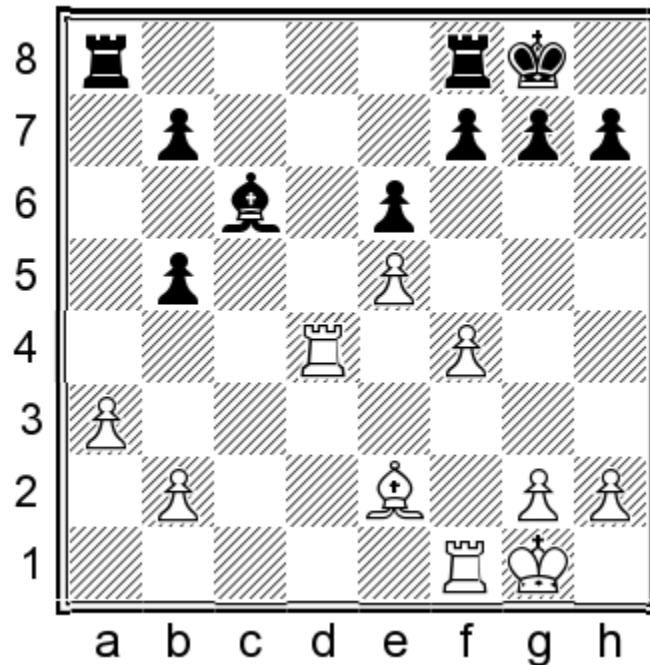
20.♜d4!

An important intermediate move, also preventing ...♘b5 and ...♜xa2.

20...♘c6 21.a3 b5?!

White's advantage is small, and Black could have kept things under control by playing 21...♜a5!, which prepares ...g5 and makes it

possible to answer 22.♖b4 with 22...♜c5!, but instead he gives White a chance to increase the advantage.



And now after

22.♖fd1!

, instead of 22.♙f3?!=, which was played in the game,

22...♜a4 23.g3 h6 24.♙f2 g5 25.♙e3

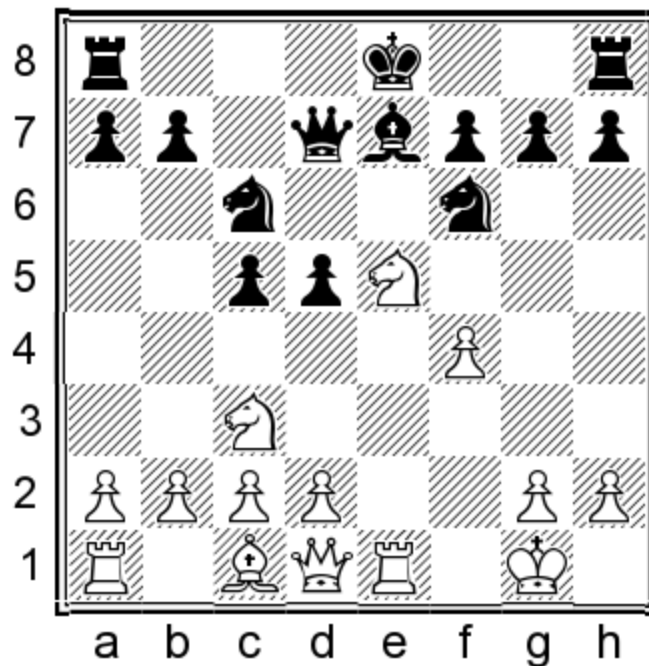
, it would have been hard for Black to hold the position.

It often happens, and sometimes with justification, that the piece exchange which improves the opponent's structure takes place out of a desire to eliminate an attacking piece.

Daniel Riu Lopez (1737)

Andrea Jausas López (1598)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2014



Black stands well, but the knight on e5 is annoying.

10...Nxe5?

This exchange modifies the structure in the opponent's favour. It was preferable to lose a tempo by moving the queen: 10...Qc7!

11.Nxc6 Qxc6. This is better than worsening the structure with 11...bxc6, given that White is unable to hinder Black from castling. 12.d3 (12.Qe2? 0-0!) 12...d4 13.Ne4 (13.Nb1 Nd5, followed by castling, which can be done on either side) 13...0-0 was equal.

11.fxe5!

The clumsy pawn on f4 now becomes a headache for Black on e5.

11...Ng8?

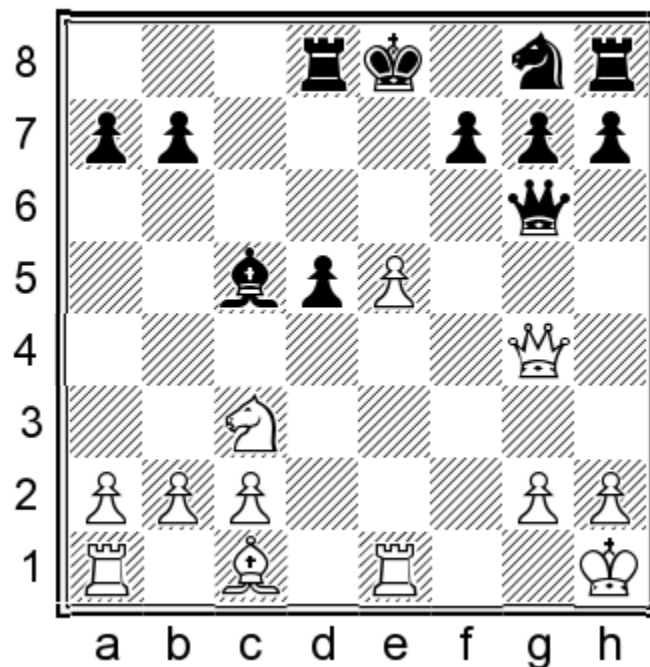
A very ugly move. It will take a long time for the knight to get back into play. Black should have given up a pawn to gain some freedom of movement with 11...Ne4!? 12.Nxe4 dxe4 13.Qxe4 0-0 14.d3 f5 ±.

12.d4 Qc6 13.Qh1 Rd8 14.dxc5?

Here 14.♔g4! was much stronger.

14...♗xc5 15.♔g4?! ♔g6

White has maintained the advantage from the moment that Black exchanged pieces.



16.♔xg6?

But now White returns the favour to his opponent with an error of the same kind: an exchange which also improves her structure. After this strangely parallel error, the game is equal again.

Much stronger was 16.♔a4+!, which maintained some advantage; for example, 16...♔c6 17.♔b3 ♖e7 18.♗g5 0-0 19.♖ad1.

16...hxg6

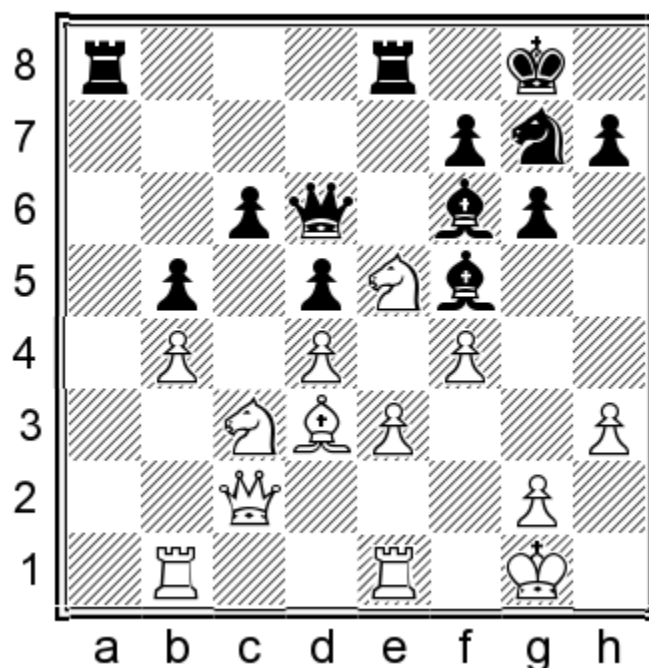
The black rook is activated and the knight can come back into play.

Although it is possible to compensate for a bad structure with greater piece activity, it is advisable to be prudent with decisions of this kind, since structural damage is permanent.

Juan Plazuelo Pascual

Jose Luis Muñoz Ávila

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2014



The knight on e5 is a nuisance, but it is a clear example of an ‘entrenched’ piece which should not be exchanged because the exchange is structurally unfavourable to Black. It is a strategic defensive problem: exchanging the more annoying piece is logical, but when this cannot be done, we have to move on to the second option: ejecting it. If neither of these is feasible, we are left with the third option: living with it, even if only for a few moves.

21...♙xe5?

Black cannot withstand the pressure. He should have played:

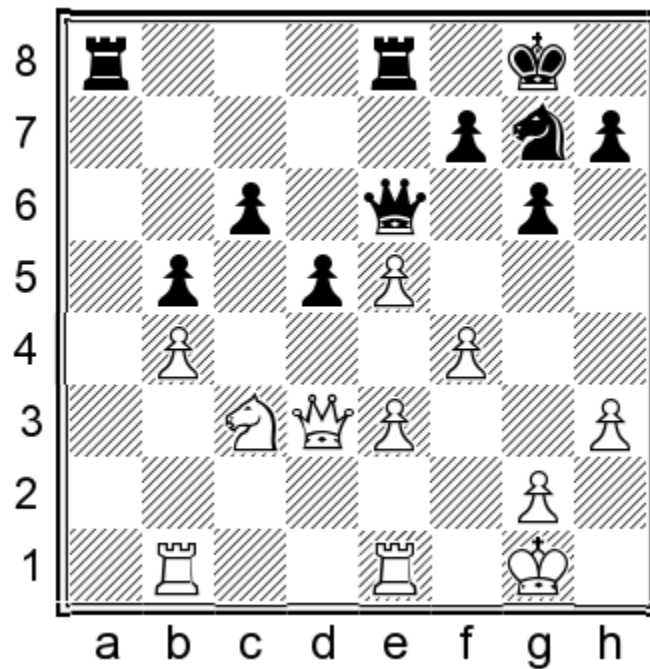
A) 21...♙xd3, which really is a favourable exchange because it makes the g7-knight more active: 22.♔xd3 ♘h4 23.♖e2 f6! and once the knight has been ejected, Black stands better;

B) Or the immediate 21...♘h4! 22.♖e2 f6+ (22...♙g3!? might be more precise).

22.dxe5!

Creating a strong point for the knight on d4. Black was probably rather expecting the capture to be with the f-pawn, which is more common in response to the capture of a knight on e5, but here it was not as strong.

22...♙xd3 23.♚xd3 ♔e6



24.e4

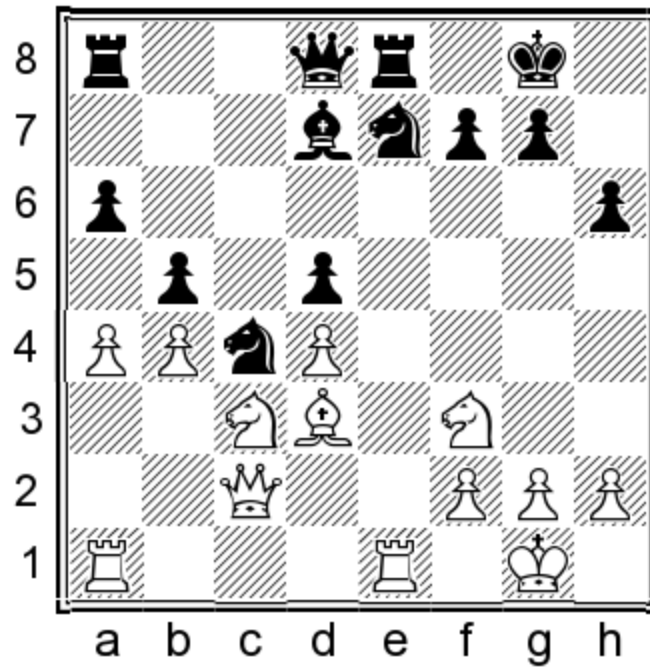
Here 24.♘e2! was slightly stronger, exploiting the weakened squares.

24...dxe4 25.♘xe4±

Pau Juan Bartroli (2179)

Jose Manuel Nieves Cabanes (2117)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2014



Once again, we find ourselves in a scenario where an outposted knight annoys us, and the temptation to exchange it is hard to resist. Even more so in this case, as the option to eject it does not exist.

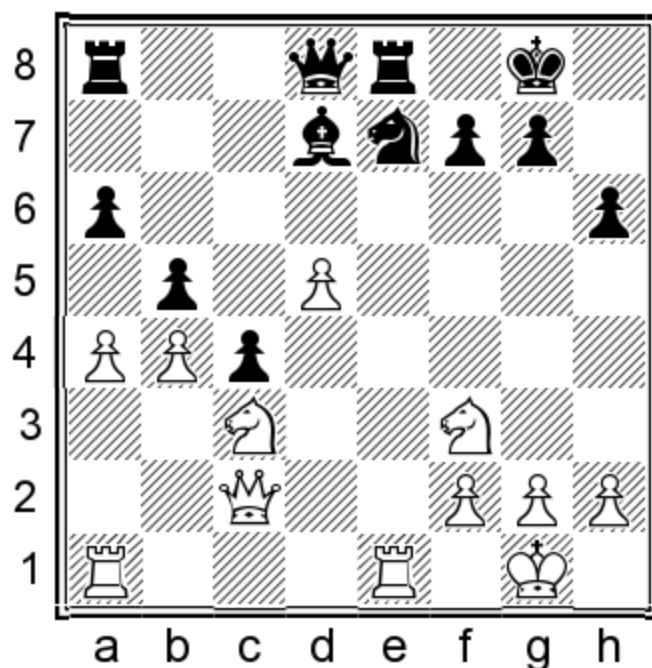
23. ♖xc4?

It's uncomfortable, but it was necessary to live with the c4-knight; for example, 23. axb5 axb5 24. ♖xa8 ♔xa8 25. ♞e5 and White also has a knight on e5 – chances are equal.

23...dxc4

This is a sad ending to a minority attack. It is White who is left with a weak structure and the black bishop grows stronger.

24.d5?!



And now with

24...bxa4!

Black would have stood better. Instead, in the game, Black played 24...♗f5?.

25.♖ad1!

Even worse would be 25.♘xa4?! ♘xd5! and Black wins an important pawn.

25...♞c8

In order to blockade on d6.

How to avoid Errors 3 and 4

In the first place, I want to emphasise the following idea, which has already been mentioned: **an exchange of pieces is rarely completely innocuous; it almost always benefits one side or the other.**

Compared with **Errors 1 and 2**, there are a few differences. **Errors 3 and 4** usually have less impact on the game; that makes them

more insidious and likely to pass unnoticed. If we want to detect them, we must apply a more discriminating filter. We must get used to considering each piece exchange as if it were a problem in itself and weigh up the advantages and disadvantages. Remember that although many exchanges may be mistaken, they can be beneficial for the other side. In this case, we might be ‘the other side’.

Recommended books: as well as the one mentioned for **Errors 1 and 2**, we will add *To exchange or not?* by Eduardas Rozentalis.

Error 5 - Exchanging unfavourably with miscellaneous material

The postulate of the value of material, which is absolutely essential in the first stage of learning chess, is one of the crudest of all those included in ‘basic-level strategy’ (see the introduction) and becomes a brake on a player’s progress. There are many situations in which it is applied badly. One of these, which is complex but very interesting to study, is when the material is more or less equal in value, but the ‘teams’ that make up the value consist of different pieces. The values of the pieces are more distorted in such cases, which will inevitably affect exchanges. We shall look at some examples of material imbalances that are most frequent.

We begin with a case where two pieces are facing a rook.

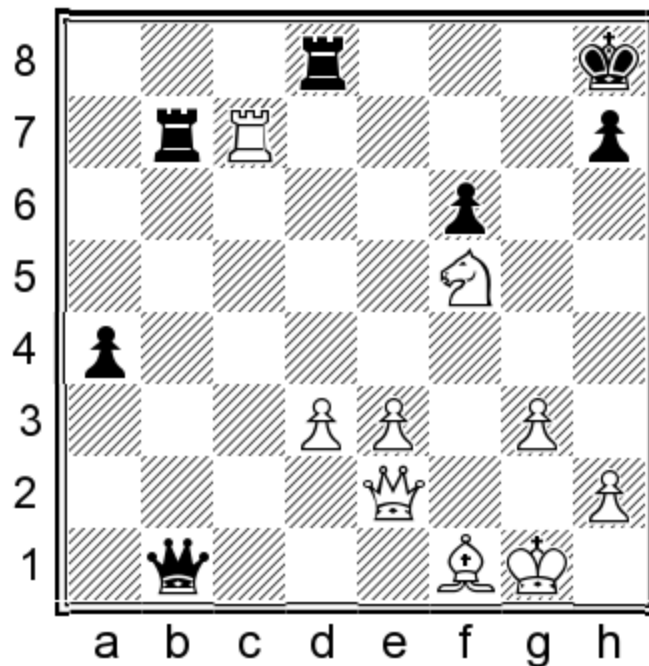
Two pieces are far superior to a rook in the middlegame but less so in the endgame, and even less if the side with the rook has a passed pawn.

Hence, the side with the two pieces against the rook should avoid exchanging major pieces. This is aptly illustrated in the following example.

Gorka Argandoña Salinas (2115)

Iñigo Ortín Blanco (1994)

Pamplona 2015



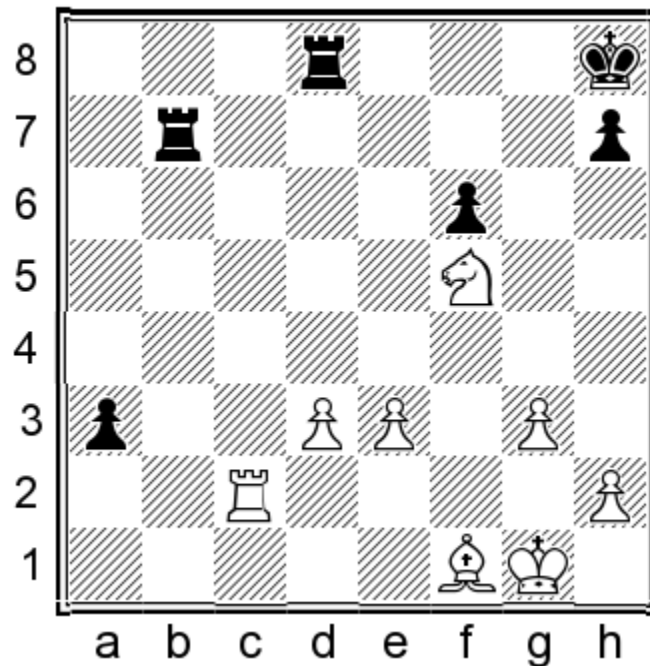
In the diagram position White has a large material advantage: two pieces plus one pawn against the black rook. But the passed pawn on the a-file is very dangerous. The true evaluation of the position is unclear.

38. ♔c2?

The classic queen exchange is induced by having a material advantage. However, in this case, the attack on the king is more important. The queen must be supported by the minor pieces so these can be useful in the attack on the king, as they are quite clumsy in controlling passed pawns.

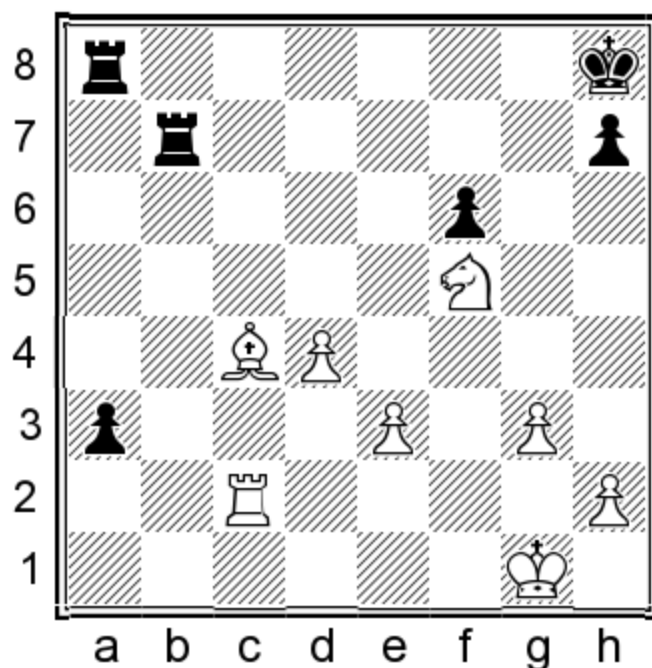
The strongest continuation must be 38. ♖c4!, in order to avoid exchanges and control the a-pawn: 38... ♖a7 (38... a3 39. ♖a4 ♕b3 40. ♕g4 a2 41. ♕e4 ♖bd7 42. ♕c6 ♖f7 43. ♕a6 and the dangerous pawn falls) 39. ♕g4 (threatening 40. ♖xa4) 39... ♕a1 40. d4 (to block the return of the black queen) 40... a3 41. ♕h4 ♖f8 (41... ♖f7 42. ♘d6 ♖xd6 43. ♖c8+ ♔g7 44. ♕g4+ ♔h6 45. ♖g8 ♖d5 46. ♕f4+ ♖g5 47. h4+-) 42. ♕xf6+ ♖xf6 43. ♖c8+, followed by mate.

38...♔xc2 39.♖xc2 a3!



After the queen exchange, there is no attack on the black king, and the rook's pawn takes centre stage. White has no advantage. The most likely outcome is that the white bishop will be given up for the a- pawn, leading to an inevitable draw.

40.d4 ♖a8 41.♗c4



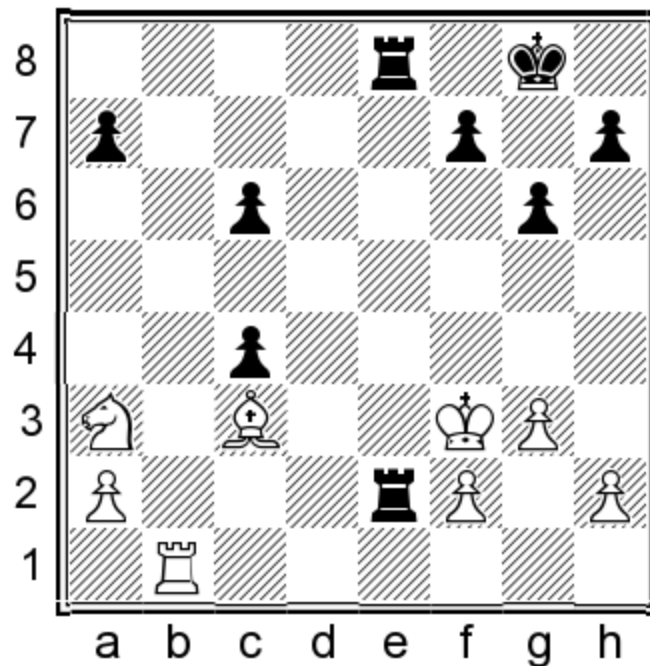
41...Rc7

Here 41...Rc7 would have caused White some difficulties, but after, for example, 42.d5 Rxc4 43.Rxc4 a2 White should have no problems drawing, thanks to his pawn superiority on the kingside: 44.Rc1 a1Q 45.Rxa1 Rxa1.

42.g4 Rc7 43.Nd6 a2 44.Rxa2 Rxa2 45.Bxa2 Rc1+ 46.Kf2 Rc2+ 47.Kf3 Rxa2

With an equal ending, similar to the one in the previous variation. Now, we shall look at an example where the piece to be exchanged is a rook.

Alejandro Perez García (2322)
Ángel Domínguez Fernández (1988)
 Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2015



In the struggle between a rook and one or two minor pieces, if a player has two rooks, exchanging one of them is in his interest. This exchange is of similar value to the win of a pawn.

25. ♖b2?

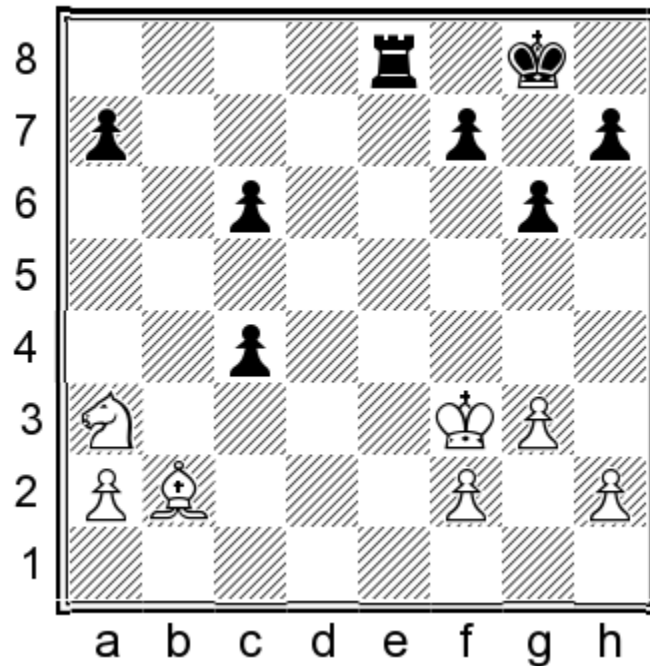
White radically rejects the above rule, probably due to some poorly calculated variation.

25. ♘xc4! was correct. Possibly, White was afraid of losing the a-pawn, or allowing Black's rooks to double on the second rank, but if 25... ♖xa2 (25... ♖c2 26. ♖b3 and the e8-rook cannot leave the back rank), then 26. ♕f6! prepares a strong attack, based on the coordination of the three white pieces and with the immediate threat of 27. ♘d6.

25... ♖2e4?

Black does not accept the gift; he would probably have been less suspicious if it had been a pawn or an exchange whose value was more familiar.

25...♖xb2! (the immediate 25...g5! is just as good) 26.♙xb2



analysis diagram

26...g5!, with the idea of 27... g4+, although there are other moves which should not lose: 27.h3 (27.♘xc4?! g4+ 28.♙f4 ♖e2⌘) 27...f5 28.♙f6 (28.g4?! ♖b8 29.♙e5 fxg4+ 30.hxg4 ♖b4; or 28.♘xc4 g4+!⌘) 28...h6 29.♘xc4 g4+ 30.hxg4 fxg4+ 31.♙f4 ♖e2 and Black is not going to lose.

And now White could have played 26.♙d2!, followed by 27.♖c2, and he would have a decisive advantage with the capture of the foremost c-pawn. Instead, he played

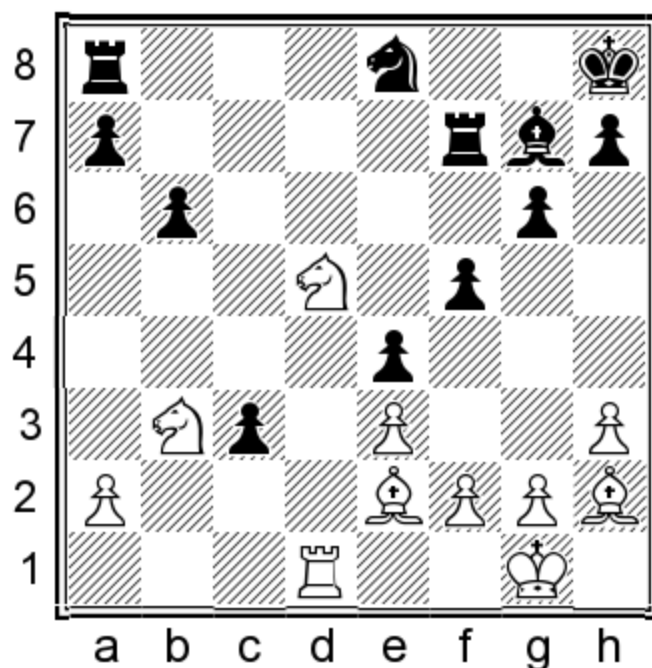
26.♖b4?!

but ended up winning in any case.

Francisco Piqueras Guardiola (2066)

Rubén Domingo Núñez (2272)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2016



Exercise 4

White has two pieces against the rook: a pair of bishops and very good knights. In these circumstances, Black's two extra pawns are not sufficient compensation. But in positions with this material relationship, it is important for the side with the two pieces to keep their last rook. From the material point of view, this can be considered equivalent to a pawn (or more). With this principle in mind, it is easy to find the best solution.

27...♖c8?

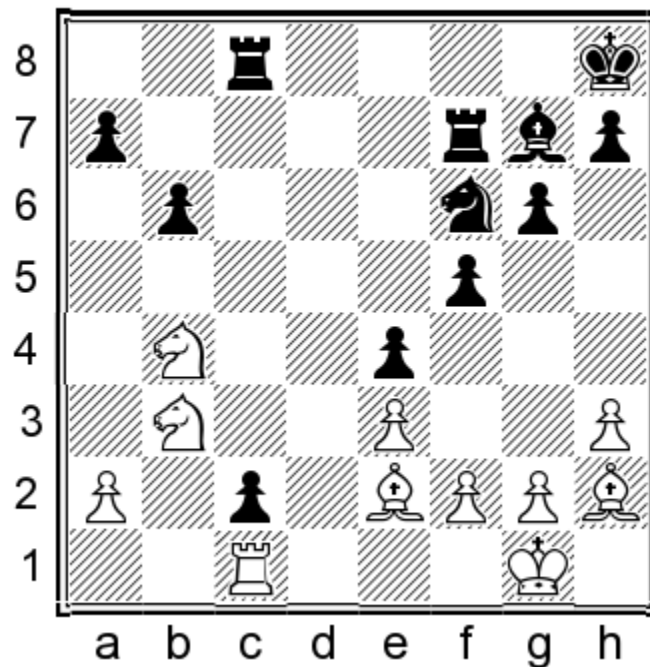
Black puts material considerations (keeping the c3-pawn) above the exchange of rooks. In a few moves we shall take stock. Instead, 27...♖d7! would have put pressure on the knight and, at the cost of the c3-pawn, forced the exchange of rooks. (The rook is the piece that suffers most from the effect of redundancy.) 28.♘xc3 ♖xd1+ 29.♘xd1 ♖c8! and White still has an enormous amount of work to do.

28.♖c1!

Threatening 29.♙a6, in order to win the c3-pawn without exchanging the rooks.

28...c2 29.♘b4! ♘f6?!

Here 29...a5 was better, practically forcing White to capture on c2, acquiescing to the exchange of rooks.



30.♖xc2?

Probably a miscalculation. Once again, the strategic error of exchanging pieces occurs, although in this case, with less dramatic results.

30.♙a6! was better, when the c2-pawn will fall without exchanging the rooks; for example, 30...♖d8 (the move which might have frightened White, because it threatens 31... ♖d1+; 30...♖c3?!

31.♙e5+-) 31.♘d4 ♖fd7 32.♖xc2 ♘d5 33.♘bc6 and after capturing the pawn, the white pieces begin to harass the black rooks from their active positions.

30...♖xc2 31.♘xc2 ♘d7 32.♙d6 ♙e5 33.♙a3

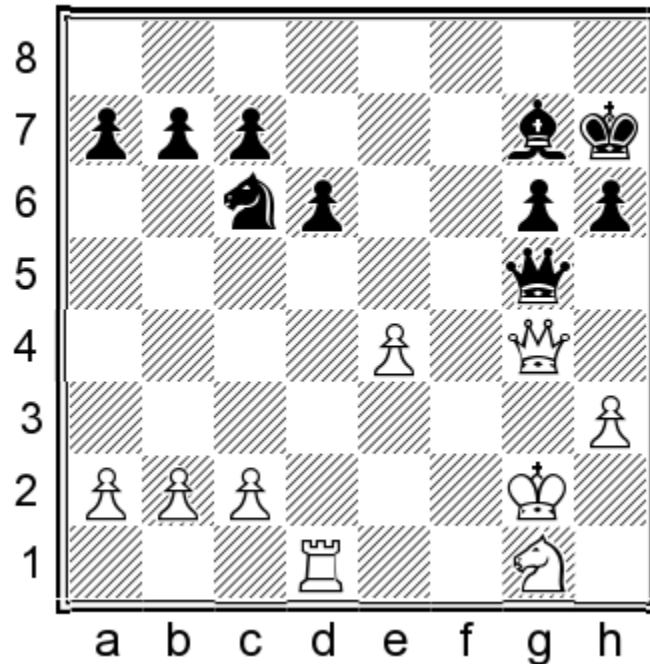
White's pieces are much more active than in the variation given at move 27, and we can consider the position as giving him a clear advantage, which he succeeded in converting into victory.

Let us now consider the case of one side being the exchange up. Here, too, the side that is the exchange down should avoid trading major pieces.

Leyre Abrisqueta Zudaire (1985)

Roger Bernardo Lopez (1985)

Roquetas de Mar 2023



Black is the exchange down for a pawn. There is sufficient compensation because of the good squares the black minor pieces can occupy.

28...♔xg4+?

Black decides to exchange the queens in order to win a pawn, which turns out to be a serious error. The side that is the exchange down should not exchange queens or rooks.

Better was 28...♔a5! 29.a3 ♔b5 30.b3 ♔c5, winning a second pawn.

29.hxg4 ♕xb2?!

Perhaps thinking that the rook on b7 will be trapped.

30.♖b1 ♕d4 31.♖xb7 ♕b6 32.♞e2

The knight sets off to free her rook.

32...♔g7 33.♞f4 ♔f6 34.♞d5+ ♔e5 35.♞xb6

And once the rook has been liberated, White will have a winning position, since the rook is far superior to the knight with pawns on both flanks.

How to avoid Error 5

This error is strongly related to the ones in Chapter 6, ‘Positional sacrifices’, so I recommend studying them jointly. It is also one of the mistakes some players make much more often than others, so it is important to establish the diagnosis.

In order to avoid it, it is necessary to have a good understanding of material imbalances. For that, two things are needed: study and experimentation.

For the second of these, I recommend being more resolute and experimenting more with your own games. Experimentation is a learning tool in all fields and can also be used in chess. For the first, I recommend reading the book *Rethinking the chess pieces* by Andrew Soltis, but it is important to review each position with an engine and to reach your own conclusions.

Error 6 - Exchanging major pieces in positions with opposite-coloured bishops

We shall see the important role of opposite-coloured bishops in several sections of this book, and this is logical, because they give rise to one of the most interesting paradoxes in chess strategy: on their own, they facilitate draws, but accompanied by major pieces they facilitate the attack. This rule is quite well known, but it should be even better known, because it continues to be poorly applied. The excuses for making this exchange tend to be the usual ones: that we were hoping for circumstances to become more favourable, or else we were avoiding tactical dangers.

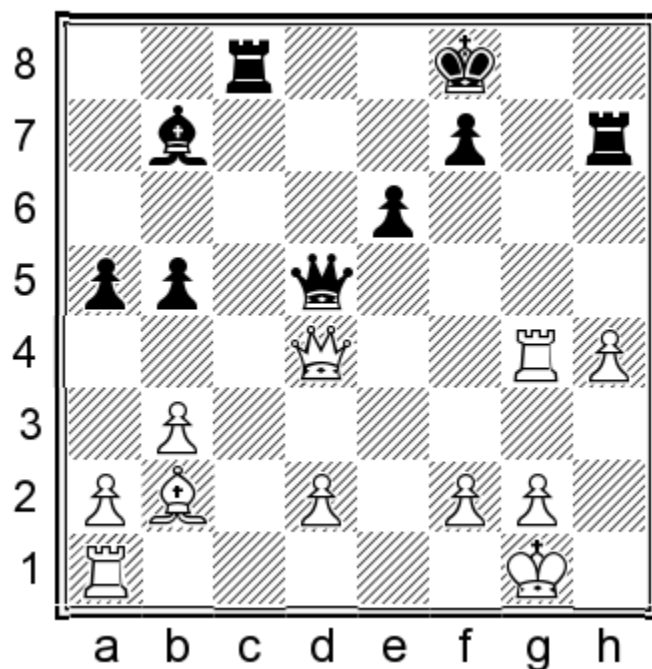
Even great players have made this error (for extra material on this topic see the eighth game of the Kramnik-Kasparov match in 2000, or the Rapport-Duda game from the Superbet Tournament in 2023, which was being played while I was writing this book).

In short, the exchange of the last major piece marks a critical moment in positions with bishops of opposite colours. The situation is similar to the one in ‘Final Simplification’, which we shall see in the following Error. Still, while in that case correct calculation of the resulting endgame is essential, in this case, the decision can almost always be conceptual.

The next example is one of the most noteworthy examples I have ever seen of how to dilute an enormous advantage by exchanging major pieces in situations of opposite-coloured bishops, even though in the game, the black player failed to seize the opportunity to recover from the deep trouble he was in and eventually lost anyway.

White has two advantages in the position to our right: a material one (he is two pawns up) and a positional one (the black king is more exposed).

Antonio Rupérez Benito (1927)
Marc Ribera Cebolla (2011)



The material advantage suggests a queen exchange, while the positional one argues against it. In this case, either is enough to win, but even though the positional decision subsequently requires energetic play, here too, it is stronger than the material one.

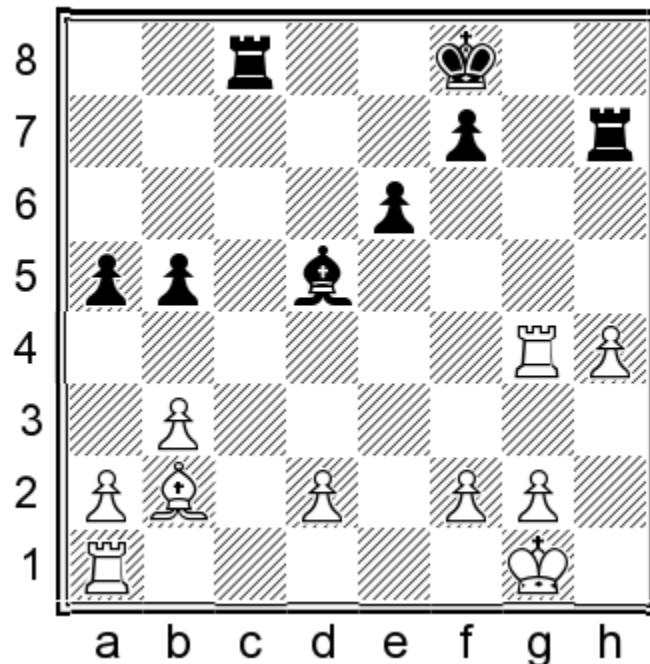
26. ♔xd5?!

26. ♔f6! was much better, retaining the queens, even though there is no ‘simple’ manoeuvre to conclude the attack. White should play quite patiently, activating his a1-rook and then seeking to penetrate with his bishop. We give two variations although they are not exhaustive:

A) 26... ♔xd2 27. ♕d4, followed by 28. ♔e5, with ideas of 29. ♕d6+ or 29. ♕c5+; for example, 27... ♔e2? 28. ♕c5+!, mating;

B) 26... ♔f5!. Now White has to exchange, but he does so under much better conditions: 27. ♔xf5 exf5 28. ♖f4 ♖c2 29. ♕c3 b4 30. ♕f6 ♖xd2 31. ♖xf5, followed by 32. ♖e1 or 32. ♖c1, with mating attacks.

26...♗xd5



27.♖c1?

The second exchange of another major piece, which is the natural follow-up to the first, is more serious. It seems incredible, but this loses all the advantage!!

Correct was 27.♗f6! ♜c2 (27...♜h5 28.f3 ♜c2 29.♜d4 ♜f5 30.♗d8! a4 31.♗a5! axb3 32.axb3 ♗xb3 33.♗b4+, resuming the attack) 28.♜g5! (preventing ...♜h5) 28...♔e8 (28...♜xd2? 29.♜c1; 28...♜xh4? 29.♜xd5) 29.♜g8+ ♔d7 30.f3! ♜xd2? 31.♜c1 and White should win, but he still has work to do. It is clear that in these variations White has had to sacrifice pawns several times and seek attacking positions for his pieces, which would have been much simpler with the queens still on the board.

27...♜b8??

Black makes the same error as White, and in this case, it cannot be because he is overconfident, but because the postulate ‘When you have a material advantage, you exchange pieces. When you have a material disadvantage, you avoid exchanges’ is deeply rooted, even

though it is often incorrect. In this case, rejecting the exchange allows the enemy rook to be activated decisively.

27...♖xc1+! 28.♙xc1 f5!. Black likely did not foresee this continuation, which activates his passive rook: 29.♖g3! (29.♖f4 ♖c7 and I would say that this even gives White problems) 29...♖xh4, regaining a pawn, and now, with the better rook and bishop, Black has no problems.

28.♖c7 b4 29.♙d4

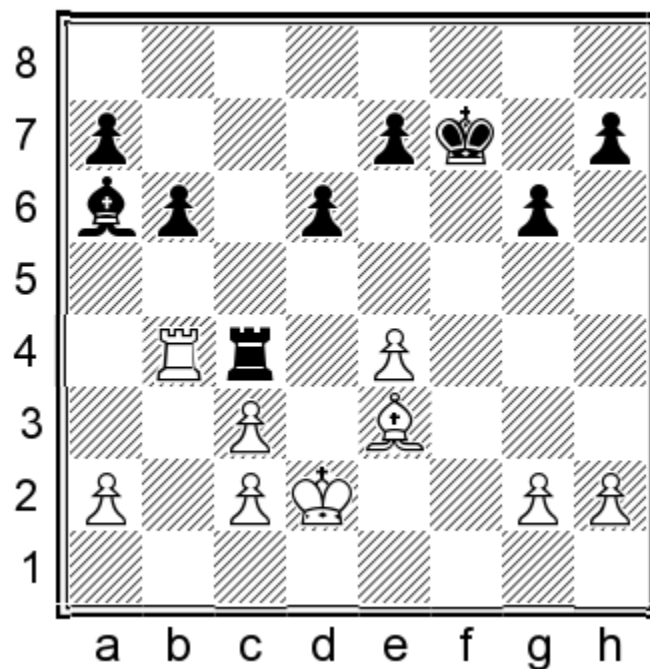
,

with a decisive threat of mate.

Juan Romero Cruz

Adrian Martínez Fernández

Salobreña spanish Championship U14 2014



20...♔f6?

Allowing the rook exchange leads to a drawn ending, despite Black's structural advantage. On the other hand, the presence of the

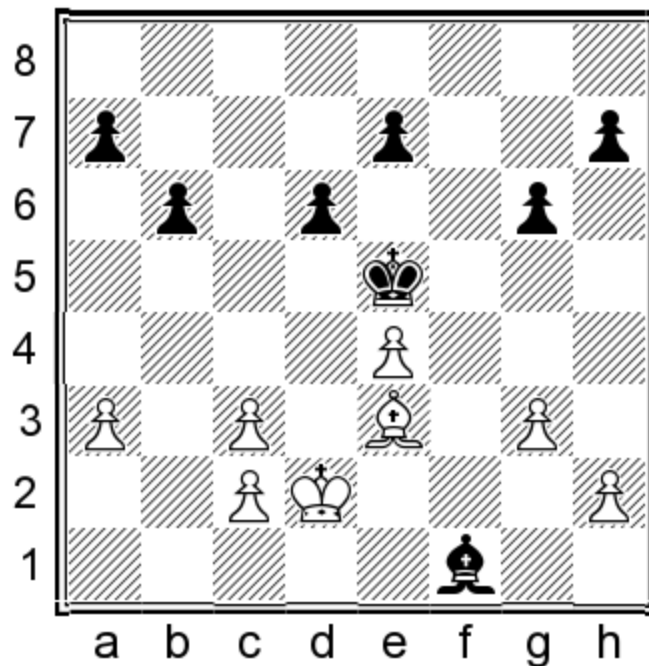
rooks makes Black's bishop stronger, and the drawing tendencies of the bishops of opposite colours disappear.

Let us analyse one variation a little: 20...♖c7 (necessary to defend the pawn on a7) 21.g3 e5 22.h4 ♔e6 23.a3 ♘b7 24.♔d3 (24.a4?! hardly poses a threat; for example, 24...♙c6 25.a5? bxa5!-+) 24...♙c6 25.♖b1 ♗f7 26.♗g1 ♗f3 27.♗g2 b5 28.♗g1 a5 29.♗g2 a4 (29...♗f1 30.♗g1 achieves nothing) 30.♗g1 h5 31.♗g2 d5 32.exd5+ ♙xd5 33.♗g1 ♔f5 34.♔d2 (34.♗g2? ♗xe3+; 34.♔e2 ♔e4) 34...♔g4 35.♙b6 ♙c4 36.♙c5 ♔h3 37.♙b6 ♙f1 38.♔e1 ♙g2 39.♔d2 ♔xg3 and Black wins. These are not the only moves, but they give an idea of how things could go. Black can restrict the movement of the white pieces and then break in with the king. Sometimes it is useful to spend some time analysing these endings once the game is over, in order to improve your technical intuition of such positions.

21.♖xc4 ♙xc4

Black has chosen the lazy route and, as often happens, he will be rewarded by his opponent's poor defence, which will be an incentive to him the next time he needs to make this decision.

22.a3 ♙f1 23.g3 ♔e5



The e4-pawn falls more easily now than with the rooks still on the board, but without them it is not a sufficient advantage to win.

24. ♖g5! ♔xe4 25. ♙xe7 d5 26. ♙d6

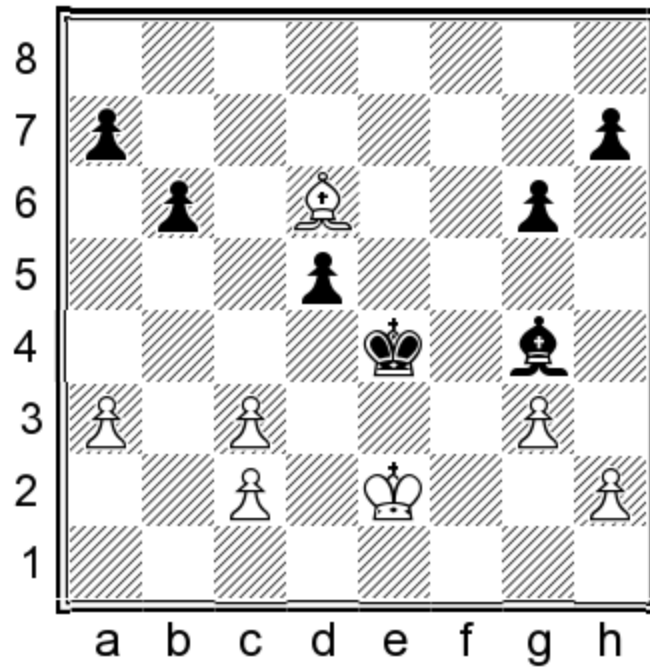
It is all still a draw, but it was much better to safeguard the pawns with 26.h4!.

26... ♙h3

Now it's clear that the h2-pawn is in some danger, although its loss is not enough to lose the game.

27. ♔e2 ♙g4+

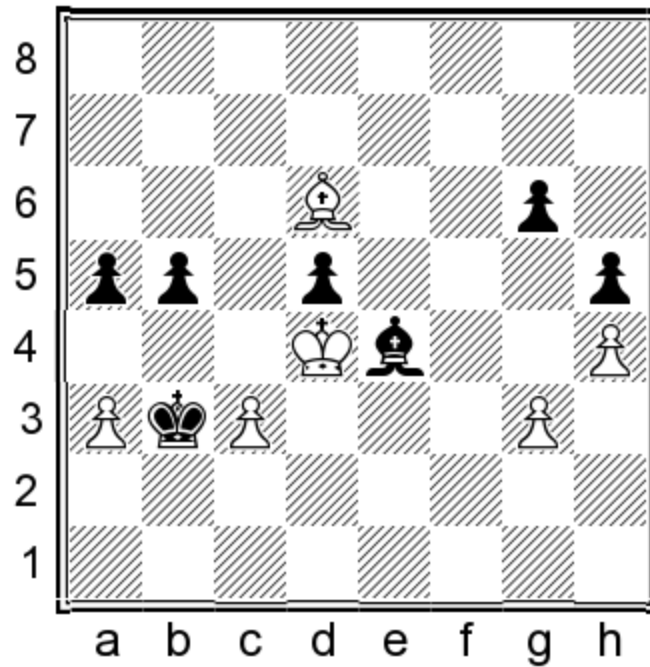
27...g5, to fix the pawn on h2, is not much use, because if ...g4 is played the bishop would not be able to leave h3.



28.♔f2?

Making a present of a pawn is not a good idea, even though the ending is still drawn. Better was 28.♔d2!, followed by h4, and the defence is easy.

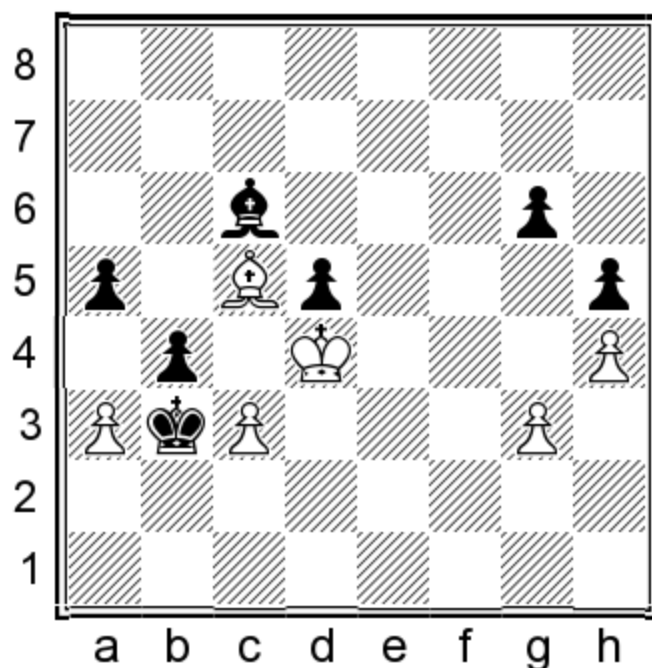
**28...♙d1 29.♔e1 ♙xc2 30.♔e2 ♙d3+ 31.♔f2 ♙c4 32.♙b8 a6
33.♙c7 b5 34.♙a5 ♔d3 35.♔f3 ♙a2 36.♙b4 h5 37.h4 ♙b1 38.♔f2
♔c4 39.♔e3 ♙e4 40.♔d2 ♔b3 41.♔e3 ♔a4 42.♔d4 a5 43.♙d6
♔b3**



44.♙c5?!

Step by step, White is heading for disaster. 44.♙c7! was better, following a well-known rule for the defender in endings with bishops of opposite colours: it is appropriate to attack the pawns situated on the squares of the same colour as the defender's bishop, in order to force them to move onto squares of the opposite colour.

44...♜f3 45.♙e7 ♜g4 46.♙c5 ♜d7 47.♙e7 ♜c6 48.♙c5 b4!?



Finally comes the only winning try: Black must create a passed pawn far from the control of the white king.

49.axb4?

The wrong capture. Correct was 49.cxb4! a4 and now 50.b5, ensuring the defence of the a3-pawn, with a guaranteed draw.

49...a4!

Now Black has his winning passed pawn.

50.b5! ♖xb5 51.♗b4

51.♔xd5 does not create many problems; for example, 51...♔xc3 (51...a3 also wins) 52.♔e5 ♖b3 53.♔f6 ♗d3 54.♔g5 ♗f5! and wins.

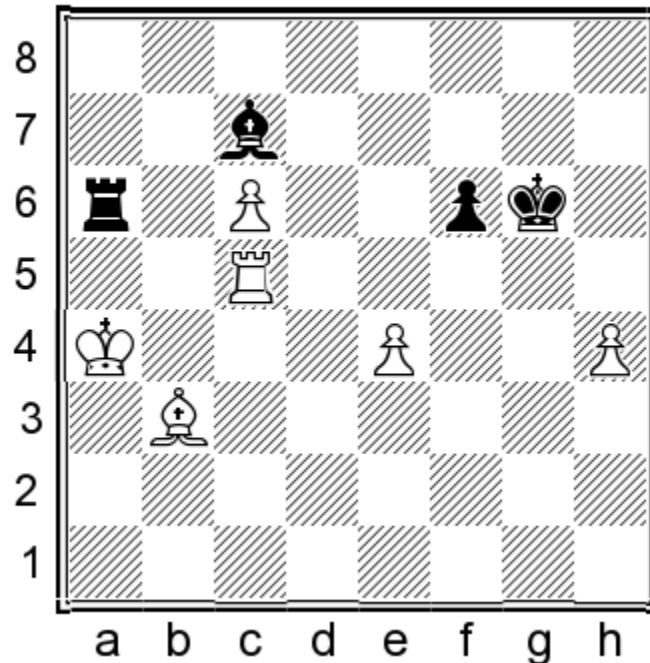
51...♗c4 52.♔e5 a3 53.♗xa3 ♔xa3 54.♔f6 ♗d3 0-1

The following example should be enough, on its own, to convince us that exchanging the last major piece in positions with opposite-coloured bishops should not be based on the number of pawns. Endings with bishops of opposite colours tend to hide certain subtleties.

Víctor Gil Provedo (1703)

Guillermo Lagunas (1887)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2018



White is in check, and he has only two possibilities, one of which seems to allow a pin. The reason for choosing the move played in the game may have been tactical or strategic, but in either case, it is an error.

47.♔b5?

47.♔b4! avoids the exchange of rooks and 47...♙d6 is followed by 48.♔b5 ♖a3 (48...♙xc5 49.♔xa6 and the pawn will cost Black his bishop) 49.♖c3; by retaining the rooks White wins easily.

47...♖a5+ 48.♔c4 ♖xc5+ 49.♔xc5

It is possible that White was counting on this: he has two distant passed pawns (see **Error 34**), but the problem is that one of them is **the wrong rook's pawn**. It is enough for Black to give up the bishop for the other passed pawn:

49...f5!

Forcing the exchange of the only dangerous white pawn.

50.h5+

50.exf5+ ♖xf5 gives the same result more graphically.

50...♔f6! 51.h6 fxe4 52.♔d4

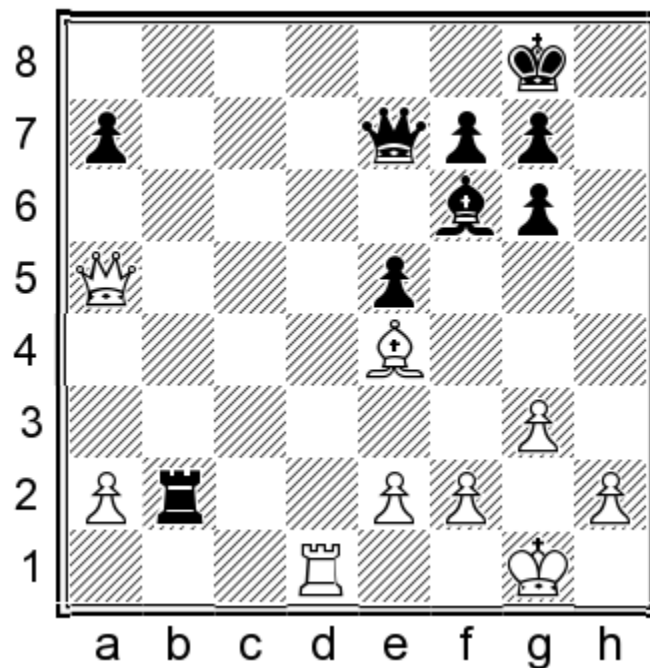
Draw.

One of the apparent paradoxes of the topic of colour can be seen in the different evaluations of a position with opposite-coloured bishops when they are accompanied by major pieces, preferably a queen and a rook.

Ander Martin Iribar (1935)

Jose Manuel Nieves Cabanes (2180)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2015



The diagram (Exercise 5) shows us an example of a type of position that many middle/high-level club players would evaluate as ‘dead drawn’. If we observe the difference between the bishops, we see that White has some advantage, but in order to be convinced that it

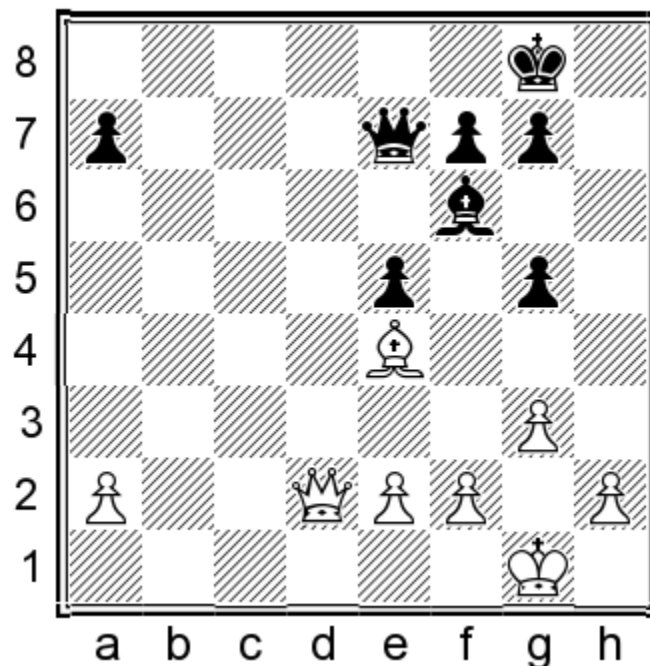
is a big advantage, it is almost necessary to have experienced it, having played this type of position on some occasion and having suffered.

26.♖d2?

The fact of the matter is that White has a big advantage, but he evidently did not think so. Without rooks, the advantage of the better bishop dissipates and finally disappears, because Black has time to improve his kingside pawns.

With 26.e3! White defends the pawn and at the same time restricts the enemy bishop. White should improve his pieces and coordinate them to attack the big weakness, which is f7: 26...♕b4 27.♕d5 (threatening 28.♗xg6) 27...♕b5 28.♕a8+! (28.♕xb5!? ♖xb5 29.♖d7 might be sufficient to win) 28...♕b8 29.♕c6, followed by ♗d5, ♗b3 and ♖d7, with a clear advantage.

26...♖xd2 27.♕xd2 g5!



Very good, immediately preparing ...g6 and ...♗g7.

28.♗d5

28.♔d5 ♕c7 29.♙d3 ♖f8 30.♙c4 g6 31.e3 ♗g7 is equal. The pressure on f7 cannot be accompanied by other measures.

28...g6 29.♔d3 ♗g7 30.♙b3 ♕c7 31.♔c4?!

The exchange of queens makes it easier for Black to draw. Instead, 31.♔d5 maintained some pressure in the position, although it is equal.

How to avoid Error 6

This error is almost certain to occur in our games as it is common to the majority of players. The cause is probably a poor understanding of positions with opposite-coloured bishops or colour weaknesses in general. So I recommend also studying **Error 24**.

Strong willpower will be needed to avoid this error in our games. It is useful to seriously analyse the games in which it occurs and pay attention to the variety in the engine's evaluations, which can be surprisingly large.

There are a few good chapters here and there in chess literature, but there is no entire book devoted to this topic – at least not that I have discovered. I recommend the relevant chapters in *Mastering Chess Middlegames* by Alexander Panchenko and Jacob Aagaard's *Attacking Manual*.

Error 7 - Simplifying to an endgame which is not winning

The **final simplification** is what we call the exchange or exchanges that lead to a position that can be calculated exhaustively. Usually, it will be a pawn ending or an ending with one piece versus pawns, but sometimes it will be an ending with more pieces, the outcome of which is either known (for example, mate with bishop and knight) or calculable. The playing attitude with which this decision is taken is very different from that of the other exchanges, although some psychological aspects are constant, as we shall mention.

The first thing I want to emphasise is that this decision is more than irreversible; **it is definitive!** And it is probably the last decision we shall take in the game. Therefore, we should keep cool in order to escape from the psychological influences (the desire to put an end to the tension, to reach a simpler position, or simply to stop suffering) which arise from laziness and fear. We must assess only its objective merits, which in this case we should be perfectly able to evaluate through calculation.

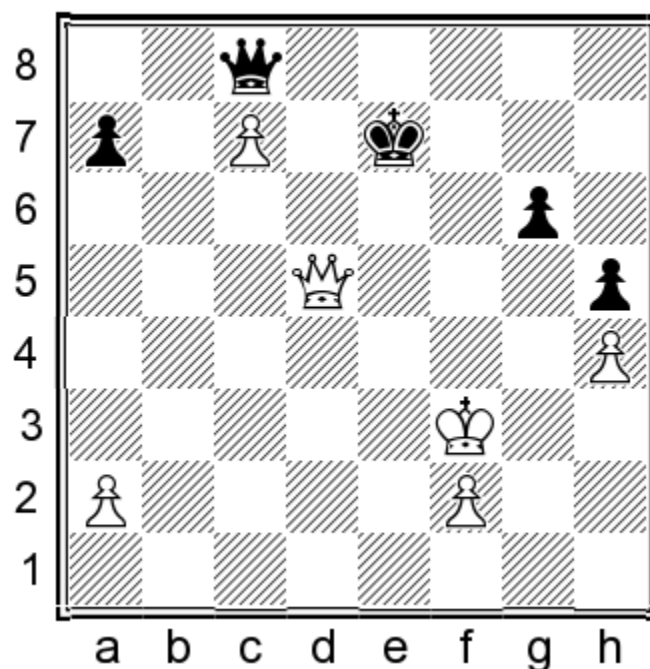
If we are unable to be clear about what the correct result should be, then we are not facing this sort of decision and we should go back to the parameters used for earlier decisions, in which intuition carries some weight.

This error occurs most often because a simplification is carried out that does not win, but other versions reject a winning simplification or allow the opponent to carry out a winning simplification.

Marcos Lianes García (2352)

Adrià Mari Copa (2103)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2017



We begin with a relatively simple example (although we can see already that a 2352 player went wrong). White has a big advantage and now has the option to take the game into a perfectly calculable ending. What would you choose?

58.♔d8+??

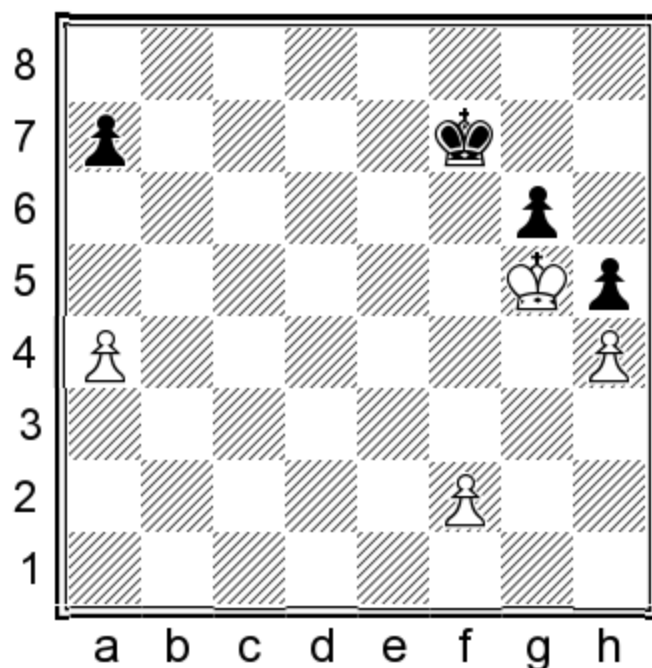
I anticipate that in this section, we shall make great use of the double question mark. Even if it is easier to win with other moves, **final simplification** will be justified if the winning calculation is correct.

In this case, the classic problem of the ‘unnatural candidate move’, which is very typical of pawn endings (see Game 29), does not arise, but rather ignorance (or, what can be even worse: incomplete knowledge) of a theoretical position.

Although other moves win, the most ‘technical’ one is 58.♔c6!, stopping the approach of the black king and even preparing ♔xg6. What made White reject this move? Probably the black queen checks, but they are perfectly calculable, as they will run out very quickly: 58...♕g4+ 59.♖e3 ♕h3+ 60.f3 ♕c8 and now the simplest is 61.♔xg6.

Or 58.♔c5+ ♔d7 59.♖f4 and in both cases the checks come to an end. It looks like a case of laziness.

58...♕xd8 59.cxd8♕+ ♔xd8 60.♖f4 ♔e7 61.♔g5 ♔f7 62.a4



62...a5!

The white a-pawn must not be permitted to reach the fifth rank, because then the ending would be won.

63.f4 ♖g7 64.f5

The break that allows two pawns to be won in return for one, but the problem is that the remaining pawn is the rook pawn, and it has already advanced far enough.

64...gxf5 65.♔xf5 ♔f7 66.♔e5

White applies a rather odd plan, probably a sign that he realised he had erred.

If 66.♔g5 ♔g7 67.♔xh5 ♔f6! (in order to force White to lose a pawn a tempo earlier; 67...♔h7? would lose to the usual 68.♔g5 ♔g7 69.♔f5, and the black king does not reach c7) 68.♔g4 (68.♔h6 ♔f5 69.h5 ♔f6 70.♔h7 ♔f7 71.h6 ♔f8 72.♔g6 ♔g8 ends up leading to the same ending) 68...♔g6 69.♔f4 ♔h5 70.♔e4 ♔xh4 71.♔d4 ♔g5 72.♔c5 ♔f6 73.♔b5 ♔e7 74.♔xa5 ♔d8 75.♔b6 ♔c8 and with the arrival of the king on one of the c8/c7-squares, we

reach one of the basic drawn positions in endgame theory which it is essential to know.

66...♔g6 67.♔e6 ♔g7 68.♔d5 ♔f6 69.♔c5 ♔e5 70.♔b5 ♔d5
71.♔b6 ♔c4 72.♔xa5 ♔c5 73.♔a6 ♔c6 74.a5 ♔c7 ½-½

It is surprising that White did not continue, but finally the note on move 66 would have been reached, though on the other flank.

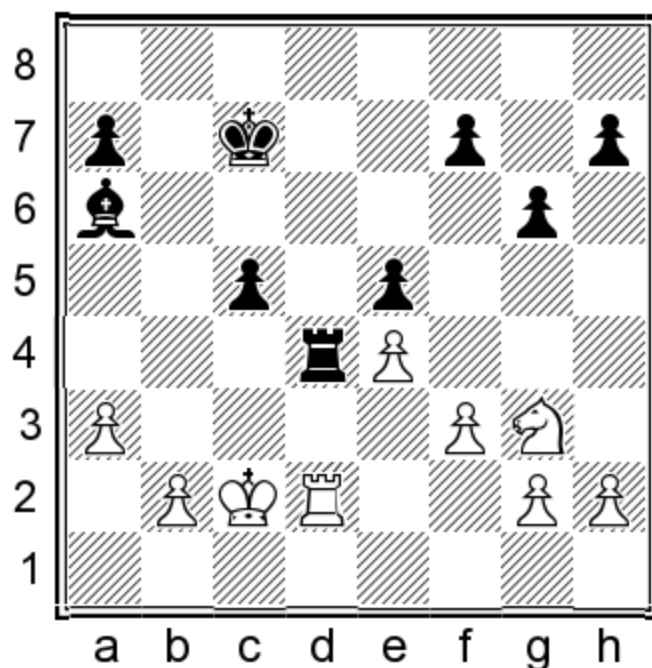
We can draw the following lessons: if, every time an ending like this happens to us, we analyse it in detail and learn it well, we will not go wrong in the same case again. If we have extended curiosity and also learn from the endings of our ‘friends and acquaintances’, we shall reach the threshold of necessary endgame knowledge more quickly.

In the next example, we are faced with a case where the **final simplification** was correct. The error was in providing the opportunity.

Alejandro Fernández Camello (2201)

Oscar Torcal Miguel (2142)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2018



Exercise 6. White played 26. Nxe2 . Do you think this was a good idea?

26. Nxe2??

No, it was not a good idea. A **final simplification** should not only be calculated by the person who executes it, but also by the one who lets it happen. In this case, White must have felt a little pressured by the uncomfortable sensation of not being able to exchange the rooks on d4, and by the remoteness of his knight. But he could have maintained the position with a waiting strategy, or by patiently improving his worst piece, the g3-knight, for example:

A) 26. Kc3 Rc4+ 27. Kb3 and nothing happens;

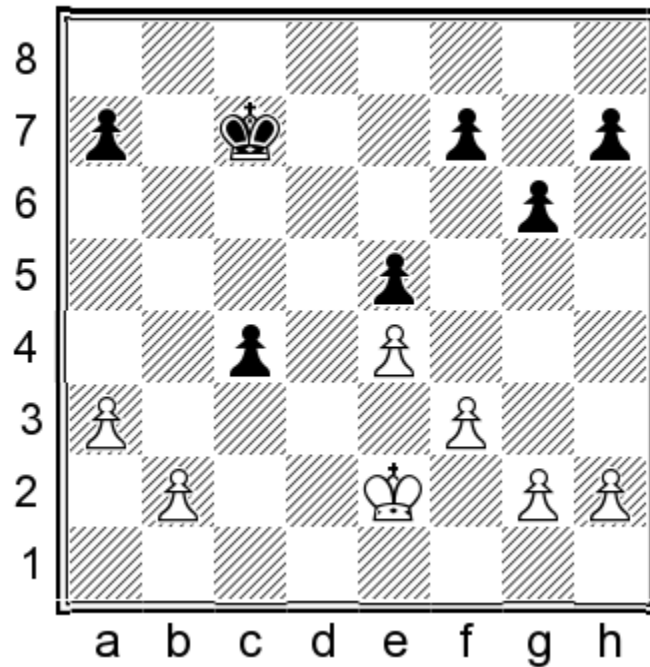
B) 26. Nh1?! is a little riskier because of 26... Rxd2+ 27. Kxd2 Qf1 and White has to give up a pawn;

C) 26. b3! prepares Nxe2 and is, therefore, the most sensible move.

26... Rxd2+!

Black did not trust his opponent, which sometimes happens. He calculated the ending correctly, and this allowed him to seize an opportunity that often passes unnoticed.

27.♔xd2 ♚xe2 28.♔xe2 c4!



The key move and, from White's viewpoint, the **unnatural candidate move**. The black monarch becomes the **dominant king**.

29.♔d2

29.f4?! is a desperate attempt which does not work: 29...exf4

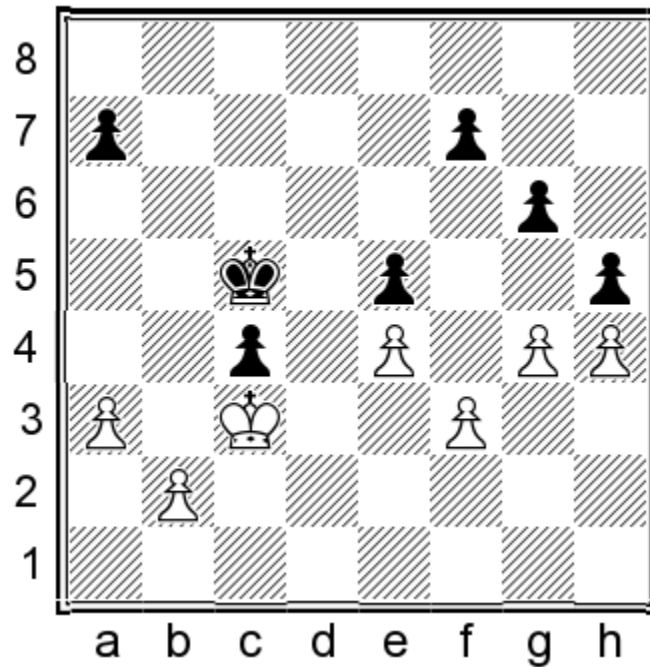
30.♔f3 g5 31.♔g4 h6 32.♔h5 ♔d6 33.h3 ♔e5 34.♔xh6 f6 35.♔g6 ♔xe4 36.♔xf6 ♔d3 and Black wins.

29...♔d6 30.♔c3 ♔c5

The black king is a step away from penetrating via d4. Everything now depends on the reserve tempi, which are not easy to work out here, but it is possible to feel (correctly) that Black has more of them.

31.b3?!

This makes things too easy. There were various other tries; for example, 31.h4 h6 32.g3 h5 33.g4,



analysis diagram

which forces Black to find the only move 33...f6!: 34.gxh5 gxh5 35.a4 a5! and wins.

31...cxb3 32.♔xb3 ♔d4 33.g4 ♔e3 34.♔c4 ♔xf3 35.♔d5 ♔xg4 36.♔xe5 f5

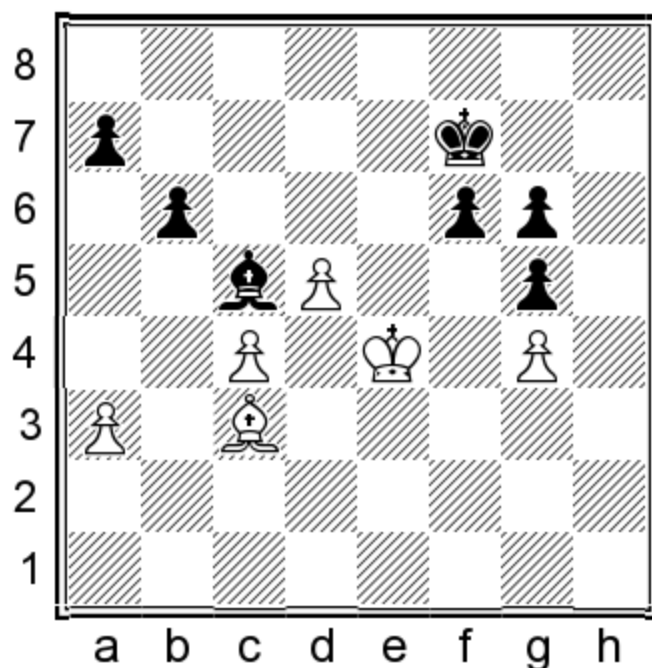
The rest is simple (0-1, 47).

In the next case, the error is in giving the opponent the opportunity to simplify, but also in not taking advantage of it.

David Alcón Llosada

Gumer Fernández García

Salobreña Spanish jr Championship 2017



White is a pawn down but does not appear to be in any danger, because it is not easy for Black to make further progress and White's king restrains Black's only expansive pawn break (...f5). Indeed, after either of the two normal moves, the position is equal.

37.♔b4??

This is one more case where offering to exchange seems unnecessary and is very risky, but from what we keep seeing, it is irresistibly attractive. The natural move is 37.a4, and 37.♔b2 is also drawn.

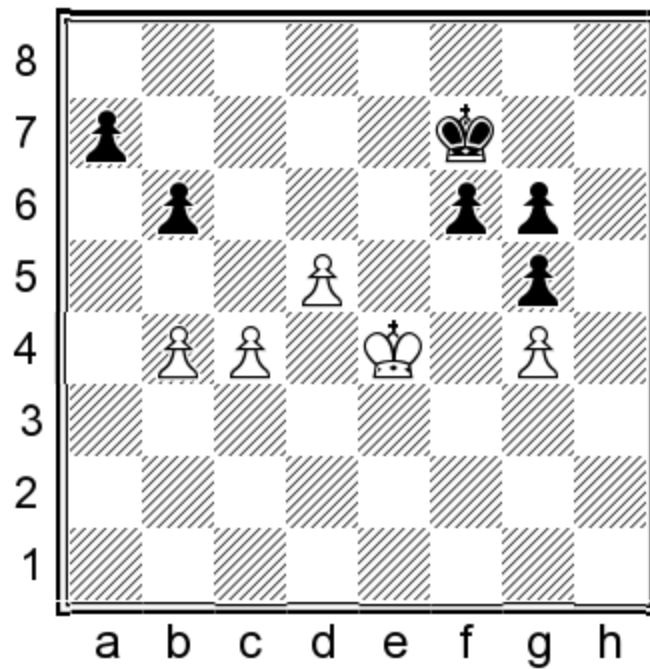
37...♖xb4!

Black's move is correct, but only on the condition that he has calculated the next one correctly. Otherwise, it is an error.

37...♖f8 also maintains Black's advantage, because the a3-pawn stops White from manoeuvring favourably.

37...a5? forces a drawn ending.

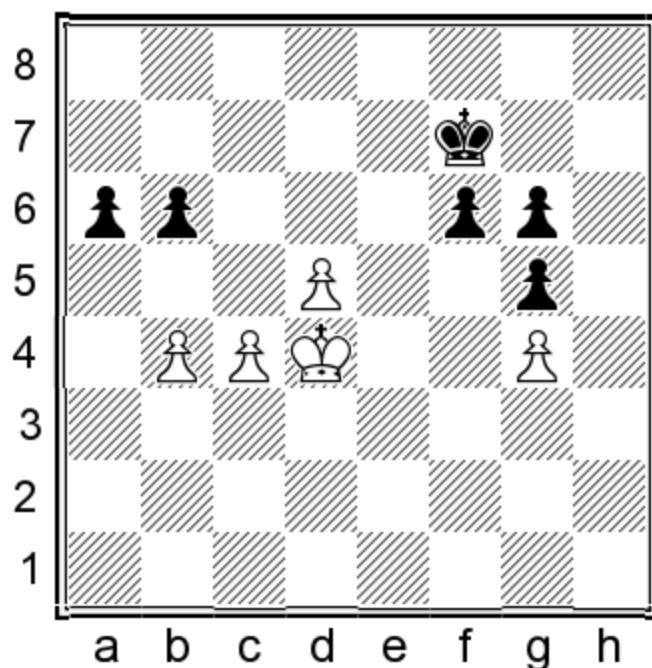
38.axb4



38...a5??

Trying to create a position with two widely separated pawns, but it does not take into account the opponent's response, which leads Black into a difficult position, which he ends up losing.

38...♔e7?! allows White to equalise with 39.b5!, but the correct, and winning, move is 38...a6!, preventing the queenside from being closed with b5 and placing White in a sort of zugzwang: 39.♔d4 (39.c5 bxc5 40.bxc5 ♔e7 41.♔d4 ♔d7 42.♔c4 f5 and the two separated pawns will win easily)



analysis diagram

39...♔e7! (39...f5? is too hasty: 40.gxf5 gxf5 41.c5 bxc5+ 42.bxc5 g4 43.c6= ♔e7? 44.♔c5 and White wins with the well-known theme of mating with two pawns on the seventh rank: 44...g3 45.c7 ♔d7 46.♔b6 ♔c8 47.♔c6 g2 48.d6 g1♕ 49.d7#) 40.♔e4 ♔d7 41.♔d4 f5! (time to create the second passed pawn on the other wing) 42.gxf5 gxf5 43.c5 bxc5+ 44.bxc5 g4 45.c6+ ♔d6.

39.c5!

Undoubtedly, the unexpected candidate.

39...a4!

39...bxc5 40.bxa5 creates a passed pawn that the black king is unable to reach.

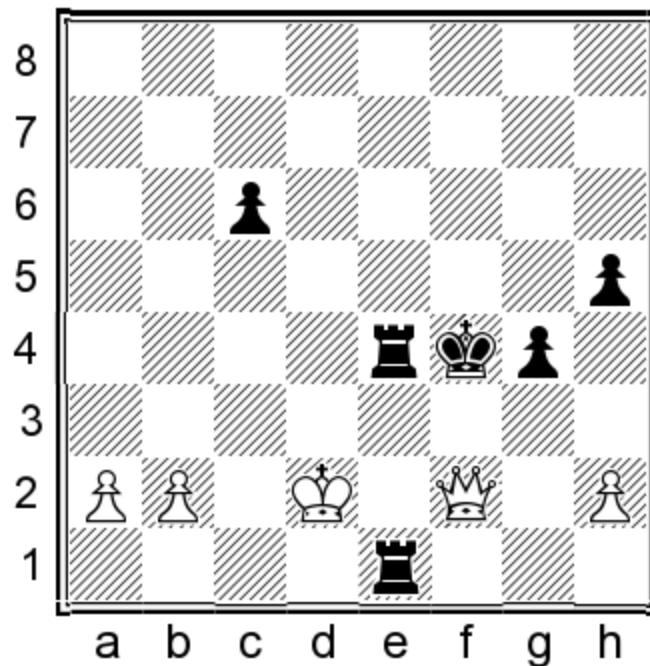
40.cxb6 a3 41.b7 a2 42.b8♕ a1♕

With a very favourable queen ending that White eventually won.

Alonso Lopez Núñez (1814)

Steve Badillo Ramos (2044)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2021



Does it matter where the black king goes?

52...♔g5??

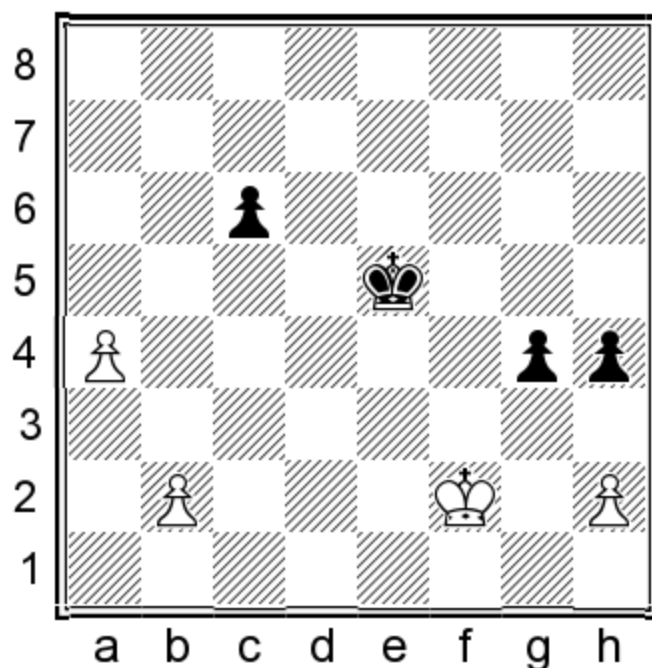
Well, it does matter. Black, who is very safe with his two rooks on the board, only needs to pay attention to the exchange of the queen for the two rooks, and with the king on g5 he loses.

52...♔e5! was correct, with equality.

53.♙xe1! ♖xe1 54.♔xe1

Now the black pawn queens in five moves and the king has to enter the square.

54...♔f4 55.♔f2 h4 56.a4 ♔e5



57.b4?

Throwing away the win, but admittedly it was difficult to see the difference. 57.a5! was the accurate advance and if 57...♔d6 58.b4 ♔c7 (58...c5?! 59.a6 ♔c7 60.bxc5 is easier), then 59.♔e3! and incredibly, the white king comes to support his pawn: 59...♔b7 60.♔f4 g3 61.hxg3 hxg3 62.♔xg3 ♔a6 63.♔f4 ♔b5 64.♔e5 c5 65.a6! ♔xa6 66.bxc5 and White wins.

57...♔d6?

Black offers a new opportunity. The way to draw was 57...c5! 58.bxc5 ♔d5 and the king captures the c-pawn on the way to stopping the a-pawn.

58.♔e3?

58.a5! was winning.

58...c5!

Now he sees it.

59.bxc5+ ♔xc5 60.♔e4

Draw.

How to avoid Error 7

This error is of a different kind to the previous ones. The others were strategic, and this one is essentially about calculation. But they have one thing in common: the psychological tendency in favour of exchanges. Therefore, the first recommendation is that we should be prepared to resist that tendency.

The second is to hone our calculation skills, as this is the only tool for taking decisions of this kind, and in order to calculate well, it is useful to know the typical themes of the endgame. In this case, many good books of exercises are available. I recommend Van Perlo's *Endgame Tactics*, and especially *Liquidation on the Chessboard* by Joel Benjamin.

This error can be studied and trained at the same time as **Error 12** in the next chapter, 'The calculation of variations'.

Error 8 - Rejecting favourable exchanges

We have studied a variety of situations where there were reasons not to exchange pieces and yet the players exchanged them. Most frequently this happens because we humans seek clarity and security. Now, we are going to devote just one section to situations that are similar in content but have the opposite decision.

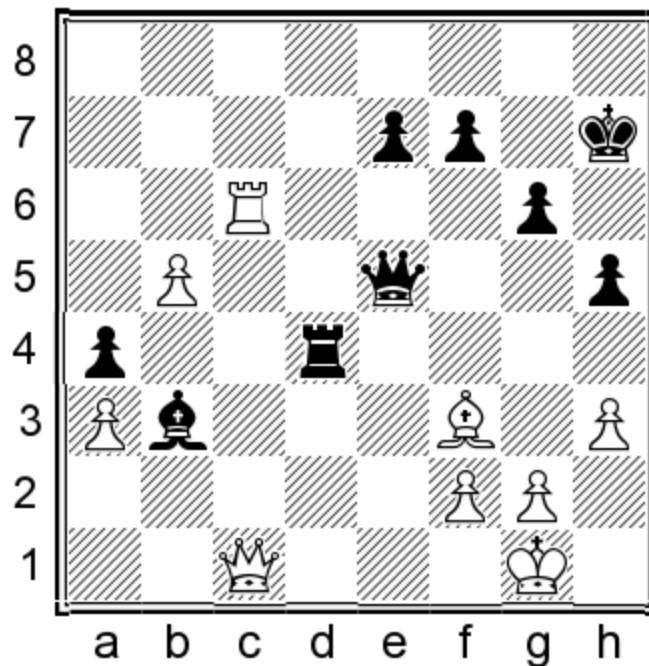
In this section, we shall look at strategic reasons which can lead to avoiding the exchange (when it ought to be made), but above all we shall examine psychological circumstances, the main ones being wanting to win at all costs and the desire to gain rating points.

Players who make this error are fewer in number than those who make the opposite one, but it can also happen that circumstances push us into making it.

Leyre Abrisqueta Zudaire (1985)

Hyaneshwar (1985)

Roquetas de Mar 2023



White has a large advantage with her passed pawn. Black's counterplay comes from his active pieces, which can harass the white king. It is natural, therefore, for White to be interested in exchanging the queens.

32.b6?

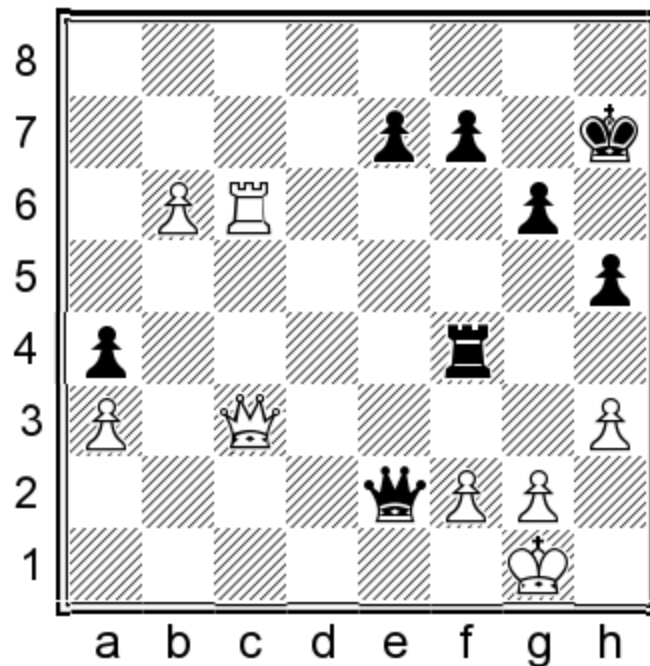
Instead, she should have played 32.♔e3!. It suits Black to retain the queens, but in this variation, he can only do so with a great deal of effort, as his rook is also already under attack: 32...♔xe3 (32...♔g7?! 33.♔xe7) 33.fxe3 ♖d7 34.b6 (threatening 35.♖c7) 34...♖b7 35.♖xg6! and White wins.

32...♗d1!

Black begins his counterplay with threats from the outset.

33.♔c3 ♗xf3 34.♔xf3 ♖f4! 35.♔c3 ♔e2?

Here 35...♖d4! would have threatened mate, avoided immediate exchanges and maintained equality; for example, 36.♔f3 (36.♔c1 ♖e4!, or 36.♔a1 ♔d5) 36...♖f4, repeating the position.



36. ♔e3?

36. ♖c8!. The **unnatural candidate move**, scorning the opponent's threat and threatening mate: 36... ♕xf2+ 37. ♔h2 ♖f6 38. b7 ♕f4+ 39. ♕g3 and the pawn queens.

36... ♕d1+?

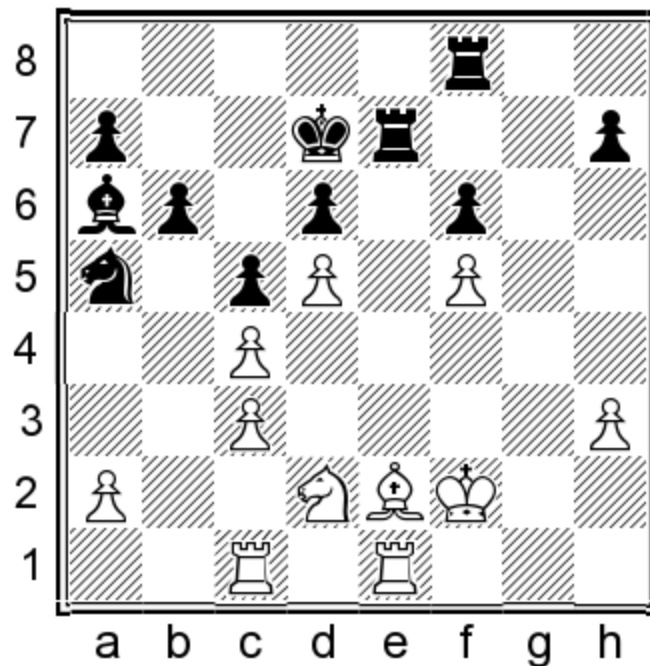
36... ♕xe3!. It must be admitted that now it was a difficult decision to exchange the queens because the rook ending appears lost, but, as a matter of fact, the black rook can make use of one of the most famous themes: placing itself behind the pawn (see **Error 37**). After 37. fxe3 ♖f5 38. b7 ♖b5 39. ♖c7 g5! 40. ♖xe7 ♔g6, despite the pawn on the seventh rank, Black should have no problems achieving a draw since he can bring the king across to capture it.

37. ♔h2 g5 38. b7 ♕d7 39. ♖b6 ♕f5 40. b8 ♕ ♖xf2 41. ♕bg3 ♖f4 42. ♕xe7 h4 43. ♕gxg5 1-0

Ismael Rodríguez Sanz (1740)

Juan Plazuelo Pascual (2140)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2014



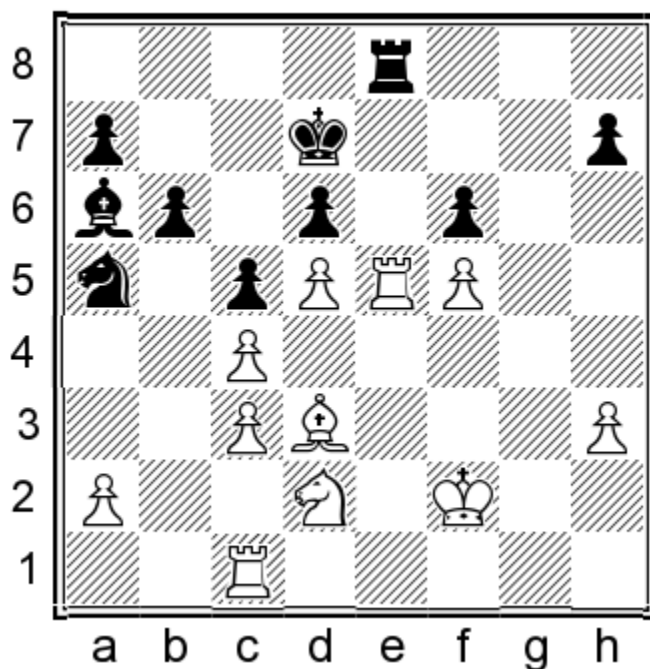
Black has a better pawn structure, and White has more space. Although both these factors encourage Black to exchange some pieces, we tend to think that the rules are not going to work perfectly in our own positions, and that this only happens in the games of the masters. Here, if Black can exchange both the rooks, he will be a little better, but if he only exchanges one, he will be much worse.

34...♖e5?

After this move, White is able to keep one rook on the board and has an advantage. The way to force the exchange of both rooks was 34...♜fe8!, tying down the white pieces, which can only get free by permitting the exchange of both rooks: 35.♙d3 (35.♜b1 ♜e5! forces the same thing) 35...♜xe1 36.♜xe1 ♜xe1 37.♙xe1 and now the weaknesses in White's structure put him at a disadvantage: 37...♞b7! followed by ...♞b7-d8-f7-e5, although then it will not be easy to make progress due to the closed nature of the position, with

no valid pawn breaks: 38.♔f2 ♖d8 39.♔e3 ♖f7 40.♔f4 ♖e5 41.♙e2
and it should be a draw.

35.♙d3 ♖fe8?! 36.♖xe5



36...fxe5?

The worst of the three captures. Much better was 36...♖xe5 37.♖g1! ♖e7 38.♖g8 ♖e8 39.♖g4 ±, intending ♖e4; or 36...dxe5 37.♖g1 ♖e7 38.♖g8 ♖e8 39.♖g4 ± with the idea of ♖g4-h4-h6 and eventually ♖e4.

Here, the game was abandoned as a draw, but White has a big advantage, for example:

37.♖g1!

Here we can see the gravity of having left a rook ‘alive’.

37...♖e7 38.f6 ♖f7 39.♙f5+ ♔e8 40.♖g8+ ♖f8 41.♙d7+ ♔f7
42.♙e6+ ♔e8 43.♖e4!+-

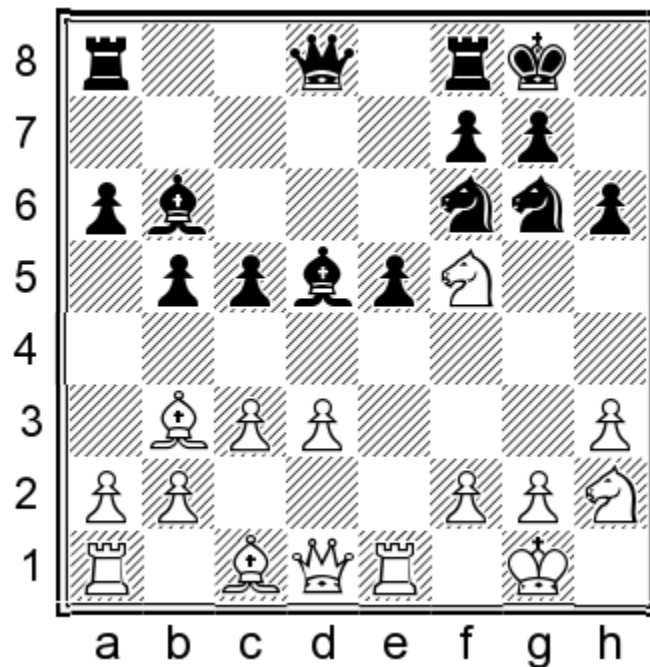
Unnecessary piece exchanges can occur with all kinds of differences in rating, although they are more frequent when the difference is negative. On the other hand, reluctance to make favourable or

simply necessary exchanges tends to occur when there is a rating difference in our favour, as in the example we see here.

Mikel Ortega López (2037)

Cameron Cortes (1701)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2013



17.♖c2?

White was fine before making this ugly move, but he should have traded two pieces, which seemed to him to go against his desire to win.

17.♖xd5! ♔xd5 (17...♘xd5 18.♘g4±) 18.♘g4± and if 18...♘xg4? (18...♖d8! 19.c4±) 19.♔xg4, White threatens tactical blows on h6 and g6, creating a very dangerous attack.

17...♔d7! 18.♘e3 ♖ad8?

18...♖b7! was better; the bishop is a very good piece and Black should not allow it to be exchanged: 19.♘eg4 ♘xg4 20.♔xg4 ♔c6±.

19.♘xd5?!

So he was prepared to exchange it for the knight. This is odd because he remains worse.

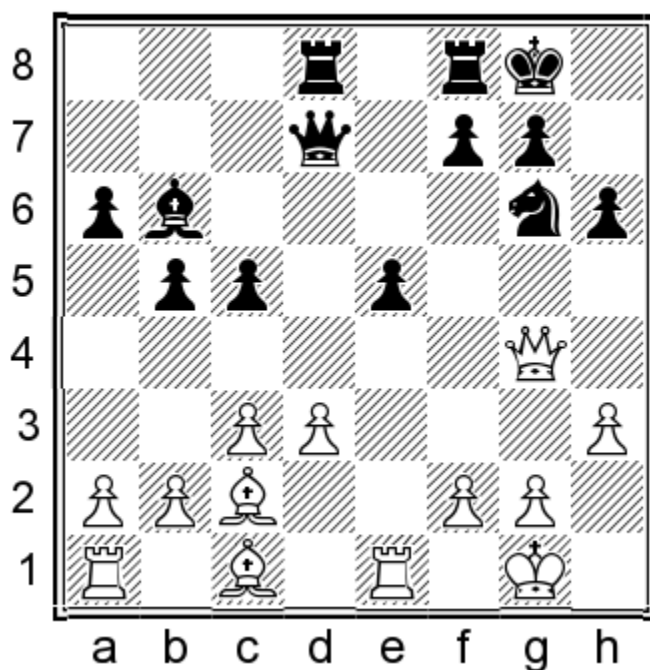
19. ♖hg4! ♖xg4 20. ♘xd5 ♙xd5 21. ♙xg4 would have equalised.

19... ♙xd5

19... ♘xd5! favoured Black clearly.

20. ♖g4 ♖xg4 21. ♙xg4 ♙d7?

Black's insistence on exchanging is strange; he rejects good possibilities, such as 21... ♙c6, defending the knight and preparing the aggressive ...f5.



22. ♙g3?

And even stranger is White's insistence; he seems to believe that it is not possible to win a game without queens on the board. Once again, as before, the lower-rated player tries to exchange (even though it does him harm) and the other player rejects it (even though it would benefit him): 22. ♙xd7! ♖xd7 23. g3 ±, restricting the g6-knight and preparing the a4 break, in order to activate the **unopposed bishop**.

22...♗c7!

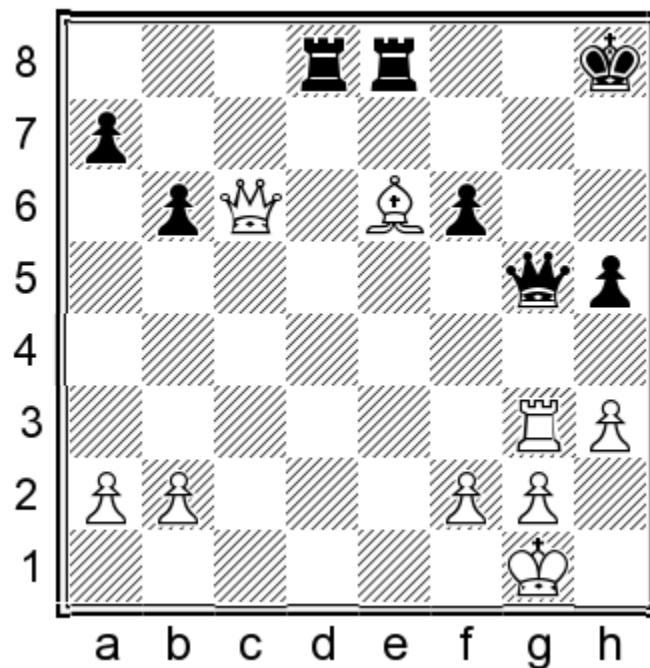
Black threatens 23...e4 and is once again a little better, although he ended up losing.

One of the most justifiable reasons for trying to exchange the queens is to defend against an attack on the king.

Jaume Ros Alonso (2109)

David Aledo Yanguas (1793)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2016



White is attacking for the exchange.

31...♔e5?

Black rejects the most natural and best move 31...♔c5!, which can only be explained by faulty calculation: after 32.♔b7 ♖e7 Black wins.

31...♔h6?! was also better than the move played in the game; play is balanced.

32.♔b7!

Perhaps Black did not see this move and was expecting the attacked bishop to move.

32...f5?

Again Black rejects an exchange, this time of miscellaneous material: 32...♔xg3! 33.fxg3 ♖xe6 34.♔f7 still would have given him some hope of fighting on.

33.♙xf5 ♖e7 34.♔f3 ♔e2

And now White, who was well ahead on time, could have wound up the game with

35.♔f4!

instead of 35.♔c3+, which ended up as a loss for White after much excitement.

How to avoid Error 8

This error amounts to the opposite of the others we have studied in this chapter. A much smaller percentage of players make it, but some do it over and over again.

It is important to determine whether it is one of our typical mistakes. If it is, we should convince ourselves of two things: firstly that attacking is not the only way to win games, and secondly, that we too can enjoy endgames and technical play in general.

For players who make this error occasionally, and who do so because they feel that they have to win at all costs when faced with a lower-rated opponent, I leave them with this thought: *The best way for a lower-rated player to win is for us to make moves which go against the sense of the position. If we continue in this manner, we will lose objectivity and give our opponent opportunities which he would not otherwise have.*

The advice in common to both types of players is to try to take decisions about exchanges, not according to our preferences but objectively, following the dictates of the position.

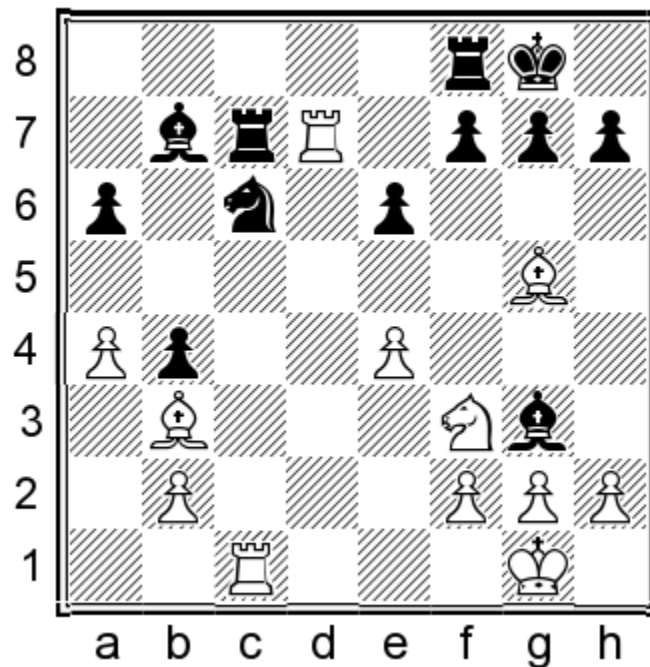
I am unable to recommend specific books, but here all books that improve our strategic sense will be useful.

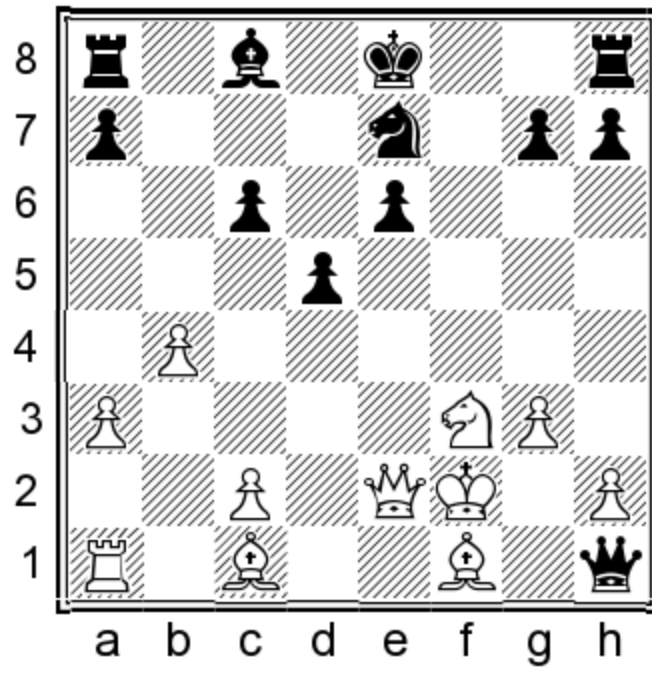
Chapter 2

The calculation of variations

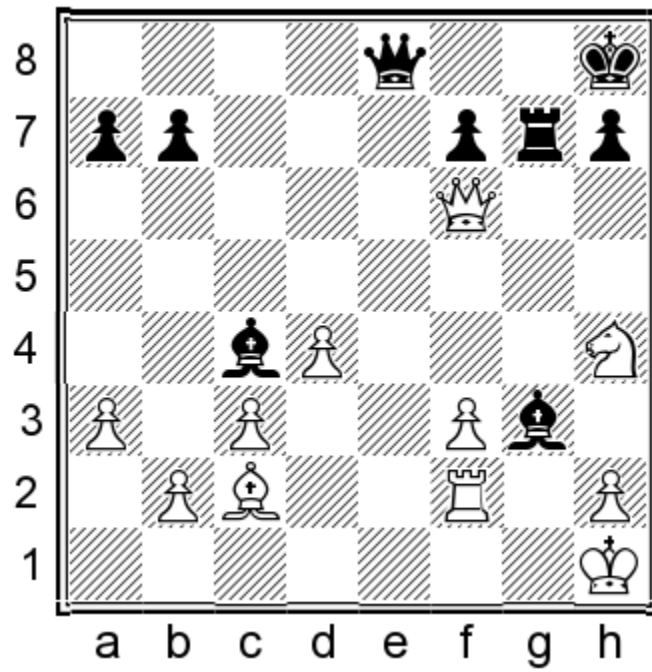
- Error 9 - Failure to see an unnatural candidate move
- Error 10 - Losing (or ignoring) the sense of forcefulness
- Error 11 - Not seeing an intermediate move
- Error 12 - Bad calculation involving passed pawns

Exercises for Chapter 2

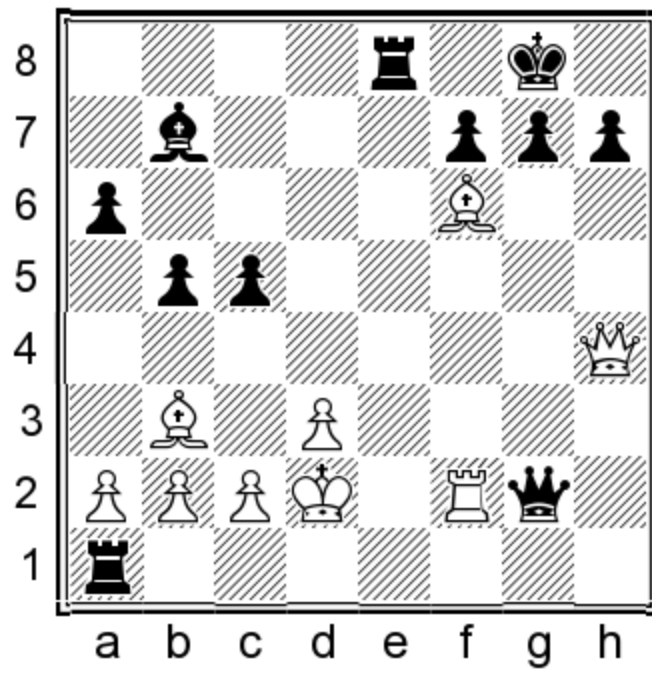




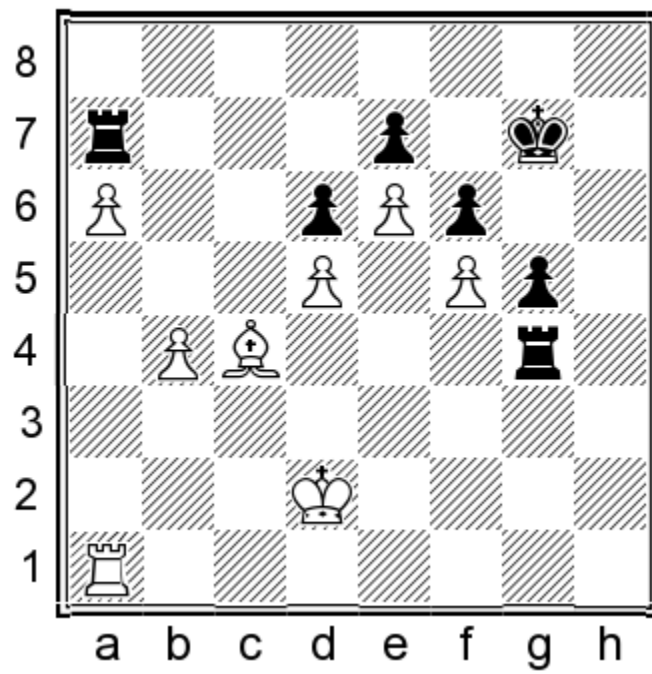
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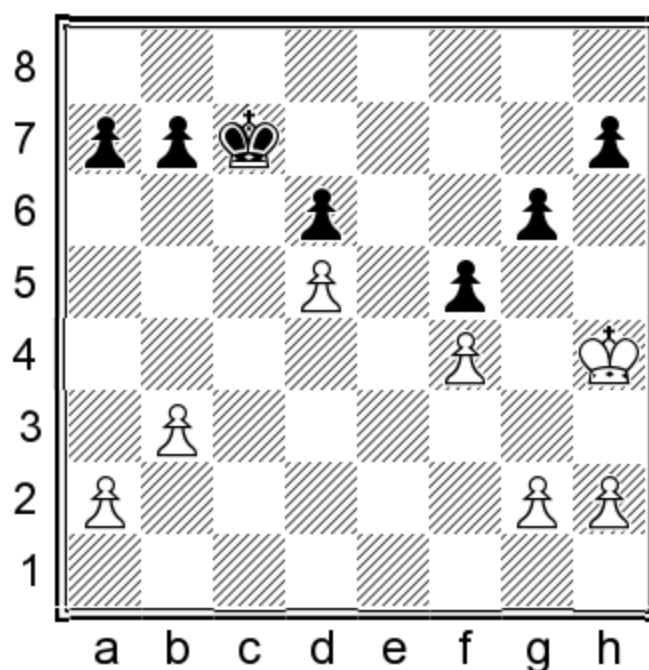
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10



11



12

Tactics and faulty calculation are the main cause of errors. But we should not just settle for acknowledging this and saying that it was just another oversight. We should look for the reasons for that poor calculation, and if we discover them, try to provide remedies, both on an individual level and in general.

We can classify the causes of tactical errors into two groups:

- 1) Not knowing basic tactical themes;
- 2) Being unable to ‘find’ the correct moves.

Regarding errors related to basic tactical themes, we are going to look at these in Chapter 10, ‘Basic tactics’, which, of necessity, is connected with this chapter. Here, we are going to concentrate on why our calculation techniques fail to find the correct move.

The common element in 90% of calculation errors in the second group is the existence of an **unnatural candidate move**, which the

player fails to see on the first, second or third move of the variation (rarely further along). All the examples revolve around the idea of the unnatural candidate, but we are going to identify some cases of this more clearly. We shall also discuss the development of calculation techniques to allow us to minimise our errors, both in number and seriousness.

I have used the positions in this chapter over and over again in training sessions with club players and I have confirmed that **unnatural candidate moves** are difficult to see.

Every player should be aware of his ‘calculation horizon’, although this can be extended with training. Usually, we only try to calculate flawlessly positions that are easy to calculate (which are different for each of us), occasionally positions that are difficult, but never ones that are impossible. With the examples in this chapter, we are not going to delve more deeply into the details of calculation techniques; instead, we are going to emphasise seeing moves, and **to see, we must learn how to look.**

Error 9 - Failure to see an unnatural candidate move

An **unnatural candidate move** is one which is hidden from our search, because it contains some suspicious element, or some element which is not usually found in correct moves. It can be the first move of a variation or one of those that follow. It is normal for an unnatural candidate move to also be hidden from the opponent, and, therefore, it has great potential to influence the outcome of the game.

Below, I have made a list of unnatural candidate moves which are fairly common to the majority of players, but you could add more moves and compile your own list, influenced by your own biases, which would be very useful to discover.

List of unnatural candidate moves

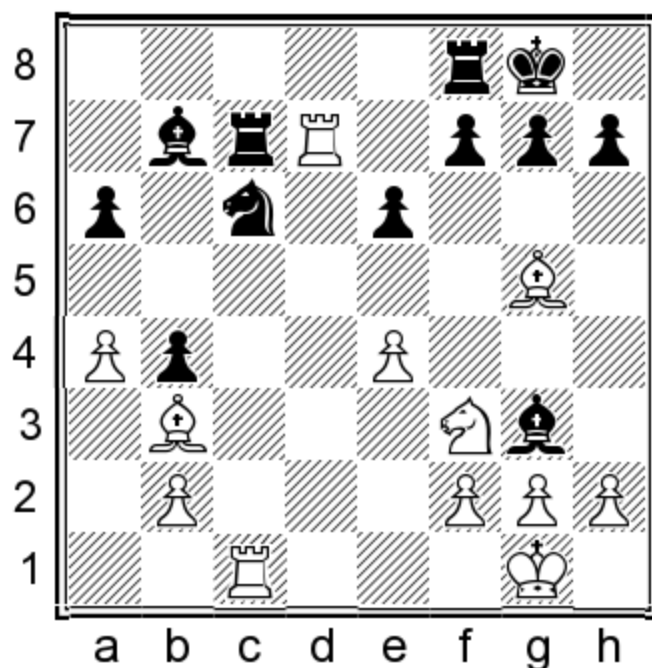
- Sacrificing material, and specifically:
 - A second sacrifice of material (within a few moves);
 - Sacrificing the queen;
 - Sacrificing material with check;
 - Not recapturing.
- A backwards queen move;
- A knight retreat to the first rank;
- An in-between move (aka intermediate move or zwischenzug);
- A move that damages one's own pawn structure;
- A move that damages the protection of one's own king;
- A self-pin;
- A quiet move (without check or capture) after sacrificing material;
- A quiet move when there are many incisive moves available;
- Exposing the king to a discovered attack;
- Silent defence (described later).

In this section, we shall see many examples, more than in any other section, and all of them involve quite short but decisive calculations. We are going to start with a perfect example of a poor search for candidate moves, despite the fact that in this position, there are only a few of these available.

Juan Plazuelo Pascual (2140)

Eduardo Pruja Ramírez (1834)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2014



Exercise 7

21.♖cd1?

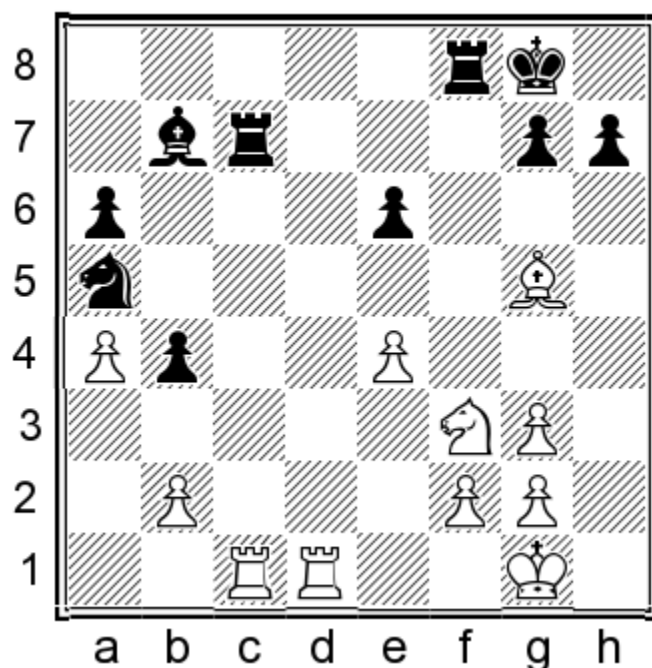
The most natural move, but it reduces White's advantage to a minimum. In a position where 'something could happen', since there are several pieces in strange (or critical) positions, it is advisable to look at many more moves, in other words, to widen the range of candidate moves.

It is probable that White does not see one of the motifs present, specifically that the bishop on g3 is short of safe squares, so he does not look very hard and allows it to escape. Here, we see a case that is connected to Chapter 10, 'Basic tactics' and **Error 42**.

There are at least two moves, not so very natural but logical, which should have been included in a meticulous search.

The first is 21.♖dd1!, simply attacking the g3-bishop; this has been the move proposed by all the grandmasters to whom I have shown this position, but by few club players. Black has only one move

which does not lose a piece: 21...♞a5, attacking the bishop on b3, which should become a desperado: 22.♙xe6! fxe6 23.hxg3.



analysis diagram

At the moment White has an important extra pawn: 23...♖xc1 24.♖xc1 ♙xe4 25.♙e7 ♖b8 26.♙d6, and again White wins a pawn, with a big advantage, because if Black wants to keep defending it with 26...♖b7?, then White plays 27.♖c8+ ♔f7 28.♘g5+, winning a piece.

The second move, which might emerge as a result of analysing the first, is 21.♖d3!?, trying to trap the g3-bishop and defending the one on b3 from the eventual counterattack with ...♞a5. But the rook on this square places itself within range of another counterattack, enough to save the piece, although it loses a pawn: 21...♞e5! (21...h6, in order then to play ...♞e5, gives White the extra option of 22.hxg3 hxg5 23.♞xg5 ±) and now White should play 22.♖d4, to eventually capture the b4-pawn; for example, 22...♖xc1+ 23.♙xc1 ♞xf3+ 24.gxf3 ♙e5 25.♖xb4, leaving White a pawn up and with the more active pieces.

21...♞e5?

Now Black should have continued with 21...♖xd7! 22.♖xd7 ♘c8!. It appears that Black did not see this saving intermezzo (see **Error 11** in this same chapter), or else trusted excessively in his luck. Perhaps White had not seen it either, which would explain the choice of 21.♖cd1. After 23.♖d2 ♘c7, White is slightly better.

22.♖d8!

This multiplies the threats: to take the bishop and also to give mate.

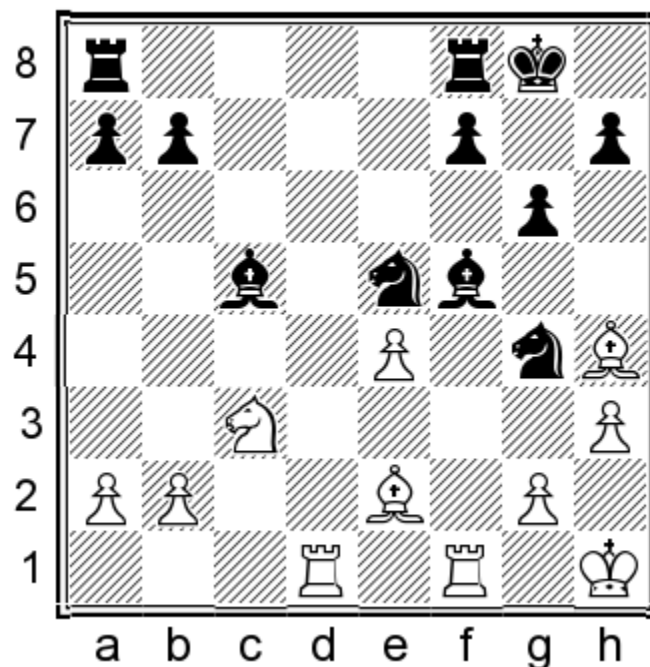
22...f6 23.♞xe5 ♘xe5 24.♘xe6+ ♖cf7 25.♖1d7 1-0

Now for another position with many small tactical themes: the ideal scenario for ignoring candidate moves.

Alejandro Perez García (2322)

Jose María Perez Beltrán (2011)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2015



Here we have a fairly common position. Several pieces are under attack or undefended, which demands a careful preselection of

candidate moves. But, once the candidate moves have been chosen, the analysis of each one does not take long. It should be a situation where it is impossible to go wrong, but we shall see that it is quite the opposite.

18.hxg4?

18.exf5? fails to 18...♘e3, with a fork.

18.♖d5! is the strongest move. How can we arrive at considering this move? The first thing to do is to reject the natural moves, which are captures; once this is done, and as we need to win back material, we should consider the moves that threaten to win material, and then this is perhaps the most natural move.

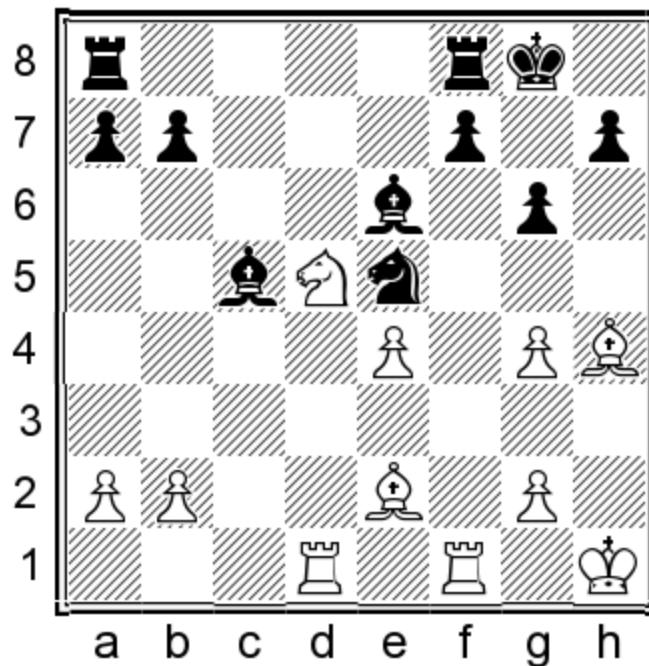
I must say that when I saw this position for the first time, it was hard for me to think that I might have seen this move; it did not seem logical to me, but it is one of the moves that the subjects of my experiments have guessed most often ☺. It is possible that seeing a move for the first time through the engine window (before we have been able to understand its logic) inclines us to think it is ‘unhuman’, when, in fact, it is not so unhuman.

Now all Black’s minor pieces are under attack, and White achieves a decisive advantage; for example, 18...♙b4 19.exf5!. The knight on e5 is attacked, and the fork on e3 is ineffective.

18...♙e6?

Black tries to prevent 19.♖d5, which would attack two pieces. But it was perfectly possible to capture on g4: 18...♙xg4 19.♖d5 ♙b4!⚡. This curious intermezzo, which constitutes a counterattack against the e2-bishop, must have been the move neither of the two players saw.

19.♘d5!



Excellent; the white pieces are very active. The main threat is 20.b4, when the bishop would have no squares, because if it goes to b6 White would give mate in three moves, beginning with ♖e7+.

19...h6?

19...a5?! would have avoided immediate loss of material. But after 20.♔g3 ♖c6 21.♘f6+ ♔g7 22.♘d7 ♕xd7 23.♖xd7, the black pawns (b7 and f7) are defenceless.

19...♖fc8! is the best defence, giving the bishop a safe retreat and avoiding the forks. After 20.♔g3 ♖c6 21.a3 White has only a positional advantage.

20.♘c7 ♖ac8 21.♘xe6 fxe6 22.♔f6! ♖c6 23.♔c4

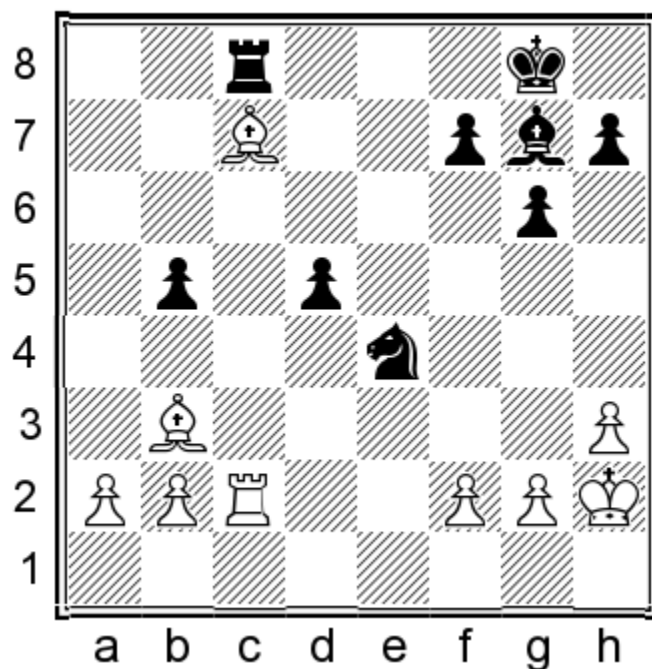
Here the immediate 23.♖d7! was already winning.

23...♖ce8 24.♖d7 1-0

Here is a third case of a situation with several themes, short calculations and a hidden move.

Francisco Orantes Taboada (2242)

Beatriz García Porlan (2070)



Would you say that it is safe, or at least possible, to take the d5-pawn?

31. ♖xd5?

White devours the pawn, which is logical, because the candidate move that refutes it is unexpected. But he should have been suspicious about getting into such an uncomfortable pin. We could call this the error of disregarding the tactical motif, which in the case is an obvious one (see **Error 42**).

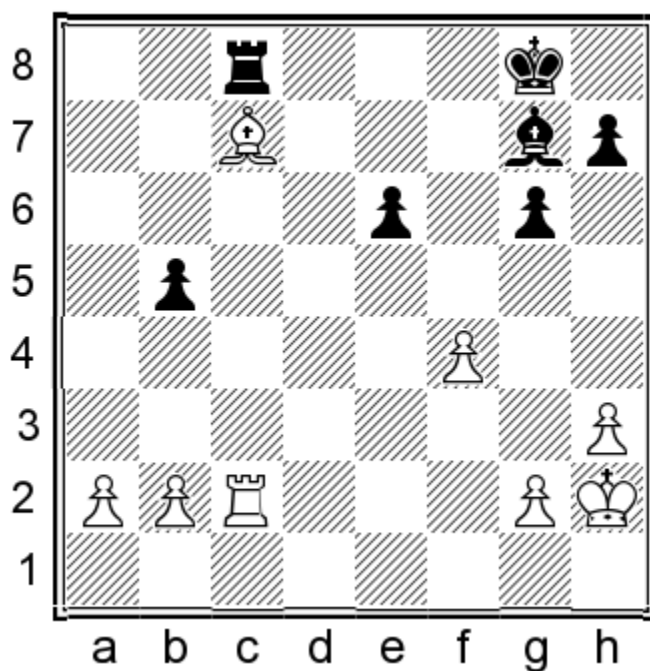
31.f4! is what White should have played, nipping in the bud all the tactical possibilities on the h2-b8 diagonal and aiming to achieve a slight advantage, which Black can only avoid with a move that is also not very natural: 31... ♖xb2 32. ♖xd5 ♘d6 33. ♖xb2 ♖xc7.

31... ♖xc7?

The second-best move, good enough to reach an ending with bishops of opposite colours and to guarantee a draw. Black failed to

find 31...♖g5!, threatening 32... ♖xc7 or 32... ♗e5. This is really the only retreat for the attacked knight which does not obstruct the threats on the diagonal h2-b8, which makes it a candidate move that should be considered.

If then 32.f4 ♘e6 33.♗xe6 fxe6,



analysis diagram

now comes the surprise, because the attack on the pinned bishop with ...♗g7-f6-d8 is unstoppable: 34.♖c5 (or 34.b3 ♗f6 35.♖c5 ♗e7 36.♖c6 ♗d8) 34...♗d4 35.♖c6 ♗xb2!, which is better than winning the exchange immediately with 35...♗a7, because the white pieces cannot escape from their awkward positions.

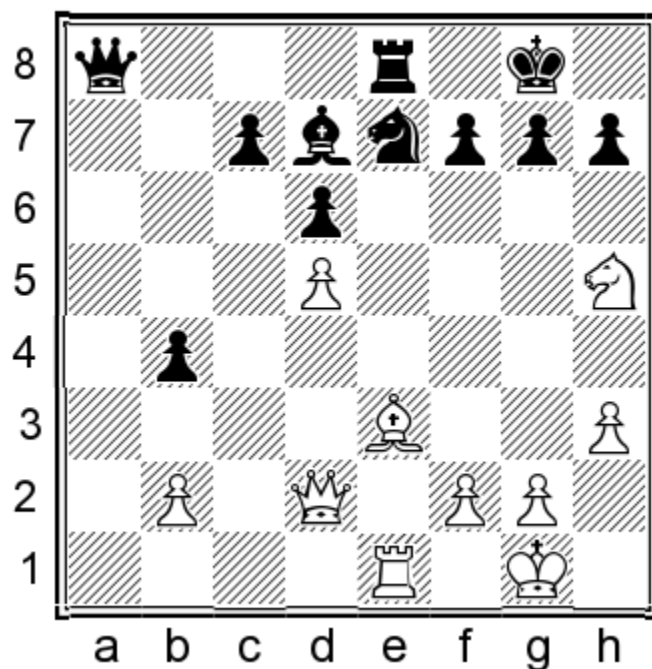
32.♖xc7 ♗e5+ 33.g3 ♗xc7 34.♗xe4

With an inevitable draw.

In the following example, we are going to see two key moments where the players, in turn, overlook a candidate move.

Roger Bernardo Lopez (2110)

Javier Sainz Allo (1804)



The black queen is far away and the white pieces are lurking close to the black king. White is aware of this, because he makes a violent move, but he has probably not considered the other option, which is better:

29. ♖h6!?

The initial sacrifice 29. ♖xg7! was certainly checked. However, after 29... ♔xg7 30. ♖h6+ ♔g8, the winning move 31. ♖xe7! places the second material sacrifice in this variation on the VIP list of **unnatural candidate moves**, although the calculation required is very small.

29... ♔xd5?

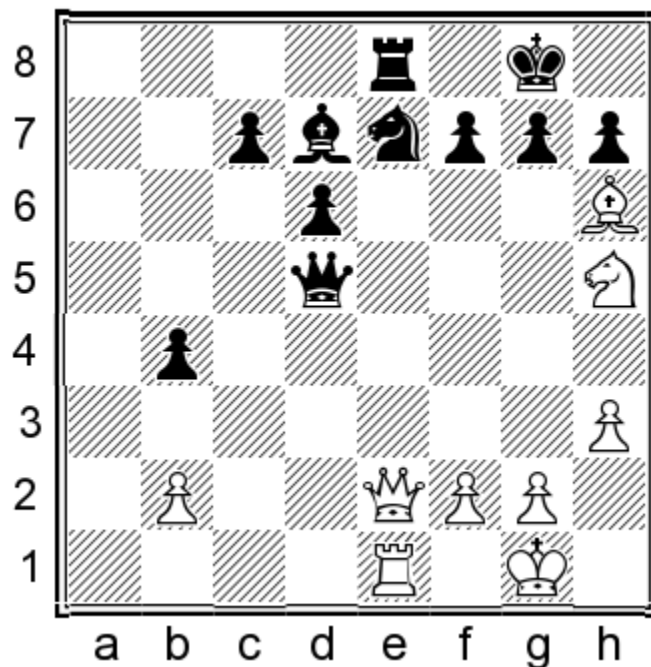
29... ♖xd5! was a much better defence; for example, 30. ♖xe8+ (30. ♖xg7 ♖xe1+ 31. ♔xe1 f5!=) 30... ♔xe8 31. ♔xd5 ♔e1+ 32. ♔h2 gxh6 33. ♖f6+ ♔g7 34. ♖xd7. White has won a piece, which makes this variation very difficult to choose, but this line can be continued

a bit further: after 34...♔xf2! Black has three pawns and the knight is rather uncomfortable. The drawing possibilities are clear. In fact, there is only one move that maintains White's advantage, and it is not obvious: it is 35.♔b3!.

30.♖xe7?

Once again, natural, but not the strongest.

30.♔e2! is another example of an unnatural candidate move in this case, because it does not capture anything in a position where several pieces are exposed.



analysis diagram

White defends everything, pins the e7-knight and threatens to take on g7. There is no good defence:

A) 30...♘g6?. Of course, one must look at the refutation of this move, which we can consider basic tactics, but which is often the cause of calculation errors: 31.♔xe8+ ♕xe8 32.♖xe8+ ♘f8 33.♘f6+! gxf6 34.♖xf8#;

B) 30...♙e6 31.♘xg7 ♖a8 32.♘xe6 ♚xe6 33.♙d2 ♚d7 34.♙g5+ ♘g6 35.♙f6 and White wins.

30...♙xh5 31.♖xd7 ♙xh6

An excellent defence that causes White difficulties.

32.♙xb4?

Very risky; a very natural emotional reaction after a series of violent moves. White should have thought about a draw with 32.♙xh6!

gxf6 33.♖xc7 ♖e1+ 34.♙h2 ♖e2 35.b3! ♖b2 36.♖d7 ♖xb3 37.♖xd6.

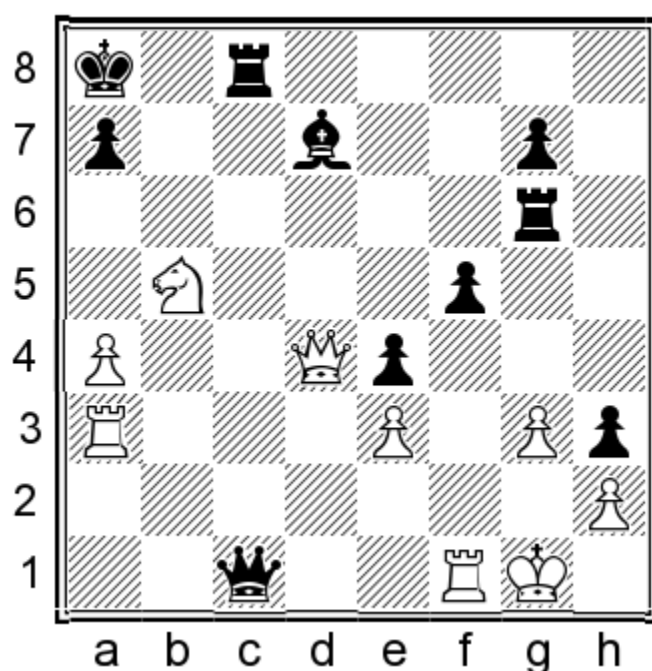
We have now reached a new scenario, which we shall take up again in **Error 42**.

A further example showing that positions in which candidate moves are easily overlooked is one in which there are many themes mixed together.

Samuel Navarrete Espi (2329)

Eihartze Buiza Prieto (2095)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2015



We have a typical position with attacks and counterattacks. As often happens, the variations are not long, but they contain the occasional unnatural candidate move. The key is to keep an open mind and to be able to calculate rapidly.

34...♖xg3+?!

This is the second best move. Everything else loses apart from the one winning move 34...♙xb5!, an unnatural candidate move with three short variations:

- A) 35.axb5? ♔xa3;
- B) 35.♖xc1?? ♖xc1+ 36.♙f2 ♖f1#;
- C) 35.♔d5+!? is the least bad, but 35...♔c6 is winning for Black.

35.hxg3 h2+ 36.♙xh2 ♖c2+??

Now the checks run out at once, but with the other check 36...♖h8+! Black could have forced perpetual check: 37.♙g1 ♖h1+ or 37.♙g2 ♔c2+ 38.♖f2 ♖h2+. Not very difficult, but this might have been the overlooked unnatural candidate move.

37.♙g1

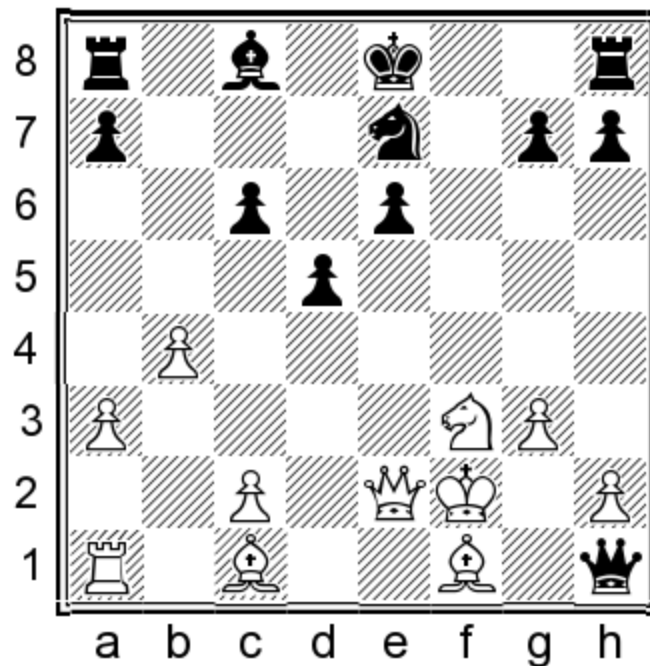
Black resigned.

Now we are going to see a really difficult candidate move, which could only be discovered by means of **progressive thinking**.

Jose Miguel González Capacete (2080)

Francisco Orantes Taboada (2242)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2016

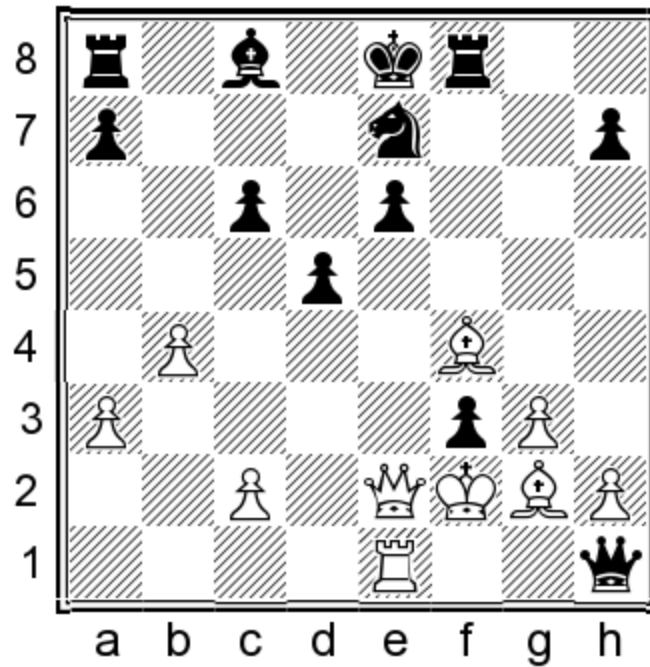


We are in a critical position (Exercise 8). Calculation is essential, and considering all the interesting moves is a necessary step in order to come across the solution. Using the following process is often effective: calculate the most natural move, and if it does not work, use the information you have gathered to select the next candidate move to calculate. In this case, that information could have been essential.

17...0-0?

Black opts for the natural move, which leaves him almost lost. It is difficult to guess intuitively that 17...♖f8 is much better, but after calculating 17...0-0? and seeing why it fails, it is obvious.

Let us look at it: 17...♖f8! 18.♕f4 (18.♕g2 ♔xh2 – the queen escapes and Black wins) 18...g5! 19.♖e1 g4! 20.♕g2 gxf3 and now:

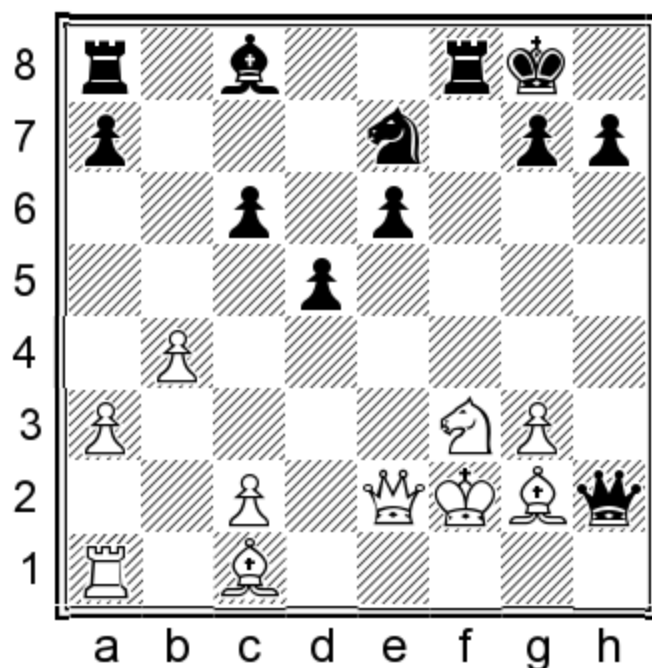


analysis diagram

A) 21. ♔xf3 ♕xh2 22. ♖h1 ♕xh1 23. ♙xh1 ♖f5! (preventing the check on h5 and threatening 24... e5, against the doubly pinned bishop) 24. g4 ♖f7 and Black wins. Once more, 25... e5 is threatened, but now so is 25... ♘g6;

B) 21. ♔xf3 ♕xh2 22. ♖h1 ♘f5! (once again a tremendous resource) 23. ♕e5 (23. ♖xh2 ♘d4+) 23... ♘h4+! 24. gxh4 ♕xf4+ 25. ♕xf4 ♙d7! and Black remains a healthy pawn up.

18. ♙g2 ♕xh2



19.♙g5!

This is the move that needed to be foreseen. Now the knight is under attack, and there is no time to defend it in view of the more serious threat of 20.♖h1.

19...♘f5?!

Black reels from the blow and immediately makes an error. This resource is ingenious but insufficient. Somewhat better was 19...♙h5 20.♙xe7 ♖e8 21.♖h1 ♙f7 22.♙c5 e5 23.♙g1!. Now it is difficult to evaluate the position accurately. The two white pieces will probably be stronger than Black's rook and two pawns because they can be blockaded. But what is certain is that after this calculation, the alternative 17...♖f8 should have been analysed and eventually selected.

20.♘xh2 ♘d4+

And now White could have maximised his advantage by playing:

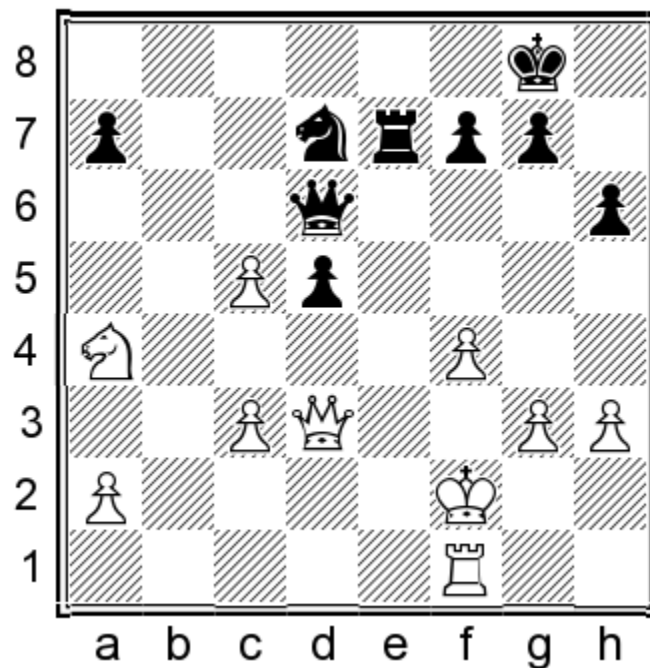
21.♙f3! ♘xf3 22.♘xf3 e5 23.♙g1!

A very high percentage of errors made in club players' games are calculation errors. Some are a long way from being able to be avoided without hard work. Nonetheless, others certainly can be avoided because they are the result of 'very stupid' matters, which a disciplined calculation routine can eliminate.

Álvaro Bayo Milagro (2024)

Iñigo Ortín Blanco (1726)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2014



In this case, Black did not think that there could be a different move other than immediately recapturing, which is probably one of the types of **unnatural candidate moves** that are most difficult to see. Iñigo thinks that even today, he would have made the same error and taken on c5 with the knight. But if he had had any suspicion that there was a good alternative, calculating it would not have demanded any effort on his part.

25...♞xc5?

Much better was 25...♔c6!, first attacking the white knight, which is unprotected (which is a motif he should have considered). Black's move is an unnatural candidate move, which, as we shall keep seeing, is the cornerstone of tactical errors. 26.♔c2 (26.♖b2 ♘xc5, followed by 27...♘e4+) 26...♘xc5 27.♘xc5 ♔xc5+ and now with the queen on c2, the exposed white king does not have a good move; if 28.♔g2, then 28...d4 and wins.

25...♔e6 is also good, but we are going to ignore it in this case.

26.♘xc5 ♔xc5+ 27.♔f3

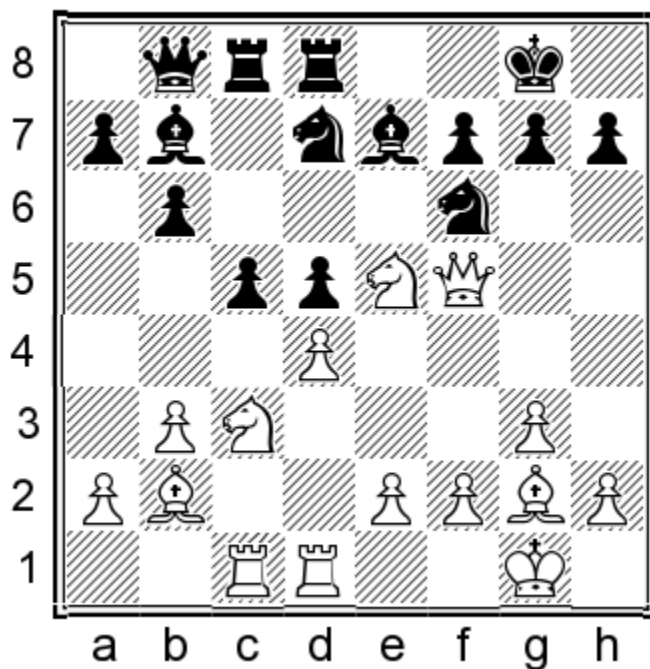
And nothing serious has happened. 27.♔d4 also saves the situation, with limited damage. The game continued and ended with a win for White, as we shall see in **Error 36**.

We return to a position with many attractive moves available.

Maxim Ventura Bolet (2080)

Marta García Martín (2166)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2015



White has achieved an ideal arrangement of pieces against Black's rather weak pawns. Now it is time to take decisive action.

16. ♘xd7?!

This was probably made with the intention of winning the d5-pawn. But the right way to do this was with 16. ♙xd5!, a candidate move that should have been checked, though it is more difficult to consider first capturing with the bishop:

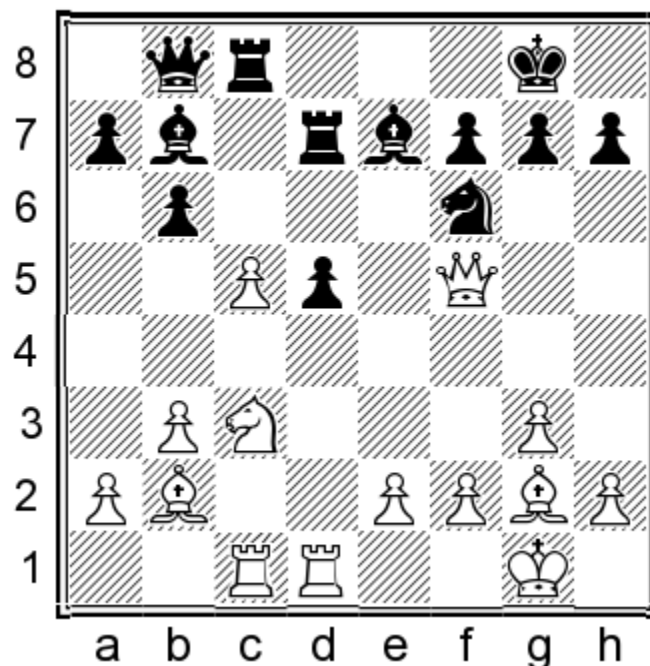
A) 16... ♙xd5? is weak in view of 17. ♘xd5 ♘xd5 18. ♚xf7+ ♔h8 19. ♘xd7 ♖xd7 20. dxc5, threatening mate as well as attacking the black knight;

B) 16... ♘xe5? also fails because of 17. ♙xb7!;

C) 16... cxd4! is the best and unexpected defence: 17. ♙xf7+ ♔h8 18. ♘xd7 ♖xd7 19. ♘b5± .

16. ♘xd5? is easier to consider, but it fails to 16... ♙xd5 17. ♙xd5 ♘xe5!. This refutation of 16. ♘xd5, if it had been discovered, should have opened White's eyes to 16. ♙xd5.

16... ♖xd7 17. dxc5



And now:

17...g6!

This intermezzo (see **Error 11**) was overlooked by both players, and so it is the **unnatural candidate move**. Instead, the game continued 17...d4?! 18.c6, with a clear white advantage, although it finished in a draw.

18.♔c2 ♖xc5

White's advantage is reduced, allowing Black to continue in the game.

How to avoid Error 9

We are going to begin with three reflections: this error is made by all players, it is the most important one to avoid, and you can never completely eliminate it.

The first piece of advice, as with all tactical errors, is to keep training (solving thousands of puzzles). The following pieces of advice are more difficult to put into practice, even though they may seem less demanding.

First, we have to open our minds to all the possibilities. To do this, a necessary first step is to become aware that while in strategy, unnatural moves are rarely good, in a position involving calculation, any move that addresses the problem may well be the correct one.

Afterwards, we have to identify the candidate moves we do not see (and concentrate on them), be diligent in applying progressive thought (and therefore be flexible and prepared to switch to another candidate move), and then think slowly (not allowing ourselves to be carried away by the maelstrom of variations).

To summarise:

- 1) Do lots of exercises from any book or on any platform;

2) Open your mind to all moves, for which I recommend the books *Invisible Chess Moves* by Yochanan Afek and *Creative Chess* by Amatzia Avni;

3) Reflect on your own practice: every time you have ignored a favourable combination, identify which move was the **unnatural candidate move** and think about why you did not see it.

In the following sections, we are going to examine separately some kinds of unnatural moves which I find especially interesting because of their impact on errors, with the intention of recognising them and avoiding them.

Error 10 - Losing (or ignoring) the sense of forcefulness

In this section, we are going to analyse calculation errors where one of the players appears to lose the sense of forcefulness, which is the main guide for calculating during the middlegame (see the **Forcefulness scale** in the Introduction).

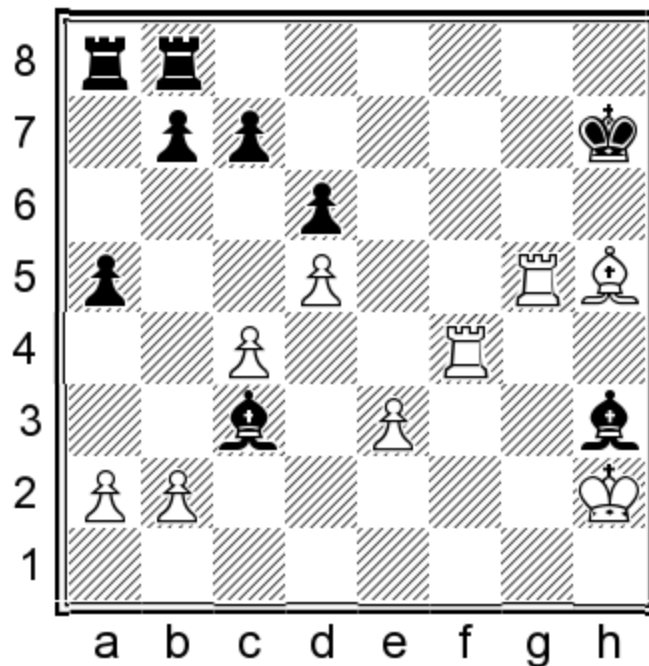
Of course, the errors might have been made for other reasons, but it will be useful to see that by applying the criteria of analysing the most forceful moves, it should be possible to find the correct moves in all these cases.

Let us quickly revise the **Forcefulness scale**: the top level is check, because it forces the opponent to defend himself out of necessity. After check come mating threats, then captures, and finally threats to win material.

Alberto Vela Frago (2046)

Carles Martin Barceló (2231)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2020



32.♔xh3?

This is a winning move, but it complicates the game enormously. Apparently, White failed to follow the guiding thread of the forcefulness scale; he should have considered the ‘very forcing’ moves first.

Given that none of White’s checks are attractive, he should have moved on to analyse 32.♖h4!, which threatens mate. Then 32...♔h6 is almost the only move (if 32...♕e1, then 33.♖xh3) and now comes 33.♖g6+!, with check; this is the most precise continuation, but some others also win. After 33...♔h7, 34.♖g3 threatens mate again. 34...♕f6 35.♖hxh3 and now no further resistance is possible against the discovered check: 35...♕g7 36.♕f7+ ♕h6 37.♖g6, followed by mate. It is interesting to note that the variation is five moves long, but the moves are so forced that it should be possible to calculate them in a few seconds.

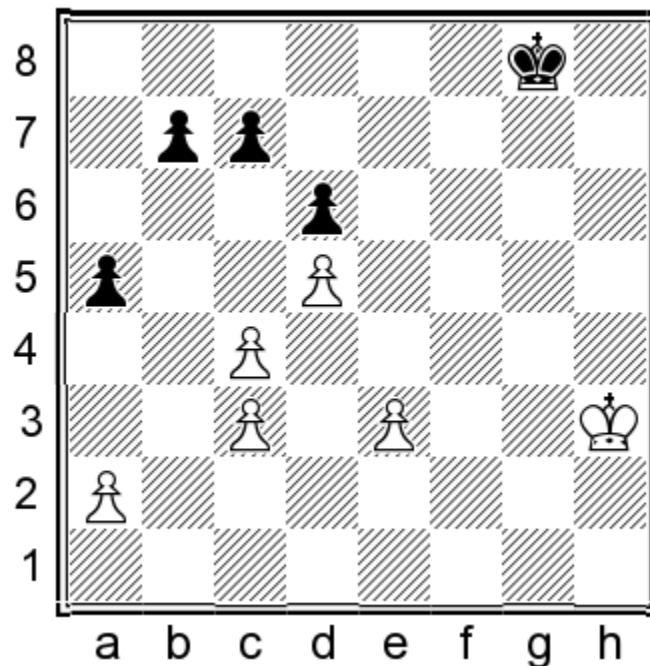
32...♔h6 33.♖g1?

Again he makes the same error, when he had a really forced variation available:

A) 33.♖g6+! ♔xh5 34.♖g3 ♕f6 35.♖f5+ ♔h6 36.♖xf6+ and mate in two;

B) 33.♖ff5 ♕e5 34.♕f7, followed by 35.♖g6+ and 36.♖h5#.

33...♖g8 34.♖xg8 ♖xg8 35.bxc3 ♔xh5 36.♖h4+! ♔g6 37.♖g4+ ♔f7 38.♖xg8 ♔xg8



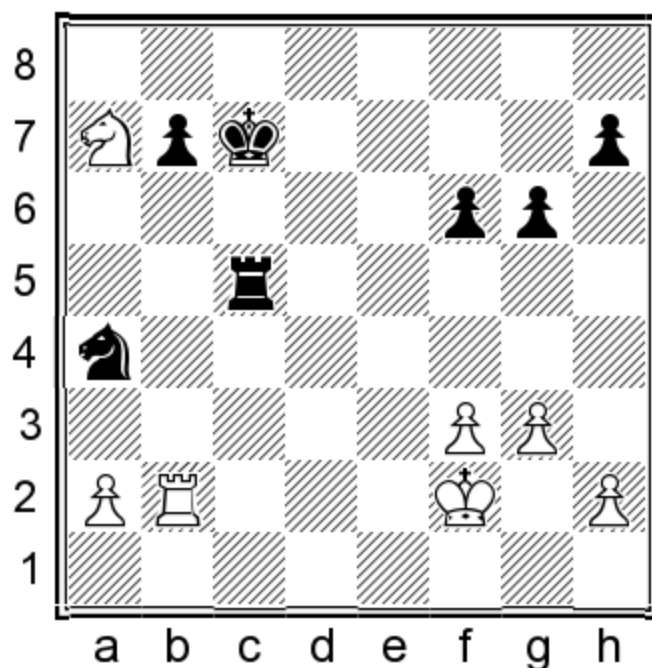
The pawn ending is also winning, but it requires a level of precision, as shown by the fact that White lost in the end.

Following the guiding thread of forcefulness does not mean looking only at checks, rather it should allow us also to work down through the lower levels (captures, and threats to material) when necessary.

Martin Pascual García (1986)

Xabier Barbazán Bilbao (2151)

Basque Championship 2022



40. ♞b5+??

White has just regained a pawn on a7, and in the resulting state of euphoria he rushes to withdraw the knight; at the wrong time, because this way he loses it. He should have played 40. ♖b4 ♜c2+ 41. ♔e3 and could then have held the position.

40... ♔b8??

Black also ignores the winning move, which is an **unnatural candidate**, because it exposes the king to a discovered check.

40... ♔b6! attacks the knight with two pieces and the piece that can deliver the ‘terrible’ discovered check, the white rook, is itself under attack. If 41. ♖b4, then 41... ♔a5.

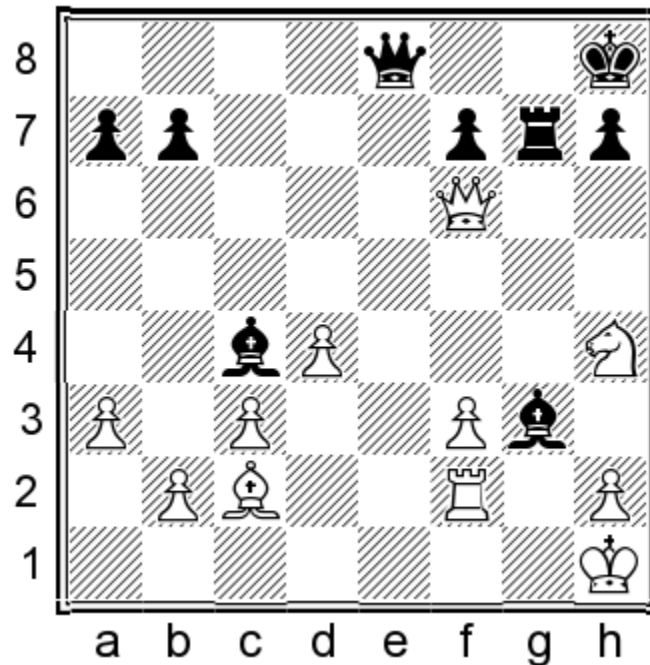
41. ♖b4=

We should never abandon our sense of forcefulness, not even in apparently dominating or quiet positions. And if we have relaxed, we should recover it automatically when an unexpected move occurs.

Pablo Soto Martin (1796)

Iñigo Ortín Blanco (1796)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14. 2014



Black, who was in a desperate position (Exercise 9), has just taken a pawn on g3. It is an ingenious resource, but not sufficient if White stays calm and re-examines all the possible candidate moves.

Normally, under the effect of surprise, the correct state of mind is not maintained, and it is therefore important to immerse yourself in the routine of meditation, following guidelines in which you have confidence. In this case, White had time and should have analysed the checks first.

34.hxg3?

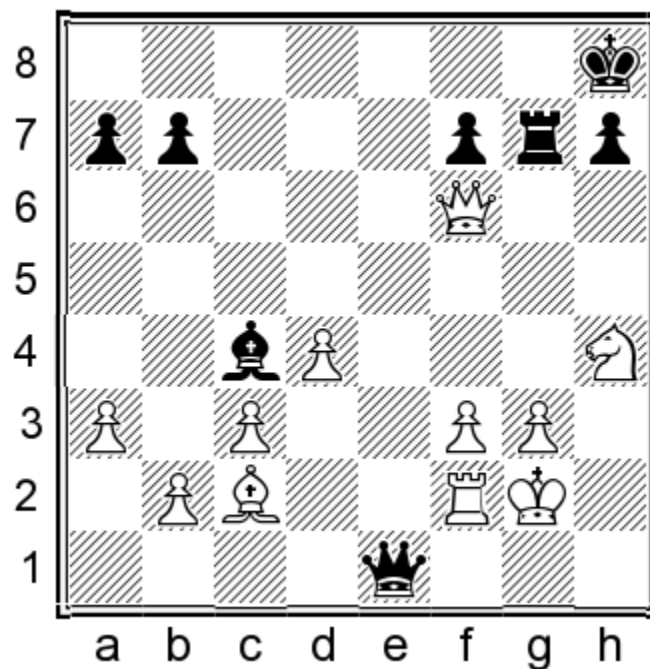
This amounts to placing himself in Black's hands, who, from this point on, finishes the game with four checks, one after the other. It is curious that White had only two checks available and these were (almost) his best moves.

A) 34.♖e2!? saves the game and is an example of an unexpected defensive candidate move, which is often overlooked, although it is not important in this case;

B) 34.♙xg7+ is only enough to equalise: 34...♔xg7 35.hxg3;

C) But the best move is the other check, 34.♞g6+!, shutting down the action of the rook, and after 34...hxg6 35.hxg3 Black has nothing and remains lost.

34...♔e1+ 35.♔g2



35...♞f1+

Undoubtedly White was not expecting this, but all checks should be considered, especially your opponent's checks.

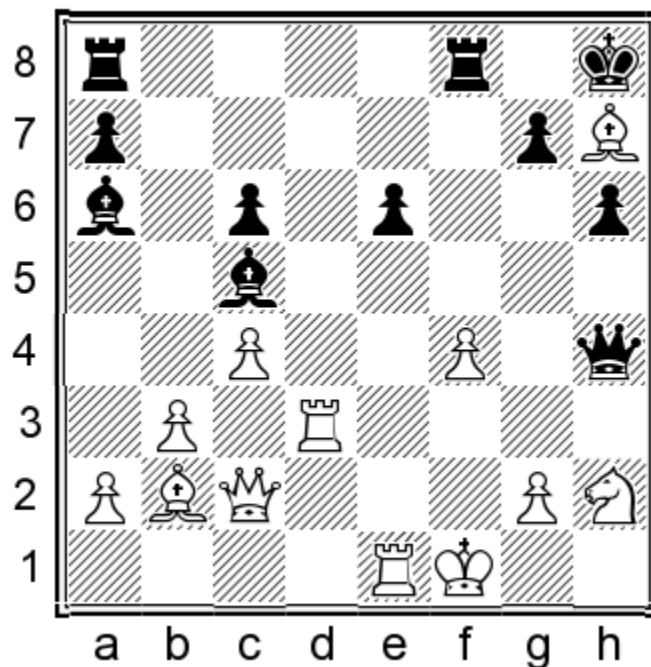
36.♔g1

36.♖xf1 is the worst variation: 36...♙xg3+ 37.♔h1 ♙h3# but
36.♔h2 lasts a bit longer: 36...♙xf2+ 37.♔h1 ♙xg3 38.♙d8+ ♖g8
39.♙f6+ ♙g7 and Black wins.

36...♞h3+ 37.♔h2 ♙xf2+ 38.♔xh3 ♙xg3#

Carlos Molina Ortega (1478)

Lucas Antuña Pavón (1872)
 Spanish Team Championship U14 2022



22...♔xh2?

In such a violent position, it is not surprising that a ‘slow’ move like this one is an error. He should have followed the guiding thread of forcefulness and considered the checks first: 22...♖xf4+! 23.♘f3 (there is nothing else worth considering) 23...♔h1+ 24.♔e2 ♔xg2+ 25.♔d1 ♔xc2+ 26.♔xc2 and now that the storm has passed, Black can play 26...♔xh7 with some advantage, although the white pieces are still active.

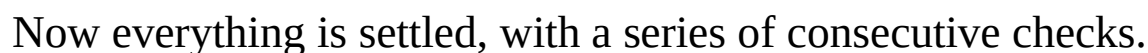
23.♙xg7+!

But White did take account of the forcing moves. Probably Black did not expect this heavy blow, and he did not react well:

23...♔xg7?

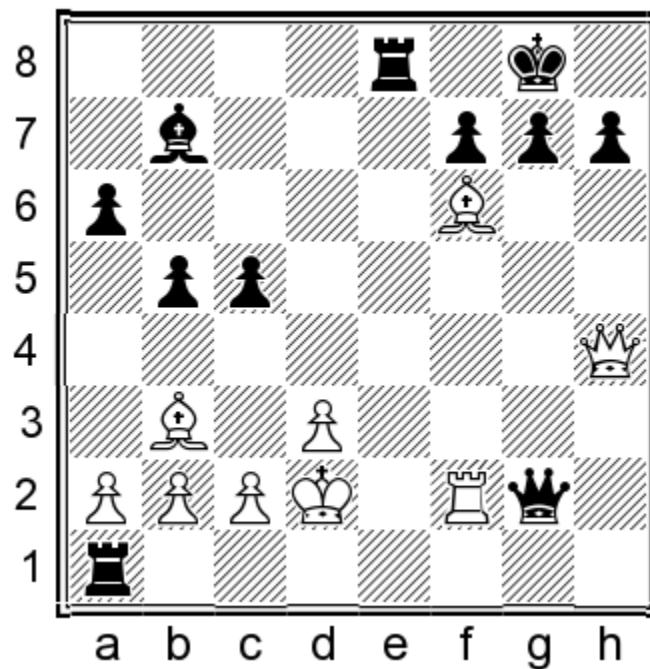
A) 24. ♖h3+?! ♔g8!! (24... ♔xg7? loses to 25. ♕c3+, followed by 26. ♖xh2) 25. ♖xh2 ♖xf4+ 26. ♔e2 ♖f2+ 27. ♔d1 ♖d8+ 28. ♔c1 ♖xc2+ 29. ♔xc2 ♔xg7+;

24.♖d7+



For many years, I have used the game below from the 2010 Navarra championship in my lessons on the concept of forcefulness. I believe it is a very inspirational game.

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Black has a superior position (Exercise 10) in terms of material and initiative, but he should not ignore the fact that White has four pieces aimed at his king.

1...♔g1?

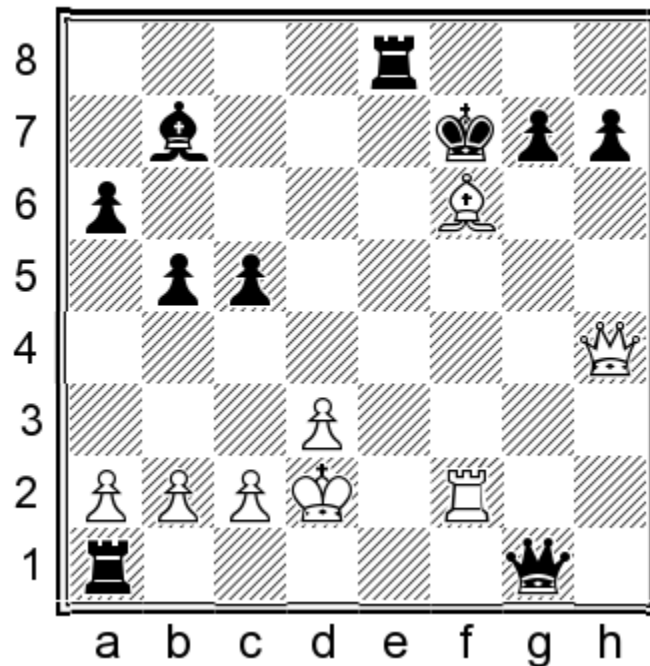
This threatens mate and is sufficient to win, but it could be considered an error, because it ignores the Forcefulness scale. Remember that the highest level of forcefulness is the check: 1...♖d1+!! (the first rule of good calculation is not to make a list of candidate moves, but to ‘look at all the checks’ and in this position this is the only ‘not absurd’ check; the other three, 1...♔xf2+, 1...♔g5+ and 1...♖e2+ can be dismissed immediately) 2.♔c3 (2.♔xd1 ♔g1+ 3.♔d2 ♔e1#) 2...b4+ 3.♔c4 ♔d5#.

2.♙xf7+!

White, 'forced' by his opponent's fearsome threat, applies the basic principle and finds a 'logical check', but right now it is not sufficient.

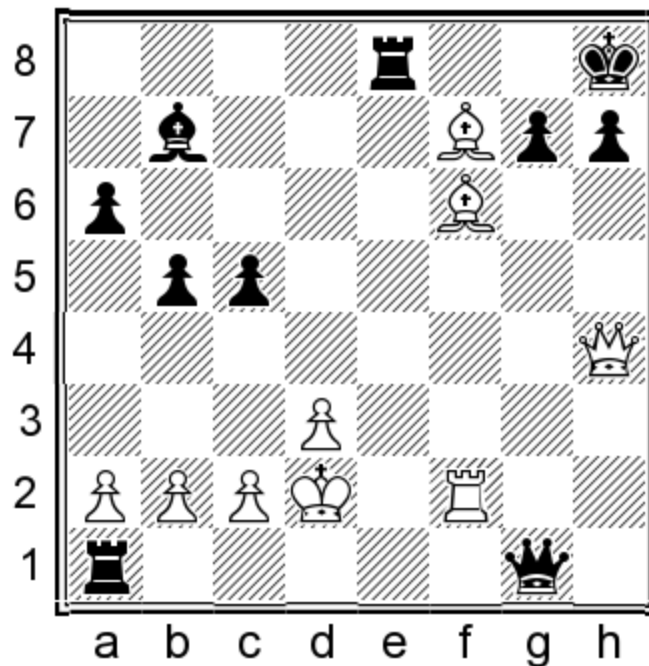
2...♔h8?

A scenario we have already discussed is repeated. Taken by surprise, Black grows confused and in preventing discoveries he allows a more troublesome check. Correct was 2...♔xf7!



analysis diagram

3.♙d4+ (3.♚h5+ ♚g6) 3...♔g8 4.♖f8+ ♖xf8 5.♙xg1 ♖xg1 and Black wins.



3.♙xg7+!

It remains curious that, once again, there is a check with a double sacrifice, but it is logical.

3...♔xg7?

The last mistake; it was essential to avoid the following check by playing 3...♙xg7 4.♙xe8 ♖g1=.

4.♙f6+ ♔f8 5.♙d5#

How to avoid Error 10

All the errors in this chapter have something in common with regard to how to avoid them: do exercises and open your mind to all the possibilities, because this is what contributes the most towards improving your calculation technique.

My advice is to always be on the lookout for forcing moves, develop your sense of the Forcefulness scale, and get into the habit of being guided by it. This helps you to develop disciplined calculation routines.

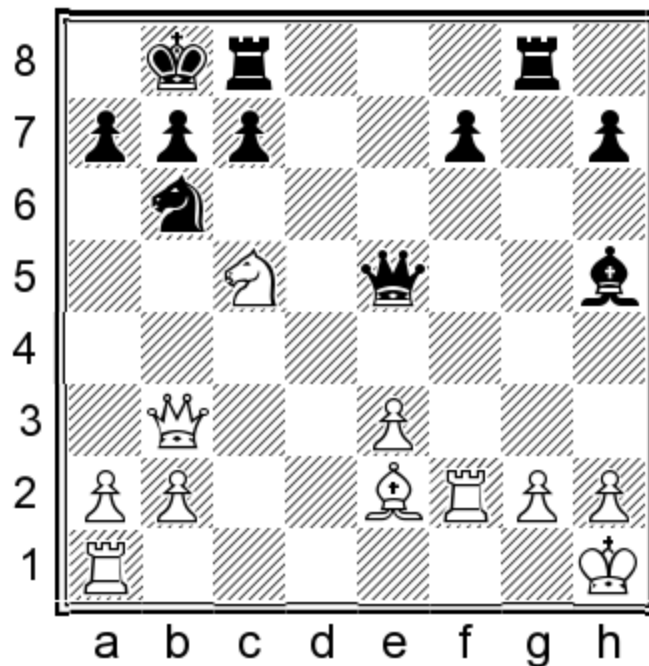
I do not recommend any specific books of exercises here, but I remind you (once again) that you must do plenty of them.

Error 11 - Not seeing an intermediate move

An intermediate move (aka *zwischenzug* or in-between move) is what we call a move that is inserted in the middle of what appears to be the logical sequence. It is a kind of **unnatural candidate move** with its own logic and is often overlooked. The number of intermediate moves to consider is very large, as we have already seen in previous examples.

We are going to illustrate the idea with a short anecdote:

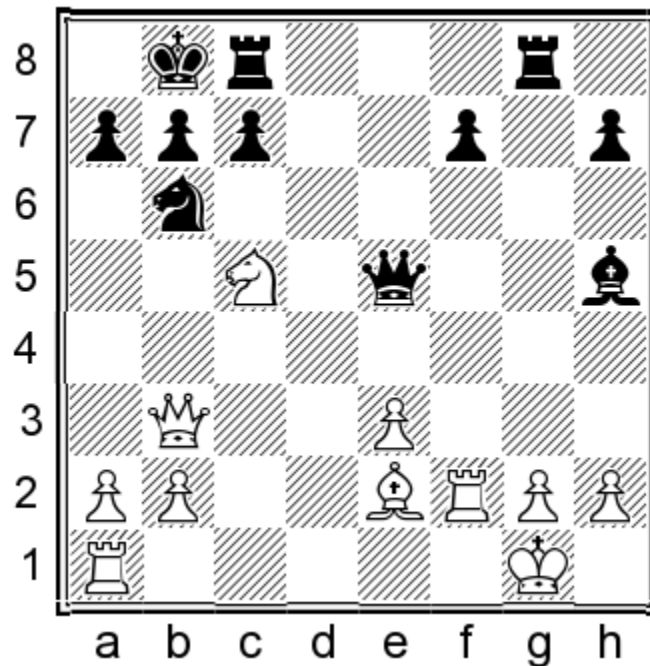
Bondarevsky's Diagram 49 – Combinations in the Middlegame



This first diagram appears in Igor Bondarevsky's booklet *Combinations in the Middlegame* (where it is Diagram 49), and its only purpose is to illustrate the theme of eliminating a defender by playing 1. ♔xb6.

I think I have used it frequently as an exercise, but on one occasion, I accidentally placed the white king on g1 and presented the position as in the second diagram, with the ‘misfortune’ that one of my students thought about it and discovered that now 1.♔xb6 is bad because of 1...♖xg2+:

Bondarevsky’s Diagram 49 – Twin

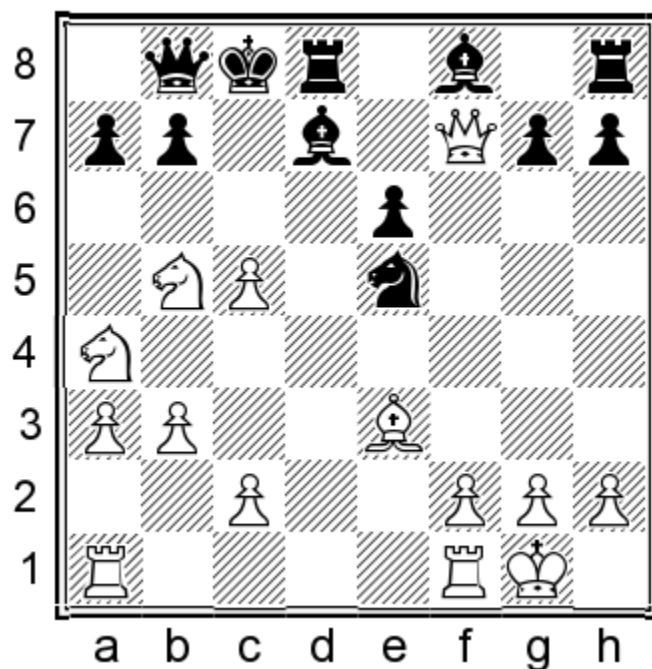


1.♔xb6? ♖xg2+!

These two positions, almost identical, show us the essence of the theme of the intermediate move, which is the same as that of the counterattack (see Chapter 3, ‘Defence’): an intermediate move can exist whenever it is possible to threaten something equally or more important than the threat received. This should serve as a warning that a tactical variation of low forcefulness is very sensitive to unexpected intermediate moves, and the player who forgets this may be in for some nasty surprises.

Mikel Ortega López (2088)

Jorge Iglesias García (1947)



Black's position is difficult, but right now, he is attacking White's queen and knight. There are two interesting candidate moves, and White chooses the worst of the two, perhaps through not examining the other correctly, but almost certainly through overlooking an intermediate move two moves later.

19. ♔h5?

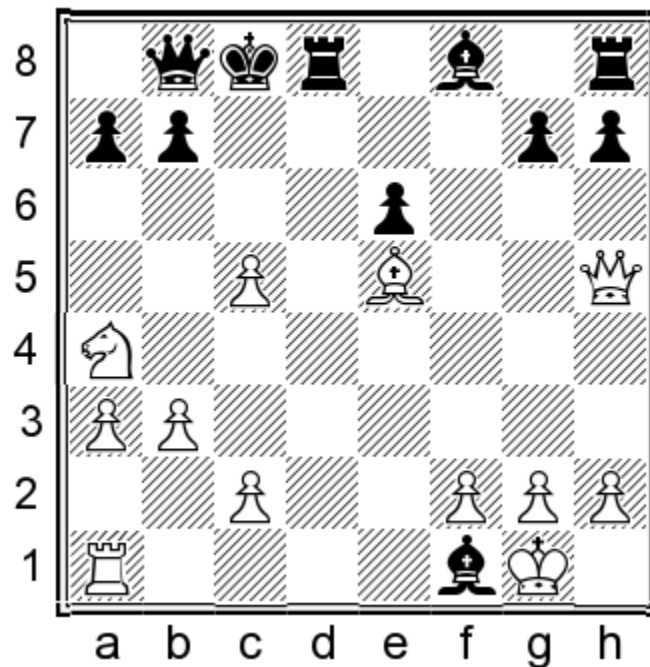
19. ♘xa7+! was definitely winning, but the calculation has a small difficulty: 19... ♔xa7 20. ♔h5, attacking the knight and threatening a check on b6 at the same time. 20... ♖xa4 (20... ♘c4 is ingenious but is answered with 21. c6+—) 21. ♔xe5 ♖c6 and now White has a tremendous position but no immediate win or way to recover material. 22. ♖ad1! is best, intending 23. ♖xd8+ or 23. ♔xe6+, and if 22... ♖d5, then 23. c4.

19... ♖xb5 20. ♖f4 ♖xf1

20...♖d5!? also causes problems, but after 21.♖fd1! (21.c4? ♞d3) 21...♞g6 22.♙xd5! exd5 23.♙xb8 ♔xb8 24.♞c3 ♙c6 25.b4 we can evaluate that White is somewhat better.

21.♙xe5?

Completing the faulty calculation. Instead, 21.♔xf1 g6 22.♙xe5 ♙xe5 23.♙xe5 ♖g8 gives only a slight advantage to Black.



21...g6!

This is the intermediate move that was overlooked. Of course, it adheres to the rule of attacking something of equal or greater value than the attack that is received. The fact that the attacks are equal here (to the queen on both sides) instead of greater (for example, a check) makes it more difficult to see.

22.♙xb8

If 22.♙g5, then 22...♖d5!.

22...gxh5 23.♙e5 ♖g8!

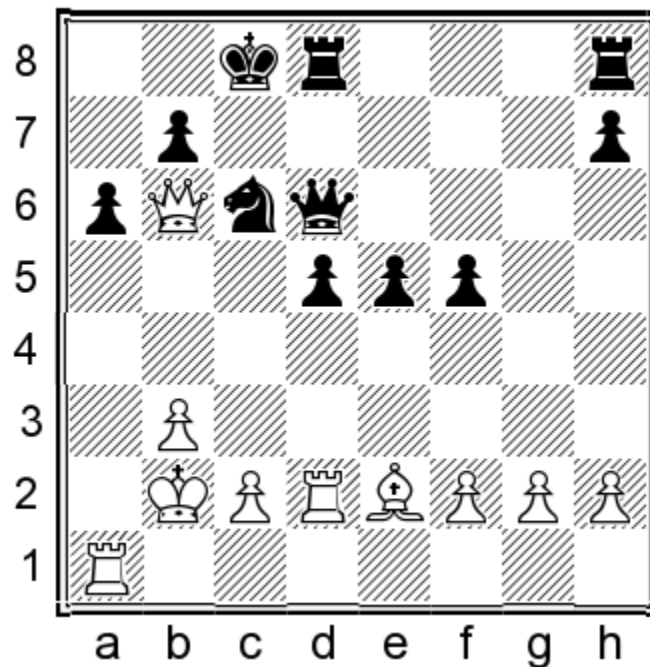
Black has a big advantage, though he lost the game in the end.

Now we shall analyse an example in which the error is related to overlooking an intermediate move, although there are other omissions related to other themes, such as identifying a threat and unwise exchanges.

Adrian Galiana Fernández (1836)

Carlos Martínez Lopez (1780)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2014



Black is a pawn up, but his position is rather uncomfortable and White appears to be threatening with captures on a6.

26...♞d4?

Faced with the apparent white threat, it is natural to move the knight, but it is exposed here. Instead, 26...♞e7!? was a solid and natural move, and with this, Black's advantage is also solidified. 27.♙a7 seems worrying, but after 27...♙c7 followed by 28... ♞c6, the white queen will have to move away.

Nevertheless, the best move is 26...♖hg8!, preparing 27... ♖g6. Some sangfroid is needed in order to allow the sacrifices on a6 and other moves, such as ♕c4, but adding the rook to the defence means there is no danger; for example, 27.♖xa6 (27.♕xa6 bxa6 28.♖xa6 ♖g6!) 27...bxa6 28.♕xa6+ ♔d7 and there is no problem; Black is winning.

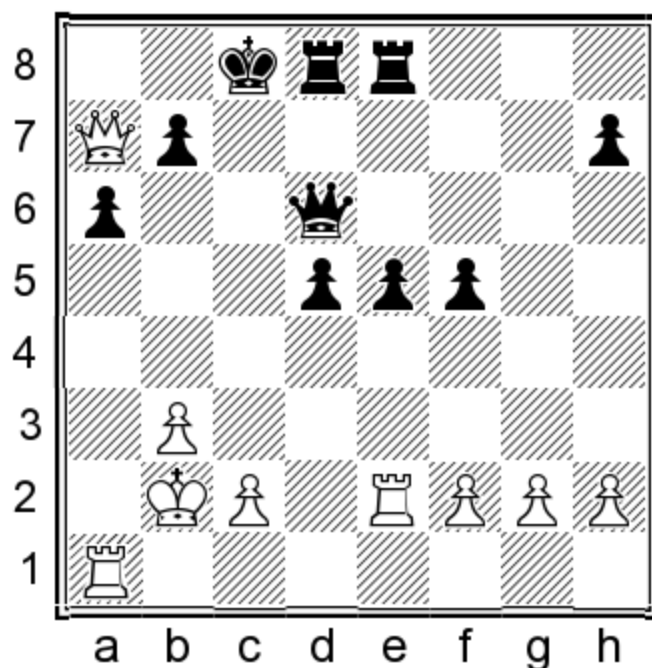
27.♔a7?

Fortunately for Black, White did not see the intermediate move either. After the move played in the game, Black had the opportunity to return to the previous position, but he did not take advantage of this either. Here, White should have played 27.♔xd6! ♖xd6 in order to be able to continue with 28.f4!, undermining the knight, and if 28...♞xe2, then 29.fxex2!, the key intermediate move, which is undoubtedly what the players had missed.

27...♞xe2?

Each player continues with their postulates. Black wants to exchange pieces, White does not, which leads to these last two errors. With 27...♞c6!, Black could have gone back to the previous position, where the knight is more useful than the bishop, because it helps eliminating White's activity and keeps the important extra pawn.

28.♖xe2 ♖he8=



Black is still a pawn up, but he has not eliminated the problem of White's activity and he will not succeed in doing so without giving up his advantage.

29.♖a5 ♜d7 30.♙a8+ ♚b8 31.♞c5+ ♜c7 32.♙xb8+ ♔xb8 33.♞xd5

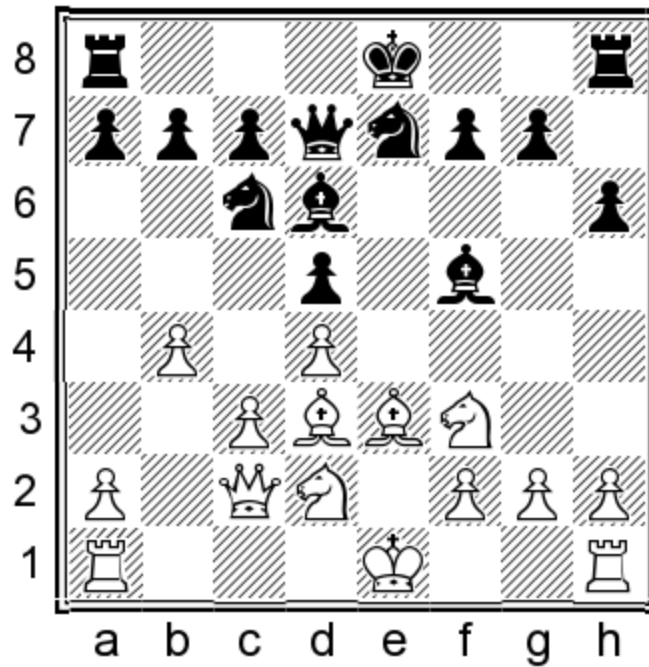
And White has regained the pawn with a slight advantage. The game ended in a draw.

Now we shall see an example of an apparently easy intermediate move.

Adriá Mari Copa (1837)

Julio Suarez Gómez (2307)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2014



White to play.

11. ♖b3?

We assume that both players saw Black's next move but miscalculated it.

11... ♗xb4!

Instead, the game continued 11... ♗xd3? 12. ♔xd3=.

12. ♗xf5

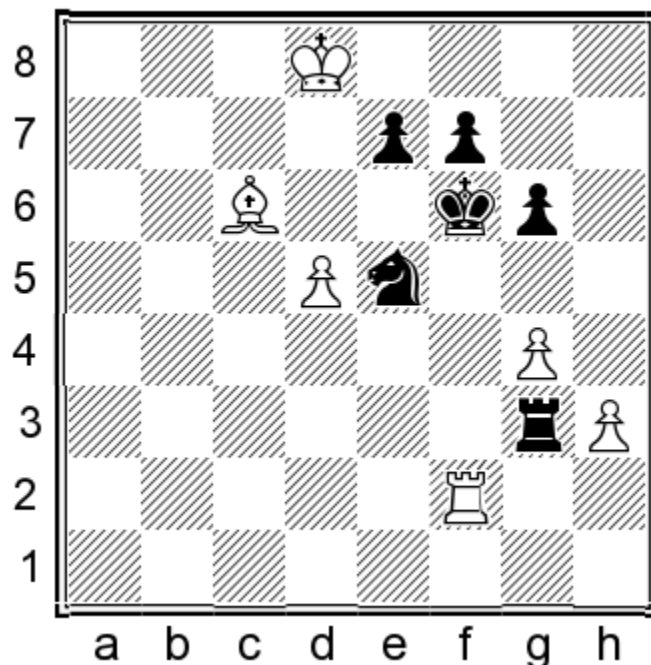
If 12. cxb4, then 12... ♘xb4 13. ♗xf5 ♘xc2+ and Black wins.

12... ♔xf5 13. ♔xf5 ♗xc3+!

This is the winning intermediate move. It looks simple, because it is a check, but it is much harder to foresee when the piece you postpone recapturing for a move is the queen.

Once again, an intermediate move is inserted into a sequence of captures.

Juan Plazuelo Pascual (2228)



42...♖f3?

Black sees no danger in the rook exchange, and indeed, if it occurs immediately there is no danger. I want to remind you once more about many players' excessive inclination to exchange rooks, which we see again here.

42...♔g5! is a little frightening, because it loses the e7-pawn, but after 43.♔xe7 ♖xh3 Black will have no problems. In the worst of cases, he will sacrifice the knight for White's passed pawn.

43.♖xf3+?

The best move was 43.g5+!! . Clearly, both players overlooked this intermediate move (which, as is usually the case, is a move of greater forcefulness, in this case a check). 43...♔xg5 and now the exchange of rooks is winning: 44.♖xf3 ♘xf3 45.♔xe7 and, once again, we see the truth of the premise that a passed pawn is much

more dangerous with fewer pieces on the board, in this case without the rooks: 45...♞e5 46.♙b5 ♔h4 47.d6 ♔xh3 48.♔f6 and the pawn queens.

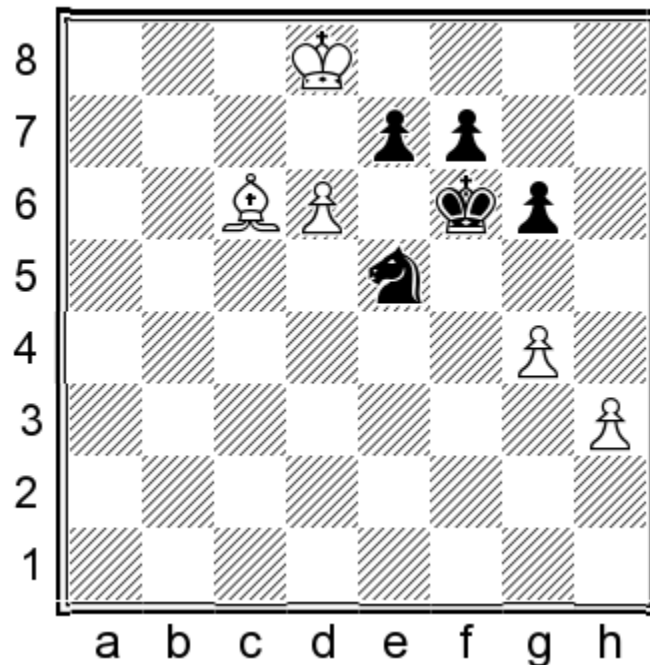
43...♞xf3

Now g5 is controlled by the knight. From now on, this example could well have been included in the section on passed pawns (see **Error 12**).

44.d6!?

A good try, since other moves do not win; for example, 44.♙b7 ♞e5 45.g5+ ♔xg5 46.♔xe7 ♞c4 47.d6 ♞xd6 48.♔xd6=.

44...♞e5



45.d7?

A surprising error in calculation involving passed pawns (see **Error 12**), as the knight's ability to give a fork check against a newly-promoted queen is well known.

Here 45.g5+! was again the best move (overlooked twice), but only for a draw now: 45...♔xg5 46.♔xe7 ♘xc6+ 47.♔xf7 or 45...♔e6 46.♙b7 exd6 47.♙c8+ ♔d5 48.♔e7.

45...♘xc6+46.♔c7

White probably thought he was winning, at least when he played 45.d7.

46...♘d4!

The classic way to hinder a pawn promotion by means of a fork.

47.h4

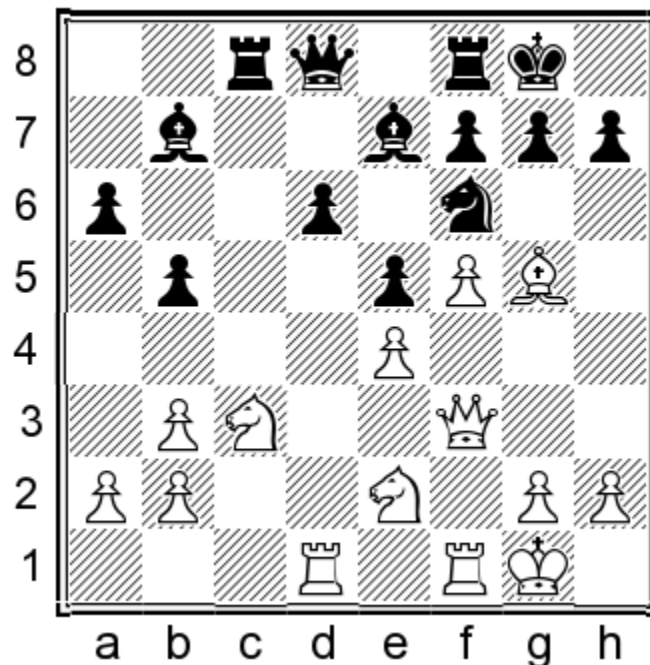
And as a result of his miscalculation, instead of winning, White lost.

47...♘e6+48.♔c8♔g749.g5f50-1

Marc Montoya Pecurul (2092)

Andrés García Valle (1717)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2014



White probably saw the idea of ...♖xe4, considered it a threat after 16... b4, and tried to prevent it:

16.b4?

But in reality, he has provoked it. 16.♙xf6= was a simple solution.

16...♖c4?

Black probably saw the first move, but not the second. 16...♖xe4! was an excellent blow, thanks to 17.♙xe7? ♕b6+!!, the kind of intermediate move that leaves you open-mouthed, although the calculation is elementary: 18.♔h1 ♖xc3-+.

17.♙xf6 ♙xf6 18.a3=

A special kind of intermediate move is the **desperado**. This occurs when a piece that is going to be captured anyway is sacrificed, in order to obtain at least a quantity of material in return for its loss. Despite of being a very logical idea, this is often forgotten, especially when the desperado piece is the queen. We shall present a double example from a well-known opening position, which could also have been included in the section on traps. For players who do not know it, it is undoubtedly a shock.

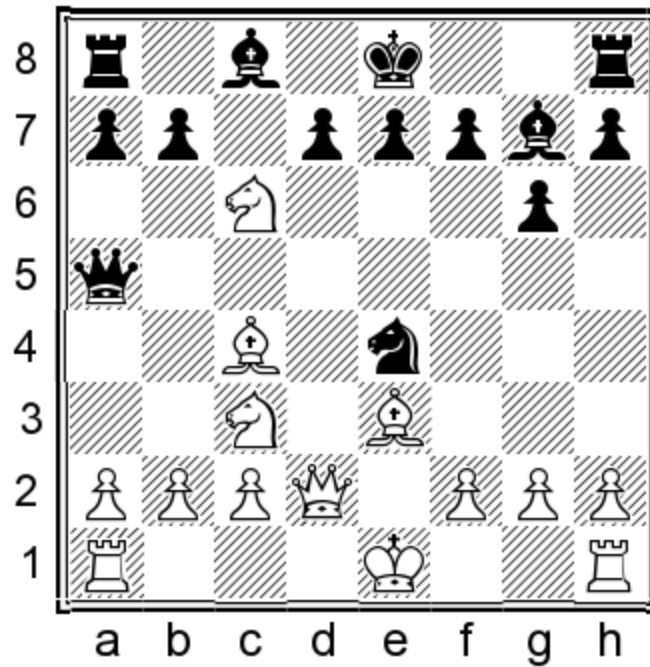
Pablo García De la Dueña (1690)

Leyre Abrisqueta Zudaire (2035)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18. 2022

1.e4 c5 2.♖f3 g6 3.c4

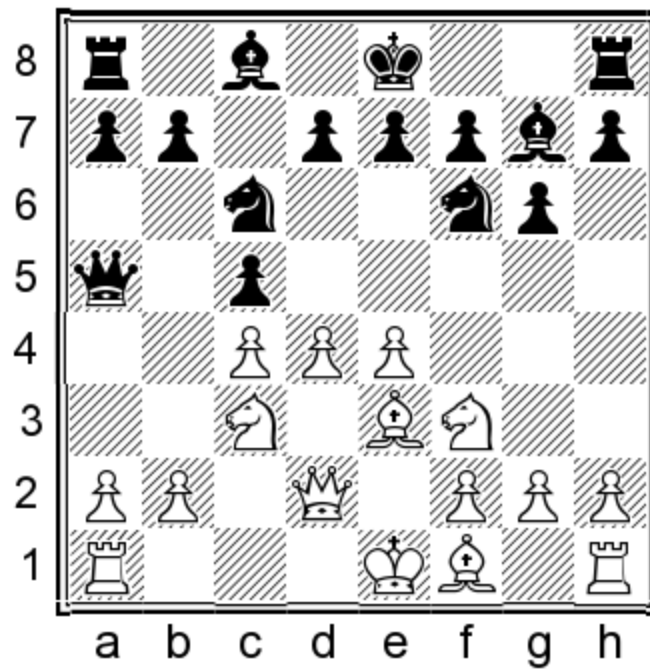
3.d4 leads to an almost identical position, where the same trick occurs. After 3...cxd4 4.♖xd4 ♖c6 5.♖c3 ♙g7 6.♙e3 ♖f6 7.♙c4 ♕a5 8.♕d2? White loses a pawn, but he probably relied on an intermediate move: 8...♖xe4 9.♖xc6



analysis diagram

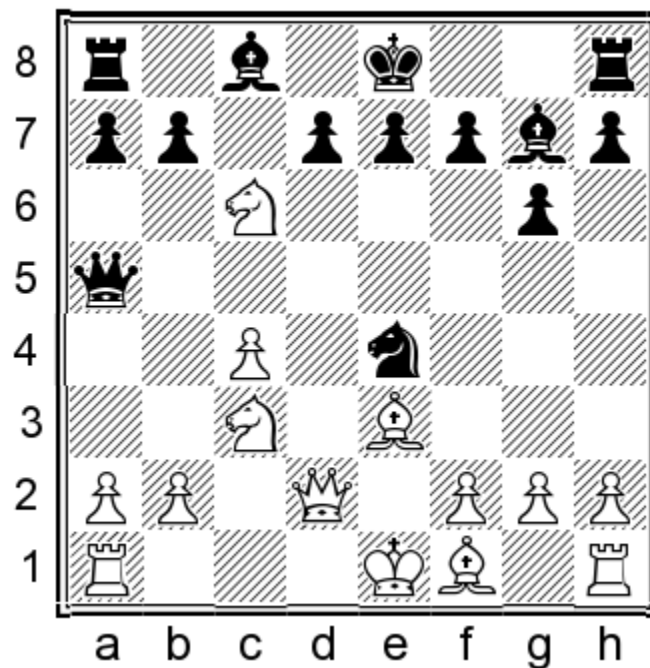
9...♔xc3!. The queen is sacrificed as a desperado. 10.♔xc3 ♕xc3+ 11.bxc3 dxc6 and Black emerges a pawn up and with the better structure. Portero Bravo-Larranaga Juaristi, Salobreña 2020.

3...♖g7 4.d4 ♔a5+ 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♙e3 ♞f6 7.♔d2?!



The same error as in the previous comment, although the white position was already uncomfortable.

7...cxd4 8. ♖xd4 ♜xe4 9. ♖xc6



Again, it is possible that White was relying on this intermediate move and overlooked his opponent's intermediate move/desperado, with which we are already familiar:

9...♔xc3! 10.bxc3 ♘xd2

Again, Black has emerged a pawn up and with a better structure.

How to avoid Error 11

The intermediate move is, by its very nature, an unnatural move. Therefore, everything we have said about **Error 9** applies here. But it has special characteristics which allow us to spot it more easily than others.

If we don't want to let ourselves be surprised by intermediate moves, we should improve our calculating technique by always including a little routine. Each time we make a move that initiates (or continues) a forcing variation, we should measure how forceful it is and think not only about the moves that defend against our threat, but also about all the moves of equal or superior forcefulness. The lower the forcefulness of our threat, the more possibilities for intermediate moves the opponent will have at his disposal. But if our move is a check, the likelihood is close to zero.

Error 12 - Bad calculation involving passed pawns

Having to calculate in positions with passed pawns is very common in games at any level. It is almost as common as when attacking the king, but it gives rise to a higher percentage of errors. And it is not surprising that many games between club players are decided for that reason, but it also happens at higher levels. It is worthwhile asking ourselves why. Some of the answers might be very convenient (although that does not prevent them from being true), such as the fact that the errors occur at an advanced stage of the

game, when players have less time, are more tired, and feel less calm.

But we can also find other causes. An important one is a lack of training, given that there are far more exercises for other basic tactical themes (pawn promotion is only one of these) and for brilliant combinations during attacks on the king.

Another cause is when candidate moves lack in forcefulness. When we give check, our opponent's options are very limited; when we threaten mate this is also the case, but when we advance a pawn, we do not limit the opponent so much; that is why it is easier to calculate mating attacks.

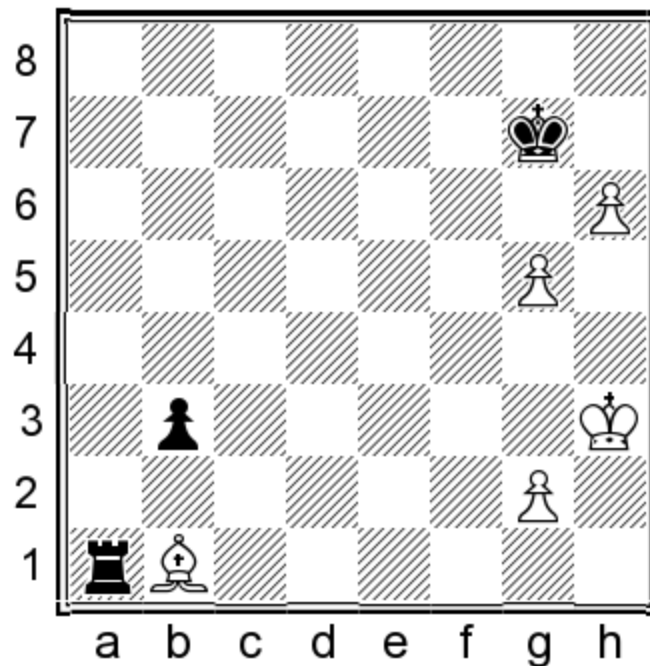
One suggestion I am making again is to calculate by objectives: in positions with few pieces, we should choose the moves with an objective as candidate moves and then consider those that oppose it as responses. In this way, we can limit the volume of variations, and we will be able to go further. Fortunately, the objectives in an ending are simple, and the progress of a pawn towards promotion is the most common of these.

We begin with an example in which both players are struggling to queen a pawn.

Jaume Ros Alonso (2109)

David Aledo Yanguas (1793)

Salobreña Spanish Championship jr 2016

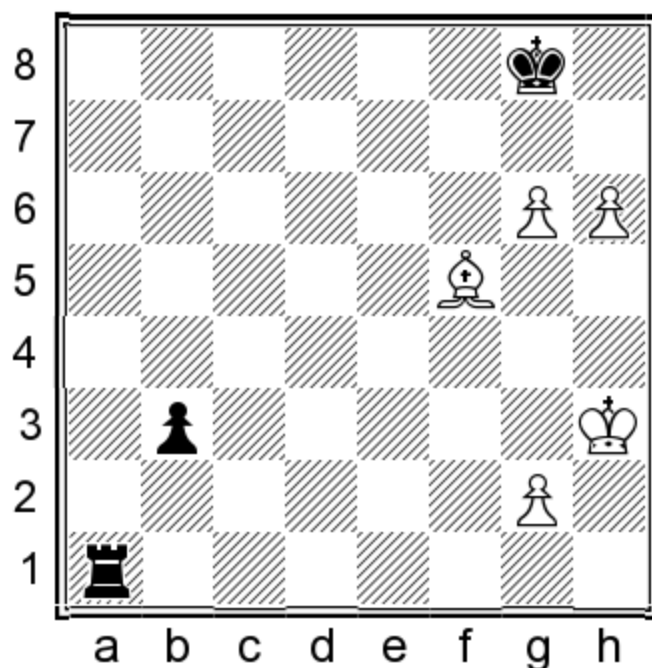


In this first example, the difficulty of calculating positions with passed pawns is illustrated quite crudely. It is hard to think that, out of the four options available to Black, only one does **not** win, but that was the one that was played – and yet, at the end of the day, it did win.

54...♔f7??

The whole key is not to allow g5-g6 with check, but for that, it was necessary to see the idea of ...♖h1+ and capturing on h6. For example, Black wins with 54...♔h8 55.♕e4 b2 56.g6 ♖h1+ 57.♔g4 ♖xh6.

55.g6+ ♔g8 56.♕f5



Now the threat is to queen with a series of checks.

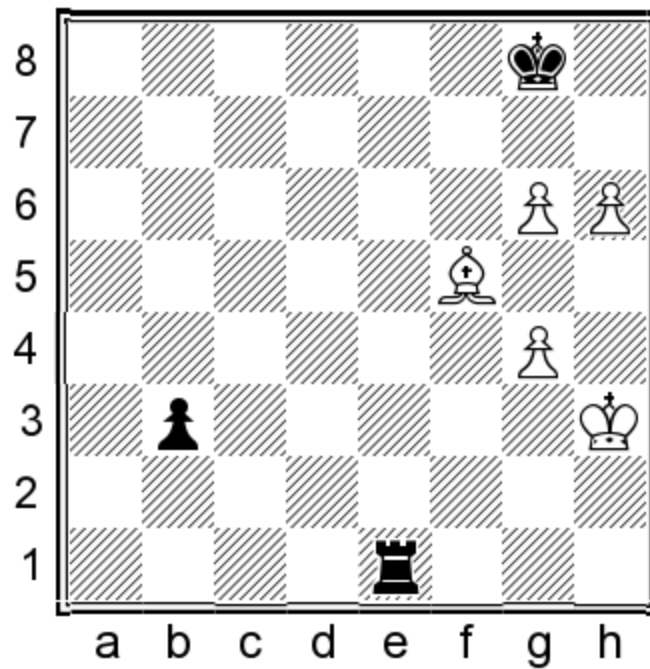
56...♖e1

Here, 56...♖h1+ 57.♔g4 ♖xh6 wins the white h-pawn, but only in return for Black's own pawn: 58.♙e6+ ♔g7 59.♙xb3 with a draw.

57.♔g4?

Here we see one of the reasons why calculation involving passed pawns is so difficult: the existence of positions which might be theoretical but with which we are unfamiliar and whose result is paradoxical.

The bishop does not seem to have a square on the diagonal from which to prepare another check, so it is normal for White to lose hope here, but he could have played 57.g4!.



analysis diagram

It is difficult to guess or believe that this group of three pawns could manage to draw against a rook, but that is the case; for example, 57...b2 58.g5 b1♔ 59.♙xb1 ♖xb1 60.♔g4.

57...b2 58.♙d3

A supreme effort to queen a pawn.

58...b1♔ 59.♙c4+ ♔f8 60.g7+ ♔e7 61.g8♔

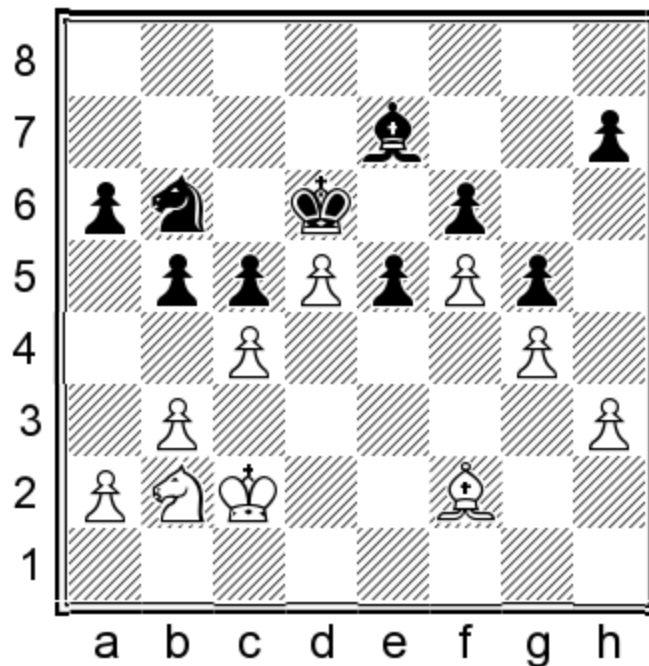
But Black now begins checking, which guarantees a win in 90% of cases, and this is one of them.

61...♔e4+ 62.♔g5 ♔xg2+ 63.♔f4 ♔f2+ 0-1

Javier Aledo Yanguas (1772)

Ana Redondo Benavente (1706)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2014



The passed pawn on d5 seems to be well under control, but there is a certain weakness on c5, which encourages White to create another passed pawn:

35.b4!

This is the correct move to win, but only if it has been well calculated, otherwise it will turn into a boomerang.

It is interesting to look at the other winning move in the position:

35.♘d3 and if 35...♘d7 (35...bxc4 36.♙xc5+ ♔d7 37.♘xe5+ fxe5 38.♙xb6), 36.b4! transposes to the game.

35...♘d7

The logical response; other moves lose easily. Now White should continue with

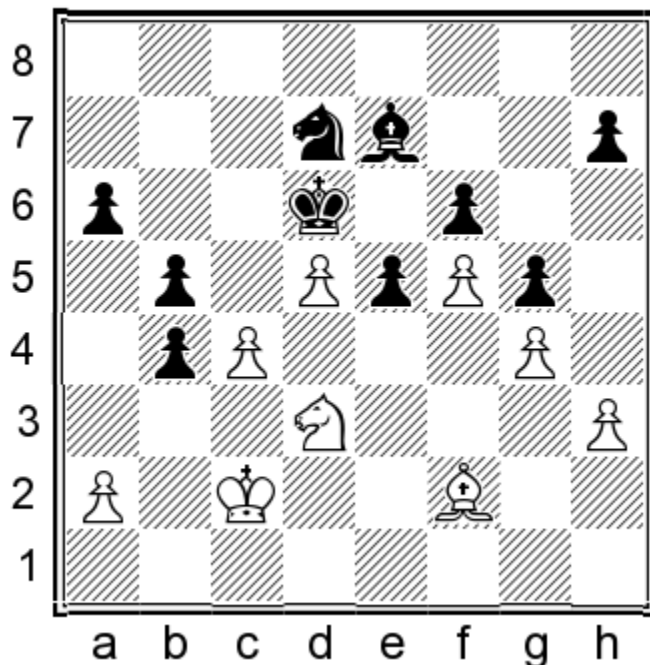
36.♘d3!

,
increasing pressure on c5, so it will be Black who exchanges first.

In the game, White played 36.bxc5+?? ♞xc5, and now it was Black who was better.

36...cxb4

If 36...bxc4, then 37.bxc5+ ♔xd5 38.♞b4+ ♔e4 39.c6 and the pawn queens; for example, 39...♙xb4 40.c7 ♞b6 41.♙xb6 and White wins.



37.c5+!

It was necessary to see this new pawn sacrifice in advance.

37...♔xd5 38.♞xb4+ ♔c4 39.c6

And now the pawn is unstoppable; not hard to calculate, but hard to be sure about it beforehand.

39...♙d8

If 39...♔xb4, then 40.c7! and the pawn queens.

40.♞xa6!

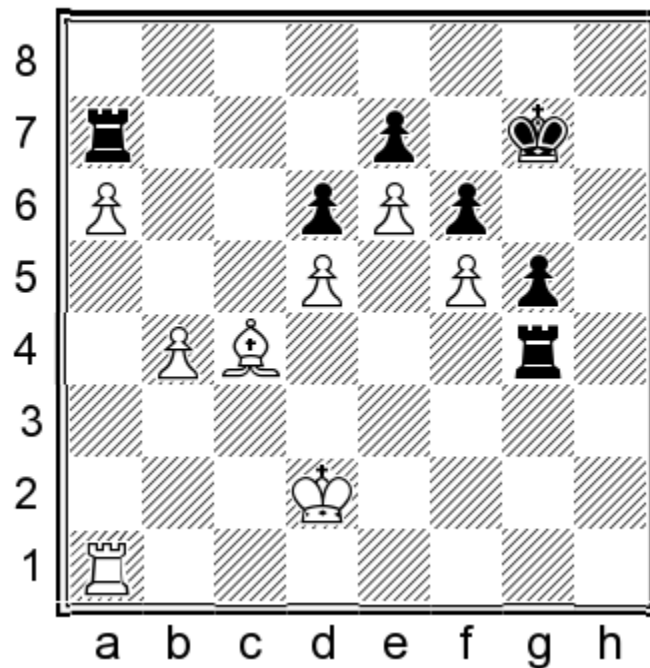
White wins at least a piece, and the game.

Now we shall look at an example that had to be solved without calculation, but this had no influence on the outcome because Black did not seize the opportunity.

Pablo Luis Aguado Doncel (2029)

Haymar Leone Amigot (1984)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2022



Exercise 11

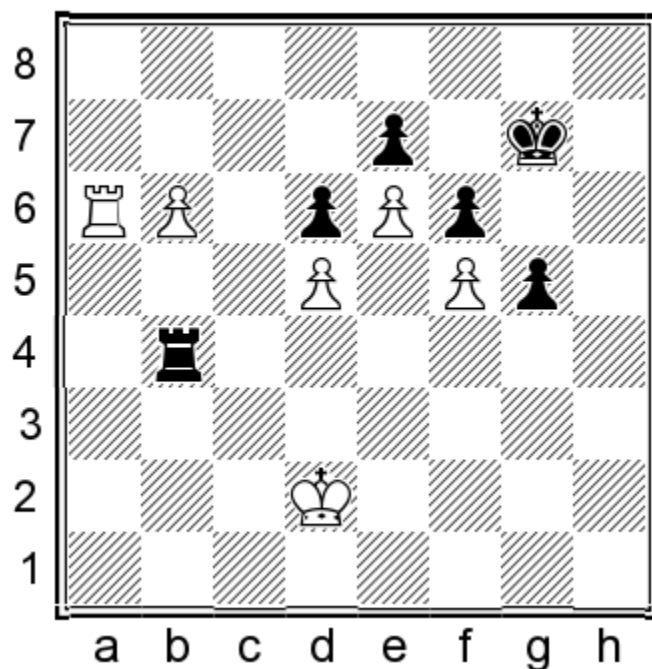
The two passed pawns seem to be winning compensation for the exchange, but Black has managed to create a certain amount of tension in the position, which, with passed pawns involved, usually makes errors more likely.

51.b5?

Rather impatient. Probably, White was certain of having calculated it well, but sometimes there is no need to calculate. The fact is that

59.♔e2 ♖b2+ 60.♔f1 ♔g5 61.♖xd6 ♔f4 62.♖a6 ♖b1+! with a classic perpetual check.

53.♖xa6 ♖b4



This is not the same here, because the e7-pawn falls more quickly.

54.♖a7 ♖xb6 55.♖xe7+ ♔f8

Or 55...♔h6 56.♖f7.

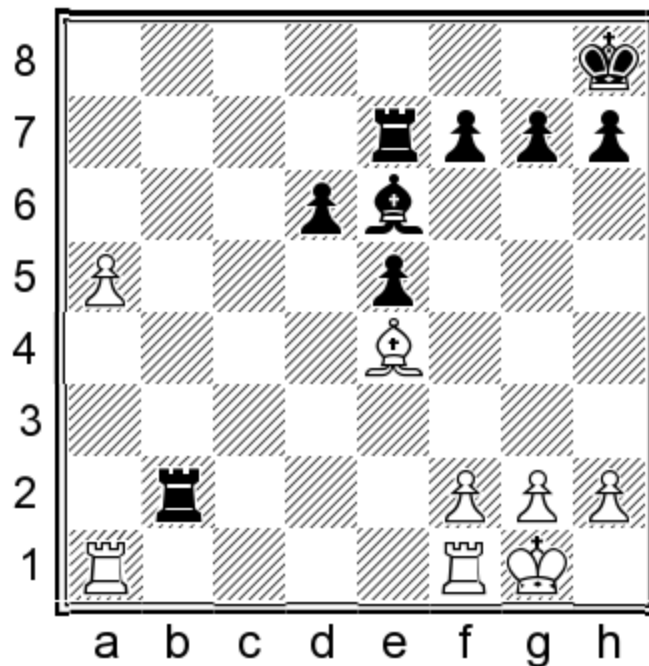
56.♖f7+ ♔e8 57.♔e3 ♖b3+ 58.♔e4 ♖b4+ 59.♔d3 ♖f4 60.♖xf6

And the two passed pawns win easily.

Alberto Portela Peleteiro (2105)

Juan Alfaro García del Cerro (1872)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18. 2015



26.a6?

Once again, an error in calculation in a position with passed pawns. All that was needed was to apply the teachings of progressive thinking and change the move-order: 26.♖fb1! ♜xb1+ 27.♖xb1 (now the mate has to be prevented) 27...g6 28.♖b7!. This was the seemingly **unnatural candidate move** at the start, although it is very natural when you think about it, or at least it should be in a list of possible moves. Its logic is expressed in a rule that we have so often heard:

The side with passed pawns usually benefits from piece exchanges.

After 28...♜e8 29.a6 or 28...♜xb7 29.♙xb7 ♙c4 30.a6, White wins.

26...♜a7!

Now the passed pawn is blocked.

27.♖fb1 ♜xb1+ 28.♖xb1 g6 29.♙b7

Or 29.♙d3 e4 30.♙e2 ♔g7.

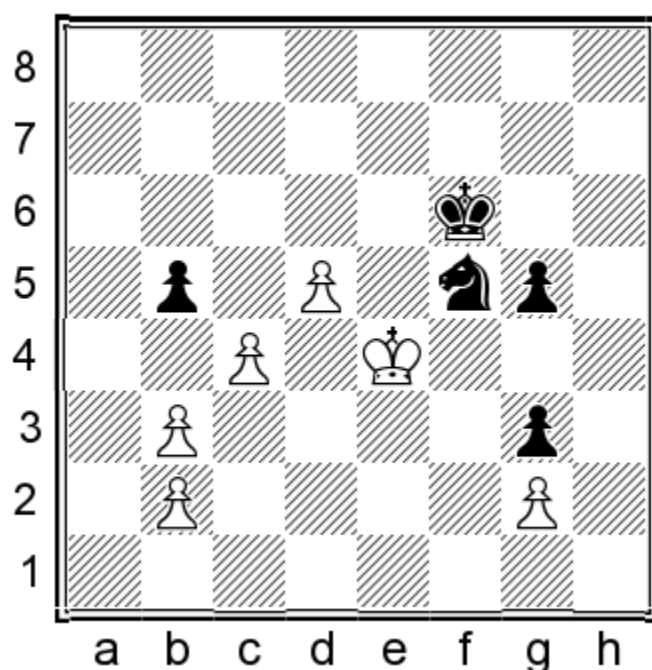
29...♙c4! 30.♖b6 d5 31.f3 ♔g7

Here comes the black king, and now it is White who has to take extreme care in order to make a draw.

Guillem Porta Tovar (1976)

Ana Redondo Benavente (1706)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2014



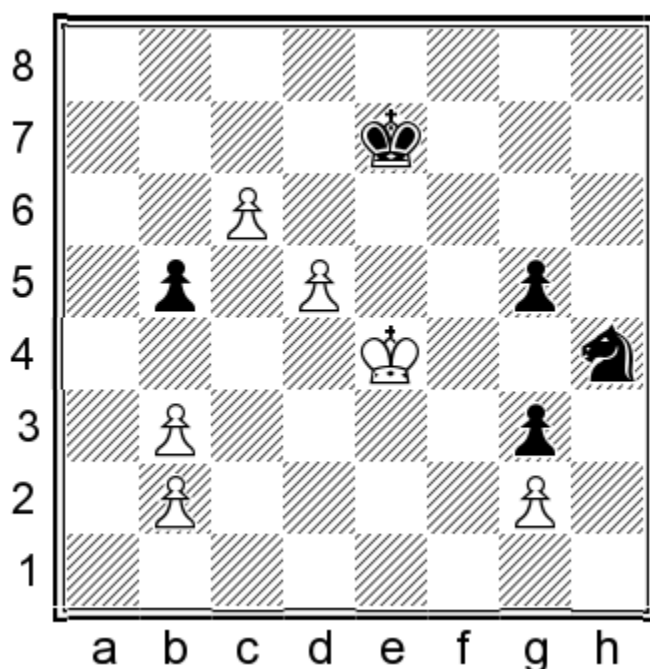
50.c5?

It seems obvious that two connected passed pawns will be stronger than one. This is another case of how difficult it is to judge positions with passed pawns; what seems evident can be erroneous, and only concrete calculation will give us the answer.

It is well known that against the knight, distant passed pawns are more unpleasant: 50.cxb5! ♞d6+ (now there is no time to go for the pawn on g2: 50...♞h4?! 51.b6 and the king does not arrive to stop the b6-pawn, so the knight should return with 51...♞f5!=) 51.♔d4 ♞xb5+ 52.♔c5 ♞c7! 53.d6 ♞e6+ 54.♔c6, and Black, who has no

time to take the g2-pawn, must fight for a draw: 54...♔f7 55.b4 ♘d4+! 56.♔c7 ♘b5+! 57.♔c6 ♘d4+.

50...♘h4! 51.c6 ♔e7!



As in most endgame positions, here we can see an example of the **division of labour**: the king takes care of the two connected passed pawns, while the knight will capture the pawn on g2.

52.♔e5 ♘g6+?!

The capture 52...♘xg2! wins because the knight gets back in time, even though White's pawns seem fearsome: 53.d6+ ♔d8 54.♔d5 (54.♔e6 ♘f4+-+) 54...♘f4+ 55.♔c5 g2 56.♔b6 g1♔+ 57.♔b7 ♔c5!.

53.♔f5 ♘h4+ 54.♔e5 ♘g6+??

Now the error is decisive because it forces a third repetition.

55.♔f5 ♘h4+ 56.♔e5 ½-½

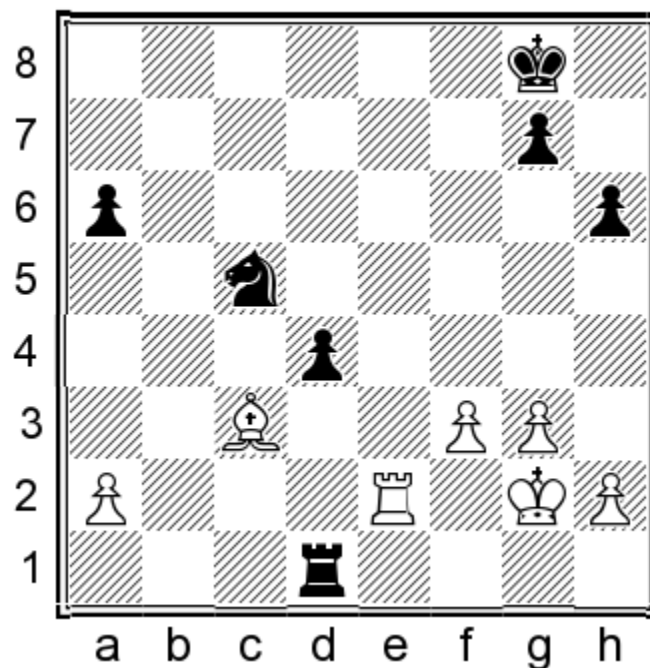
A frequent theme is that of a knight which, by means of threats or potential forks, accompanies a pawn in its final steps towards

queening. An error in this regard may reflect limited knowledge of the theme or a lack of care, which is very dangerous when a knight is involved.

Kevin Meneses González (2341)

Irene Nicolás Zapata (2341)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2013



Black has a passed pawn, which can be controlled in several ways. And then, the white king will approach.

34.♖d2??

But White wanted to block the pawn and, at the same time, exchange the rooks. This example could have been featured in Chapter 1 on piece exchanges, since it is the obsession with exchanging that leads White to overlook a detail. Of course, it could also have featured in Chapter 12 on paying attention to the opponent. 34.♙b4!= is the best move.

34...dxc3 35.♖xd1 c2

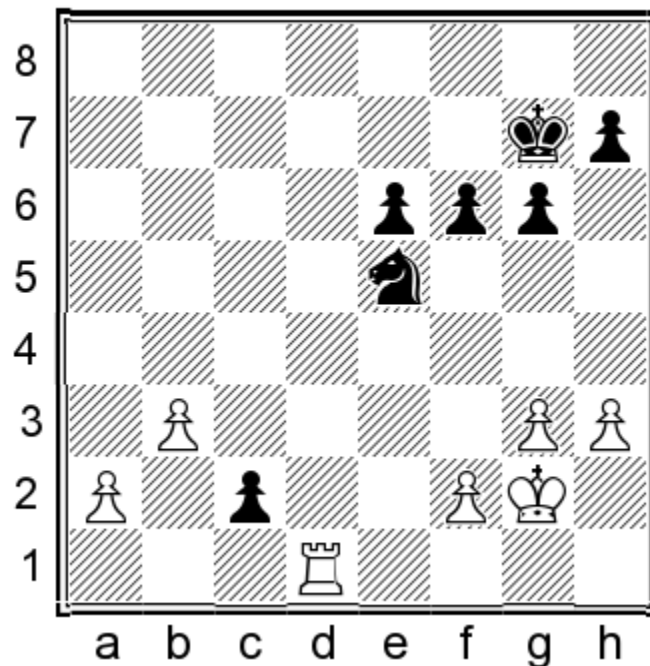
And now the pawn costs White his rook, and subsequently the game. It would not happen if the white king were on a different square, and this is a circumstance we should note, ready for the next time we find ourselves in this kind of situation.

Next is a very instructive example on the same theme.

Aneta Korosciel (2069)

Beata Kadziolka (2286)

Poland teams 2013



One more example which shows that the pattern of support for a pawn advancing several squares thanks to knight forks, deserves to be better known.

49.♖c1?

It is very likely that White overlooked the coming fork, because after it, the knight is going to be much better situated to stop the white pawns, reversing the result. It is also possible that the

realisation that he was going to lose the rook demoralised White and she lost confidence in the success of her pawns.

White should have accepted the loss of the rook in return for the black pawn and should have had faith in her passed pawns. Let us calculate: 49.♖h1! (or ♖a1, f1, or g1, the other squares lose)

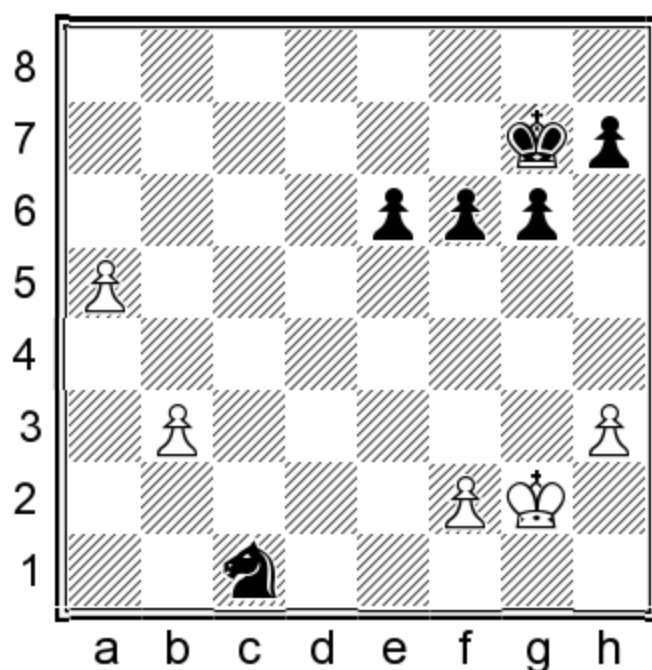
49...♞d3 50.a4 c1♚ 51.♖xc1 ♞xc1 52.a5. If we stop here, it is easy to calculate that the knight cannot stop the pawn.

Some calculation techniques are useful, but many players do not develop them for situations with passed pawns, whereas they do so for mating attacks. We shall explain a very simple one:

Counting technique: We count the number of tempi the pawn needs to queen, then we visualise the square(s) the knight needs to reach in order to stop it, and we count how many tempi it needs to get there.

While we do this, we remember that in order to reach a square of the same colour, a knight has to make an even number of moves, and for a square of a different colour, it needs an odd number; so 52...♞xb3 53.a6 and the knight does not get there.

Finally, if the knight does not get there, we check if it can be helped with a **trampoline check** (see the comparative diagram without the pawn on g3).



Here, for instance, the knight would definitely arrive in time. I invite you to verify this.

Each observation can teach a new technique; each new technique can make a task easier.

49...♞d3 50.♞xc2 ♞e1+ 51.♚f1 ♞xc2 52.♚e2

Even though the white king is closer, the knight prevents the pawns' first steps, and Black's king has time to arrive and stop them.

52.a4 ♚f7 53.a5 ♞b4! 54.♚e2 ♚e7 55.♚d2 ♚d6 56.♚c3 ♚c5 and Black wins.

52...e5

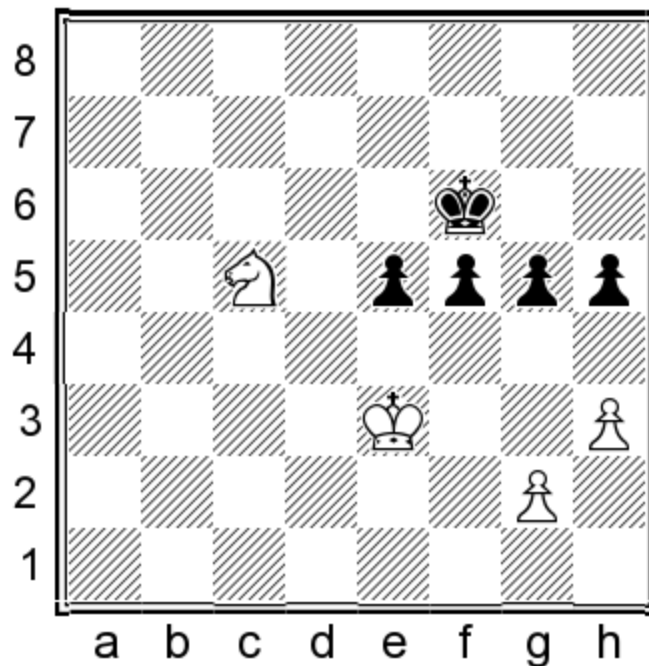
Other moves also win. The rest was easy.

Now, we shall look at an example in which lack of experience leads to calculation errors.

Alejandro Domingo Núñez (2334)

Mireya Represa Perez (1966)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2016



Can the knight stop the pawns and capture them, or will Black manage to exchange his pawns for the two white ones?

41...g4?

This first move is already an error. If the pawns are to be exchanged, what better way than to exchange one of them at the first opportunity? But this move makes it possible for White to avoid the exchange by advancing.

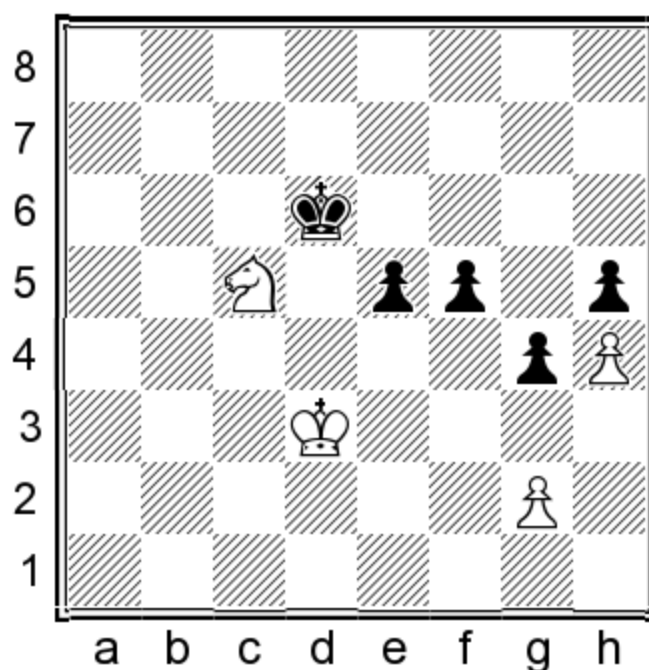
It was essential first to fix the pawn that had to be exchanged:

41...h4! 42.♔f3 e4+. This structure is both flexible and solid. Let us compare it with the one that occurs in the game on move 44: 43.♔e3 ♔e5 44.♞d7+ ♔d6 45.♞b6 ♔e5=.

42.h4

Now, any advance by the black pawns would let the white king wedge itself between them, so Black must either send the king round or wait.

42...♔e7 43.♔d3 ♔d6



44. ♔c4?

The king is moving too far away. 44. ♖b3 seems ugly because after 44... ♔d5, Black can prepare the advance of her pawns, and the knight is far from being able to give check, but White plays 45. ♖d2 and if 45... e4+ (or 45... f4 46. ♖e4, blockading), then 46. ♔e3, and the pawns are once more blockaded.

44... f4?

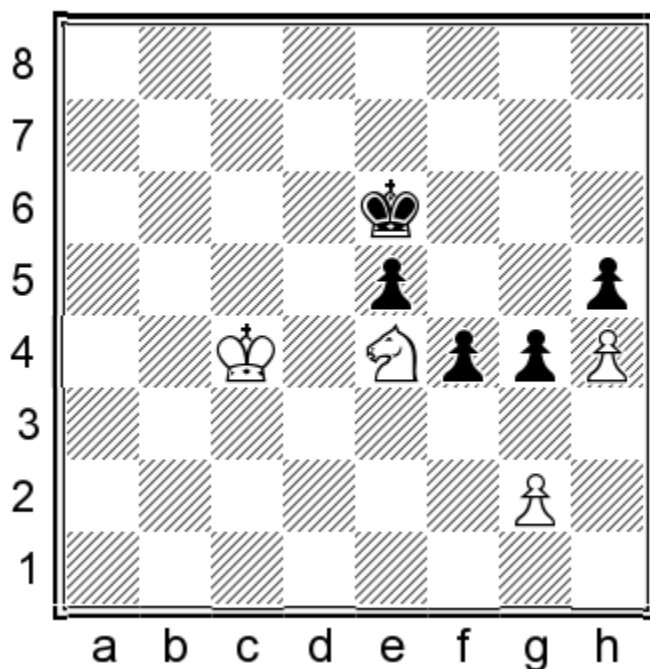
Black makes the same error as on the first move. She needed to fix the pawn on g2 before advancing: 44... g3! 45. ♖a4 (45. ♖b7+ ♔c7! 46. ♖c5 ♔d6 repeats) 45... f4 and it is not possible to prevent 46... f3: 46. ♔d3 f3 47. ♖c3. A marvellous resource, which looks as though it is going to halt and capture the pawns in the event of any move by the f3-pawn, but after 47... e4+! 48. ♖xe4+ ♔e5 49. ♖xg3 fxg2 50. ♖e2 ♔f5 Black captures the h-pawn.

45. ♖e4+

Occupying the blockading square is natural, but 45. g3! leads directly to the same position but with fewer possible variations:

45...fxg3 (45...f3 46.♘e4+) 46.♘e4+ and not only does the g3-pawn fall, but also the one on h5.

45...♔e6



There is an extraordinary similarity between this ending and the one in the game So-Vachier-Lagrave, Baku 2015, which I recommend readers to look at.

46.♔d3?

The most natural error. It is a little frightening to allow two passed pawns, but after 46.g3! all the black pawns lose their mobility.

46...♔f5?

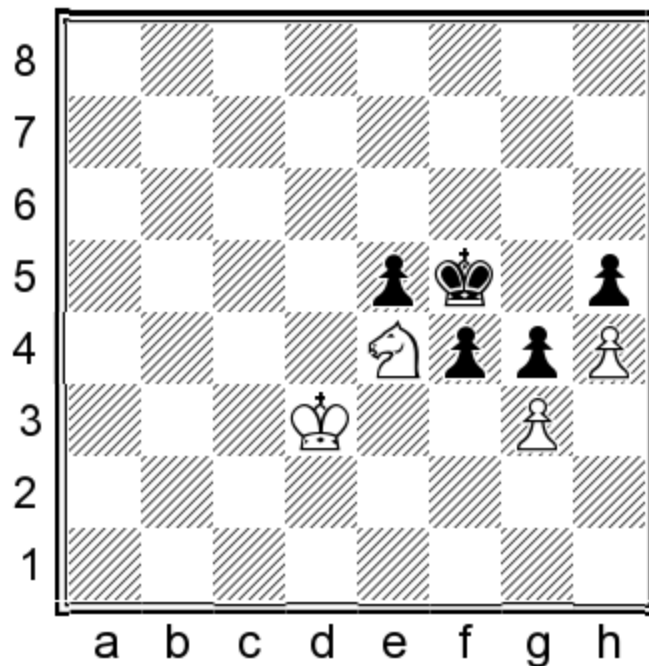
For the third time, the error of not blocking the white pawn before going forward with the king.

46...g3! 47.♔e2 ♔f5 48.♔f3 ♔e6 and no progress is possible.

47.♘d6+?

47.g3!.

47...♔e6 48.♘e4 ♔f5? 49.g3!



At last, White, perhaps without much conviction, tries the only available resource, and the pawns are quickly blocked and vulnerable.

49...fxg3

Or 49...♔e6 50.♔c4 ♔f5 (50...fxg3 51.♘xg3 e4 52.♔d4+-) 51.♔d5+-.

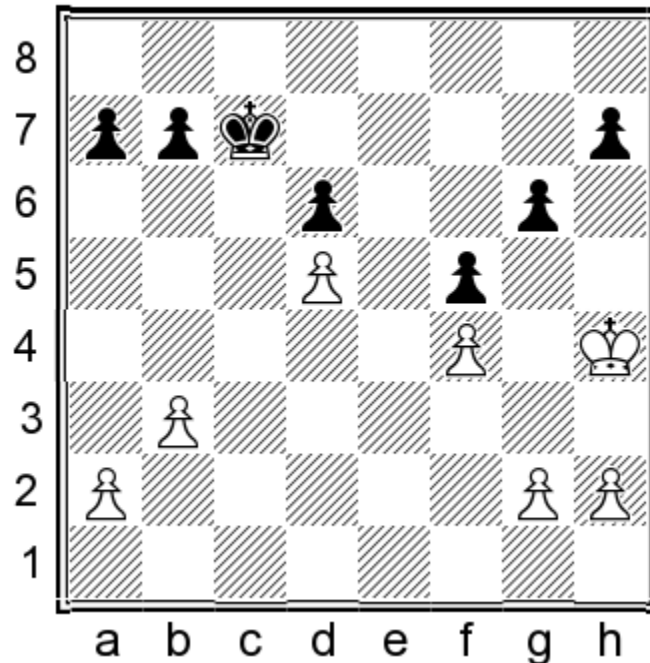
50.♔e3! g2 51.♘g3+ ♔g6 52.♔f2

All the pawns fall and White wins.

When calculating pawn endings, there is a high percentage of calculation related to passed pawns, but in a very particular way, involving some new aspects, which we shall discuss.

These positions are often reached after a decision to simplify, and for that reason, we have already come across some examples in the section on Simplification (see **Error 7**). However, in the examples in this section, the error occurs not at the time of simplification but within the pawn ending itself, and sometimes there is more than one.

Emilio Sánchez Jerez (2141)



Exercise 12

35...h6?

Black goes wrong right away. This is not so unusual because he makes a logical move, blocking the white king's path; in other words, he played by concept, when he needed to go deeper and calculate to the end.

Since it is a race to capture and queen a pawn, it is natural to calculate direct moves first. I am a strong supporter of counting the tempi each player needs to achieve his objective (in this case, queening), although I know very well that this can make you miss some subtlety or other, and that not all trainers share my opinion. The reason is that I have seen how many players improve their

calculation of these positions when they use this technique, and so I recommend it.

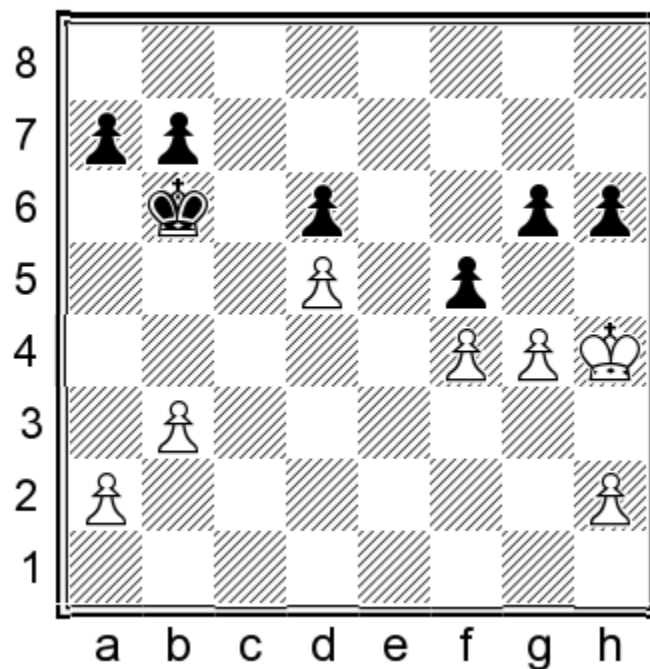
From the position in the diagram, Black needs nine moves to queen, and White also needs nine, so Black will not lose, and in any case, he will have some initiative in the queen ending: 35...♔b6! 36.♔g5 ♕c5 37.♔h6 ♕xd5 38.♔xh7 ♕e4 39.♔xg6 d5 40.h4 d4 41.h5 d3 42.h6 d2 43.h7 and both sides queen.

36.g4!

After this break, White is winning. Black can choose between exchanging or letting White exchange. In the first case, White will reach e6 with his king; in the second, he will queen in eight moves instead of nine as previously.

36...♔b6

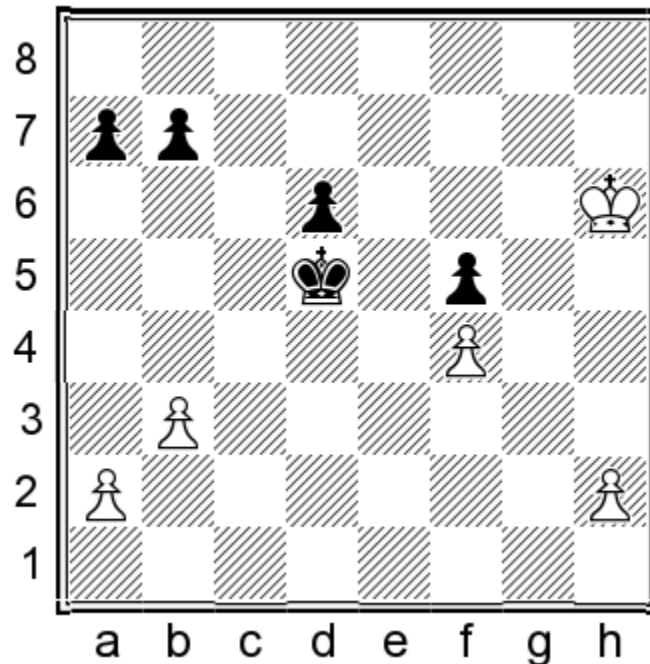
36...fxg4?! makes it much easier for White: 37.♔xg4 ♕b6 38.f5 gxf5+ 39.♔xf5 ♕c5 40.♔e6! (threatening 41.b4) 40...a5 41.a3 b5 42.a4 b4 43.h3. Zugzwang: White wins the pawn.



37.b4?!

This is still winning, but it is surprising that, once again, a player (this time White) renounces the counting technique, although it is certainly necessary to refine it with the retreat of the king and finish it off in the queen ending.

But if he could not calculate it (it was a rapid game), he should have trusted it: 37.gxf5 gxf5 38.♔h5 ♔c5 39.♔xh6 ♔xd5



analysis diagram

40.h4! (an important finesse, not yet committing the king; 40.♔g5?? ♔e6!–+; 40.♔g6 ♔e4±) 40...♔e4 (40...♔c6 41.♔g5 d5 42.♔xf5; 40...♔e6 41.♔g6+–) 41.♔g5 d5 42.h5 d4 43.h6 d3 44.h7 d2 45.h8♔ d1♔ 46.♔e8+!, capturing or exchanging the enemy queen.

37...fxg4?!

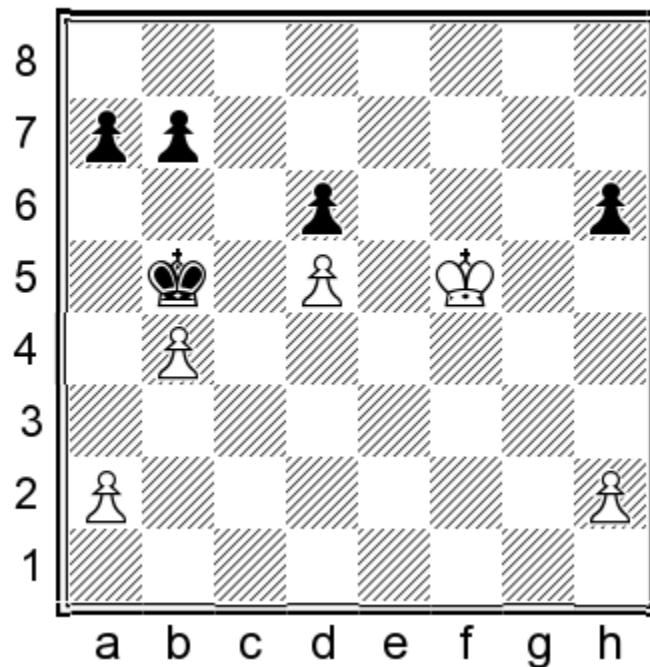
37...♔b5! would have caused White more problems. After 38.gxf5 gxf5 39.♔h5 ♔xb4 40.♔g6 ♔a3 41.♔xf5 b5 42.♔e6 b4 43.f5 ♔xa2 44.f6 b3 45.f7 b2 46.f8♔ b1♔ 47.♔xd6 White has a decisive advantage but needs to play out a queen ending.

38.♔xg4 ♔b5 39.f5?

Now, as it tends to happen, as a result of the imprecise 37.b4, White needed to continue very accurately, and this was not the winning move.

After 39.h4! ♖xb4 40.h5 gxh5+ 41.♔xh5 the white pawn queens much sooner.

39...gxf5+ 40.♔xf5



From this point on, both players can promote to queen in eight moves and the game is a draw, but there are still some surprising nuances.

40...♔xb4 41.♔g6?!

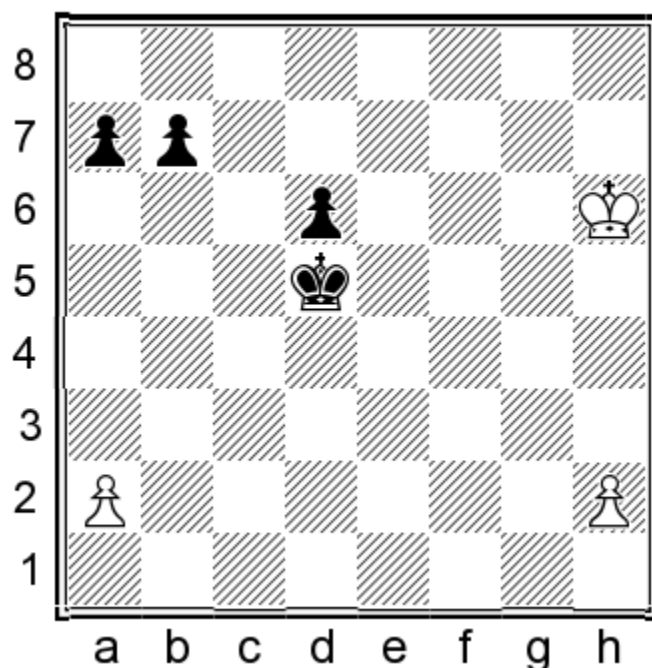
I would say that 41.h4 was easier: 41...b5 (41...♔a3? even loses after 42.♔e6! and now it is not the fact that Black queens in six and White in five, which would not be enough to win, it is the fact that the white king comes to hinder the advance of the black pawns: 42...b5 43.♔xd6 b4 44.♔c5) 42.h5 a5 43.♔g6, and at this point, Black can choose between two queen endings that seem advantageous (in practice, they are), but are both drawn: 43...♔a3 44.♔xh6 ♔xa2 45.♔g5 b4 46.h6 b3 47.h7 b2 48.h8♔ b1♔ or

43...♔c5 44.♔xh6 b4 45.♔g5 a4 46.h6 b3 47.axb3 axb3 48.h7 b2 49.h8♚ b1♚.

41...♔c5

41...♔a3! 42.♔xh6 (changing objective with 42.♔f6 also draws)
42...♔xa2 43.♔g5! (the only correct move) 43...b5 44.h4 b4 45.h5 b3 46.h6 b2 47.h7 b1♚ 48.h8♚ and in spite of Black being a pawn up and having the move, correct play leads to a draw, as the Lomonosov Tablebases confirm, although in my opinion it is not correct to evaluate the position as equal.

42.♔xh6 ♔xd5



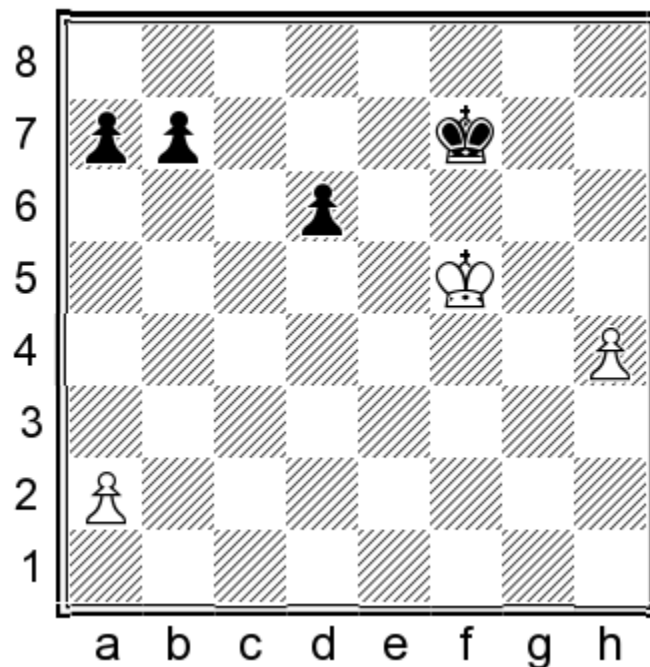
Now we will have a new error for each side; in this case, due to their overlooking the **bodycheck**.

43.♔g5?

In contrast to other variations, here the correct move was to g6 because of the bodycheck: 43.♔g6 ♔e4 44.h4 and the queen ending is drawn.

43...♔e4?

Black misses the chance to use the bodycheck and to hinder the advance of the white pawn with 43...♔e6!. Admittedly, it was not easy to calculate some of the subsequent finesses in a rapid game, but he should have played it, as there is no risk: 44.h4 ♔f7 45.♔f5 and now, with the black king occupied on the kingside for a long time, the three pawns must fend for themselves, and they are able to do so.



analysis diagram

So: 45...b5! 46.♔e4 a5 47.♔d5 (or 47.♔d4 a4 48.♔c3 d5 49.♔b4 d4–+) 47...a4! (but not 47...b4? 48.♔c4 and Black would need to find a unique move to prevent loss: 48...d5+!) 48.♔d4 b4 49.♔c4 b3 50.axb3 a3! 51.♔c3 d5 and White's own b3-pawn loses the game for him.

44.h4 d5 45.h5 d4 46.h6 d3 47.h7 d2 48.h8♔ d1♔

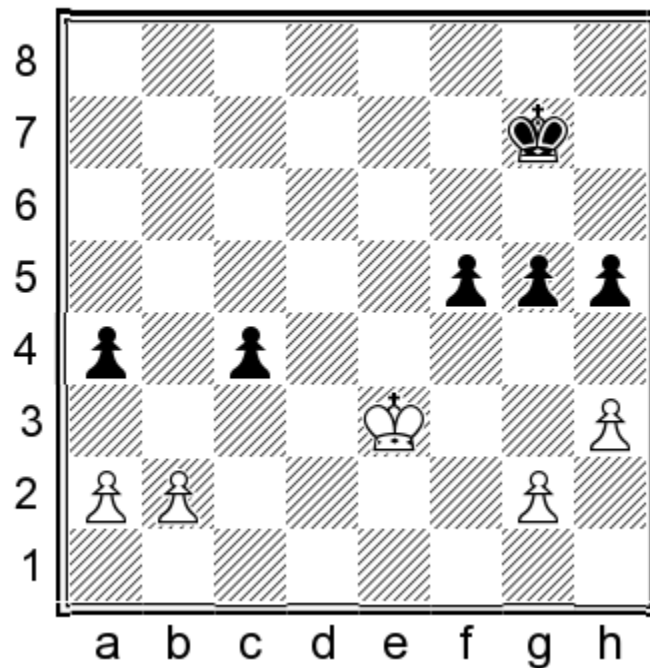
The pawn ending is over and the players have reached a drawn position, although White ended up losing.

In addition to the technique of counting moves in races between passed pawns, another important element in calculating pawn endings is the sacrificial pawn break to create a passed pawn. This is a subject about which many exercises have been prepared, and all the possible pawn breaks are already well known, but not everyone has done the work. The player who pays attention to this theme will win many points.

Miguel Ruiz Buendía (1806)

Ricardo Rodríguez Del Cerro (2235)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2019



38.♔d4

Having reached the pawn ending, Black thought there was no need to work anymore, or perhaps, horror-struck by this move, he thought he was going to lose.

38...f4 39.♔xc4

39.♔e4 makes things easier: 39...♔f6 40.h4 (if 40.a3, then 40...h4) 40...a3 41.bxa3 c3 42.♔d3 gxh4 43.♔xc3 f3 and wins.

Now the white king is a very long way from the black pawns, but it is in the square of all of them except the h-pawn, so it is necessary to make this into a passed pawn now, and this is possible:

39...g4 40.hxg4

40.♔d3 loses to 40...f3 41.♔e3 fxg2 42.♔f2 gxh3. The black king will go to the queenside, eliminate the white pawns and then return.

40...h4??

In order to play 41... f3. This is an error that costs a whole point, perhaps attributable to carelessness but also to not knowing the theme well. After 40...f3! the h-pawn queens. Quite a lot of examples of this pawn break can be found.

41.♔d3! f3 42.♔e3 fxg2 43.♔f2 h3 44.b4

And now, with a passed pawn on each wing, White wins.

44...axb3 45.axb3 ♔g6 46.b4 ♔g5 47.b5 1-0

How to avoid Error 12

Of all the calculation errors, the issue of errors in calculating positions with passed pawns has never been systematically addressed.

Of course, the advice about training and observing our errors remains useful. But in this case, I also recommend some routines to improve your technique. Specifically, calculating by objectives (see the Introduction), the habit of counting the moves in queening races in pawn endings, and getting to know the themes for each type of ending.

In order to improve these calculation techniques and discover others, I recommend making up for the traditional lack of training in those positions by choosing exercises on that theme.

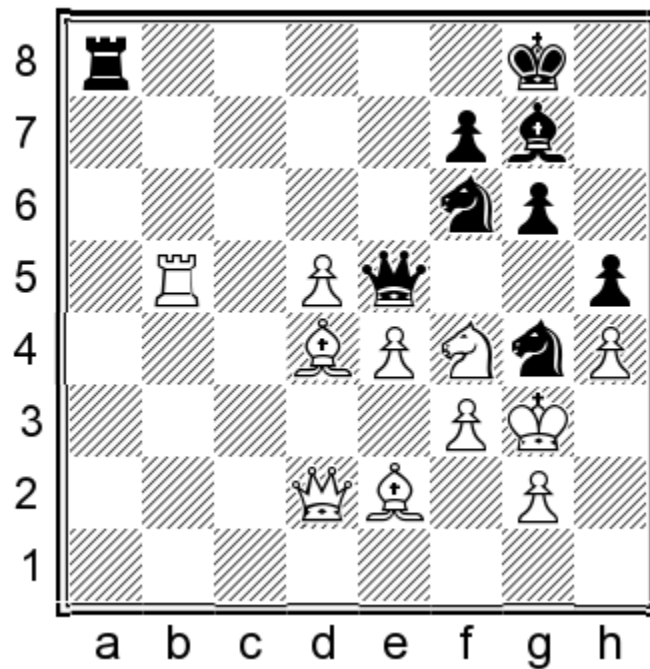
For specific books of exercises, I recommend *Liquidation on the Chessboard* by Joel Benjamin, *Mastering Endgame Strategy* by Johan Hellsten, *101 Endgame Crimes and Punishments* by Alexander Galkin, *The Chess Endgame Exercise Book* by John Nunn and *Endgame Play* by Jacob Aagaard.

Chapter 3

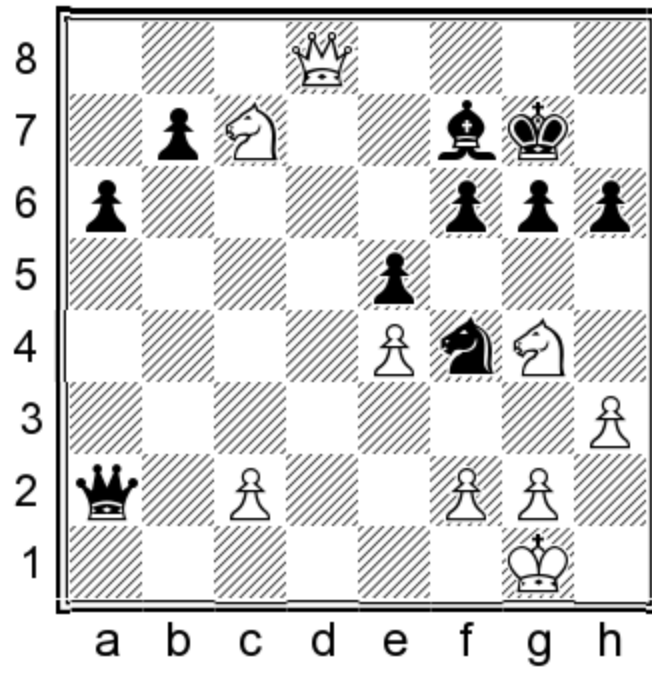
Defence

- Error 13 - Neglecting the option of counterattacking
- Error 14 - Not identifying the threat clearly
- Error 15 - Not considering all the possible candidate moves
- Error 16 - Not finding the silent defence

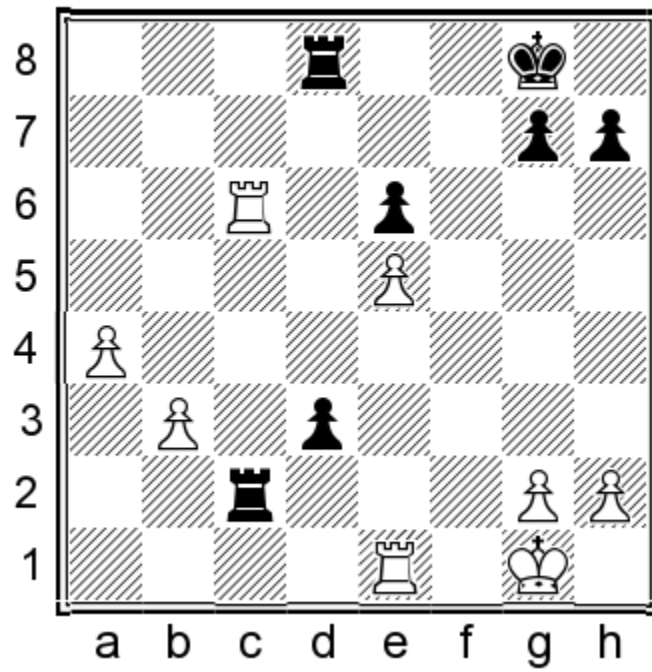
Exercises for Chapter 3



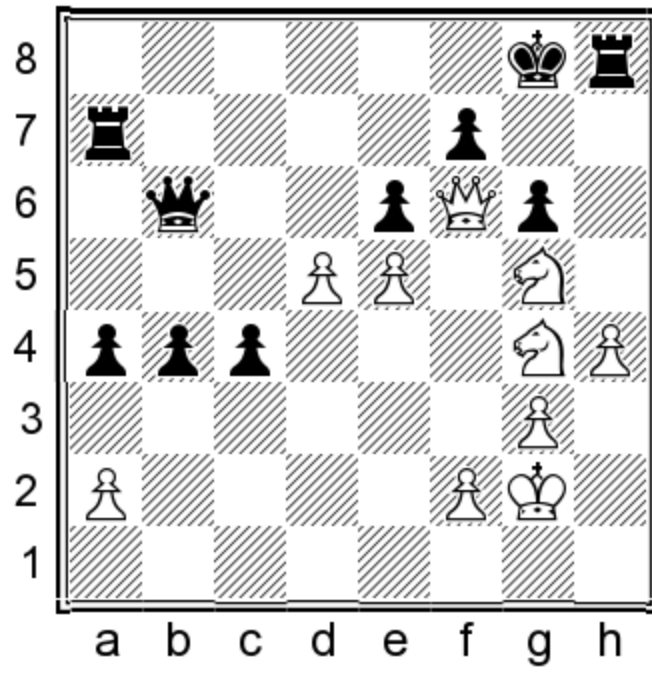
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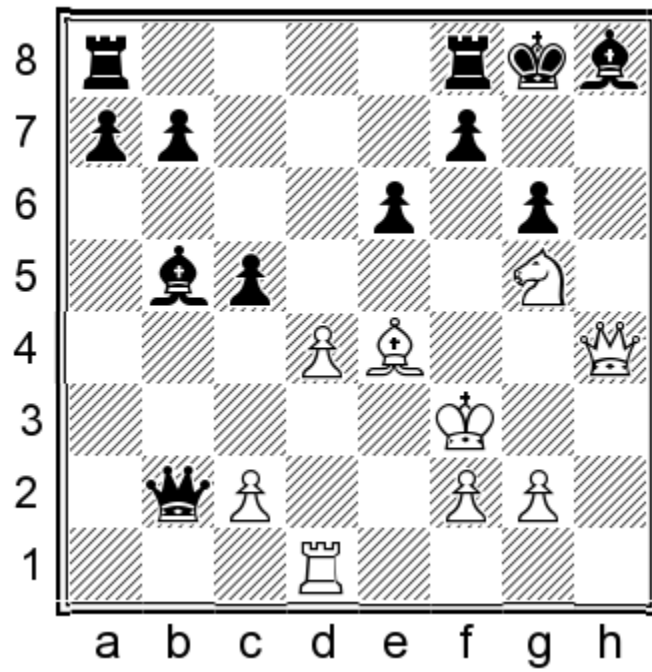
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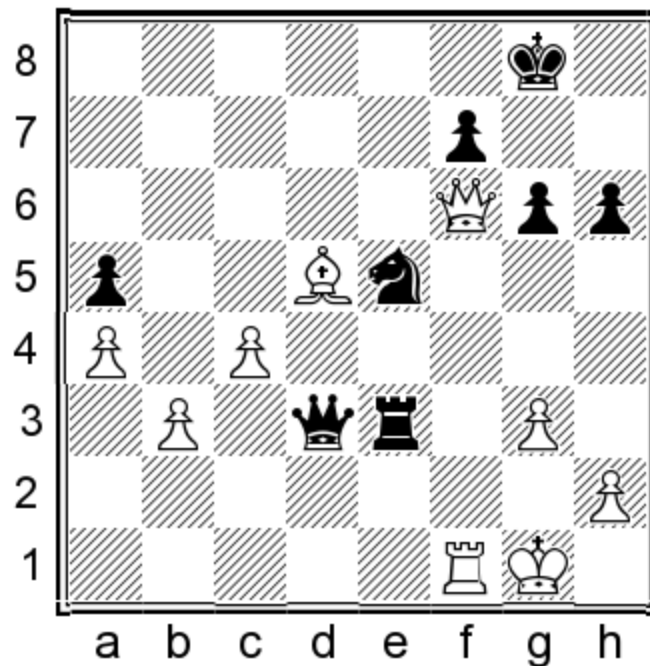
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16



17



18

Do not rely on them not attacking you. Rely on being prepared. –
Sun Tzu

*I must not fear.
Fear is the mind-killer.
Fear is the little death that brings total obliteration.
I will face my fear.
I will permit it to pass over me and through me.
And when it has gone past, I will turn my inner eye to see its path.
Where the fear has gone there will be nothing.
Only I will remain. – Frank Herbert Dune)*

Defence is the situation in the game that puts our emotional control to the severest test, although not for everyone; some players have

assimilated it and enjoy it. Being close to defeat makes us anxious, but it is also an incentive to bring all our reserves into play.

Furthermore, the clarity of the threats illuminates for us the sometimes narrow path we must travel towards salvation.

Despite mobilising our resources, and even though sometimes an ‘only move’ is required, mistakes in defensive situations are many and often serious. Sometimes, when we analyse them later, we cannot understand how we could have attained such a level of stupidity. And the fact is that some of the resources we mobilise do not lend themselves to the search for a solution because they lead us into a state of hysteria.

Most players hate defending, maybe in the same way that we despise what we fear, and undervalue it with ingenious explanations. But defence is one of the areas in which most progress can be made and which can give us more points and more pleasure if we succeed in mastering it. It requires training, but it is even more necessary to improve our attitude and thinking routine when we are faced with it. What is the first thing a player under attack should do? **The first thing is to keep calm.** When you manage to get a student to give you that answer when you have casually asked the question, then he has understood some very important rules of competition and is ready for the next steps.

And once we have calmed down, what is the next step? **‘Identify the threat clearly’; only then will we be able to face up to it.**

Sometimes, the threat is clear, and then this step is automatic, but in other cases, when it is not clear, we must avoid the situation which I am going to call **Extreme Unidentified Danger**, which makes us react in a hysterical and ineffective manner.

Once the threat has been identified, what are the first moves a player who is being attacked should consider? It seems obvious that it should be those that stop the threat, but that is not so; there is a previous step which we shall study in the first section.

Error 13 - Neglecting the option of counterattacking

When you have identified the threat, the first moves you should consider are counterattacking moves.

If you do not do so, and concentrate first on defensive moves, you will overlook many excellent possibilities. On the other hand, thinking about a counterattack before you understand the threat is not effective either because it may be that our counterattack is not strong enough.

What characteristics should a counterattacking move have in order to be a candidate move? It should be as strong as possible, at least as strong as our opponent's threat, and, if possible, stronger. We shall call this the Manolo Ruiz law, and it can be simply stated like this:

If they attack something in your position, before you think about defending yourself, think about whether you can attack something more important in your opponent's position.

This is an extension of the golden rule (rule of thumb) on how to react to the threat of mate:

If you are threatened with mate, before defending yourself, consider all your checks.

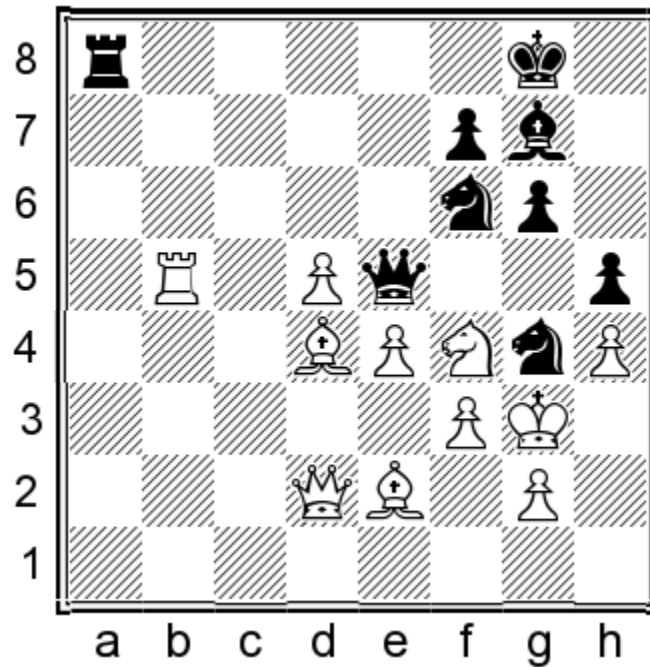
The threat of mate is the most basic situation, but this principle can be extended to all defensive situations.

That is why, in the first section on defence, we begin by studying examples of counterattacking.

Alejandro Perez García (1994)

Francisco Javier Jiménez Lozano (1700)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2013



In the diagram position (Exercise 13), the black queen is under attack, and the fact is that any retreat leads to defeat. Still, we have just said in the introduction to the topic that before defending, we should look for the option of a counterattack which is equivalent or superior in strength. In fact, here Black has two such options and by ‘chance’ they are also the two best moves.

26...♔d6??

A) 26...♖a3!! was the strongest move; Black threatens 27...♘xe4+, which might capture the white queen or give perpetual check, and it leaves White with no choice: 27.♙xe5 (27.♔h3 ♘xe4 and the best White has is to transpose) 27...♘xe4+ 28.♔h3 ♘ef2+;

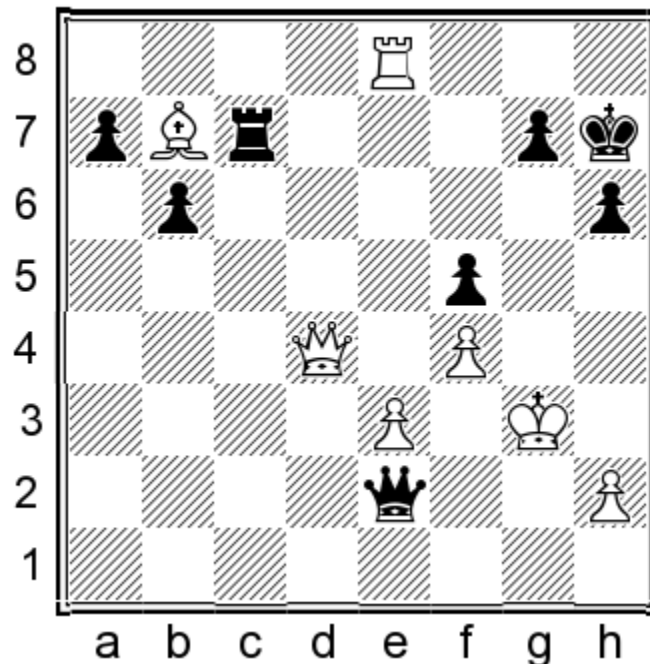
B) 26...♘xe4+!?, with check, is easier to see but less effective: 27.fxe4 ♖a3+! 28.♙f3 ♔xd4 29.♔xd4 ♙xd4, recovering one pawn, but there is still another one: 30.d6!±.

27.♔b4!+-

Héctor Sama Salinas (2096)

Francisco Orantes Taboada (2242)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2016



Black's main threat is 47... ♔g4+, followed by the entrance of the rook with mate (he also threatens the bishop). White thought he was eliminating the threat by bringing the bishop closer to the defence. But in a position with the king so exposed, there can be other worrying moves.

White forgot that before defending, he should see whether he had some active move; coincidentally, he had just one, and it is a good one.

47.♘f3?

White tries the defence card, perhaps because he wants to win, but he has overlooked something. Instead, 47.♖h8+! was the counterattacking option, which only achieves a draw in this case,

but White could not hope for anything better in this position. After 47...♔xh8 48.♕d8+ ♔h7 49.♕xc7 Black must settle for perpetual check.

47...♕e1+ 48.♔h3 ♕f1+ 49.♖g2

49.♔g3 extends the game by a further two moves: 49...♕g1+ 50.♖g2 ♕e1+ 51.♔h3 (51.♔f3 ♖c2–+) 51...♕e2, reaching the same position as in the game.

49...♕e2!

A move like this is usually called a quiet move, even if it threatens mate in one, because it is interposed within a series of checks. But this is no excuse for not seeing it.

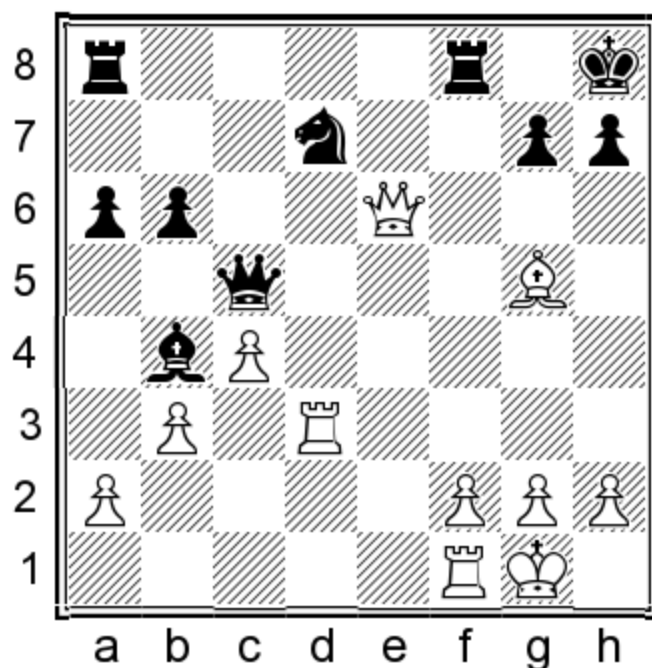
50.♔g3 ♕g4+ 51.♔f2 ♖c2+ 0-1

If the side under attack should look for salvation in counterattacking options, we should take a step further in our thinking. The attacker should consider the possibility of a counterattack before carrying out his threats. We join the next game one move before the player with the initiative makes his threat.

Gonzalo Martino Gironés (1732)

Pau Manel Prada Villagrasa (1898)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2022



22.♖d5??

White is only attacking the black queen, which is a type of threat that only occupies the fourth level in the **forcefulness scale** (see the Introduction), so he should have suspected that there might be a counterattack, and all the more so if he had kept an eye on the black queen and rook aiming at f2.

White should have anticipated the defence by counterattack with 22.♙e3!, which guarantees that he will recover the piece with a two-pawn advantage.

22...♖ae8!

Black ‘sees’ the counterattacking move, and it wins. The calculation of variations is trivial.

23.♙xd7

Or 23.♖xc5 ♖xe6–+.

23...♙xf2+!

The **unnatural candidate move**.

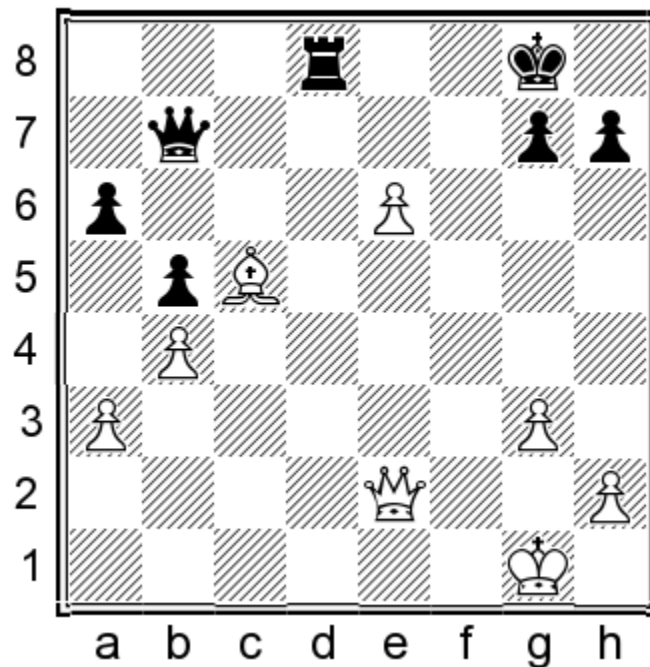
24.♖xf2 ♜e1+ 25.♖f1 ♜exf1#

Active moves should always be considered. Sometimes, it is not easy to fit a counterattack into the immediate threat.

Francisco Orantes Taboada (2138)

David Aledo Yanguas (1660)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2015



White has risked a lot by sacrificing the exchange, but now he threatens to win by advancing his pawn. What is Black's best defence?

44...♖e8?

Black settles for stopping the pawn solidly, which is enough to draw. But once again, he should have first considered the active moves; 44...♔d5!, to exchange queens with check, wins easily: 45.e7 ♔d1+ 46.♔f2 ♔xe2+ 47.♔xe2 ♖c8.

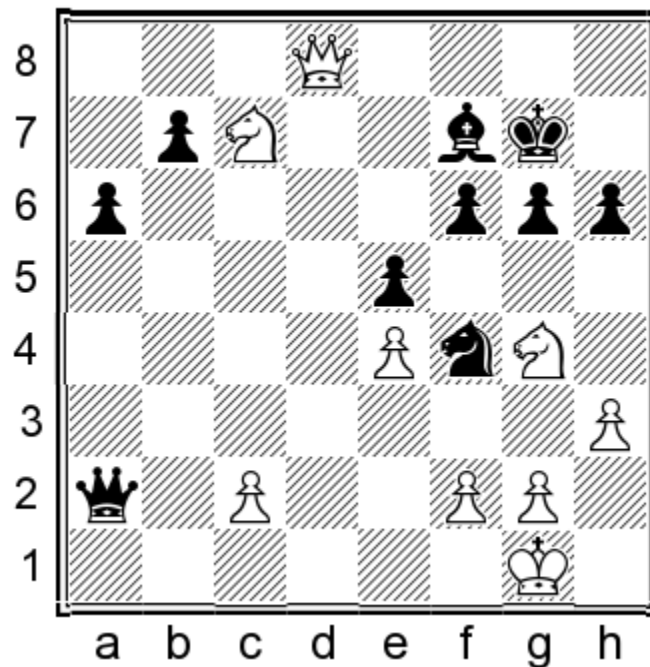
45.e7 ♔d7 46.♔a2+ ♔h8 47.♔f7 h6 48.♔f4 ♔d1+ 49.♔g2 ♔e2+ 1/2-1/2

Next is an interesting case that reflects on the technique of counterattack.

María Ordoñez Torres (1951)

Juan Plazuelo Pascual (2140)

Salobreña Spanish Junior Championship 2014



White threatens to invade on f6, and the fact of his doing so with check is impressive (Exercise 14). However, it is necessary to observe that after ♔xf6+, if White wants to win, he will have to make a move without check, which gives Black breathing space. We shall make an extension to the well-known rule:

If your opponent threatens you with mate, your only counterattacking option is to give check,

and we shall do so in this way:

If, in order to carry out his threat (of mate), your opponent needs a quiet move, then you also have a quiet move available, before checking or somewhere within the sequence of your checks.

34...♞h5?

The move in the game withdraws the knight from the attack, but this fails to defend.

The correct way was to play 34...♔a1+! 35.♙h2 and then threaten mate with 35...♞e2 (it is curious that the other mate threat 35...♔f1 can also be adequately answered with 36.♔xf6+ ♙g8 with a draw) 36.♔xf6+ ♙g8 37.♞xh6+ ♙h7 and White must settle for perpetual check with 38.♔xf7+ ♙xh6 39.♔f8+ ♙h7.

34...♞e2+ can transpose, but gives White a further option: 35.♙f1 h5! is unclear.

35.♔e7

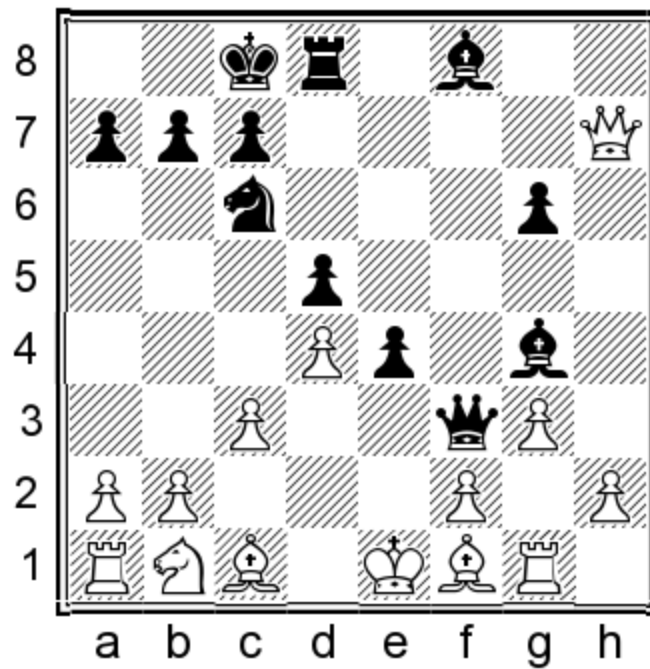
Threatening 36.♞e8+. From now on, Black will have no defence (1-0, 52).

Sometimes, the counterattacking option is discovered out of necessity. But unless we have developed the habit of looking for it, it will not be found even in the most extreme situations; our mind has grown used to the thought that there is no hope.

Iñaki Barbería Fernández (1904)

Ángel Martín Fito (1471)

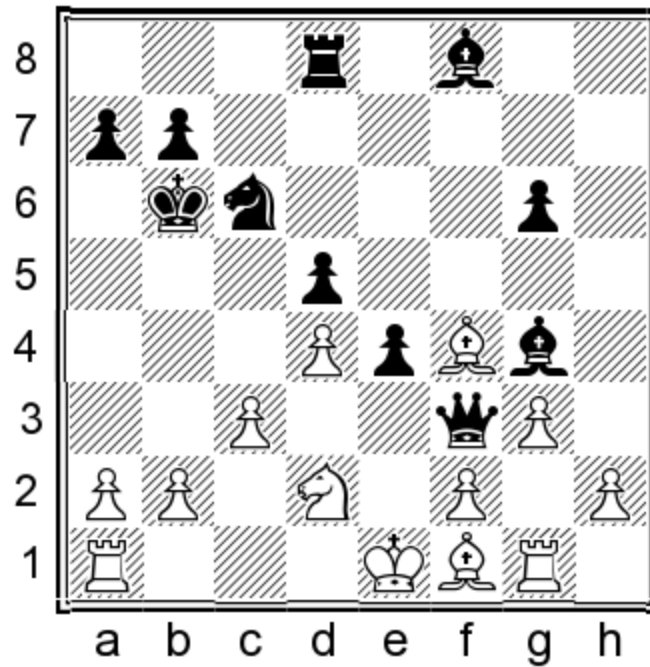
Pamplona rapid 2013



This position is from a rapid game, which can excuse the mistakes, but the moves are so striking that it is a very useful fragment to look at.

13. ♔d2??

Obviously, White did not see the solution. But he had a counterattack available: 13. ♕xc7+!! ♔xc7 14. ♖f4+, and after these two checks, 15. ♘d2 follows, trapping the black queen. Now Black needs to choose, and 14... ♖b6! is the best move, but at this stage, it was hard to see the subtleties: 15. ♘d2.



analysis diagram

This would have led Black to the same situation in which White found himself just before: only a counterattack allows him to defend himself: 15...♞xd4! 16.cxd4 ♙b4 and the queen has escaped.

Curiously, the material is equal, but Black now threatens 17... e3, followed by 18... ♖e8. After 17.♙e3 (or 17.a3 e3! 18.fxe3 ♖e8 19.axb4 ♖xe3+ 20.♙xe3 ♙xe3+ 21.♙e2 ♙xe2#) 17...♖c8 Black's attack should win.

13...♙d1+ 14.♙e3 ♙f3+ 15.♙d2 ♙e7 16.♙h6 ♙xf2+ 0-1

Error 14 - Not identifying the threat clearly

When I was a child and I was learning road signs, there was one that perplexed me – the one for unspecified danger:



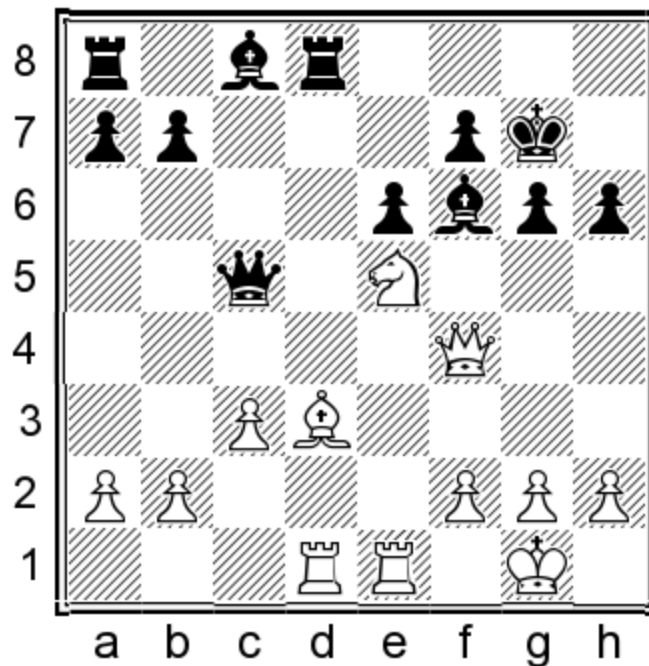
Because if the danger was unspecified, how could you avoid it? And besides, how did they know there was any danger? I find it curious how that situation is similar to one arising when the time comes to defend in chess. Sometimes the threat is clear, but not always. Sometimes we are in a situation which we could define (or describe) as one of **Extreme Unidentified Danger**, and it is normal for players to react very badly in such situations.

That is why it is so important, after the defender has calmed down, that his first task is to ‘clearly identify the threat’. Only in this way will the defender be prepared to find the solution. If the possibilities for counterattack have already been checked, and they do not work, then it is time to look for defensive moves. In many cases, the defence cannot be found because the threat has not been properly identified, while in other cases, identifying it will clearly show us how to respond.

Iñigo Ortín Blanco (2167)

Jose Javier Moreno Alcaraz (2060)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2018



In this promising attacking position, White played

20.h4

and by controlling the g5-square, he threatens 21. ♘g4. The immediate 20. ♘g4 was harmless due to 20... ♖g5.

20... ♖xe5?

This is one of the two possible defences against the threat of 21. ♘g4 and is, therefore, logical, but exchanging pieces is not always the best way to eliminate threats. In this case, the white rook is strongly activated, and although the mobility of the white bishop is now restricted, there is no way to repulse the new threats that arise after the attacked queen retreats.

The best move was 20... ♔c7!. The key to finding this (difficult) defence was to identify the threat, which, as we have already said, was 21. ♘g4; this is one of the few moves that prevent it. This is also a subtle example of **paying attention to the opponent**, as it would have been necessary to ask oneself why White has played h4 and to

have guessed that it was in order to play 21.♘g4. Subsequently, in order to find 20...♙c7, some imagination is required; Black prevents 21.♘g4 and, at the same time, threatens 21...♖d5. It was also essential to realise that the pin on the knight is only a relative one and to calculate that Black is fine after 21.♘xg6!? ♙xf4 22.♘xf4 ♕xh4.

21.♖xe5 ♜d5?

The second piece exchange turns out to be more negative than the first.

21...♙c7! was the best defensive try here, but if Black saw it in this variation, he would probably have seen it on the previous move, too: 22.♙g3 (22.♙e3 h5 (22...♕d7 23.h5) 23.♖g5 ♕d7 24.♕e2 ♕e8 25.♕xh5±) 22...h5 23.♜de1! ♕d7 24.♕e2! ♜h8 25.c4 ♕c6 26.♙c3±.

22.♖xd5 ♙xd5 23.♕c2 ♙b5

It becomes clear that the three remaining white pieces are sufficient to conduct a decisive attack. Logically, the reason is the passivity of the two black pieces on the queenside, which have not yet made their debut in this game.

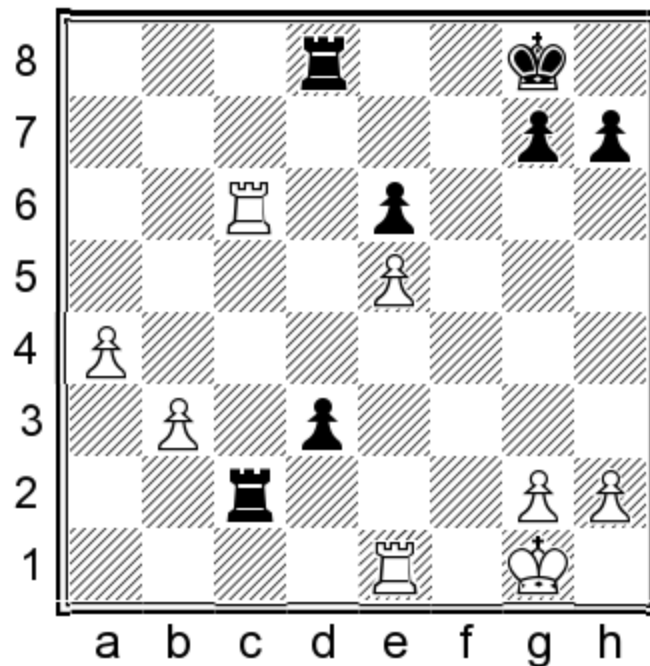
24.♜d8+–

The habit of identifying the threat makes decisions much easier in endgame positions with passed pawns. Initially, I thought the next example was very simple, but after setting it as an exercise in various group classes, I was able to see that it creates many difficulties.

Francisco Tejedor Ariza (2021)

Cristian Gómez Logrosan (1812)

Aranjuez 2022



In this position (Exercise 15), the player with White must have had a real fright when he saw Black's last move (...♖d2-c2), which, as well as attacking the rook, also threatens to play 33... d2, followed by ...♖c1; but this manoeuvre is impossible if the white rook remains on the c-file.

32.♖d6?

Either White did not see it that way, or else he tried to counterattack but miscalculated. Instead, 32.♖c4!= is the type of candidate move that is often overlooked despite its simplicity.

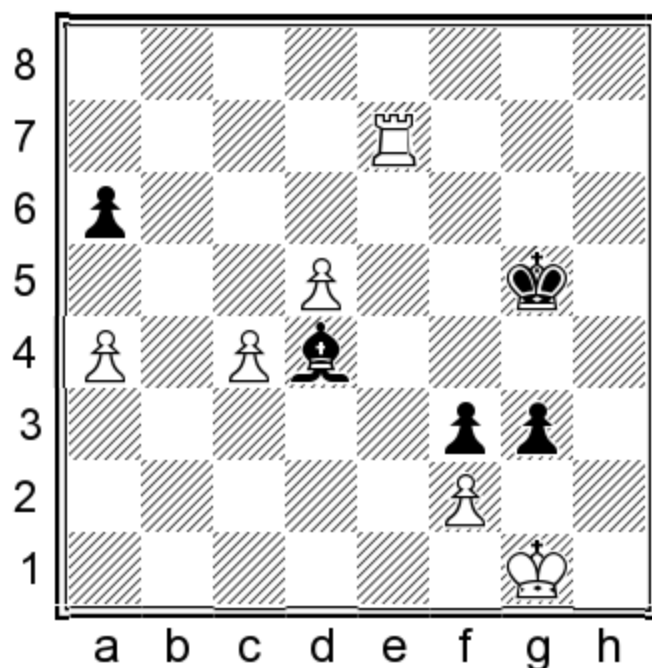
32...♖xd6 33.exd6 d2 34.♖d1 ♖c1 35.♙f2 ♖xd1 36.♙e2 ♖b1 37.♙xd2 ♖xb3 0-1

We shall now look at another example of this kind, with a rather more hidden threat.

Marta García Martín (2257)

Pablo Vidal Fernández (1916)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2016



The black pawns are frightening, but what is the specific threat? The answer is 56... ♖xf2+, followed by withdrawing the bishop and then playing ...g2+. The only defence is to attack the pawns with the rook before the bishop retreats.

56. ♖e8??

Played with an idea similar to the correct one, but it fails due to a logical circumstance: once the bishop retreats, the threat of ...g2+ cannot be stopped. Correct was 56. ♔f1! (the move-order 56. ♖f7! also works) and after 56... ♖xf2 57. ♖f7 (attacking the f3-pawn and allowing no time for the withdrawal of the bishop) 57... ♔g4 it is vital to prevent the bishop from retreating: 58. ♖g7+ ♔h3 59. ♖h7+ ♔g4 60. ♖g7+ ♔f4 61. ♖f7+ ♔e4 62. ♖e7+ ♔d4 63. ♖f7=.

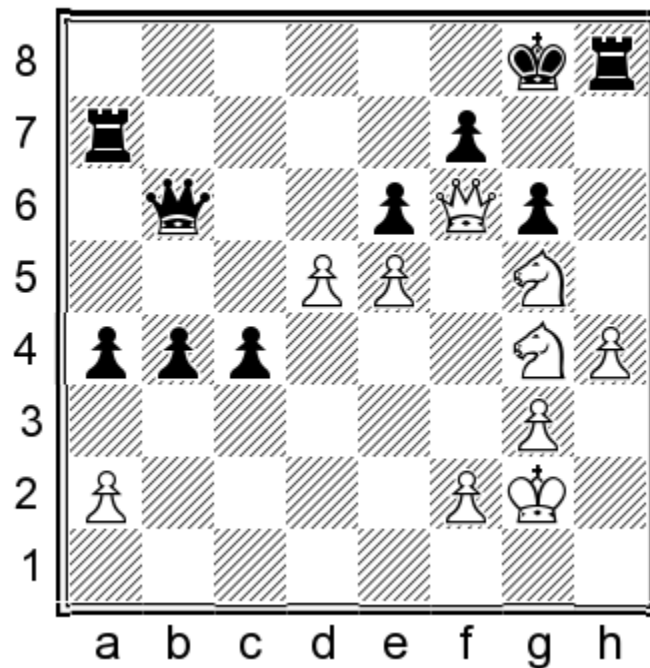
56... ♖xf2+ 57. ♔f1 ♖c5 58. ♖g8+ ♔f4 59. ♖g7 g2+ 60. ♖xg2 fxg2+ 61. ♔xg2 a5 0-1

After two relatively simple examples, we will look at a complicated case, where the connection between identifying the threat and finding the defence, which seems impossible, is shown strikingly.

Juan Alfaro García del Cerro (1872)

Marta García Martín (2166)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2015



This time, White has twice sacrificed the exchange and the black passed pawns on the queenside would be enough on their own to decide the game (Exercise 16). But White's attacking position, with the queen and the two knights, not forgetting the influence of a few pawns, is impressive.

Black should clearly identify the threat (or threats) and consider all the possible solutions in order to discover the best defence. But, to begin with, he should keep calm and trust that there is a solution, and it is very likely that in this case those two prior requirements were not met.

39...♖h7?

The main threat was 40.dxe6, although some preparatory moves would also win. This move does not parry that threat and loses; even worse, it makes possible another winning continuation which did not exist before. We could describe this as a real disaster, but it is ‘the usual scenario’ in situations where the **feeling of extreme unidentified threat** predominates.

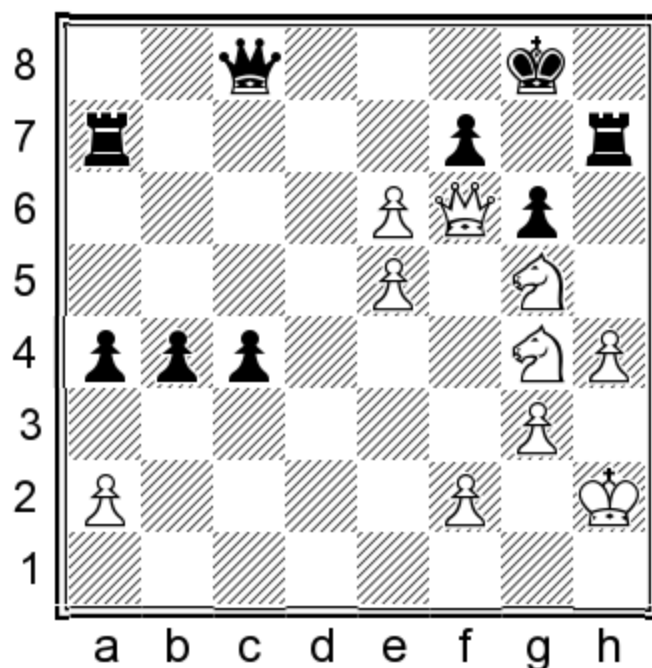
The best defence was 39...♖b7!, pinning the d-pawn. It is a very elegant defence, which can be reached by a process of elimination, provided that the threat (remember that it is 40.dxe6) has been properly identified. White could then opt for perpetual check and the fact is that he has nothing else: 40.♔d8+ (40.♔h2? loses to 40...♔xd5) 40...♔g7 41.♔f6+ ♔g8 42.♔d8+ ♔g7 43.♔f6+.

Instead, 39...b3!?, ignoring everything and seeking to quickly queen a pawn, is quite acceptable: 40.f3! (first preventing the check along the diagonal; 40.dxe6?! ♔c6+ 41.f3 fxe6 42.♘xe6 ♔e8! is unclear) 40...b2 41.dxe6 fxe6! 42.♘xe6 ♔g1+!! 43.♔xg1 b1♔+ 44.♔g2 ♔c2+ 45.♔h3 ♔f5, pinning the knight, which was about to give mate on f6. Now White has nothing better than 46.♔d8+ ♔f7 (46...♔h7 47.♔d4 ♔xe6 48.♔xa7+ ♔g8 49.♔g2±) 47.♔xh8 ♔xe6 48.♔e8+ ♔e7 49.♔c6+ ♔f7 50.♔xc4+± .

40.dxe6

Following the path foreseen earlier. Instead, 40.♘xh7! was more crushing; for example, 40...♔xh7 41.♔g5 ♔g8 42.♔h6 f5 43.♘f6+ ♔f7 44.♔h7+ ♔f8 45.♔g8+ ♔e7 46.♔e8#.

40...♔c6+ 41.♔h2 ♔c8



42. ♖xh7

Here 42.exf7+! was more precise because it leaves Black no choice:

42... ♖axf7 43. ♘h6+ ♔f8 (43... ♖xh6 44. ♕xf7+ ♔h8 45.e6+-)

44. ♘xh7+ ♔e8 45. ♕xf7+ ♔d8 46.e6.

42... ♔xh7?!

42... ♕xe6! was more tenacious, though, for example, 43. ♕d8+ ♔xh7 44. ♘f6+ wins for White.

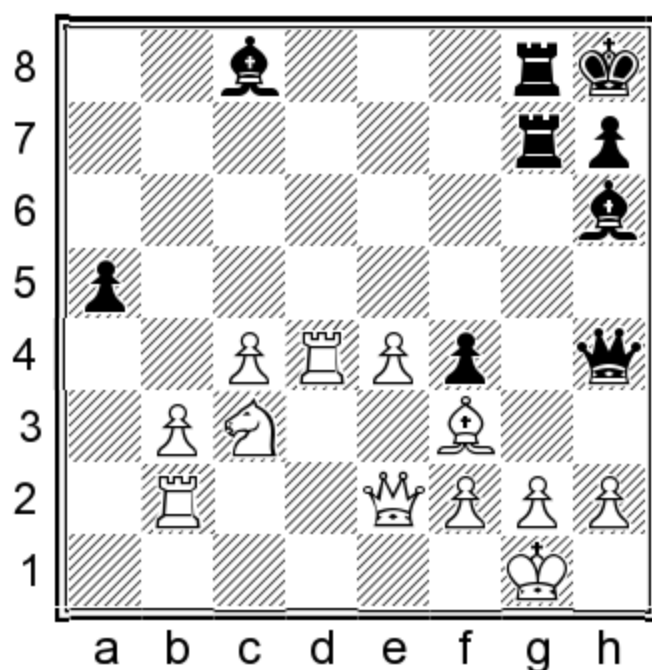
43.exf7 ♕f8 44.e6 b3 45. ♘e5+-

Now, we present a nice example where the defence is very difficult. But if there is any possibility of finding it, it begins with identifying the threat, exactly in the uncomfortable scenario of **extreme unidentified danger**.

Mireya Represa Perez (1812)

Bernardo Rebollo Montes (1614)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2014



Black has gone for broke. All his pieces are in very aggressive positions and appear to be threatening everything; what is more, that is indeed the situation. In cases like this it is very difficult to remain calm and identify the individual threats, and then see if it is possible to parry all of them.

A good practical trick is to try first to identify the most direct threat; when a defence (or more than one) has been found against it, then look to check if any of the other threats work.

In this case, the most forceful variation is the one that begins with ...♖xg2+, followed by ...♘h3, and as it is not possible to defend the g2-square or to flee with the king, and g3 fails, as we shall see in the continuation of the game, then we need to resort to indirect defence. Only in that way could we find...

30.♖d3!!

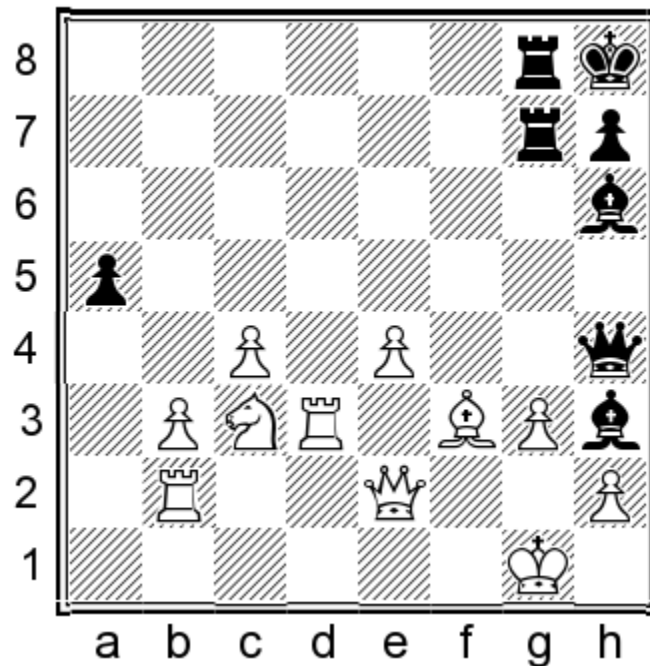
Indirectly defending the h3-square and forcing Black to continue accurately to maintain equality. The game continued 30.g3? but the refutation was very direct, with a series of checks, and it led to a

black victory: 30...fxg3 31.fxg3 ♖xg3+! 32.hxg3 ♚xg3+ 33.♔g2 ♘e3+ 34.♔f1 ♜f8+ 35.♚f3 ♜xf3+ 36.♔xf3 ♚xf3+ 37.♔e1 ♔xd4 38.♞d1 ♔xb2 39.♞xb2 ♚c3+ 0-1.

30...♔h3!

Other moves give White the advantage, for instance 30...♖xg2+? fails now to 31.♔xg2 ♔h3 32.♖xh3 ♚xh3 33.f3.

31.g3 fxg3 32.fxg3



And now Black has two attractive continuations, but neither is favourable:

32...♔f4

Now 32...♖xg3+!? 33.hxg3 ♖xg3+ 34.♔g2 ♖xg2+ 35.♚xg2 ♔xg2 36.♔xg2 wins the queen and leaves the white king exposed, but the good coordination between White's pieces should save her.

33.♔g2! ♔xg3 34.hxg3 ♖xg3 35.♖xg3 ♚xg3

And now White has several defences, although only for the purpose of equalising; for instance:

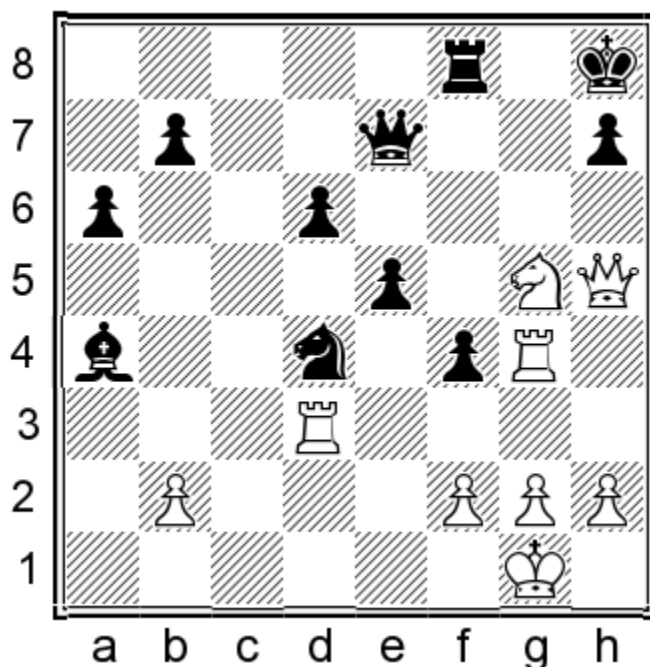
36.♞d5 ♔xg2 37.♚f2! ♚g7 38.♚f6

We end with a subtle example, whose beauty lies hidden in the variations. It could be classified as an example of counterattack, but I think that the key to the error is a failure to identify the threat.

Daniel Centrón Antuña (2217)

Miguel Picos Maiztegui (2094)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2016



Black has a good position and could even have won, but he fails to identify the main threat, and that is why he does not defend against it.

White is not threatening the immediate 27. ♔xh7+, because after 27... ♔xh7 28. ♘xh7, Black has the counterattack 28... ♖c8. This variation should have put Black on his guard against the other possibilities.

His reasoning could have gone along the following lines:

1) Discover the white threat, which is 27. ♘xh7!, which in turn will threaten mate with a series of checks;

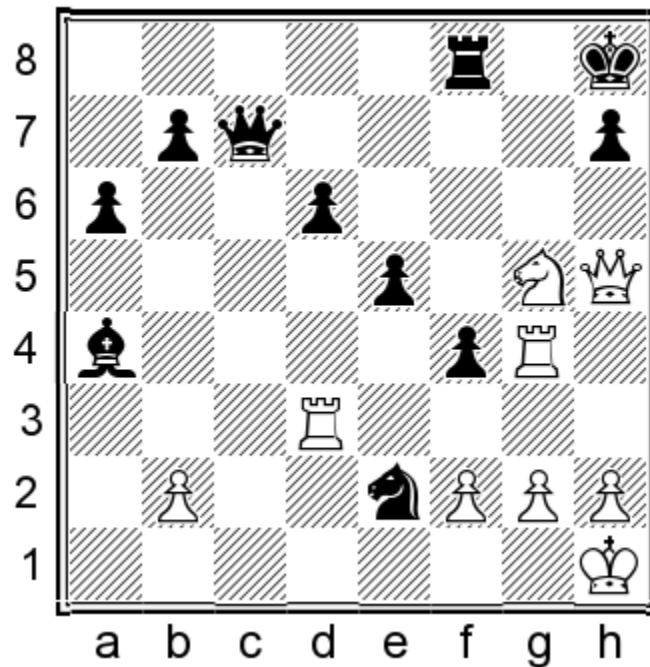
2) Since the white threat is not with check, it is not necessary for Black to give check on the next move, so he can prepare a counterattack with the threat of mate starting with a series of checks on the next move.

26...♘c2?

Black simply fails to defend against the real threat, probably because he thought it was 27.♔xh7+, which he is able to parry.

There were two possible defences:

A) 26...♞e2+ 27.♔h1 ♚c7!. This is the key, threatening mate (27...♖c8? now fails because of 28.h4).



analysis diagram

Now if 28.♔xh7+ ♚xh7 29.♞xh7, there is no need to capture the knight, nor to give check, but it is necessary to threaten mate on the next move, which can be achieved with 29...♖c8!, and if White prevents the mate Black can take the knight; for example, 30.h4! ♔xh7 31.♖xd6 with equality;

B) 26...♖c8, threatening mate, is also playable. It forces White to find 27.♖c3! (27.h4? ♕e8 gives an advantage to Black) 27...♖xc3 28.bxc3 ♕e8! (an essential intermediate move) 29.♔h3 ♘f5 with a very difficult position for both sides;

C) 26...♕e8? fails to 27.♔xh7+ and now Black cannot move his rook to c8 in time.

27.♘xh7! ♕xd3 28.♘xf8+ ♕h7 29.♘g6+ 1-0

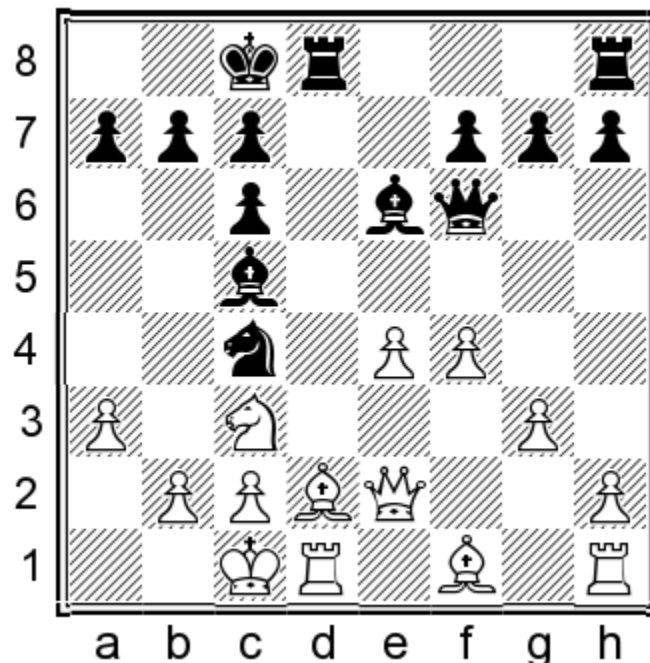
Error 15 - Not considering all the possible candidate moves

One of the problems in defence is that the candidate moves are not always intuitive, as they are in attack, and that means that very good solutions are often overlooked. The only rule I have managed to come up with to combat this problem is to scrupulously ‘take into account’ all the moves which prevent the threat.

Alfonso Gutiérrez Guillen (1594)

Rubén González Tamarit (2006)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2018



As usual, we should start by identifying the threat (or the main threat, since in this case there are several, the main one being ...♖xd2, followed by ...♗xa3). After that White should have considered all his defensive moves, of which there are many.

15.f5?

The move played in the game attacks the bishop on e6 (which is defending the knight on c4), and it certainly attenuates the threat, but it is far from ideal.

The best move was 15.♙h5!, and in fact this is the only move which maintains equality. It is a clear example of a counterattack, but we have placed it in this section because it is an even better example of a candidate move which we will not see unless we take all possible moves into account.

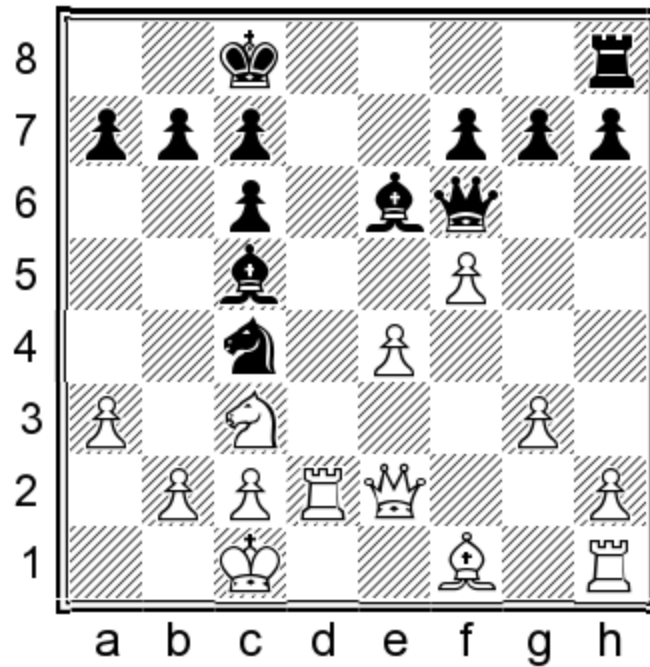
White is attacking the bishop on c5 but also has pressure on the knight on c4.

15...♗d4 (with the position of the bishop on d4 Black renews many threats; 15...♗xa3? fails to 16.♗xc4!; 15...♘xd2? loses to 16.♙xc5; 15...♖xd2? is answered with 16.♙xc5) 16.♗xc4 (but by exchanging the knight, Black's most dangerous attacking piece, White solves all the problems) 16...♗xc4 17.♙f3 with a balanced position.

It is curious that the second-best move is 15.♗h3!?, which also threatens the knight; once again this is a candidate move which would not be one of the first to be considered. After 15...♗xh3 16.♙xc4 ♗d4 Black is better, but the game continues.

A third option, better than the game move and one which should be one of the first candidate moves to consider, is 15.e5?!; for example, 15...♙e7 (threatening 16...♗xa3) 16.♘b1 ♗d4 17.c3 ♗b6. The white position is very ugly, but for the moment it is holding.

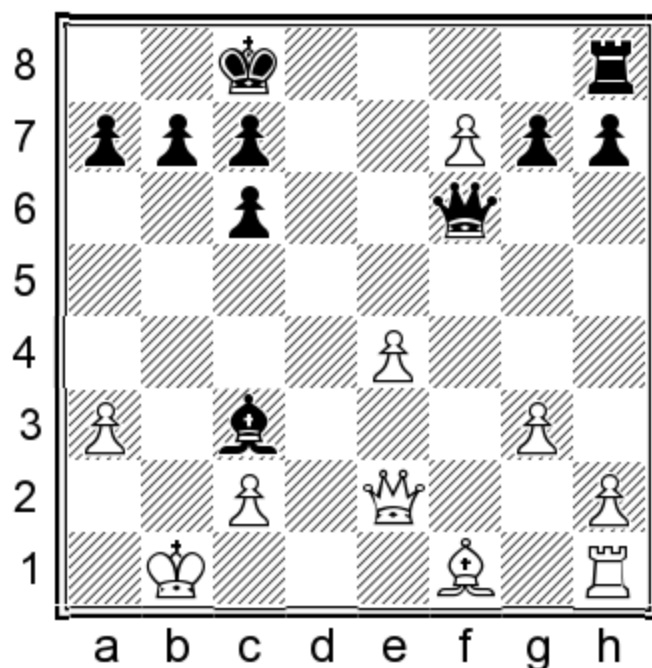
15...♖xd2! 16.♖xd2



16...♙e3!

Now 16...♙xa3? encounters a silent defence: 17.♔b1! ♙xb2 (17...♘xd2+? 18.♙xd2 and both Black's bishops are under attack) 18.fxe6 ♙xc3 19.♙xc4 ♙xd2 20.exf7 with a very complex position which appears to be equal.

17.fxe6 ♙xd2+ 18.♔b1 ♘xa3+ 19.bxa3 ♙xc3 20.exf7



Black has conducted the attack well in the last few moves, although he had temptations all around, but now he fails to find the most brilliant move, which presents us with another nice defensive problem, although rather simpler than the one in the initial position.

20...♔b8?

Rubén wanted to play 20...♘a1, but he saw that 21.e5 followed by ♘h3+ and ♖f1 would leave him lost, so he tried to prepare it with this move. In positions of attack and defence, it is usually better to look for a better idea rather than to try to repair one that is not working, and this is not the first time that we have commented that chasing after a brilliant idea (...♘a1) can spoil the position.

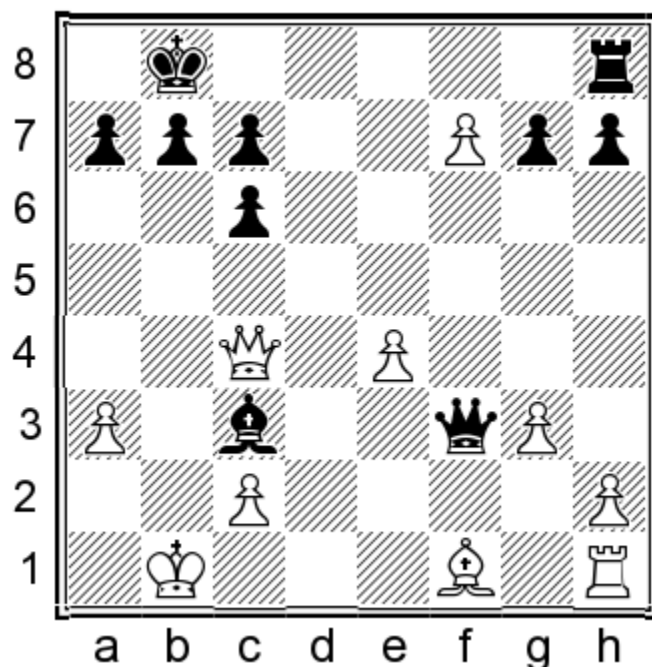
20...♙e7!, with the idea of 21... ♙xa3, was the best solution; if 21.♔a2, then 21...♙xf7+; 20...♙xf7 first is less convincing due to 21.♙e3!.

Now Black threatens 21...♙e7, heading for a3. White needs to keep the black bishop under attack, but not all the squares are equal.

21.♙c4?

And this is not the best one. 21.♔e3! prevents the threat and prepares ♕c4, equalizing.

21...♖f3!



With the double threat to take the rook and give mate in two moves. Things have got worse for White, but here he had a third opportunity to solve an interesting defensive problem and stay in the game.

22.♔c5?

22.♔g2! was the right move. It can be found by a process of elimination, and it is a good example of considering all the possible moves and looking for counterattacking moves. After 22...♔xg2 23.♖d1, and confronted with the danger from the f-pawn, Black is forced to return the piece, although after 23...♔f2! 24.♔xc3 ♔xf7 he still has a big advantage.

22...♖d8?!

Missing 22...♔d1+ 23.♔a2 ♔xc2#.

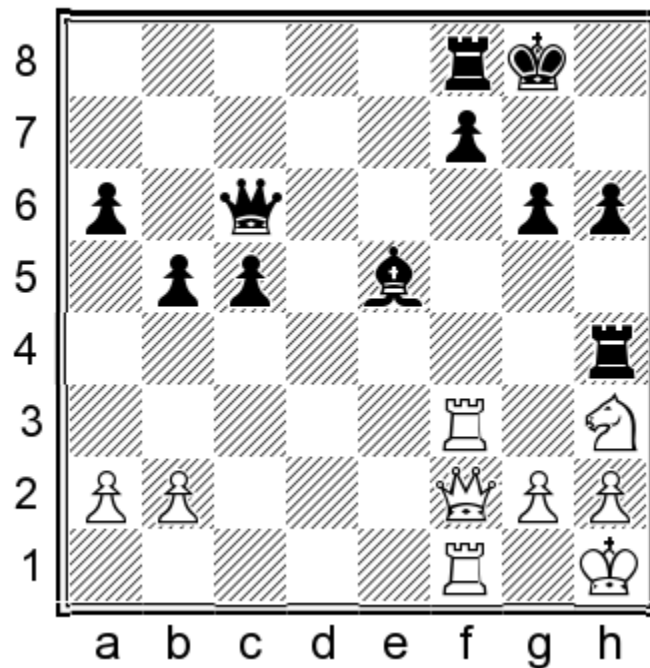
23.f8♔ ♔d1+ 24.♔a2 ♔a1+ 25.♔b3 ♔b2+ 26.♔c4 ♔b5+ 0-1

All the mechanisms we have studied can also be applied to simple positions, where the threats do not seem so fearsome but are equally decisive.

Alex Villa Tornero (2106)

Daniel Ibáñez Koblash (1666)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U12 2022



White has just played 38. ♔f2, with a double attack on the rook and the f7-square. Black, coming from a winning position, goes into a panic:

38...♖d4??

After this move, the game will not last much longer. Naturally, Black should either move the rook or defend it, because without the rook he will be unable to continue. Among all the possible rook moves there is one which, even though it does not defend f7, protects Black from the effects of the capture: 38...♖h5! 39.♖xf7 ♖f5! and Black even wins.

How is it possible to find a sequence of two moves like these? It should be possible precisely because they are just two. The first step is to keep a cool head and carefully evaluate the threats you are up against. In this case, the loss of the rook is not acceptable, but the capture on f7 only regains a pawn. It is a matter then of finding out how it is possible to defend the threats which arise **after** ♖xf7, and then it is possible to find the interposition.

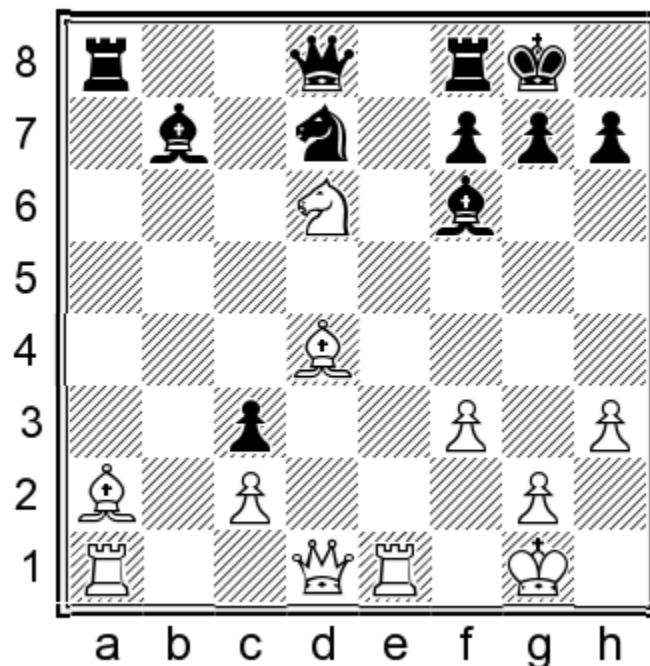
39.♖xf7 ♖xf7 40.♙xf7+ ♔h8 41.♙f8+ ♔h7 42.♖f7+ 1-0

Now we are going to place emphasis on the necessity or suitability of considering all the candidate moves.

Miguel Santos Ruiz (2343)

Alberto Portela Peleteiro (2050)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2014



There are many pieces under attack, so we need to be careful here. What can easily happen to us, especially if we have not developed

the correct routine, is that we overlook an interesting candidate move.

20...♔c7?

Black accepts the idea that he has to defend, and even though this is the second-best move, he will still be at a disadvantage. By considering all the possible moves, he could have included 20...♕d5!! in the list. And once it has been considered, it is not difficult to become convinced that it is a good move, since you only need to analyse the two captures. Let us examine some variations: 21.♕xf6 (21.♕xd5 ♖xa1 22.♔xa1 ♕xd4+ 23.♔h1 ♘f6 and White has some problems, although following exchanges on f7 the game is still in dispute) 21...♘xf6 and everything is defended: 22.♕xd5 ♖xa1 23.♔xa1 ♔xd6 with equality.

21.♘xb7! ♔xb7 22.♕f2

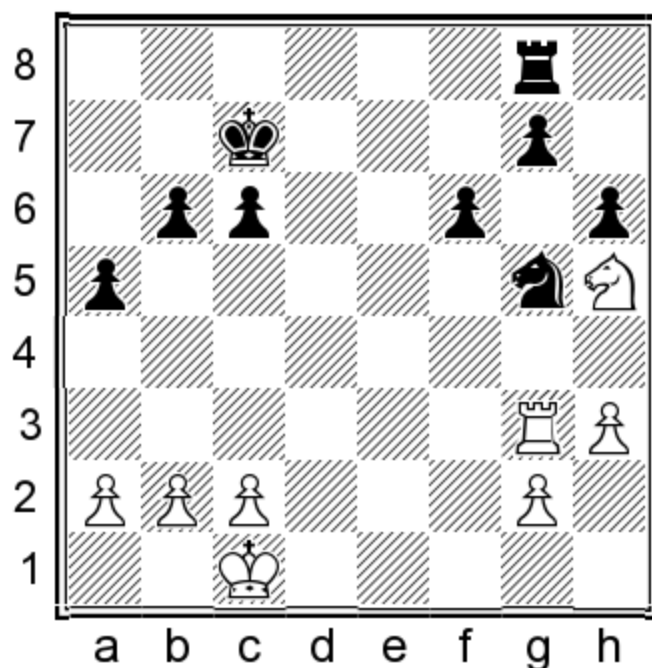
White threatens 23.♕d5 and 23.♔d5 and is clearly better.

In positions with few pieces, it is also useful to consider all the candidate moves, and it is usually easier.

Cristian Atipov Hadzhiev (1484)

Fernando Fernández Estremera (1717)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U12 2016



Black is a pawn up, but White is applying a lot of pressure. These are situations in which mistakes are often made, because the need to defend makes you anxious, and decisions are not taken with a cool head. In the first place it is essential to be clear about what, if any, are the concrete threats, and then to confront them; in this case the real threat is 33. h4, followed by 34. ♖xf6.

32...f5?

Black sees the threat and contents himself with moving the pawn, which was going to be captured, but his position remains passive and other problems appear.

There were two very good alternative solutions:

A) 32...♖e8!?, **defence by counterattack** (see **Error 13** in this chapter); the g7-pawn is abandoned but adequate threats are created in return. Now, 33. ♘xg7? is not the correct response, but it is probably the one that deterred Black from taking the right decision (33.h4! ♖e1+ 34.♙d2 ♖h1 35.hxg5 ♖xh5 36.gxf6 gxf6 37.♗g6 f5 and

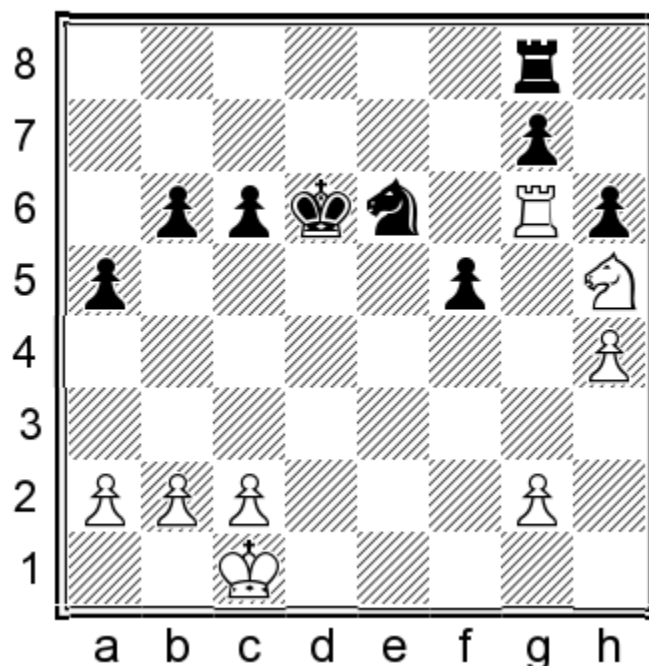
Black still has some advantage): 33...♖e1+ 34.♔d2 ♖e7 with the double threat of 35... ♖xg7 and 35... ♘e4+;

B) And even better in this case was 32...♔d6!, **defence by returning material**; for example, 33.h4?! ♘e4 34.♖xg7?! ♖xg7 35.♘xg7 ♔e5 and the tempi used to recover the material have left the black pieces dominating the board and his advantage is possibly decisive.

33.h4 ♘e6! 34.♖g6!

The white pieces are still very active and creating problems.

34...♔d6



Here White, instead of 35.♘f6?, which gave Black another chance to defend by means of a counterattack (see **Error 13**) with 35... ♘f4! (winning), should have played

35.♘f4!

, which allows him to exploit his greater activity to regain the pawn and reach an equal position; for example:

35...♖e8 36.♔d2!

Slightly better than 36.♖xe6 ♖xe6 37.♖xg7 ♔d5+.

36...♔d7 37.♗xe6 ♖xe6 38.♖xg7+=

Error 16 - Not finding the silent defence

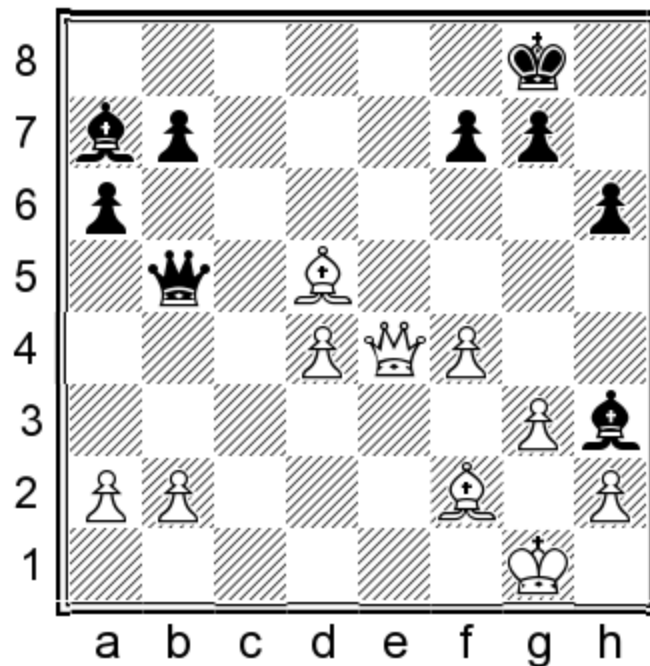
We have devoted a lot of effort to the idea of thoroughly checking all candidate moves when we are in a position of defence. But there is a special kind of candidate move that I wish to talk about here.

Has it ever happened to you that your opponent threatens you with something terrible, and there seems to be no way of preventing it (nor of counterattacking), when in reality, there is a very simple move, seemingly inoffensive, which prevents it completely? And have you ever happened to resign in such a position? If that is so, don't feel ashamed; you are not the only one. It is not a very common situation, but it is very upsetting and of course decisive for the final result of the game. The most famous historical example is the following position:

Salo Flohr

Henry Grob

Arosa match 1933



In 1933 a match was played between one of the best players in the world, Flohr, and the Swiss champion, Grob. The former won the match 4 to 1, with some draws, and this is the game that he lost. But the memory of the match has remained linked to this position from 90 years ago now, as the reader will be able to discover if he does a quick search on the Internet. Flohr resigned, as he could see no defence against the threat of ...♖f1 mate, overlooking the simple move ♔h1.

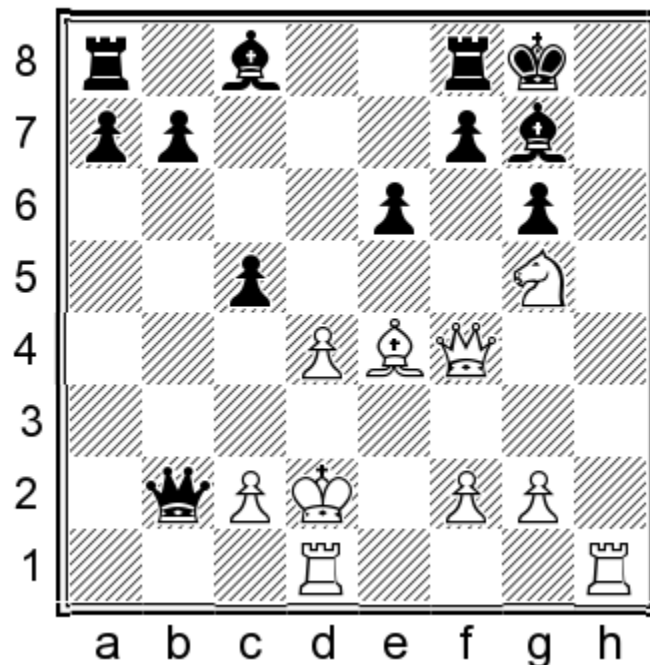
How could one of the best players of the time not find such an easy response, one which needs almost no calculation and moreover is the only move? It is one of the curiosities of chess. However, other striking cases have occurred, and they bear a certain similarity. I think this type of defence, which we shall call **silent defence**, hides from our eyes, trained as they are for another type of move, and the concept we should develop is: **Sometimes it is not necessary to prevent the threatened move and it is sufficient to prevent its effects.**

We begin with an example that has little reason to envy the classic Flohr-Grob game, apart from its level of popularity, and which features a player who a few years later would become a ‘Super-GM’.

Miguel Illescas Córdoba

Carlos Falcón

Benasque 1983



A very young Miguel Illescas (still without a FIDE rating) had achieved a promising attacking position but now succumbed to the ‘temptation’ of a brilliant idea.

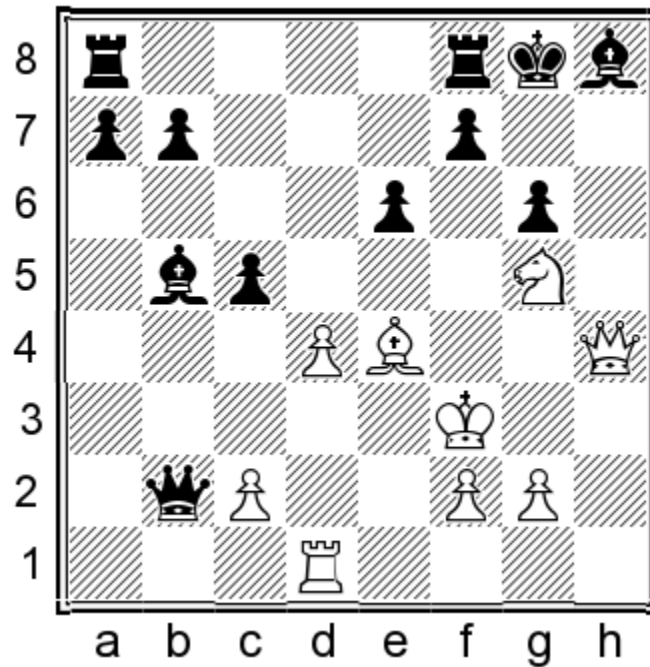
19.♔e2?

Instead, 19.♖h7 with the idea of 20.♙h4 and then maybe ♖h8+ was the right way to crown the attack, but this was far from obvious.

19...♙d7! 20.♖h8+?

The supposed finish that Miguel was relying on (or was hypnotised by). With the preparatory 20.♔f1 instead, he could have put the attack back on to the winning track.

20...♙xh8 21.♚h4 ♖b5+ 22.♔f3



Exercise 17

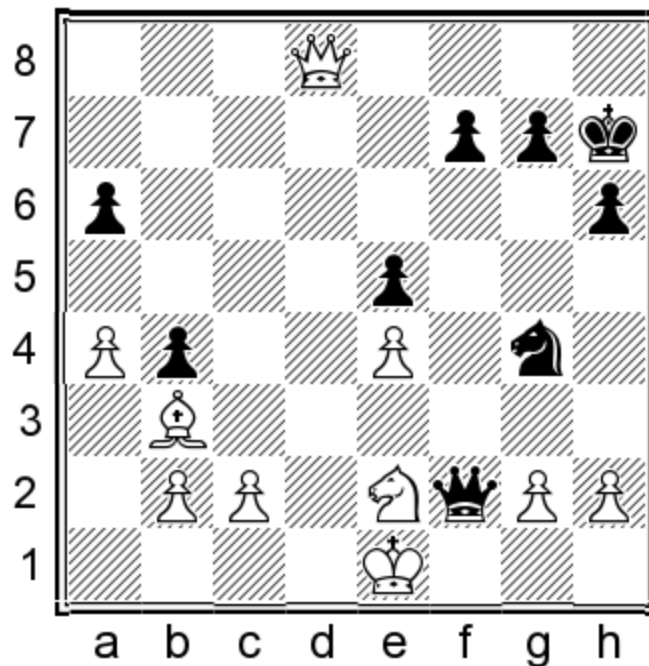
The player with the black pieces, the distinguished arbiter Carlos Falcón, thought for a long time but could find no defence against 23. ♚h7#, as a result of which he resigned the game. And while it is true that there is no defence against 23. ♚h7+, there is indeed a defence against its effects. After 22...♔g7 it would have been White who would have had to resign.

In the next example, White ignores as many as two silent defences; the first makes him miss a win, while the second leads to his defeat.

Javier Sainz Allo (1804)

Juan Manuel Martínez Montes (1925)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2021



Black has made an interesting sacrifice, difficult to refute in practice.

32.♔d2

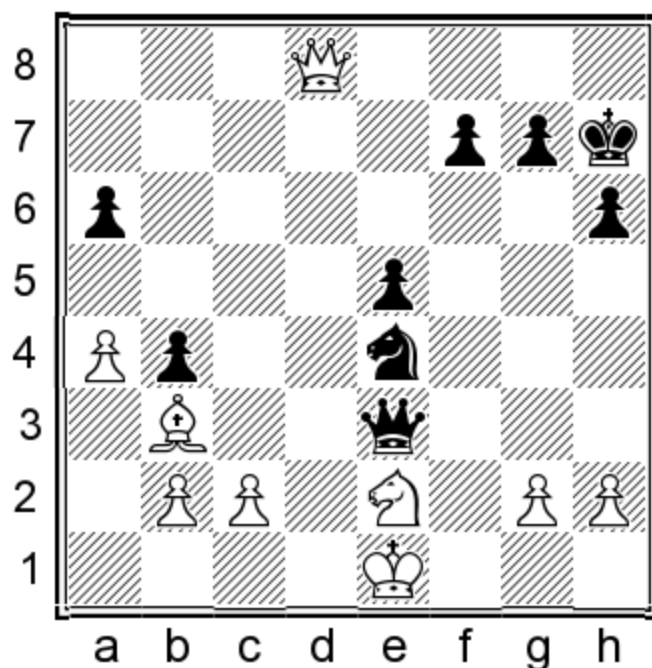
This looks like the obvious square, but it leads to nothing.

32.♔d1! ♖e3+ 33.♔d2 ♖f1+ and now is the right moment for 34.♔d3!, allowing a seemingly devastating check: 34...♕e3+ 35.♔c4 ♕xe2+ 36.♔xb4 (36.♕d3!? is simpler) 36...♕xe4+ (36...♖e3 37.♕d3) 37.♙c4 ♖e3 38.♕d3! and White wins.

32...♕e3+ 33.♔d1?

This now allows a draw; White should have played 33.♔e1! and transposed to the variation above.

33...♖f2+ 34.♔e1 ♖xe4



Black now threatens mate in two, beginning with 35...♔f2+, and this presents White with a very difficult defensive decision.

35.♔h4?

It is surprising that White does not find the solution, when we consider that there are very few options and the threat of mate is very clear. But if we recall the two previous examples, it is easier to understand it. The defence with the queen fails because it can be deflected, while the creation of an escape square with c3 (or c4) begins by losing the knight with check, so that all that is left is the king move.

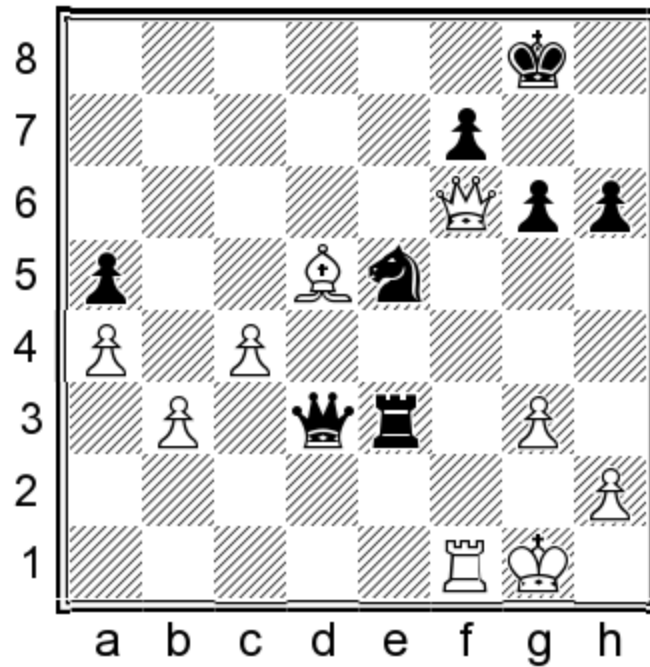
35.♔d1!! is a spectacular silent defence; for example, 35...♔f2 (35...♘f2+ repeats the position) 36.♘g3! ♔g1+ 37.♔e2 ♔xg2+ 38.♔e3 ♘xg3 39.hxg3 ♔xg3+ 40.♔d2=.

35...g5 0-1

Daniel Centrón Antuña (2112)

Sergio Castillo Dalmau (2258)

Salobreña Spanish Junior Championship 2017



In this case (Exercise 18), White threatens to invade on f7, and this seems unstoppable, but in fact, there is a silent defence...

38...♖e2?

... which Black did not find. He should have played 38...♔h7!, and if 39.♙xf7, the bishop stops taking part in the defence of his king and this allows 39...♖xg3+! 40.hxg3 ♕xg3+ with perpetual check. It is likely that the process consists of first considering 38...♖xg3+? and seeing that it fails to 39.hxg3 ♕xg3+ 40.♙g2, then putting two and two together regarding the double function (and therefore overload) of the bishop on d5.

**39.♙xf7+ ♔h7 40.♙g8+ ♔xg8 41.♕f8+ ♔h7 42.♕e7+ ♞f7
43.♖xf7**

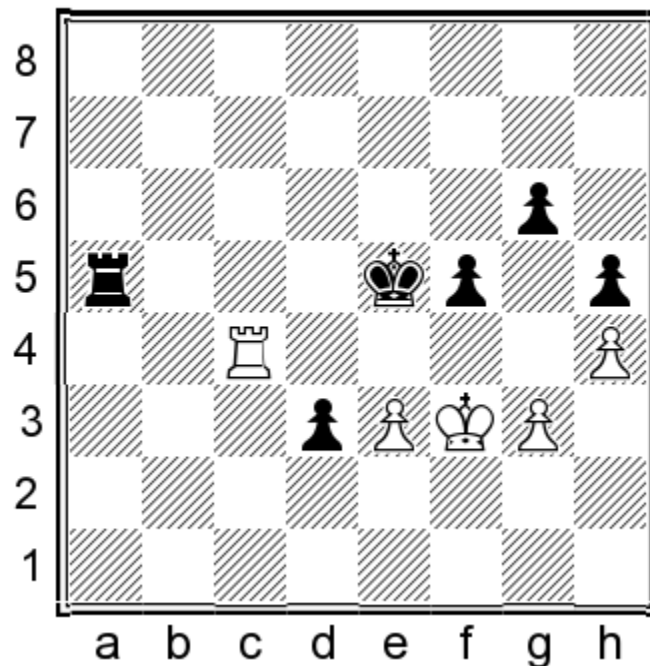
Black resigned. Mate follows.

As we have seen in the previous section, endgame positions are fertile ground for defences that do not seem to prevent anything, often because the threats are difficult to identify.

Juan Plazuelo Pascual (2335)

Xavier Povill Claros (2107)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2015



In this case, Black's passed pawn commands respect, but it is essential to check what is the exact threat and then parry it. After some thought, we discover that neither 59... d2 (which can be answered with 60. ♔e2) nor 59... ♖a1 (which is answered with 60. ♖d4) are real threats and that the only definite threat is 59... ♖d5.

59.e4?

And White probably discovered this. White's move prevents 59... ♖d5 and prepares 60. ♔e3, but it means that other moves, which were not so dangerous before, now work.

59.♔f2!! . Already categorised as **silent defence**. The king will transfer to d2 if Black plays 59...♖d5 and otherwise will help White to improve his defence and subsequently control and eliminate the d-pawn with ♖c4-b4-b3. After 59...♖d5 60.♔e1 d2 61.♔d1 ♖d3 62.♖c6 ♔e4 63.♖xg6 ♔xe3 64.♖g8 there is nothing further that Black can try – it's a draw.

59...♖a1! also works now and is easier: 60.♔e3 ♜e1+ 61.♔xd3 fxe4+ 62.♔d2 ♜g1 63.♜c3 ♔d4, and Black wins.

Diagram 1: Chessboard position after White's move 1. d4. The board has columns labeled a-h and rows 1-8. White pieces are at d4, e5, f6, g7, h8, and a rook at a5. Black pieces are at d2, e3, f4, g5, h6, and a rook at a8. Squares b1, b3, b5, b7, d1, d3, d5, d7, f1, f3, f5, f7, h1, h3, h5, h7 are shaded.

60...fxe4!

61.♔xd2

Now Black attacks the pawn on g3, which is defenceless:

61...♖a3

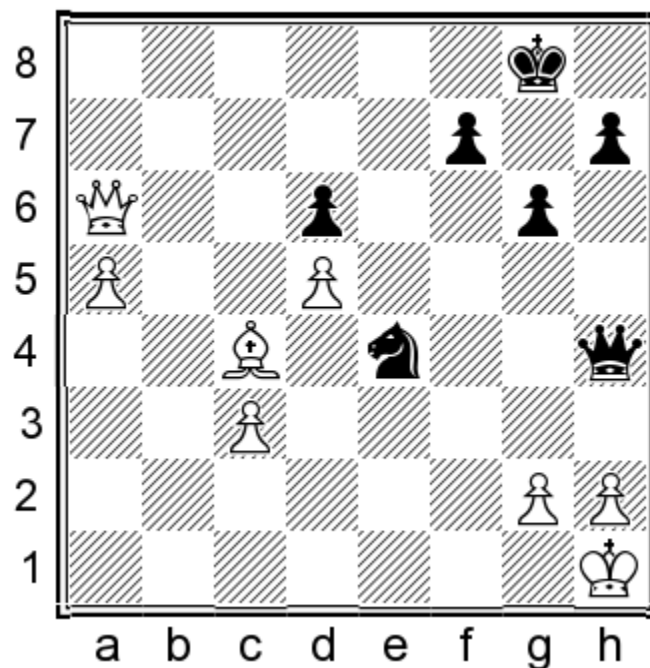
And Black wins.

Finally, we present a position that illustrates the meaning of the **forcefulness scale** very well.

Manuel Muñoz Peláez (1946)

Adrian Palenciano Escolar (1850)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2014



The positioning of the black pieces is very strong, and this should outweigh White's passed pawns.

33...♔e1+?

Black forgets to navigate using the **forcefulness scale**. Best was 33...♞f2+!, which is check, 34.♔g1 ♞g4, which is not check, but threatens mate in five moves with a series of checks, starting with 35...♔e1+, and White has no defence.

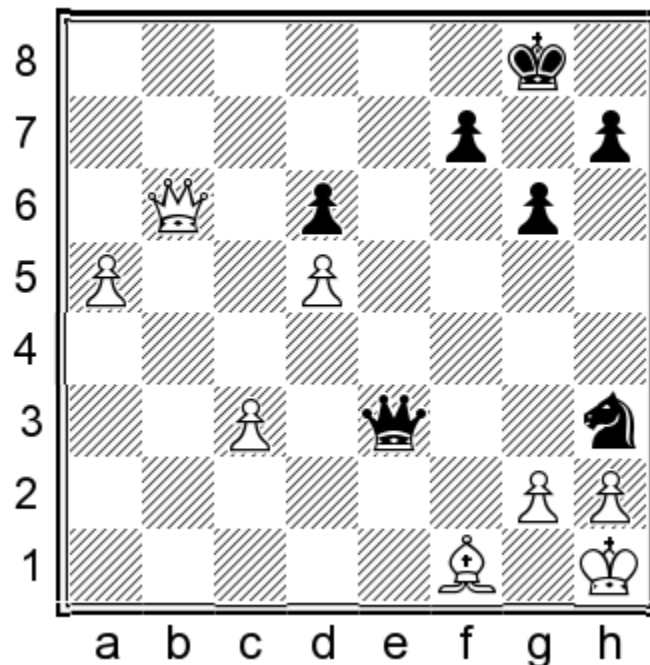
34.♙f1 ♔e3

Black has serious threats, but gives a breathing space to White, who can defend himself.

35.♔b6?

Offering the exchange of queens does not always save us. White could have avoided the effects of the 'fearsome' 35... ♘f2+ by playing 35.h3 (or even 35.g3, in both cases with a **silent defence** which cannot be breached): 35...♘f2+ 36.♔h2 when Black should settle for a draw with 36...♘g4+ 37.hxg4 ♕h6+.

35...♘f2+ 36.♔g1 ♘h3+ 37.♔h1



37...♕e1?

Black's threat is not a big enough one. 37...♕f4! was stronger. When checks do not work, it is necessary to consider threats of mate, and from now on, besides threatening mate with 38... ♕xf1, another way of threatening mate is being prepared: 38.♕b5 ♘f2+ 39.♔g1 ♘g4 with an immediate threat of mate on h2 or mate following a series of checks starting with 40... ♕e3+, to which there

is no answer. So White has to play 38.gxh3 ♖xf1+ 39.♖g1 ♖f3+ 40.♖g2 ♖d1+ 41.♖g1 ♖xd5+ 42.♖g2 ♖xa5 and Black has a won ending, although he still has work to do.

38.♖b5 ♘f2+ 39.♔g1 ♖e3 40.♖b6 ½-½

How to avoid Errors 13, 14, 15 and 16

My advice on all the errors in this chapter on defence is being grouped together here, because they are all related to the defensive protocol and I think I can explain them better in this way.

As regards training, my advice is to solve plenty of exercises. All the tactical exercises we do have some defensive component, but I propose the following two collections, as they are rather more specific: Practical Chess Defence and Grandmaster Preparation – Attack & Defence, both by Jacob Aagaard.

My second piece of advice is about attitude. Defensive situations are very tense. It is essential to control your emotions and to be capable of confronting the move search coolly and optimistically. I am convinced that continuous training and effort in tournament games can help you create a more and more effective attitude.

The third piece of advice is to apply the defensive protocol, which we shall summarise now:

- 1) Keep calm!**
- 2) Identify the threat(s)**
- 3) Look for a counterattack**
- 4) Consider all the moves that parry the threat(s), including ‘silent defences’.**

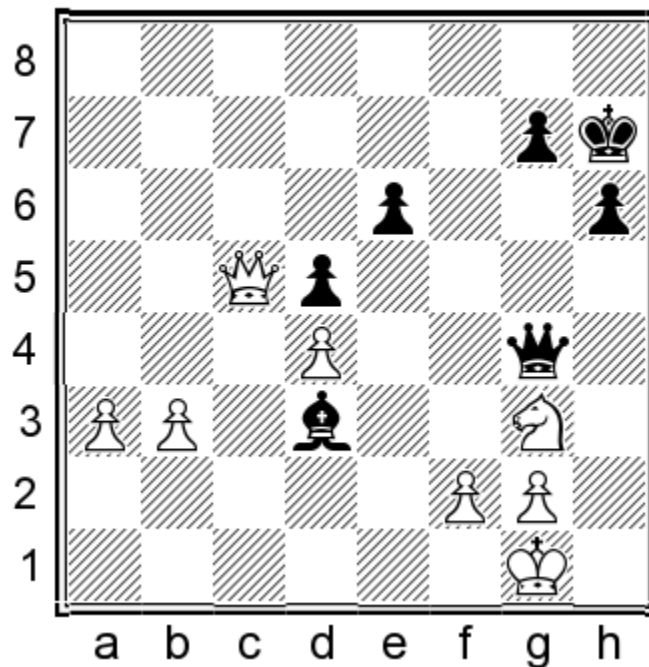
The protocol can be further personalised, but I recommend following this until it becomes an intuitive process.

Chapter 4

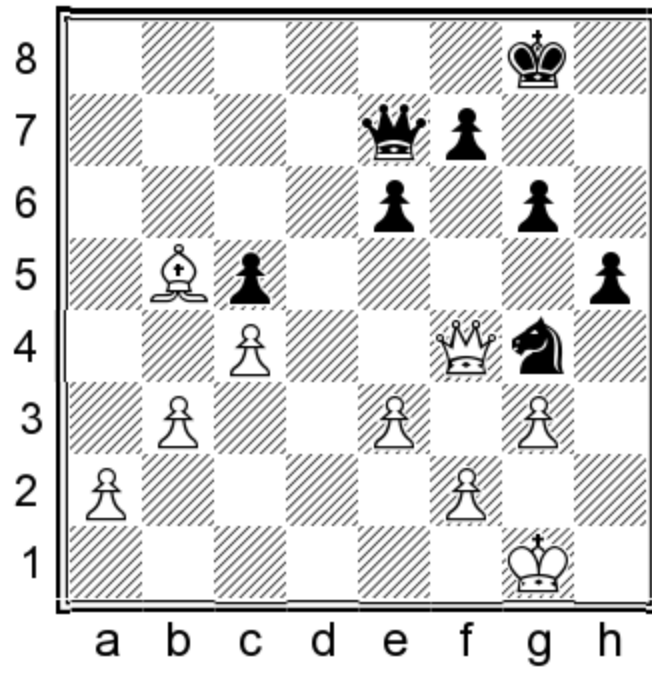
Attacking the king

- Error 17 - Facilitating the opponent's attack
- Error 18 - Not using all the pieces in the attack
- Error 19 - Attacking with insufficient energy

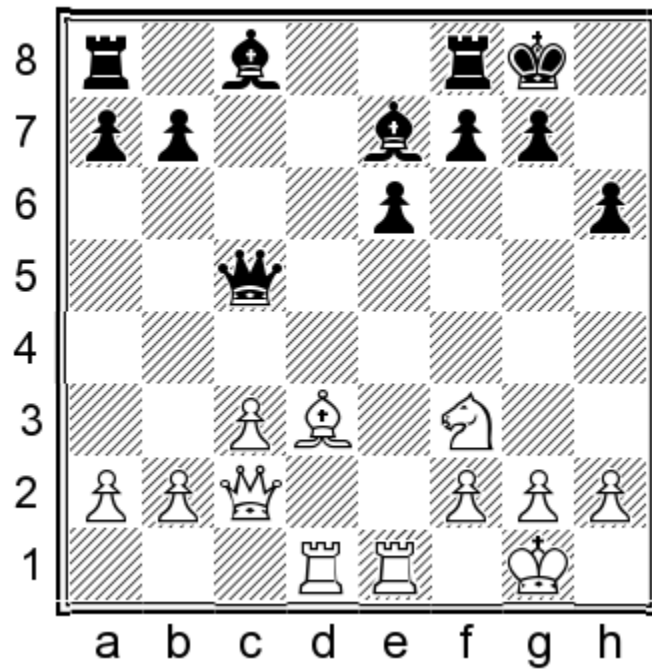
Exercises for Chapter 4



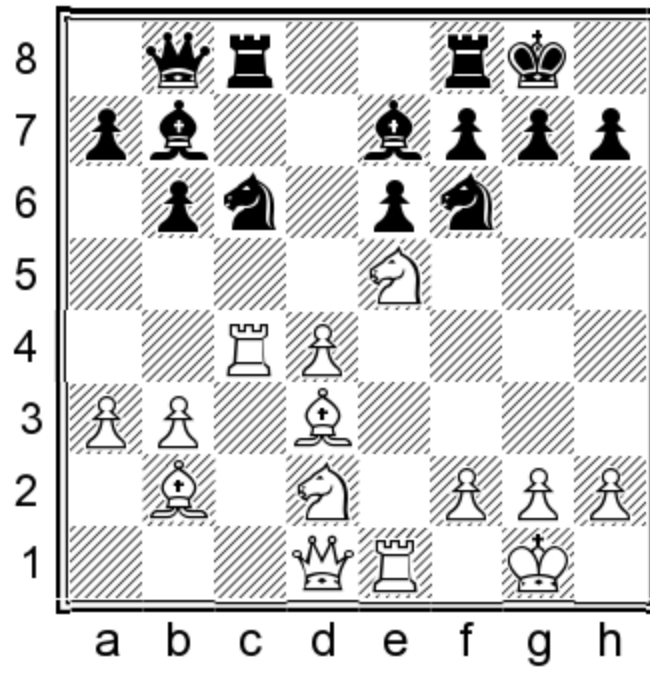
19



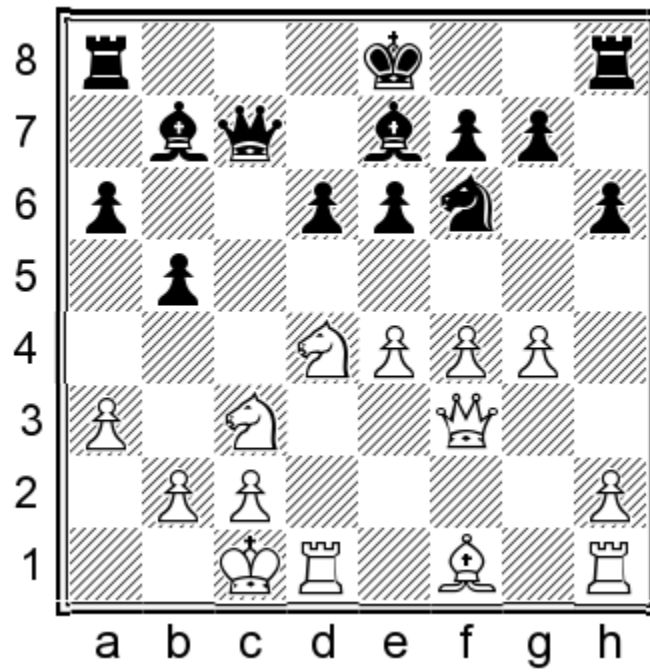
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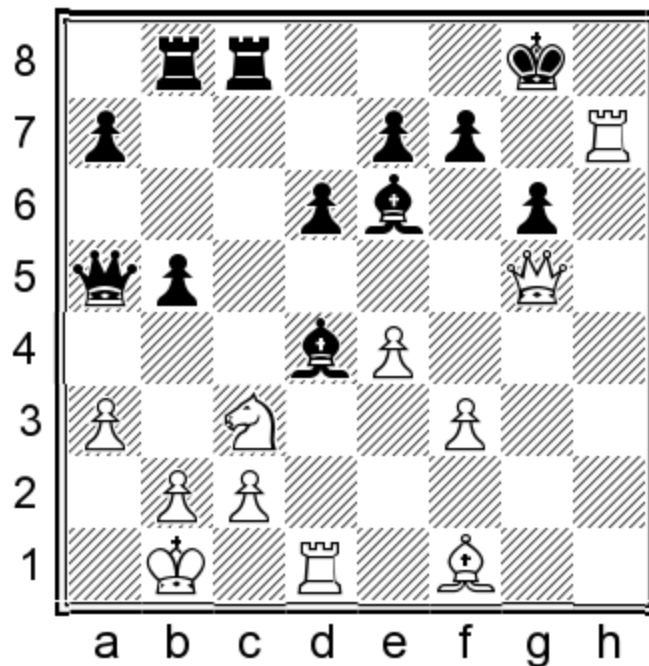
21



22



23



24

Attacking the king is one of the most attractive situations within a game of chess, both for the protagonist and for the spectator. Most players prefer the attack to any other facet of the game. Even those players who enjoy defending, of whom there are not many, are very happy when they have carried out a good attack.

In addition to being attractive, the attack on the king is the most frequent strategic plan in the middlegame, and it often demands both high levels of tactical skill and a strong intuition. Many players are brilliant at executing an attack, especially in the final phase, when they bring into play their powers of calculation and imagination, and some are also brilliant in the earlier phase of preparing the attack, which is more strategic in nature.

There are books full of brilliant attacking games, but the final stages of accumulation and rounding off the attack are usually analysed in more detail, much more than the prior phases of preparing the attack. Yet it must be admitted that no attack could be successfully

carried out without the creation of favourable conditions, and such conditions are almost always produced by the opponent's errors, starting from positions which present no danger.

In this chapter, we are going to study some of the errors that are made in relation to the attack. I have selected three of these. We shall start with a poorly systematised yet very important type of error, which deals with what should not be done before the attack even exists. And we shall conclude with the two most important strategic conditions which must be met if an attack is to be successful.

An attack almost always relies upon a large amount of tactics, which is why we have already seen many attacking positions in Chapter 2 on calculation errors. And of course, attack and defence represent two sides of the same situation, and therefore this chapter and the two previous ones are closely related; it is useful to study and reflect upon them together.

Error 17 - Facilitating the opponent's attack

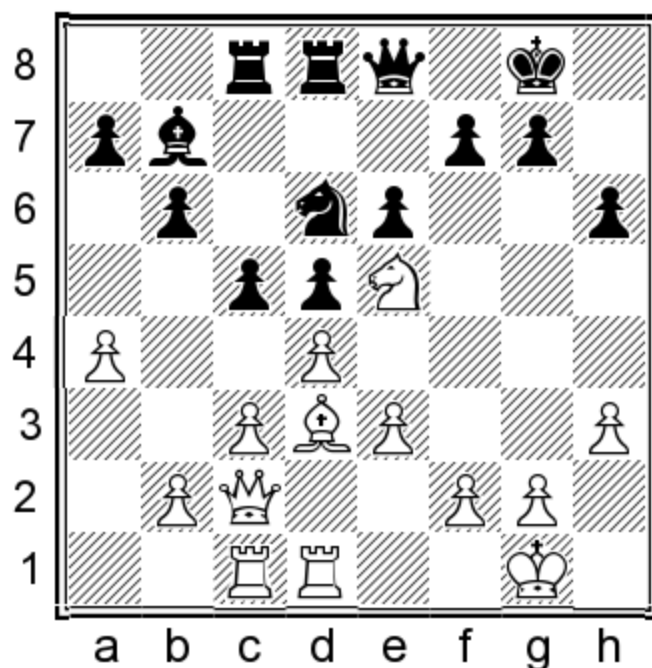
Normally, an attack will not succeed in the absence of favourable preconditions. In this first section, we are going to study how a not endangered position can become, in very few moves, a dangerous attacking position for the opponent, and we shall try to understand why.

Many circumstances can facilitate an attack, and it never ceases to be curious (even though the explanation is simple) how some players who can attack very well allow their own king to come under attack easily.

Javier Habans Aguerrea (2067)

Joan Ponseti Lluch (1992)

Spanish U18 Team Championship 2019



To many players, this position will seem very boring. In spite of Black's bishop being restricted by his centre pawns, Black has a number of advantages which amply compensate him (the misplaced white pawn on a4, the black knight perfectly placed on d6), and it is even possible that he stands slightly better. And yet, there are some distant signs that might warn him of an attack: the white knight on e5 and, most of all, the position of the white bishops (an ominous bishop versus an impatient bishop). Perhaps a Petrosian would have eliminated these first signs of a future attack without blinking an eye, but the reality is that White develops a tremendous attack in very few moves.

19...cxd4?

Now everything changes. Black willingly relinquishes his advantage on the queenside and becomes worse. But how does this make it easier for Black's king to be attacked? There are three reasons, and very important, although not obvious at first glance:

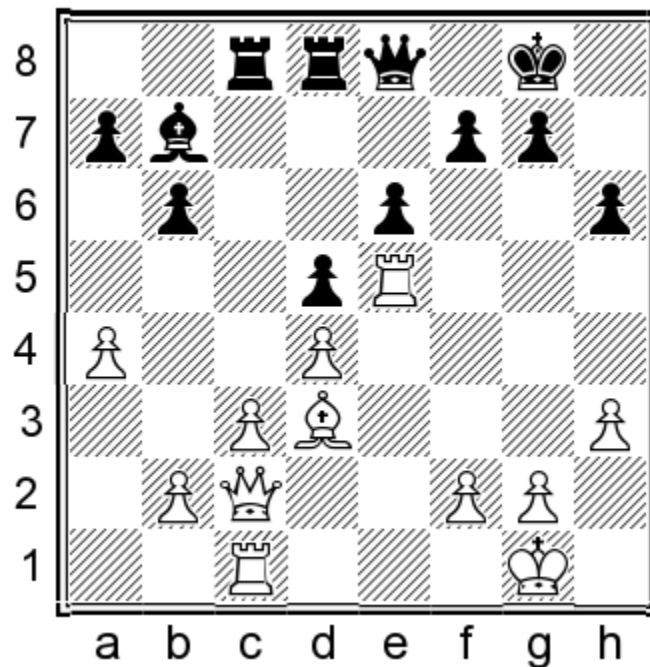
- 1) the white queen can now transfer more easily to the kingside;

2) a white rook (or even both rooks) can move into the attack via the third rank; and finally

3) it is now harder to evict the knight from e5 with the f7-pawn due to the resulting weakness on e6.

The best course for Black was to launch his attack on the queenside with 19...c4! but there exists a strong postulate in classical strategy that says: **It is useful to maintain the central tension, in order not to release the opponent from the need to be vigilant.** Then after 20.♖f1 Black can evict the knight with 20...f6 21.♘f3 e5.

20.exd4 ♘c4 21.♖e1! ♘xe5 22.♖xe5



Only three moves later, the position is very different. Black has traded off the white knight on e5. Now, it is quite obvious that White can launch an attack on the black king; his four pieces can all reach the kingside zone and it will be more difficult for the b7-bishop to take part in the defence. We are now in the phase that we could call a ‘promising attack’.

22...♔d7?

Another natural move; the queen looks awkward on e8 (although in reality it is well situated for the defence there, and its action reaches as far as a4), and now the white attack is going to continue to make progress. Best seems to be 22...♘c6!, rapidly creating counterplay on the queenside. White would have to decide whether to sacrifice the a-pawn (as in the game) or delay the entry of his second rook into the attack by playing 23.♖a1!, with the idea of continuing with f4 (23.♙e2 ♘xa4 24.♞e1, as in the game, also gives White compensation for the pawn), but then 23...b5! really stops the attack, albeit at the cost of a pawn; for example, 24.axb5 ♘xb5 25.♖xa7 ♘xd3 26.♙xd3 ♖a8±.

23.♞ce1!

The second rook is on its way. Naturally, this move already implies the sacrifice of the pawn on a4.

23...♘c6 24.♞1e3 ♘xa4 25.♙e2

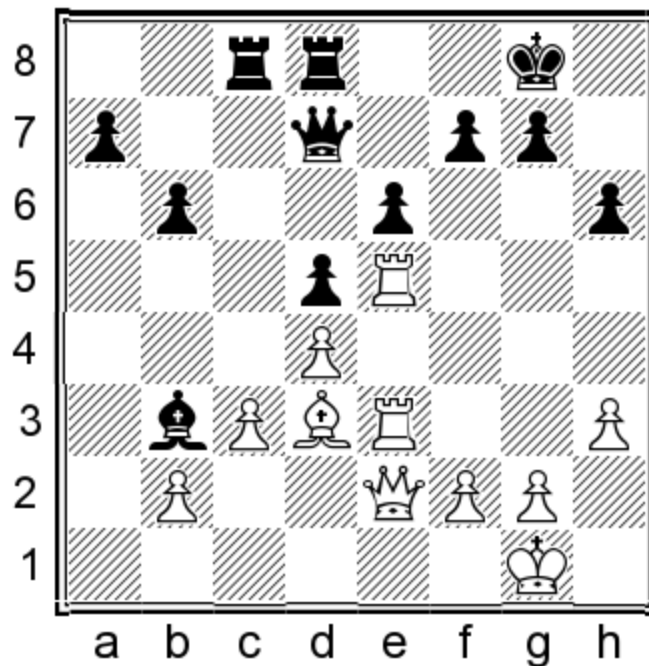
The four white pieces all stand opposite Black's castled position, which nevertheless looks very solid.

25...♘b3?!

Seeking to trade bishops with ...♘c4, but in fact, distancing the bishop from the defence.

25...♙d6?! prepares the flight of the king and clears the path to e8 for the bishop, but then comes 26.♞g3 ♔f8?! 27.♙g4! and White wins.

25...♙e7!? looks strange because the queen puts itself on the same file as the white rooks, but is slightly better; nevertheless, after 26.♘b1 ♘e8 (preventing ♙h5) 27.♞g3 ♞d6 28.♞h5 ♙f6 29.♙d2 ♔f8 30.♙c2, intending ♞f3, White's attack is strong, perhaps unstoppable.



26. ♔h5

It is revealing to compare this diagram with the one from only six moves ago. And it is also very revealing that White can even allow the exchange of bishops: 26. ♖g3! ♙c4 27. ♗h5 ♘xd3 28. ♔xd3 ♚f8 (28... ♚h8? 29. ♕e3! ♚h7?! 30. ♖xg7+) 29. ♕h7 and wins.

26... ♙c4 27. ♙c2 ♖c7 28. ♖g3

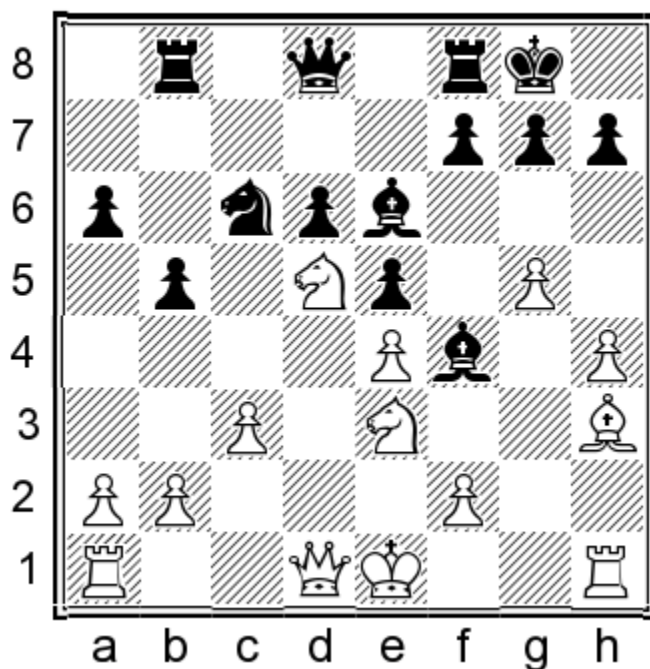
White has too many pieces in the attack for any defence to be possible.

28... ♚f8 29. ♕g4 ♜f5 30. ♕g6 ♖e8 31. ♕h7 ♚d6 32. ♙xf5 ♙b5 33. ♙g6 1-0

After seeing so many examples where a player exchanged pieces unnecessarily and erroneously, it is striking to see an example where someone avoids exchanging pieces when it was appropriate to do so and would have stopped the attack. But, as we have said, different players make different errors.

Fabrizio Lautaro Periotto Miori (1948)

Alex Mangues Rubia (1766)



Black has deployed his pieces splendidly, so much so that he must have thought that the white attack was anti-positional and harmless.

17...♔d7?

A serious error, from which we can learn more than one lesson. In the first place, it allows White a winning continuation. But I think that Black could have taken sensible defensive measures without needing to see his opponent's winning combination.

The manoeuvre which begins with 17...♙xe3! exchanges two pieces and would leave Black in a favourable position: 18.fxe3 (18.♘xe3 b4!±) 18...♙xh3 19.♖xh3 ♘e7.

18.♘f5!?

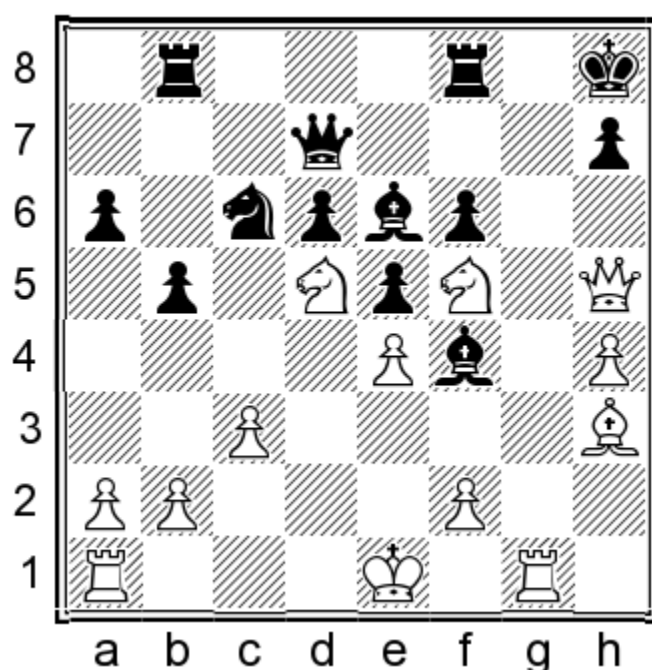
White had an attractive winning continuation, but even without seeing it, with this thematic occupation of f5 he has a good attacking position.

Instead, 18. ♖f6+!! gxf6 19. ♘d5 ♔h8 20. ♘xf6 ♕e7 21. ♕h5 was decisive.

18...f6?

Once the attack accumulates favourable conditions, repelling it is much more difficult, and errors tend to happen. The best move was 18... ♖b7!, but it involves a pawn sacrifice: 19. ♘xd6 ♕a7, with some compensation in view of White's disorganised position.

19. gxf6 gxf6 20. ♖g1+ ♔h8 21. ♕h5



Now White has five pieces attacking and total domination of the light squares. Defence is impossible. The contrast between this position and the one resulting from the variation beginning with 17... ♗xe3! is overwhelming and demands serious reflection.

21... ♗xf5 22. ♗xf5 ♕f7 23. ♗g6 ♕g7 24. ♔e2 ♘e7 25. ♗f5 ♕f7 26. ♕xf7 ♖xf7 27. ♗e6

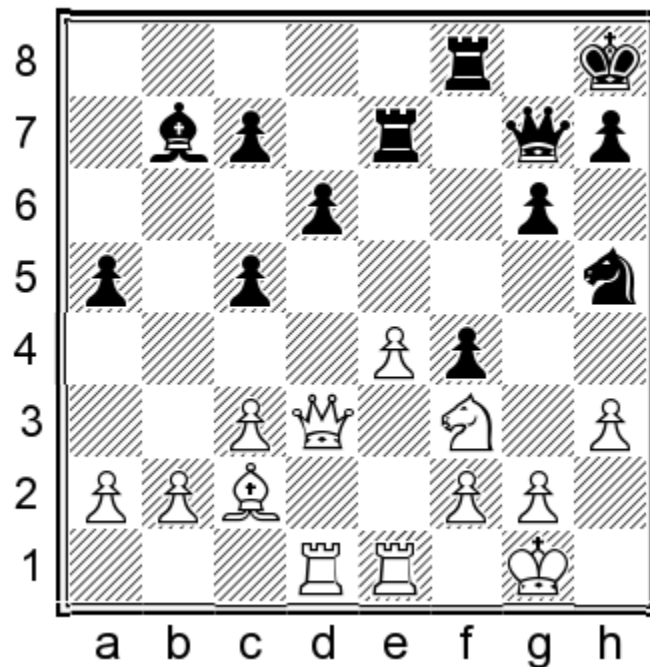
Winning material, although the subsequent conversion required a lot of work.

With the centre open, a flank attack is difficult to execute, but if it is allowed to grow, it can prove successful. In the next phase of the game, which we are going to analyse, we shall encounter a real collection of typical errors.

Mikel Ortega López (2088)

Juan Miguel Perez Tores (1935)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2014



This might look like a normal position, but Black is threatening to start a crushing attack with 24... g5.

24.♖e2?!

Clearly White is not worried. It is true that the ways to prevent the attack were not straightforward:

A) 24.♔b5! was possibly best. This move is meant to prepare the e5 break under better conditions: 24...♙a8 (24...♙c8 25.e5!) 25.h4 h6 26.e5! ♙xf3 27.gxf3 ♖xe5 28.♔f1±;

B) 24.h4 is a reasonable solution, but Black has a strange-looking move in reply: 24...♙c8! (not 24...h6? 25.e5!±), which equalises;

C) There is also 24.b4 axb4 (24...g5! 25.bxc5 g4 26.hxg4 ♖xg4 27.♘h2 ♖g5 28.cxd6 cxd6 29.f3 ±) 25.cxb4 cxb4 26.♙b5 ♙a8 27.♙xb4 g5 28.♙a5 ± (28.♙d4 ♘f6 29.e5!);

D) Finally, another option is the immediate 24.e5, a strategically logical move: since Black is threatening a flank attack, White hinders it by starting an action in the centre. The problem is that it involves a pawn or even a piece sacrifice, so it is difficult to calculate: 24...♙xf3 25.exd6! (after 25.♙xf3 ♖xe5 26.♙a4 there is compensation for the pawn, but this is not obvious) 25...♖xe1+ 26.♖xe1 ♙c6 27.♖e7 ♖f6 28.♖xc7 and now Black should give back the piece, with equality: 28...♙xg2! 29.♙xg2 f3+ 30.♙f1 ♖e6 31.c4 ♘g3+ 32.fxg3 ♖xh3+ 33.♙f2 ♖h2+ 34.♙e3! ♖h6+ 35.♙f2.

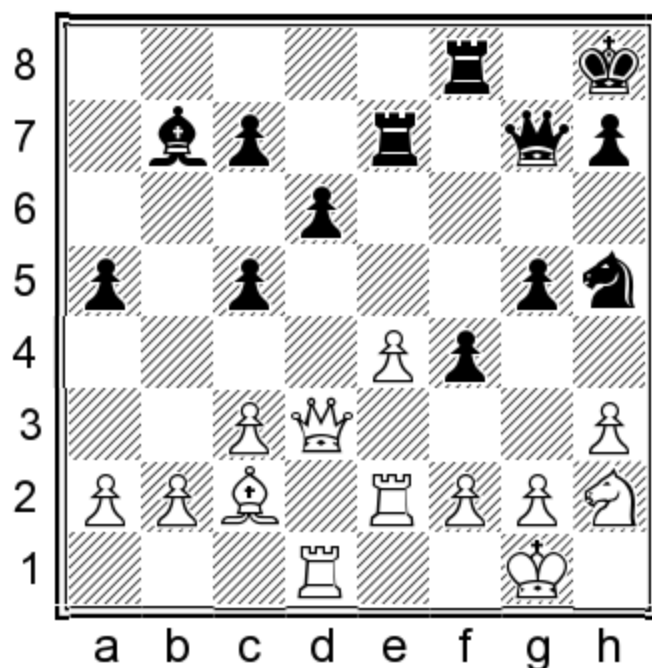
In light of these variations, it can be concluded that White could have prevented the attack, although the decision was not clear. What is not justified is that he allowed it.

24...g5!

Black carries out the expected advance, and now White does not have a good solution.

25.♘h2?

Mistakes often follow on from each other when a dangerous option for the opponent has been overlooked. This is not the first example we have seen. Now White attempts to block the attack, but makes a calculation error. 25.♙f1 was much better, although it fails to keep the balance: 25...g4 26.hxg4 ♖xg4 27.c4! ♘f6 (27...♖g8 28.♙c3+) 28.♙c3 ♙g8 29.♘e1 (29.♖de1 ♖g7-+) 29...♙h4 30.♙h3 ♖xh3 31.gxh3 ♘xe4±.



25...♞f6?

Here we have an example that would be quite suitable for the next section: energetic play in carrying out the attack. Blocking should not be permitted, if it is possible to avoid it, even though, in this case, it involves material sacrifices: 25...f3! would have been decisive; for example, 26.♞xf3 (26.gxf3 ♞f4) 26...g4 27.hxg4 ♞f4.

26.f3?

This partially stops Black's attack, but it was much better once again to strike in the centre and create complications with 26.e5! dxe5 27.♞b5 ♞xg2! and chances are even.

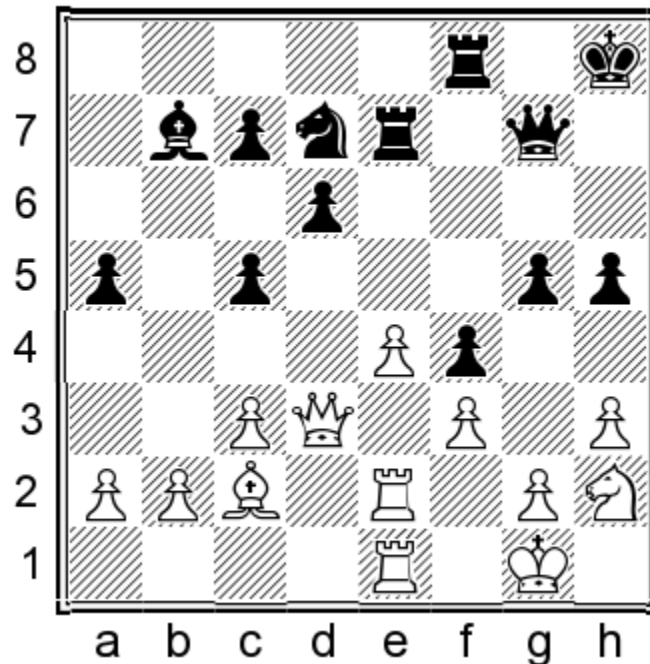
26...h5?

This error in the move-order reflects once more a lack of attention to the opponent's options; 26...♞d7! first, followed by ...♞e5 and ...h5, would have secured Black's attacking options.

27.♞de1?

For the sixth time in this game, White abstains from the break, which would have given him better options: 27.e5! dxe5 28.♔b5.

27...♞d7!



Finally Black transfers the knight to its excellent attacking position and he carries out the rest of the plan energetically.

28.♔b5 ♞c8 29.♔xa5 ♞e5 30.♔b5 g4 31.hxg4 hxg4 32.♞xg4
 ♞xg4 33.fxg4 ♔xg4 34.♞f2 ♞h7 35.♞e3 ♞g8 36.♞ee2 ♔h3 37.♞xf4
 ♔h1+ 38.♞f2 ♞xg2+ 39.♞e3 ♔c1+

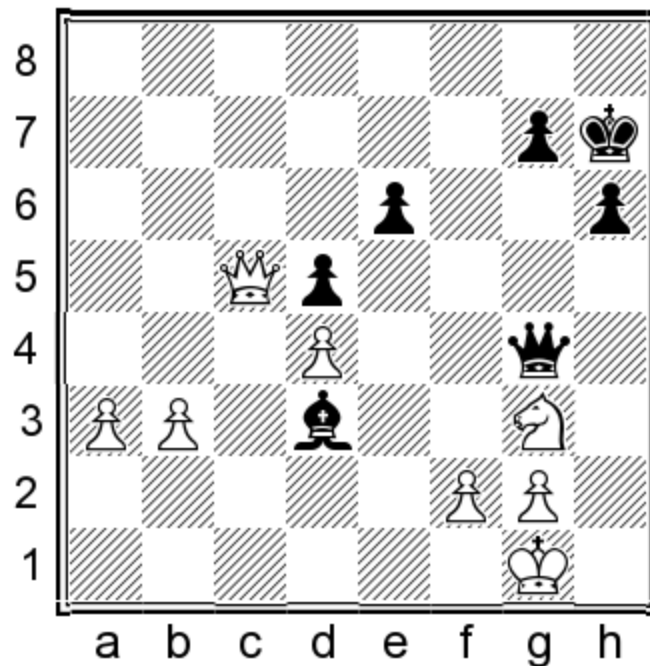
And mate follows. White resigned.

Now, we are going to consider a specific circumstance which facilitates the enemy attack, namely the remoteness of the defender's queen. This will be the theme of our next few examples, combined in some cases with the remoteness of other pieces as well.

Julio Suarez Gómez (2307)

Jesus Martin Duque (2271)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2014



Exercise 19

White has won some material, and Black has launched a desperate counterattack.

34.b4?

There does not seem to be any problem, but keeping the queen so far away from the kingside facilitates the enemy attack, as we shall see in the following variations.

Just like the football manager who pulls back most of his forwards when his team is ahead, bringing the queen closer to the king would have ended all speculation: 34.♙c3! and White wins.

34...h5?

It was not easy to find the solution, but Black had two twin variations with the same idea: not letting the queen approach. The position would also encapsulate other themes concerning calculation:

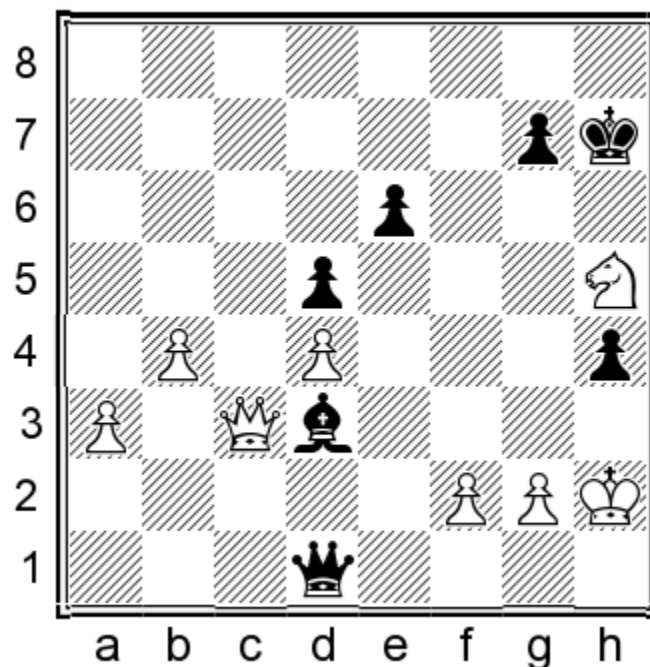
A) 34...♔c4! (cutting off the queen's return and preparing ...h6-h5-h4) 35.b5 h5 36.a4 (36.b6 h4=) 36...h4 37.♘h1 ♔f4 38.♔e7 ♔d3! (preparing the check on f4; this whole variation demonstrates the skill of attacking energetically yet at the same time slowly and deliberately) 39.b6 ♔c1+ 40.♔h2 ♔f4+ with equality;

B) 34...♔d1+ 35.♔h2 ♔d2 36.♔f8 ♔f5! is a more tactical way of keeping the queen at a distance: 37.♘xf5 ♔f4+ 38.♔h3 (the only way of preventing perpetual check; 38.♔g1 ♔c1+) 38...exf5 (for 39...♔g4) 39.f3 g5!. Not an easy decision; now perpetual check is inevitable.

35.♔c3!

White brings the queen closer and his problems are solved.

35...♔d1+ 36.♔h2 h4 37.♘h5!



37...h3?!

This looks unpleasant, but in fact it makes the defence easier. Instead, 37...♔f5!? would have forced White to find several 'only'

moves: 38.♘f4! g5 39.♘h3 g4 40.♘f4 ♔f1 41.♚e3! and the counterplay is over.

38.♘f4!

Attacking the bishop and the annoying pawn.

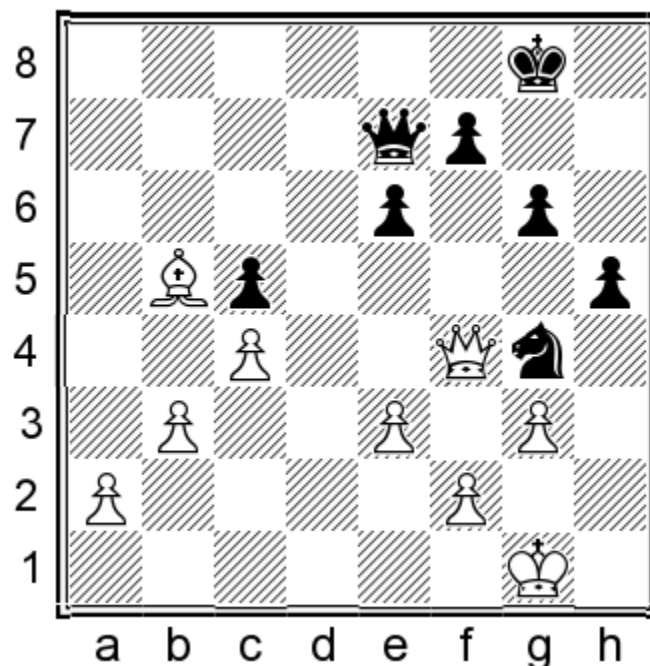
38...♙f5 39.♘xh3 ♚e2 40.♚f3 ♚d2 41.♚e3 ♚d1 42.♘g5+ ♔g6 43.♘f3 ♙e4 44.♘e5+ ♔h7 45.♚h3+ 1-0

In the next game, we are going to see how the remote location of the defender's queen is compounded by the remoteness of a minor piece. White insists several times on keeping his only two pieces at a distance from the defence, thus facilitating the attack on his king, although we should take into account that this was a rapid game.

Miguel Suarez Álvarez (1601)

Javier Cuadrado Carmona (1835)

Spanish U18 Rapid Championship 2022



Exercise 20

As in the previous example, White has won enough material on the queenside to win the game. However, the pawns' progress is slow and should be made while attending to the only possible danger: the attack on his king, since Black has his two pieces there as well as a pawn majority.

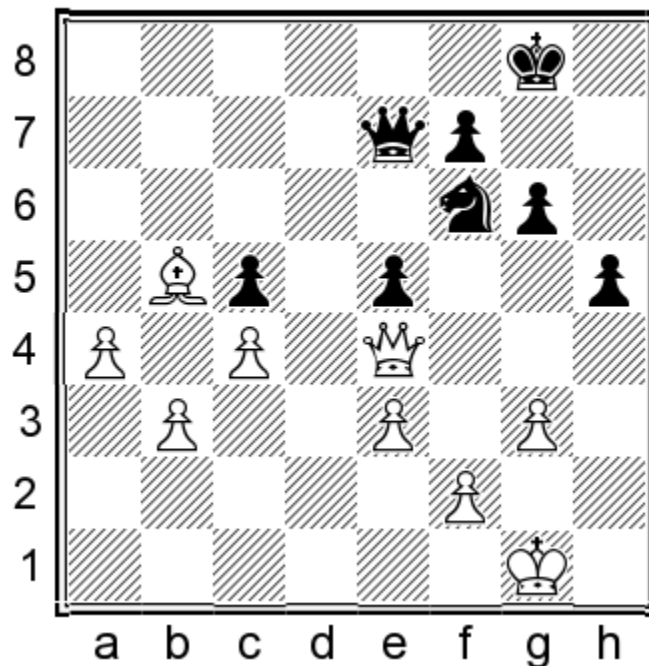
32.a4?

White misses his first chance to transfer his bishop to within the castled position and to make progress while keeping his king secure: 32.♔c6! ♕d8 (32...♕a7 33.a4 ♖b6 34.♔e8! ♖b7 35.a5+-) 33.♔f3 ♘f6 34.♖g5 ♕e7 35.a4 and wins.

32...e5

The best way to take advantage of White's error was 32...♕d8! 33.♖f3 ♘e5 34.♖e2 ♕a8, when White's neglect in leaving his bishop out of play and allowing an attack on the light squares is patently obvious.

33.♕e4 ♘f6



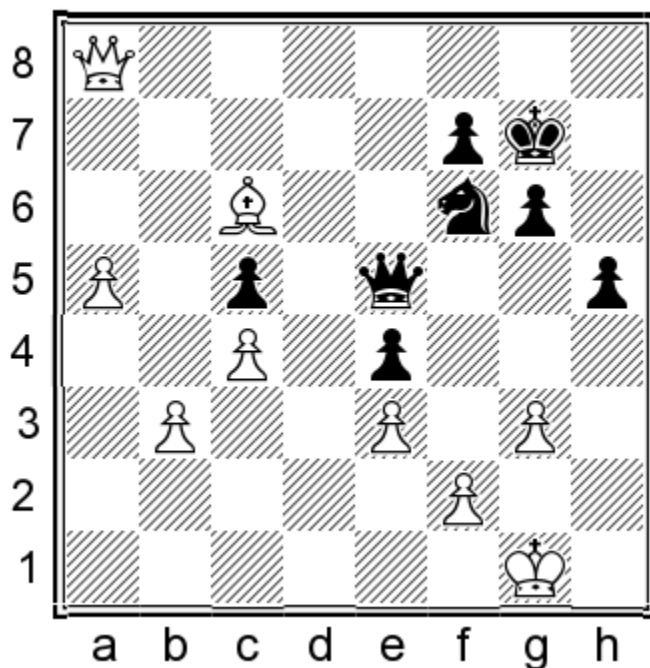
34.♕a8+?!

Now White moves the queen away as well, With 34.♔f3! White could defend; for example, 34...e4 35.♔f4 ♔d8 36.a5 ♔g7 37.a6 ♔d1+ 38.♔g2 ♔xb3 39.g4! (39.a7 ♔a2 40.♙a4 ♔xa4 41.♔b8 ♔d1=) 39...hxc4 40.a7 ♔a2 41.♙a4 ♔xa4 42.♔b8 ♔d1 43.a8♔ ♔f3+ 44.♔g1 ♔d1+ 45.♔h2+-.

34...♔g7 35.a5?!

White once again misses the chance to bring his bishop into the defence; 35.♙c6! was necessary; for example, 35...♔e6 36.♙d5, and White keeps some advantage.

35...e4 36.♙c6 ♔e5



37.♔g2

Ignoring Black's attack and advancing the pawn even loses: 37.a6? h4 38.a7 ♔a1+ 39.♔h2 (39.♔g2 h3+) 39...♙g4+ 40.♔h3 ♔f1+ 41.♔xc4 ♔xf2. These variations demonstrate that Black's threats are already very serious.

37...♔f5 38.♔g1?

Once again, it was necessary to play 38.♔d8 and bring the queen back.

38...♕f3

38...♞g4! was winning.

39.♔d8 ♞g4 40.♔d2 ♞h4 41.gxh4 ♕h3?

41...♞e5 42.♙b7 ♕g4+ 43.♙f1 ♕h3+ 44.♙e2 ♕g4+ 45.♙f1=.

42.♙xe4 ♕h2+ 43.♙f1

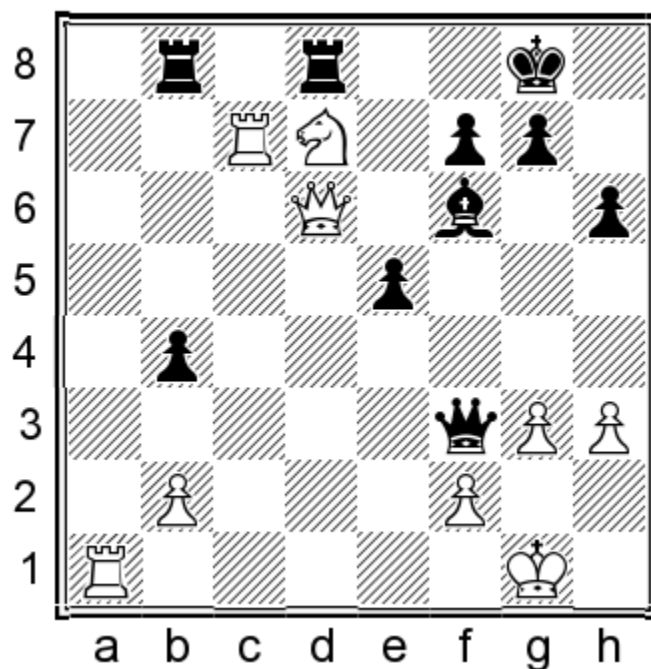
White is able to defend and is now winning, but after many exciting events, the game ended in a draw.

In the next example, White moves his pieces away, intending to attack, but he leaves his king on its own. It is a strategy which even gets a good press, but it is almost always suicidal.

Alejandra Marquez Marvizon (2049)

Max Orteu Capdevila (2209)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2016



White is very active in return for the pawn. It is difficult in these positions to think about defensive moves, and even more so with a material disadvantage. But the black queen is embedded on f3, and in the end, that will prove decisive.

31. ♖a7?

The rook moves away, and in spite of the impressive lineup of the white pieces along the seventh rank, here it achieves very little, as the knight is pinned.

A good defensive measure was 31. ♖e1!, with the idea of expelling the black queen from its active position with 32. ♖e3; for example, 31... ♗g5 (31...e4? 32. ♕d5±) 32.h4=.

Offering an immediate queen exchange is also quite effective.

Remember how one should respond to a very active enemy piece:

exchange it, expel it or (always as a last resort) keep a close watch on it. 31. ♕d1!? ♕xd1+ 32. ♖xd1 ♗e7 33. ♖d3 ♖b5 leads to a draw.

31... ♖a8?

Black's reaction is much more natural, although not correct; he tries to exchange one of the attacking pieces, instead of looking for a way to take advantage of the vulnerability of White's position.

Instead, there was no way to parry 31... ♗g5!, with threats of ... ♗e3, ...e4 (intending ...e3) and even ... ♖b5 with the idea of ... ♖d5; if 32. ♕c6, then 32...e4!, threatening ... ♗e3 and even ... ♖b6, followed by ...e3.

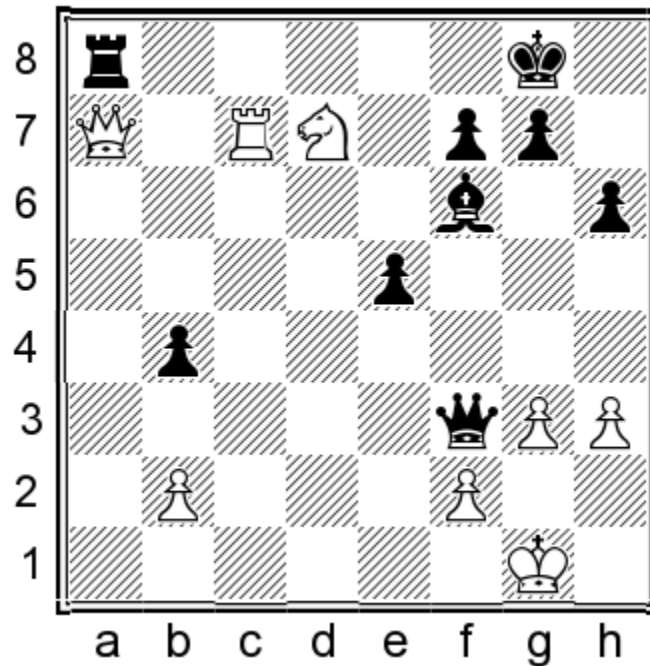
32. ♕b6?

Better was 32. ♖xa8 ♖xa8 33. ♖c1 and White holds (the tactical solution 33. ♕a6!? also works here).

32... ♖xa7 33. ♕xa7 ♖a8?

On this occasion, Black's error is understandable, because this move seems to win. Both players are guilty of not having imagined White's defensive resource for one moment. The truly winning

move was 33...e4!, and if 34.♘xf6+ gxf6, there is no good defence against ...♖d1+; for example, 35.♖c1 (or 35.♖d7 ♖c8 36.♖c7 ♖xc7 37.♙xc7 e3) 35...♖d2 36.b3 ♖e2, followed by 37...e3.



34.♘xf6+?

Panicking. Black was not really threatening to take the queen.

A) The most direct response was 34.♙a6!, which threatens 35.♖c8+, and if 34...♖xa6 (34...♖d8 35.♙b7!) 35.♖c8+ ♔h7 36.♘f8+, with perpetual check;

B) 34.♖b7?! is less accurate due to 34...♖d8!±.

34...gxf6 35.♙b6 ♖a1+ 0-1

How to avoid Error 17

There are no specific books that deal with this theme and there are no systematic exercises available on it.

I recommend analysing all the attacking games, first our own and those of our friends and colleagues, then the brilliant ones that appear in books, trying to discover these two moments:

- 1) When does the attack begin?; and
- 2) When does it become irresistible?

The second piece of advice is for tournament games. It concerns paying attention to the circumstances which facilitate attacks, and which we have identified here: moving pieces (especially the queen) away from the defence of the king, the creation of breaking points, inappropriate piece exchanges, and others, which can be discovered individually.

Error 18 - Not using all the pieces in the attack

The two most important factors when it comes to carrying out an attack, which we can find in all the books on this theme, are the need to employ all the pieces and to act speedily.

At times, players are so overcome with the excitement produced by the drama of attack and defence that they forget the basic rules, and, what is even worse, they double down on forgetting them. As all manuals of attack point out, the first of the basic rules is to involve all the pieces. This has been illustrated in sayings such as ‘bring all your toys to the nursery’ (Aagaard in *Attacking Manual I*) or the now very popular ‘invite everyone to the party’. But if we are being scrupulous, we could argue that many attacks are successful without involving all the pieces (the queen’s rook is without any doubt the least-invited piece, or the least glamorous toy), but this does not invalidate the argument; it merely refines it.

There are moments when bringing more pieces into the attack is a good idea, especially in the preparation phase, which we can call the phase of accumulation. Another very interesting phase is the finishing phase, about which we are going to give the following advice, which we shall continue to quote with slight variations:

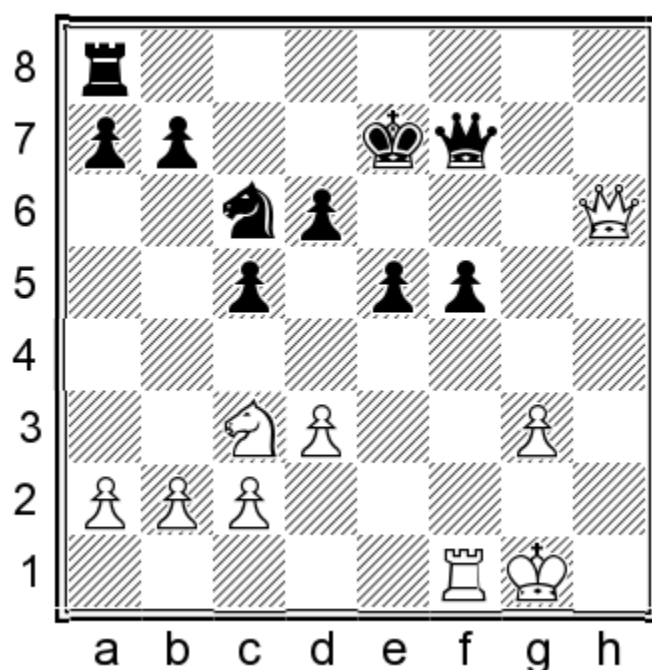
If you calculate your next few attacking moves and you see that you are unable to finish off the opponent, then bring up another piece.

We begin with an example in which employing the last piece can be useful in attack – or defence!

Mireya Represa Perez (1836)

Francisco Orantes Taboada (2138)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2015



In this game, White had been attacking fiercely, so much so that Black did not consider that now it was his turn to attack.

22...♞d4?

Forgetting about the final piece (curiously the queen's rook), which is very serious when there are only three left.

Instead, with 22...♞g8! Black brings the rook into play, not only defending against all the threats and keeping his extra pawn, but even taking the initiative. Then 23.♞e4 defends g3 and threatens to take on d6 with the queen, as well as other minor inconveniences. But after 23...♞g6! the piece which has just arrived takes up the

most important role: it defends the third rank and repels the queen; then if 24. ♖h4+ ♔d7 25. ♖h3 ♞e7, White can cause no more trouble.

23. ♞e4!

In this line too White attacks d6.

23... ♞e6?!

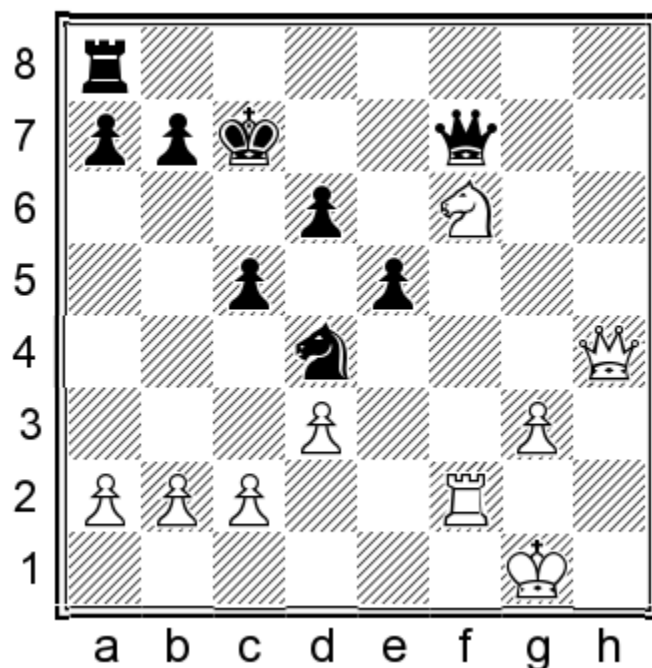
An odd choice by Black; once again, he delays the arrival of the rook, this time reducing the knight's activity and leaving the f5-pawn exposed.

23... ♖d8 was the normal move, although 23... ♖e6 24. ♖h7+ ♖f7 also maintained equality.

24. ♖h4+! ♔d7 25. ♞f6+! ♔c7 26. ♖xf5 ♞d4

The only move in view of the threat of 27. ♞d5+.

27. ♖f2



27... ♖xa2?

Surprising insistence on not using the rook. In this case, the idea may be to penetrate White's back rank, but it scarcely creates any threats. 27...♖d8! was still the best move, although White is now better.

28.c3! ♘c6 29.c4?

White leaves the black queen isolated, a theme that we have seen before in this chapter, and she consolidates the d5-square for the knight, but she gives a tempo to the opponent, allowing him to make up for his earlier errors.

Better was 29.♙h7+ ♔b6 30.b4!, the **unnatural candidate move**. It prepares the knight check and the b5 advance. If 30...♙b3 (30...♙b1+ loses to 31.♖f1 ♙b2 32.♘d5+), maintaining the defence of the d5-square, White has 31.b5! ♘d8 32.c4 and the threat of 33.♘d5 is decisive.

29...♔b6?

Curiously consistent, which makes this example very special. Black could still escape by bringing the rook into play with 29...♖d8!, completing his development on move 29! After 30.♘d5+ ♔b8, the game is equal once more.

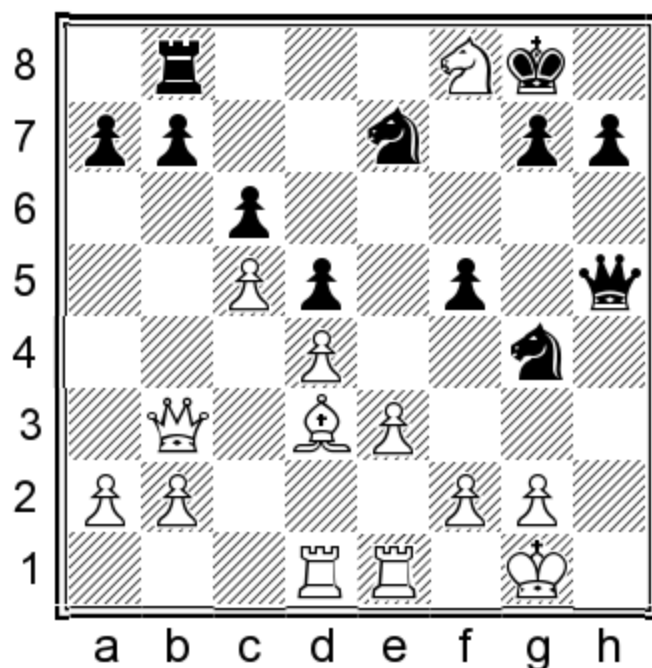
30.♘d5+ ♔a5 31.b4+ 1-0

In the next example, Black rushed into the attack without ensuring that he had sufficient forces available.

Lin Yingrui (1901)

Raúl Perez Guerra (1846)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U12 2016



One of the most useful attacking techniques is summarised in the following rule, as we saw in the introductory text to this Error:

When you are unable to find a winning finish with the pieces you have in the attack, then bring up your reserves.

Black forgets this.

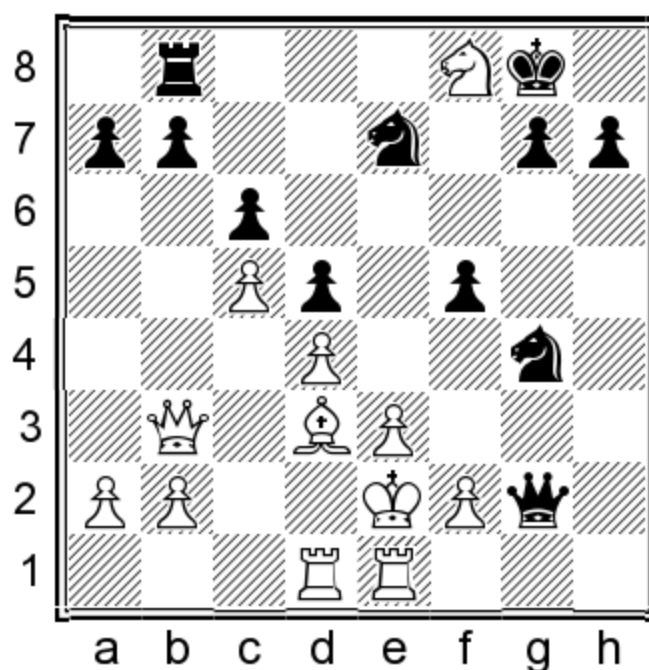
19...♔h2+?

This helps the white king to escape. In contrast, the inclusion of the rook into the attack with 19...♖xf8 would leave White defenceless: after 20.♔c2 (20.♔xb7 f4!) 20...f4! (to incorporate the rook effectively) 21.♙xh7+ ♔h8 22.exf4 ♖xf4, now indeed the execution with ...♔h2+ is decisive and unstoppable.

20.♙f1 ♔h1+?!

Completing the assistance given to the opponent. Instead, 20...♖xf8! 21.♙e2! ♔xg2 22.♙d2 ♙xf2 23.♖e2 ♔f3 still gave Black good prospects.

21.♙e2 ♔xg2



And now, instead of 22.♔d2, after which he still ended up winning, White should have quietly defended:

22.♖f1! ♕xf8!

Not 22...♖xf8? 23.♕xb7 f4 24.♕xe7 and Black has nothing.

23.♕b4

Bringing the queen into the defence.

23...f4 24.♕e1= fxe3? 25.♖g1! ♕xf2+ 26.♕xf2+ ♖xf2 27.♖df1

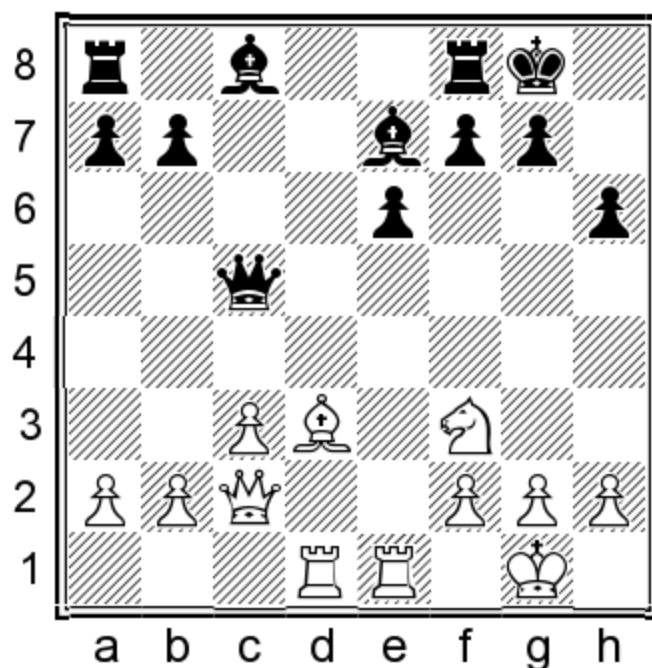
And here White is clearly better.

The queen moves so quickly that when it joins the attack it seems quite natural, but its very presence seriously enhances the attacking forces already.

Iñigo Ortín Blanco (2167)

Jose Javier Moreno Alcaraz (2060)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2018



Exercise 21

All the white pieces are deployed, which gives them the right to attack, but in order to target the king, they need to be placed differently. Specifically, the queen should take the leading role.

16. ♔e2!?

This looks normal, but it gives Black time to defend. Much more effective was 16. ♔a4!, preparing to move the queen not only to e4 but also to other squares on the kingside: 16... ♕f6 (in the variation with 16... g6? lies the main difference between ♔a4 and ♔e2: 17. ♔f4! (attacking h6) 17... ♖g7 18. ♘e5, preparing both ♔g3, followed by the sacrifice on g6, as well as h4 or ♕c2 in order to transfer the rook) 17. h4!, preparing ♔e4, followed by the preparation of h5; for example, 17... ♖d8 18. ♕c2 ♖f8! 19. ♖xd8+ ♕xd8 20. ♔e4 and the invasion on h7 is difficult to prevent.

16... ♕f6?!

Black misses his best chance to play 16...g6! 17.h4 h5! and the weakening of the kingside structure is less serious because of the (unopposed) presence of the dark-squared bishop.

17.♔e4± g6 18.♔f4! ♔g7 19.♘e5

It was better to prepare ♘e5 with 19.♙c2!, as we can see in the following variations: 19...b6 (19...♖d8 20.♖xd8 ♙xd8 21.♘e5. Now White is attacking with four pieces, while Black is only defending with two (the bishop and the queenside rook take no part): 21...♙f6 22.♘g4 ♙g5 23.♔g3) 20.♘e5 (preventing ...♙b7) 20...♔c7 21.♘xg6 with a clear advantage.

19...♖d8!

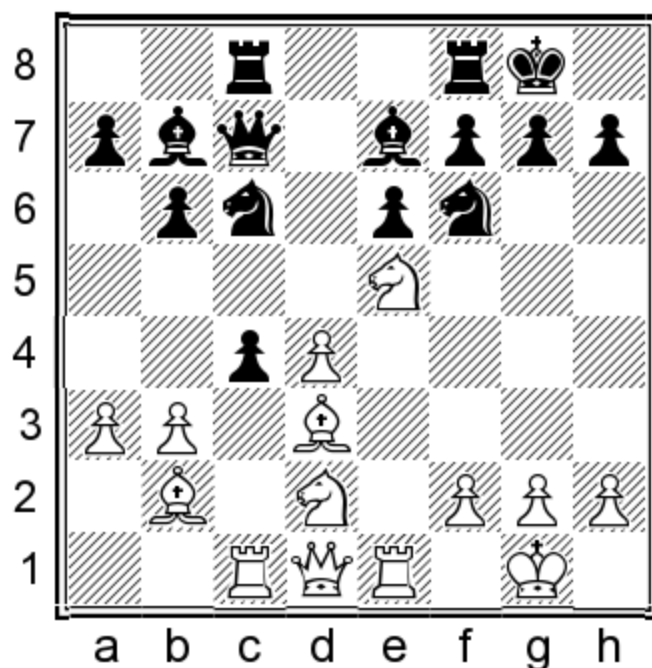
And here Black is over the worst, although White won in the end, as we have seen in **Error 14**.

Now we have an example in which other themes were more important, but where the idea of bringing more pieces into the attack could have led to a very different rhythm.

Daniel Centrón Antuña (1868)

Juan Plazuelo Pascual (2140)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2014



White can capture on c4 with as many as five different pieces, but only one capture is good, while another (the one played in the game, which is the one we are going to analyse) contains a certain venom.

15.♖xc4?!

This is not energetic enough, even though it could have worked. Let us look at the alternatives:

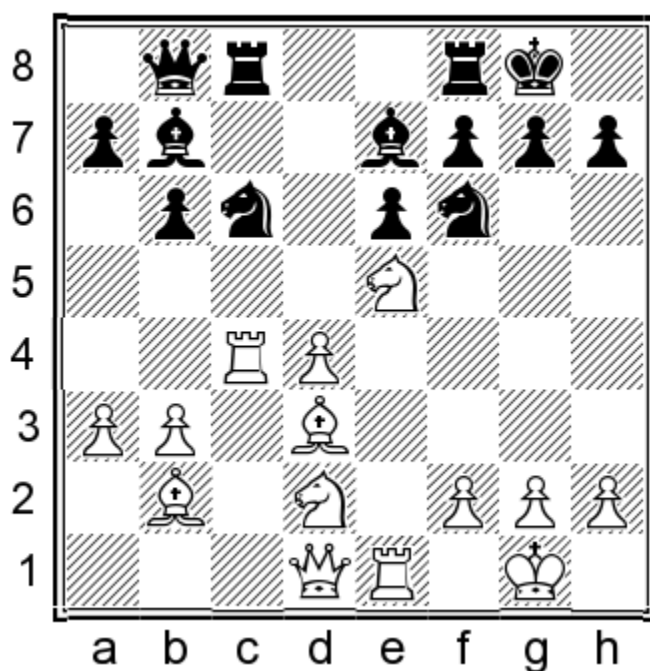
A) 15.bxc4? creates hanging pawns, but their aggressive strength can be eliminated with the continuation 15...♞xe5 16.dxe5 ♞d7+, followed by ...♞c5, ...♞fd8 etc.;

B) 15.♞dxc4?! ♞d8 is a complex, equalish isolated pawn position;

C) 15.♙xc4! is the best move, activating a piece for the attack and recognising the typical weakness of the squares e6 and f7: 15...♞d6 (15...♞b8 16.♞xf7! ♞xf7 17.♙xe6) 16.♞xf7! ♞xf7 17.♙xe6 ♞d8 18.♞c4 with a clear advantage.

15...♞b8?

Moving the queen a long way from the defence of the kingside (see **Error 17**), but of course there seems to be no danger. Instead, 15...♔d8!? 16.♘xc6 ♕xc6 17.♖c2 was acceptable, while the most correct was 15...b5! 16.♖c2, displacing the rook from its aggressive position, and after 16...♔b6! Black takes the initiative against the isolated pawn on d4, which does not coordinate well with a bishop on b2.



Exercise 22

16.♔c2?

This is the error we want to highlight. Again, it is a move that looks aggressive, but it is not very energetic and was probably made without much confidence that there would be an attack.

White missed the chance to make a thematic move, 16.d5!, a positional pawn sacrifice to enable the c4-rook to cross over to the kingside, but which also activates the dormant bishop on b2. All the variations indicate that White's attack is then irresistible: 16...exd5 (16...♘xd5?! loses immediately to 17.♕xh7+! ♔xh7 18.♔h5+ ♔g8

19.♘xc6 ♖xc6 20.♙xg7!; or 16...♘xe5 17.♙xe5 ♔a8 18.♖h4, with an unstoppable attack) 17.♖h4. The rook has crossed over and White threatens 18.♘xc6, followed by 19.♙xf6 and 20.♙xh7+, as well as attacking the e7-bishop. Now after 17...♔d6 (17...h6? 18.♘xc6 ♖xc6 19.♖xe7), 18.♘dc4 dxc4 19.♘xc4 ♔d8 20.♙xf6 is even better than 18.♘xc6, which also wins.

16...♘a5!=

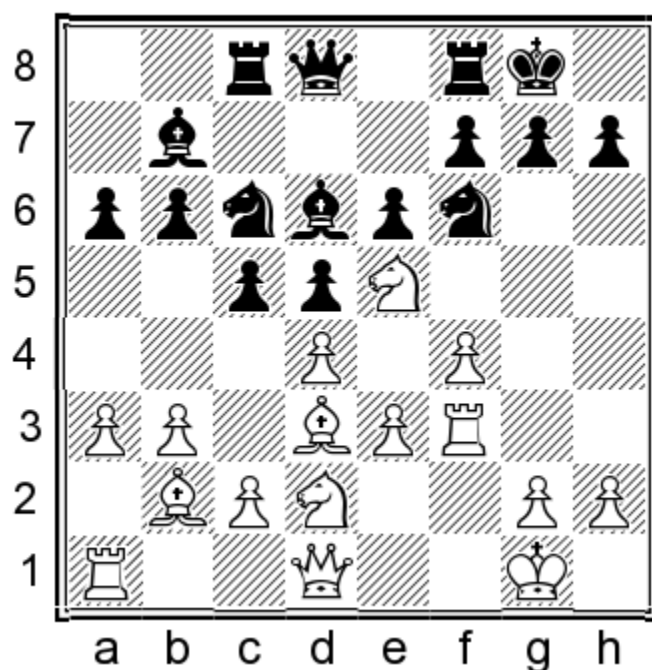
A brilliant defence, forcing the exchange of the most aggressive white piece, even though Black ended up losing.

In the next example, many attacking themes appear, but at all times, the main one is the idea of bringing reserves into the attack, applied with variable amounts of competence.

Josep García Sancho (2027)

Marta García Martín (2257)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2016

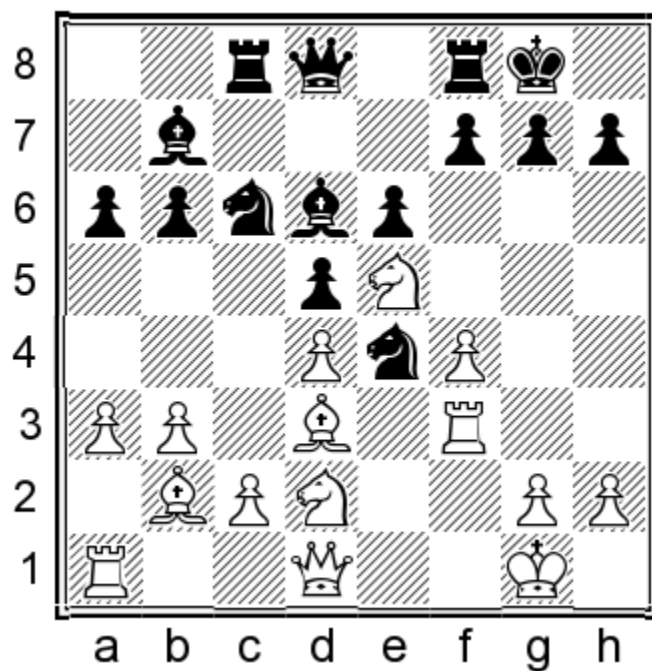


White has just played 12. ♖f1-f3, making his intentions clear. The entry of the rook into the attack seems to tilt the balance of forces towards the white side.

12...♞e7?

Black responds with the same strategy, bringing reserves into the defence. But the execution has a serious defect: it allows lines to be opened for the attack and thus more white pieces are able to threaten the black king. This move would fit into **Error 17**, as it facilitates the enemy attack.

The best defence was 12...cxd4!, to close the b2-bishop's diagonal, and if 13.exd4?! (the alternatives 13.♖h3 ♜h6 14.exd4 ♜c7 and 13.♞xc6 ♜xc6 14.♞xd4 ♞c5 15.♞b2 d4 16.e4 e5 are slightly better, although they do not achieve much either), there follows 13...♞e4!,



analysis diagram

also closing the diagonal of the d3-bishop, although it entails the sacrifice of a pawn: 14. ♞xe4? (the capture is dangerous for White, who should settle for 14. ♞xc6 ♜xc6 15. ♞xa6 ♜a8 16. ♞d3 f5 with

compensation): 14...dxe4 15.♙xe4 ♘xe5 16.♙xh7+ ♔xh7 17.♖h3+ ♔g8 18.♙h5 ♘f3+ 19.gxf3 f6 and the attack is insufficient to compensate for the piece.

13.♖h3

This threatens 14.♙xh7+, so Black has no time to close the diagonal with 13...c4.

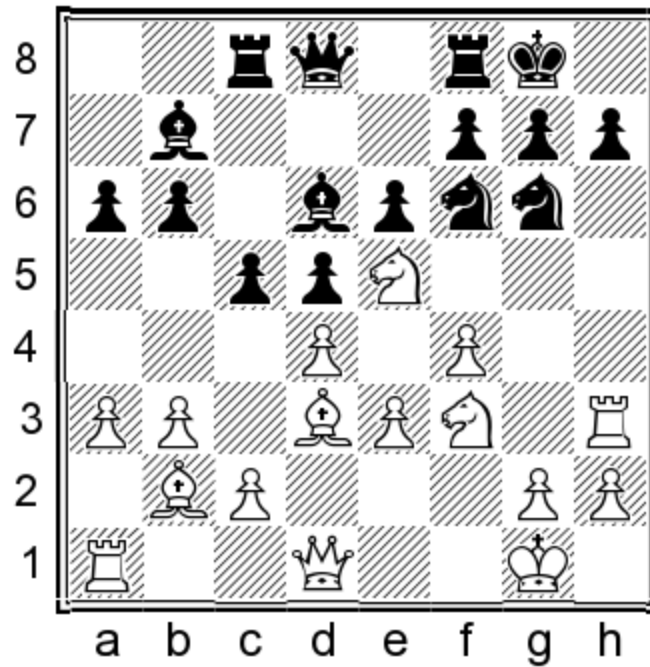
13...♘g6

If 13...g6, then 14.dxc5!, opening the diagonal for the b2-bishop: 14...bxc5 15.♘g4! ♘xg4 16.♙xg4 d4 (16...♘f5 17.♙xf5 exf5 18.♙h5! with almost inevitable mate) 17.♘c4 ♙c7 18.♙h4 h5 19.g4! ♘d5 20.♙g3 hxg4 21.♙xg4 ♙f6 22.b4!, and with this blow the diagonal of the b2-bishop will be reopened, with a tremendous attack.

14.♘df3?!

White is still thinking of bringing up reserves, but this time he does so in a mistaken manner, because, although he brings the knight closer, he allows the bishops' diagonals to be closed.

Much better was 14.dxc5! bxc5 15.♙e2, with the idea of opening the b2-bishop's diagonal and bringing the last piece closer with ♖f1. Once this phase of accumulation is over, the superiority of the white pieces in the zone of attack will be crushing.

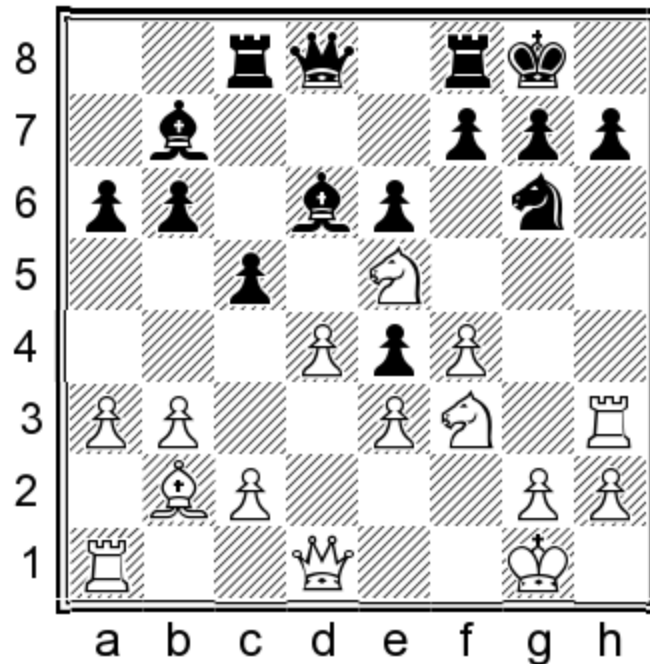


14...Nxe4?

For Black as well, the idea of blocking the diagonal is correct, but its implementation has a serious flaw; after the exchange on g6 the structure of Black's castled position is very bad for neutralising the attack by the rook on h3.

Instead, 14...Bxe5! was necessary, exchanging an important attacker; 15.Nxe5! (15.fxe5?! makes it more difficult for White to open the long diagonal, and 15...Nxe4 closes the d3-bishop's diagonal) 15...c4! and once again by means of a pawn sacrifice Black keeps the b2-bishop's diagonal closed and gains some compensation, thanks to his firm grasp of central squares and his better structure: 16.bxc4 dxc4 17.Nxc4 (17.Bxc4 Nxe5+) 17...Bxe4±.

15.Bxe4! dxe4



16. ♘g5?

Bringing another piece into the attack, but once again it is an error. The strongest move was 16. ♘xg6!. Exchanging the imposing knight on e5 is a difficult decision, but any recapture on g6 does irreparable damage to Black's castled position: 16...hxg6 (16...fxg6?! is uglier, although no worse; 17. ♘g5±) 17. ♘g5 (threatening to bring the queen to h4, after which defence would be almost impossible) 17...♙e7! (17...♚e7 18. ♚g4 f6 19. ♖h8+ ♔xh8 20. ♚h4+) 18. ♚g4 ♙xg5 19. fxg5 f5 20. ♚h4 ♔f7 21. dxc5 ♖g8! (21...♖xc5? 22. ♙xg7!) and after five 'only' moves Black is still alive, although at a clear disadvantage.

16... ♙xe5!

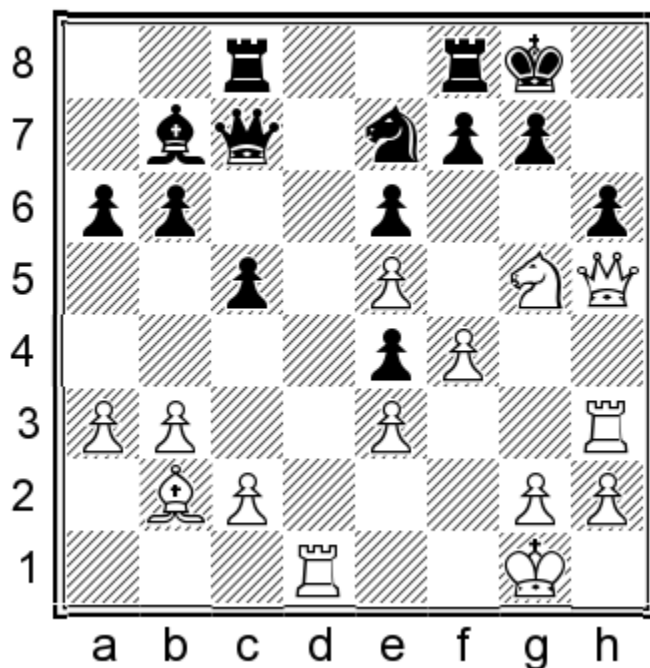
Black exchanges an attacker, closes the b2-bishop's diagonal for a long time to come, and retains enough forces to defend his king.

17. ♚h5 h6 18. dxe5 ♘e7

Correct, controlling f5 and threatening 19...♚d2. 18...♚d2!? immediately can be met with 19. ♘xe6! – unclear.

19.♖d1 ♔c7?!

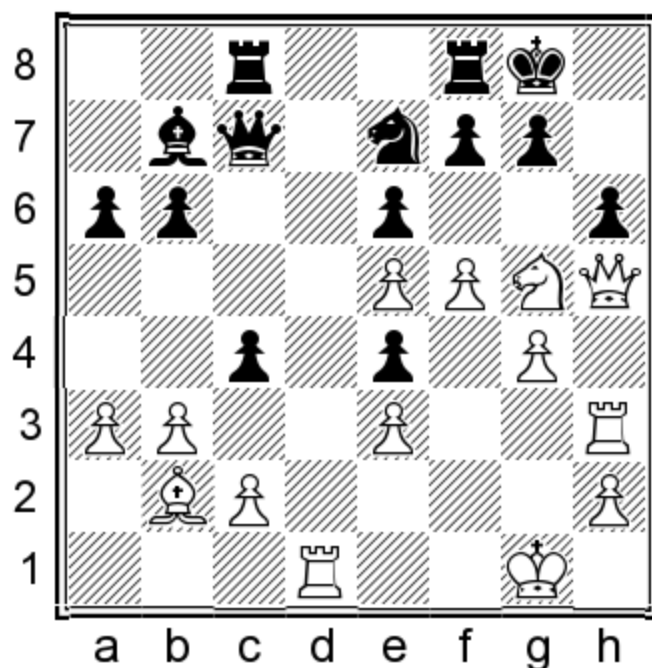
Better was 19...♕e8!, bringing the queen closer to the defence as well as preparing a counterattack via b5; for example, 20.g4 ♕b5.



We are now at another critical moment in the attack.

20.♖f1?

In this game, White obsessively follows the rule about bringing pieces into the attack. With this move, White is perhaps intending to play f5, as preparation with g4 is visually unpleasant. But in fact, 20.g4! was the only strong move, although leaving the squares around the king so open makes it uncomfortable. When the game turns into an attacking race there is no choice but to act with maximum energy and calculate: 20...c4! (Black must also act quickly; 20...♖cd8 21.♖f1! transposes to the game) 21.f5



analysis diagram

21...c3! (not 21...cxb3? , which allows White to move ahead in the race with 22.f6! ♔xc2 23.♖f1 ♔xb2 24.fxg7+-; or 22...bxc2 23.♖f1 (with the idea of fxg7, if possible) 23...c1♔ 24.♖xc1 ♔xc1+ 25.♙xc1 ♖xc1+ 26.♙f2 ♘g6 27.♘xe6 ♖fc8 28.♘d4+-) 22.♙xc3 ♘d5 23.f6 ♘xf6 24.exf6 ♔xc3 25.fxg7 ♔xg7 26.♔xh6 ♔xh6 27.♖xh6 ♖xc2 28.♖f1=.

20...♖cd8?

Black misses his great opportunity: 20...♘f5!, which prevents g4, (because of ...g6, trapping the queen), and might threaten ...g6, followed by ...hxg5, or first ...c4.

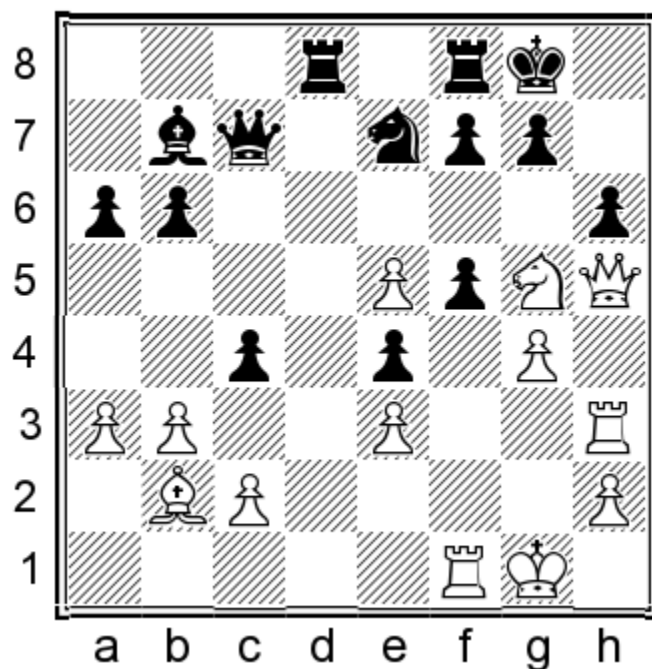
21.g4!

Why now, and not on the previous move? Possibly because now White saw no other option for pursuing his attack. The race has begun and White is in the lead.

21...c4 22.f5!

22.b4? c3 23.♙c1 ♔c4 24.f5 ♕e2 25.f6 ♖d1 is an example of a variation in which Black arrives first.

22...exf5



23.gxf5?!

Slow, but still winning. The most appropriate continuation was 23.e6!, opening the bishop's diagonal, and threatening mate with a series of checks.

When you have entered the last lap of an attacking race, it is a good idea to remember that the more direct our threat, the fewer the options our opponent has available. The threat of mate with a series of consecutive checks is the strongest threat of all.

We add the rest of the game with just a few tactical comments.

23...♘xf5 24.♖xf5 c3 25.♙c1?

25.♙xc3! ♕xc3 26.♘xf7 ♕e1+ 27.♖f1 ♕xf1+ 28.♙xf1 ♖xf7+ 29.♙e1+-.

25...♕d7

25...♗c8! 26.e6! (26.♖f1 ♔xe5—+) 26...♗xe6 27.♘xe6 fxe6
28.♖xf8+ ♖xf8 would have equalized.

26.♖f1 ♖de8 27.♖g3! ♖xe5 28.♘h7! ♖xh5 29.♘f6+ ♔h8 30.♘xd7
♖d8 31.♖xf7 g5 32.♘f6 1-0

How to avoid Error 18

Mistakes made through not bringing enough pieces into the attack have a clearer technical component than those we have analysed so far, as well as a small psychological component of impatience.

If you have seen that you make this error regularly, you should analyse your own attacking games thoroughly, to identify the missed opportunities. This should be an enjoyable pastime.

The second recommendation will be even more pleasant. You need to look at and analyse a large number of attacking games. There are plenty of books on this theme, and with all of them, you will be able to enjoy some good examples.

My main recommendations are Aagaard's *Attacking Manual* (Volumes 1 and 2) and *The Greatest Attacker in Chess* by Cyrus Lakdawala (a selection of Rashid Nezhmetdinov's attacking games), but you should read some others as well. You will be able to find other sources easily and make your own selection of games by the great masters of the attack, for which the database of games from the Chess Informant might be very useful.

In both cases, let me remind you that you should review all those games with an engine, because errors in the annotations of attacking games, especially old games, are very common and can create an incorrect picture.

Error 19 - Attacking with insufficient energy

The other important circumstance when attacking, and one which is often ignored, is the pace of the attack. We could divide attacking positions into two groups: those where only one player is attacking and those where both players are attacking, in a so-called attacking race. While in the first case the speed of the attack is important, but not always decisive, in the second case, as the name implies, it is always decisive. It is a situation with some similarity to a development advantage, and in fact some examples could apply to both themes.

Attacking play at a fast pace, or simply with a lot of energy, should be applied to cases where the position demands it, not when the player feels like it, nor should it be a question of style. We are all acquainted with those players who have to make a threat with every move, as well as those who spend the whole game preparing an attack and can never quite make their minds up to act.

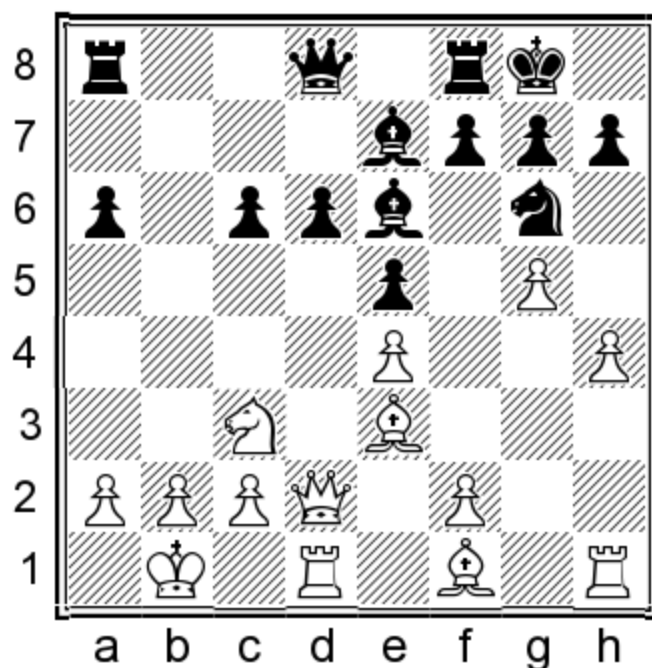
Attacking at pace can sometimes conflict with bringing all the reserves into play, but it makes us mobilise our reserves effectively and without losing tempi.

In the first example, we have a position with opposite-sides castling. In such cases, each side's plan is to attack the other's castled position, and this should be done with the greatest possible energy.

Marta García Martín (2257)

Jose Manuel Nieves Cabanes (2215)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2016



White's attack is much further advanced, but there is no reason to take it easy.

14.♘d3?

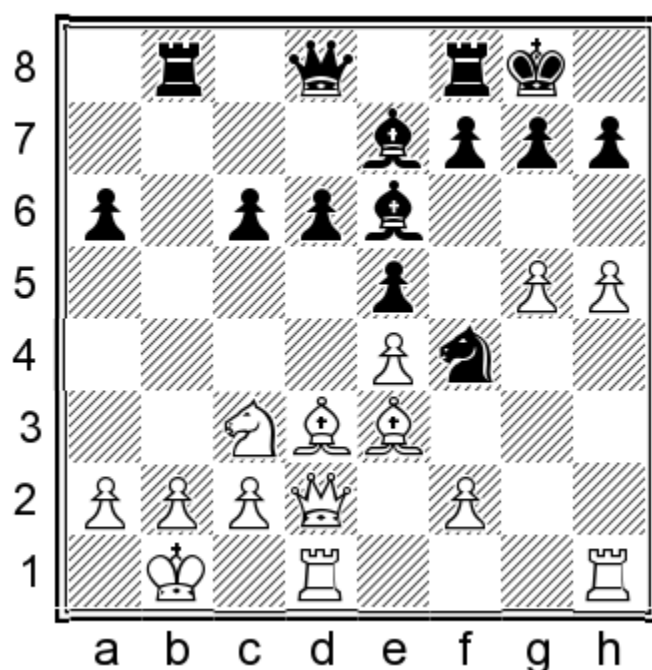
This move has obvious virtues: it completes development and connects the rooks, but it threatens nothing, and in an attacking race it is very slow.

Let's look at a variation as an example. This is not the only way that White can be better, but it is the most direct. We shall see that each one of White's moves has an immediate objective:

14.h5!. Attacking the knight. 14...♘f4 **15.h6. Threatening to open up the castled position.** 15...g6 (15...♘xg5?! is very dangerous in view of 16.hxg7 , destroying and Black's castled position) **16.♘xf4. Exchanging a defender**, although this move is very difficult to make, because the dark-squared bishop is a powerful attacking piece in this structure. 16...exf4 **17.♙d4!. Threatening mate**, in a way which forces the opening of lines. 17...f6 **18.♘c4!. Bringing another piece into the attack** and exchanging an important

defender. It is interesting to observe the difference in activity between this move of the light-squared bishop and move 14 in the game. 18...♙f7 (18...♙xc4 19.♚xc4+ ♜f7 20.♚xc6+-) 19.♞he1. **Threatening e5.** 19...♞b8 20.gxf6 ♙xf6 21.e5 dxe5 (21...♙xe5? 22.♞xe5 dxe5 23.♚xe5) 22.♙xf7+ ♜xf7 23.♚c4 ♚b6 24.b3 and it is not possible to defend against ♘e4 and ♞d6. In this variation, all of White's moves were energetic and direct.

14...♞b8 15.h5 ♘f4



16.♘e2?

A natural move in a slow and deliberate strategy, but not here. Now, instead of the game move 16...♙xg5?, which led to a draw, Black could have taken the initiative:

16...♙xe2! 17.♙xe2

17.♚xe2? hands the initiative to Black, who can win with a very energetic continuation: 17...♙xa2+! 18.♙xa2 ♚a5+ 19.♙b1 ♜xb2+ 20.♙xb2 ♞b8+. Notice that it has all been a series of checks.

17...d5+

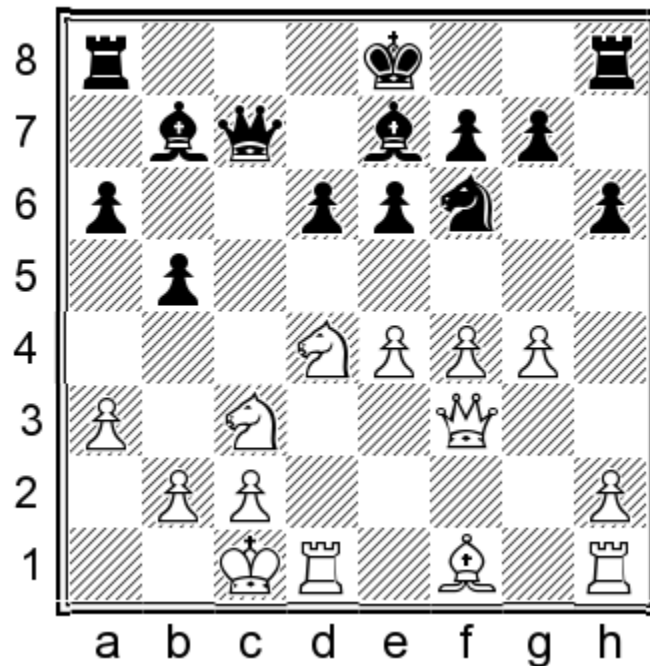
Threatening 18...d4 and opening a line for his dark-squared bishop to join in the action on the queenside.

The next position is also from a tense Sicilian Defence.

Manuel Muñoz Peláez (1946)

Yvan Jiménez Vado (1776)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2014



From this point onwards, both players give up playing energetically in an attacking race (Exercise 23).

15.h4?!

White gives preference to safe moves rather than fast moves. He prepares g5, without spoiling his pawn structure, which is the correct thing in many positions, but here there was no time for it. Instead, 15.g5! prevents the liberating advance 15...d5 and enables the pawn to advance to g6 to destroy the solidity of Black's position: 15...hxg5 16.fxg5 ♖d7 17.g6 (this break is the key)

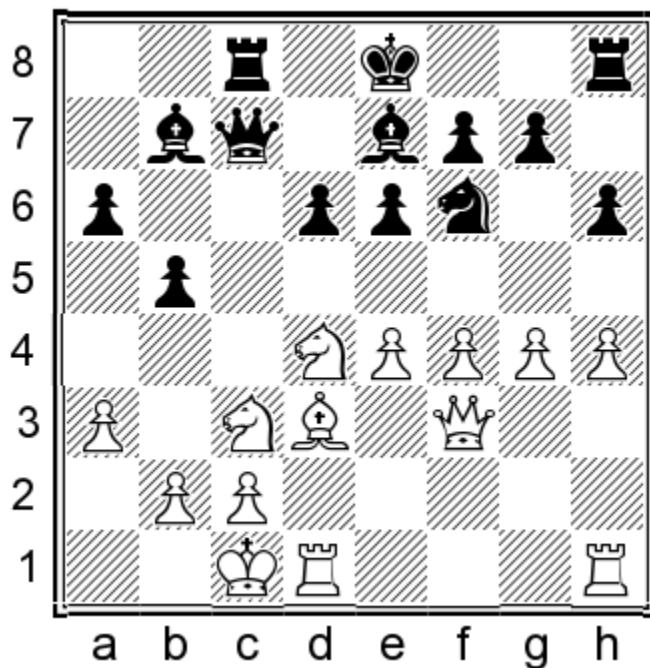
17...♗g5+! 18.♔b1 ♞e5 19.gxf7+ ♚xf7 20.♚g2±. The position is complex, but the black king will have no place of safety.

15...♖c8?

This move is much slower than White's. Black needed to play the thematic freeing move 15...d5! , attacking e4 and opening the diagonal for the dark-squared bishop to come into action: 16.e5 ♞e4 17.♞xe4 dxe4 18.♚e3=.

16.♗d3?

Now there was no reason to abstain from the previously prepared break 16.g5!; for example, 16...hxc5 (16...♞d7 17.g6!) 17.hxc5 ♖xh1 18.♚xh1 ♞d7 19.♔b1 ♞f8 20.♚h8 ♚d8 21.♚xg7 and White wins.



16...♚a5?!

Now Black does want to act more quickly, but instead of preparing the break on b4, he tries to speculate with the sacrifice on c3, which does not work. Instead, 16...♚b6! 17.g5 b4! was stronger, leading to a tense struggle which is far from clear.

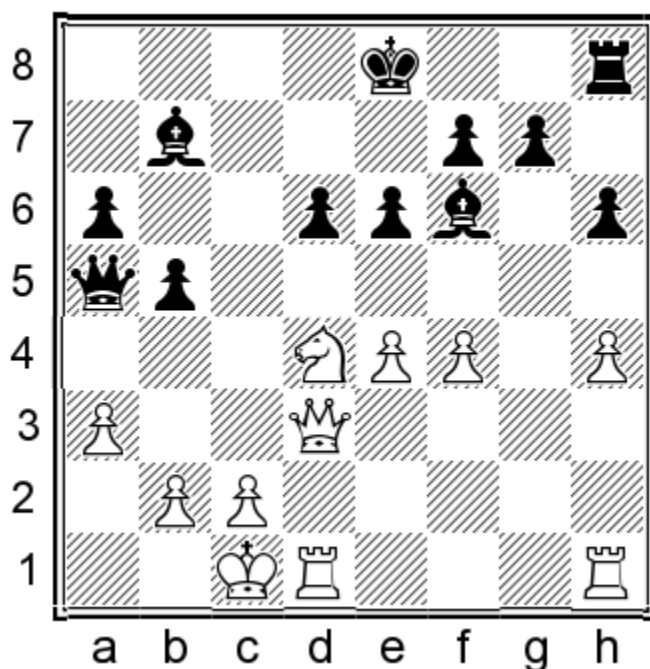
17.g5!

Finally White speeds up.

17...♖xc3?

This is an error, but a natural one, because the calculation is complex. 17...♞d7 18.♞b3 gave White the edge.

18.gxf6! ♖xd3 19.♔xd3 ♙xf6



There seems to be compensation for the exchange, but it continues to be an attacking race and now White could have concluded the game with another energetic move:

20.e5!

Instead of the move in the game, 20.♞b3, which kept the advantage and led to a white win the end.

20...♙xh1

Instead, 20...dxe5 is not a solution either; for example, 21.♞xe6 fxe6 22.♔d7+ ♔f8 23.fxe5 ♙xh1 24.exf6 gxf6 25.♔xe6 and White wins.

21.exf6 ♖d5 22.fxg7 ♜g8 23.♔h7

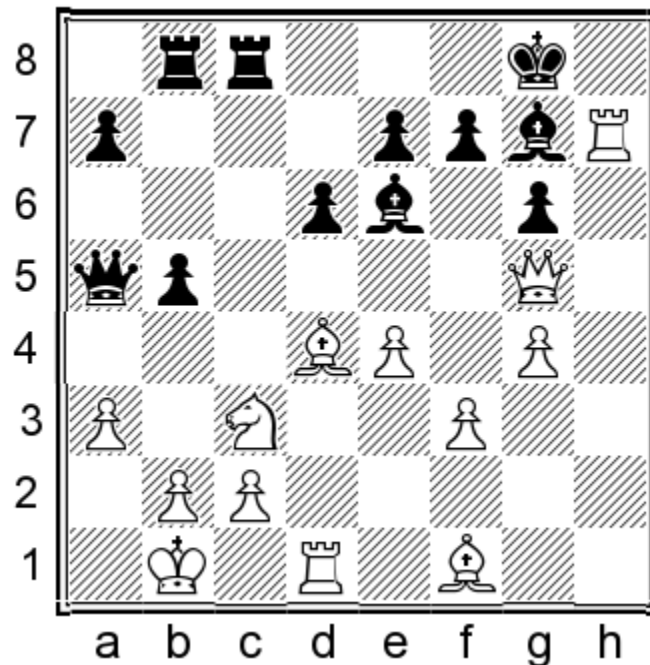
With a decisive gain of material.

The next game is one of those examples of gems hidden among tournament games between non-masters which tend to get quietly overlooked. It is worth seeing, although much of its beauty lies in the variations.

Jesus Martin Duque (2073)

Manuel Orantes Taboada (1785)

Linares Spanish Championship U14 2010



We join the game when the attacking race is at its height. As we already know, energetic moves are essential, and several of them are going to be overlooked.

18...♗xd4?

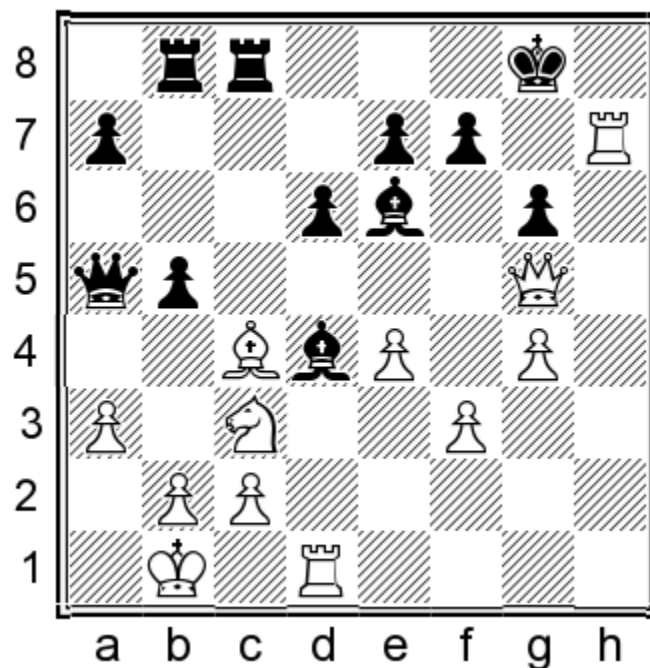
This move is very logical, perhaps the most logical one as its refutation is well hidden. But the following question can be asked: if

Black had seen the response 19.♔c4, he should not have made this move, and if he had not seen it, why did he not capture the rook? 18...♔xh7 is the first move which should be calculated and it has only one correct response: 19.♔c4!! (all other moves lose; for example, 19.♔xg7? ♔xg7 20.♔d3 ♖h8!) 19...♔xc4 20.♖h1+ ♔g8 21.♔xg7 ♔xg7 22.♗h6+ ♔f6 23.g5+ ♔e6 24.♗h3+ f5 25.gxf6+ ♔xf6 26.e5+ ♔f7 27.♗h7+ ♔e6 28.♗h3+ ♔f7, and Black cannot avoid perpetual check.

Now, we have arrived at Exercise 24.

19.♗h6?

This move looks energetic, but is not really, as it does not threaten mate yet. In contrast, the strongest move gives the impression of much greater energy – once again it is 19.♔c4!!.



analysis diagram

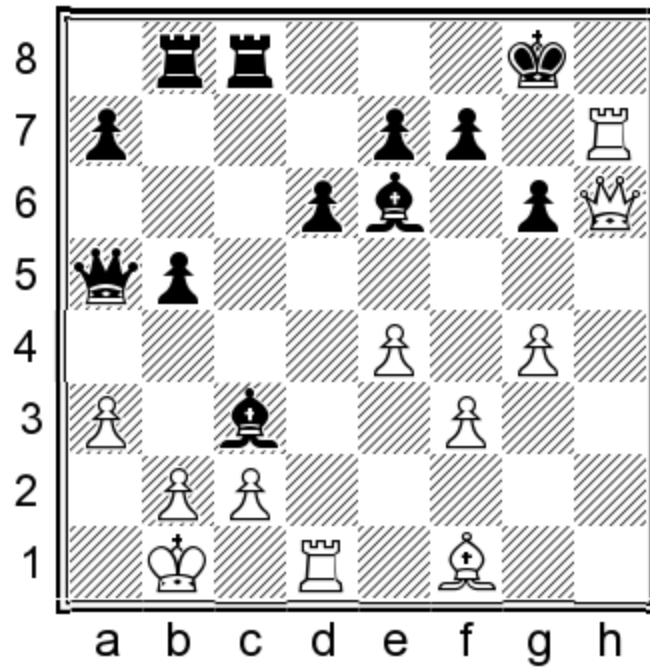
Getting the bishop out of the way so that the d1-rook can quickly reach h1, and it does so with a gain of time, because it threatens 20. ♔xe6.

Suddenly it might seem that Black is doomed, but he too has an energetic move: 19...♔xc3!!, threatening mate in one, as well as capturing a piece and defending Black's castled position from a distance. It is not possible to ask for more from one move, but it does have one snag: it loses the queen. After 20.bxc3 bxc4+ 21.♔c1 ♕f6 22.♔h6 we reach an unusual position in which the two bishops can maintain their resistance against the queen and it is not sure that White has the advantage, at least not a decisive one.

For example, there could follow 22...♖c5 23.f4 ♖cb5 24.♔d2 ♕xg4 (intending not only 25...♕xd1 but also 25...♖h5) 25.e5!, and after the following energetic and necessary moves 25...dxe5 26.♖g1! ♖d8+ 27.♔c1 ♖d1+ 28.♖xd1 ♕xd1 29.♔xd1 exf4 30.♔h3 f3 31.♔e1 ♖b1+ 32.♔f2 ♖c1 33.♔xf3 ♖xc2 34.♔h1 ♖xc3+ 35.♔g4, the position is still rather unclear, although White is probably winning.

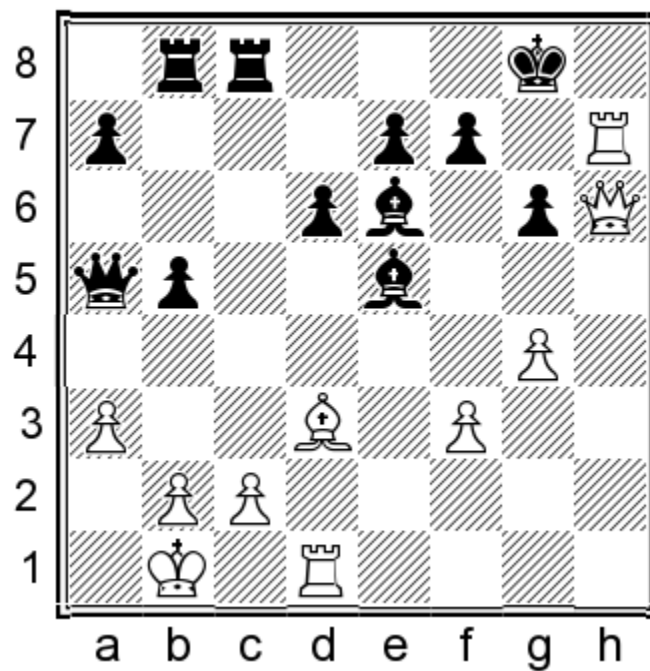
Instead, captures on c4 do not work; for example, 19...♖xc4? 20.♔h6 ♕xc3 21.♖h1! enables White to take the lead in the attacking race. In spite of his five pieces aimed at the white king, Black does not even have a check and White is threatening mate with a series of checks, which can only be delayed for a short time.

19...♕xc3



20.♙d3?

Once again, a slow move. Now it was necessary to play 20.e5! ♙xe5 21.♙d3, threatening not only 22.♖h1 but also 22.♙xg6, and now Black has to make a big decision:



analysis diagram

A) 21...♙xb2 is sufficient for a draw; for example, 22.♔xb2 ♕c3+ 23.♔c1 b4 24.♖h1 ♕a1+ 25.♔d2 ♖xc2+! 26.♙xc2 ♕c3+ 27.♔c1 ♕a1+ 28.♔d2 ♕c3+;

B) 21...♕a4! has the idea of sacrificing the queen for equivalent material: 22.f4! (if 22.♖h1, then 22...♕d4!–+, beautifully combining attack and defence) 22...♕xf4 23.♖h8+ ♙xh8 24.♕xf4, and Black's position looks better.

20...♙xb2?

Black in turn plays slowly, when he needed to threaten something more immediate, in addition to bringing the queen into the defence, by playing 20...b4!!: 21.♖h1 (otherwise ...bxa3 would win) 21...♕e5 22.bxc3 bxa3+! 23.♔c1 (23.♔a1 ♕xc3#) 23...♖b1+! 24.♔xb1 a2+ and Black gains another queen.

21.♔xb2?!

Good enough to win, although 21.e5! was much more forceful, threatening several mates in one; after 21...♙xe5, 22.♙xg6! threatens mate in two, beginning with 23.♖h8+, and following 22...fxg6 23.♕xg6+ ♔f8 24.♕xe6 ♙g7 25.♖xg7 ♔xg7 26.♕xe7+ ♔g8 27.♖xd6, White's threats arrive one tempo before Black's.

21...♕c3+ 22.♔c1 ♕xa3+ 23.♔d2 ♕c3+ 24.♔e2 ♕d4 25.♖h1 ♖xc2+ 26.♙xc2 ♙c4+ 27.♔e1 ♕c3+ 28.♕d2 ♕xd2+ 29.♔xd2 ♖b7 30.♖h8+ 1-0

How to avoid Error 19

This error is probably the one that spoils the most promising attacking situations.

Compared with the previous error, with which it will share some recommendations, it is clear that whereas **Error 18** occurs due to a psychological tendency towards impatience, **Error 19** arises rather from excessive caution, or inappropriate strategic sense.

My first recommendation would be to recognise the positions in which it is applicable and to get used to doing so – in other words, experiment in your own games.

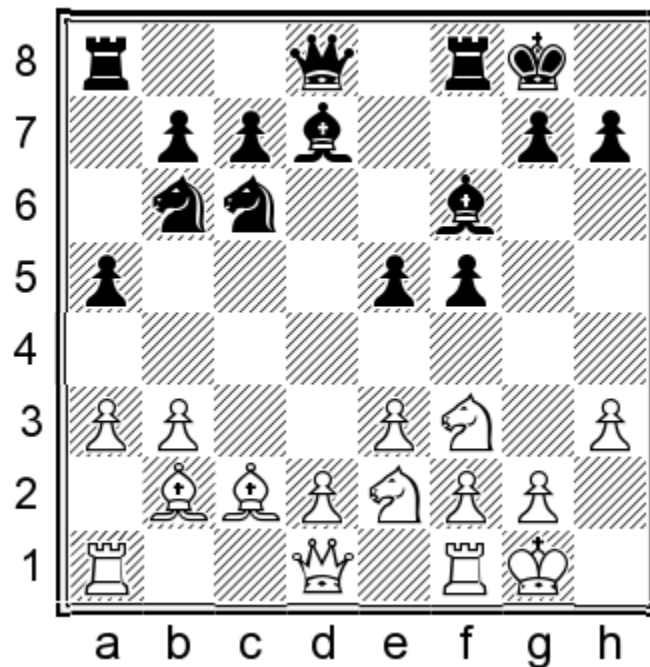
The following recommendations are the same as the ones given for the previous error: analyse your own attacking games and the great attacking games of history. The recommendations of books to study are also the same, as well as the advice to check them all with an engine.

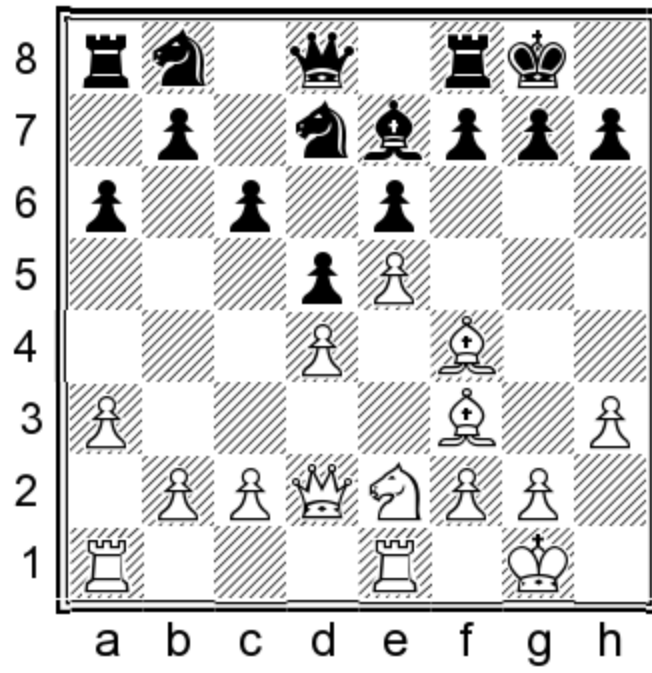
Chapter 5

Strategy

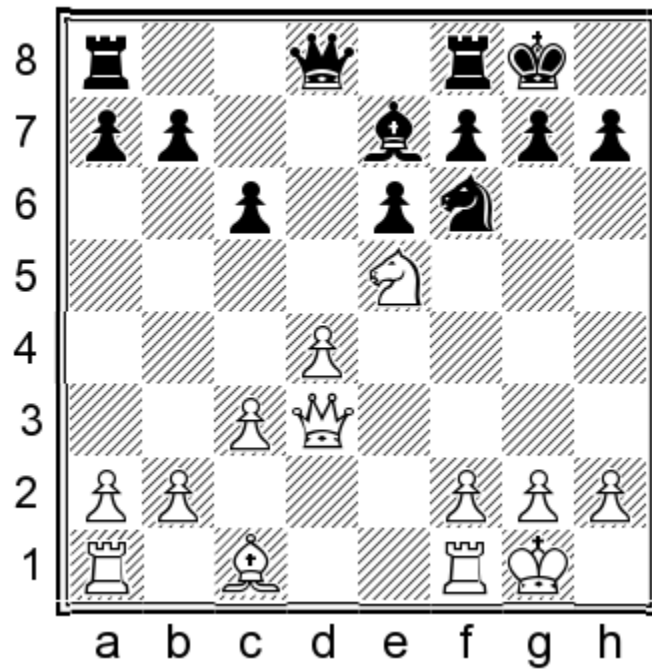
- Error 20 - Making incorrect pawn breaks
- Error 21 - Rejecting a good pawn break
- Error 22 - Creating weaknesses unnecessarily
- Error 23 - Not recognising the weakness
- Error 24 - Not recognising the importance of colour
- Error 25 - Underestimating an advantage in space
- Error 26 - Neglecting to improve your pieces

Exercises for Chapter 5

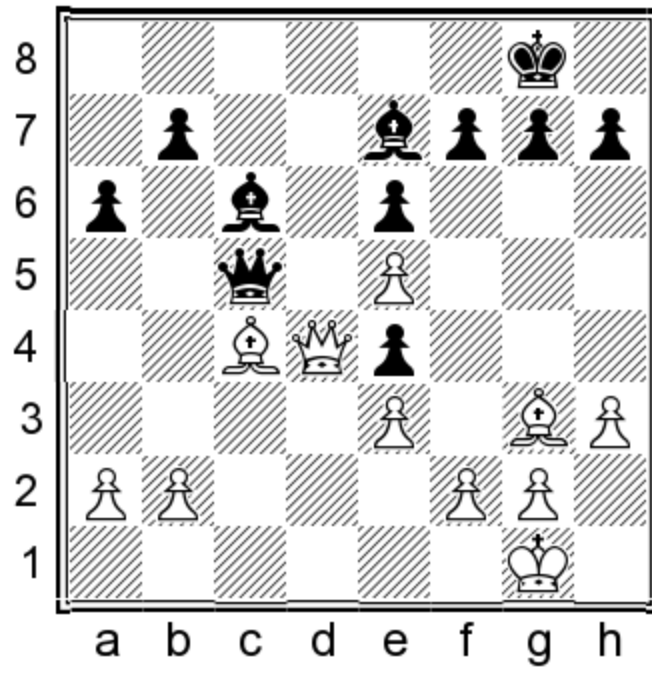




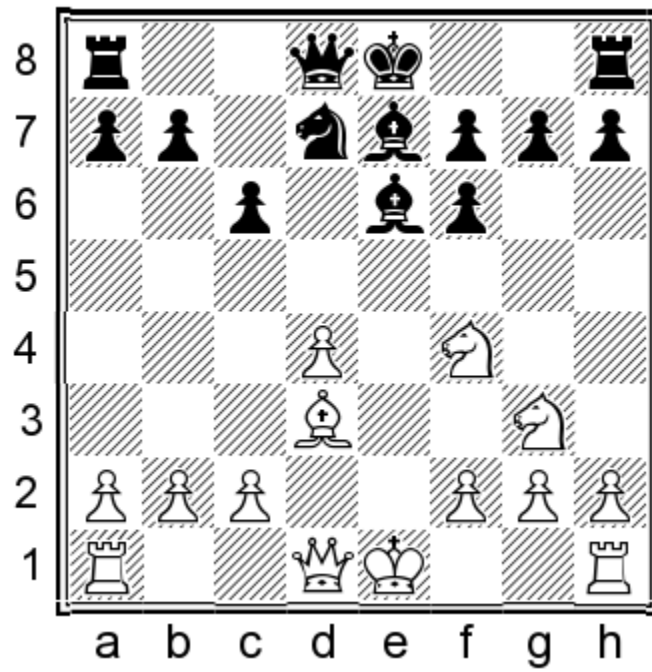
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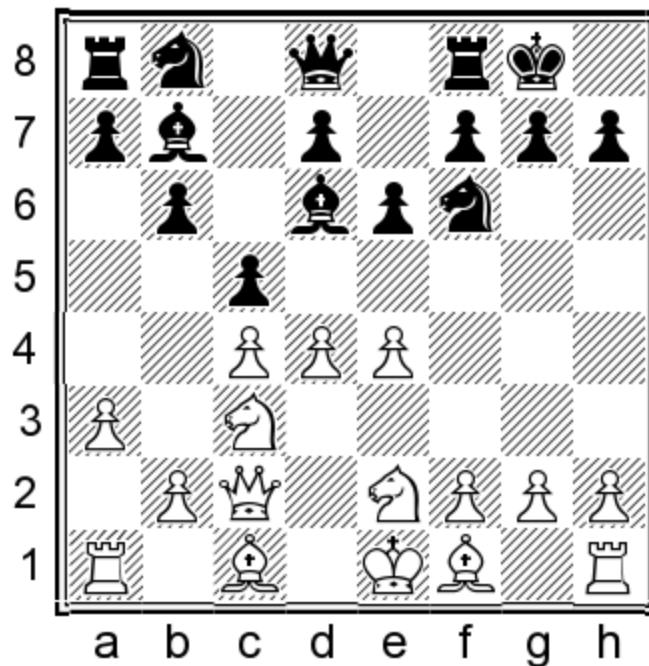
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28



29



30

When we consider the emotional aspect of error management, strategy is the most sensitive part. It is easier to admit to a tactical or theoretical error, but a strategic error is likely to be hidden under a thick blanket of excuses, and with that kind of explanation, the solution becomes more elusive.

In the first phase of learning to play, almost all games are won or lost because of tactical errors. But as a player becomes more experienced and attains a certain level of strength, strategy becomes decisive, at least in order to achieve more comfortable positions, which make their opponents' tactical errors more likely to occur. The frequency of strategic errors is high, but most of them do not have a decisive effect. That is why it is difficult to begin to study them and avoid them. The main causes are lack of knowledge or, perhaps worse, knowledge which has been poorly assimilated. The rules that we are going to discover should not acquire the status of postulates, because of the difficulty of breaking them. It is essential

to understand the ones we know and to be flexible in applying them, rather than having to create new ones each time we recognise a pattern of play.

We could specify an error (or several) for each of the traditional strategic themes: each pawn structure and the aptitudes of each of the pieces, but these would be too specific, and applicable to too few cases. For that reason, I have decided to examine errors which occur more generally and which relate the main strategic concepts to one another. And so, the errors we shall study do not depend on specific structures or openings. They can arise in any game and, as we shall soon see, they are almost all related to **irreversible moves**.

Which are the most irreversible moves? Pawn moves or piece exchanges? Which is the most important concept in strategy? There is no standard answer, but I would say it is the concept of **weakness**. We shall devote two themes to this. But we shall begin with two other errors concerning the kind of moves which do the most to create or eliminate weaknesses and change the activity of pieces: pawn breaks.

Error 20 - Making incorrect pawn breaks

In the early stages of the game, when there are still a lot of pawns left, pawn breaks are one of the clearest indicators of the plans for each side. It is difficult to imagine a plan which does not include a pawn break, unless it is a very short plan. Pawn breaks are critical moves and doubly irreversible (because of the pawn advance and because of the opportunities for exchanges that they provide), and who would take a doubly irreversible decision in life with the same cheerfulness as you would one which can be taken back? Well, such prudence is not applied to pawn breaks.

Pawn breaks should be seriously evaluated before being carried out. How? There are two factors to take into account: how it changes the

activity of the pieces (both your own and your opponent's) and how it changes the structure, and normally the difference in activity is more important than the structure.

The rule I propose is as follows:

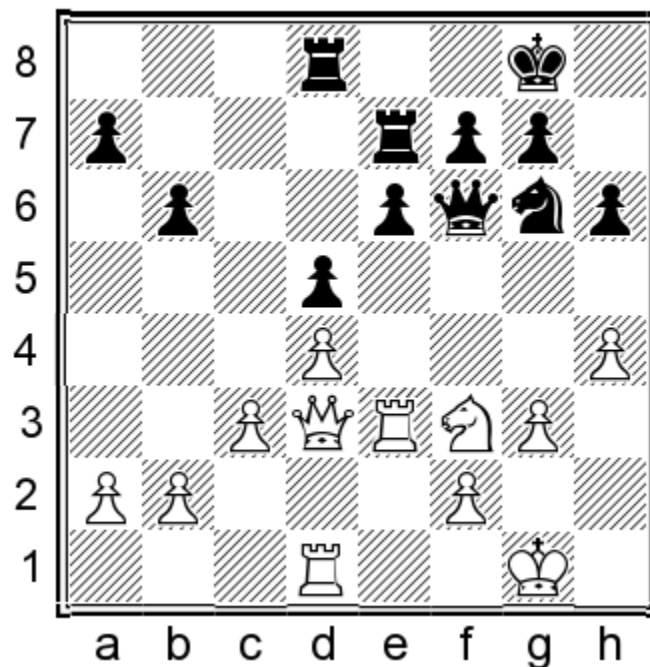
A pawn break should be made when it increases the activity of your own pieces, but should not be made when it increases the activity of the enemy pieces or creates weaknesses in your own position.

We start with a very short section of a game, although we shall return to it in another section of the book.

Pedro Antonio Ginés Esteo (2115)

Alejandro Cuellar Montes (1546)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U12 2015



Black has a sound position, although the white pieces are a little more active. I suggest that before going any further the reader

should decide which is the pawn break that is appropriate for Black (even if it cannot be made in the next move).

28...e5?

The inability to keep calm and refrain from action is the psychological element in this error. Black breaks the rule that we have proposed. Some pieces are exchanged, and the activity of the remaining ones is not much affected, but Black's structure is seriously worsened.

Instead, 28...♖b7!, preparing the advance of the b-pawn, and the subsequent pawn break ...b6-b5-b4 is one of Black's best plans.

29.dxe5 ♘xe5 30.♗xe5 ♖xe5 31.♖xe5 ♔xe5

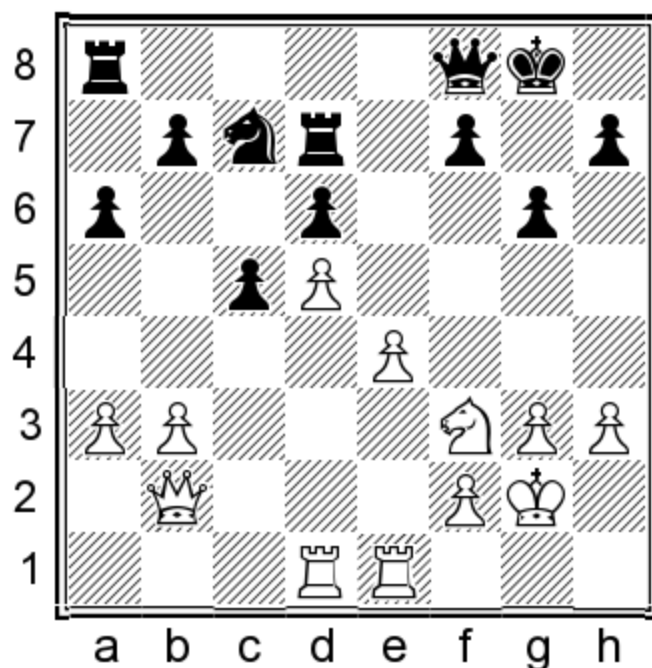
Black now has an isolated pawn, in the presence of major pieces. This is an advantage for White that can be considered an important one. The game is analysed further in **Error 3**.

As we just saw, sometimes there is more than one break. You need to decide which one is the most promising and the most correct.

Alejandro Perez García (2350)

Levon Mkrtychyan (2132)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2018



In the diagram position, White's breaks are b3-b4 and e4-e5. Both are promising, but one of them is incorrect.

25.e5?

This is the incorrect break, because it activates the enemy pieces more than White's own, despite creating a passed pawn, which of course is a point in its favour.

25.b4! is the correct break, because it activates the queen, or else wins the d4-square for the knight. In both cases, only one piece benefits, but it does so in an important way:

A) 25...cxb4 26.♔xb4! ♖b8 27.e5!. Now, the e5 break is indeed strong, because it creates a passed pawn and improves the activity of the four white pieces: 27...dxe5 28.d6 ♞b5 29.♞xe5 ♖xd6 30.♞d7 ♖xd1 31.♞xf8 and White wins;

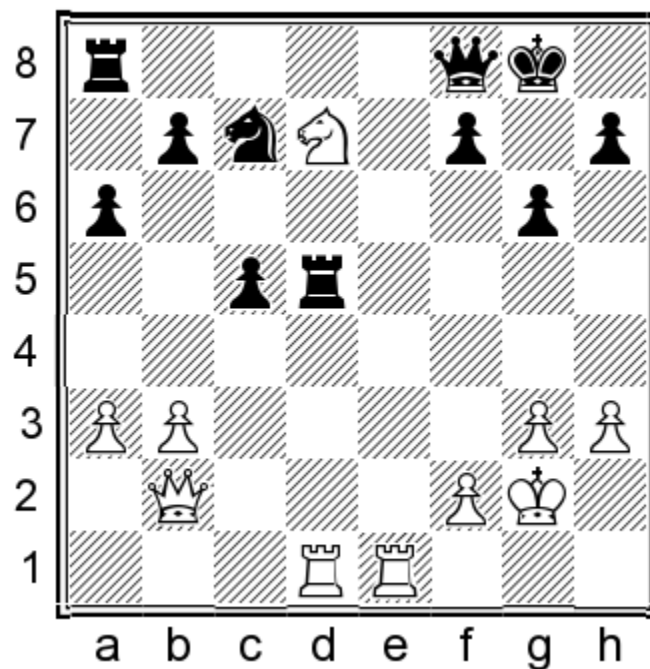
B) 25...c4 26.♔e2 (forcing the weakening of the c6-square) 26...b5 27.♞d4 f6 28.♔d2. This position is more difficult to evaluate. White has a monster of a knight (targeting the squares c6 and e6) and also has at his disposal a mobile majority in the centre

and on the kingside. Black has a protected passed pawn on the queenside, but it does not seem easy to do anything with it.

25...dxe5

25...♖e8! seems even more precise; for example, 26.a4 (preparing ♕c3; 26.exd6?! ♖xd6 and as a result of the pawn break, White's d-pawn is weak, and he has activated all the black pieces – Black has an edge) 26...dxe5 27.♘xe5 ♖d6 28.♕c3 ♖ed8 29.♕xc5 ♖xd5 with equality.

26.♘xe5 ♖xd5 27.♘d7



The justification of the e5 break; as often happens, it might have been based on a calculation error.

27...♕g7!

Now, White cannot give check on f6 because his knight would remain pinned. Often, the strategic error is hidden by a calculation error, but when a break is made which increases the activity both of your own pieces and of your opponent's, and each time an

Black has a position (Exercise 25) which is typical of the Sicilian Defence (with colours reversed) and the moves we are going to consider are typical Sicilian blows.

16.d4?

This pawn break is not usually good when the opponent can advance the e-pawn, because he is left in control of the d5-square.

In contrast, 16.e4! would have come at an ideal moment. White threatens to take on f5 and has perfect control of the d4-square, ready for a later break there. After 16...f4 (if 16...fxe4 17.♙xe4, and the e4-square is excellent for White, who in addition threatens 18.♙c2) White has a choice between the two typical pawn breaks, and both are favourable:

A) 17.d4!? exd4 18.♙xd4! (better than taking with the knight, which is more useful, controlling the e5-square and preventing ...f3) 18...♘xd4 19.♘exd4 and Black will not be able to prevent e5, which will open up White's powerful bishop;

B) 17.b4! is the stronger of the two, because the e5-pawn is a weakness: 17...axb4 18.axb4 ♖xa1 (18...♘xb4? loses to 19.♖xa8 ♙xa8 20.♙b3+ ♔h8 21.d4! exd4 22.e5 ♙e7 23.e6 ♙a4 24.♙xd4) 19.♙xa1 ♔h8 20.♖c1± .

After this analysis, we might note that the e4 break is visually uglier.

16...e4! 17.♘d2?

The only move to justify the d4 break was 17.♘e5! when certainly after 17...♙e7 18.♘xd7 ♙xd7 19.♘c3 ♘e7 the position is not as clear as in the game.

17...♘d5 18.♘c3 ♘ce7!±

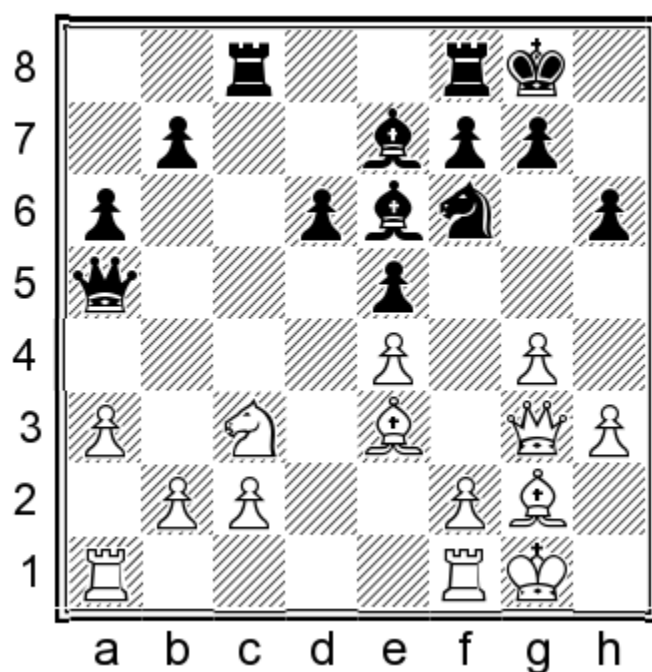
The result of the d4 break has been as follows: both white bishops have remained inactive (it is worth comparing them with the results of the e4 break); Black has consolidated his grip on d5 and in addition he has a space advantage.

It is not uncommon for an incorrect pawn break, made with the intention of improving your own activity, to improve the opponent's activity more. It is usually a sign of impatient activity, which creates weaknesses in your own camp (see **Error 22**).

Max Orteu Capdevila (1808)

Juan Plazuelo Pascual (2140)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2014



In this typical Sicilian position, Black is already better, and this displeased White, who now acted ambitiously and hastily, instead of operating cautiously and moving onto the defensive.

16.f4?!

In his eagerness to become active, White carries out the typical erroneous pawn break.

16...exf4 17.♔xf4

17. ♖xf4? loses a pawn after 17... ♔b6+; 17. ♖xf4 ♘d7 is similar to the game.

17... ♘d7!

Preparing ... ♗g5 and ... ♘e5; two black pieces have benefited from the f4 break and it is doubtful whether any white piece has done so.

18. ♔f2 ♔c7

Preparing ... ♘e5, which was bad right now because of 19. ♗b6.

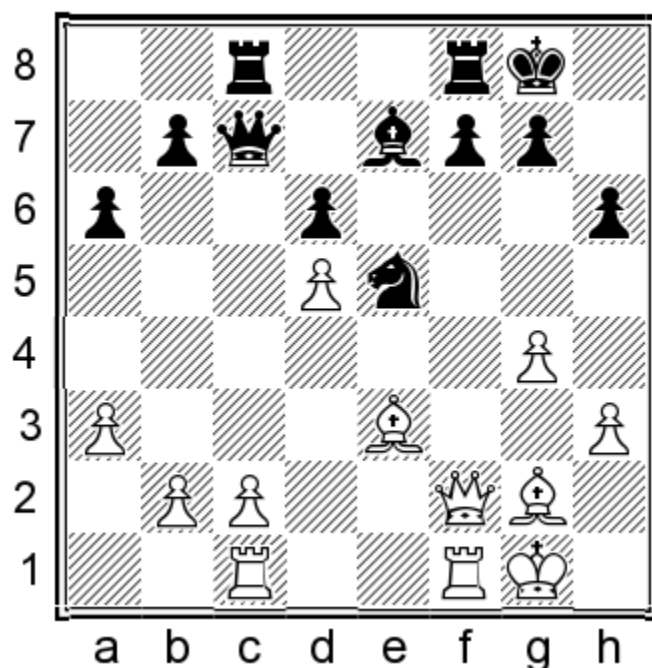
19. ♖ac1

In order to be able to move the knight.

19... ♘e5

Alternatively, 19... ♗f6!? had various points, one of which was the prevention of ♘d5; for example, 20. ♘d5?! ♗xd5 21. exd5 ♗xb2, winning two pawns.

20. ♘d5 ♗xd5 21. exd5



And now Black would have crowned his strategy with

21... ♗g5

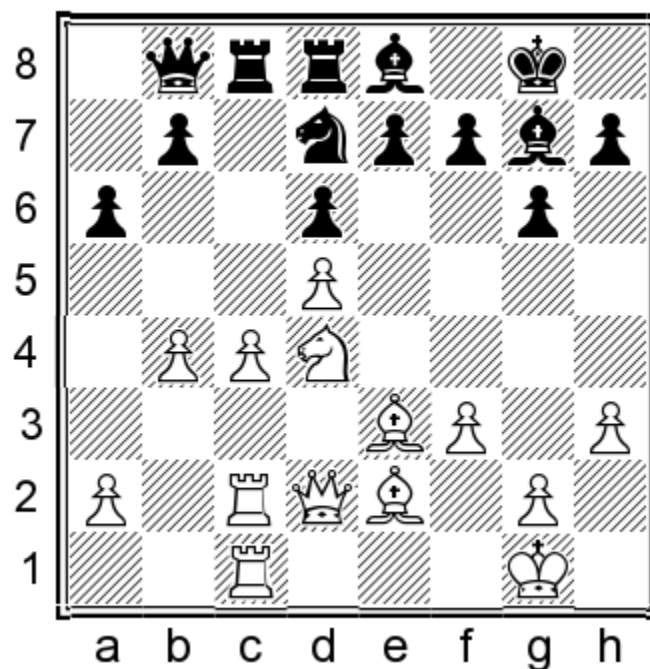
with a favourable exchange and the conversion of the knight into an unopposed piece. Instead, he played 21...♖fe8, which also left him with an advantage.

In dominant positions, pawn breaks should often be prepared calmly. If domination is based on a space advantage, then even more care should be taken. A hasty break can easily rebound, by exposing weaknesses behind the expansion.

Mireya Represa Perez (1812)

Iago Peñalonga Arribas (1504)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14. 2014



White's space advantage is crushing; almost all the black pieces suffer from restrictions in their mobility.

20.c5?

But this hasty break is unfavourable; it increases the opponent's piece activity much more than it does her own. Instead, 20.♖b3 maintained White's advantage.

20...dxc5?

It is natural to want to open the file for the d8-rook, but it was much better to play 20...♘f6!, eyeing the recently created weakness on d5, that would be impossible to defend.

21.bxc5 ♘f6 22.♙f4?

Still wanting to dominate. White should have moved on to the damage limitation phase; after 22.d6! exd6 23.c6 White would have lost the advantage but would have covered up the main weaknesses created by 20.c5.

22...♔a7!± 23.d6 exd6 24.♙xd6

And now, not 24...♘d5?!, which was played in the game, but

24...♙a4! 25.♖c4 ♘e8±

and the network of pins and exposed pieces brings White to the verge of disaster.

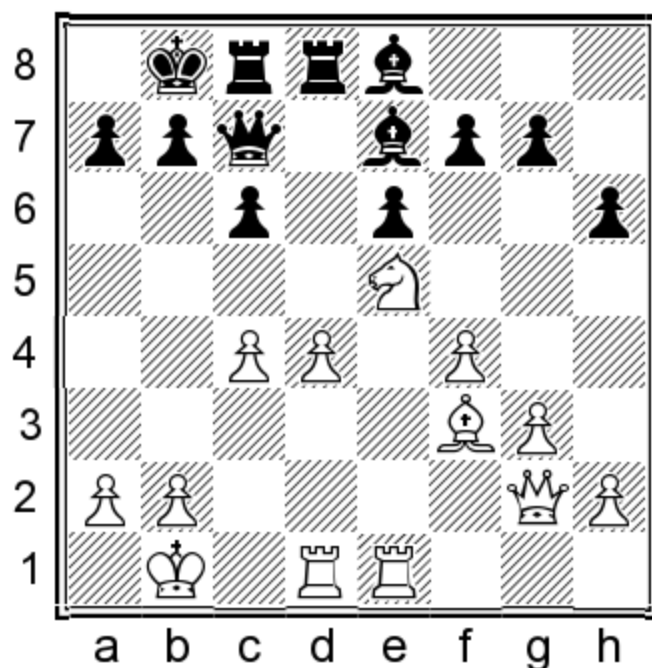
The simpler 24...♖xd6!? 25.cxd6 ♖xc2 26.♖xc2 ♘d7 also wins material, but the d6-pawn offers White some compensation.

When an advantage we had earlier evaporates, it is an ideal psychological moment to make this error.

Edgar Roca Planas (2074)

Diego Vergara Antón (2155)

Spanish Team Championship U14 2019



White has been better for a long time, which is a permanent invitation to play actively. But if you decide to do so just when the position is less advantageous, you are stepping onto slippery ground. Now Black threatens 22... f6, followed by 23... ♕g6, and White can see no way of preventing this without getting into difficulties.

22.d5?

A pawn break always seriously changes the balances in the position. In principle, we should reject it if it activates the opponent's pieces more than our own, but that is easy to say and less easy to evaluate.

A) Here, 22.c5 limits the effectiveness of ...f6 by giving the c4-square to the knight, but there follows 22...g5! 23.fxg5 hxg5 24.♞c4 f6 and Black is not worse, since if 25.♖xe6?, then 25...♕f7;

B) 22.♞c2!? is perhaps the move that best prepares against Black's two active options; for example, 22...g5! (22...f6?! 23.♞g6!±) 23.f5 ♕f6 (23...exf5?! 24.♞xf5 ±) 24.fxe6 ♕xe5 25.♖xe5 ♖xd4! with even chances.

22...exd5?

This seems more solid as it does not open the c-file, but it is precisely by opening that file that the black queen is activated, so 22...cxd5! 23.cxd5 f6 was much more effective, preparing for the passive bishop to emerge; for example, 24.♘d3 ♕g6 (threatening 25...♔c4) 25.♖e4 ♖xe4 26.♔xe4 ♔c2+ and Black wins.

23.cxd5 f6 24.♘d3 cxd5?

24...♕g6 25.♖e4 ♖xe4 26.♔xe4 ♕f8 is comfortable for Black.

25.f5?

Here, 25.♕g4! forces Black to sacrifice the exchange, and the compensation is very slim: 25...♕g6 26.♕xc8 ♖e4 27.♔d2 ♖xc8 28.♖c1±.

25...♔d7 26.♖e6 ♕f7

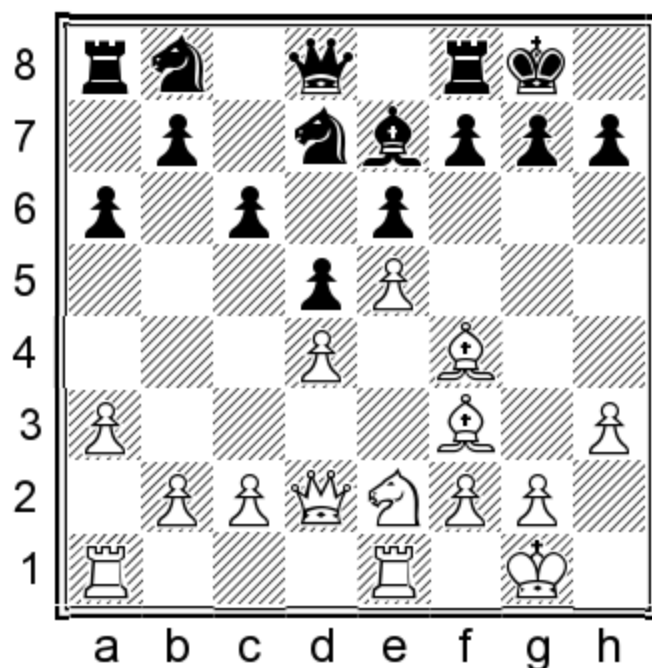
In the end, White has given away a pawn and is much worse.

The reason for incorrect pawn breaks is that they are ‘thematic’; in other words, they resemble others we have seen in similar structures or positions. This is the reason why I do not want to deal with this topic in terms of structures. I think it is better to do so based on chess common sense. Let us look at an example of a thematic break applied at the wrong moment.

Gonzalo Martino Gironés (1845)

Iñigo Elia Aldave (1608)

Navarro 2023



Exercise 26

Black has a solid, slightly worse position, resulting from playing a semi-open defence. Naturally, the freeing pawn break for Black is ...c5.

14...c5?

But not now. When you are going to make a pawn break (which is a doubly **irreversible move**) you have to weigh up the effects. Iñigo, who usually plays the French Defence, told me that he let himself be influenced by the similarity to his favourite opening and did not at all foresee the response 15.c4 (which is very unusual in the French). 14...♞b6! was sufficient preparation, and probably on the next move, Black could play ...c5.

15.c4!

This is the snag. Black has weakened the light squares and has allowed this strong counter-break. All responses now are unsatisfactory.

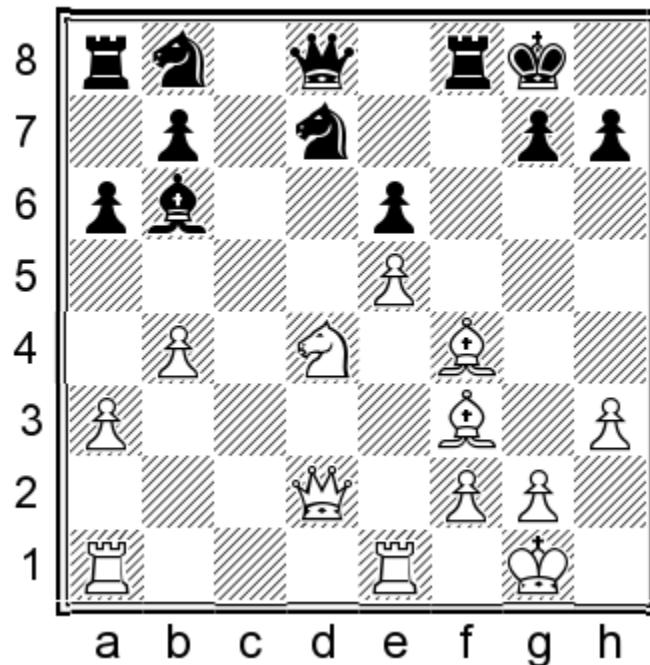
15...cxd4?

15...♘b6 was perhaps the lesser evil, but after 16.cxd5 ♘xd5 17.dxc5 ♘xf4 (17...♙xc5 18.♙xd5 ♚xd5 19.♚xd5 exd5 20.♖ad1 ♖d8 21.♙g5 and a pawn is lost) 18.♚xf4 ♙xc5 19.b4 ♙e7 20.♙xb7, a pawn is lost here too.

16.cxd5 ♙c5

16...exd5 17.♘xd4 also wins a pawn, for a start.

17.b4 ♙b6 18.dxe6 fxe6 19.♘xd4



White has won a pawn and is attacking both e6 and b7.

19...♚e7?! 20.♘xe6!

Winning more material.

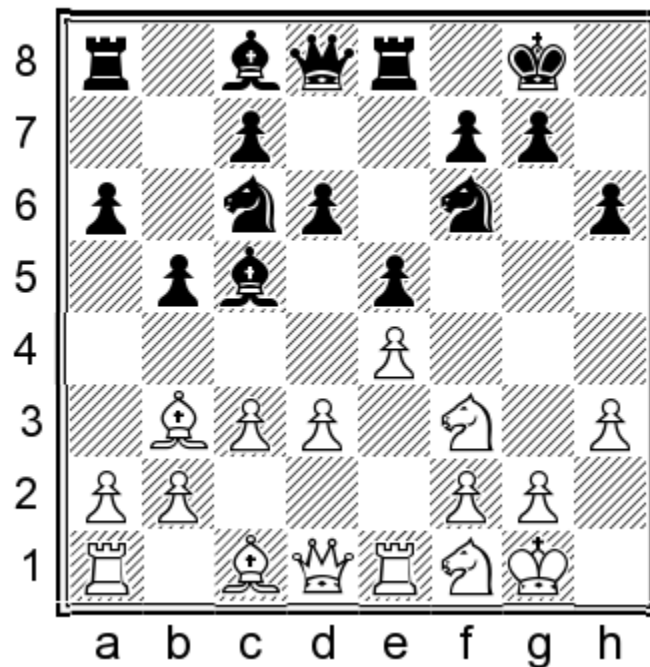
A pawn break often liberates a certain piece (most often the queen's bishop) or else is an attempt to equalise the central influence, which

is typical of some openings. And for that very reason it is also a dangerous temptation for players with an active style.

Enrique Del Moral Collado (1623)

Rubén González Tamarit (2006)

Spanish Team Championship U16 2018



The central pawns are equally advanced, but White's pieces are deployed in a more coordinated manner, and he has the help of the c3-pawn to control the centre. It is foreseeable that White will be able to play d4 and increase his influence in the centre, gaining space. In fact, White's most likely next moves are the immediate d4, or else Ng3 followed by d4. At first, I thought that perhaps that was why Black tried to anticipate this by breaking first, but Rubén confessed to me that he had had this position many times and usually played ...d5 until he realised that it favoured White more. So it is another case of a player who tends to play actively, creating weaknesses unnecessarily.

11...d5?

Black is not prepared, and this break increases the activity of the white pieces more than that of the black pieces.

11...♙b7?! is not good either, because of 12.♘g3!, eyeing f5.

11...♙b6 is the most natural move, preparing to respond to d4 with a thematic continuation: 12.d4 (12.♘g3 ♙e6=) 12...exd4 13.cxd4 d5! 14.e5 ♘e4, with active play on Black's part, although White's position is rather healthier.

11...♙e6 is one of the solid options, which perhaps did not satisfy Black in view of the ensuing piece exchange.

12.exd5 ♘xd5 13.♘g3?

13.d4! exd4? (13...♙b6 14.♘xe5±) 14.♖xe8+ ♔xe8 15.cxd4, winning.

13...♘f6=

Error 21 - Rejecting a good pawn break

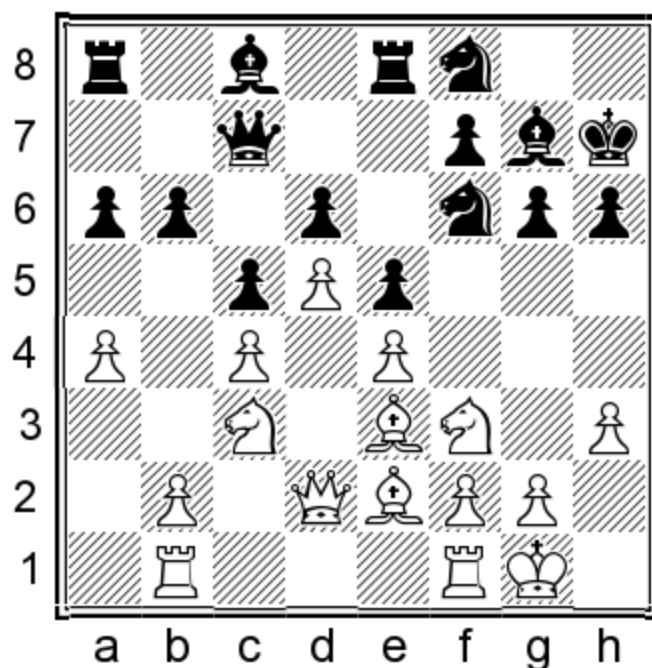
Just as common as an incorrect pawn break, although less critical, is the rejection of a good pawn break. These are probably typical errors of players of different styles, although the type of position can have an influence, as can the player's ambition with regard to that game, or his ignorance of typical ideas.

In any case, rejecting a good pawn break will make it necessary, in the best of cases, to abandon some of our plans; usually the most ambitious.

Miguel Rodríguez García (1695)

Eihartze Buiza Prieto (2095)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2015



The scenario here is one of an attacking race. White began energetically by carrying out the correct pawn break:

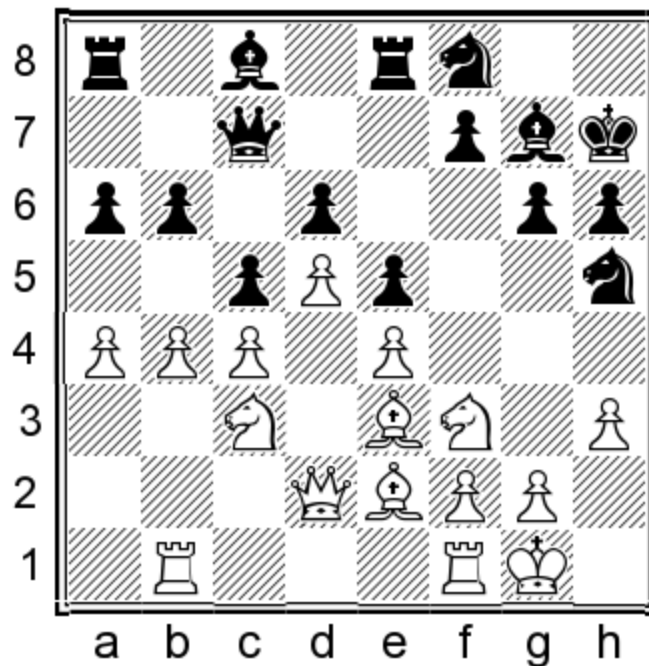
17.b4

In view of the next move, we could ask ourselves, what was White seeking with this break?

17...♞h5?

Black failed to answer the question correctly, as he had two interesting ways to oppose it, both good examples of prophylaxis:

- A) 17...♞8d7! limits the effects of a5: 18.a5?! cxb4! is unclear;
- B) 17...a5!? is the simplest way of preventing White's correct continuation; we could consider it a genuine case of **Simple Automatic Prevention** (see **Error 46**), as White's pawn break with a5 can be considered typical, and, therefore, an obvious threat, which should be prevented: 18.bxc5 bxc5 19.♞b3 ±.



18.g4?

And now White abstains from the double pawn break, which opens lines extensively in these structures. It seems that we are witnessing ignorance of a typical manoeuvre on the part of both players.

18.a5! is the thematic move, and it was very effective here:

18...cxb4 (18...bxa5 19.bxc5 dxc5 20.♘a4±) 19.axb6! (19.♖xb4 is quite good too) 19...bxc3 20.bxc7 cxd2 21.♖b8 ♕d7 22.♖fb1, intending to continue with ♖xa8 and ♖b8, winning.

18...♘f4 19.♙h2

Now Black could have eliminated the greatest danger on the queenside with

19...♘d7!

. Instead, Black played 19...g5?! and ended up losing in 80 moves.

20.♖b3

20.a5 cxb4 21.♖xb4 bxa5 22.♖b2 ♘c5±.

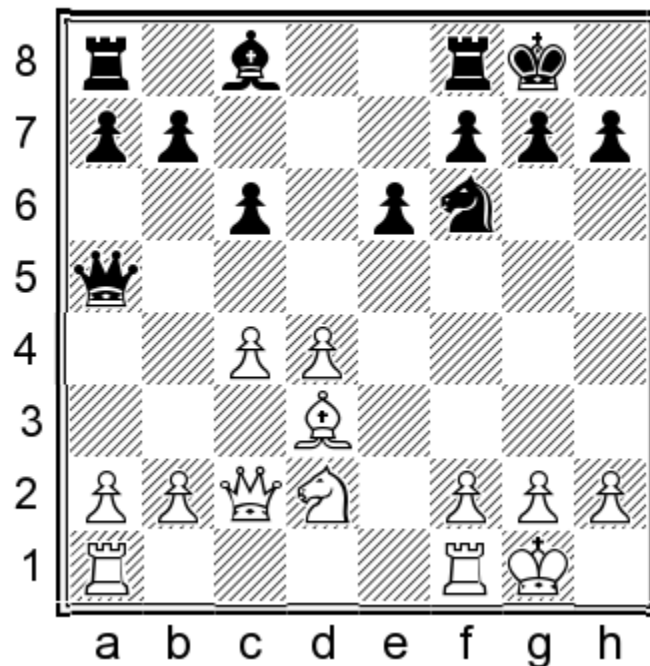
20...cxb4 21.♖xb4 a5 22.♖b2 ♘c5±

Sometimes, a pawn break is renounced because it involves some kind of risk, but it is more difficult to understand why a freeing break is rejected.

Gabriel Quispe Arteaga (2011)

Aimer Del Carmen Hernández (1399)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U12 2015



The diagram position has occurred in at least three club player games, and in two of them Black failed to take advantage of the chance to free himself:

15...♔h5?

15...e5! is a typical freeing break: 16.dxe5 ♔xe5 17.♖fe1 ♔c7 18.♘f3 c5 19.h3 b6 20.♞e3 ♙b7 21.♘e5 ♜ad8 22.♞ae1 g6, and the position is equal, although White won quickly with the incorrect sacrifice 23.♙xg6? fxg6 24.♘xg6 ♙e4? (24...♞f7—+) 25.♞xe4 ♘xe4 26.♘xf8 ♘xf2 27.♘e6 1-0 Künitz-Steinhagen, Dortmund 1998.

16.♖ae1!

All the white pieces are getting ready for the attack on the king. The e5 break is prevented and a rook lift to the kingside is prepared.

The other game continued 16.♖fe1! ♔g4 17.♘f3 b6 18.♖ad1 ♕b7 19.♘e5 ♖f4 20.b4 a5 21.g3 ♖h6 22.a3 axb4 23.axb4 c5 24.bxc5 bxc5 25.♖b1 ♖a7 26.dxc5. In this case, the black queen has become distant from the queenside and White finished off elegantly: 26...♖c8 27.♖b2 ♕a8 28.♖b8 ♖ac7 29.♖xc7 1-0 Hohn-Filzmaier, Bad Zwischenahn 2008.

16...b6

Now White could have played

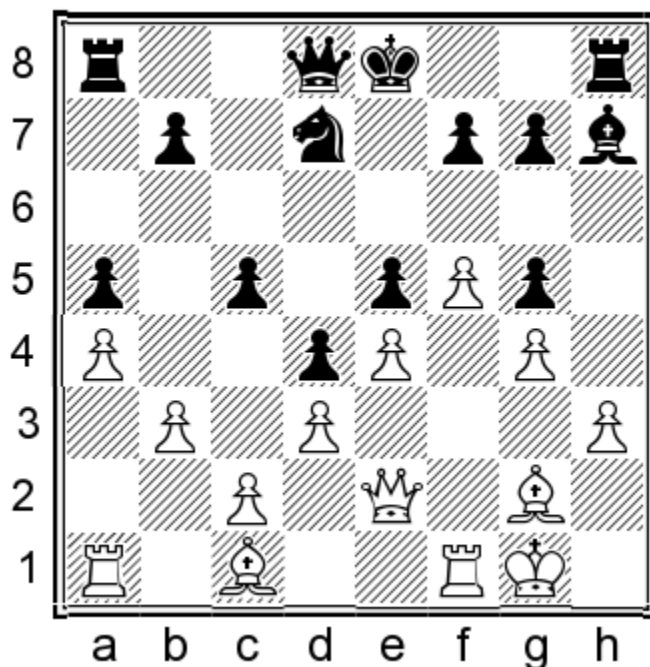
17.♖e3

with the threat of 18.♖h3 and a very strong attack.

Gabriel Quispe Arteaga (2400)

Iñigo Ortín Blanco (2252)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18. 2020



A very closed position. In this case, the pawn breaks are even more relevant, although it is unusual for them to be urgent.

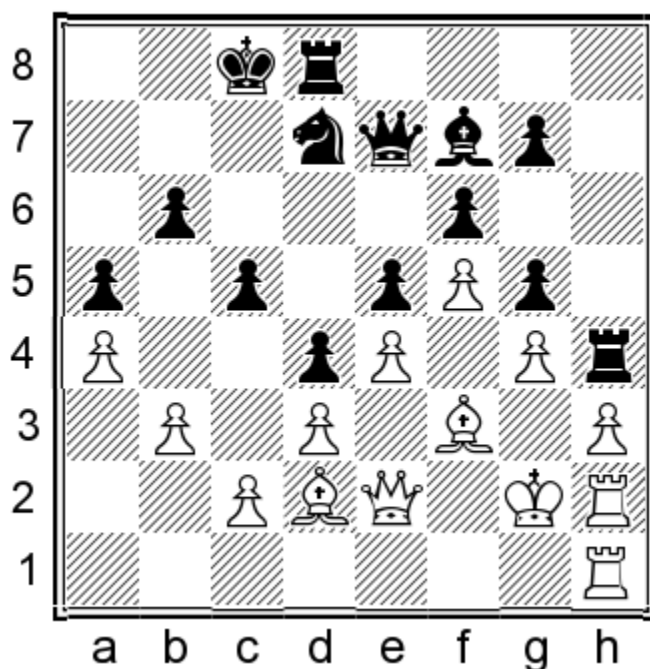
20...f6?

This is a natural move, compared with the most correct, but rather strange-looking move 20...♔g8!. This would have prevented h4, but Iñigo was concerned about f6, which would have left him with a really ugly structure, although with an extra pawn. However, after 21.f6 gxf6! Black is much better. He is able to continue with an unusual plan, which is unpreventable in this position: take the knight to f4 (through f8) and then free the bishop by giving back the pawn with ...f5.

21.♙f3?

White rejects his only possible pawn break 21.h4! ±. This was the only opportunity to make it, because once the bishop goes to g8 it will be impossible.

21...♙g8! 22.♔g2 ♙f7 23.♖h1 ♔e7 24.♙d2 b6 25.♖h2 0-0-0
26.♖ah1 ♖h4



The position is very closed, and it is quite natural to settle for a draw. Only Black has possible breaks and he could have prepared the most natural one with 26...♖dg8! for ...g6, not necessarily on the next move.

27.♙e1 ♖dh8 28.♙xh4 ♖xh4 29.♖c1 ♞b8 30.♚g3 ½-½

How to avoid Errors 20 and 21

As we have seen, in two whole sections, errors with regard to pawn breaks are not made through not knowing the typical ones for each pawn structure but through rushing them, or delaying them indefinitely. So I cannot recommend the study of structures as a solution to this error. I believe that what is required is to follow a good criterion for making decisions, and not to let yourself be swept along, neither by temperament (aggressive, or too accommodating), nor by the competitive situation, nor by the supposed level of the opponent.

As a first recommendation, I give another reminder of the proposed criterion and extend it to earlier moves:

A pawn break should be made when it increases the activity of your own pieces and should not be made when it increases your opponent's activity or even creates weaknesses in your own position,

and as a corollary to this:

A pawn break should be planned in order to improve the activity of your pieces, without incurring any weaknesses, and should be prepared such that it meets our expectations.

I cannot suggest any very specific books, but the quiet study of any good book on strategy will improve these decisions.

Error 22 - Creating weaknesses unnecessarily

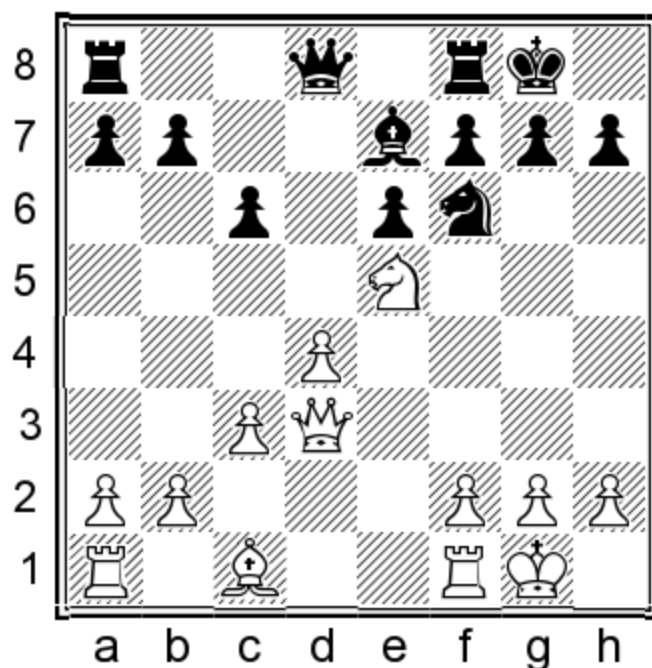
If you often play chess online, you have almost certainly come across those annoying players who are incapable of making a single quiet move but instead harass you with their threats throughout the whole game. This can also happen in rapid games at the club, but in that case, you usually know your opponent and you are mentally prepared for it.

Very often, those players, in their eagerness to attack, or simply to do something active, make moves whose main effect is to create weaknesses in their own position. As a rule, these are pawn advances; in other words, **irreversible moves**. Of course, no player is immune from making this error, but it is the kind of error that is very much related to the personality of the player and also to inexperience. Soon we are going to observe that almost all the weakening moves are pawn moves, and that the weakening move *par excellence* is f2-f4.

Álvaro Bayo Milagro (2024)

Jesus Guerrero Méndez (1632)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2014



This position (Exercise 27) has been reached in quite a few games and is very equal, too much so for a player whose style is very active and who considers that he needs to win.

14.f4?!

The f2-f4 advance is one of the most typical weakening moves, probably because it is also a typical way of starting an attack.

This is what White is trying to do here. But his position is not well developed, and the only result is that he creates weaknesses in his own camp. Often, the motive behind these attacking attempts is the need to win at all cost, and that need is sometimes the result of a difference in rating.

Instead, 14.♔e2, improving the queen's position, followed by ♖f4 and centralising the rooks, would leave Black with the task of equalising completely. The immediate 14.♙f4 is also fine.

14...c5!

Black responds energetically, although other moves are also good:

A) 14...♖e8!?, reducing the strength, if necessary, of the pawn break f5;

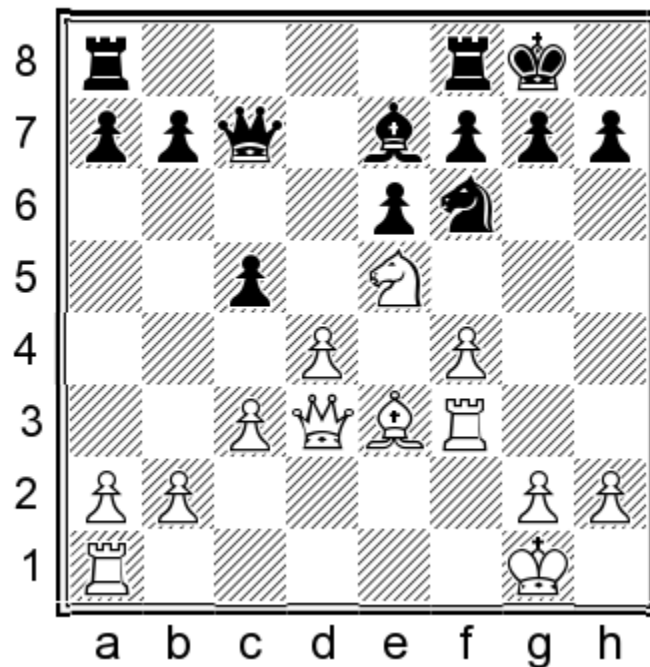
B) 14...♘d7 15.♙h3 c5! and Black has no problems, although in this game he ended up losing: 16.♙e3 cxd4 17.♙xd4 ♘xe5 18.♙xe5 ♙f6 19.♙xf6 ♙xf6 20.♙f3 b5 21.♖ad1 ♙e7 22.f5 exf5 23.♙xf5 a6 24.♖d7 ♙e3+ 25.♔h1 ♖a7?? (always tactics, and almost always based on some **unnatural candidate move** or other) 26.♙xf7+ 1-0 Richard-Cummins, Ste Foy 2017.

15.♙e3 ♙c7!

Defending the pawn and preparing the transfer of a rook to d8.

15...♙b6 with the same idea was also correct; for instance, 16.♖ab1 cxd4 17.♙xd4 ♙c5 18.♙xc5 ♙xc5+ 19.♔h1 ♖fd8 with an edge, Engelhardt-Streiter, Stuttgart 2016.

16.♖f3?!



‘Once again trying to find some way of winning, unconcerned about how your pieces are’ – Álvaro Bayo. The problems with White’s position are not yet serious, but they are increased by pseudo-aggressive moves like this one.

16...♞d5! 17.♞h3?! g6 18.♞f1

And now Black could begin to accumulate significant static advantages with

18...♞ad8!

. The game continuation 18...♞xe3 was less promising, although sufficient for a slight advantage.

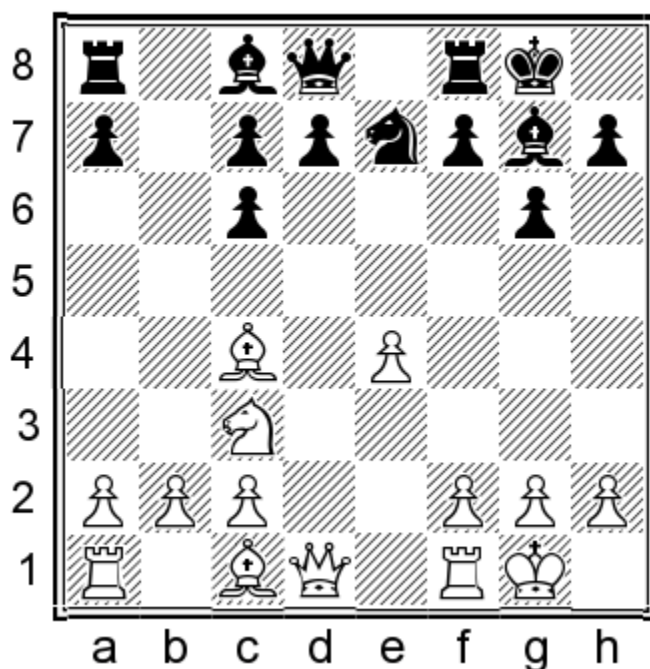
19.♙d2 cxd4 20.cxd4 ♘f6

In the following position, which has occurred dozens of times, we are going to make some reflections, comparing the decisions of masters and club players.

Eihartze Buiza Prieto (2095)

Álvaro Tevar Becerra (1857)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2015



White has excellent prospects. Several moves have been tried here which give him the advantage, but not the one played in this game:

9.f4?

Again f4, creating weaknesses unnecessarily. If we rank the games in order of the rating of the players with the white pieces, we have to go down to 2100 before we encounter this move, but after that it is repeated quite insistently. It seems clear to me that the postulate ‘f4 is an attacking move’ has been firmly installed in the mentality of novice players and a lot of experience is required to remove it, even though it is a false postulate.

Let us look at two alternatives:

A) 9.♘e3! d6 (9...d5?! 10.exd5 cxd5 11.♘xd5±) 10.♘d4!±
Korneev-Wantiez, Bergamo 2014;

B) 9.♘g5 h6 10.♘e3 is similar. These two moves (♘e3 and ♘g5) are the ones chosen by nearly all players above 2300.

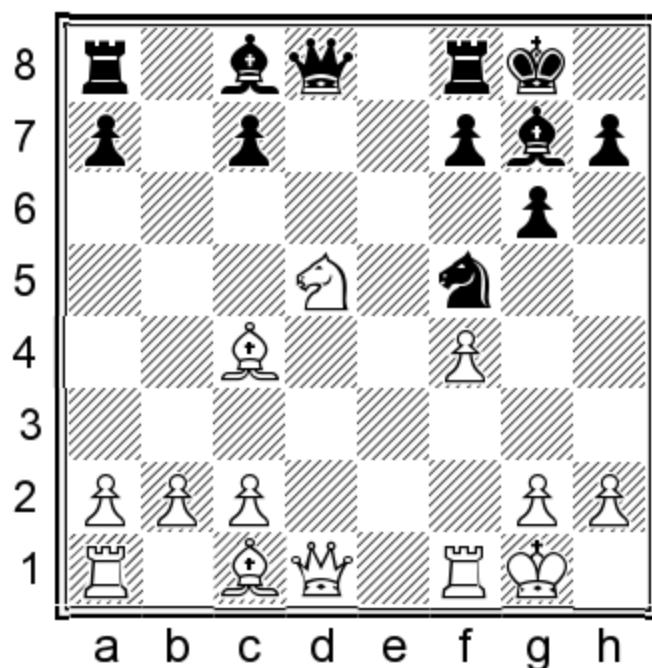
9...d5!

Energetic play with an advantage in development, as we shall see in **Error 41**. It is curious that in the first round of this tournament (played the day before), the same player with Black had done much worse with 9...♘b7?, a slow move which justifies White’s play: 10.f5! d5?. Now this comes too late: 11.f6! dxc4 12.fxg7 ♔xg7 13.♕f3 c5 14.♕f6+ ♔g8 15.♖d1, with a clear advantage that concluded in a victory for White in Benito Olmedo-Tear Becerra, 2015.

10.exd5 cxd5?!

Now 10...♘b7! really would have been good, complementing the energetic play begun on the previous move; for example, 11.dxc6 ♘d4+ 12.♔h1 ♘xc6 and White has problems, due precisely to the position of the pawn on f4. Both the black bishops are aimed at his king and the threat is ...♘f5 followed by ...♕h4; after 13.♘e2 ♘b6 14.♕xd8 ♖axd8 Black is again threatening ...♘f5 and ...♖fe8.

11.♘xd5 ♘f5!



White would put his pawn back on f2 if he could. Despite being a pawn up he has problems. Black threatens simply to play ...♗b7 and centralise the rooks.

12.c3 ♔d6

Here 12...♖e8! was more natural and better.

13.♗b3? ♔c5+ 14.♙h1 ♗a6

The black bishops cross the white position. In a couple of moves, the rooks will reach the centre and there will be no defence.

15.♖e1 ♖ad8! 16.♙f3

And now Black should have played

16...♗b7!

. The move played in the game, 16...♗b5?!, was not as strong, allowing 17.♗e3! ♘xe3 18.♖xe3 and now 18...a5! instead of 18...♖fe8? still gave Black good compensation.

17.c4

A) If 17.♘f6+, then 17...♗xf6 18.♙xb7 ♖fe8 19.♗d2 ♙f2–+; or

B) 17.♘e7+ ♔xe7! 18.♖xe7 ♙xf3–+.

17...♖fe8

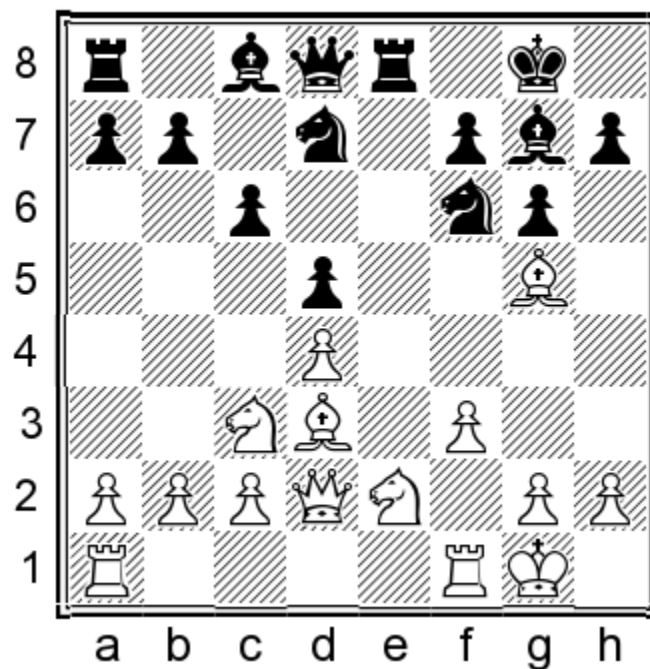
With tremendous compensation.

With the next example, we complete our trilogy about the weakening move f4. In this more ambiguous example, an inexact f4 was transformed into an effective attacking move. It is worth realizing that aggressive moves, even if they are weakening, sometimes achieve their objectives.

Luis Miguel Lechuga Cabrero (1680)

Rafael Pujante Martínez (1479)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U12 2014



White has a rather more pleasant position, but instead of forming a plan of patient preparation he embarked on one of immediate aggression:

11.f4?!

This is evidence that most weakening advances are carried out with the intention of attacking. In this case the f5 advance is attractive, and in fact this would give White the advantage if it were possible to carry it out right now, but threats cannot not always be carried out, just as hopes do not always become reality.

What has happened here, so far, is that the preparatory f4 advance, necessary for the future f5, leaves a hole on the e4-square and limits the mobility of the g5-bishop.

Instead, 11.♘d1 would have been a good strategic move to improve the knight (see **Error 26**), which on c3 was White's worst minor piece. Alternatively, 11.♖ae1 completes White's development. The position is equal.

11...♔e7?

Black fails to find the most effective continuation, which on the other hand is not at all obvious, and White's manoeuvre turns out well.

Best was 11...h6!, pushing the bishop to h4 where it will be unprotected: 12.♕h4 b5! (threatening 13... b4, followed by 14... ♘e4. It is already possible to play 12...♘e4!?, which would give Black a reasonable position after 13.♘xe4 ♔xh4 14.♘d6 ♖d8) 13.a3 (13.♘d1 ♘e4!±/ 13.♘g3 ♘e4!±) 13...a5 14.f5 g5! 15.♕g3 ♘b6 16.b3 ♘c4!±.

On the other hand, launching the assault on the queenside with 11...b5?! would have been weakening and premature in view of 12.f5!±.

12.f5!

With the pawn now on f5 White has annoying pressure.

12...b5

This is the logical plan, but now White would have been better after:

13.♘g3

To leave the e2-square free for the other knight, as well as to control e4.

13...♞b6 14.♖ae1

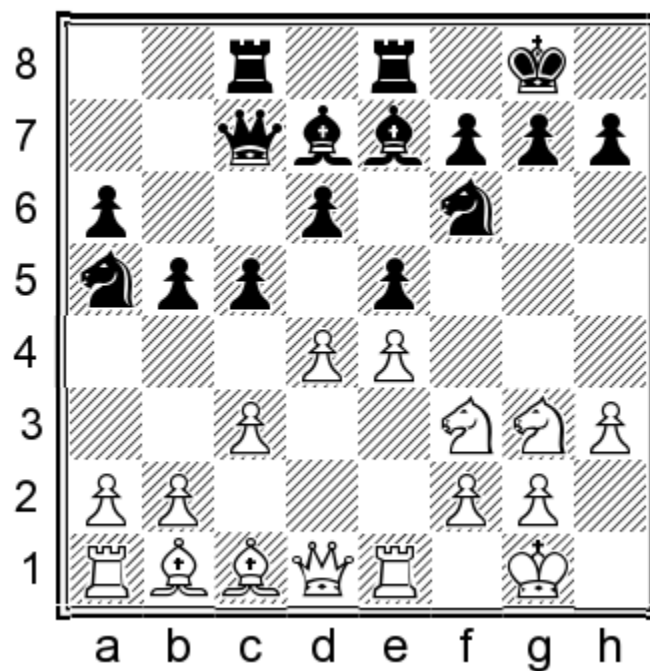
Now we shall look at a different pawn move as a cause of weaknesses, but it is still a supposedly aggressive pawn advance. It is a well-known rule that:

In positions with a space advantage, it is usually dangerous to move pawns on the flank where you are cramped.

Marcos Lianes García (1919)

Luis Miguel Lechuga Cabrero (1680)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U12. 2014



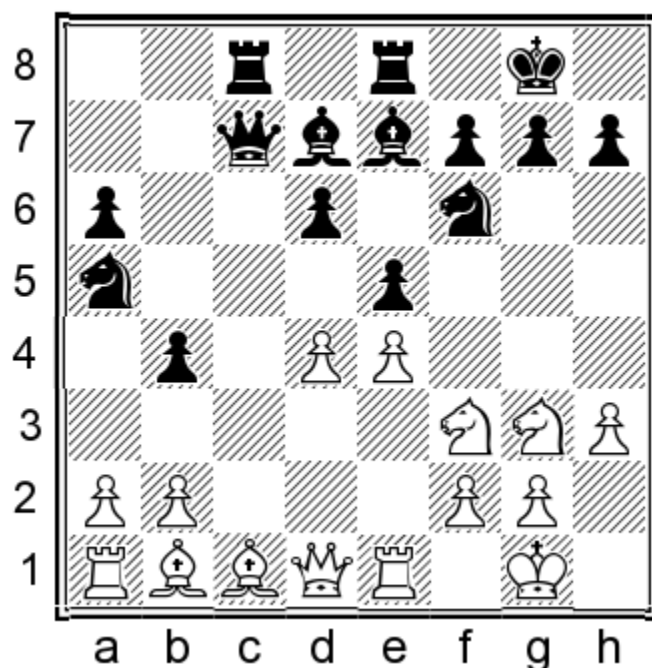
In the diagram position, White has not yet gained space with the d4-d5 push, but he may do so at any moment.

15...b4?

This is an aggressive advance which creates serious weaknesses. I doubt that Black would have made this move if White had already advanced to d5, but here it has a similar effect.

Exchanging with 15...cxd4 is the correct idea; for example, 16.cxd4 exd4 (16...♘c6=) 17.♘xd4 d5! with equality.

16.cxb4 cxb4



17.♗d2?

It often happens that recently created weaknesses (in this case a6) are not immediately detected. But be careful, because they are usually seen on the next move.

17.♗d3! attacks the weakness on a6 and improves the activity of the bishop and other white pieces. Black would have had no good solution, for instance:

A) If 17...♖a8?!, then 18.♗d2, attacking b4 and preparing ♖ac1 or a3;

B) 17...♗b5 gives up the f5-square: 18.♘f5! ♗f8 19.♗g5 ♘d7 20.♖c1 ♕b8 21.♖xc8 ♕xc8 22.♗xb5 axb5 23.b3 and the black queenside pawns will suffer;

C) 17...♔b6 18.♙e3 ♔b7 19.d5! and White will be able to attack, based on his space advantage.

17.d5 is not the strongest move, but it also highlights the defects of 15...b4: the threat is now ♙d3 and after 17...♘b7! 18.a3 bxa3 19.♖xa3 Black's a-pawn is weak; White has an edge.

17...♖b8?

Trying to defend the pawn. It was better to play 17...♘c4! 18.♙xb4 ♔b6, with some compensation.

18.♙d3!

Now the weakness really has been discovered.

18...exd4 19.♘xd4 ♔b7 20.a3!

White has an enormous advantage now; Black cannot cover all his weaknesses.

20...♔b6 21.axb4 ♔xd4 22.♙c3 ♔a7 23.♖xa5

How to avoid Error 22

This error is also the result more of a bad attitude than of a lack of technical knowledge. In this case, it usually arises from wanting to attack, combined with the (self-imposed) 'need' to win, triggering a player to create complications. But complicating the game is not always the best way to win, especially if it is done at the cost of your own position.

One clue which may help us to eliminate this error is that it almost always consists of a pawn advance. So it is a question of applying to pawn advances a protocol similar to the one we applied earlier to exchanges and pawn breaks, asking the question: Who benefits more from the advance?

Error 23 - Not recognising the weakness

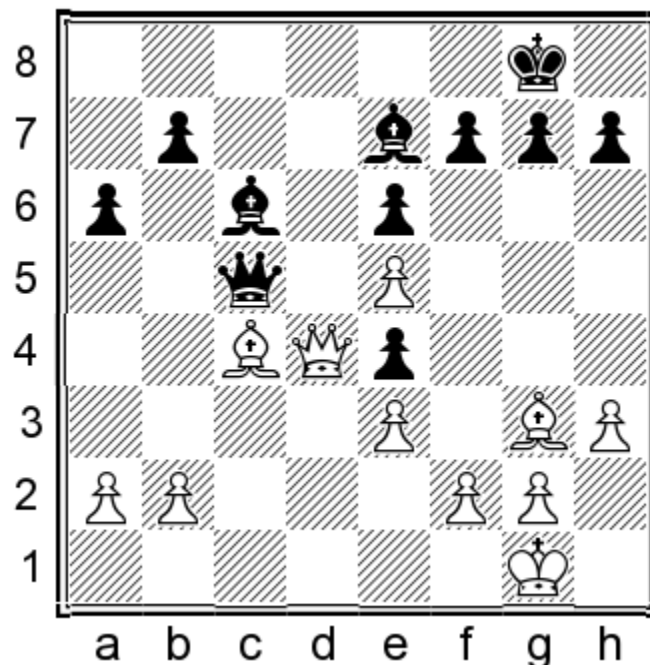
A general cause of strategic errors is the absence of a plan, much more so even than choosing the wrong plan. But how can we find a plan when no plan comes to mind? As with tactics, so with strategy, there are signs that can guide us, although they are rather more elaborate, and the most important of them is **weaknesses**. If we manage to recognise a weakness in our opponent's position, we will be able to find a plan. It is also useful to recognise our own weaknesses, because then perhaps we can frustrate our opponent's plans, or we can work out a partial plan to eliminate them.

I think that in the following position, the errors occurred because weaknesses were not perceived.

Diego Cacheiro Blanco (1929)

Xavier Mompel Ferruz (2150)

Salobreña Spanish Team Championship U14 2022



Exercise 28

22...b5?

Black fails to see the advantage of exchanging on d4 because he does not detect that the d4-pawn is a new weakness: 22...♔xd4! 23.exd4. Now, due to the bad position of the bishop on g3, there is no way to defend the weakness on d4; for example, 23...♘g5 24.♔f1 ♘c1 25.b3 ♘b2 with a decisive advantage.

23.♘b3?

Insisting on the suicidal offer. 23.♔xc5 was the correct way to exchange.

23...♔f8?

Black agrees to the exchange, but with the pawn structure unchanged. Therefore, his error is in not realising that the change in the structure would create a new weakness on d4, which cannot be covered. 23...♔xd4–+ was still best.

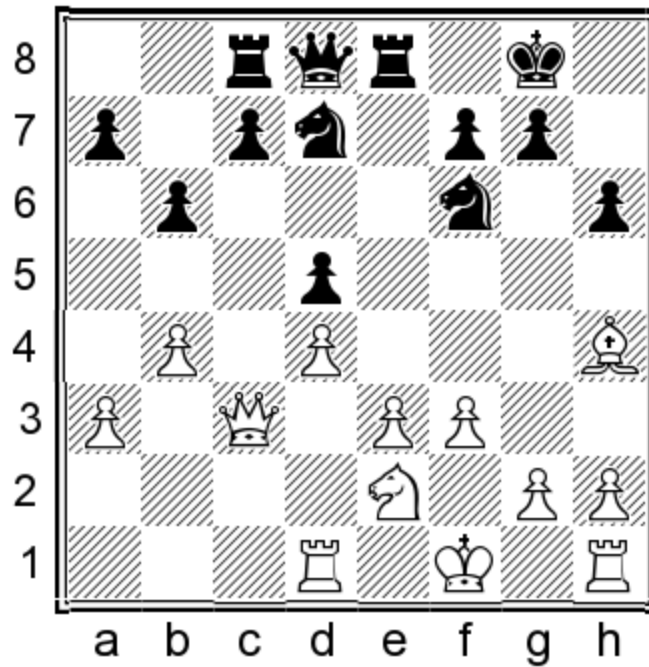
24.♔xc5 ♘xc5 ½-½

I find the next example especially interesting, because it combines two themes: detecting the opponent's weakness, and creating your own weaknesses, and all this over the course of several moves.

Roberto Alfaya Marcelo (2132)

Mikel Ortega López (2259)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2017



It seems evident that Black stands well because of the white king's unfortunate position, which hinders the coordination of his other pieces. But this is a dynamic circumstance, and it will disappear in a few moves. The reason is that Black did not find attractive moves due to not recognising White's main weakness.

15...g5?

Through not discovering the weakness in his opponent's position, Black incurs a serious unforced weakening of his own position (see the previous section).

Instead, seeking to put pressure on the weakness on e3 with 15...♔e7 was quite sensible; for example, 16.♕xf6 (16.♔f2? ♖e4+; 16.♕f2 c5!⌘) 16...♘xf6 17.♔f2 c5 18.bxc5 bxc5 19.dxc5 ♖xc5 20.♔d3 ♖a5⌘.

But it would be even stronger to detect the other weakness on c4 (on the way to e3) by playing 15...b5!!; for example, 16.♔d3 (16.♔f2? is not possible here either, due to 16...♖e4+; 16.♕f2 ♖b6⌘) 16...♖b6! 17.♖c3 ♖c4 18.♖e1 c6, followed by ...a5 or ...♖xa3.

16.♘f2 ♔e7?!

The only way to justify ...g5 was to play dynamically with 16...c5!.

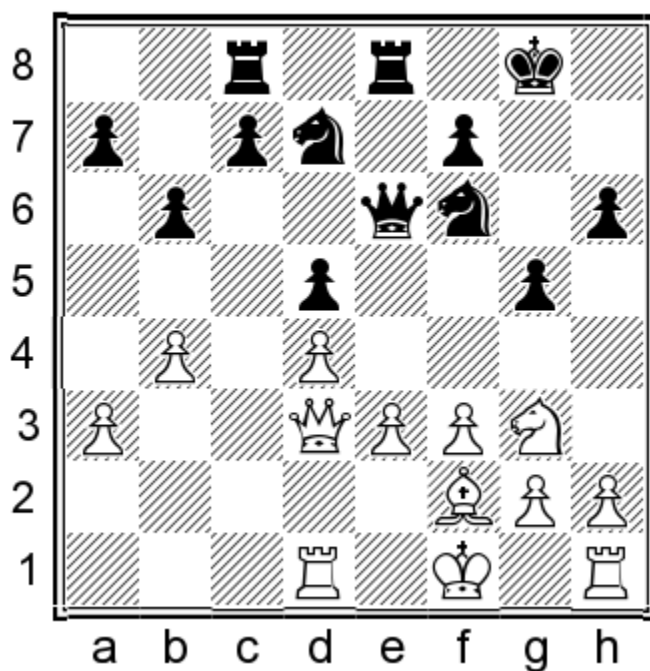
17.♞g3?!

A similar weakness has arisen in Black's position (f5), and White detects it but then tries to exploit it too quickly.

17.g4?! was interesting but would allow Black to take the initiative with 17...c5!.

The best move was 17.♔c6!, which mixes prevention of the opponent's plans (it prevents ...c5) with active play. This can be followed by g4 to fix the weakness on f5, or h4 to take advantage of the 'hook' created by Black's move ...g5.

17...♔e6 18.♔d3



18...h5?!

Creating new weaknesses for himself again. It was essential to exploit the fact that the white rooks are not connected by opening the game with 18...c5!, and if 19.♞f5, then 19...h5 with a clear advantage.

19.h4! g4

The weakness is transferred to f4.

20.♞e2

Once more White rushes to try to exploit the new weakness. What happens is that there is a problem with the position of his king, which prevents his other pieces from coordinating. That is why the best move was 20.♔g1!, to transfer the king to h2 and connect the rooks, gaining a slight edge. We could regard this move as an example of improving a piece. See **Error 26**.

20...♞f8?!

Once again, Black fails to act decisively and make the active pawn break before White can get organised: 20...c5! 21.♞f4 (21.bxc5 bxc5 22.dxc5? ♞e5 23.♔c2 ♚a6+) 21...♚c6 22.bxc5 bxc5 23.dxc5 ♚a4, with very active play for the black pieces.

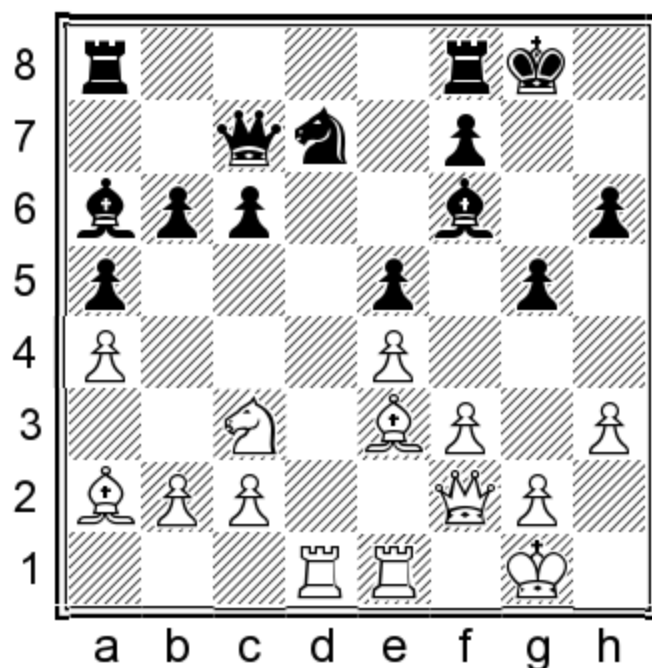
21.♞f4 ♚d7 22.♔g1 ♞g7 23.♔h2±

It is more difficult to recognise weaknesses when they are dynamic, and even more so when there is also a static weakness present, which logically attracts more attention, even though it is not the most important.

Adrian Palenciano Escolar (1850)

Alejandro Perez García (2142)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2014



White is much better, but his advantage will shrink until it almost disappears in the next few moves. The reason is that he fails to recognise the main weakness in Black's position, which is not the weak f5-square but the advanced pawn on g5, which can be attacked by h4 and ♔g3 and is difficult to defend because the black queen is so far away.

18. ♘e2?

White seems to have detected a weakness on the light squares of the kingside, and he transfers his knight, but that weakness can be covered.

Best was 18. ♔g3! ♔h7 19. h4 and now 19... ♖g8 is not possible because of the undefended pawn on f7; or 18. h4!, with the same idea.

18... ♙xe2! 19. ♖xe2 ♙e7?

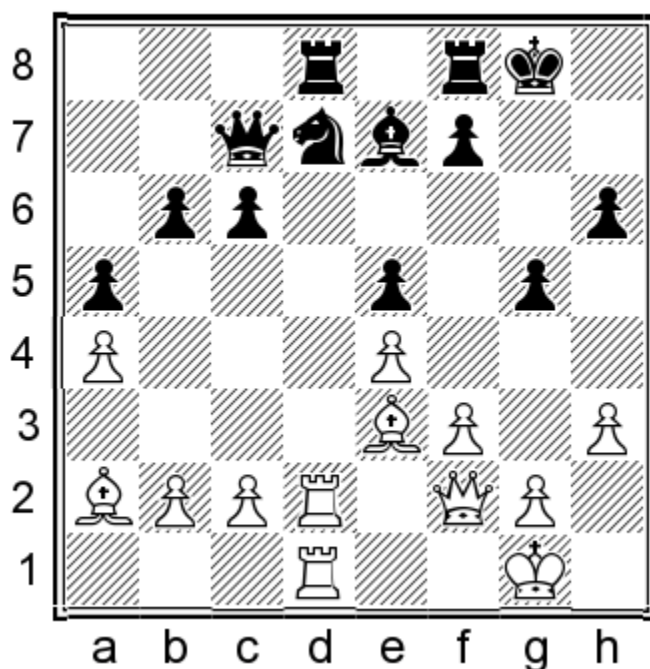
This is too ambitious. Black has a similar idea to White and seeks to exchange the dark-squared bishop, but he further weakens the g5-

pawn. Better was 19...♘c5!, attacking the a4-pawn, and if 20.♙xc5, then 20...bxc5 21.♙xc5 ♖ad8±.

20.♖ed2?!

Once again White should have attacked the same weakness: 20.♙g3! ♙c5 (20...♔g7 21.h4 f6 and now, after this forced weakening move, the light squares really are the greatest weakness in Black's position: 22.♙g4!±) 21.h4 and it is no longer possible to defend g5.

20...♖ad8



21.♙g3

Finally White takes aim at Black's weakness, but even now he does not do so in the most energetic fashion: 21.h4!.

21...♔g7 22.♙g4?

And finally White's obsession with the static weakness of the light squares proves more powerful.

Instead, 22.h4! would have attacked g5 with three pieces and after 22...f6 the light-square weakness becomes indeed the ideal

objective; for instance, 23.♔h3! ♘c5 24.♔h2 (getting ready to play ♙xc5 to eliminate the defender of the light squares) 24...♖xd2 25.♖xd2 ♜d8 26.h5!, followed by ♚f5, winning.

Now Black could have limited his disadvantage to the minimum by means of:

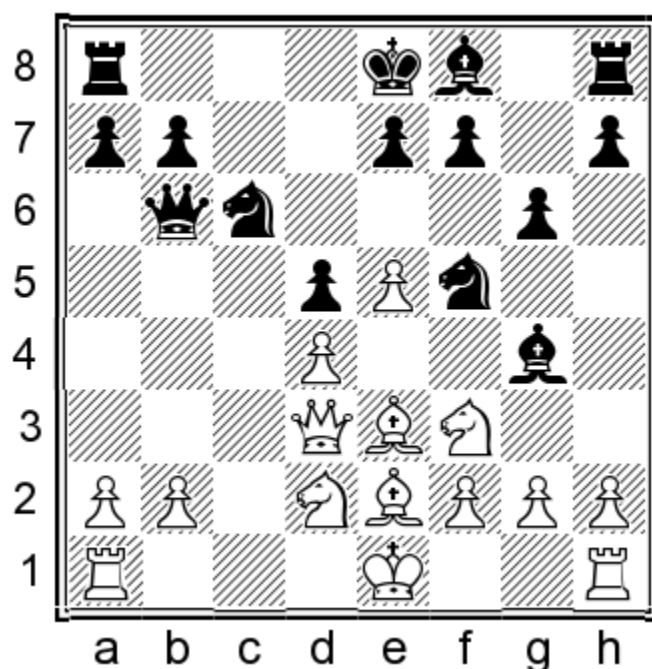
22...♞f6! 23.♚f5 ♜xd2 24.♖xd2 ♜d8!

The weakness to be detected is not always already present in the position. Sometimes it has to be created by the use of forcing moves. In the next example Black declines to do so several times.

Javier Aledo Yanguas (1772)

Andrea Jausas López (1598)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2014



10...♙g7?!

Black rejects such a committal move as the exchange on e3. The key is to realise that e3 and the dark squares will be an important

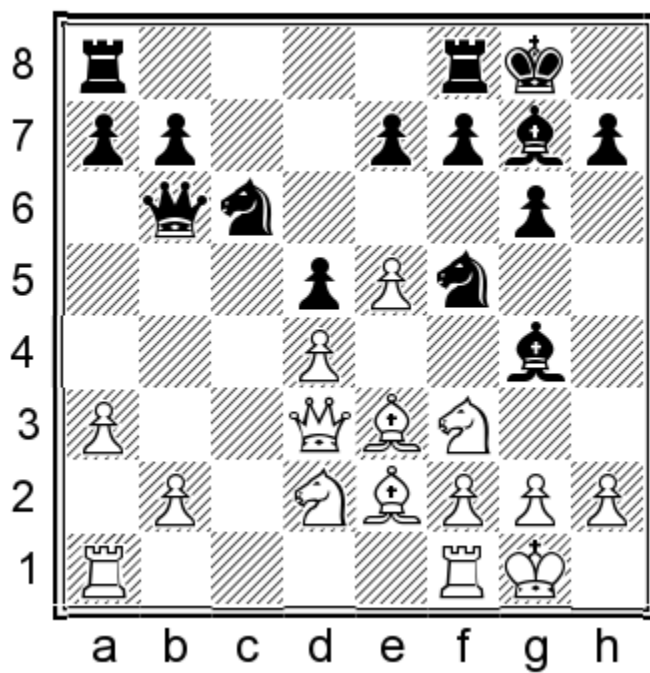
weakness, whereas the classic weakness on d4, which Black does not want to strengthen with the exchange, is already extremely well covered.

10...♞xe3! 11.fxe3 (11.♙xe3 is worse, because the dark squares will continue to be weak and the d4-pawn will remain very exposed: 11...h5! in order to continue with ...♞h6 and after Black exchanges both bishops for the white knights, d4 must fall) 11...♞h6 (attacking the newly created weakness on e3) 12.♙f2 (12.0-0? ♞f5 13.♙a3 0-0 and there is no way for White to defend against ...♞b4, followed by ...♞c2) 12...f6! 13.exf6 0-0! 14.fxe7?! ♞xe7+ and all the black pieces will be concentrated against the e3-weakness (...♞f5, ...♞ae8).

11.0-0?!

11.h3! would have eliminated a large part of the problem; for example, 11...♞xf3 12.♞xf3 ♞xe3 13.fxe3 0-0 14.♙b5! with equality.

11...0-0 12.a3?!



12...♞ac8?

Black rejects an opportunity that would have been even better than the earlier ones to exchange on e3 and created a very serious weakness, with 12...♖xe3! 13.fxe3 (in the event of 13.♗xe3 f6! 14.exf6 ♖xf6, the weakness is now on d4) 13...♙h6! and faced with the threat of ...♙f5, White cannot adequately defend the weakness on e3.

13.b4! a5?!

Here 13...f6! was better.

14.b5!

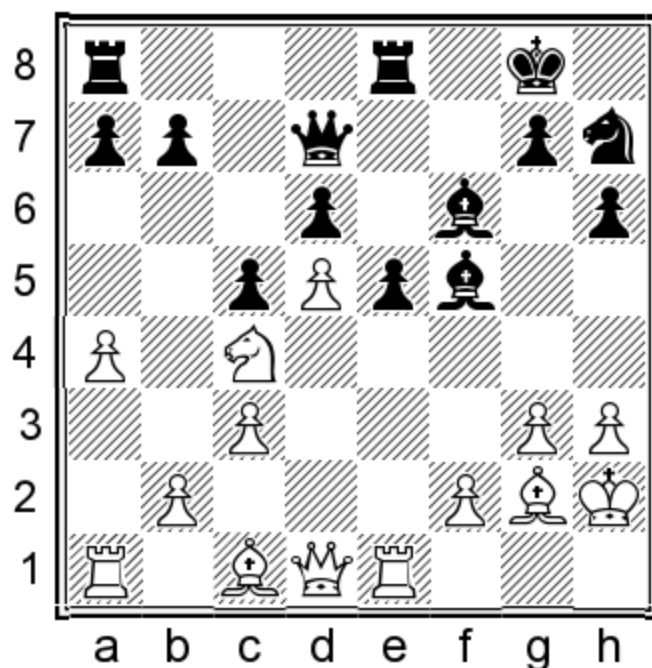
Once the knight is removed from c6, White can adequately cover d4, and the exchange on e3 stops being a problem. The position is balanced.

Outpost squares in the centre are one of the most studied cases of weakness and, therefore, very recognisable for players of all levels. Even so, examples can be found in which they are ignored by at least one of the players, if not by both.

Marta García Martín (2257)

Pablo Vidal Fernández (1916)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2016



At present, the activity of Black's pieces is sufficient to compensate for the importance of the e4-square.

19...♘g5?

Black is the first to show that he is unconcerned about the e4-square, and he exchanges the wrong pieces. Instead, 19...♙g5! would have exchanged the only black piece that is unable to fight for the e4-square, allowing Black to retain equality.

20.h4?

It seems that neither player is aware that the main weakness is the e4-square, and that this might extend to other light squares. White, apparently, in no way wants to exchange his bishop for the black knight, even though this is the most favourable exchange, because it would give him complete control of the e4-square. Instead, he prefers a weakening move, but he does so because he does not see his opponent's resource.

Here, 20.♖xg5! ♗xg5 21.h4 ♖f6 22.♗e4 was the simplest way to demonstrate domination of the light squares, and particularly e4 (22.♘e3! was perhaps even better, because the white bishop can be strong on e4 or h3): 22...♗e7 23.♔d3.

20...♘f7?

Black also fails to take advantage of the opportunity presented to him, due to his not seeing a difficult move; after 20...♗g4! 21.f3, 21...♗xf3! was the difficult candidate; Black is better.

21.♘d2 b6 22.♘e4

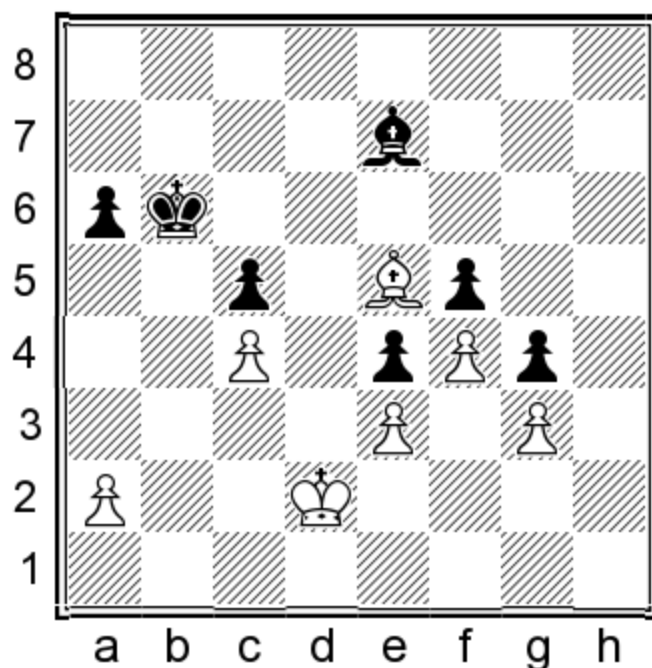
Finally White has exploited the key square and now has a clear advantage, although the game became complicated later.

We return to an example where the weakness is hidden, and at least one of the players does not see it for a long time. In the end, the player who sees the weakness first, takes advantage of it and wins the game.

Javier Riezu Resano (1201)

Xulio Del Prado Rodríguez (1444)

Spanish Rapid Championship U10 2017



This position can be evaluated as equal, but over the next few moves it can be perceived that all the time there is a latent idea: White has a weakness on g3, which can be attacked by the bishop from h4 if the white king moves too far away. Awareness of this weakness is an opportunity for Black and a danger for White, if he ignores it.

41.♔c3?!

This move does not lose, and therefore it maintains equality, but it clearly shows that White has not seen the problem in his position. It was much easier to share out the tasks like this; the bishop prevents penetration by the king via a5 and the king remains within the square of the g4-pawn, so there will be no surprises. 41.♙c3! is the move that expresses this idea.

41...♔a5

41...♙h4!? was Black's first opportunity, but the scare could be overcome thanks to the variation 42.gxh4 g3 43.h5 g2 44.h6 g1♙

45.h7, and there is no way to prevent the white pawn from queening – it's a draw.

42.♔b3 ♔b6

Now 42...♙h4?? loses to 43.♙c7#.

43.a4?!

Playing with fire.

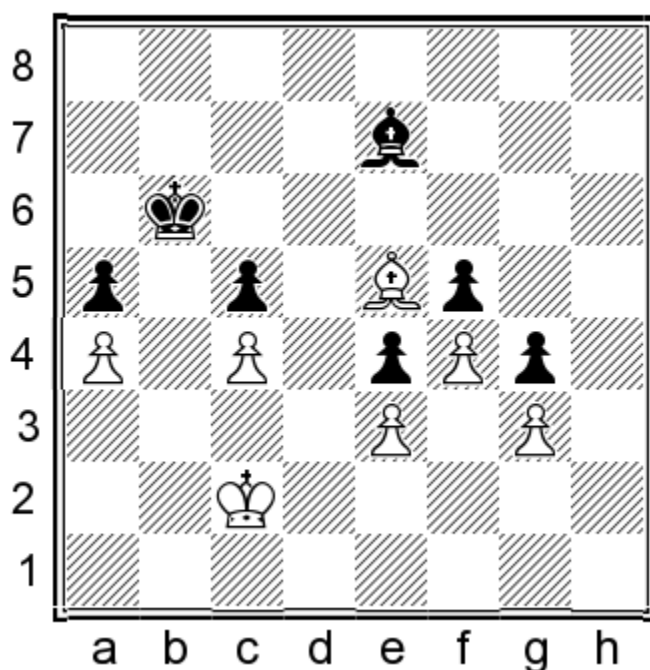
43...a5?!

This loses one of Black's advantages, although the objective evaluation remains the same. Here 43...♙h4!? would have drawn as at move 41.

44.♔c2?!

White continues to ignore Black's only trick.

44.♙c3! would have left the problems solved.



44...♙h4!

A good moment to try it, and perhaps the last chance.

45.gxh4??

Classic confusion in the face of the unexpected. With the queenside and the centre totally closed, White could have accepted losing a pawn and created a **fortress** with 45.♔d1! ♕xg3 46.♔e2 ♕h4 47.♔f1, followed by ♔g2, and the black king will never be able to get through.

45...g3 46.♕c3

Or 46.h5 g2 47.h6 g1♔ 48.h7 ♔h2+ and Black wins.

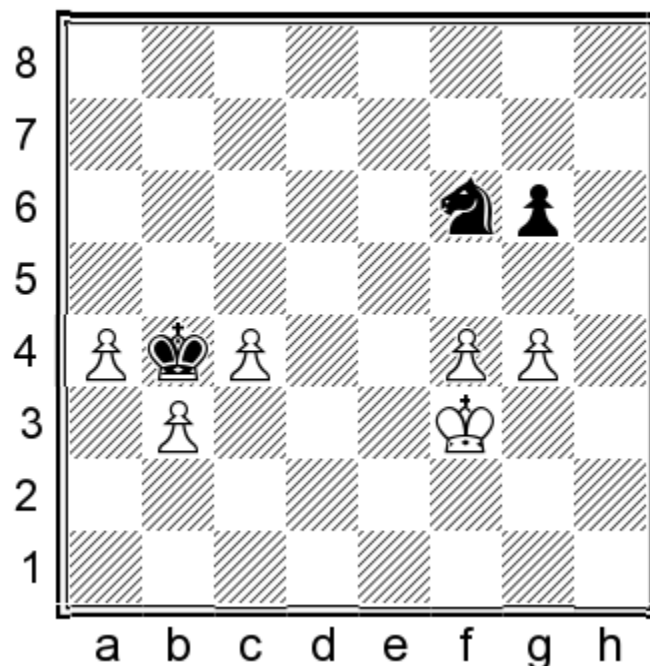
46...g2 0-1

There is a clearly static type of weakness, which is much easier to see, and a dynamic type of weakness. The latter depends on the pieces which remain on the board and their functionality; logically, it leads to more errors.

Luca Rey Chimera (1571)

Gerard Anyo Pla (2039)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2020



White has a veritable army of pawns and should win, but not easily. What is certain is that Black is threatening to take on b3.

42.f5?

With this move, White shows he is not aware that a weakness can appear in his position. Such is his feeling of control, or perhaps his haste to create another passed pawn, before Black takes on b3.

A) 42.g5! was the simplest option, because it ensures the creation of a passed pawn on the kingside, and perhaps even two; for instance, 42...♞e8 43.f5 (quite simple, although, for example, 43.♔e4 ♞g7 44.♔e5 ♞f5 45.♔e6 ♞h4 46.♔f6 ♔a5 47.c5 also wins, with the same story as in the 43.f5 line) 43...gxf5 44.♔f4 ♞g7 45.g6 ♔a5 46.c5 and the three pawns queen on their own, thanks to White's ability to lose tempi (the knight cannot move because the f5-pawn would fall);

B) 42.♔g3, with the idea of ♔g3-h4-g5, also wins, because if 42...♔xb3 43.a5 ♔xc4 44.a6 ♞e8 45.♔h4 ♔d5 46.♔g5 ♔e4 47.a7 ♞c7 48.♔xg6 ♔xf4 49.g5 and the g-pawn queens.

42...g5!

This is the problem with the procedure chosen by White. He has been left with a fixed weakness on g4; his king is tied to its defence and can do nothing useful.

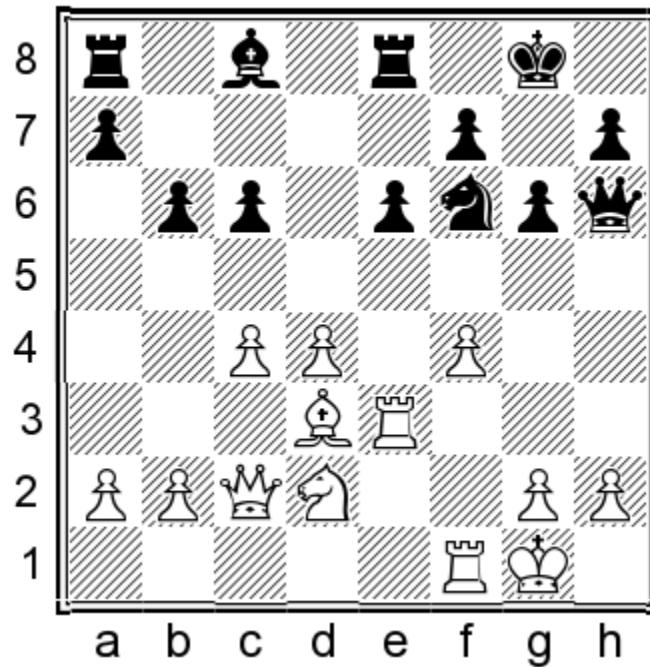
43.♔g3 ♞d7!

The knight can just waste tempi. Of course not 43...♔a5?, because of 44.c5; and not 43...♔xb3? either, because of 44.a5. A knight can hardly ever deal with three pawns.

44.♔f3 ♞f6 45.♔g3 ♞d7 46.♔f3 ♞f6 47.♔g3 ♞e4+ 48.♔g2 ♞f6 49.♔g3 ½-½

At times, a weakness goes undetected because it has only recently appeared, and we have seen that it can take time to adjust to changes.

Gabriel Quispe Arteaga (2011)
Aimer Del Carmen Hernández (1399)
Salobreña Spanish Championship U12 2015



20. ♘e4?

In this case, White, who had a crushing attacking position, plays ♘e4, indifferent to the new weakness he is creating in his position.

20. ♕e2!?±.

20... ♔g7?

Black fails to detect it, which is normal because it has presented itself in an unexpected fashion, and the game finishes with an irreproachable victory for White.

The lesson here is that you have to be on the lookout all the time and that it is not much use being on the lookout if you do not also have faith.

Here, 20...♘g4! 21.♖h3 ♔g7 22.♕c3 ♖d8 would have made it plain that the weakness on d4 has become serious, and it would have turned the game around.

21.f5! ♘xe4 22.♖xe4 gxf5?

22...♖d8! 23.f6 , with a clear advantage.

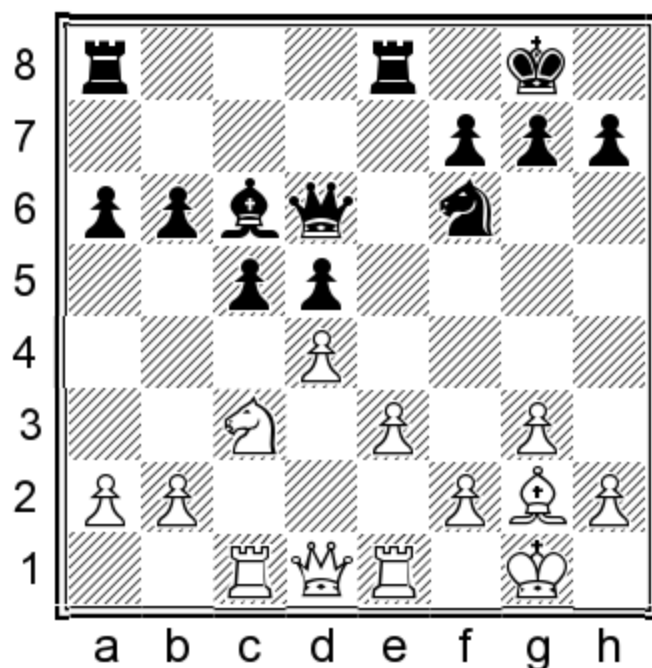
**23.♖xf5 ♗b7 24.♖f3 ♔f8 25.♕f2 ♔e7 26.♕h4+ f6 27.♖g4 ♕f7
28.♖xf6 ♔d7 1-0**

The majority of examples I have presented have been of a non-classic kind because the concept of weakness is very broad, and because they are the most difficult to detect. But this is not always the case; sometimes, the weaknesses which are ignored (or are not taken advantage of) are of a classic kind. In such cases, there are always other reasons for not focussing on them. We will look at an example and try to guess what they might be.

Pedro Antonio Ginés Esteo (2115)

Salvador Perez Beltrán (1699)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U12 2015



White could force the creation of the classic hanging pawns, and with only two minor pieces on the board, that structure tends to be rather weak, but it still has the prestige of a certain level of dynamism.

16. ♘a4?

Why does White not play 16.dxc5 yet? In this case, I believe it is because he underestimates Black's ...c4, but also because he did not consider the direct tactical variation 16.dxc5! bxc5, and now White can play energetically with 17. ♘xd5!; for example, 17... ♖xd5 18.e4! with a clear advantage.

But even without this little combination he should have exchanged on c5. 17. ♘a4!? is also favourable to White.

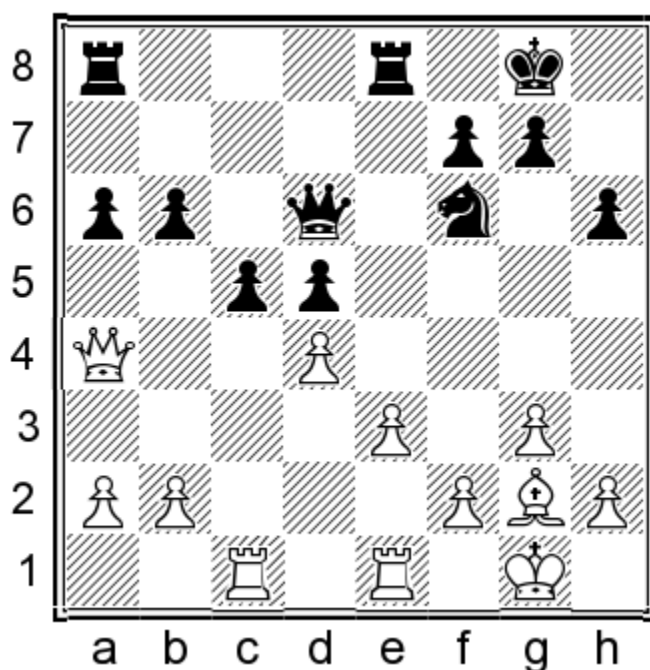
16... ♖xa4!?

This move is correct, provided that it is followed by ...c4. If that is not the case, the exchange of another piece works in White's favour.

The immediate 16...c4, creating a mobile majority, and with control of e4, is also favourable to Black but requires an evaluation of the capture on b6: 17.♘xb6 ♖ab8 18.♘a4 ♙xa4 19.♙xa4 ♖xb2±.

17.♙xa4 h6?

It seems that Black is not in the least aware of the fact that his pawns on c5 and d5 are a weakness. After 17...c4!± Black would not only have a mobile majority on the queenside, but also control of the break square on e4; furthermore, his knight is the ideal minor piece.



18.dxc5

18.♙a3! might have been even better, based on the same theme of weaknesses on d5 and c5; for example, 18...♖ac8 19.♖ed1 ♖ed8 20.dxc5 bxc5 21.♙xd5! ♘xd5 22.e4±.

18...bxc5 19.♖ed1 ♖ab8 20.♙c2

20.b3!, preparing ♙xd5, was stronger; for instance, 20...♖ed8 21.♙a3 ♖bc8 22.♙xd5!, with a big advantage.

In contrast, the immediate 20.♙xd5? was not clear after 20...♘xd5 21.e4 ♙e5 22.exd5 ♖xb2.

20...♖bc8

And now instead of 21.b3?!, which failed to make use of the little tactical detail available over the last few moves, White could have played

21.♙xd5! ♘xd5 22.e4

, winning a pawn.

How to avoid Error 23

Although this error, like the previous one, is related to weaknesses, it is very different, and the suggestions for avoiding it will also be very different.

Developing the concept of weaknesses is the key to playing better in such positions. And that can only be done by studying a lot of positions.

The first recommendation is to study the books *Small Steps to Giant Improvement* by Sam Shankland and *The Chess Café Puzzle Book 2* by Karsten Müller. The second is to solve the puzzles in Jacob Aagaard's *Positional Play*. In both cases, other similarly useful books can be used.

Error 24 - Not recognising the importance of colour

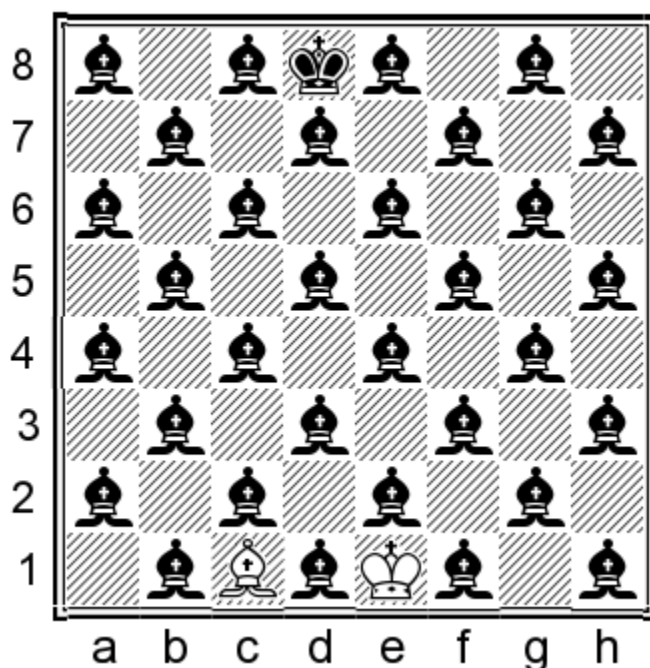
When you attack on squares of one colour, your opponent's opposite-coloured bishop is completely useless for defence.
(Grigory Serper)

Many are the errors which are made because a player does not understand the importance of colour. When so many players do not understand it, it is probably because it has been poorly explained,

has not been given the correct relevance, and does not feature among the most popular strategic postulates. Jacob Aagaard makes a big contribution in his book *Attacking Manual 1*, Chapter 3, ‘Add some Colour to your Play’. The summary is that all the pieces (except the rook) have a bias towards one colour, a bias that we must discover and understand.

But apart from this book, a few odd chapters in others, and a small number of articles on the internet, the topic has been neglected in chess literature, especially its version of bishop and knight versus a bishop pair, although this deficit, like all those relating to investigative work in chess, is being corrected.

By way of reflection, I invite you to observe the following diagram.



In this curious position, impossible in a tournament game ☺, which Borislav Ivkov presented in his book *Bad Bishop*, we can discover how extensive the control of one colour can be. I invite you to think about the correct result for a couple of minutes. You will soon see that Black cannot win, despite being 31 bishops up, but it will have taken you longer, if you have discovered it, to conclude that White wins with ease, as he controls the only useful colour on this board.

What is more, he mates in seven moves in a simple way that I invite you to find.

There are at least three situations where control of colour is a central element of strategy:

- 1) opposite-coloured bishops with major pieces present;
- 2) bishop and knight fighting against two bishops;
- 3) one side is the exchange up but weak on squares of a certain colour.

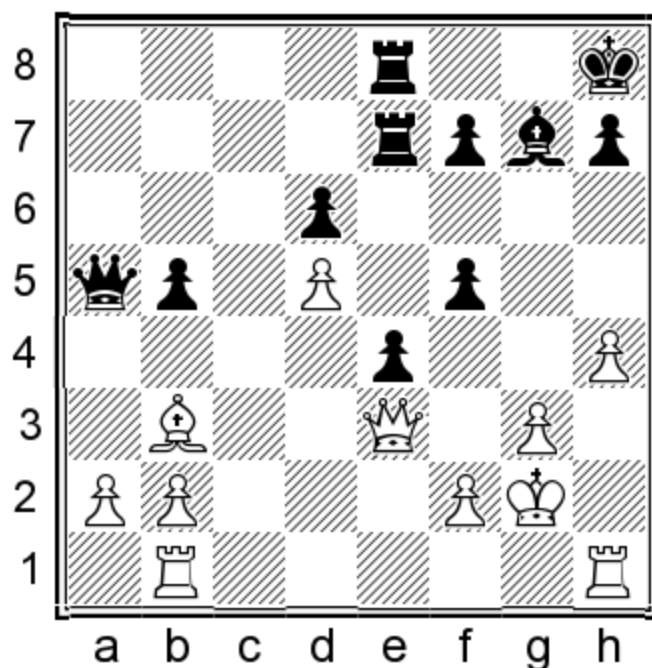
Each of these has some common elements and others which are different. The main common element is that the most effective plan is to attack the opponent's weak colour, which should be done energetically. It may seem the same, but it is usually less important to defend your own colour, although this should not be discounted. We shall present at least one example of situations 1 and 3.

We begin with the most popular: opposite-coloured bishops with major pieces present.

Víctor Moreno Royano (1578)

Francisco Orantes Taboada (1939)

Salobreña Spanish Junior Championship 2014



The fundamental element of this position is the difference between the bishops. The white bishop is obstructed by its own d5-pawn, whereas the black one has clear diagonals, but even the capture on b2 would be a very minor prize. Its greatest effectiveness will be achieved by weakening the dark squares closer to the white king; specifically, the ...f4 break is the ideal objective.

24...♖e5?

Black has not yet gone deeply into the position. The correct plan was to try to play ...f4 as soon as possible. Opposite-coloured bishops, in the presence of major pieces, require energetic play.

24...♘e5! was best, preparing to strike on the dark squares with ...f4, although this is not yet a threat. After 25.♖bc1 (25.♙g5 indeed allows 25...f4!) 25...♖g8!, the advance ...f4 is certainly a real threat: 26.♔f1 ♖ee8 (preparing the transfer of the queen to the kingside) 27.♖c6 ♙d8 28.a4 ♙f6, now again ...f4 is threatened and after 29.axb5 f4 Black's attack is unstoppable.

25.♖hc1! ♙d8

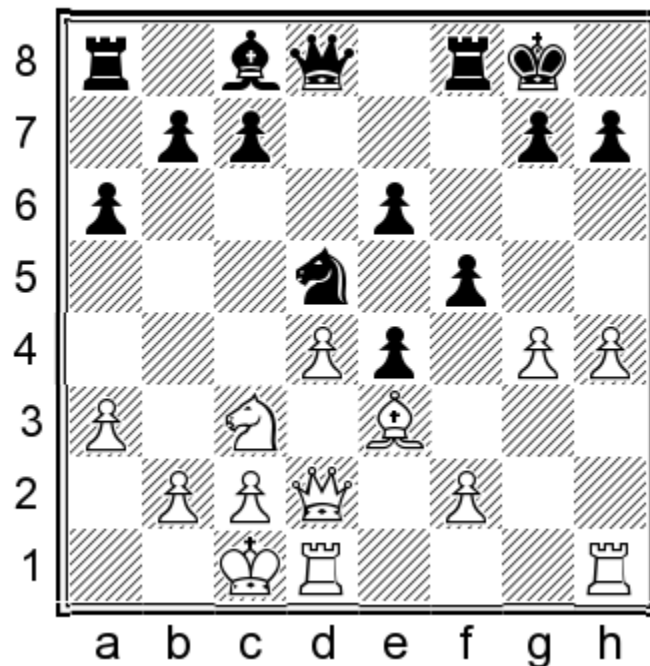
Now, instead of 26.♔g5?, after which White ended up losing in 37 moves, he could have continued the struggle with

26.♖c6!±.

Francisco Orantes Taboada (2138)

Gerard Ayats Llobera (2012)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2015



The knights are going to be exchanged and we shall enter a very characteristic phase: there will only be major pieces and bishops of opposite colour. The strategy in such positions is well defined but, in spite of that, errors are common. One of the reasons might be that the players are unaware, or cannot believe, that the importance of the bishop (the least strong piece remaining) can be so great.

14.♘xd5?

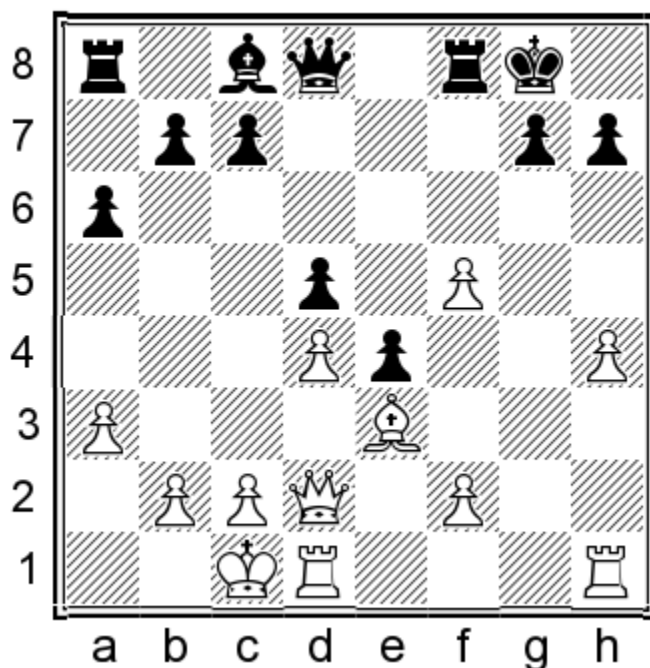
A very important error. This move opens up the range of Black's bishop as far as the kingside, and this radically changes the evaluation.

The continuation 14.gxf5! exf5 15.♘xd5 ♔xd5 16.♙f4!, blocking the f5-pawn and preventing ...f4, looks erroneous because of 16...♚a2?!, but the black queen is useless on a2 and after 17.♚c3± White prepares ♖dg1 and ♙e5, and even d5, after which all the white pieces converge on g7 (notice that the c8-bishop can do nothing) and the black queen on a2 is isolated from all its other pieces.

14.♙g5 was also better than the move in the game, but not as strong.

14...exd5 15.gxf5!?

15.g5 was another logical attempt; with opposite-coloured bishops, the fight is for control of colour, and if White managed to play ♙f4 (or g6 first) he would be better, despite being a pawn down. However, Black can prevent this with 15...f4! 16.♙xf4 ♙g4!, activating his bishop, and is then much better.



15...♙xf5?!

The natural move, but not even the second best.

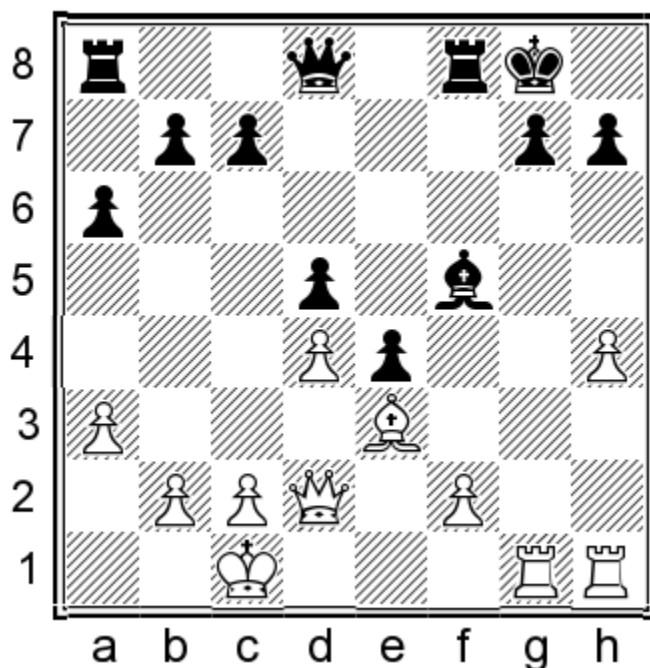
15...♖xf5!? was much more effective in opposing White's best plan, which is to advance his h-pawn; for example, 16.h5 ♚e8 17.♚e2?!

h6! 18.♖dg1 ♔h7 19.♔g4 ♕f7 (19...♖g5!? 20.♗h4 ♖xg1+ 21.♖xg1 ♕f5, followed by ...♕f7 and ...♖f8 or ...♖g8) 20.♗h4 ♕f8 (20...♕d7? 21.♖g6 ♖f7, followed by ...♕f5, clearly favouring Black.

However, the best move was 15...h5! , because it ensures an outpost for the bishop on g4, which will stop the attack, as happened in the game.

16.♖dg1?

It was essential to play 16.h5!, followed by ♕e3-f4-e5, ♖dg1 and eventually h6, which offers sufficient compensation, as Black is not so successful with ...h6; for example, 16...h6 (16...♕f6 17.♖dg1 ♖f7 18.♖g3 ♔h8? 19.♕f4 and White is clearly better) 17.♖dg1 ♔h7 18.♕f4 ♖f7 19.♕e5 ♕d7 20.♖g3 ♖g8 21.♖hg1, and neither side seems to be able to make progress in this position.



White has no suspicion of how his attack is going to be paralysed.

16...h5!

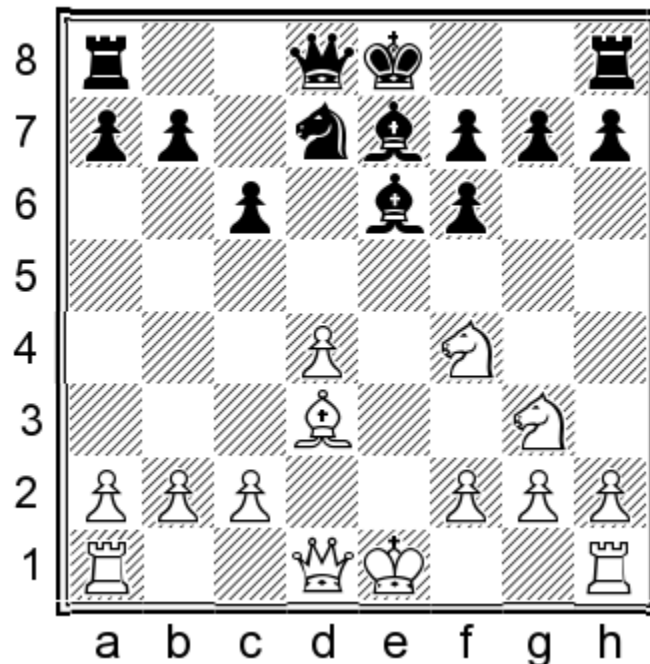
An excellent decision, with no fear of ghosts. With other pieces on the board, this move would be an irresponsible weakening, But now

Black's bishop will be deployed on g4 and will be an **unopposed piece**. In other words, it will be worth 4 points and will practically force an exchange sacrifice on that square.

17. ♖g5 ♗g4 18. ♖g1 ♔d6

And from now on, White will have nothing better than to prepare to make an insufficient exchange sacrifice on g4 because otherwise Black will keep progressing, slowly but inexorably.

Julio Centeno Mendoza (2191)
Alejandro Fuentes Guinot (1759)
 Spanish Team Championship U14 2022



In spite of the apparent calm of this position (Exercise 29), White is creating a very serious positional threat.

11... ♔b6?

Attaching no importance to it. 11... ♘f8! was necessary, in order to capture on e6 with the knight: 12. ♘xe6 (if 12. ♘gh5, then 12... ♖g8! and despite Black's last two strange moves, everything is covered;

for example, 13.c3 g6 14.♘g3 f5 15.0-0 ♔c7=, followed by ...0-0-0 if necessary) and here comes the paradox, or the new postulate: 12...♘xe6!, and in spite of the doubled pawns Black has no problems, because he can play on equal terms in the struggle for the light squares, given that his kingside pawns can restrict White's bishop. (In contrast, 12...fxe6? 13.♙c4 would lead to a similar position to the game, where Black's weakness on the light squares – especially e6 – gives White a very clear advantage.)

12.♘xe6 fxe6

Now, with bishops of opposite colours, the weakness on the light squares is decisive.

13.♔h5+ ♔f8 14.0-0-0 c5 15.d5! ♘e5 16.f4 ♘xd3+ 17.♖xd3 c4

And now White should continue:

18.dxe6 ♔xe6 19.♖dd1

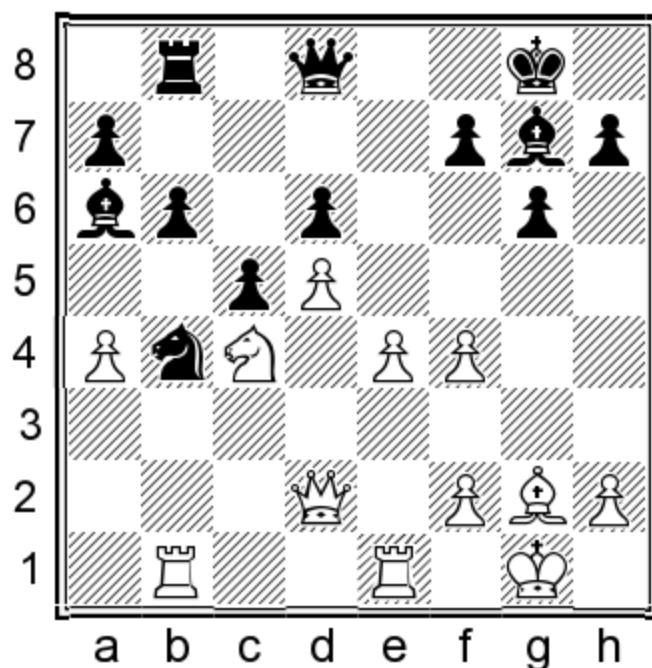
Intending 20.♖he1, and White is clearly better.

Next, we tackle the third topic of this section: positions in which one side is the exchange up. In this fragment, neither player seems very convinced of the enormous importance of the dark squares.

Daniel Roldan Marques (1644)

Héctor Gómez Sanjuán (1678)

Salobreña spanish Championship U12 2013



This position arises from a well-known exchange sacrifice in the Modern Benoni Defence. Black is the exchange down, and if he exchanges his a6-bishop for the c4-knight, there will be bishops of opposite colours. Right now, White's main weakness is f4; his bishop cannot defend it, the knight might be exchanged, and the rooks do not usually do this task well. But of the various moves to defend the knight, there is one rook move which helps quite a lot.

20. ♖f1?

Not 20. ♘e3? ♔h4! and there is no good way to defend f4; after 21. f5 ♕e5 22. h3 ♞d3, at this point the hole on f4, which several black pieces can occupy at will, and which cannot be covered, creates a strong impression.

Instead, 20. ♖bc1! ♕xc4 21. ♖xc4 practically prevents the natural 21... ♔h4 (21... ♕h6 is better, but here too 22. e5 limits the damage) in view of 22. e5! dx e5 (22... ♕xe5? fails tactically to 23. ♖xb4!) 23. d6 and this pawn is another advantage for White, and too important for Black to allow.

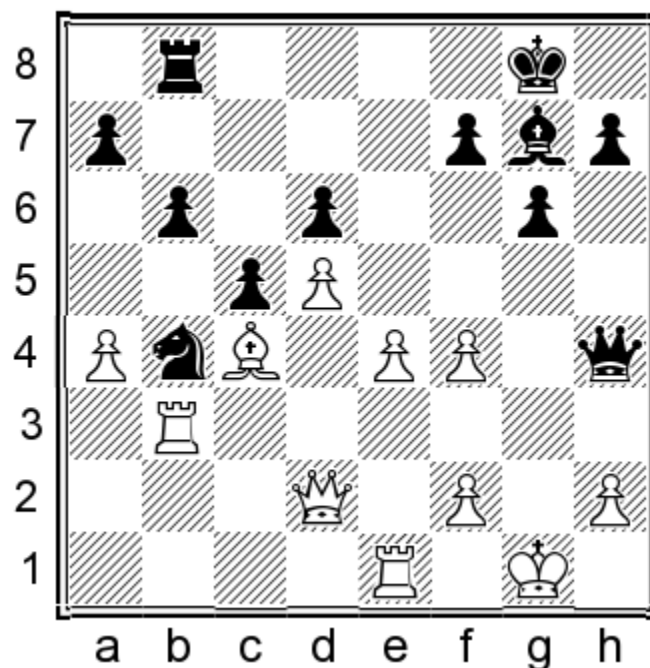
20...♗xc4!

Exchanging the bishop which cannot attack the weak squares for a knight, which could defend them, is usually a good operation.

21.♗xc4 ♕h4

Bringing the queen to the attacking position.

22.♖b3



22...a6?

A strange continuation, attacking the light squares instead of the weakened black ones; the thematic preparation of the ...b5 break might be the explanation. What is difficult to understand is Black's rejection of 22...♗h6!, possibly because of 23.♖f3 ♕g4+ 24.♖g3 ♕xf4, which allows the queen exchange 25.♕xf4, but after 25...♗xf4 26.♖f3 ♗e5 Black has two pawns for the exchange, total control of the dark squares, and will be able to prepare ...a6/...b5.

23.♗f1 b5 24.axb5 axb5 25.♖h3 ♕e7? 26.♖a3

Instead, with 26.e5! dxe5 27.d6! White could have achieved a clear advantage.

26...♔h4 27.♖h3 ♔f6! 28.e5 ♔e7

With 28...♔f5, intending to bring the knight more into the game with ...♞c2 and ...♞d4, Black could have maintained equality.

29.♙g2 ♖d8 30.e6

With a clear advantage.

How to avoid Error 24

This error might be very abstract for finding it in your own games, given that it will almost always be masked by other themes.

All I can recommend is that you should pay more attention to this theme in your games and that you should study all the chapters that you find in this topic on books. I draw your attention particularly to Aagaard's *Attacking Manual*, Müller's *Chess Café Puzzle Book 2*, and *Mastering Chess Middlegames* by Alexander Panchenko.

Finally, I advise you to study this error together with Error 6.

Error 25 - Underestimating an advantage in space

Space advantage is one of the easiest concepts to understand, and probably for that reason, it often comes up in discussions about the evaluation of a position. Try asking a group of students to explain how they evaluate a position and in several of their answers, space advantage will appear, which is then poorly interpreted or simply ignored during their games. One might suspect that in some cases the reason is that it leads to slow games that are not to everyone's liking.

A space advantage is produced when one of the players has his central pawns more advanced, generally with one (or all) of them blocked; it is more important when all the minor pieces are on the

board and much less so as these are exchanged. In such a scenario, pawn advances, if they do not free the position, are usually weakening. And when there are no freeing advances, it becomes a bind, and the game becomes an unpleasant crush, which all players learn to fear and try to avoid.

Perhaps one of the reasons for not ascribing importance to a space advantage is the number of theoretical positions in which it can occur, which makes us think that if it arises in so many of these positions, it cannot be such a big advantage.

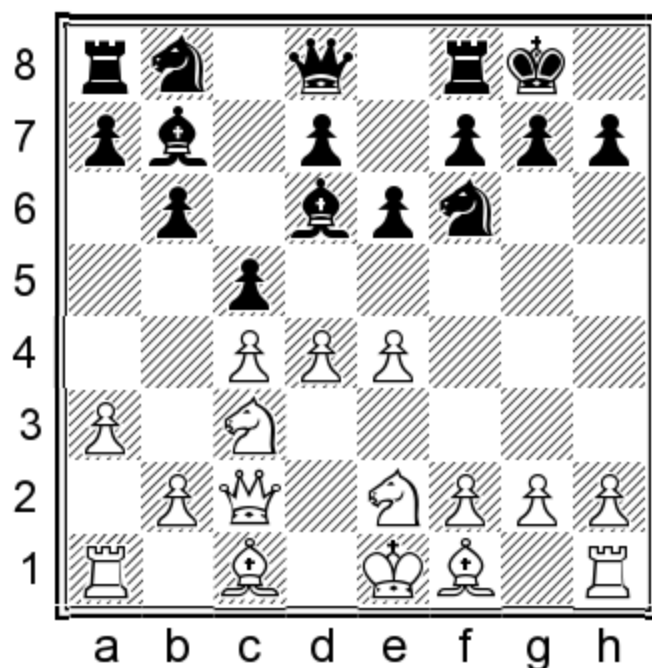
And doubtless, the other reason is the slow character of the games it produces. Many players want to play neither with the space advantage nor against it. The words ‘Maroczy Bind’ produce the same fear and rejection.

The first example shows the most common expression of this error: the refusal to construct the bind.

Pablo Baquedano Coarasa (1998)

Juan Plazuelo Pascual (2335)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2015



Exercise 30

Black has just played 8... c5, which can be a good way of reducing the strength of the threat of e5, but it does not work at all well against the other natural white pawn advance.

9. ♖g5?

It is very striking that White refuses to play 9.d5!, which builds a solid pawn chain, gives him a permanent space advantage, and leaves the b7-bishop out of play, as well as making it very difficult for the b8-knight to become active.

The refusal to build such an advantage is difficult to explain; it may be due to seeing ghosts of sudden possible activity, or simply to laziness about closed and slow positions.

After 9...exd5 10.exd5! (10.cxd5 can also be played; for instance, 10...♖e8 11.f3±) 10...♖e8, even though the e2-knight is momentarily pinned, White's development flows easily; for

example, 11.♔g5 followed by 0-0-0 and Black cannot break out of the bind, for example: 11...a6 (11...b5 12.♘xb5) 12.♘e4 ♔e7 13.♔xf6 ♔xf6 14.♘d6 and White is better.

9...cxd4 10.♘xd4

And now after

10...h6!

, instead of the game move 10...♔e5=,

11.♔h4 ♘c6

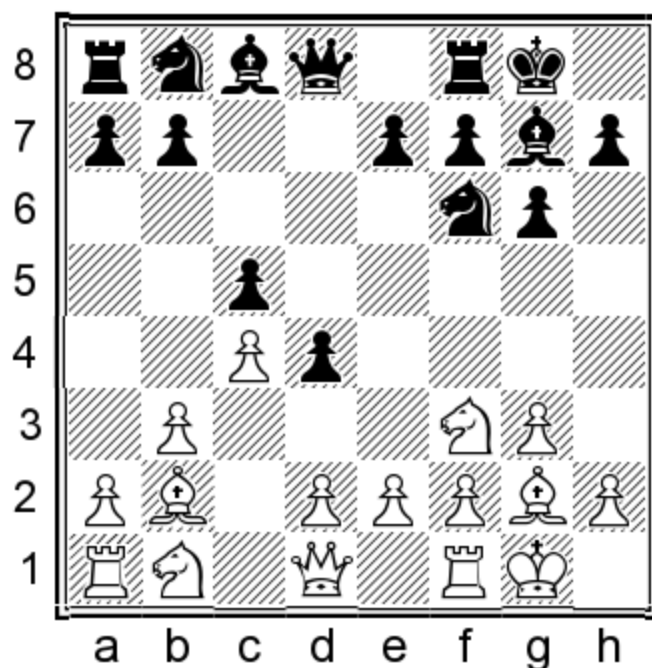
the black position is even better. In any case, you only need to observe the great activity of Black's knight and bishop on the queenside, which after 9.d5 would have remained hemmed in, to be convinced that it was a disastrous decision.

Now, let us look at a position where the bind has been created. Then, the most surprising error, but a very common one, is not destroying it while we are in time to do so. The only explanation is failure to ascribe any importance to the advantage in space.

Antonio Rodríguez Mellado (2007)

Francisco Orantes Taboada (2138)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2015



White has allowed his opponent to seize more space, leaving the queen's bishop and knight out of play. It is unusual for such a strategy to be correct, but it can happen, as is the case here. But for that to be so, the side who incurs the bind must be prepared to break it.

8.d3?

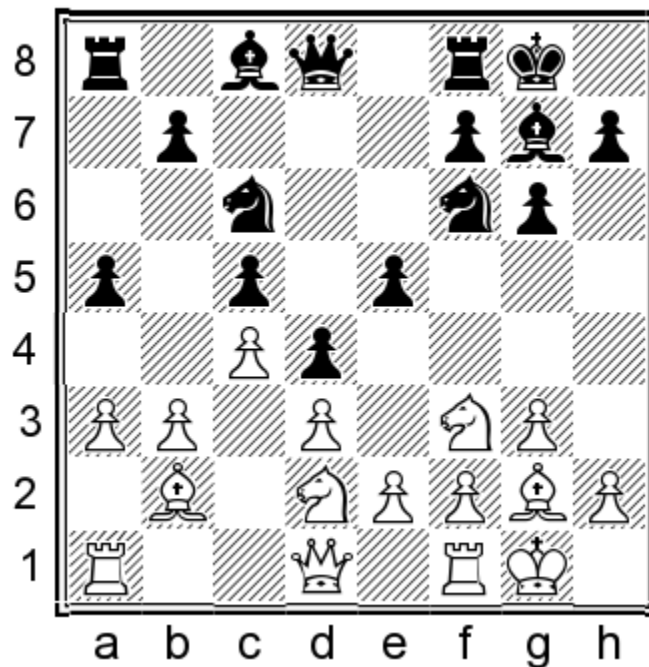
Allowing Black to consolidate his pawn chain and condemning some of his pieces to lengthy inactivity. Yet, this has been played a few times, although with generally bad results, and by only one player with a rating above 2400.

In this case, the correct pawn break is 8.b4!, as has been played in a few games, and this is almost the only way of preventing the consolidation of Black's advantage. Other moves which have also been employed here are not effective; for example, 8.e3?! does not work so well because of 8...♘c6+, while 8.a3 can be answered with 8...a5! and now it would be necessary to play 9.b4, but under worse conditions.

8...♞c6

Now there is no way to break the black chain and White will be crushed.

9.♞bd2 e5 10.a3 a5

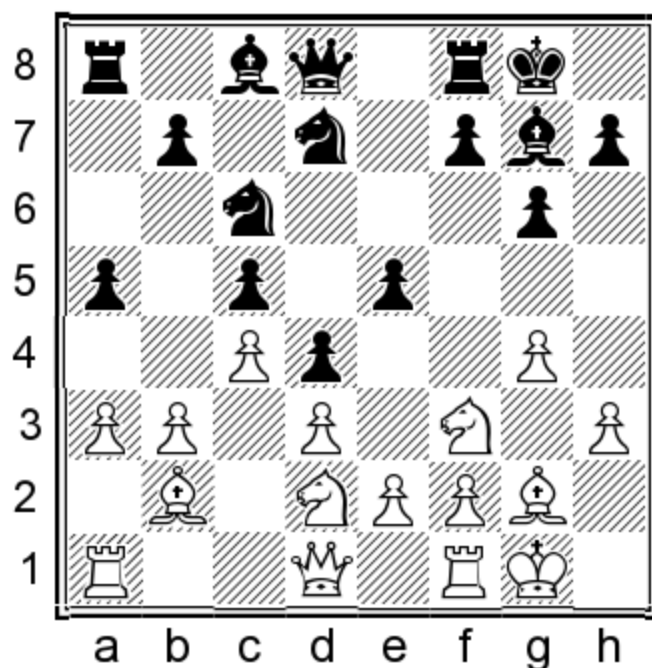


With each move, Black keeps consolidating his tremendous ring of pawns. If we look at White's minor pieces, we can see how short they are of decent moves.

11.h3?!

In these positions, it is common to make some kind of pawn advance and for it to be weakening, as is the case here. 11.♞e1 was more natural, although claustrophobic, trying to exchange a piece; for example, 11...♙e6 12.♞e4 and even though the exchange is favourable for Black, I prefer 12...♞d7 and if 13.♙c1, then 13...h6, denying the white pieces any promising moves.

11...♞d7 12.g4?



Completing the error began with h3 (see **Error 22**). When one feels short of space, it is natural to create unnecessary weaknesses disguised as freeing advances. It is hard to settle for just sitting and waiting for punishment, but this decision contrasts with the lack of a reaction a few moves earlier when it was still effective. The obvious conclusion should be: **Pay more attention to the creation of binds which will be impossible to break later.**

12...h6

Here 12...f5! was stronger.

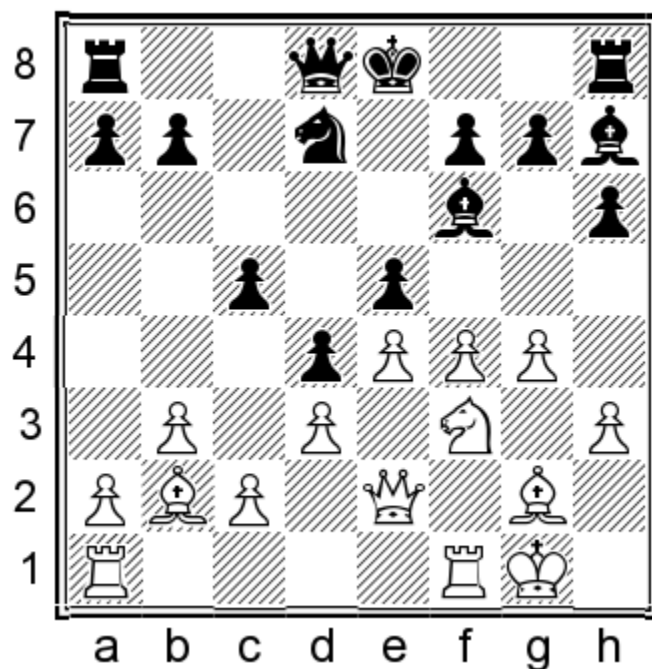
13.e4?!

And White suffered a crushing defeat in the end, about which we shall not go into details.

A space advantage is not consolidated as long as the pawn chain which supports it is not solid. Let us look at a case where it was possible for the chain to be destroyed.

Gabriel Quispe Arteaga (2400)

Iñigo Ortín Blanco (2252)



Black has a space advantage in the centre. White has advanced on the kingside and now chooses the wrong continuation of his plans:

17.f5?

White decides to gain space on the kingside. This move would have been correct if the black king were castled kingside. Taking space on the kingside seems logical if we look at the two black bishops, but it implies slow play, and both bishops might get back into the game.

Precisely in view of the position of the bishop on h7, White should have seized the opportunity to destroy the bind that Black has constructed in the centre, which he could do by playing 17.c3!! . Now Black cannot maintain the central chain, both main links of which are under attack (f4 attacks e5, and c3 attacks d4). Let us consider Black's options here:

- A) 17...exf4? allows 18.e5± ;

B) 17...0-0 drastically changes the nature of the position, and 18.f5! now becomes the best move, followed by an attack on the black king. If 18...dxc3, then 19.♙xc3± and White plans to continue with ♖f2 (or e1) and h4;

C) Finally, 17...dxc3 18.♙xc3 almost forces Black to choose one of the two previous options and White's response is the same: 18...0-0 (18...exf4? 19.e5!+–) 19.f5!, again with a space advantage against Black's castled position, and, therefore, with a big attack.

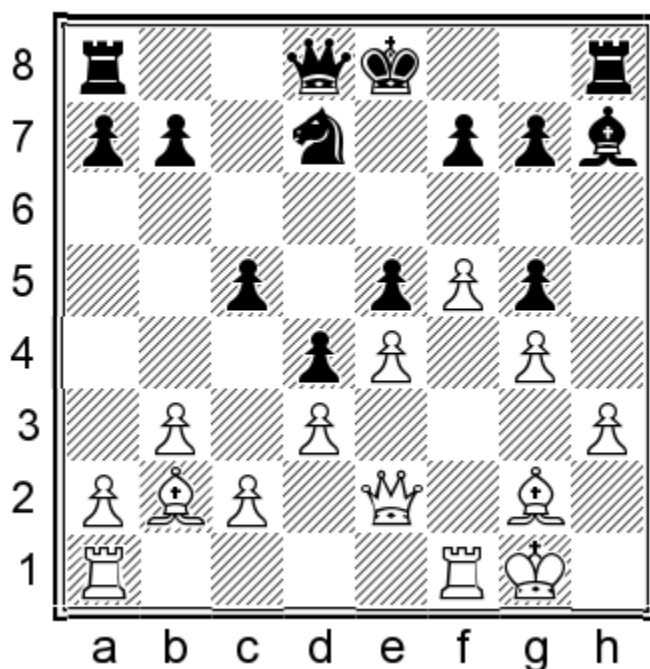
17...♙g5?!

Better was 17...♙g8! and if 18.♙c1, then 18...♙g5!, followed by ...f6: 19.♘xg5 hxg5 20.♙d2 f6±.

18.♘xg5

Correct, provided the plan is followed. 18.c3 was another interesting move in order to destroy the black centre, which is not as solid as it looks; for example, 18...♙e3+ 19.♔h1 f6 20.b4! b6 21.bxc5 bxc5 22.cxd4 cxd4 23.♙c1 ♙xc1 24.♖fxc1±.

18...hxg5



19.a4?!

Allowing the queenside to be closed, after which Black will be left with a small space advantage. Now, for the last time in this game, counting on Black being unable to castle kingside (because of the break on h4), White should have struck at the black pawn chain with 19.c3!, when his position is slightly better.

19...a5 20.♖c1

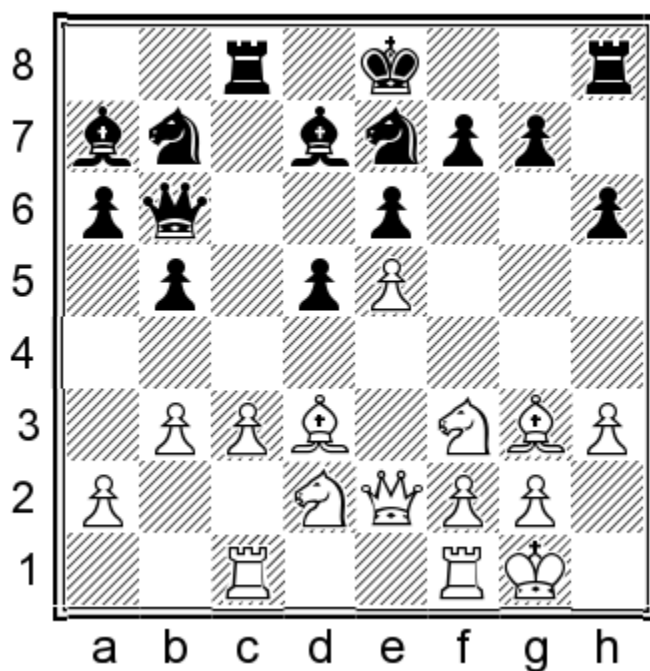
Black stands well. For the rest of the game, see **Error 21**.

A space advantage does not require a total blockade of the centre; one advanced centre pawn is enough. Its main effect is to reduce the effectiveness of some pieces. Knights, deprived of an effective circuit, may suffer especially in such a situation.

Marc Ribera Cebolla (2069)

Julio Suarez Gómez (2307)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2014



White has a typical space advantage, with good possibilities for attacking Black's castled position. Black has just played ...♞a5-b7, moving his knight momentarily to a very bad square, but it threatens to reappear via c5.

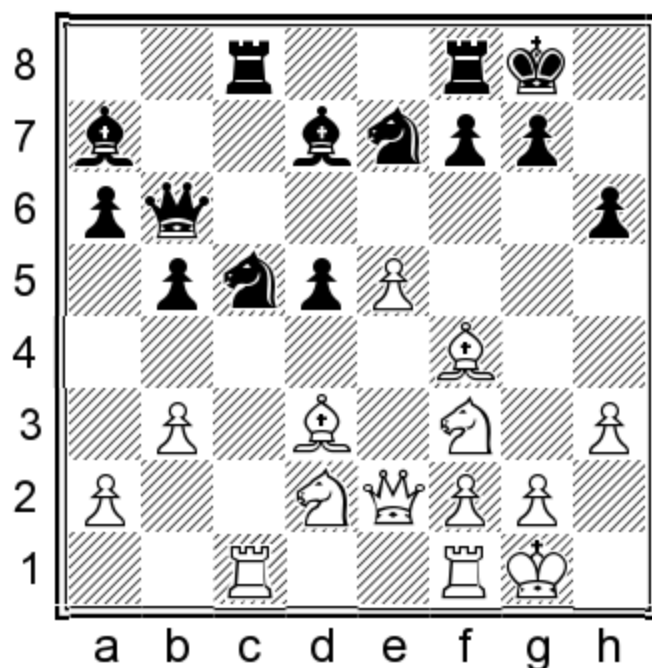
18.c4?

White wants to punish his opponent for not connecting his rooks, but Black can solve that problem in one move. In contrast, the strongest move has an ugly aspect if we only consider the pawn structure; it is, in fact, a strategically **unnatural candidate move**: 18.b4!. This would leave the b7-knight out of play for a long time and would maintain the space advantage, the basis of a future attack, as well as strengthening control and occupation (currently by the two knights) of the key central square d4. For instance, 18...0-0, which is possibly not the best move here, 19.♙b1! ♞d8 20.♚d3 ♞g6 21.h4 ♖e8 22.h5 ♞f8 23.♞b3, followed by ♞bd4, and then it would be possible to consider ♙f4 and ♙xh6 or ♞f3-h2-g4, with the same sacrificial idea in mind.

18...0-0!

Black interprets the new situation well and immediately connects the rooks, frustrating White's plan.

19.cxd5 exd5 20.♙f4!? ♞c5



What might have been a useless knight, now heads for the excellent e6-square.

21.♙b1?

Now, White should not have been thinking about attacking; 21.♙e3 was necessary to equalise.

21...♙f5

And Black is beginning to take control of the game.

How to avoid Error 25

Players who refrain from consolidating a space advantage are those who have grown used to open positions and feel a certain insecurity in closed positions.

They will be able to correct this error by ‘daring’ to face up to more positions of this kind, and so I advise them to do so more often in their games.

If they want to be prepared before experimenting, I recommend to them Boris Gelfand’s book *Positional Decision Making in Chess*

and studying the closed games in the Ruy Lopez or King's Indian of Geller, Karpov and Fischer and of Anand with the white pieces. Logically, adding some openings with closed pawn chains to your repertoire should help, but we shall not count it as a recommendation, at least not for all players. It is merely a suggestion that you should confirm with the opinion of an expert who is familiar with your play.

Error 26 - Neglecting to improve your pieces

If one piece is badly placed, the whole position is bad. (Tarrasch)

Often, we do not have a plan. A clue that can help us is to see which is our worst-placed piece and improve it. Then, we shall be better prepared to confront any eventuality that comes along.

If we become a little more subtle, we can think about how to prevent our opponent from improving his pieces.

Not improving pieces is one of the most typical errors of club players, but it usually goes unnoticed when checking with the engine, because it rarely has a serious influence on the evaluation.

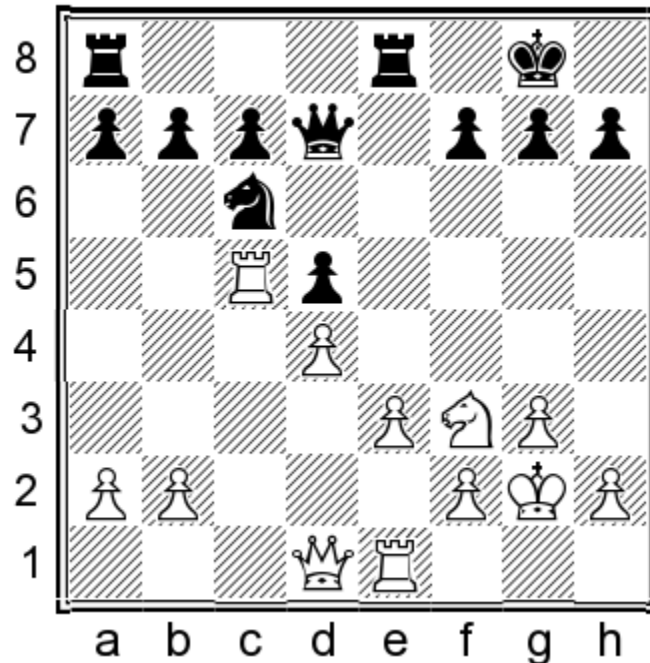
However, it is a key step forward in improving our strategic thinking, and when a certain rating level has been reached (let us say 2000), it is necessary to improve this.

An important observation is that improving pieces is always linked to weaknesses. A piece is improved to defend, attack or occupy a weakness. That is why, if our understanding of weaknesses is improved, such moves will be more easily found.

It is not easy to find any striking examples of this error, which rarely becomes suddenly evident in one move. It is more likely to consist of constantly forgetting to improve a piece until it becomes serious. Therefore, we will only view a few examples but reference this topic in many others.

Celia Pomet Polo

Rubén González Tamarit (1682)
Spanish Rapid Championship U16 2018



The position looks fairly quiet, but Black is under great pressure. The tactical problem is that his pawns at d5 and b7 are vulnerable, and after ♔b3, he would lose one of them.

The strategic problem is the poor position of the black knight on c6. In a case like this, you have to begin solving, if possible, the structural problems of the position while also taking care not to make a tactical error which could lead to material loss.

Specifically, in this case, the position of the c6-knight must be improved, which will also improve the positioning of all the queenside pawns.

16...♖e6?

Black defends the c6-square and is perhaps thinking of an attack on the king (...♖h6), but it does not solve his problems of coordination

and rather makes them worse. The best moves, logically, were knight moves:

A) 16...♞d8! is a typically difficult move, because it moves the knight to the first rank, but by preparing ...c6 and ...♞e6, Black is in time to defend everything, so this was best. The leap 17.♞e5 might look unpleasant for Black, and after 17...♔d6 18.b4 (18.♞d3 ♞e6 19.♞c3 a5=, followed by ...c6) 18...♞e6 19.♞c3 c6 20.♞d3, we could still assess the position as a very slight advantage to White, but it is clear that the problems we perceived in the initial position are no longer there;

B) 16...♞e7?! is less effective, precisely because the knight does not have any destination as good as the e6-square. After 17.♞e5! ♔d6 18.♔f3 f6 19.♞d3 c6 20.♞c2± the white knight will be installed on c5.

17.♔b3!

White has no fear of the rook moving to h6 and strikes at the two weaknesses. Black is forced to make moves that are not very healthy and he loses a pawn with no compensation.

17...♞d6

Instead, 17...♞h6 18.♔xd5 ♔h3+ 19.♔g1 achieves nothing.

18.♞ec1!

18.♔xb7 seems to give Black some compensation; for example, 18...♞b8 19.♔a6 ♞xb2, but after 20.♞ec1! he comes under strong pressure: 20...♞b6 (20...♞xd4? 21.♞xc7!) 21.♔a4± .

18...b6?

And here, instead of 19.♞5c2, which led to a draw White could have decided the game with

19.♞xc6!

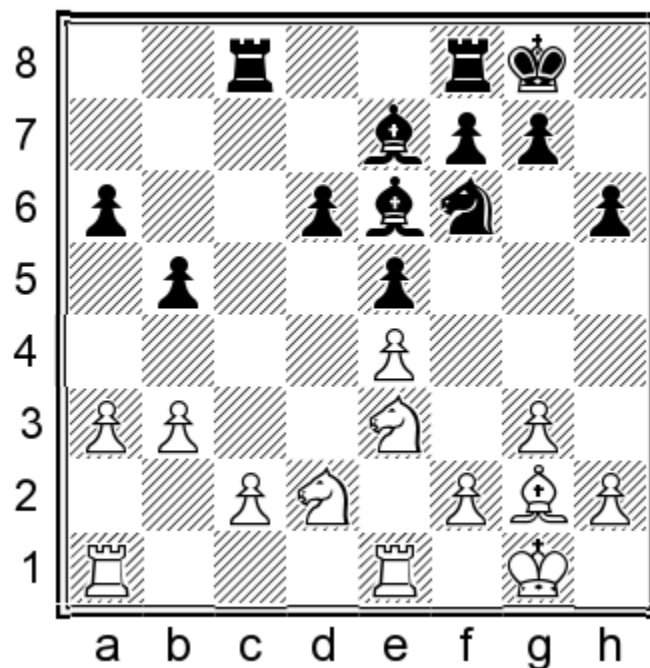
.

In the next position, piece improvement occurs on almost every move. There is logic in this, as there are many weaknesses to deal with, and the pieces are not ideally deployed for this.

Víctor Álvarez Albiol (1759)

Iyan González Guedes (1483)

Spanish Rapid Championship U14 2017



We can detect several weaknesses here: c2 for White and d5 for Black. In addition, the white pieces seem more passive. But the next seven moves bring about some striking changes in the position.

A player does not always ignore the weakness. It may happen that he tries to exploit it with inappropriate moves, sometimes very directly, instead of just increasing the pressure.

Although this was a rapid game (or perhaps for that very reason), the analysis of the next few moves is very instructive.

19...♞g4!?

The idea is good, trying to exchange the defender of the weakness on c2. But the best solution consisted of improving Black's worst piece, the e7-bishop, with 19...♗d8!, heading for b6, after which the threat to the weakness on c2 will become unbearable.

20.♞df1?!

To defend c2, but the variation 20.♞xg4 ♗xg4 21.♞f1! was more effective, exchanging the defending white knight but then improving the other one and defending c2 by tactical means; for instance, 21...♗e6 22.♞e3 ♗g5! 23.♖a2 ♜c7+.

20...♗g5?!

Trying to exchange both defenders of c2 is an imprecise decision, typical of a rapid game. Better was 20...h5 21.♞xg4 hxg4! 22.♞e3 ♗g5, with an advantage for Black.

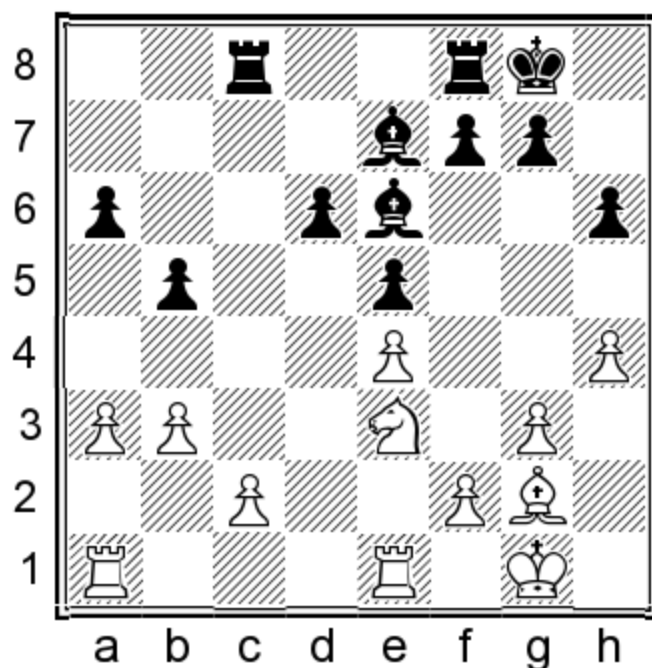
21.♞xg4 ♗xg4 22.h4!

Gaining a very important tempo.

22...♗e7?!

The natural move prevails over the logical move. Once again, the bishop should have sought its best position on b6: 22...♗d8! 23.♞e3 ♗e6 24.a4 ♗b6! 25.axb5 axb5 26.♗f1 ♗xe3! with an edge.

23.♞e3 ♗e6



24.a4!

And as soon as he has a breathing space, White strikes at Black's weaknesses.

24...b4?

Once more, the natural move prevailed, although now it was difficult to discover the counterplay that was possible with 24...g5! 25.hxg5?! (25.axb5 axb5 26.♙f1 gxh4 27.♙xb5±) 25...♙xg5!=.

25.♖ad1 ♖c5 26.♙f1!

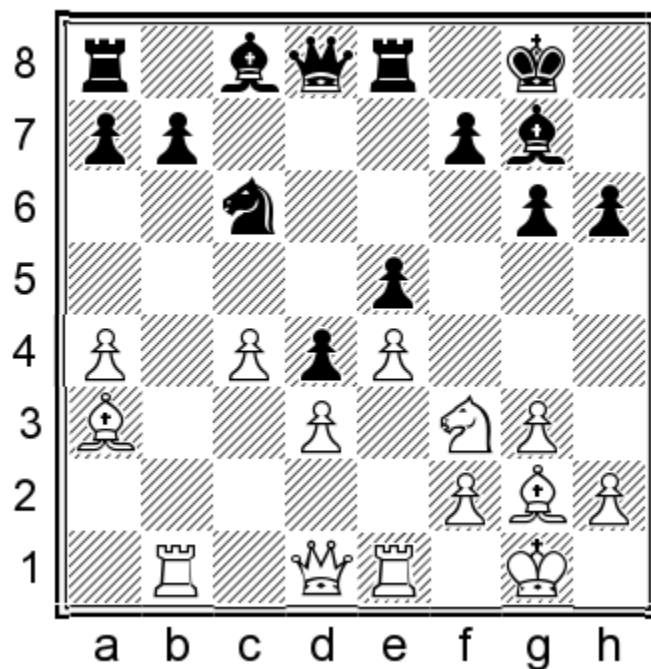
Finally White does improve his bishop.

26...a5 27.♙c4

And suddenly, the most important weakness is the d5-square, which White will occupy and exploit.

We are going to present one final example, featuring a position that could be solved by improving some pieces, but which is also a good example of creating unnecessary weaknesses and facilitating the attack.

Cristian Gómez Logrosan (1861)
Santiago David Díaz Lopez (1565)
 Castilla La Mancha teams 2022



Black is by no means worse, but he should pay some attention to the great activity of the white pieces on the queenside.

16...f5?

Another pseudo-active move (see **Error 22**). I invite the reader to compare the evaluation of an engine both before and after this move.

Black should have begun with 16...♔f8! which improves his worst piece or else exchanges it for White's best piece. In both cases, the improvement of Black's pieces continues; for example, if 17.♔c1 then 17...a5! will follow, providing an excellent support point on b4 for the knight and the bishop, while in the event of 17.♔xf8 ♖xf8 Black could easily improve his pieces with ...♔c7 as well as ...a5 and ...♘b4. In that case, White should think about improving his bishop with the manoeuvre h4, ♔h2, ♔h3.

17.♘h4

Immediately attacking some of the weaknesses that have been created, although 17.exf5! gxf5 18.♘h4 was even better.

17...♙f6 18.exf5 g5

Only two moves later, and Black is already aware that he has ‘messed up’. 18...gxf5 19.♙d5+ ♔h7 20.♙h5 ♖d8 21.f4 was also decisive.

19.♙d5+ ♔h7 20.♙h5 ♖d8 21.♙g6+ ♙xg6 22.fxg6+ ♔h8

And a second pawn will fall – White wins.

How to avoid Error 26

Detecting this error in our own games through analysis with the engine can be difficult, because it does not usually have a great influence on the engine’s evaluation. On the other hand, correcting it is not all that difficult.

The first recommendation is to get into the habit of asking ourselves in our games which of our pieces needs to be improved. Very often, we simply ignore this.

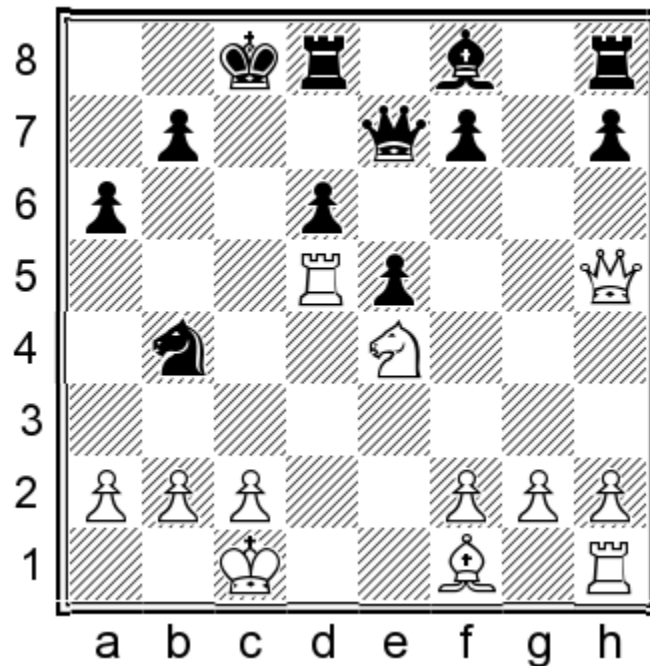
The second is to read and solve the exercises in the following books: *Positional Play* by Aagaard, *The Chess Cafe Puzzle Book 2* by Müller, *Mastering Chess Strategy* by Hellsten and especially *Manoeuvring: The Art of Piece Play* by Dvoretsky.

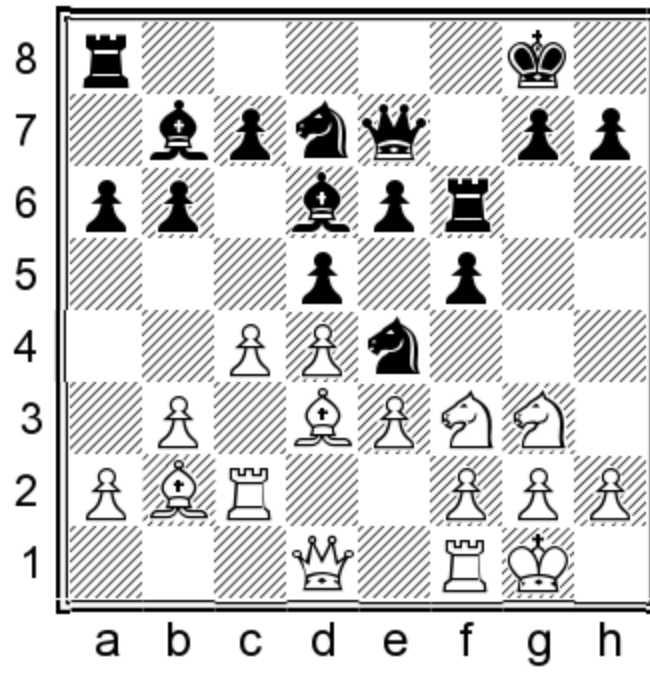
Chapter 6

Positional sacrifices

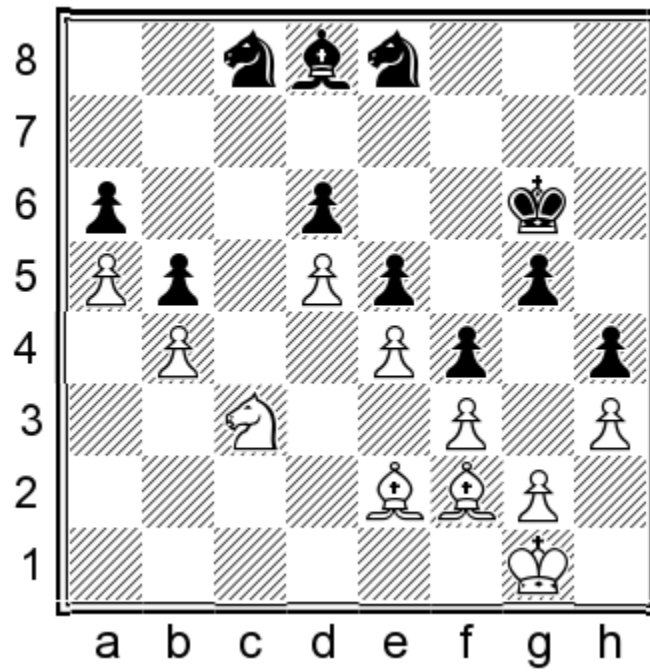
- Error 27 - Reluctance to sacrifice the exchange
- Error 28 - Reluctance to sacrifice a pawn
- Error 29 - Reluctance to sacrifice a piece for (two) pawns
- Error 30 - Ignoring the possible exchange of the queen for material of similar value

Exercises for Chapter 6

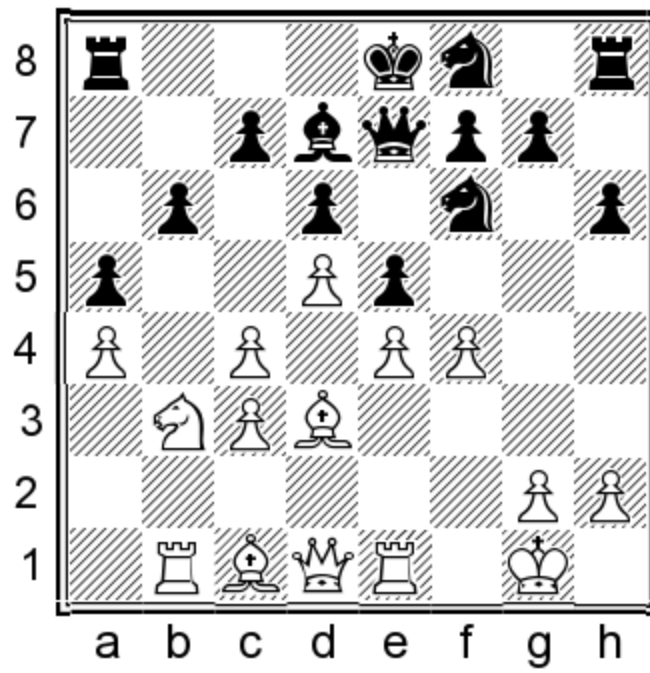




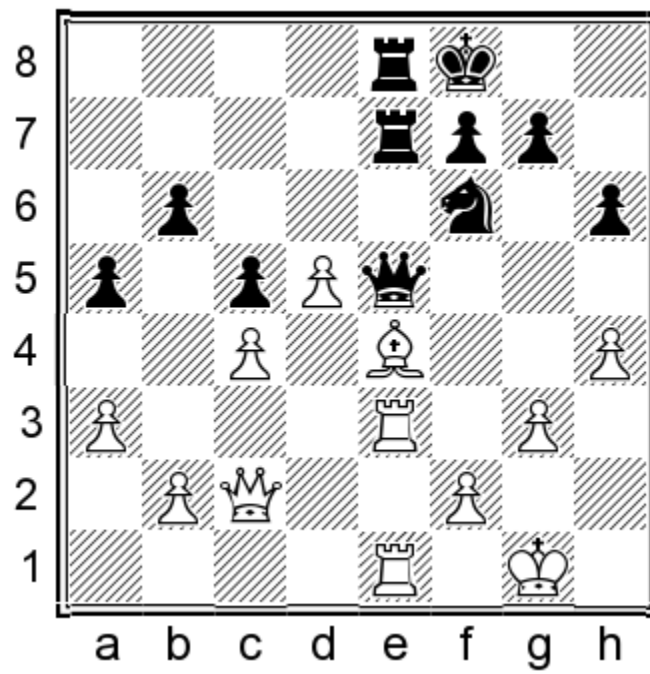
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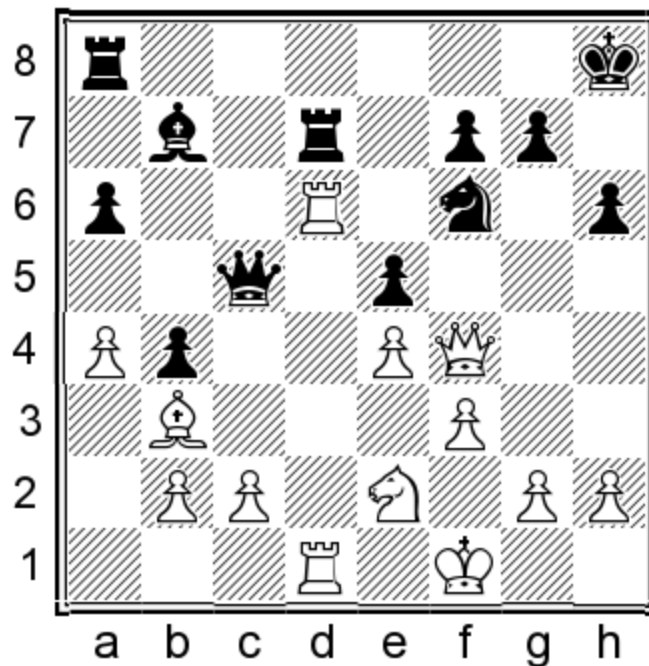
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34



35



36

The four sections of this chapter are all closely related. They all deal with decisions that upset the material balance, but not by means of a calculation that ends in recovering the material or mate; instead, the sacrifices are supported by forms of positional compensation that will be maintained in the medium or long term.

Everyone admires positional sacrifices, but they occur much less often than they should. This is because the material postulate is one of the most powerful ones. Positional sacrifice of material is a scenario many players do not even consider unless they find themselves forced into it. Curiously, very often when this happens, the sacrifice is performed very well. It's a sad thing that they are rejected so often, since there are many positions where a small sacrifice is an interesting option which makes the play much more dynamic, and in some cases it is the best choice.

Going through positions with players who have refrained from making an interesting sacrifice, it is not unusual to hear expressions

like this one: ‘This sacrifice looks interesting, I agree, and it seems like the best option, but I don’t think I would play it in a game.’ Why? ‘Because I wouldn’t see it all clearly’. Is this an expression of a materialist world? I think not; it is rather a sign of insecurity. I think about what Paco Vallejo once said to his opponent in a post mortem: ‘Don’t worry so much about your structure. In the next game you will have all eight perfect pawns ready to start afresh.’ I think that the application of this thought to small material sacrifices is even more obvious: in the next game you will have all your pieces again.

However, we can only overcome our reluctance by overcoming the material postulate. Let’s look at some examples, and then we will suggest a few ideas.

Error 27 - Reluctance to sacrifice the exchange

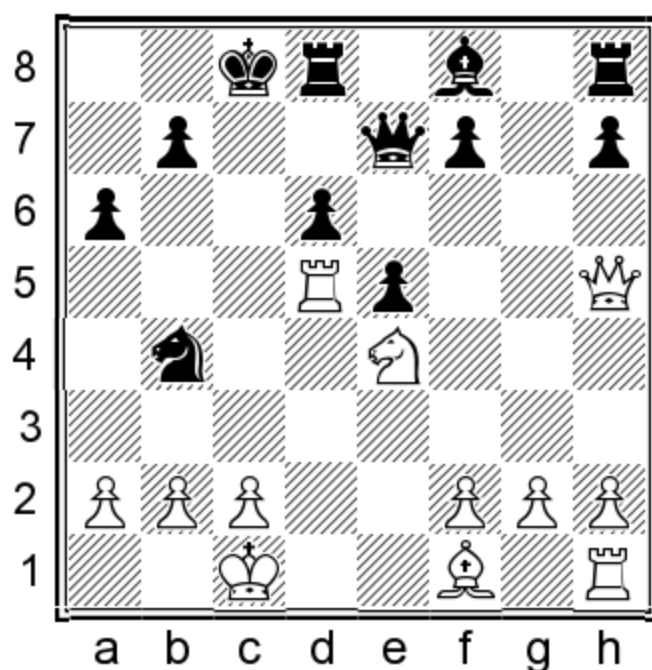
Of all the positional sacrifices, the most common is the exchange sacrifice, of which we shall present a large number of examples. To encourage everyone to sacrifice the exchange more often, I propose the following adjustment to the scale of material values: if a player has two rooks, together they are worth 10 points, but if he has only one, it is worth 5.5 points. I can assure you that this is more precise than the classical scale. In the conclusion, we shall talk more about this.

In the first example, we shall see a ‘possible’ exchange sacrifice for the purpose of controlling the squares of one colour (see **Error 24**). The immortal example of an exchange sacrifice for the sake of a blockade is the game Reshevsky-Petrosian, Zurich 1953. This was not a miracle, however; it occurs often in games, but we almost always ignore it.

Adrian Galiana Fernández (1836)

Carlos Martínez Lopez (1780)

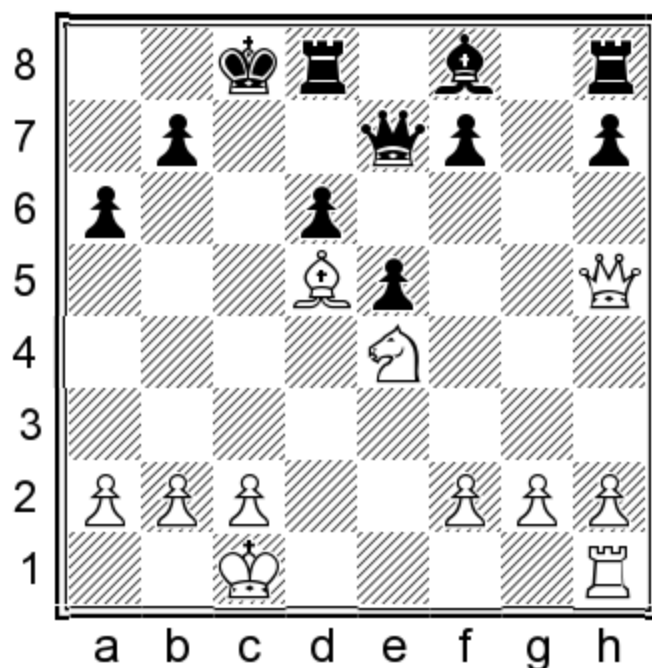
Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2014



In this position (Exercise 31), the white rook is attacked, and if it withdraws, the black pawns will advance. This is one of those cases where you should automatically consider sacrificing the exchange. Even more so if the resulting bishops are of opposite colours, the pawns can be permanently blockaded, and it turns your own bishop into a blockader, an **unopposed piece**, as is the case here.

17.♖d2?

White is worse after this move. He should have sacrificed the exchange with 17.♙c4! in order to maintain the blockade; for instance, 17...♘xd5? (which is not the best move, because it hands over eternal control of the central light squares and turns the black bishop into a mere spectator of the game; the best response is 17...♚b8! 18.a3! ♙c7 19.♙b3 ♘xd5 20.♙xd5 ♖c8 21.c3, but White stands well) 18.♙xd5.



analysis diagram

There are a couple of circumstances to highlight with the diagram in view:

- 1) The d5-bishop is an **unopposed piece**, and the e4-knight will be so as well as long as f5 is kept under White's control;
- 2) White has two minor pieces which can operate on the light squares, whereas Black has none.

This colour imbalance, obligatory in the exchange of a rook for a knight, and with bishops of opposite colours, is very great, and has been very little studied. I advise readers to look out for it in their own games, as it will have happened at some time or other.

18...♔b8 19.♖d1 ♜g8 20.g4! (to ensure control of f5) 20...♞c8 21.♔b1± . White has consolidated his control of the e4- and d5-squares, and his minor pieces, stationed in the centre, offer him a very wide range of active plans.

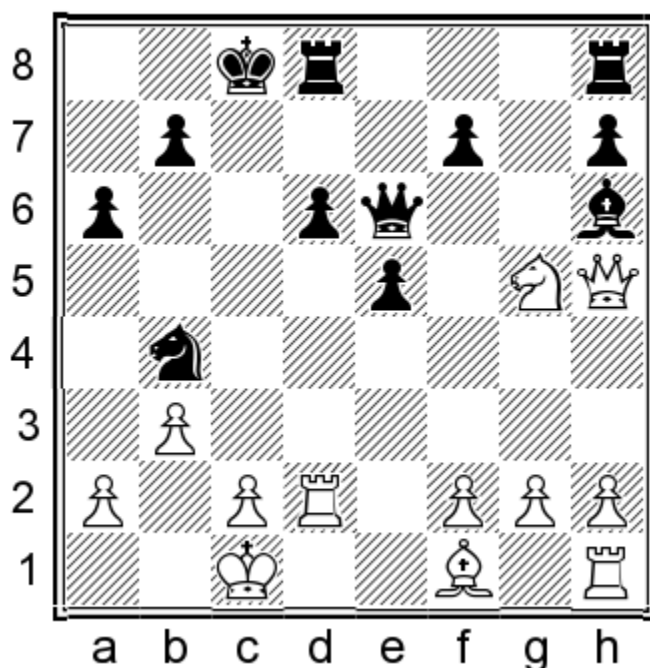
17...♔e6!

The immediate ...d5 was possible.

18.b3?

In middlegames with bishops of opposite colours, weakening your already weak colour by advancing a pawn is almost always a serious error, but in this case it also allows a pin. It was preferable to enter complications with 18.c3!, although after 18...f5! 19.♔h3 ♘c6 20.♔b1 d5 Black is slightly better, thanks to his mobile centre.

18...♙h6 19.♞g5



And now, instead of being satisfied with capturing the a2-pawn, Black could have exploited the connection between the pin with the weakness of the dark squares in White's castled position to decide the game with:

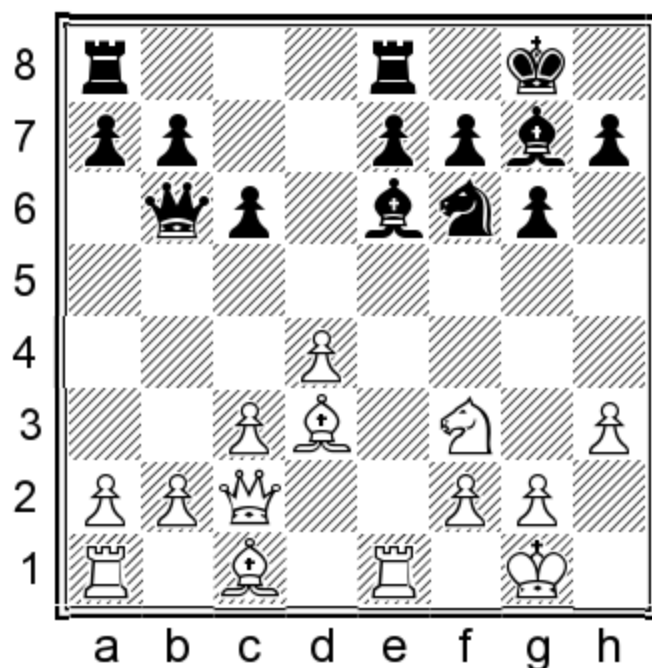
19...♔f6! 20.h4 e4 21.♔b1 ♙g7

Some sacrifices are thematic, although players often overlook them or are reluctant to execute them.

Mikel Ortega López (2141)

Alberto Portela Peleteiro (2105)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2015



In the structure in the diagram, the ♖xe6 sacrifice is not only attractive, but is also almost always the best move, as any reader can confirm by looking it up in a database and analysing it with an engine.

13.♙f4?!

13.♖xe6! is the thematic exchange sacrifice that the majority of players do not make. I have a special relationship with it because in a game I hesitated for a long time about playing it, did not do so, was left worse, and confirmed later that it was in fact the best move (see De la Villa-Carretero Ortiz, Dos Hermanas 2006). Of course, since then, I have never again had the opportunity, but I have seen it several times in the games of my students, who have always ignored it.

After 13...fxe6, there are several moves which give White the advantage, so we shall limit ourselves to one natural variation:

14.♘g5 (14.♙xg6! hxg6 15.♙xg6 is even stronger) 14...c5 15.dxc5

♔xc5 16.♔e2 e5 17.♙c4+ ♘d5 18.♔d3 ♖ad8 19.♙e3 ♔c6 20.♖d1 e6
 21.♘xe6 ♖xe6 22.♙xd5 ♔xd5 23.♔xd5 ♖xd5 24.♖xd5.

13...♖ad8

With this kind of sacrifice, there is usually a second opportunity, but White is not up to the task.

14.♙e5

14.♖xe6! was once again the best move.

14...♙d5!

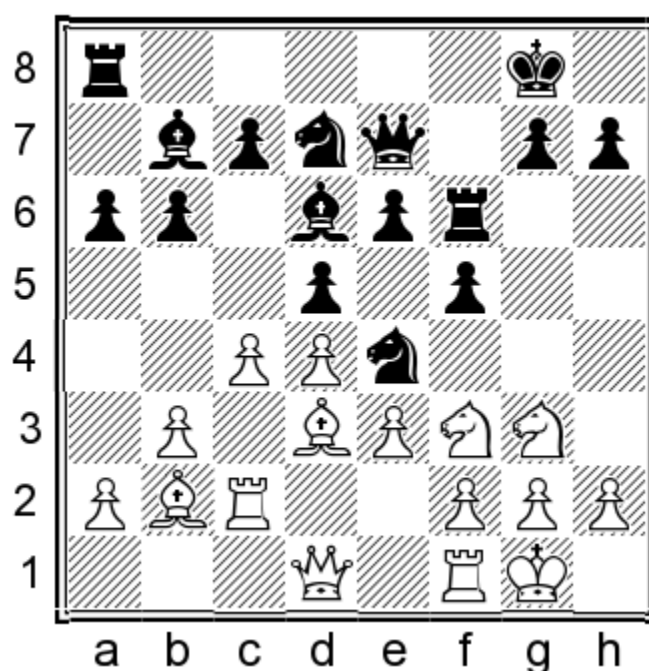
But sometimes there is not a third opportunity. The game ended in a draw.

With plenty of pieces on the board, the exchange sacrifice is more likely to be sound, and when it also involves winning a centre pawn, it is rare for the evaluation to be unfavourable.

Pedro Ginés Esteo (2375)

Salvador Guerra Rivera (2362)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2017



Exercise 32

Not even a pawn has been exchanged, and both sides' pieces are aiming at the kingside. That is why this is a very critical position.

14.c5?

White, taking advantage of the alignment of the b2-bishop with the f6-rook, forces a favourable exchange (or perhaps not?).

Instead, 14.♘e5 is the best policy, either right away or after first exchanging pawns on d5, or exchanging the bishop for the knight on e4.

14...♙xg3?

The bluff has succeeded. Black should have offered to sacrifice the exchange with 14...bxc5! and if White accepts it with 15.dxc5 (15.♙xe4!= is better), then after 15...♞exc5 16.♙xf6 ♞xf6 he gains the bishop pair and an important centre pawn and has the advantage.

15.c6!?

Ingenious, but 15.hxg3! was sufficient for a clear advantage; for example, 15...bxc5 16.dxc5 e5 (16...♞dxc5? is not possible now, among other things because of 17.♙a3!+-) 17.c6! (the same idea as in the game) 17...♖xc6 18.♖xc6 ♙xc6 19.♙c2 ♙d6 20.♞xe5!.

15...♙d6? 16.cxb7

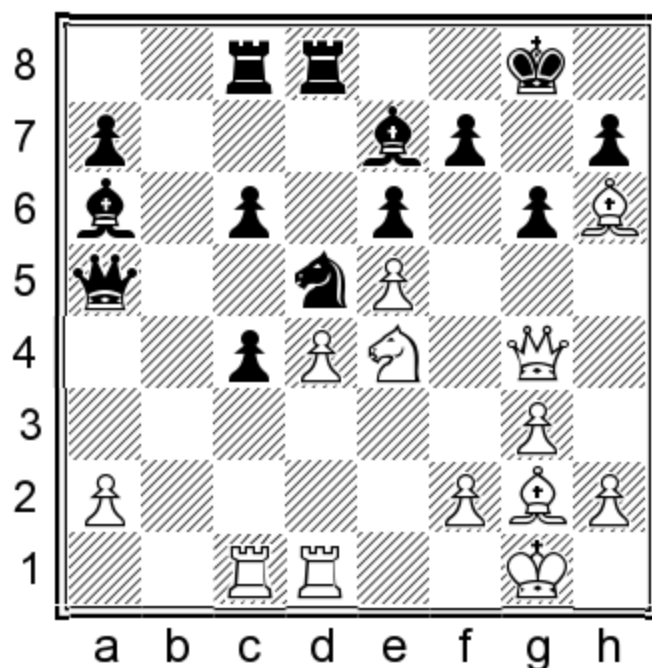
With a big advantage, which ended in a win for White in 67 moves.

In the following example, Black ignores the danger of losing the bishop covering the weak colour complex in the zone of his castled king.

Aimer Del Carmen Hernández (2036)

Juan Diego Bermúdez Ureba (2182)

Salobreña Spanish Junior Championship 2022



Even though the position is tremendously complex and dangerous for Black, he has several moves that maintain the balance more or less. What he should not do under any circumstances is get rid of his dark-squared bishop.

21...♗a3?

But this is the first thing he plans. Instead, 21...c3! was the best move, to continue with ...♙xa2 and ...♗e2. If White tries to exchange the defender of the weak squares, Black can substitute it with his queen. After 22.♗g5 ♙a3! 23.♗xe7 ♙xe7 24.♘xc3 ♘xc3 25.♖xc3 c5 Black frees his position, with equality.

Also playable is 21...♙a3!?, to continue with ...c3 and ...♖b8 and to have the queen ready to help on the kingside.

22.♘g5!?

The idea of leaving the rook to be taken and preparing an eventual ♘xe6 is correct, but 22.h4! was stronger, intending h5; for example, 22...♗xc1 23.♖xc1 c5?! (after 23...♙a3 24.h5 ♙e7 the black queen

has come back, but without the bishop it is unable to take care of everything: 25.♗g5 ♔f8 26.♘c5 ♖b5 27.hxg6 hxg6 28.♕h4, with the idea of continuing with ♗xd5 and ♗f6. It should always be remembered that the defender of the dark squares on d5 can be eliminated when White considers it convenient) 24.♕g5!. In the absence of Black's dark-squared bishop, the white queen can look for a mating net; for instance, 24...cxd4 25.♘f6+ ♗xf6 26.♕xf6.

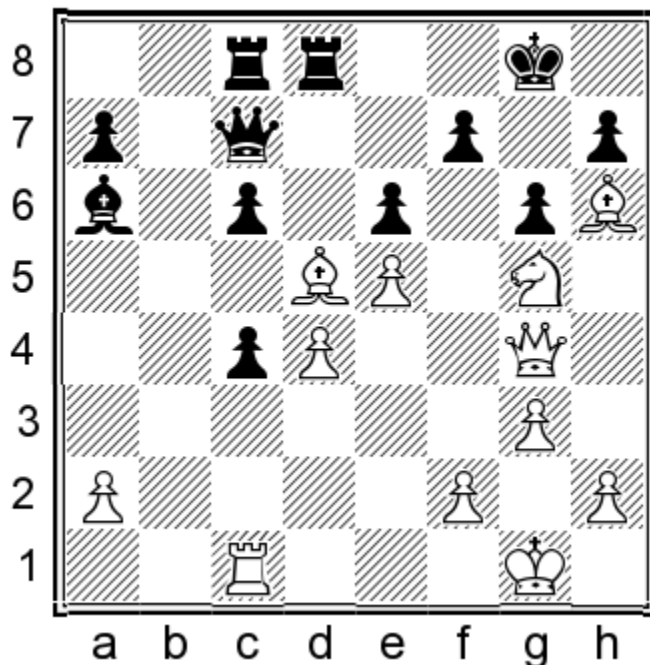
22...♗xc1?

There is no going back after exchanging this bishop.

22...c3! was much better; for example, 23.♘xe6 ♗e2! 24.♕xe2 ♗xc1 25.♖xc1 fxe6, but here too White has a strong attack, beginning with 26.♕g4.

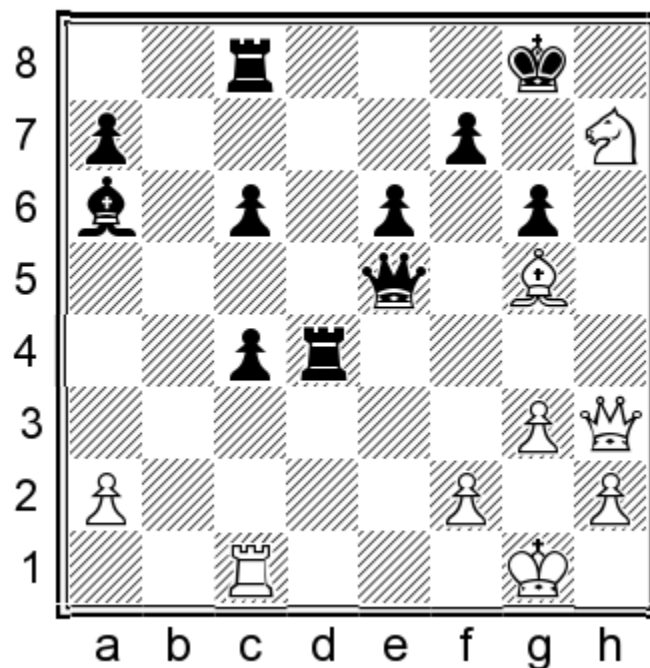
23.♖xc1 ♕c7 24.♗xd5

Once again, this is a correct decision, but it is slightly premature. 24.♕h3! first was much stronger.



24...cxd5?

With this move, Black continues to respect the classical postulate: win material and improve the structure, but he does not worry in the least about the danger on the dark squares of his castled position. It was better to take with the rook, 24...♖xd5!, because it can intervene in the coming sequence of moves. This conclusion could have been reached by **identifying the threat**, which has to be ♔h3. After 25.♕f4 (now 25.♕h3? would fail to 25...♖xd4! 26.♘xh7 ♕xe5! 27.♙g5,



analysis diagram

and now, if the threat is clearly identified, which is ♘f6+ followed by ♕h7+ or ♕h8+, Black has an exceptional but simple **unnatural candidate move**: 27...♕h8!!) 25...f5! (not 25...♕e7 26.♘e4+-) 26.♘xe6 ♕f7 27.♘c5 White is better.

25.♕h3!

Now Black can do nothing against the threat of ♘xh7.

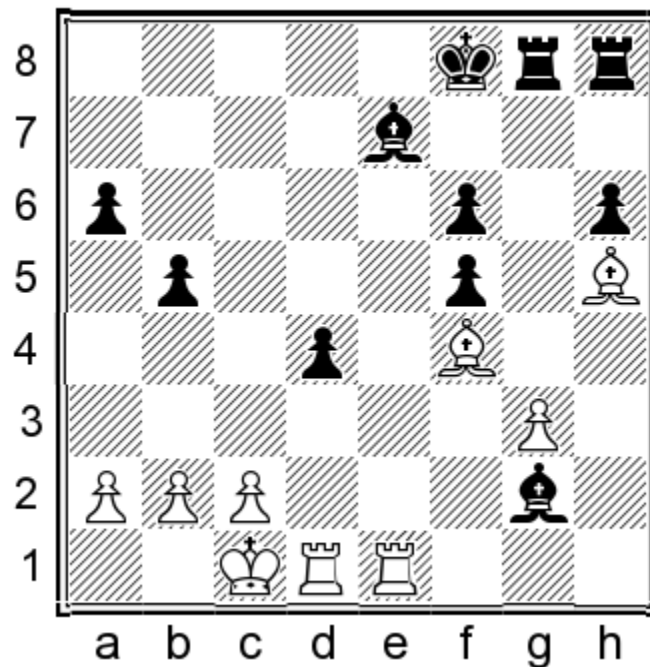
25...c3 26.♘xh7 f5 27.♘f6+ ♔f7 28.♙f8! ♔xf8 29.♕h8+ ♔f7 30.♕h7+ ♔f8 31.♕g8+ ♔e7 32.♕g7#

Another interesting scenario is the case of defensive positions, in which sacrificing the exchange can relieve the pressure.

David Villacorta Nicolás (2019)

Daniel González Eiris (1799)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2017



In this game, White had been outplaying his opponent for a long time, but now he became overconfident and overlooked a resource that could have cost him dearly.

27.♖e6?

Paying attention to your opponent's resources is one of the pieces of advice that cannot be repeated often enough. With 27.♖xd4!, which can be followed by ♖d7 or else by the move in the game, ♖e6, White would have reached a practically winning position; for example, 27...♗e4 (this is possibly the move that White wanted to avoid. If 27...♖g5, then 28.♗xg5 hxg5 29.♖d7 ♗e4 30.♗f3 and Black is losing) 28.g4! and Black has no answer (28.♖d7 ♖g7 29.♖e3 is also sufficient).

Black also overlooked the opportunity to strengthen his defence with an exchange sacrifice.

27...♖g5!

Instead, he continued with 27...a5?, losing after 28.♖xd4 ♗h7 29.♖d7 ♖gg7 30.♖d8+ and mate.

28.♗xg5?

The only way to maintain any advantage is 28.♗e2, and if Black insists on 28...h5!, now it is already better to take, but he must find a series of precise moves: 29.♗xg5 fxg5 30.♖g1! ♗d5 31.♖e5 ♗e4 32.♖f1 ♔e8 33.♗d3! and White is clearly better.

28...hxg5 29.♗g6 ♗e4 30.♖xd4 ♖h1+ 31.♖d1 ♖h2

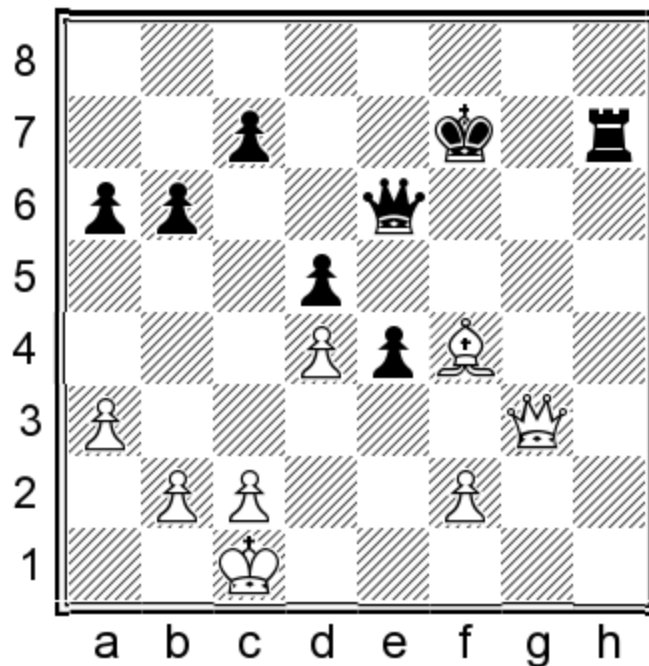
Forcing a draw.

A problem coupled with the exchange sacrifice is how to exploit the advantage of being the exchange up. One of the first rules for the side that is the exchange up, is to exchange the major pieces.

Francisco Orantes Taboada (2138)

Gerard Ayats Llobera (2012)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2015



In this case, the advantage of the exchange seems very clear, but this can lead to relaxation and errors.

35...c6?

This weakens the dark squares, although it does not seem obvious that this might make winning the game more difficult.

The fact is that Black had the opportunity here to force the exchange of queens (in this case, White's last major piece), and we emphasise:

The exchange of the last major piece is worth more than a pawn in a position where one side is the exchange up.

35...♔h3! 36.♙xc7 (36.♔g5? ♔f1+) 36...♔xg3 37.♙xg3 b5!

(hindering a4) 38.♔d2 ♔e6 and Black wins easily by advancing his king via the light squares.

Other moves that avoid moving the c7-pawn also win easily; for example, 35...♔e8 36.♙xc7 (36.b3 ♔d8! and Black wins) 36...♔h1+ 37.♔d2 ♔h3 38.♔f4 ♔f3 39.♔h2 e3+.

36.♙e3!

But from now on, with the dark squares weak on the queenside, the black king is unable to find a safe refuge, and White can hold the position, which is what happened in the game.

36...b5

36...♖h1+ 37.♔d2 b5 38.♕c7+! with a draw.

37.♕c7+ ♔g8 38.♕b8+ ♔f7 39.♕c7+ ♔g6 40.♕g3+ ♔f7 ½-½

Error 28 - Reluctance to sacrifice a pawn

Together with the exchange sacrifice, the other very common positional sacrifice is that of a pawn, although it is very often difficult to tell the difference between a pawn sacrifice and the loss of a pawn, which is less often the case with an exchange sacrifice. In any case, in the game of chess the past is unimportant, and if a pawn has been lost, but there is some compensation, it is advisable to play with the same attitude as if it had been sacrificed.

The most common reasons for sacrificing a pawn are development, attack, or at least initiative. Club players often make this kind of sacrifice, and we can see such scenarios in almost every chapter of this book, especially in the sections on attack and defence. We shall refer to this error (or this idea) on various occasions in other sections.

But we are studying typical errors here, and the pawn sacrifice which is most often ignored is the purely strategic one, in which a piece gains activity. Also, usually it has defensive characteristics, although at times it allows an advantage to be achieved. That is why most of the examples in this section will be of that type.

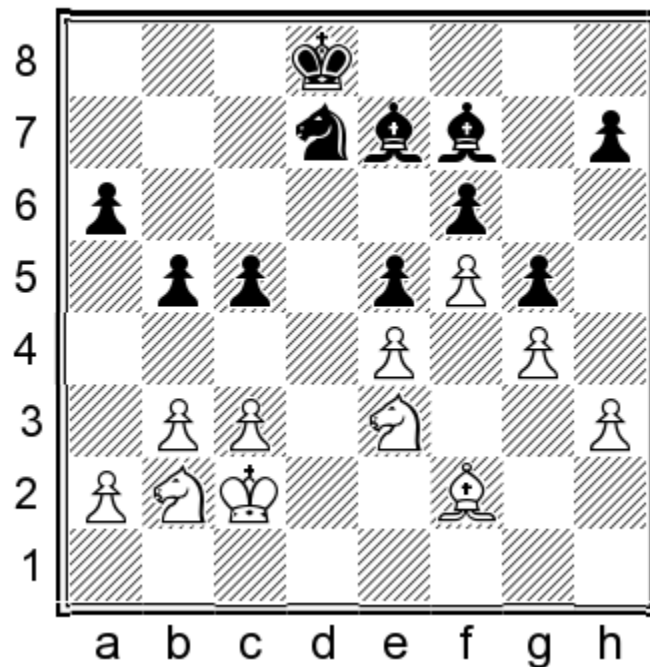
Compared with the exchange sacrifice, the pawn sacrifice is more often seen amongst club players, even though the difference in value is quite small. I believe that the reason is that situations where one player is a pawn down are more common, both in games and especially in opening theory. I would say that the popularity of gambits makes it easier to become accustomed to playing a pawn

down, but there are not many gambits in which the exchange is sacrificed.

Javier Aledo Yanguas

Ana Redondo Benavente

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2014



The diagram position appears to offer us a rather boring prospect, but it has an ‘inner life’. I suggest that the reader should try to guess the correct evaluation, plan and next move.

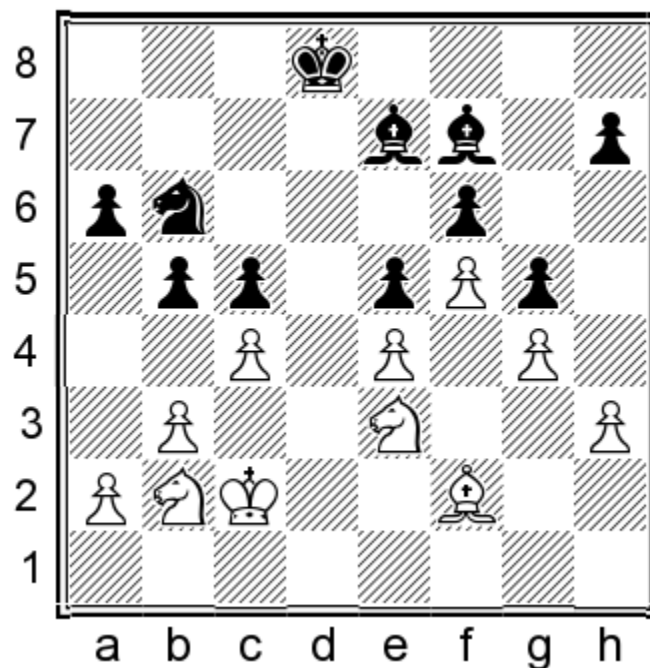
31...♞b6?

The correct evaluation was that the position was equal, but only after the best move by Black. With the text move, Black assumes that White can make no progress, and for his part he prepares to play ...c4 without giving up any material. But in this case there was no time for this preparation, because White is going to play c4 first. The result is that Black is clearly worse.

Instead, 31...c4! was correct – a pawn sacrifice to clear a square, which we are going to come across several times in the subsequent

examples. This was necessary in order to stop White from playing c4 himself and becoming strong on d5. Now capturing with 32.bxc4?! gives Black the more pleasant position after 32...♞c5 (instead, 32.b4! maintains equality). The knight does its job on the square that has been acquired; the pawn will be recovered and the play opens up for the black bishops: 33.cxb5 axb5. Now the pawns on a2 and e4 are attacked.

32.c4!



Now it is White who makes the desired move, gaining space, making the d5-square available for his knights, and gaining a significant advantage.

32...♔d7 33.♞d5! ♞xd5 34.exd5 ♔d6

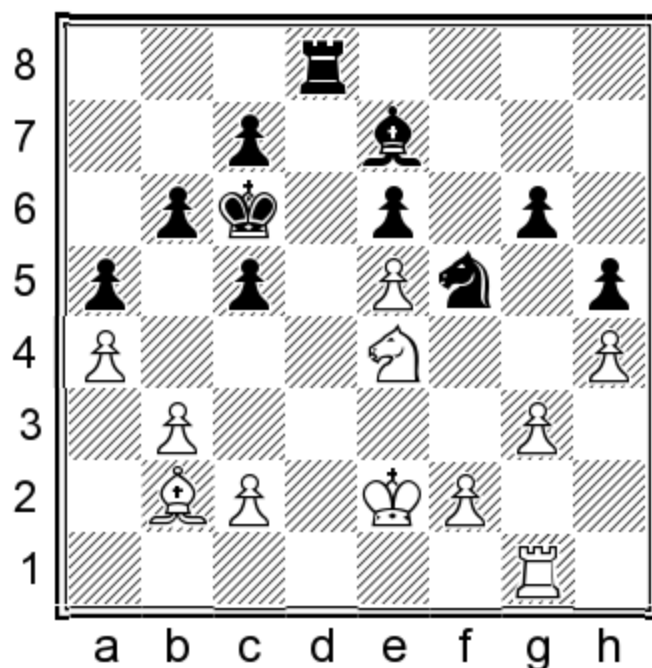
The game is continued under **Error 12**, on calculation with passed pawns.

The next example is so similar that it begins with the same move.

Gerard Ayats Llobera (2225)

Jesus Muñoz García (1909)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2016



26...♞d4+?

The move played in the game brings about a very unfavourable piece exchange, even though it eliminates the double pawn, and it can only be explained by a pessimistic evaluation of the position.

Black (and probably White too) seems blind to the option of 26...c4!, which spoils the white structure and increases the activity of Black's pieces. After 27.bxc4?! (White should be satisfied with 27.♞d2 cxb3 28.♞xb3, with equality, but he probably would not have played this) 27...♞d4+ 28.♙xd4 ♖xd4 29.♞d2 ♙b4 Black recovers the pawn with an advantage.

27.♙xd4 cxd4 28.♙d3 ♙d5 29.f4 c6 30.♖d1

And we shall see the ending of this game in **Error 48**.

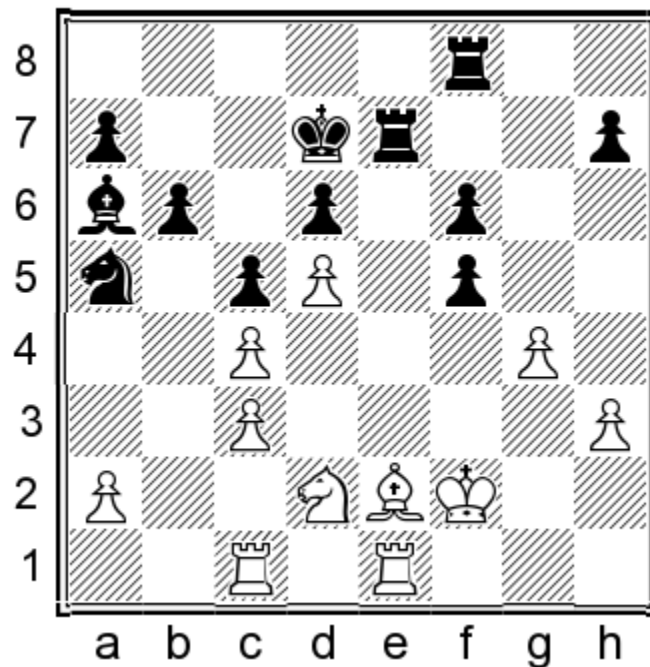
Cases in which the pawn sacrifice offers enough compensation for equality are at least as frequent as ones which allow a player to gain an advantage, and often the evaluation is difficult. The pawn sacrifice is therefore an important defensive resource, which makes

it even more absurd that such a high percentage of solid players reject it.

Ismael Rodríguez Sanz (1740)

Juan Plazuelo Pascual

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2014



34.gxf5?!

Black had just taken on f5, and White simply recaptured the pawn. He probably did not consider that any other move might be possible, but there was a better one. In fact, with the capture, the pawn on f5 remains fixed, which is a clear weakness and limits the white bishop's activity.

Instead, 34.♔d3! frees the bishop, which threatens to recover the pawn with check, and after 34...fxg4 35.hxg4 White is sufficiently active not to have any problems; for example, 35...♖e5 (if 35...♖g7, then 36.♖h1 ♔c7 37.♖cg1, intending to continue with ♔f3; or 35...♖xe1 36.♖xe1 ♖f7 37.♖e4 ♔d8 38.♖f4, with the idea of ♖e4

and White is even a little better) 36.♖h1 ♜f7 37.♖h6 and Black is tied down to his multiple weaknesses – draw.

34...♜fe8!

This is the move which Black failed to find and which we explained fully in **Error 8**. 34...♜e5 , with equality, was played in the game.

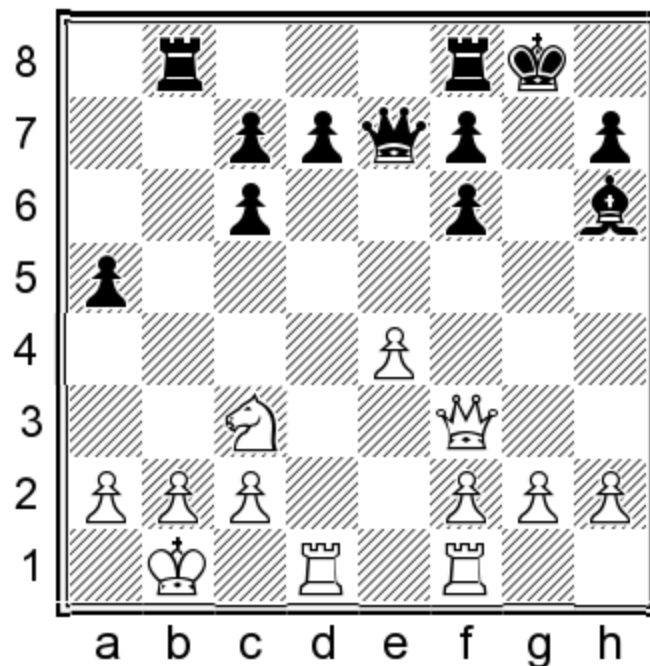
35.♙d3 ♜xe1 36.♜xe1 ♜xe1 37.♔xe1 ♞b7

In all the examples we have seen so far, the sacrifice had a defensive element. Now we shall see one in which its role is completely defensive.

Héctor Sama Salinas (2096)

Ana Redondo Benavente (2115)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2016



The black position looks awful, but it has some strengths which White should keep in mind: the b-file (with the immediate threat of ...♙a3) and ...f5 to open the long diagonal for the black bishop.

14.♜d4?!

Not one of the worst moves in the position. It weakens the force of ...♔a3, as it controls a4, but it shows that White has not taken into account Black's other idea.

A) 14.♖d3! was a much better preparation against something which is inevitable, the pawn sacrifice 14...f5; for example, 15.♔xf5 ♗g7 16.f4±, in order to shut down the bishop's range with e5;

B) 14.g4? rules out the second idea but does not deal with the first: 14...♔a3 15.b3 a4!±.

14...♗g7?

Too slow, and too transparent in its intention.

14...f5! (14...♔a3 15.b3±) was a pawn sacrifice which the position cried out for, because it is the only way to prevent the bishop from being shut in. Furthermore, from g7 the bishop will have excellent activity in coordination with the open b-file. After 15.exf5 ♗g7 16.♖d3 d5!, preparing to double the rooks on the b-file, the g7-bishop is excellent and compensates for the pawn.

15.♔f5!

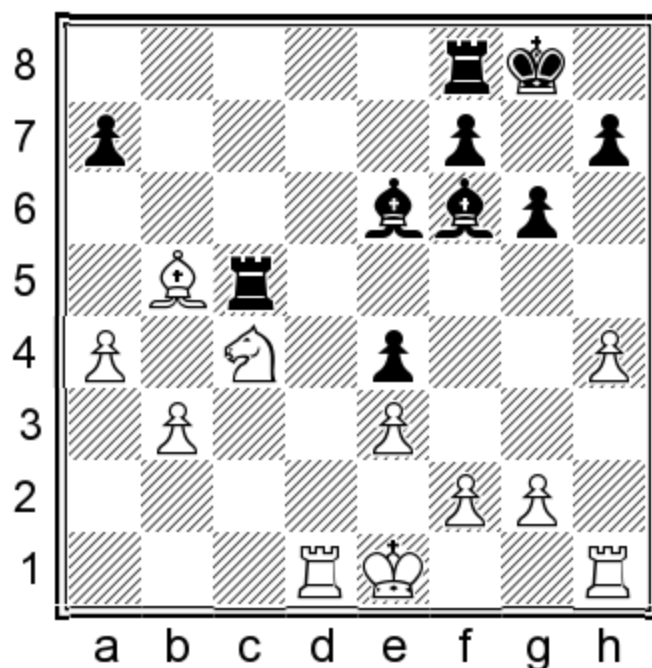
As usually happens, if we make our intentions plain, our opponent will discover them. Now the g7-bishop will be out of play for a long time.

Sometimes, the pawn is lost rather than sacrificed, but some activity is gained in return. In such cases it is easy to make the mistake (as common as it is dreadful) of renouncing activity in order to recover the pawn.

Eduard Domínguez Laguna (1938)

Jarein Lopez Ruiz (1796)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2020



This game is a clear example of what we have been saying. Jarein was not aware of how good his compensation was and he focused on recovering the pawn:

21...♖h5?

The h-pawn is the least valuable, and to capture it Black will lose the bishop pair and exchange his most active rook. He should have concentrated on his activity with 21...♗g4!, attacking the rook, which has few safe squares: 22.♖d6! (22.♖c1?! ♖d8 and Black activates another piece, threatening 23... ♗c3+ and forcing castling: 23.0-0 ♗xh4, recovering the pawn without making any concessions) 22...♗c3+ 23.♔f1 ♖b8, threatening ...♗e5, followed by ...a6 (the immediate 23...♗e5 is possible but achieves less due to 24.♖d2! ♖b8 25.f3!). 24.♔g1 ♖c7 and the white pieces are very tied down, because 25.♔h2? is not possible in view of 25...♖xc4.

22.♗d7!

A relief for White, ensuring the exchange of the bishop.

22...♗xc4 23.bxc4 ♖xh4?

Completing the error. It was possible to return to the active path with 23...♖b8!, and if 24.g3, then 24...♖b4 25.♗b5 g5!, with good drawing chances.

24.♖xh4 ♗xh4 25.c5! ♗d8?

Here 25...♖b8! was still better.

26.♖b1 h5 27.♖b7 g5 28.c6

And Black resigned, without ever having moved his f8-rook.

Error 29 - Reluctance to sacrifice a piece for (two) pawns

The next positional sacrifice in frequency is that of a piece for various pawns, usually connected passed pawns. In the middlegame, this normally occurs in the centre, because centre pawns can overwhelm pieces, while in the ending it tends to take place on one wing, because distant passed pawns are hard to stop.

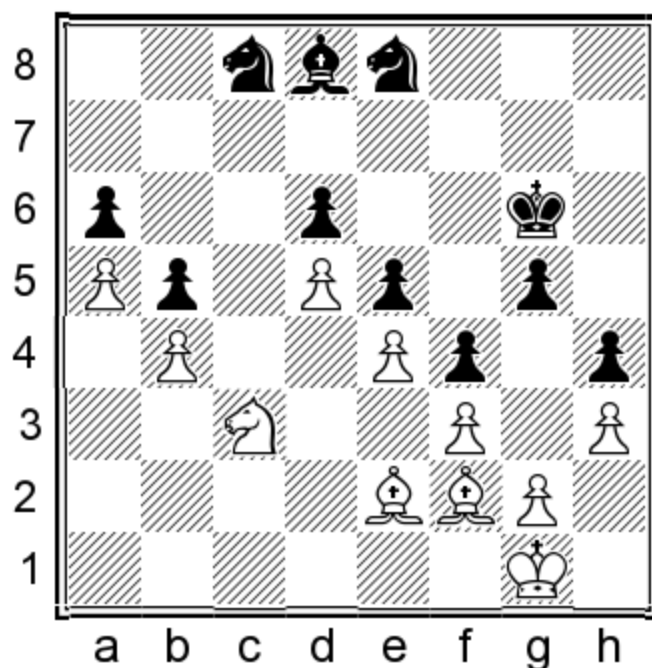
The most normal sacrifice is that of a piece for two pawns, because it can be carried out in one and a half moves, but the material imbalance is not usually maintained for long and other pawns can fall, even if they are not as important as the first ones.

We start with an interesting position which seems simple, but it demonstrates a broad group of typical errors: paying insufficient attention to your opponent (see Chapter 12), making calculation errors involving passed pawns (see **Error 12**), and lacking adequate knowledge of some ‘not so common’ typical models.

Lucas Antuña Pavón (1872)

Daniel Gaspar Lopez (1804)

Spanish Team Championship U14 2022



White has just played 50. ♖e2, and we have already talked quite a lot about the importance of understanding the meaning of your opponent's last move.

The position (Exercise 33) is completely closed, and so it will end in a draw, will it not? And it did indeed end in a draw, but **precisely because the position allows no pawn breaks, it is essential to watch out for sacrifices.**

50... ♔f7?

On the first move, we already have the first mistake. Instead, 50... ♞c7! was necessary, preventing any sacrifices on b5. This is usually called prevention or prophylaxis, and it is correct to give it this name, because it can (and should) be made without the need for calculation, although in this case it is purely and simply defence against an immediate and very real threat. Then, 51. ♞b6 ♔f7 is equal.

51. ♔f1?

A) White also ignores the idea of 51.♖xb5!. This is the strongest move, though it is interesting to realise that the alternative sacrifice also wins (see line B): 51...axb5 52.♗xb5 ♔e7 (White was threatening ♗a6, followed by ♗b7 and the a-pawn advances and queens) 53.♕f1 (now it is enough to bring the king to support the pawns) 53...♞c7 54.♗c6 ♞a6 55.♗e1 (better than the immediate ♗b7) 55...♞c7 56.♕e2, followed by the march of the king and the unstoppable advance of the pawns;

B) 51.♗xb5!? axb5 52.♞xb5 ♔e7! 53.♕f1 ♔d7 54.♕e2 (the king is coming) 54...♞c7 55.♞a3! ♞a8 56.♔d3 ♔c7 57.♔c4 ♔b7 58.♔b3 ♞c7 59.♔a4, followed by the advance of the pawns.

51...♔e7?

The moves have followed one after another without preventing or executing the sacrifices, which suggests that the idea of sacrificing was not even considered.

52.♔e1? ♗c7?

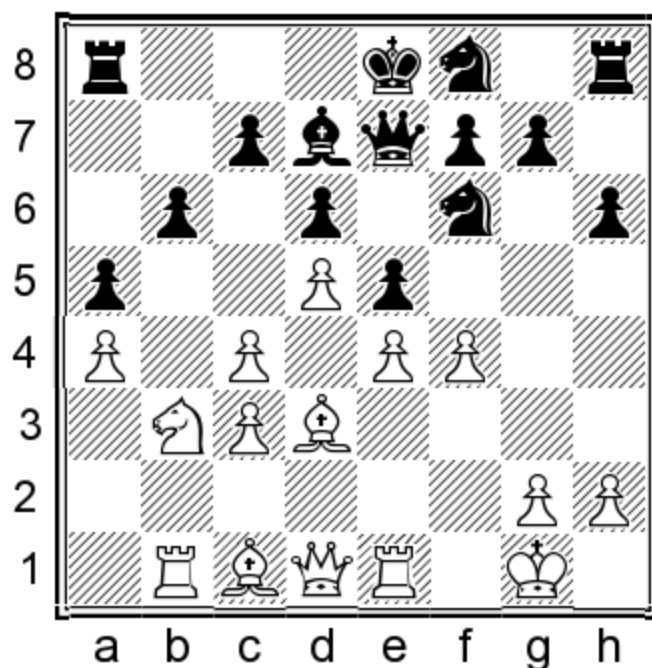
And a draw was agreed here in a position where both the knight sacrifice and the bishop sacrifice are still winning for White.

The creation of a mass of pawns in the centre can also compensate for the loss of a piece, but this is usually in the middlegame. As in the majority of cases of positional sacrifices, there is great visual strength in positions with compensation, but it is not always easy to evaluate them exactly.

Ainhoa Ortín Blanco (1788)

Cesáreo Arrese-Igor Sánchez (1952)

Pamplona 2015



Exercise 34

Here, instead of 16.♘a1?, which was played in the game, in order to defend the pawn and improve the knight, White should have played:

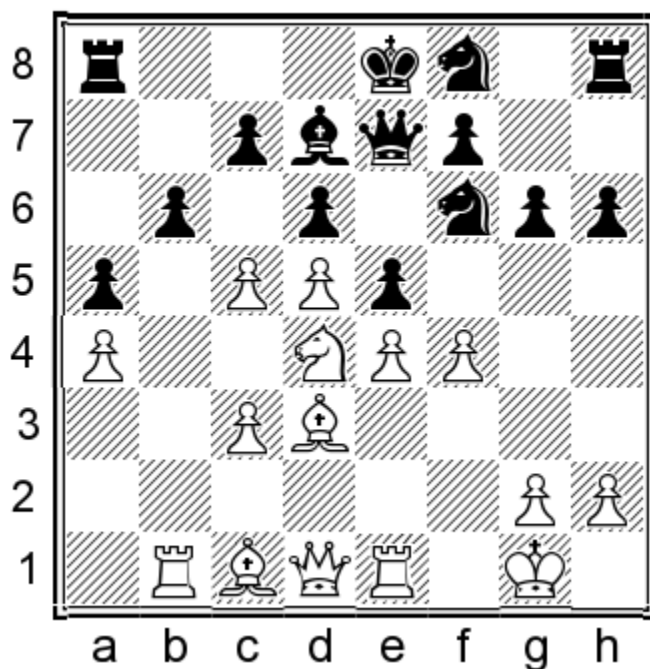
16.♘d4!

This would have ensured White an overwhelming attack. The knight threatens to jump to f5, which seems to force Black to capture it, but this is the variation on which we are going to focus and it soon becomes clear that it is an error.

16...exd4?

A) 16...♘g6 was relatively best: 17.♘f5 ♔d8! (after 17...♔f8, 18.c5! is once again the thematic sacrifice; for example, 18...bxc5 19.♔b3+-, threatening 20.♔b8+) 18.fxe5 ♘xe5 19.♘xg7+ ♔f8 20.♘f5± ;

B) 16...g6? prevents the knight jump to f5 but gives White a series of promising alternatives, some very elegant; for example, 17.c5!.



analysis diagram

The kind of pawn sacrifice that we have just studied in the previous Error. 17...bxc5 18.fxe5 dxe5 19.♘b5 (the piece sacrifice has turned into a pawn sacrifice) 19...♙xb5 (if 19...♖c8, then 20.♙c4+-, intending d6) 20.♙xb5+ ♘6d7 21.♙c6 ♖d8 22.♖b7, with crushing domination.

17.e5!

17.cxd4 also leads to a visually impressive and advantageous position; for instance, 17...♘8h7 18.e5.

17...♙d8

If 17...dxe5, then 18.♖xe5 ♘e6 19.dxe6 ♙xe6 20.f5 and in the course of two moves White has exchanged his two centre pawns for two pieces.

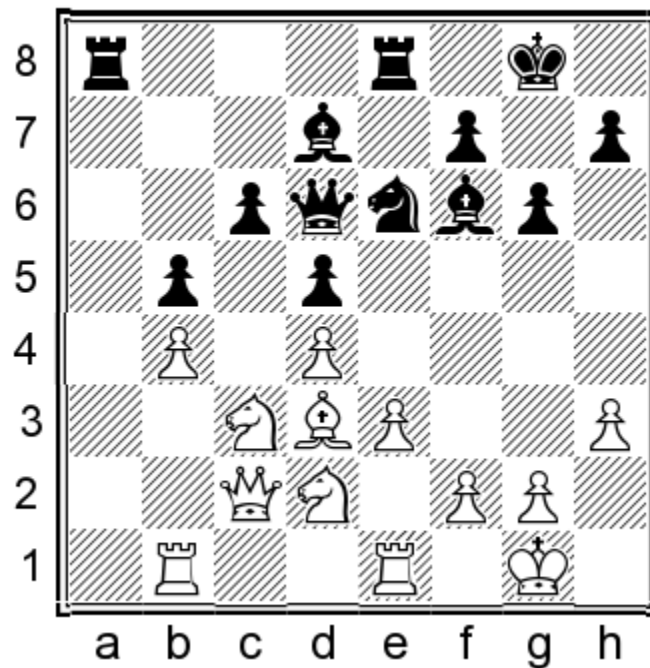
18.♙a3! ♘6h7 19.exd6 ♙h4 20.dxc7+ ♙xc7 21.♙b3 ♖b8 22.c5+-

There is a type of piece-for-pawns sacrifice that often occurs in closed positions when a whole chain that appears very solid collapses following a piece sacrifice that uncovers its weak points.

Juan Plazuelo Pascual (2140)

Jose Luis Muñoz Ávila (1740)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2014



Here we have the result of a Carlsbad structure, following quite a few moves of struggle for and against White's minority attack. Probably White is unhappy with his position and he changes his plan:

19.f4?

Now White wants to take action on the kingside, presumably with $\text{N}d2-f3-e5$. Rather better was $19.\text{N}b3 \text{R}a3$ $20.\text{N}c5 \text{R}ea8$, although the knight on c5 will not give White the expected benefit.

The modest 19.♘f3 was probably best, but it is difficult to move a piece back to the square from which it came only a few moves ago (on move 16 in this case).

19...♘g7

A perfectly correct move, but it misses an interesting opportunity:

19...♘xf4!. The sacrifice of a piece for three pawns in this structure is not at all strange: 20.exf4 ♖xe1+ 21.♖xe1 ♙xd4+ 22.♔h1 ♚xb4.

A group of three connected pawns is almost always good compensation, but what makes the white position more unpleasant is that his minor pieces are occupying unprotected and not very active positions.

20.♘f3 ♙f5

Black also stands well here.

Error 30 - Ignoring the possible exchange of the queen for material of similar value

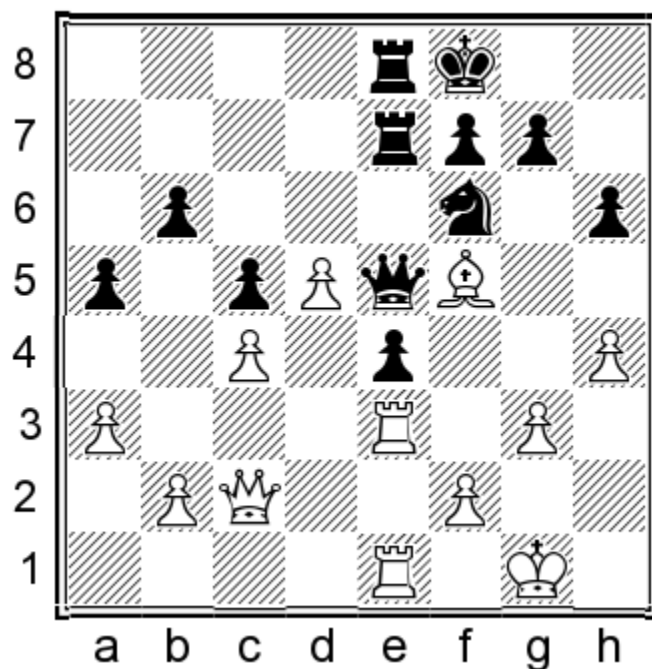
The fourth situation of material sacrifice that we are going to consider is the sacrifice (or exchange) of a queen for material of similar value.

This situation is one that occurs frequently at the end of a pitched battle where the attack can only be stopped by sacrificing the most important piece; in such a case the error may be one of evaluation. But it can also happen that one of the players chooses it voluntarily, or misses the opportunity to do so.

Most commonly, the queen is sacrificed for one of these sets of pieces: queen versus two rooks, queen versus two pieces, or queen versus rook, piece and pawn. Each of these cases requires study and experience, and the latter is usually lacking.

Lance Henderson de La Fuente (2258)

Juan Plazuelo Pascual (2228)



30.♙xe4?!

Now, we have arrived at Exercise 35.

White captures the pawn, trusting in the exchanges on e4, and he was proved right. But objectively it was better to keep up the pressure with 30.♙h3±.

30...♘xe4?

Here we have another example of an automatic exchange. Perhaps Black failed to see any alternative, but the fact is that **if you do not look, you will not see.**

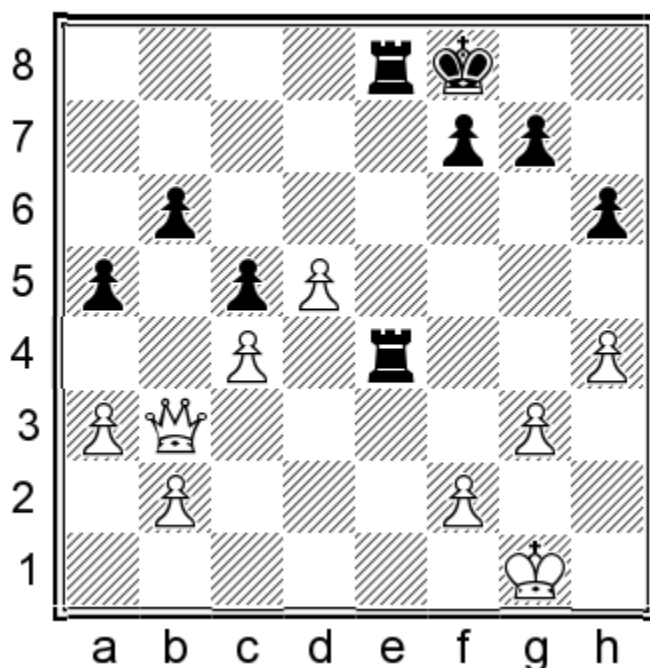
This exchange represents a poor evaluation of the material imbalance of queen against two rooks.

Instead, Black could have made a defensive pawn sacrifice (see **Error 28**) in order to provoke the exchange of all the pieces except the knight: 30...♘g4! 31.♖3e2 (if 31.♖d3, then 31...♘f6 practically forces a repetition of moves) 31...♙d4! (threatening 32...♘xf2)

32.♔c3 ♕xc3 33.bxc3 f5 34.♙d3 ♖xe2 35.♖xe2 ♖xe2 36.♙xe2 ♞e5 and, despite being a pawn down, Black has a fortress and cannot lose.

Even 30...♕d6!?, playing on a pawn down, was much better than the game continuation.

31.♖xe4 ♕xe4 32.♖xe4 ♖xe4 33.♕b3!



It is true that two rooks are usually better than the queen in the endgame, and sometimes they compensate for being a pawn down, or even two, as we shall see in other examples. But in this case, White has a strong pawn on d5 and pressure on the b6 weakness. Black might have been relying on coordinating his rooks, a key factor in this material relationship. He would achieve this by placing one of his rooks on d6, which would give him good drawing chances, but he will not manage this.

33...♖b8 34.♕d3?

This gives Black the opportunity to coordinate the rooks, but he does not take it, because it involves an **unnatural candidate move**.

The immediate 34.♔b5! was much better, leading to the same position as in the game after move 36.

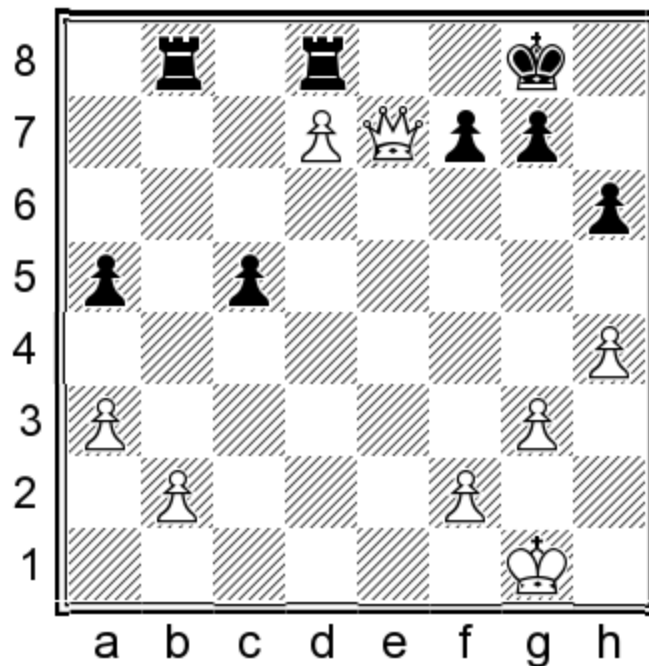
34...♖be8?

The opportunity consisted of 34...♖ee8!, a difficult move to make, because it allows 35.♔h7, which looks worrying. But Black just plays 35...f6, when the solitary queen can do very little against the black king. Black will continue with ...♖bd8 and ...♖d6, which cannot be prevented, constructing a **fortress** which would be very difficult to breach.

35.♔b3 ♖b8 36.♔b5! ♖ee8?!

A natural but desperate decision; the rooks are now connected on the eight rank but they will be unable to leave it because of the passed pawn, and finally, with the participation of his king, White will win. But there was not really anything better. After 36...♖e7 37.♔c6 h5 38.d6 ♖a7 39.a4 Black loses because he cannot coordinate the rooks.

37.d6! ♖ed8 38.♔c6! ♔g8 39.♔c7 ♖dc8 40.♔d7 ♖d8 41.♔c6 ♖dc8 42.♔d5 b5 43.cxb5 ♖xb5 44.d7 ♖d8 45.♔e5 ♖bb8 46.♔e7



This type of position, with the pawn on the seventh rank and both rooks tied to the eighth rank, is always winning for the queen side. White just needs to bring up his king.

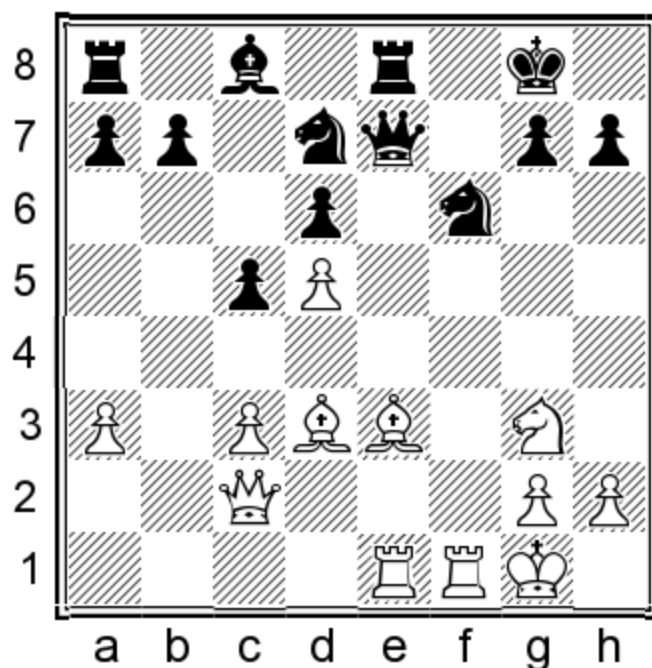
46...c4 47.♔f1 ♔h7 48.♔e1 ♔g6 49.♔d1 ♔f5 50.f3 h5 51.♔c2 ♔g6 52.♔c3 f6 53.♔xc4 1-0

It is not uncommon for the trade of the queen for various other pieces to be carried out incorrectly, and this tends to happen because the scenario is one in which the players lack experience.

Alberto Medina Martin (1714)

Francisco Miguel Callejas Rojas (1829)

Spanish Rapid Championship U16 2017



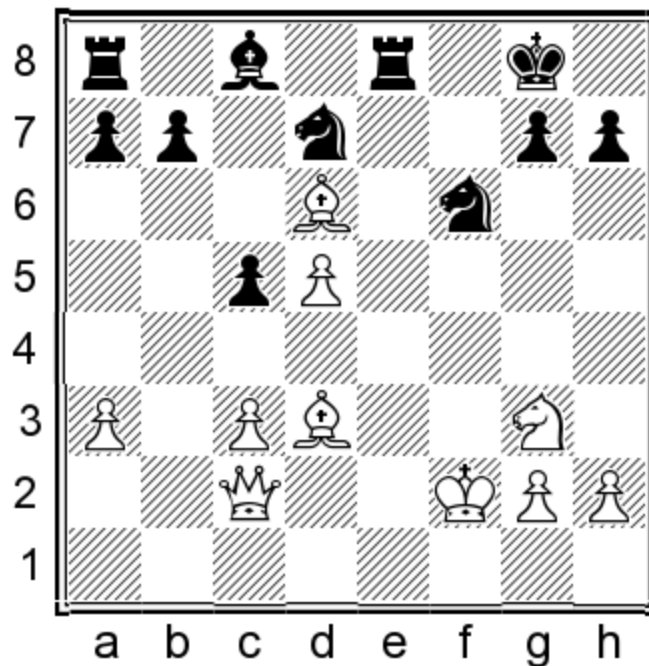
White has a magnificent attacking position in return for the pawn. You only need to see the way all his pieces are deployed, while Black is a long way from getting his into play.

18.♙f4?

Understandably, White is very concerned about the strongpoint on e5, but by provoking an exchange of two rooks for the queen, he allows Black to create a position that can offer great resistance.

It was better to play 18.♙d2! ♔d8 (18...♘e5?! fails to 19.♙g5, when the pin is accompanied by direct threats such as ♙xh7+ or ♘h5) 19.♙g5 (this pin is the key) 19...h6 (if 19...♖xe1 20.♙xh7+! ♘xh7 21.♙xd8 ♖xf1+ 22.♘xf1+-) 20.♖xe8+ ♔xe8 21.♙g6 ♔f8 22.♙h4, and once more the pin is decisive; now 23.♘h5 is threatened.

18...♔xe1 19.♖xe1 ♖xe1+ 20.♙f2 ♖e8 21.♙xd6



White has several pieces accompanying the queen and has even recovered a pawn, but the bad position of his king will allow the black pieces to be activated and create a very resilient position.

21...♞e5 22.♙xe5 ♜xe5 23.c4 ♙g4?!

The illusion of activity deceives Black. It was better to play 23...♙d7, preparing ...♜f8 and keeping the g4-square available for either the bishop or the knight. Then, after 24.h3 (24.♙g1 achieves nothing due to 24...♜e1+ 25.♙f2 and Black can repeat moves or try for more) 24...♜ae8 Black has coordinated his rooks and has equalised.

24.h3!

White benefits from the gift of a tempo.

24...♙d7 25.♙b2?! ♜ae8

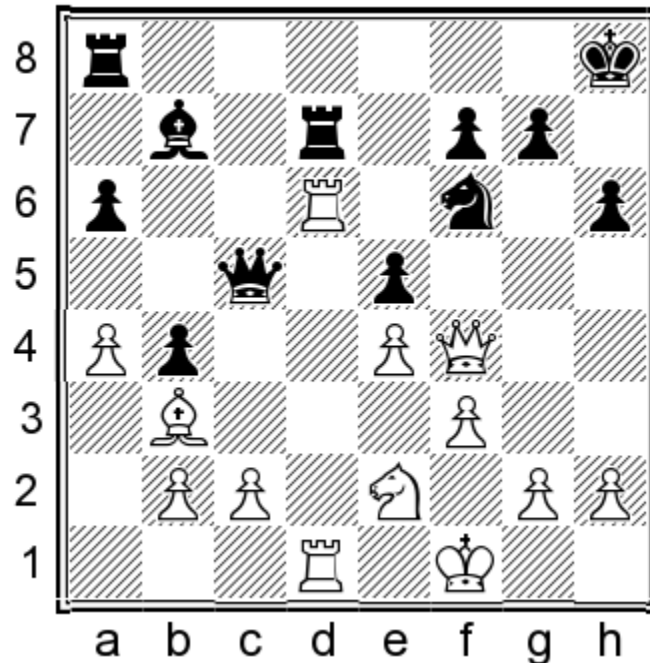
Here, 25...♜f8! 26.♙g1 ♜e3 was slightly better.

26.♙xb7

With a complex position.

Javier Sainz Allo (1804)

Juan Manuel Martínez Montes (1925)
Spanish Team Championship U16 2021



Exercise 36

White is a pawn up, but cannot rest easy, as he must choose between two possibilities, both unusual.

25. ♔d2?!

Not the best move. It keeps the extra pawn, but the activity of the black pieces is very uncomfortable.

25. ♔xf6! was very strong, but it is a difficult move to make, because miscellaneous exchanges of material tend to be avoided; therefore no experience is gained in this regard. So, a player will try to avoid it even at the cost of choosing a more dangerous alternative, which is the case here.

After 25...gxf6 26.♖xd7 White's position is very advantageous, almost clearly winning. The black queen has no pieces helping her to control the dark squares and the f7-pawn cannot be defended.

25...♖ad8 26.♖xd7 ♖xd7 27.♙e1 ♖xd1 28.♙xd1 ♘xe4!?

Black finds an excellent practical option.

29.fxe4 ♘g4 30.♙d8+!

This is the only winning attempt. 30.♙e1 allows a draw while everything else runs into mate.

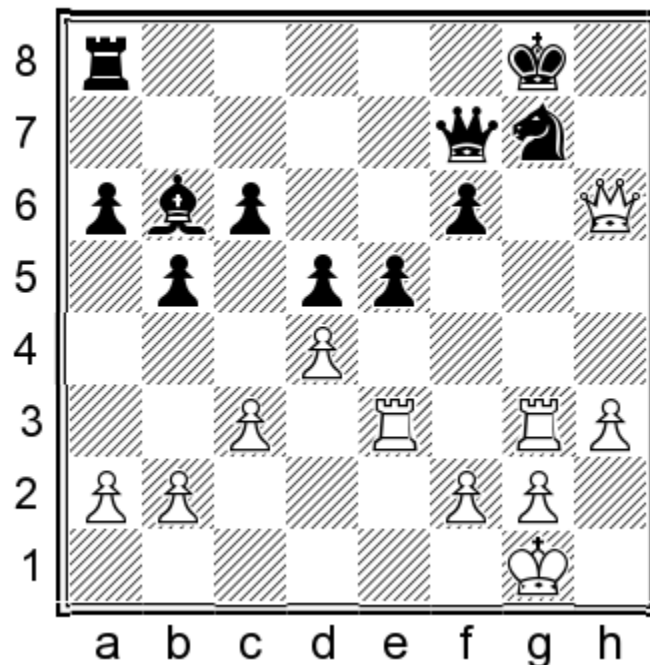
30...♙h7 31.♙e1 ♙f2+

And White has made life more complicated for himself. The ending of this game can be seen in **Error 16**, Silent Defence.

Marcos Felipo Martínez (1642)

Carlos González Lema (1794)

Spanish Team Championship U14 2018



We join this game shortly before the moment of the key decision, in order to bring into focus what is a very frequent situation. White had

Now is the time to take stock. Materially, the queen is confronting rook, bishop and pawn (material equality), but the black king is very open, and the queen is far superior. Nevertheless, there is a large mass of black passed pawns and now is not the time to relax. A good assessment of the queen's powers tells us that if the enemy king is exposed, the queen can deal with the passed pawns effectively because of its wide range of double attacks. That is why it is best for White here to use the only passed pawn he possesses with 37.h4+–.

37.♔c2?

The queen moves away from its active position and loses tempi in the struggle against the advance of the black pawns.

37...b4?

For the time being, Black does not realise that his most dangerous passed pawn is the d-pawn, because the rook can move to support it from behind, thanks to the closeness of the king to the d8-square:

37...d4! 38.♔h7 ♖d8=.

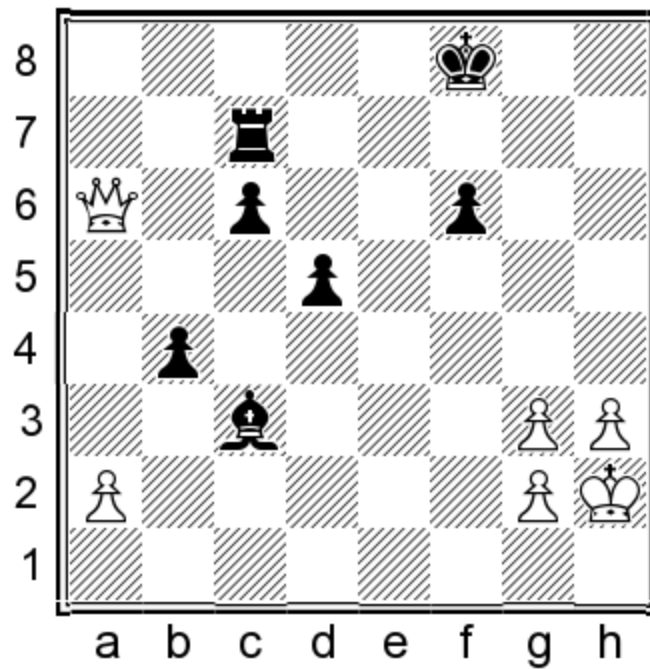
38.♔a4

Better was 38.♔h7! ♖d8 39.♔c7 ♔e8 40.♔xc6+ ♔e7 41.♔xa6 d4 42.♔d3, winning.

38...♖c8?

And here 38...♖d8! kept the balance.

39.♔xa6 ♖c7

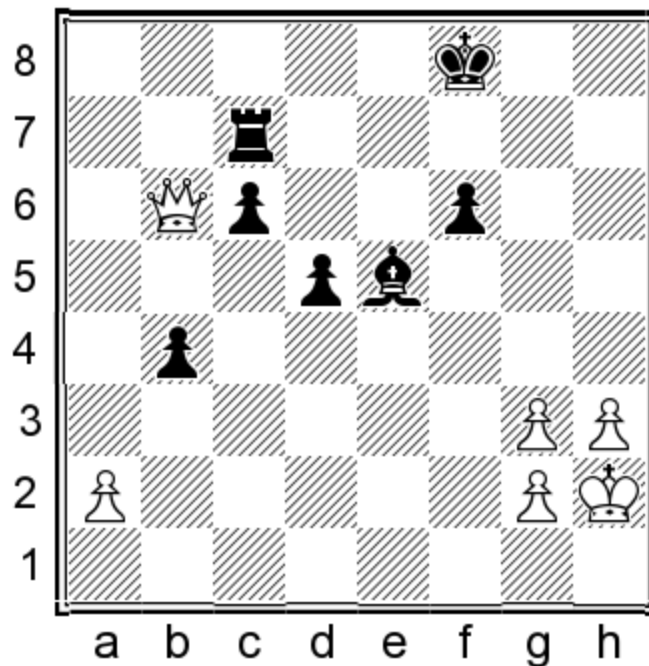


The position has become difficult for both sides.

40. ♔b6?

White does not spot the effective coordination network that Black is going to create with his next move. Here it was necessary to mobilise the other passed pawn, because the position of the queen facilitates this: 40.a4! d4 41.a5 and White wins.

40... ♘e5!



Extraordinary. Black has shed his useless material and has created the type of position in which rook, bishop and pawn are superior to the queen: **a passed pawn supported from behind by the rook.** The open position of the black king still allows White to draw, but now he needs to hurry to seek that objective.

41. ♙xb4+?!

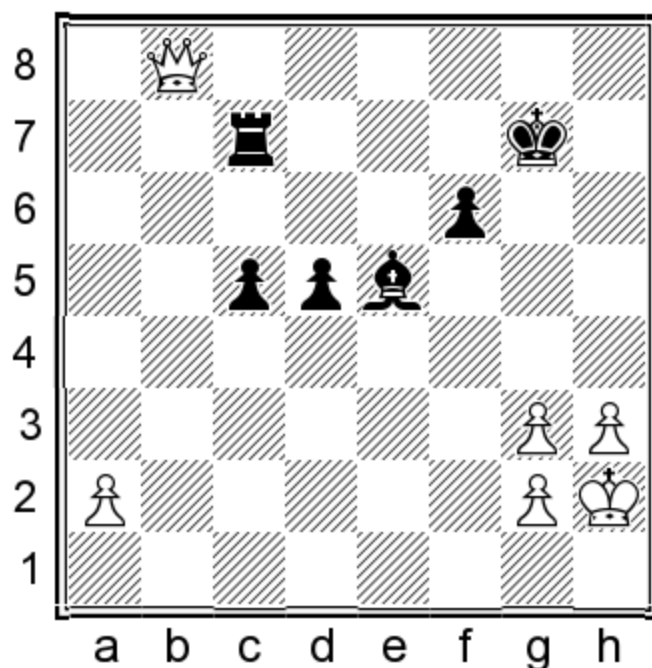
This pawn is not worth much.

41. ♙c5+! ♔e8 42. h4 was better.

41...c5 42. ♙b8+?

And this very natural check is already losing; after the black king's next move the checks come to an end and the favourite passed pawn (the c-pawn) advances. Instead, 42. ♙h4 c4 43. ♙h6+ would have enabled great resistance, relying on the numerous checks that the queen could still give.

42... ♔g7!



It is worth looking at the position; the coordination of the bishop with the rook and the passed pawns is perfect.

43.a4 c4 44.a5 c3 45.a6 c2 46.a7 c1♙ 47.a8♙ ♔xg3+ 48.♔xg3 ♙e3+ 49.♔h2 ♙f4+ 50.g3 ♙f2+ 51.♔h1 ♖c1#

How to avoid Errors 27, 28, 29 and 30

We will address all the errors in this chapter together because the main reason is the same for all of them: excessive respect for the material postulate. Nevertheless, there are some particular aspects that are related to experience and knowledge of the themes of each of them.

The first recommendation, and the most important one in this case, is to experience it more often, because it is a lack of experience that causes us to be afraid. I assure you that exchange and pawn sacrifices are available in almost every game, and often they are good. The other two types of sacrifices are less common.

The second recommendation is to study *Rethinking the Chess Pieces* by Andrew Soltis. Read it seriously and check the examples with the engine.

The third recommendation is to keep refining the material postulate, based on your own experience. To begin with, I suggest the following rules for you, all well tested and not at all exhaustive:

- A bishop pair is worth an extra half-point (one point in open positions).
- Centre pawns are worth more than flank pawns in the middlegame.
- Rooks and pawns increase in value with each piece exchange.
- Queens and minor pieces diminish in value with each piece exchange.
- The two rooks are worth 10 points but a single rook is worth 5.5 points.
- Knights are worth more, the more pawns there are on the board.

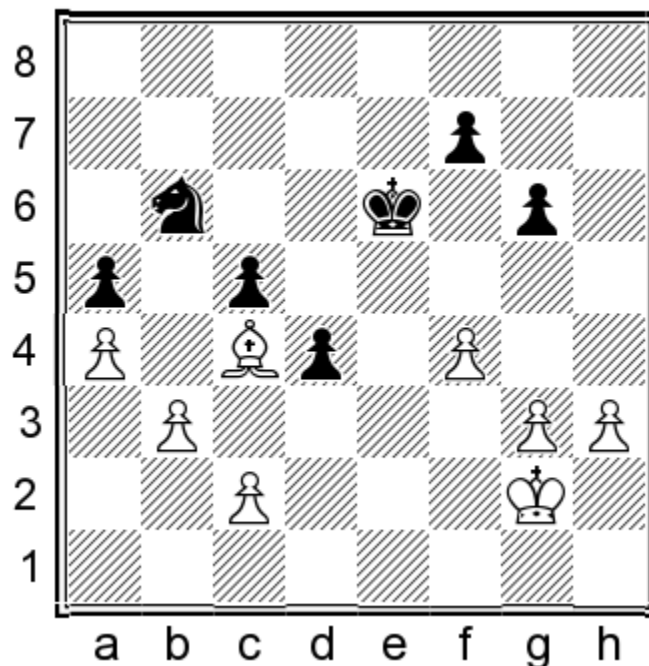
The fourth recommendation is curiosity: whenever a sacrifice occurs to you in a game, check it later. Whenever a friend of yours has been able to make a sacrifice, analyse it with him.

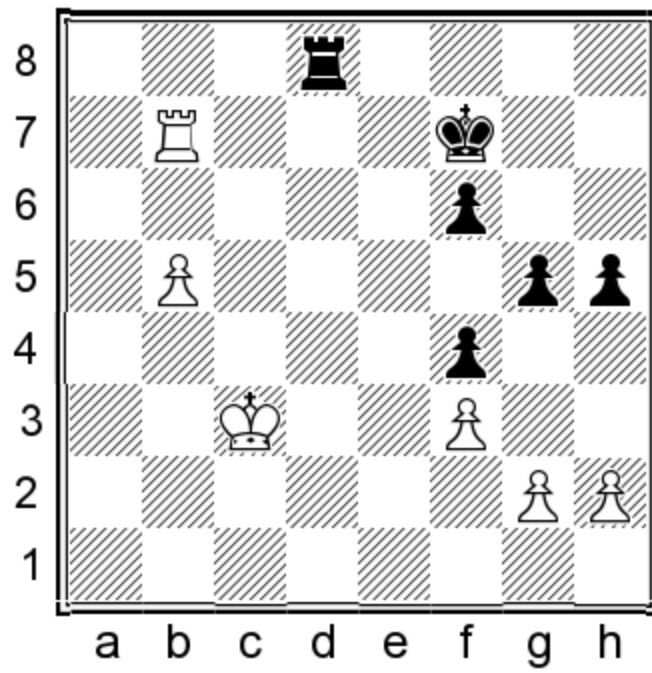
Chapter 7

The endgame

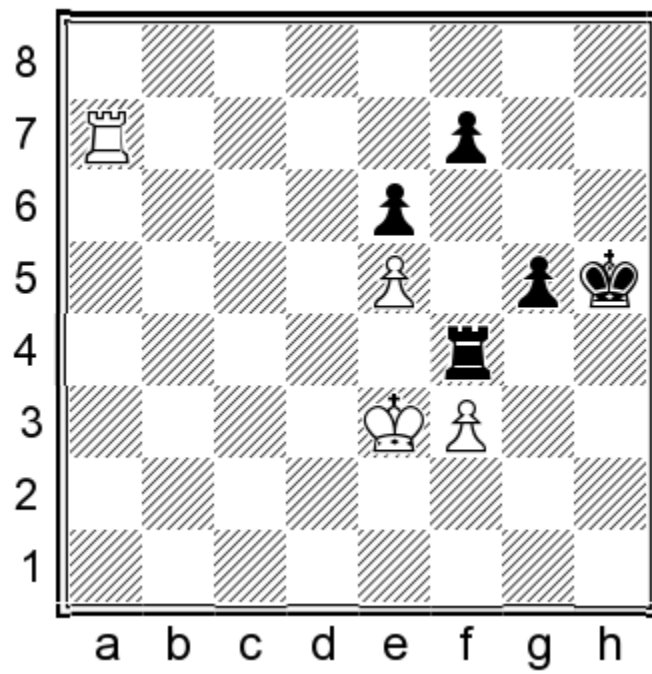
- Error 31 - Neglecting the role of the king
- Error 32 - Forgetting about zugzwang
- Error 33 - Bad 'division of labour' between our pieces
- Error 34 - Not applying the rule about two separated passed pawns in opposite-coloured bishops endings
- Error 35 - Overrating passed pawns in the fight against a rook

Exercises for chapter 7

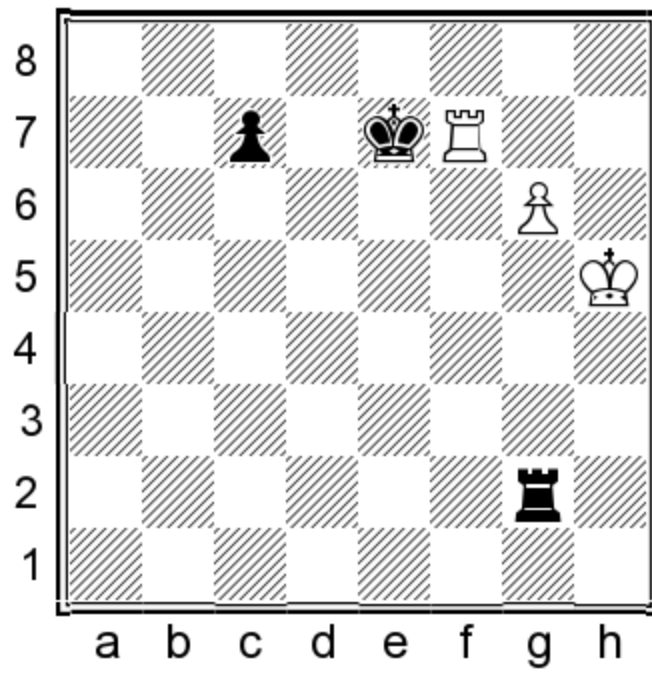




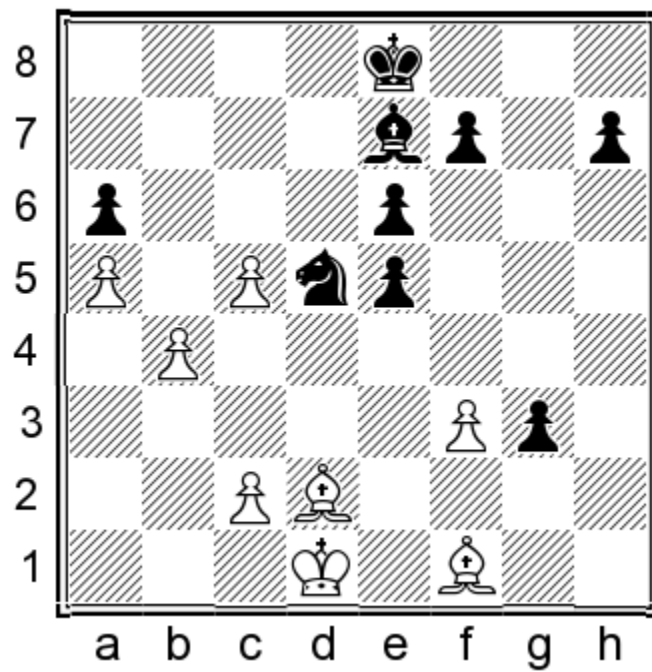
38



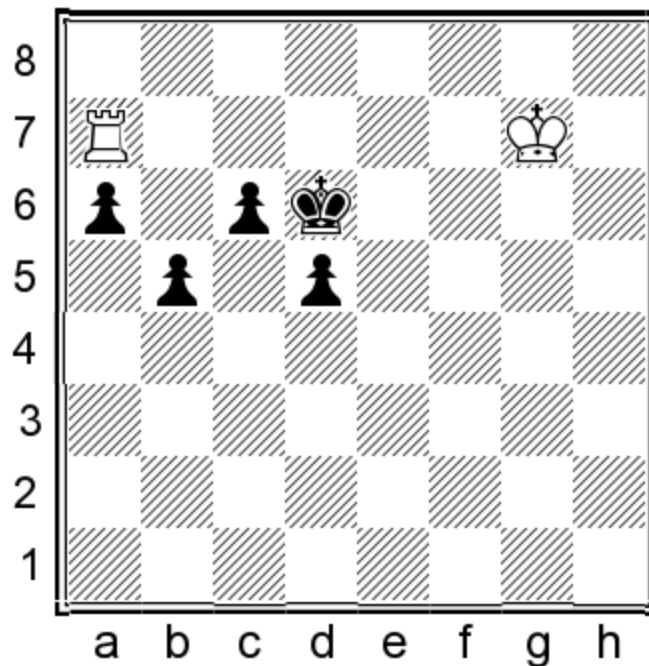
39



40



41



42

In this section, we shall see errors characteristic of positions with only a few pieces left. Errors which can also occur in positions with many pieces are covered in other sections of the book, in which some endgame examples also appear.

The endgame is a phase of the game distinguished not only because it comes after the other two, but because it exhibits different aspects. Many authors have talked about what those differences are, and there is a considerable consensus regarding most of them. I suggest the following five as essential:

- the important role of the king;
- the importance of passed pawns;
- the frequency of zugzwang;
- the frequency of fortresses;
- the use of schematic thinking, which has its main manifestation in the ‘division of labour’ (i.e. the distribution of tasks among the pieces).

And it turns out that the majority of typical mistakes are related to one or other of these elements, as we shall see throughout this chapter and the following one.

Regarding fortresses, I have not devoted a separate section to these, but they appear as ‘guest stars’ in several examples in this and other sections of the book.

Finally, it is well known that rook endings are by far the most common endings (approximately 10% of all games reach a rook ending) and they feature their own typical mistakes. It is logical, therefore, that they have their own chapter. But there will also be a few rook endings in this chapter when it is a matter of a mistake common to all endings.

Error 31 - Neglecting the role of the king

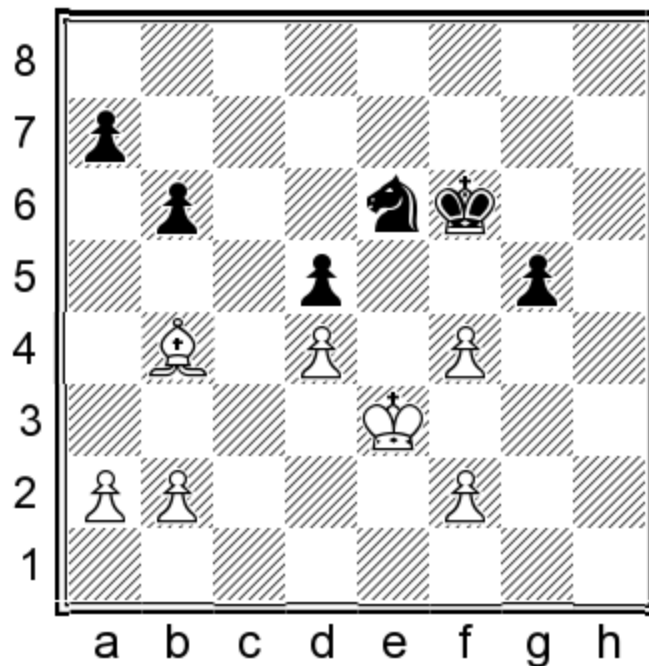
The activity of the king in the endgame is a well-known principle even at the most basic levels. But often, it is not applied, almost always because other objectives seem more important, and sometimes also because the capabilities of the king are not well known. Specifically the king’s capability to control enemy passed pawns is not well known, which is much greater than the capability to support its own passed pawns. Consequently, the king is often not employed in this function, while it should really be automatic.

Sometimes, the player is aware that he ought to use the king but cannot find a way to do it in time. These are usually cases where the advantage is only slight or where the king’s route to the battle scene is difficult.

Lucas Abal Cores (2137)

Julio Suarez Gómez (2307)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2014



In this example, Black's greatest problem is how to penetrate the enemy territory with his king.

43...♞xf4?

Superficially, this move offers the black king more options to penetrate, but that is not the case. After 43...gxf4+! the pawn does not block the passage of the black king but even facilitates it, thanks to some tactical details: 44.♔d3 (44.♔f3 loses after 44...♔f5 45.♕c3 ♞g5+ 46.♔e2 ♔e4) 44...♔g5 and now the king detours round the outside, which cannot be prevented. 45.♕c3 (45.f3? ♔h4) 45...♔g4 46.♔e2 f3+ 47.♔e3 ♞g7 and wins.

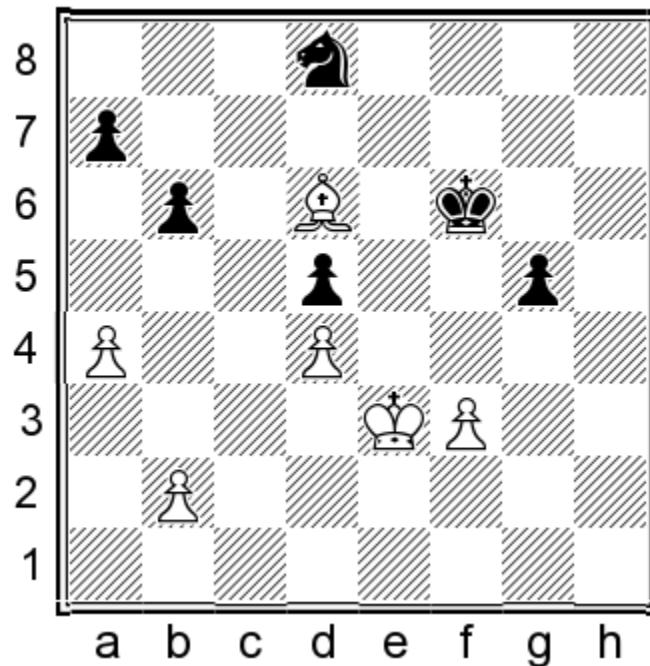
44.♕d6 ♞e6 45.f3!

This is the key move, and now Black's king can be prevented from getting through, although he did eventually achieve this in the game.

45...♞d8

And now, instead of creating problems for himself with 46.b4? b5!±, White should have played:

46.a4!



After this move, the ending to study is the one that occurred in Karpov-Kasparov, Moscow 1984, Game 9.

46...♞c6 47.b4 a6 48.b5 axb5 49.axb5 ♞a7 50.♞c7

The position is a draw.

In endings without any major pieces, the king is the most powerful piece.

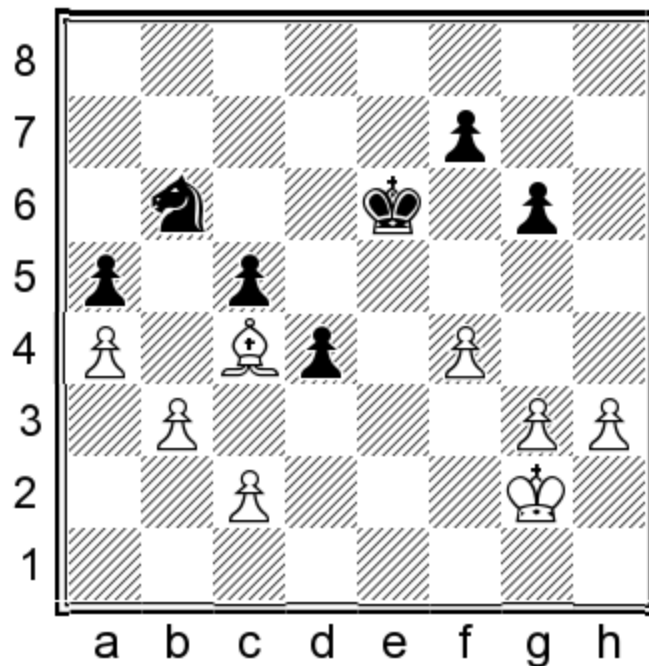
In such endgames, the activity of the king is so important that positions with a material advantage cannot be won if the king is unable to invade the enemy position.

Let's look at an example.

Aketza Pereyra (1755)

Leyre Abrisqueta Zudaire (1958)

Baracaldo 2019



Exercise 37

Should Black exchange on c4?

It is generally considered that a pawn ending a pawn down will be lost, while a knight can be a good piece for creating complications. Hence, Black did not exchange pieces.

1...♞xc4!

But the exchange is correct if the entry of the enemy king can subsequently be prevented, or, in other words, if the defender can construct a fortress. The sign that alerts us to this possibility is that the board is already partly closed off.

The game continued 1...♔e7? 2.g4? (White provides a second opportunity. The best move was 2.f5!, but any retreat of the bishop was also sufficient for a win) 2...♞xc4 3.bxc4 f5 4.♔g3 ♕f7! 5.♔h4 ♕f6! 6.gxf5! and here too we have a fortress.

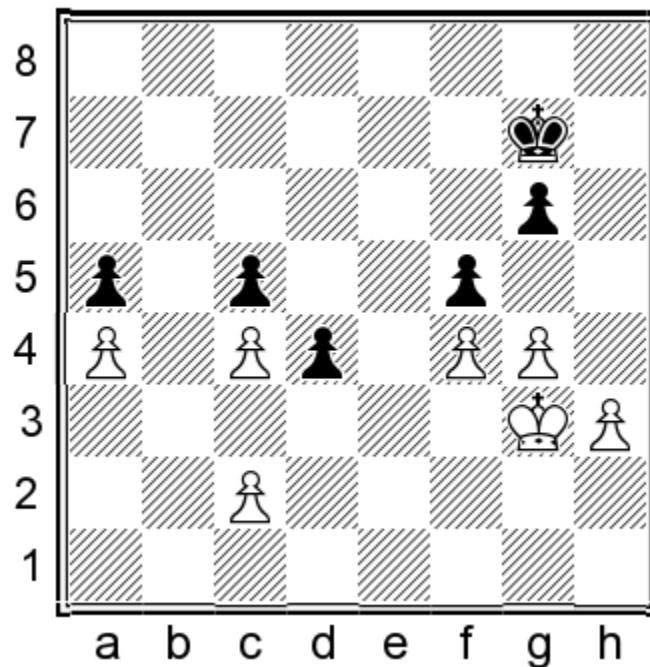
2.bxc4 f5!

Building the fortress. Now we are going to check whether it can be breached; the only way is to break with g4 or h5 and then try to enter there with the king.

3.g4

3.h4 ♔f6 4.♔h3 ♔g7 5.h5 gxh5 6.♔h4 ♔g6 is a draw.

3...♔f7 4.♔g3 ♔g7!



5.h4

With 5.gxf5 gxf5 6.♔h4 ♔g6 it is obvious that there is no way through.

5.♔h4 ♔h6!. Black must prevent ♔g5 and now the position is one of mutual zugzwang: 6.g5+ ♔g7=.

5...♔h6 6.h5

6.♔h3 ♔g7 7.h5 gxh5 8.g5 ♔h7 9.♔h4 ♔g6 is a draw.

6...gxh5! 7.g5+

7.gxf5?? even loses: 7...♔g7 8.♔h4 ♔f6 9.♔xh5 ♔xf5 10.♔h6 ♔xf4.

7...♔g7! 8.♔h4 ♔g6

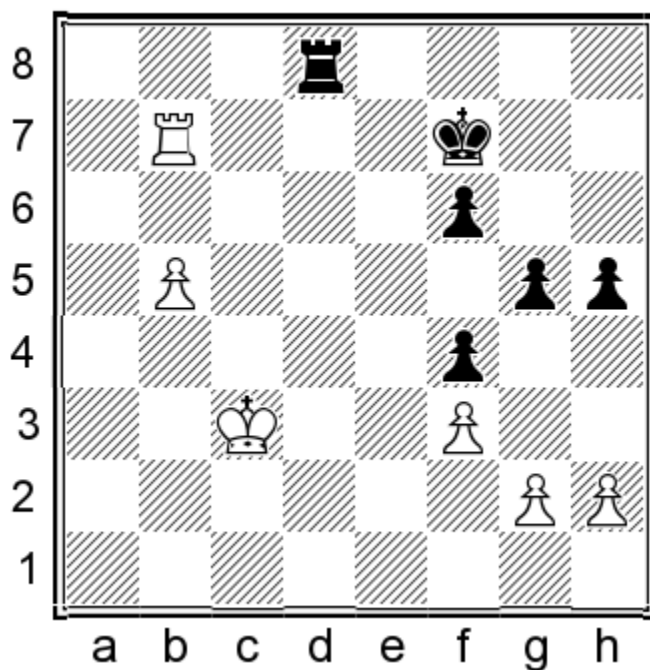
The position is one of mutual zugzwang and Black can just repeat moves if she has to. Hence, the position is a draw.

Another particular aspect of this theme is that **the king is the best piece to fight against passed pawns in the endgame**. This principle is either not very well known or not widely respected, because it crops up in a multitude of errors. I would say this is an example of a postulate that is poorly publicised in classical chess strategy.

Lance Henderson de La Fuente (2104)

Marcos Lianes García (1953)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2015



Exercise 38

The passed b-pawn is White's main advantage, but Black can neutralise it by approaching with his king.

42...♔g6?

A serious mistake, although easily understandable. The position with the attacker's rook in front of the passed pawn and the defender's king close to its own pawns is so common and so well studied that it might suggest that here the black king should move to this side.

But the principle that the king should deal with the enemy passed pawns would indicate that the king should head towards the queenside, which is the correct move here:

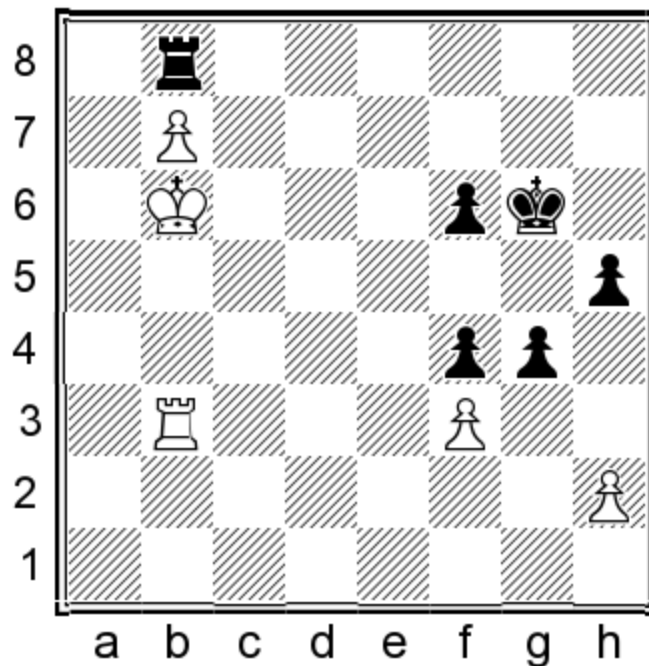
42...♔e6! 43.b6 (43.♔c4 ♖d2, just as in the other variation; 43.♖b6+ ♔e7 44.♔c4 ♖d2. With the king close to the pawn, the rook can be activated to capture enemy pawns and help to control the enemy passed pawn from behind) 43...♖d1 44.♖c7 ♔d6 45.♖c4 (with the idea of 'building a bridge' on b4) 45...♖c1+ 46.♔b4 ♖b1+ 47.♔a5 ♖b2 48.♖b4 ♖a2+ 49.♔b5 ♔d7!. The only move, continuing with the idea of bringing the king across to control the passed pawn. Black draws.

43.♖a7?

It is too early to move the rook away, at least on this side. One of the winning moves was 43.b6!; for example, 43...g4 44.♖c7 ♖b8 45.b7 f5 (45...♔g5 46.♖c5+!) 46.♔d4 h4 47.h3 ♔f6 48.♔d5 and Black will soon have to give up the rook for the passed pawn, without gaining any counterplay.

43...g4?

Black misses his opportunity: 43...♖c8+! 44.♔b3 ♖c5 45.♔b4 ♖c2 46.b6 ♖xg2 47.♖a3 ♖b2+ 48.♖b3 ♖d2 49.b7 ♖d8 50.♔c5 ♖b8 51.♔b6 g4.



analysis diagram

Here, Black has indeed gained enough counterplay to draw; for example, 52.♔c7 ♖xb7+ 53.♔xb7 ♔g5! 54.♔c6 g3 55.♖b1 ♔h4 56.hxg3+ ♔xg3 57.♔d5 h4 58.♔e4 h3 59.♖g1+ ♔f2 60.♖g8 h2 61.♖h8 ♔g2 62.♔xf4 h1♕ 63.♖xh1 ♔xh1 64.♔g3 ♔g1 65.f4 ♔f1 66.♔g4 ♔f2 67.♔f5 ♔f3.

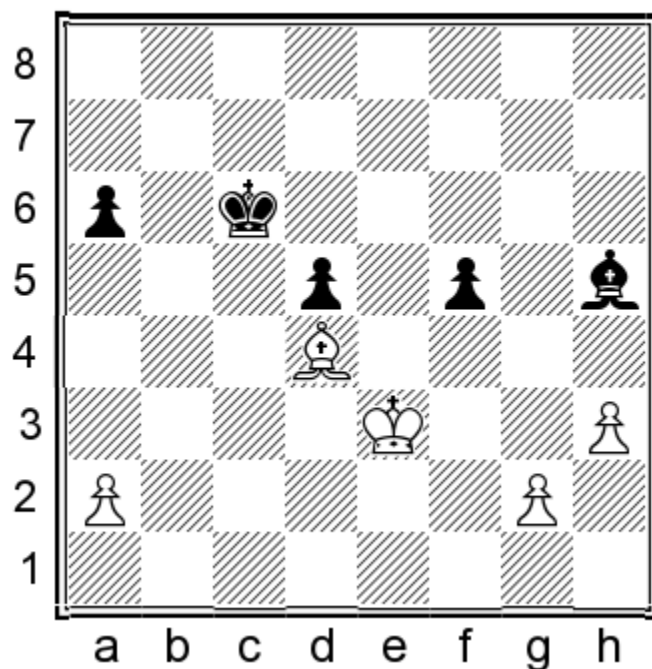
44.♖a4 ♔g5 45.b6 f5 46.b7 ♖b8 47.♖b4

Black does not have sufficient counterplay.

47...♔h4 48.♔d4 gxf3 49.gxf3 ♔h3 50.♖b2 h4 51.♔e5 ♖e8+ 52.♔xf4 ♖e4+ 53.fxe4 fxe4 54.♔xe4 1-0

In opposite-coloured bishop endings, it is well known that one passed pawn is not usually sufficient to win. This often leads to a lack of confidence in our own passed pawns. However, we should know that when the king supports the passed pawn, unopposed by the enemy king, the colour of the bishops scarcely matters.

Gabriel Roma Barge
Rubén Fernández Gil

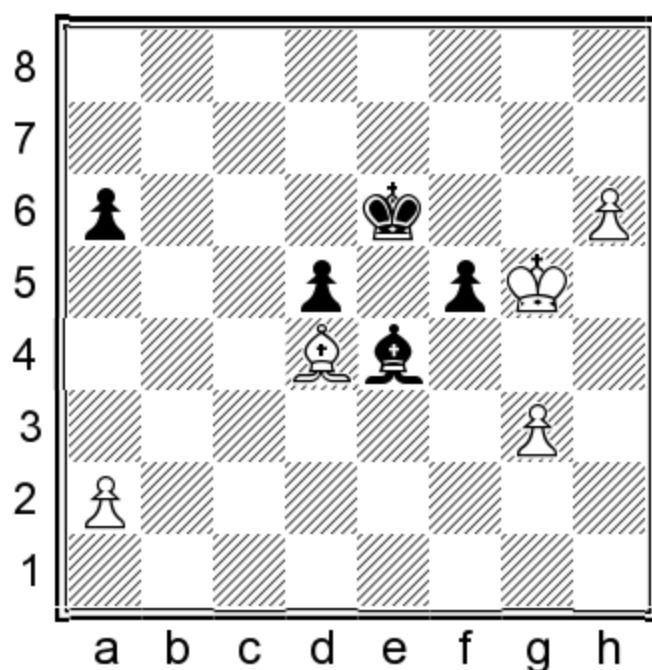


The pawns are equal and the bishops are of opposite colour. Nevertheless, that does not excuse the black king from carrying out the task for which it is best qualified: stopping the enemy passed pawn.

59...♔b5?

The black king chooses the wrong direction. It is true that this seems the most active, but White's h-pawn will prove to be much more dangerous than Black's d-pawn.

59...♔d6!, heading for the passed h-pawn, draws, although not without some difficulties: 60.♔f4 ♔e6 61.♔g5 ♕e2 62.h4 ♕f1 63.g3 ♕d3 (this is not necessary yet, but in the end the bishop will have to come to this diagonal) 64.h5 ♕e4 65.h6 (65.♔f4 ♔f7!)



analysis diagram

65...f4!. This pawn sacrifice is necessary to allow the bishop to control the h-pawn, and this is the best moment to do it, with the pawn on h6, although it is not the only one. 66.gxf4 (66.♔xf4 ♖b1 67.g4 ♖c2 68.g5 ♖e4 and the pawns are unable to advance further) 66...♖h7. The king and the bishop coordinate perfectly to rule out even the slightest attempt by White to make progress.

60.a3?

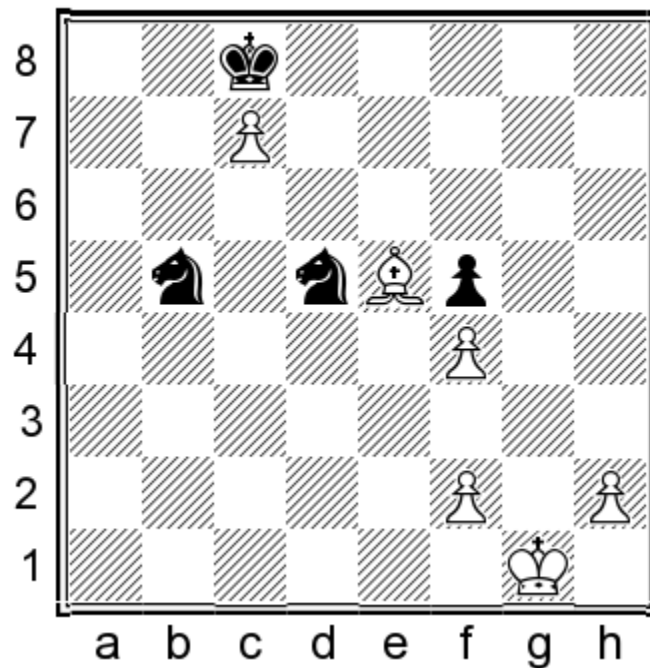
With the offer of a draw, which was logically accepted. Black's king appears to be more active than White's, but that appearance can change in the process of calculation. White could have won, precisely by using his king to support the passed pawn: 60.♔f4! ♔c4 61.♖f2 ♖g6 (61...d4 62.♔xf5 d3 63.♖e1 ♔d4 64.g4) 62.♔g5 ♖h7 63.h4 d4 64.h5 ♔c3 (64...d3 65.♖e1) 65.♔h6 ♖g8 66.♔g7, followed by h5-h6-h7.

The next example is one of my little pranks in the selection for this book. The future World Champion also made amateurish mistakes, but of course in this case he did so when he was nine years old.

Ding Liren

David Recuero Guerra (2228)

Oropesa del Mar World Championship U10 2001

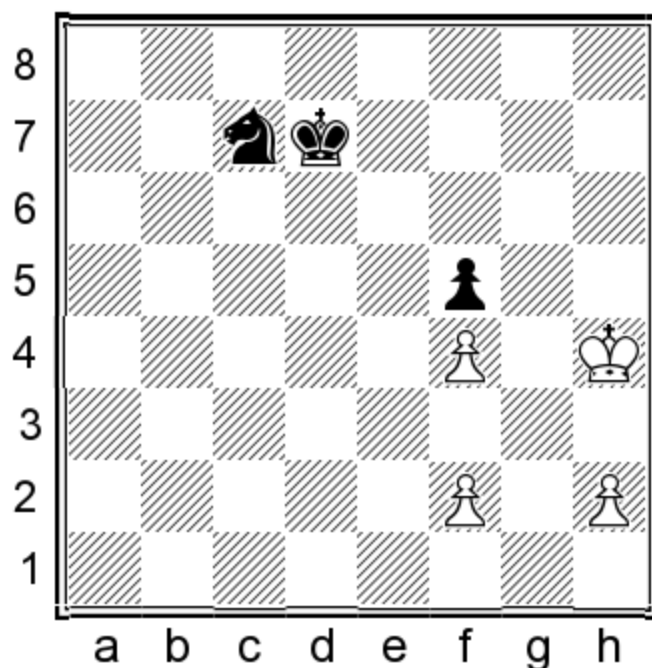


Black has just one pawn left, but only the white king is capable of capturing it. However, it is possible that White was seeking more than a draw.

37.h4?

White speedily advances the passed pawn, but it is not dangerous and this is an important waste of time; furthermore, the pawn will get in the way of the white king.

By bringing the king forward immediately, White is able to draw with some ease: 37.♔g2! ♖bxc7 38.♔g3 ♔d7 (38...♘e6 39.♔h4 ♔d7 40.♔h5 ♔e7 41.♔g6=) 39.♙xc7 ♘xc7 40.♔h4



analysis diagram

40...♞e6 (40...♔e6 is the natural move, but it fails to create any problems: 41.♔g5! ♞b5 42.h4 (the pawn's advance is not essential; instead, the king could oscillate between g5 and g6) 42...♞d4 43.h5 ♔f7 44.h6 ♔g8 45.♔g6 ♔h8 46.h7=) 41.♔h5 ♞c5 42.♔g5 (at least here White might fall for 42.♔g6? ♔e6 43.h4 ♞d3 44.♔g5 ♞xf2 45.h5 ♞h3+ -+) 42...♔e6 43.f3.

37...♞bxc7!

Only capturing with this knight wins. 37...♞dxc7? 38.h5! ♞e6 would have encountered a very elegant move, but one which is a typical idea: 39.♔g7! (39.h6? ♞f8-+) and the other knight would have to come: 39...♞d6 40.h6 ♞f7=.

38.♔g2

One tempo later and it is already too late. Here, 38.h5 does not arrive in time: 38...♞e6 39.h6 (39.♔g7 ♞xg7 40.h6 ♞f6!-+) 39...♞f8 40.♔g2 ♔d7 41.♔h3 ♔e6 42.♔h4 ♔f7 43.♔g5 ♞e7, followed by ...♞h7.

38...♔d7 39.♔g3 ♔e6 40.♔f3 ♔f7 41.♙d6 ♔g6 42.♙e5 ♔h5
 43.♔g3 ♞e6 44.♙d6 ♞c3 45.♙e5 ♞e4+ 46.♔f3 ♔xh4

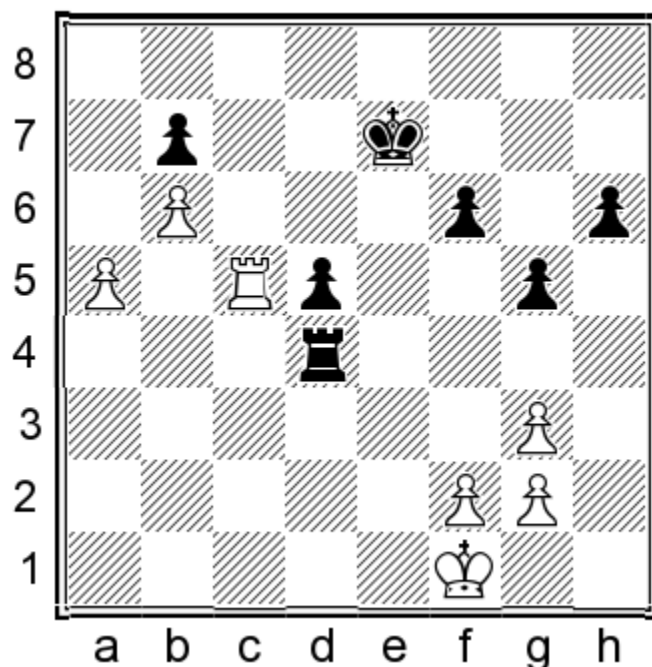
The first pawn has fallen and Black won in 64 moves.

Often, a tactical mistake is made by not having properly absorbed a known strategic concept.

Juan Labiano Hernández (2283)

Xulio Del Prado Rodríguez (2283)

Benidorm 2022



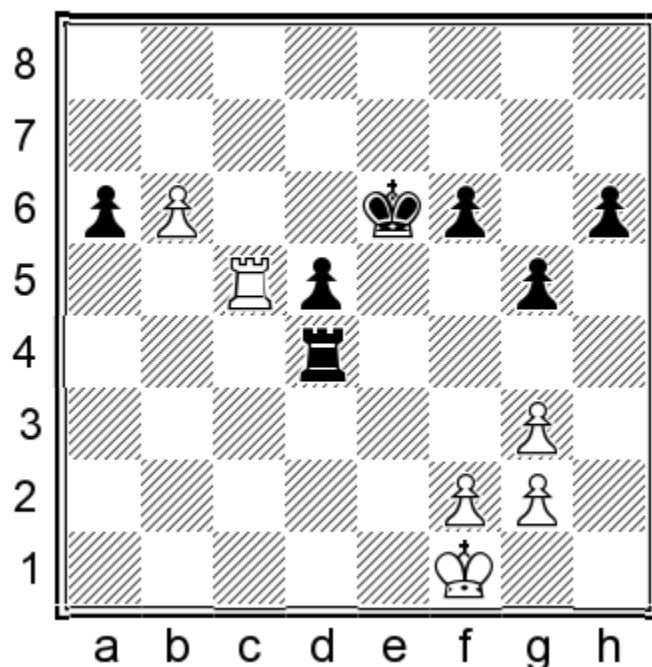
White has just played a5. Black should really have asked himself why, but it was difficult to be suspicious of this move, as it simply defends the b-pawn (and the a-pawn itself).

1...♔e6?

Naturally, this is a serious tactical error, which we can attribute to insufficient familiarity with a tactical theme involving passed pawns (see **Error 12**). However, it also suggests that Black has forgotten

that the king should move towards the opponent's passed pawns, as we have already seen in several examples. With 1...♔d6! it is an easy draw following 2.♖c7 ♜a4 3.♖xb7 ♜xa5 4.♖f7 (4.♖h7 ♜b5 5.♖xh6 ♔e6=) 4...♔e5 5.b7 ♜b5.

2.a6 bxa6



3.♖b5!

And suddenly, it is revealed that the black king is very far away.

3...axb5 4.b7+–

How to avoid Error 31

I shall start with a recommendation that applies to all the errors covered in this chapter, although it will affect some more than others: solving practical endgame exercises, which is essential to improve understanding of the typical themes. I shall provide a book list (more extensive than on other occasions) at the end of the chapter.

In the specific case of **Error 31**, I believe that it is one of those that are mainly caused by deficient knowledge of typical models. That is to say, the general principle is known (in this case the important role of the king) but it is not fully understood, which means that it is sometimes applied too late and sometimes badly.

To improve your understanding of a theme, it is best to look at examples of it and analyse them seriously. For some errors, looking at just one or two examples might be sufficient, because this will bring to light something that was previously hidden. However, in cases of poor understanding of a theme (as is usually the case with this one), five or six examples might be too few. That's why I recommend a calm and unhurried reading of a series of books on practical endgame themes: *100 Endgame Patterns You Must Know* by your author, *Mastering Endgame Strategy* by Johan Hellsten and *A Matter of Endgame Technique* by Jacob Aagaard.

Error 32 - Forgetting about zugzwang

Accustomed as we are to waiting impatiently for our turn to move and hoping that our opponent does nothing unpleasant on his move when we suddenly find that having to make a move harms us, it still comes as a surprise, even though we might have seen it a thousand times before. If this were an extremely rare occurrence, it would just have an aesthetic impact and would only rarely affect the result. But it turns out that in the endgame, zugzwang is a frequent and even natural phenomenon.

So there is really no excuse for the persistent forgetting about zugzwang, which can be detected in some of the examples. And yet, when we win a game thanks to zugzwang, we jump for joy and tell everyone about it, as if we have finished off the game with an unforgettable combination.

Sometimes, the zugzwang is there in front of us, literally, but we do not see it; we don't realise that if it were the opponent to move, he

would have no defence. In those cases, allowing the opponent to escape is ironic.

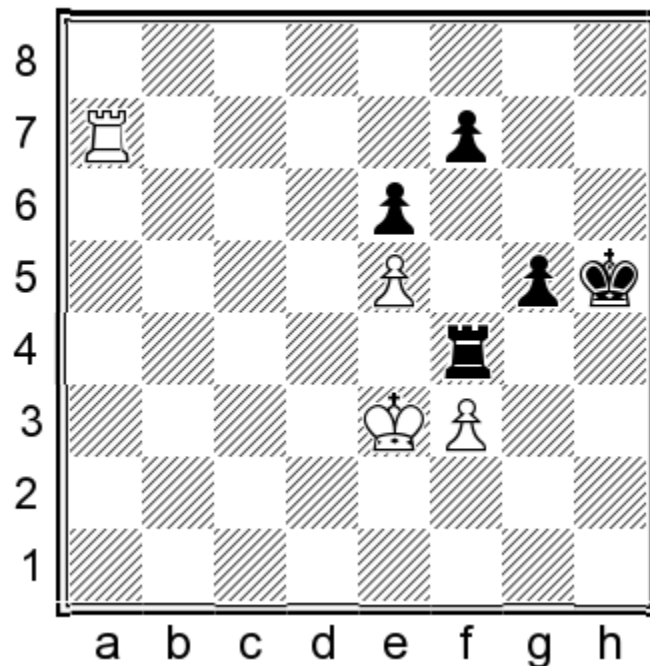
When only a few pieces are left, we should always consider the possibility of zugzwang. And although mutual zugzwang is a rare occurrence, zugzwang affecting just one of the players is quite normal.

In positions where one player is trying to win, and the opponent does not have many moves, it is natural for the player with the advantage to look for a decisive zugzwang. In this section, we present a few examples that I consider to be particularly striking, but the situation arises repeatedly in other cases.

Pedro Viñal Gutiérrez (1901)

Jesus García Callejo (2154)

Spanish Championship 65+ 2022



Exercise 39

In this example, taken from the Spanish Super-veterans Championship, White's possible win is hidden behind a zugzwang, which is rather distant to foresee from here.

49.♖a1?

This move is losing, and when we reach the critical position it will be very easy to understand why the apparently absurd 49. ♖a2!! draws. Could this be discovered from here? Certainly, it's difficult, but by applying progressive and schematic thinking, it is within the reach of an experienced player.

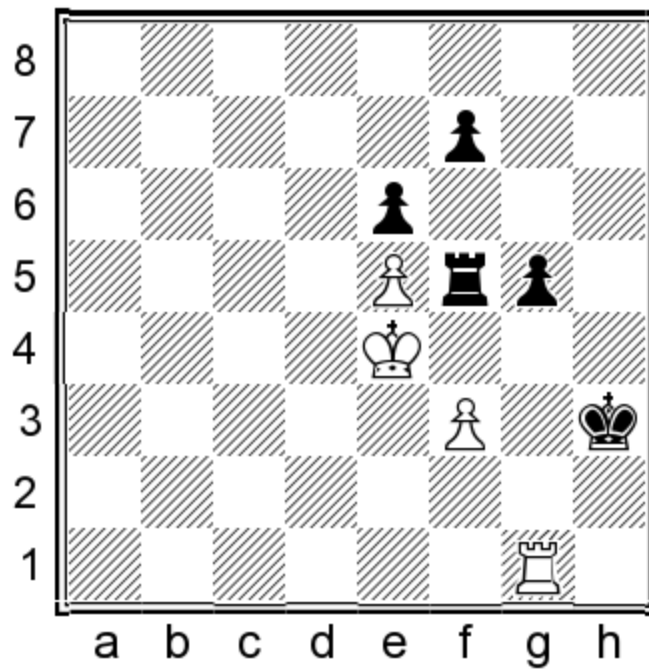
Let's focus on how Black might beat us. It will surely be by bringing the king to attack the f3-pawn via h4 and h3/g3; that can be done with the rook on f4 but more probably on f5, to prevent counterattacks against the weakness on g5.

Having thought that out, we can imagine a threat of this type (without White moving): Black will play ...♖f5 and will answer ♔e4 with ...♔h4; we play ♖a1 and Black plays ♔g3; we then have to check on g1; now it is not difficult to realise that that ...♔h2, attacking the rook, does not win, but ...♔h3, passing the move to us, wins through zugzwang.

After working this out, we can adjust our moves and see that we need to lose a tempo with 49.♖a2!! ♖f5 50.♔e4 ♔h4 51.♖g2 ♔h3 52.♖g1=.

49...♖f5 50.♔e4 ♔h4 51.♖g1 ♖f4+?!

Although this move allows Black to return to the correct path later, it is normally made with the wrong intentions. We shall explain the winning plan here: 51...♔h3!.

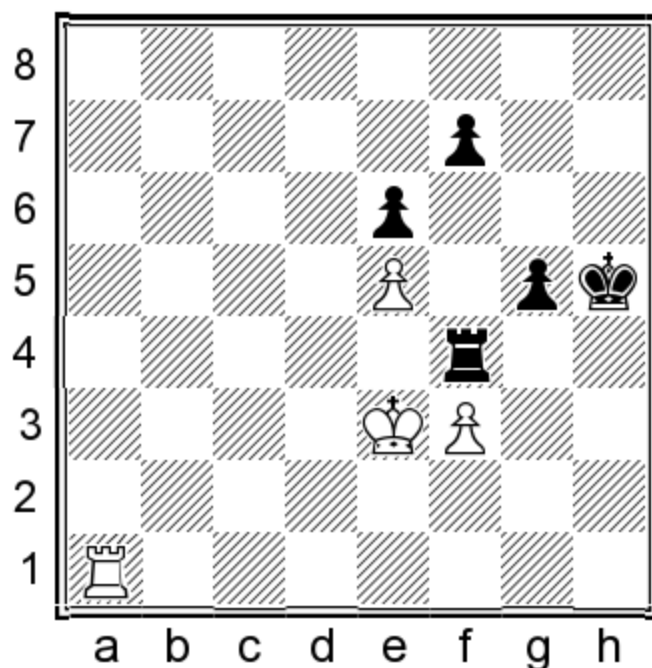


analysis diagram

And it is not that Black is threatening much, in fact, he is not threatening anything; if it were Black to move, it would be a draw. The problem for White is that it is a zugzwang position, and by having to move, he loses.

Let's pause a while to consider the position. White cannot move the king without losing one of the two pawns immediately. He cannot move the rook without allowing the black king to move to g3; well, he can prevent it for one move with 52.♖g4, but after 52...♔h2! the white position is comical, as the pawn ending after 53.f4 ♖xf4+ 54.♖xf4 gxf4 55.♔xf4 ♔h3! (only thus) 56.♔f3 ♔h4 is completely losing.

52.♔e3 ♔h5 53.♖a1



53...♔g6?

We already know that this move throws away the win, but only if White chooses the right square for his rook the next time this is required. Instead, 53...♖f5! would have allowed Black to get back on the right track.

54.♖a7 ♖b4

54...♖f5 would have been more challenging for White, as we already know; 55.♔e4 ♔h5, and now it is essential to play 56.♖a2! ♔h4 57.♖g2 ♔h3 58.♖g1 ♔h2 59.♖g4 and the zugzwang is in White's favour.

55.♖c7 g4?!

After this, the position is an easy draw.

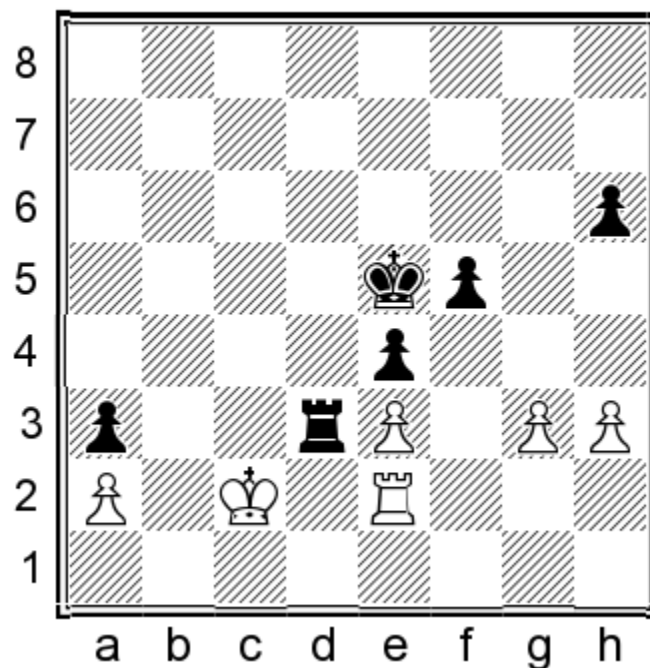
56.fxg4 ♖xg4 57.♖a7 ♖g1 58.♔e4 ♖f1 59.♖a8 ♔g7 60.♖b8 ♖h1 61.♖a8 ♖h4+ 62.♔e3 ♔g6 63.♖a7 f5 64.exf6 ♔xf6 65.♖a5 ♖b4 66.♖c5 e5 67.♖c8 ½-½

Zugzwang is closely related to the triangulation manoeuvre, which typically arises in pawn endings, but it can also apply to other pieces when their movements are very limited.

Fernando Fernández Estremera (2123)

Víctor Arguelles González (1662)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2021



In this ending, where the white pieces are already very passive, the only problem for Black is to find a way for his king to enter the white position.

64...h5?

Black's play is guided by threats, rather than plans; now he wants to play ...h4. It is hard to believe that this move throws away the win, but it is easy to realise that it hinders the entry of the black king, which is 'precisely' the piece that must execute the active plan, since the rook already has a very clear function of keeping both white pieces tied up. Instead, 64...♔f6!, followed by ...♔g5 and then ...h6-h5-h4, is a clear winning plan.

65.h4!

A very good idea, barring the black king's entry and preventing the immediate ...h4.

65...♔d5?!

This makes things easier for the defender, but 65...♔e6!? is also a draw: 66.♖e1 f4!? (the best try; 66...♔d5 67.♖d1! and the pawn ending is still a draw) 67.gxf4 ♔f5. This is almost zugzwang; White must now worsen his position, but nevertheless he does not lose: 68.♖e2! ♔g4 69.f5! (this is the right moment; when the black king captures one of the two pawns, the white rook will be activated) 69...♔xh4 (69...♔xf5 70.♖f2+! ♔e5 71.♖e2) 70.f6 ♔g3! 71.♖d2 ♖xe3 72.♖d5 ♖f3 73.♖xh5 ♖xf6 74.♔d2.

65...f4? allows an easier defence with 66.gxf4+ ♔f5 67.♖e1 ♔g4 68.f5! ♔xf5 69.♖f1+.

66.♖d2!

White is very attentive; everything else loses.

66.♖e1 ♔c4 67.♖e2 ♔b4 (triangulating to create zugzwang; 67...♖d8? is premature due to 68.♖d2!) 68.♖e1 ♔c5 69.♖e2 ♔c4 and White is in zugzwang: 70.♖e1 ♖d8, intending ...♖d8-b8-b2.

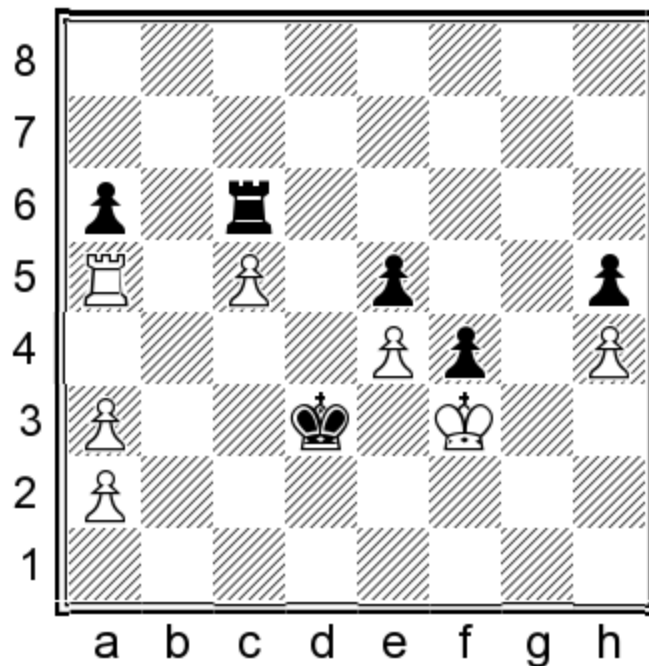
66...♖xd2+ 67.♔xd2 ♔c4 68.♔c2 ♔b4 69.♔d2 ♔c4 70.♔c2 ½-½

The next example is a very good illustration of the typical problem involved in the error that we are studying. The zugzwang is already present in the position but passes unsuspected.

Leia Andries (1627)

Leyre Abrisqueta Zudaire (2077)

La Nucia 2023



Black has a rather dominating position and has a protected passed pawn that looks very strong. He must be winning, but direct moves do not work.

41...♔c3

One of the problems of analysing these positions with an engine is that it is demoralising. It turns out that although you did not win, according to the engine all moves are winning (in this case all the king moves) and you are left feeling like an idiot.

But the truth is hidden: all moves win, because you can always come back to the same position. The direct try 41...♖g6? allows 42.c6 ♖g3+ 43.♔f2 ♔xe4 44.♖c5! ♖g8 45.c7 ♖c8. With the pawn on the seventh rank White has enough counterplay to prevent losing: 46.a4 ♔d4 47.♖c1 ♔d5 48.♔f3! ♔d6 49.♖d1+! ♔xc7 50.♖d5 ♖e8 51.♔e4 ♔c6 (51...♖f8 52.♔f3! ♖f5 53.♔e4=) 52.♖a5 and there is no way to make progress.

A waiting move on the c-file is worse: 41...♖c8? 42.c6! ♖xc6 43.♖d5+! ♔c3 44.♖xe5 and White is winning easily.

42.♖a4 ♔d3 43.♖a5 ♔c4 44.♖a4+

Now is the key moment.

44...♔xc5?

Black makes this move because she believes there is nothing else. She should have played 44...♔c3! 45.♖a5 ♔d3. Now you can look at the initial diagram. The position is the same but now it is White's turn to move and she is in zugzwang. Black should have asked herself in the initial position what would happen if it were the opponent to move, and then the triangulation is very easy. 46.♖a4 is then the most tenacious: 46...♖xc5 47.♖xa6 ♖c3! 48.♖a4 ♖c1 and now the only way to prevent ...♖f1+ followed by ...♖e1 is 49.♖a5, but Black wins with 49...♖f1+ 50.♔g2 ♔e2 51.♖xe5 f3+ 52.♔g3 ♖g1+, followed by ...f3-f2-f1.

45.♖a5+ ♔d6 46.♖d5+ ♔e6 47.♖a5

And despite the extra pawn, Black can make no progress, precisely because the white rook is occupying an active position. See **Error 36**.

How to avoid Error 32

Just as with the previous error (forgetting about the role of the king), the relationship between zugzwang and the endgame is well known but tends to be forgotten. The difference is that, although it is always useful and enjoyable to see some beautiful examples of zugzwang, I do not believe that this does much to solve the problem. Despite seeing numerous examples of zugzwang, we tend to keep forgetting about it as if it were a magical event.

I can only make two recommendations, and they are related: we should be attentive in looking for zugzwang in our own endgames, and we should review our games afterwards and see how many times we were unaware of it.

Error 33 - Bad ‘division of labour’ between our pieces

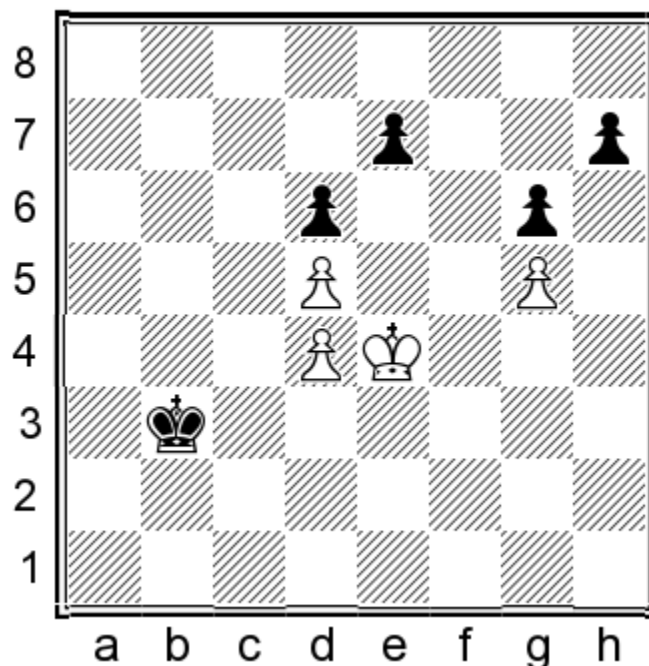
Schematic thinking is applicable to any position, but it works much better when there are only a few pieces left. A simple and, at the same time, more structured version is the division of labour. If we assign each piece a task (preferably the one that it can perform best), we can establish a plan and then check whether the plan works using short calculations. When it does not work, we should apply progressive thinking and keep correcting the faults until it works better.

Progress in developing plans in the endgame is notable when this concept is understood and applied well.

Aimar Álvarez Etxarri (1806)

Ciro Revaliente Montoya (2056)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2021



White played

42.♔f3

, maintaining the distant opposition. The game was then abandoned as a draw.

It is worth stopping to think about this. What is the reader's opinion? Should the game really have been given up as a draw? It seems that this error was influenced by trust in the opponent and by previous events. At this point Black, who had recently brought his king to the queenside, sees that he cannot win by means of the classic detour with the king and, impressed by his opponent's ingenious defence, he forgets to look for other options. But he could have won by means of a plan which would have been very enjoyable to execute.

42...♔b4!

The king finds a task: to go to g7 (f7 might be sufficient if the white king follows in pursuit) and break with ...h6. So simple!

43.♔f4 ♔b5 44.♔e3 ♔b6 45.♔d3 ♔c7 46.♔c4 ♔d7 47.♔b5 ♔e8 48.♔c6 ♔f7 49.♔d7 h5 50.gxh6 g5 51.h7 ♔g7 52.♔xe7 g4!

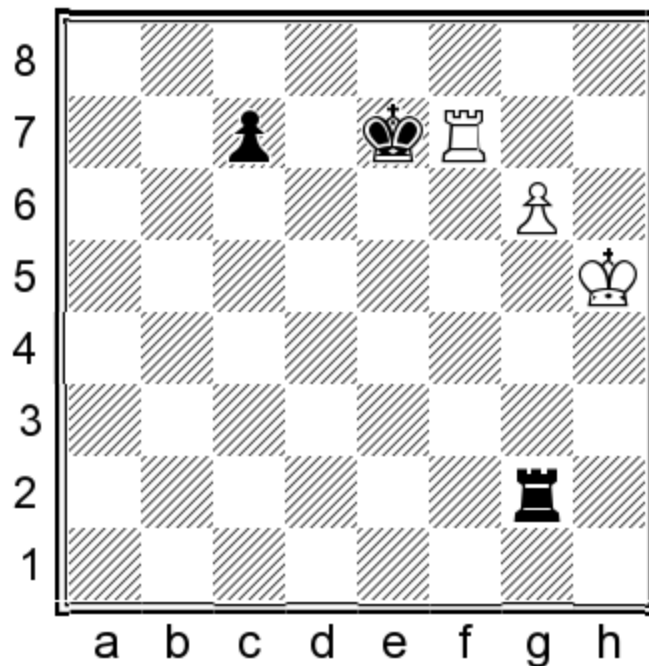
The black pawn will be promoted and the new queen will do the rest.

In the following position (Exercise 40), it is just a question of choosing the right job for the king.

Pablo Cruz Lledó (2430)

Alex Villa Tornero (2122)

Alicante 2022



64...♔e8??

Black opts to keep his king close to the white passed pawn and use the c7-pawn as bait, but in reality, it converts the pawn into a weakness, while Black's king is unable to get in front of the white pawn.

The correct division of labour was to send the king to support the passed pawn with 64...♔d6!, which must be used to win back the rook, since Black will have to give up his own rook for White's passed pawn. For example: 65.g7 c5 66.♔h6 (the 'bridge' method with 66.♖f6+ is inappropriate here, due to the proximity of the black king: 66...♔e5!). In this variation we can see that the task allocated to a piece should not be followed blindly to the end, and instead, flexibility of thought is required. The black king helps to deprive its counterpart of squares and prevents it from leaving the edge: 67.♖g6 ♖h2+ 68.♔g5 ♖g2+=) 66...c4 67.♖f8 c3 68.g8♙ ♖xg8 69.♖xg8 ♔e5 70.♖c8 ♔d4 71.♔g5 ♔d3 72.♔f4 c2 73.♔f3 ♔d2=.

65.♔h6!

65.♖xc7? ♔f8 would have meant the success of Black's plan.

65...c5 66.♖c7 ♜h2+ 67.♔g7 ♜h5 68.♔f6 ♜h1 69.♖c8+ ♔d7
70.♖xc5

With a theoretically winning and very basic ending, quickly reaching the Lucena position.

70...♖f1+ 71.♔g7 ♔e7 72.♖e5+ ♔d7 73.♔h7 ♜h1+ 74.♔g8 ♜g1
75.g7 ♔d6 76.♖e8 ♔d7 77.♖e4 ♜f1 78.♔h7 ♜h1+ 79.♔g6 ♜g1+
80.♔f6 1-0

In the previous examples, we shared the labour between, at most, two pieces. Now, we shall analyse a rather more complicated example. The mistakes made are very excusable, but I think that they have great instructional value.

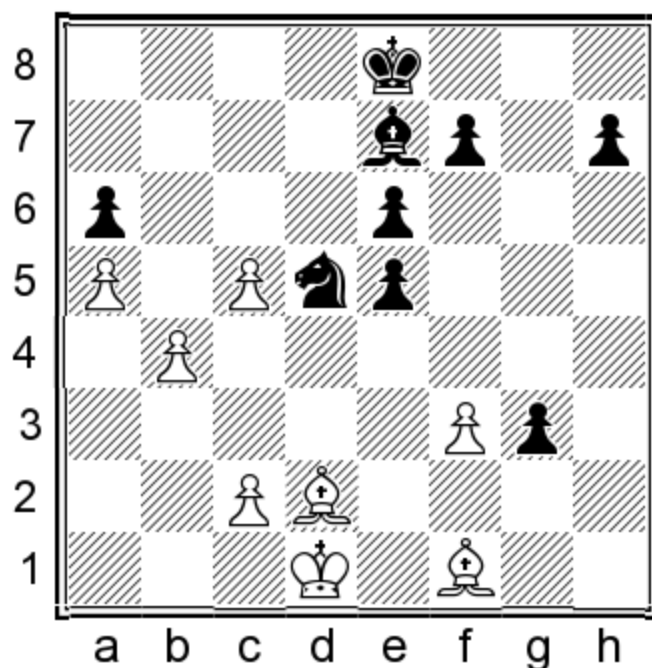
I analysed the ending of this game in my book 100 Endgame Patterns You Must Know, but I return to it now from an earlier position. Very complicated games usually present us with more than one moment worth reflecting upon.

In this case, we are going to emphasise how the division of labour could have helped White play correctly at this point of the ending and, of course, subsequently.

Joaquín Scarpa (2260)

Diego Herman (2120)

Argentinian Championship U26 1997



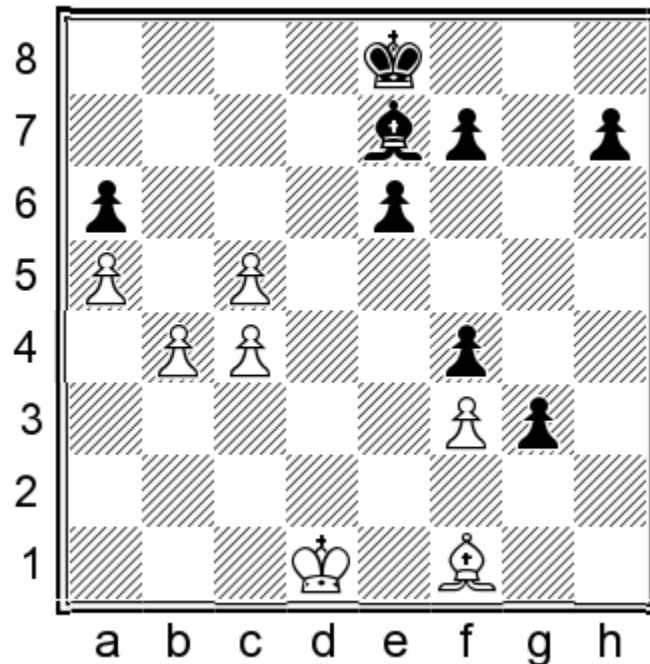
We find ourselves facing a most unusual position (Exercise 41), with overwhelming pawn majorities of 5 vs 1 and 4 vs 1 occupying both flanks of the board. It's impossible to know who is better here, but White could find his best move by applying two principles that are discussed in **Errors 31 and 23**: the king should stop the passed pawns, and the opponent's weaknesses should be attacked.

27.c4?

After this move, which forces a transition to an ending with bishops of opposite colours, the game is lost, but there will still be some excitement. It was necessary to play 27.♔e1!!, sharing out the tasks as follows: the king should control the g3-pawn, while the bishop should attack the a6-pawn. 27...♙h4! (27...♘c7? defends the pawn, but White can play 28.♙d3 h5 29.♔f1 and, having managed to control the black passed pawns with his king, can make progress with c4, ♙e3 and b5) 28.♙g2 (necessary) 28...♔d7 29.♔f1 (continuing with his plan) 29...♔c6 30.♔g1 ♘f4 31.♙f1 ♔b7 32.c6+! ♔xc6 33.♙xa6, with a position which is still impossible to

evaluate but which is obviously better for White than the one arising in the game.

27...♞f4 28.♞xf4 exf4



We have reached an ending with just one piece each. The winning plan (for Black) is a long one and requires several steps. If Black can visualise these steps correctly, he will be able to avoid mistakes and make steady progress towards victory. But if White is able to visualise them correctly, he will be able to exploit the opportunities that arise to turn the correct result on its head. We shall only halt at the important moments.

The first part of Black's plan is to destroy White's queenside pawn majority. The only way to do this is by sacrificing the bishop on c5.

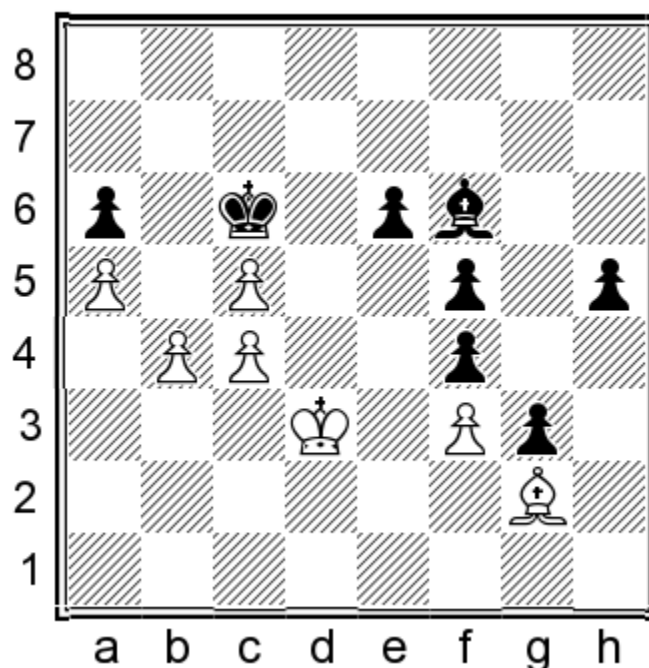
29.♞c2

In this alternative variation, we shall play a game. I suggest that the reader should try to guess the errors of each player. You can do this twice: before and after seeing how the game progresses: 29.♞e1 h5 30.♞d3 h4 31.♞f1 ♞xc5 32.b5 axb5 33.cxb5 ♞b4+ 34.♞e2 ♞xa5 35.b6 ♞xb6=.

29...♔d7 30.♔d3 f5!

It is advisable to prevent the white king from coming to e4.

31.♙h3 ♔c6 32.♙g2 ♙f6 33.♙h1 h5 34.♙g2



We have reached another critical position. The question is not which moves win (almost all of them do), but rather, what is the plan?

Black has not yet destroyed the white pawn mass on the queenside and this is now the first thing to be done.

34...h4?

This move throws away the win. If you have followed the alternative variation to the end, you will quickly understand why. Naturally, you can argue that it requires seeing a long way ahead and is not within the capabilities of just any player, but this is only partly true. Although an experienced player might not be able to see to the end, the advance ...h4 should be treated with suspicion, as it brings no benefit to Black unless made with some specific idea, which is not the case here.

It is, therefore, **advisable to play with an idea in mind and to refrain from making moves which bring no benefit and are**

irreversible, such as this pawn advance. With that approach, we can rid ourselves of the idea of playing ...h4, which, I insist, no longer wins.

For instance 34...♙e7 35.♙f1 ♙xc5, and now:

A) 36.bxc5 ♔xc5. The pawn on a5 will fall and then with such widely separated passed pawns White's bishop and king cannot deal with all of them: 37.♔c3 h4 38.♙g2 e5 39.♔d3 (39.♙h3 e4 40.♙g2 h3 41.♙xh3 exf3 and the g-pawn will queen) 39...♔b4 40.♙h3 ♔xa5 41.♙f1 ♔b4 42.♔c2 a5 43.♔b2 a4 44.♔a2 e4 and Black wins;

B) 36.b5+ is a more profound idea, trying to maintain the blockade against the five black pawns, but with the pawn on h5 or further back it does not work: 36...axb5 37.cxb5+ ♔xb5 38.♔e2 ♔xa5 39.♙h3 ♔b6 40.♙g2 ♔c6 41.♔f1 ♔d7 42.♙h3 ♔e7 43.♔e2 ♔f6 44.♙g2 ♔g5 45.♔f1 ♔h4! 46.♔e2 e5 47.♔f1 e4 48.♔e2 ♙b6, with zugzwang. If White could wait indefinitely in this position, it would be a draw. 49.♔f1 exf3 50.♙xf3 ♔h3 51.♙d5 ♔h2 52.♙f3 h4, followed by ...h3 and ...g2, winning.

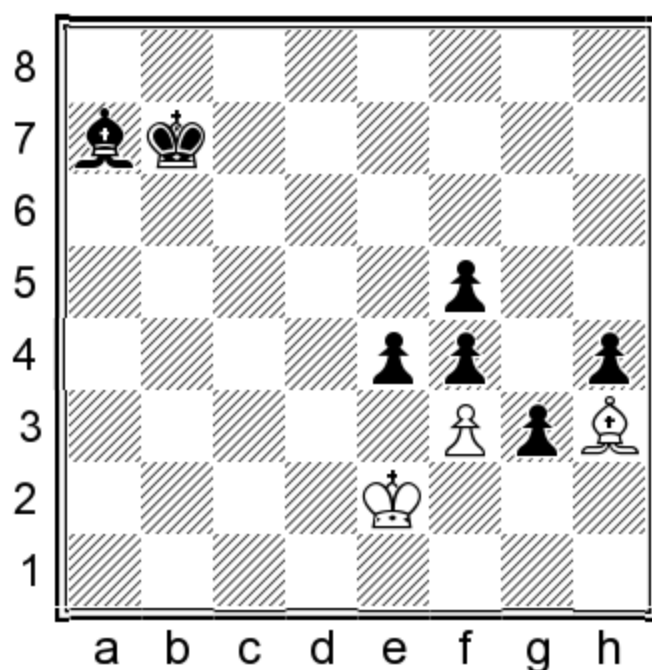
35.♙f1

Here White could already have played 35.b5+!=; the fact that he delayed playing this move has no impact on the result but it suggests that either he had not seen the defensive idea yet or he was unsure about it.

35...♙b2 36.♔c2 ♙d4 37.b5+! ♔xc5 38.bxa6 ♔b4

All White's pawns are going to fall.

39.c5 ♙xc5 40.♔d2 ♙a7 41.♔d1 ♔c3 42.♔e2 e5 43.♙h3 e4
44.♙g2 ♔b4 45.♙h3 ♔xa5 46.♙f1 ♔xa6 47.♙h3 ♔b7

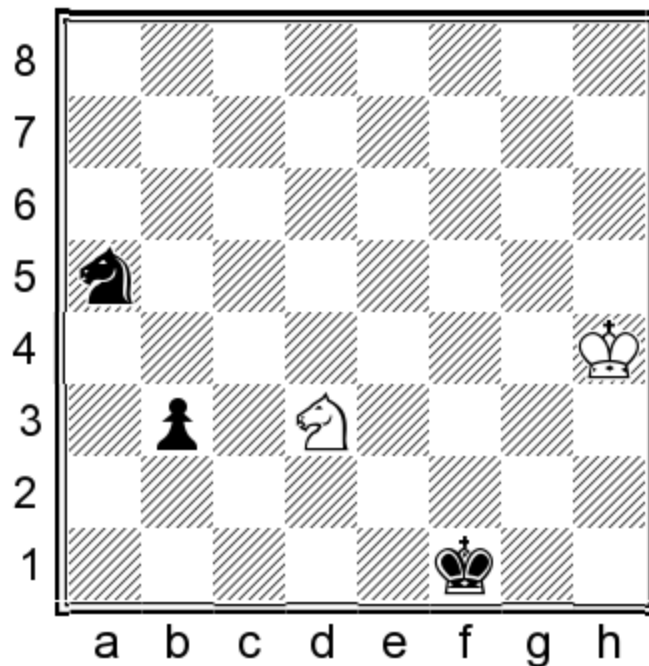


The white pawns have fallen, but now White has an impregnable fortress, one of the most impressive I have ever seen in a real game. It is not difficult to verify it, but the most interesting thing is to draw conclusions from the previous play.

48.♙f1 ♔c7 49.♙h3 ♔d6 50.♙g2 ♔e5 51.♙h3 ♔f6 52.♙g2 ♔g5
 53.♙h3 ♙b6 54.♙g2 ♔f6 55.♙h3 ♔e5 56.♙g2 ♔d4 57.♙h3 ♔c3
 58.♙g2 ♔c2 59.♙h3 ½-½

In the following position, schematic thinking can help us choose the right move.

Juan Chacón Pérez (2122)
Javier Habans Aguerrea (1878)
 Almería 2018



There is only one pawn left, and, if Black wants to win, the pawn needs to queen without allowing the knight to be exchanged for it. The solution can be found by brute-force calculation, but a little bit of schematic thinking is a big help here.

Since Black's king is unable to approach the white knight, the only way to win must be to divert it with Black's knight. However, it is important to note that the queening square (b1) is in the range of a knight fork (on d2). Where should we sacrifice the black knight, so that if it is captured, the white knight is a long way from d2? The answer is that of the three possible sacrifice squares, b4, c5 and e5, the last two don't fulfil that condition; only b4 works. Therefore, the black knight should head for that square, and the solution is:

57...♞c6!!

The game continuation was 57...♞c4? 58.♔g4 ♞e5+ 59.♞xe5 b2 60.♞c4 with a draw, and 57...♞b7? 58.♔g4 ♞c5 59.♞xc5 b2 60.♞e4 does not work either.

58.♔g4 ♞b4!-+

How to avoid Error 33

The first recommendation is to read and solve the exercises in the books mentioned in **Error 31** and in the final list of the chapter.

The second recommendation concerns how to focus during the game. It is easy to recognise these positions when they arise in the game. Then you have to force yourself to focus on them with calm thinking, playing down the importance of variations. A habit that can help when important exchanges have taken place and the endgame has been reached is to relax, even take a stroll, and then look at the position with fresh eyes.

After thinking hard about which task each piece should perform, it might be necessary to redo the process of calculation. If we apply this procedure when we solve exercises, we shall soon do it naturally, and we shall improve its application in competitive games as well.

Error 34 - Not applying the rule about two separated passed pawns in opposite-coloured bishops endings

Endings with opposite-coloured bishops have many special rules. The most basic one is that they increase the chances of a draw and that, specifically, a single passed pawn is usually insufficient to win the game. But there is a widespread and mistaken belief that these endings are always drawn, and thus, many games reach an ending of bishops of opposite colours as a result of one side trying to evade punishment for his earlier errors.

The extension of this first rule leads to a second and very important one, which states:

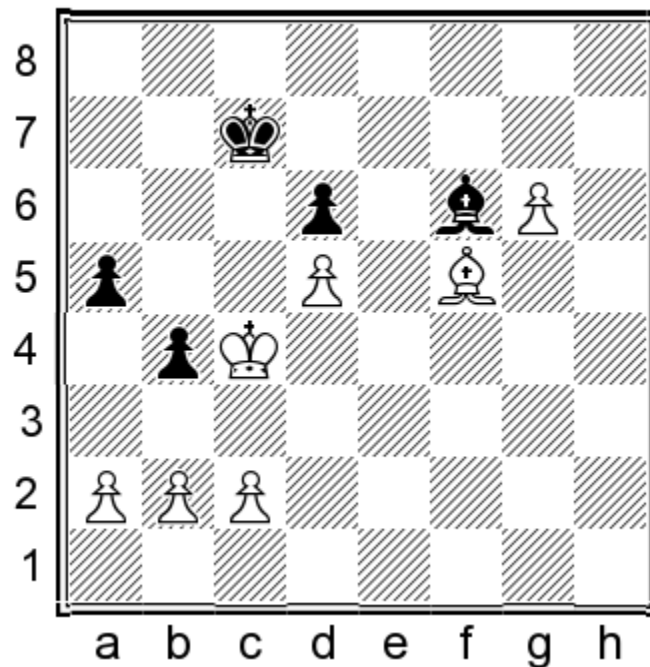
To win an opposite-coloured bishops ending, it is necessary to gain two widely-separated passed pawns.

I can vouch for the fact that many opposite-coloured bishops endings are handled well just by following this rule resolutely and imaginatively. Many players, such as myself, belonging to the generations born in the second half of the twentieth century, have learned how to play these endings from brilliant examples by the old masters (I specifically recommend Polner-Chigorin from 1881). But I can assure you that you can also learn them from the club player games selected here.

Manuel Muñoz Peláez (1946)

Antonio Porlan Minarro (1844)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2013



White already has one passed pawn on the kingside (g6). He still needs to obtain another one on the queenside, but he already has a pawn majority there. Black's hopes are based on the fact that the pawn structure on the queenside makes it difficult for White to create a passed pawn.

42...♔b6?

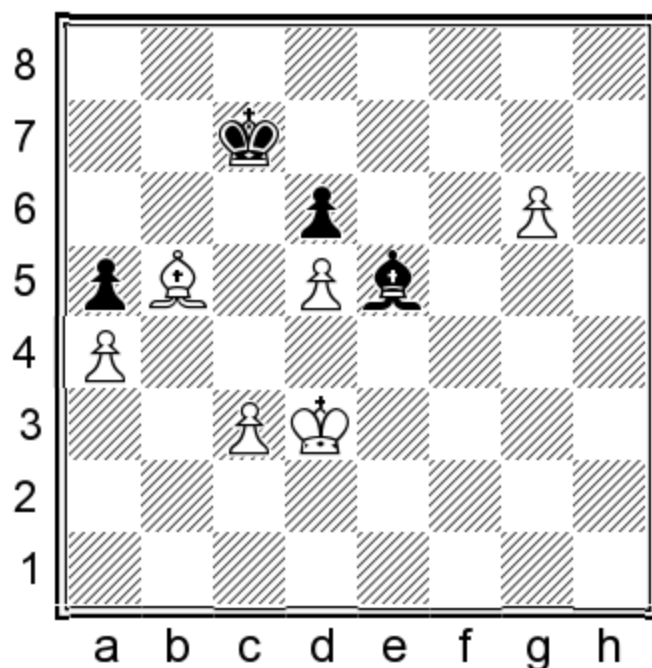
Black is relying on the fact that the blockade will prevent the creation of the second passed pawn. On the other hand, he thinks that he cannot capture the b2-pawn, presumably thinking that he will then lose the a5-pawn.

Yet 42...♗xb2! is the move that makes a draw: 43.♔b5 and now 43...♗c3! prevents White from taking on a5. It's possible that Black thought that the white bishop could go to b3, enabling his king to capture on a5, but by being vigilant Black can prevent the success of this plan. Let's see how: 44.♗d3 ♔d8! (bringing the king across to capture the g6-pawn is the only plan that draws) 45.♗c4 ♔e7 (indeed, if Black waits and plays 45...♔c7?, then 46.♗b3 enables the capture of the a5-pawn, after which Black would eventually lose) 46.♗b3 ♔f6 and here White can only obtain one passed pawn.

43.c3 bxc3 44.bxc3

The moment when White will break on c5, creating a second passed pawn, might seem distant right now, even utopian, but it is inevitable.

44...♗e5 45.♗c2 ♖h8 46.♗b3 ♗e5 47.♗a4 ♗h8 48.♗b5 ♔c7 49.a4 ♗e5 50.♔d3



The white king heads for the kingside to threaten to advance the pawn to g7.

50...♔d8

And the black king has to go to the aid of his bishop to prevent it. Let us imagine that he does not do this: in that case, White wins with 50...♙g7 51.c4 ♘e5 52.♔e4 ♙g7 53.♔f5, followed by ♔f5-e6-f7.

51.c4 ♙a1?!

51...♔e7 was slightly more tenacious, but there follows 52.c5 dxc5 53.♔c4 ♔d6 (this is the different defence) 54.♙e8 ♙d4 55.♙f7 ♙g7 56.♔b5 ♙c3 57.♙e6 and Black is in zugzwang (see **Error 32**).

52.c5! dxc5

White has obtained the two passed pawns and wins easily.

53.♔c4 ♙d4 54.d6 ♙g7 55.♔xc5 ♙c3 56.♔b6 ♙d4+ 57.♔xa5 ♔c8 58.♔b4 1-0

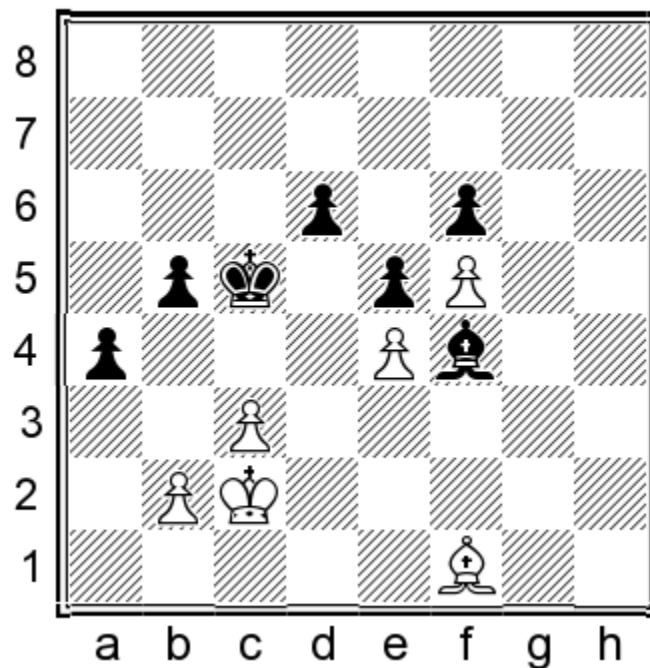
It is common for a player to become overconfident in thinking that the opponent can only create one passed pawn. But you should not

limit your thinking to natural methods; sometimes, another passed pawn can be created by sacrificing pawns, and sometimes by zugzwang. In addition, such overconfidence can work against you because when things start to go wrong, you are unprepared to handle it.

Svyatoslav Vorobyev (1671)

Jose Javier Moreno Alcaraz (1839)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2016



55.♙g2?!

White decides to play passively. This is a strategy which can be acceptable, but only for a time. Instead, 55.b4+! was the best solution, exchanging a pawn, which otherwise could become dangerous: 55...axb3+ (Black must exchange, because otherwise his weakness on b5 will immobilise his king) 56.♔xb3 ♕d2 57.♕e2 b4 58.cxb4+ ♖xb4 59.♕c4 and now it will definitely be impossible to create passed pawns – not even one.

55...b4! 56.cxb4+ ♔xb4

The difference between this structure and the one resulting from the exchange on b3 is very great. White's bishop is not attacking Black's weakness (a4) and if the b2-pawn falls, due to the king being busy elsewhere, the a4-pawn will be another passed pawn. However, nothing would happen if White took immediate action.

57.♘f3?

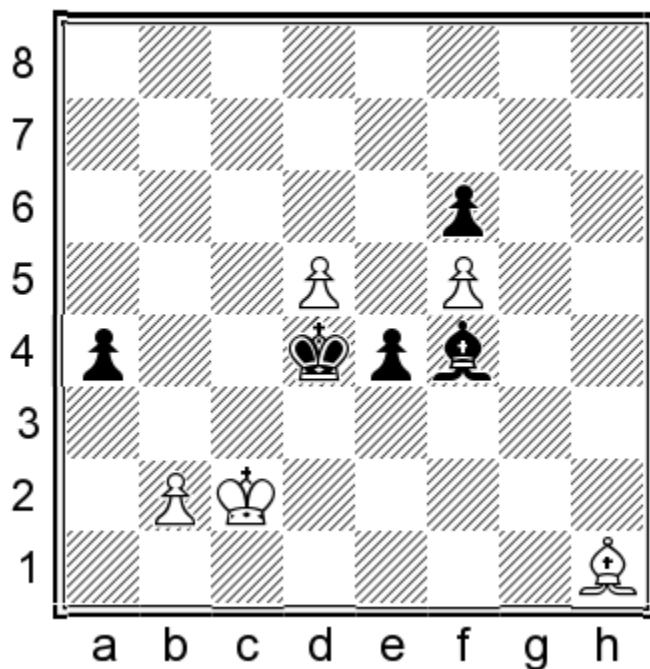
White continues his waiting strategy, but now it is a losing one.

57.♘f1! not only prevents ...♔c4, but also prepares to activate the bishop via a6-b7: 57...♔c5 58.♘a6 d5 59.exd5 ♔xd5 60.♘b7+ and if the king wants to support the e-pawn with 60...♔d4, then 61.♘c6 and the a4-pawn falls, with a draw.

57...♔c4

Black ensures that he can break with ...d5, creating the first passed pawn.

58.♘g2 ♔d4 59.♘h1 d5 60.exd5 e4!



Naturally, this is the idea, and it is the only way to win. Now, Black already has one passed pawn, and deploying the bishop on e5 will attack the weakness at b2.

61.b3?!

After the first setback, White becomes demoralised very quickly and facilitates the creation of the second passed pawn, but this was inevitable anyway; for instance, 61.♗g2 ♗e5 and now the white king must choose: either to defend the pawn on b2 or to allow the comfortable advance of the e-pawn: 62.♔d2 (62.♗h1 ♔e3 63.♗g2 ♔f4 64.♗h3 e3 65.♗f1 ♔f3 66.♔d3 ♗xb2 67.d6 ♗a3 68.d7 ♗e7–+) 62...♔xd5 63.♔e3 ♗d4+! 64.♔f4 prevents Black from obtaining two passed pawns, but you do not have to do everything to the letter; after 64...♗xb2 65.♗xe4+ ♔c4 White is unable to stop the a-pawn, because his pieces are too far away.

61...a3 62.b4 ♗d6 63.♔b3 ♗xb4!

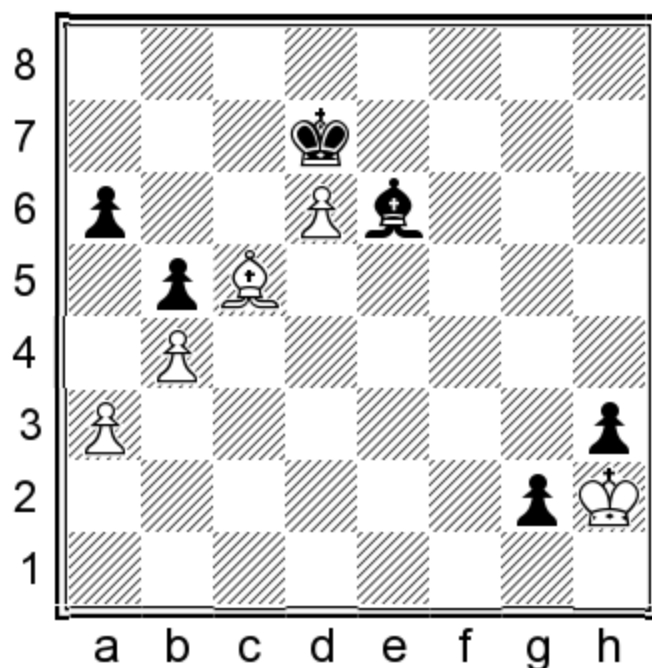
Black has obtained the necessary two passed pawns and wins easily.

64.♗g2 ♗d6 65.♗f1 ♔xd5 66.♗c4+ ♔d4 67.♗e6 ♔d3 68.♗c4+ ♔d2 69.♔a4 e3 0-1

Ricardo Rodríguez Del Cerro (2034)

Sergio Serrera Sánchez-Romo (1679)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2017



Do you think that the diagram position will end in a win for Black? The answer is once again related to the theme of one passed pawn on each wing.

Black already has two passed pawns (in fact very advanced ones), but they are perfectly blockaded and for the purposes of our strategic theme they can be considered as one single passed pawn, although one that is very comfortable to defend and with a few other small advantages (for example, a possible ...h2(+), followed by ...♔f1).

The fact is that, to win, Black needs to create another passed pawn on the other wing. The process to achieve this is long and tortuous.

57...♔c6 58.♔g1 ♔d5

Black has identified as the first step in his plan that his king should capture the a3-pawn, which in these endings we call the indefensible pawn. This seems correct, but...

59.♔h2

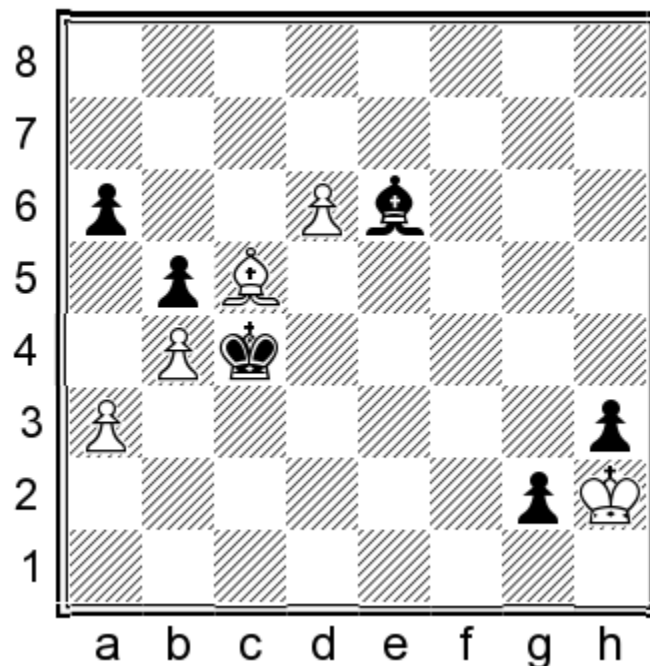
With 59.♖b6 White could prevent ...a5, but only by giving up the d6-pawn for nothing, which does not seem very important but in fact is decisive, because it helps in a few critical variations.

Specifically, after 59...♔xd6 60.♗a5 White ends up losing like this:

60...♔d5 61.♗b6 ♔c4 62.♗a5 ♔b3 63.♗b6 ♔xa3 64.♗a5 ♔b3
 65.♔h2 ♔c2 66.♔g1 ♔d3 67.♔h2 ♔e2 68.♔g1 ♗d5 69.♗c7 ♗c6
 70.♗a5 h2+! 71.♔xh2 ♔f1 72.♗b6 a5!, creating the second passed pawn – the same plan as in the game.

59...♔c4?

But here Black fails to appreciate all the subtleties and allows the white bishop to change its defensive post. Instead, 59...a5! was winning, exploiting the defenceless of the bishop on c5: 60.♔g1 a4 and now the black king will capture on a3, with the second passed pawn already sitting proudly on a4.



60.♔g1?

White continues to wait. He sees no need to do anything else, but in fact 60.♗b6! ♔b3 61.♗a5 would have ensured the draw; White's

bishop can oscillate between a5 and c7 and if he does this correctly it will no longer be possible to create the second passed pawn.

60...♔b3?

Now both players repeat their mistakes. 60...a5! was winning, as we know.

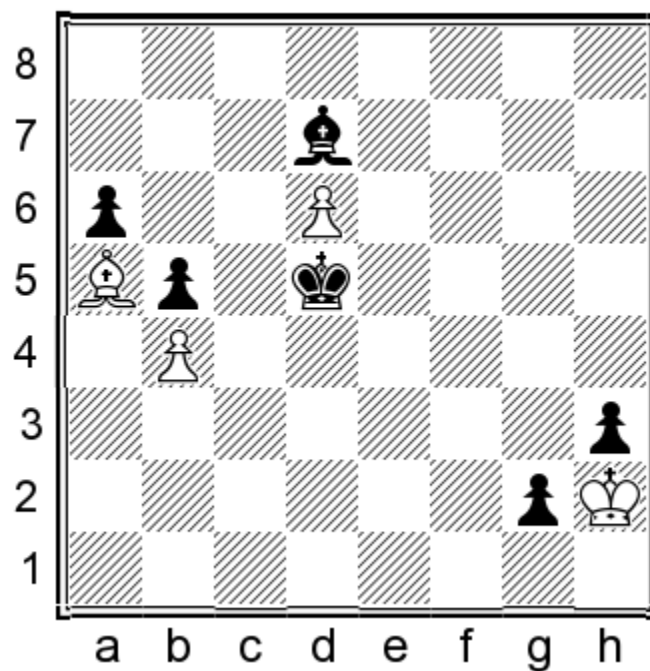
61.♙b6!

Finally, White discovers the idea.

61...♔xa3 62.♙a5

Now White has shored up his fortress.

62...♙d7 63.♔h2 ♔b3 64.♔g1 ♔c4 65.♔h2 ♔d5



66.♙c7!

It is necessary to defend the pawn; for example, 66.♔g1? ♔xd6 67.♔h2 ♔d5 68.♔g1 ♙c6 69.♔h2 ♔c4 70.♔g1 ♔d3 71.♙b6 ♔e2 72.♙c7 ♙b7 73.♙a5 h2+ 74.♔xh2 ♔f1 75.♙b6 a5!, finally creating the second passed pawn.

66...♔e5

Now, if 66...a5, then 67.♙xa5!, preventing the creation of the second passed pawn.

67.♙b8?

White has been defending well, but with this move he shows that he does not have everything fully under control. The bishop needs to be on c7 at this moment, so 67.♙g1! was the right move.

67...♙e4?

67...a5! would have created the second passed pawn.

68.♙c7!

White reverts to the correct disposition and will not abandon it again.

**68...♙f3 69.♙b6 ♙e2 70.♙g1 ♙c6 71.♙c5 ♙d3 72.♙b6 ♙e4
73.♙h2 ♙d7 74.♙g1 ♙f3 75.♙h2 ½-½**

I think that after analysing three examples in this section, it is interesting to observe that in all of them the losing side committed the same error: ‘abuse of the waiting strategy’.

How to avoid Error 34

This is an error that is very closely connected to a specific rule, which is not very common in this book. The basic recommendation is to learn the rule and understand it well. Another obvious recommendation is not to rely exclusively on the waiting strategy, although there are times when this is the correct one.

This is a case where you can improve and avoid the error by serious analysis of various selected examples in books of practical endings, and you can look in books or chapters devoted to endings with opposite-coloured bishops. The specific books that we recommend are *Technique for the Tournament Player* by Mark Dvoretsky and Artur Yusupov and, to delve deeper into the topic, *The Secrets of the Opposite-Coloured Bishop Endings* by Gyula Meszaros.

And one special recommendation: once understood, the mechanism is easy to apply, but we have to **free ourselves from an excessive concern for material**, which more often than not prevents us from seeing ideas which are both brilliant and effective. Pawn sacrifices are a constant; bishop sacrifices are also to be expected.

Error 35 - Overrating passed pawns in the fight against a rook

Most players overestimate the power of a group of connected passed pawns, especially when facing a rook. The reason must lie in bad experiences when trying to stop enemy pawns, and a lack of rigorous analysis of these endings.

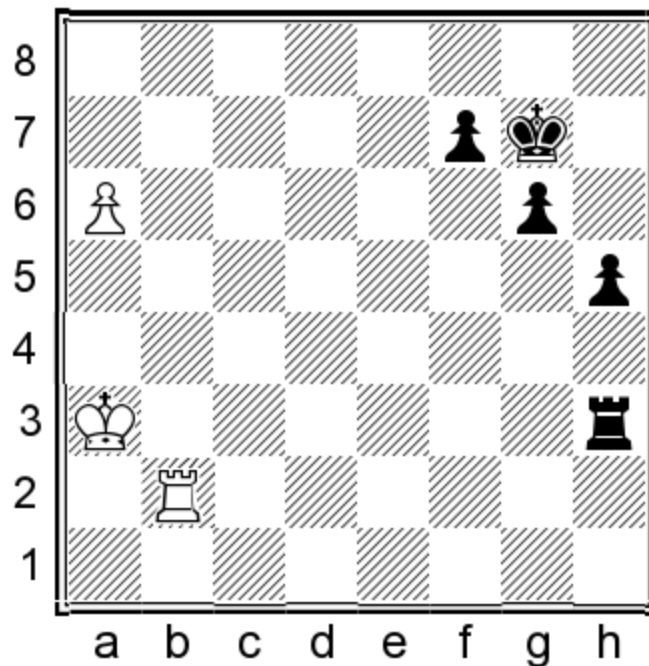
This bias in valuation has great practical importance, because the struggle of rook versus pawns is the natural consequence of a rook ending where a dangerous pawn forces its exchange for the opponent's rook.

In our first example, the opposite error (overrating the rook) was probably also made.

Pablo Martínez Rodríguez (1931)

Eduardo Fernández Palacio (1939)

Asturias teams 2018



White has spent a lot of time trying to win. He has sacrificed his kingside pawns in order to queen his a-pawn and has now reached a critical position.

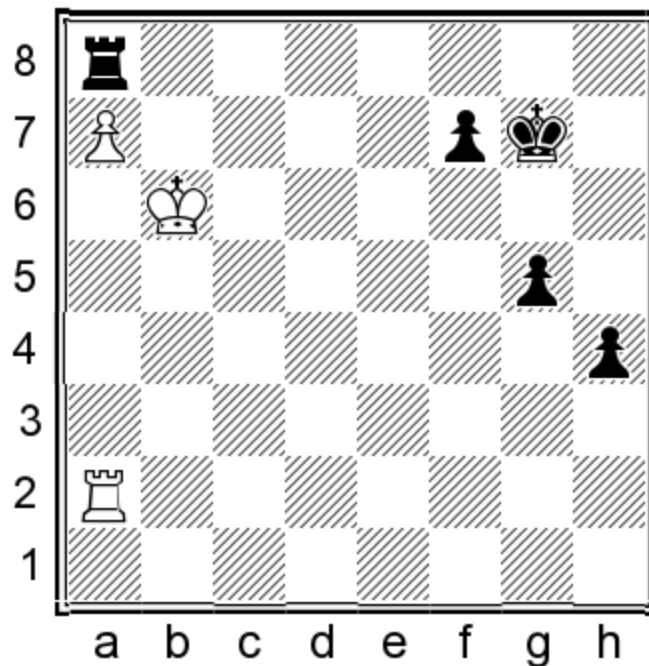
59.♔b4?

And with this move, White goes too far. In his eagerness to win, he enters a losing position.

Instead, 59.♔a2 threatens 60.a7, and now the white rook is ready to go to b8, which leaves 59...♖h4 as the only move, after which the players should settle for a draw; for example, 60.♖b3 ♖h2+ 61.♔a3 ♖h1 62.♔a2.

59...♖h1?

59...♖e3! gains a tempo in comparison with the line in the game. There might follow 60.a7 ♖e8 61.♖a2 ♖a8 and now White should advance the king in order to win the rook: 62.♔c5 h4 63.♔b6 g5.



analysis diagram

Compare this position with the one at move 65 in the game. Here Black has an extra tempo and can win. Is there any easy way to find out whether the pawns win? Of course, it is utopian to expect universal solutions, but there is a simple check that might help:

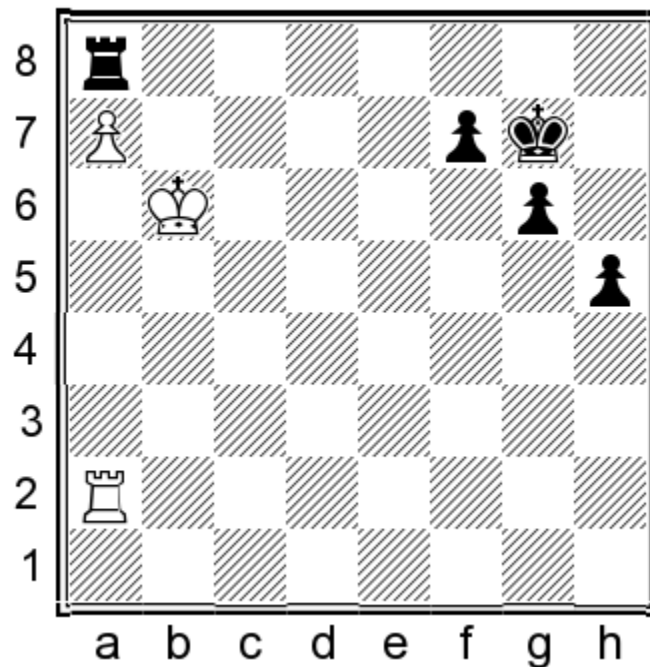
It is worth comparing how quickly the two pawns can reach the sixth rank with how quickly the king can make contact with them.

64. ♖b7 ♜xa7+ 65. ♜xa7 (capturing with the king comes to the same thing) 65...h3 66. ♖c6 g4 67. ♖d5 g3. Both pawns reach the sixth rank, but the white king is not able to move to f3 (which would win), and, therefore, White loses.

Notice that if the rook were already on the first rank, the white king would have an extra tempo and would arrive in time.

60. ♜a2 ♜b1+ 61. ♖c5 ♜c1+ 62. ♖b6 ♜b1+ 63. ♖a5 ♜b8 64. a7 ♜a8 65. ♖b6

Now, the white king has arrived on the crucial b6-square one move sooner.

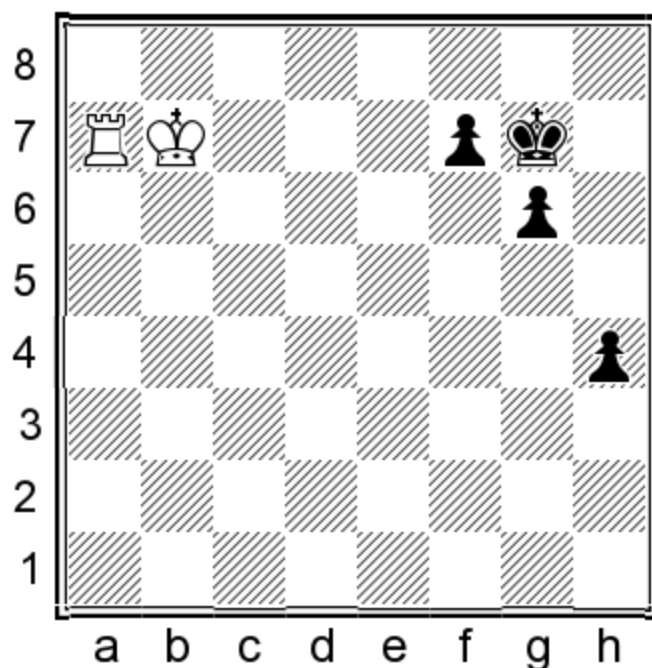


This means that the king will be able to reach the pawns, which will have raced to the sixth rank, in time. But in this case, Black, with three pawns, has the saving resource of placing them diagonally in a row on the fourth, fifth and sixth files:

65...h4

65...g5 66.♔b7 ♖xa7+ 67.♖xa7! is similar.

66.♔b7 ♖xa7+ 67.♖xa7

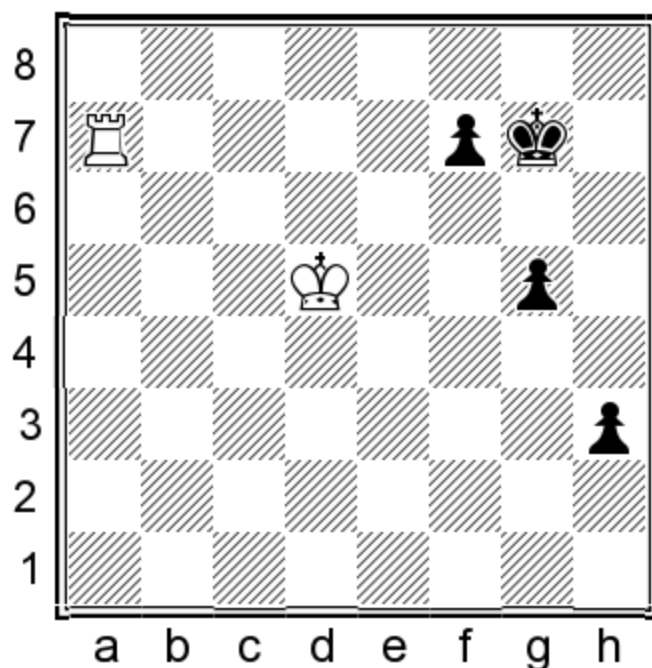


67...g5?!

If Black understands that the most he can aspire to is a draw, the best strategy is for the king to rush forward to support the most distant pawn – the h-pawn in this case. The move played should draw – one can say easily – but if Black is not familiar with the correct drawing set-up, as will become evident below, it must have been made with the hope of winning the race:

67...♔f6! 68.♔c6 ♔e5 (or 68...g5 69.♔d5 ♔f5! 70.♖xf7+ ♔g4 71.♔e4 h3 72.♖h7 ♔g3 73.♔f5 with a draw) 69.♖xf7 g5 70.♔c5 h3 71.♖h7 g4 72.♔c4 ♔e4! 73.♖h4 ♔f3 74.♔d3 ♔f2 75.♖xg4 h2.

68.♔c6 h3 69.♔d5



69...h2?

The losing move. At this point, it is impossible to believe that Black was still trying to win; it was rather that he had lost confidence in being able to draw, because he did not know the correct set-up.

The pawns must be placed on the fourth, fifth and sixth rank, before the white king can insert itself among them; here, the most advanced pawn is already on the sixth rank, so it should be an easy draw, and in fact it is: 69...g4! 70.♔e4 ♔g6 71.♔f4 f5, reaching a theoretically drawn position, although it is useful to know something more: if the rook goes to the eighth rank, the defender must prevent it from attacking the pawns from behind. So if 72.♖a8, Black must play 72...♔g7! (72...♔f6? loses to 73.♖g8 ♔f7 74.♖g5 ♔e6 75.♖h5 with zugzwang) 73.♖a5 ♔g6 and White cannot capture the pawn.

70.♖a1 g4 71.♔e4! ♔g6 72.♔f4 f5 73.♖h1 1-0

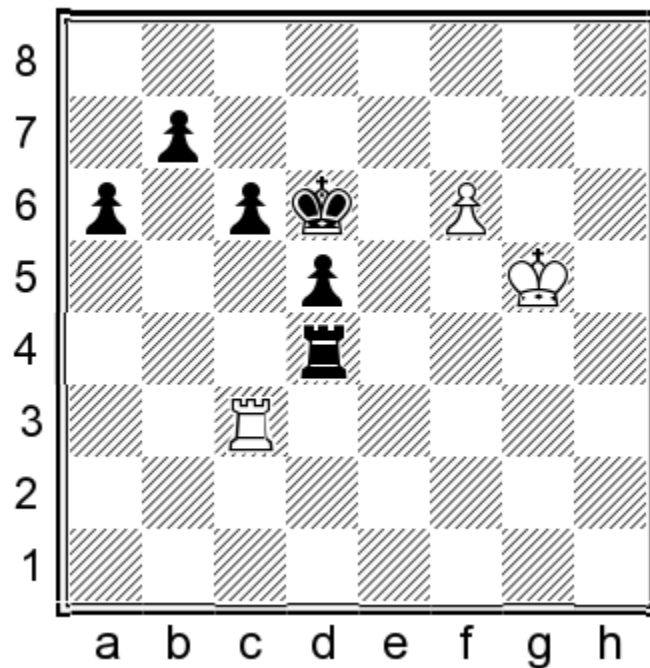
All the pawns fall.

I have used very few rapid games, because the players are more prone to make errors there, but I could not resist using such a graphic example as the following.

Víctor Moreno Oller (1877)

Jose Manuel Morales Carmona (1337)

Spanish Rapid Championship U14 2019



Black has a huge pawn mass. It would be quite normal for the player of the black pieces to think that he was going to win easily with those pawns. Furthermore, Black still does not have to give up his rook. The win should be easy, even when playing at increment.

66...♖d1?!

Winning; but to my taste, it is an important inaccuracy. It was possible to try to stop the white pawn with the collaboration of the king and the rook. 66...♔e6? does not work due to 67.♞e3+ ♔f7 68.♞e7+ and with the white rook on the seventh rank Black cannot win. But by first erecting an umbrella, the black king threatens to approach and at least gain a few tempi in the future battle of the

pawns against the rook: 66...♖e4! 67.♔g6 (67.♖f3 ♜e8 68.f7 ♖f8 69.♔g6 d4 70.♔g7 ♖xf7+ 71.♖xf7 b5 72.♔f6 d3 with a much easier win) 67...♔e6 68.f7 ♖g4+, winning.

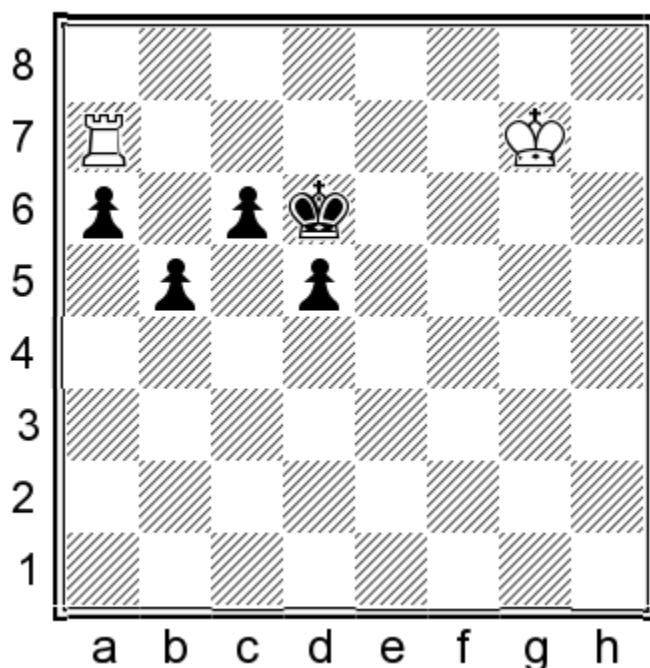
67.♖f3!

Creating maximum problems with his pawn.

67...♖g1+ 68.♔h6 ♜g8 69.f7 ♖f8!

This move forces the white king to move away! Let us compare 69...♖b8? 70.f8♖+ ♖xf8 71.♖xf8 b5 72.♔g5!. Here we can see that the white king is nearer to the queening square, and this is sufficient to draw.

70.♔g7 ♖xf7+ 71.♖xf7 b5 72.♖a7



Now we have arrived at Exercise 42. Black has only one winning move:

72...c5?

Logical, but not best. The pawn mass is impressive but its advancement is slow. It is better to quickly push one of the pawns, in this case the b-pawn: 72...b4! 73.♔f6 (73.♖xa6 d4!) 73...♔c5!

74.♖xa6 b3. This pawn is already threatening to queen, leaving no time for the white king to continue its approach. 75.♖a1 (75.♖a8 d4 76.♔e5 d3 77.♖b8 d2–+) 75...♔b4! (the king is going to support its fast-moving pawn, relying on the others to defend each other) 76.♔e5 b2 77.♖b1 ♔c3. This set-up occurs again and again in these few examples; the king wins the rook for the most advanced pawn, while the other two pawns provide security for each other: 78.♔d6 ♔c2 and Black wins.

73.♖xa6+ ♔c7?!

A very strange decision, although it does not lose. If 73...♔e5!, Black might have feared 74.♖a5!, immediately winning a pawn, and in fact this is the only move that does not lose, and there is still an easy draw by advancing any of the pawns: 74...c4 75.♖xb5 c3 76.♖c5 ♔d4 77.♖c8 ♔d3.

74.♔f6 ♔b7?

Now Black should have headed for our familiar draw of rook against three pawns by advancing his pawns to achieve the correct 4-5-6 set-up, which was possible with five consecutive moves:

74...b4! 75.♔e5 b3! 76.♖h6 c4! 77.♔d4 ♔d7! 78.♖h8 ♔c7!.

75.♖d6 d4 76.♔e5 b4 77.♔d5 b3 78.♔xc5

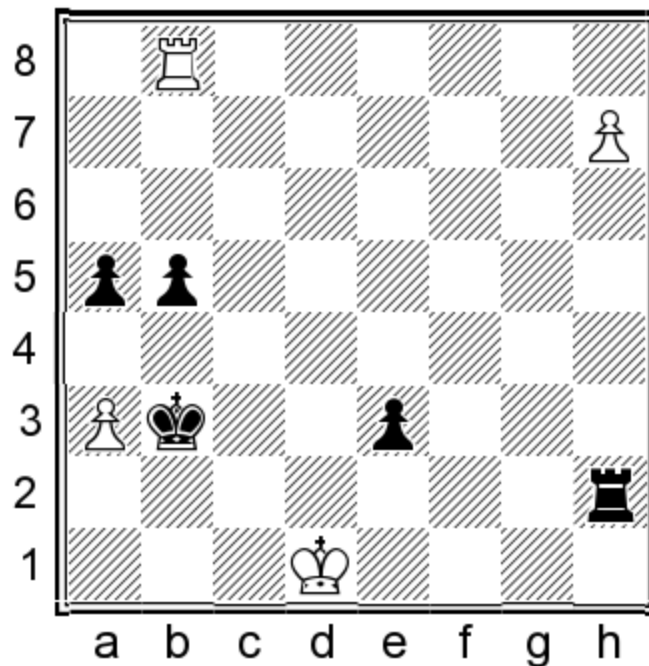
And all the pawns fall.

78...d3 79.♖xd3 1-0

Mikel Ochoa Aldaz (1559)

Joaquín Perez-Seoane Garrido (1607)

Pamplona 2013



We start in this position, although the decisive error does not occur until a few moves later. The Black player's desire to play for a win from here is what leads to disaster.

37...♔xa3?!

Clearly overestimating the value of the pawns. Although the correct result is still a draw, Black should have played 37...♖xh7 38.♖xb5+ ♔a4, remaining a pawn up for some moves and placing on his opponent the onus of avoiding any errors.

38.h8♕ ♖xh8?!

This should also suffice to draw, but in this case, it requires Black to play with greater finesse in the following moves. Instead, 38...e2+! drives the white king away from the two most dangerous passed pawns: 39.♔d2 ♖xh8 40.♖xh8 a4 41.♔xe2 ♔b2! leads to a draw more easily by focusing on supporting the a-pawn.

39.♖xh8 b4?

Finally, Black makes a definite error, although he will get a second chance. Black needed to play 39...♔b2! 40.♖h5 b4! 41.♖xa5 b3 and in the event of the most challenging move 42.♖h5 (42.♖c5 ♔a2 is simple), then 42...♔c3! and the king prepares to support one or other of the pawns; for example, 43.♖h3 (43.♔c1 b2+ 44.♔b1 e2 45.♖e5 ♔d2=) 43...♔d3 44.♖h2 ♔c3.

40.♔c1 ♔a2

Black prepares to advance his pawns, at the same time preventing ♔b1.

41.♖a8?

A natural error; White will be able to capture the a-pawn with check. What more could you ask for? But the way to win involves brilliant use of the king to destroy the pawns: 41.♖h2+! ♔a1 42.♔c2!, intending ♔b3, and if 42...a4, then 43.♔d3! (with the plan of ♔c4) 43...a3 44.♔c4! ♔b1 45.♔xb4 a2 46.♔b3 a1♘+ 47.♔c3 and the knight is lost immediately.

41...e2?

The final error, but it was not easy to discover that the a-pawn must be sacrificed on a4 in order to gain a tempo: 41...a4! 42.♖xa4+ ♔b3 43.♖a7 ♔c3. This is a very curious position; the black king moves to support one or other of the pawns, according to which one the white king is closer to; for instance, 44.♔d1 b3 45.♔c1 e2 with a draw.

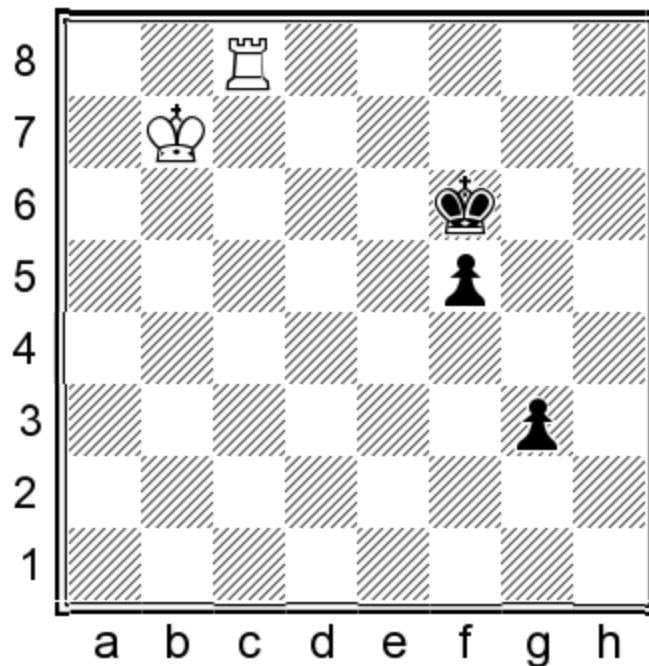
42.♖xa5+ ♔b3 43.♖e5 1-0

Overvaluation of the pawns can affect not only their owner but also, and perhaps even more often, the side fighting against them. Precisely for this reason, it is appropriate to equip yourself with some technical tools, in order to have more confidence and more resources.

Luca Rey Chimera (1378)

Diego Vergara Antón (1628)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U12 2017



White has just captured Black's rook. If he now thinks that he is losing, what a waste of all his previous effort!

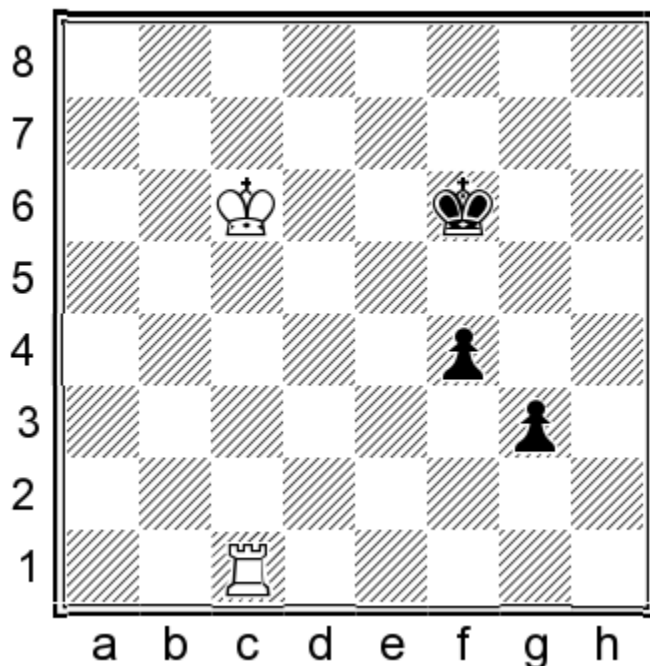
64. ♖c1?

The rook was already well prepared to help out from behind. The most urgent thing was to bring the king nearer the pawns, but it seemed so far away that sometimes the player did not even check whether it would help. See also **Error 31**, regarding the king's role in controlling passed pawns.

64. ♔c6! ♕e5 (64...f4 would force White to use the rook: 65. ♖g8 (preventing ...g3) 65... ♕e5 66. ♔c5 ♕e4 67. ♔c4 f3 68. ♖g4+; an intermediate check, which is a characteristic way to save oneself in positions like this) 65. ♖e8+ ♔d4 66. ♖g8 f4 67. ♔d6 ♕e4 68. ♔e6 f3 and now White can draw, either by capturing the pawn or (easier) by checking on g4.

Placing the rook behind the most advanced pawn is also usually effective: 64. ♖g8 f4 65. ♔c6 ♕e5 66. ♔c5 ♕e4 67. ♔c4 f3 68. ♖g4+!, transposing to the position considered above.

64...f4 65.♔c6



65...♔e5?

Another error, caused by the feeling that the pawns need the support of the king, and normally that is the case. But here, the two pawns can reach the sixth rank and queen on their own: 65...f3! 66.♖f1 (this might have been the move that created the doubt; 66.♔d5 f2 67.♖f1 ♔g5 68.♔e4 g2–+) 66...f2 67.♔d5, but now any king move works; for example, 67...♔g5 followed by 68...g2.

66.♖e1+?

The solution is difficult, but I would wager that White's lack of confidence had an influence on the fact that he did not find it: 66.♖g1!, preventing the immediate advance: 66...♔e4 67.♔c5 f3 (this move appears to be winning) 68.♖xg3 f2. The solitary remaining pawn would be unstoppable if the white king stood on one of many other squares: 69.♖g4+! ♔e5 70.♖g8! with a draw.

66...♔d4?

Giving White a second chance.

66...♔f5! 67.♖g1 ♔g4! 68.♔d5 f3! was the way to win.

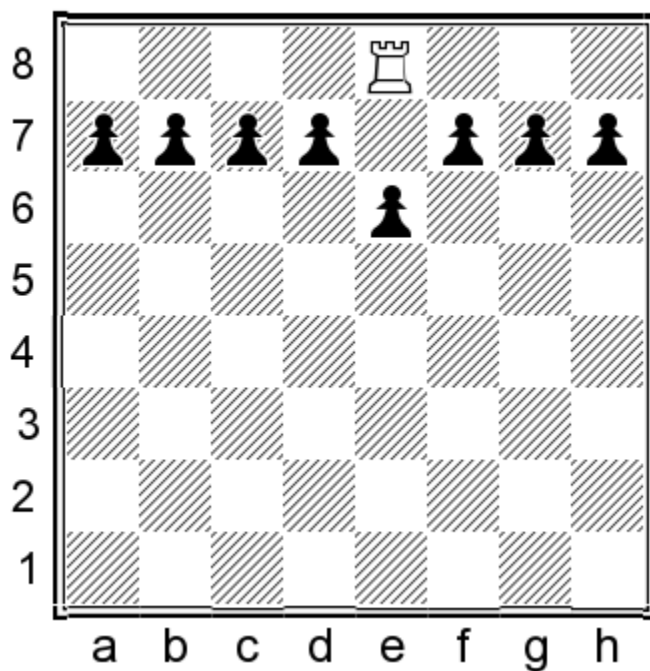
67.♖e8?

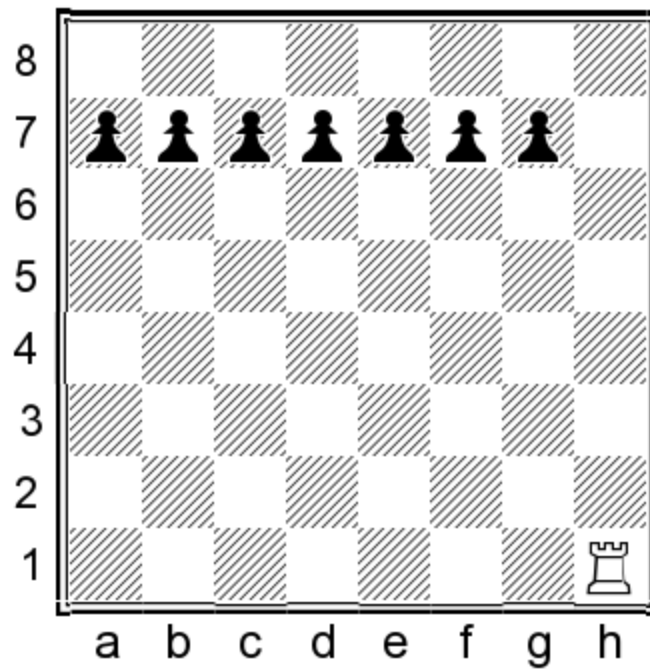
67.♖g1! ♔e3 68.♔d5 ♔f2 69.♖a1 f3 70.♔e4 and a draw by means of the ‘tail-hook’ – see 100 Endgames You Must Know, Ending 32.

67...g2 68.♖g8 f3 69.♖g3 ♔e3 70.♔d5 ♔f2 0-1

How to avoid Error 35

My first recommendation is to analyse more positions in which a rook faces a number of pawns. And I suggest doing so in all possible situations: with connected or separated pawns, with one king or both involved totally or partially in the battle. That will allow you to judge this imbalance better and to take better decisions. Play out positions with a rook against pawns, which, as well as being enjoyable, can make you more aware of the relative strength of each side.





I suggest investigating these positions, in which I have removed the kings.

Finally, here is a list of practical endgame books that are useful for helping you avoid all the errors covered in this chapter:

100 Endgame Patterns You Must Know (Jesus de la Villa)

A Matter of Endgame Technique (Jacob Aagaard)

The Chess Endgame Exercise Book (John Nunn)

Van Perlo's Endgames Tactics (Gerardus van Perlo)

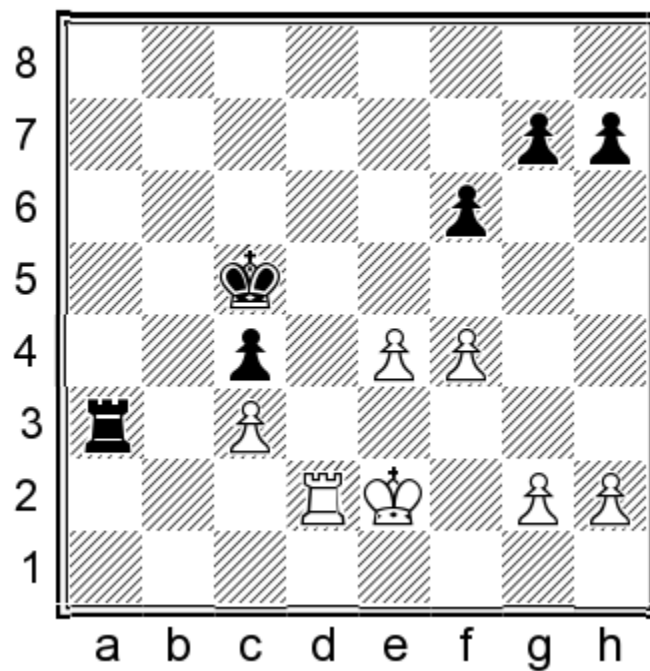
Dvoretsky's Endgame Manual (Mark Dvoretsky)

Chapter 8

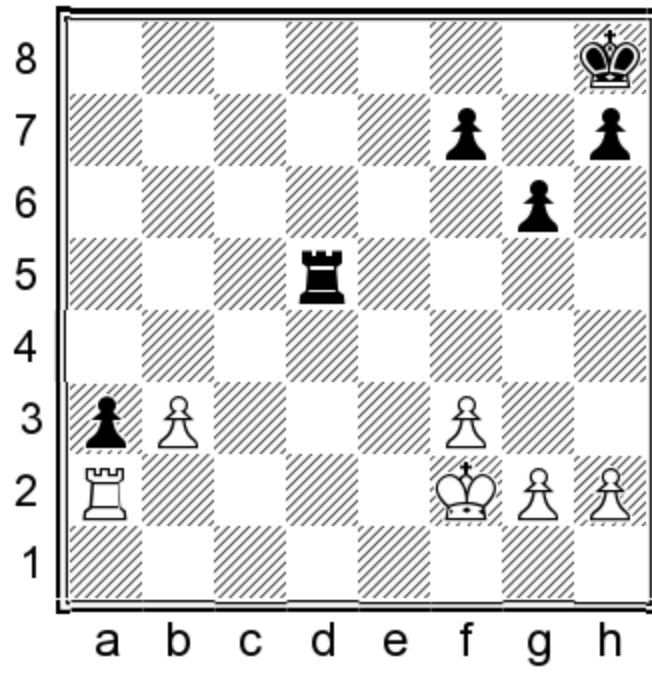
Rook endings

- Error 36 - Passive play with the rook
- Error 37 - Not placing the rook behind the passed pawn
- Error 38 - Getting your rook stuck in front of your passed pawn on the seventh rank

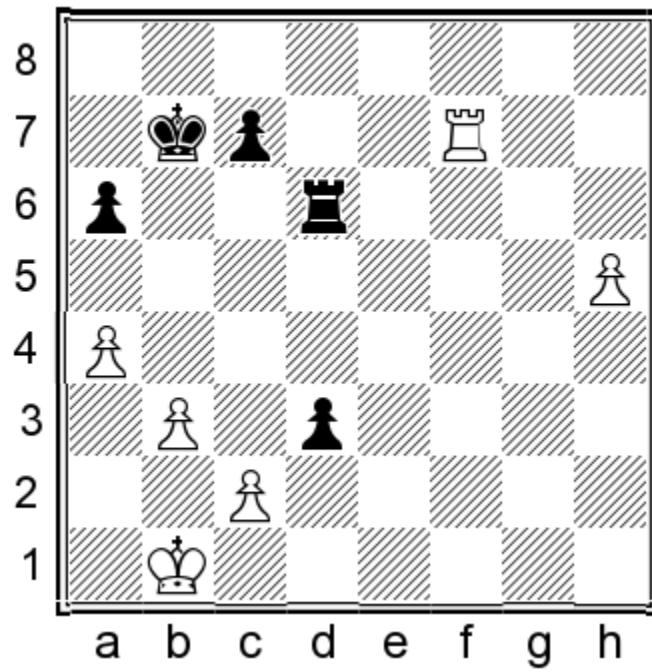
Exercises for Chapter 8



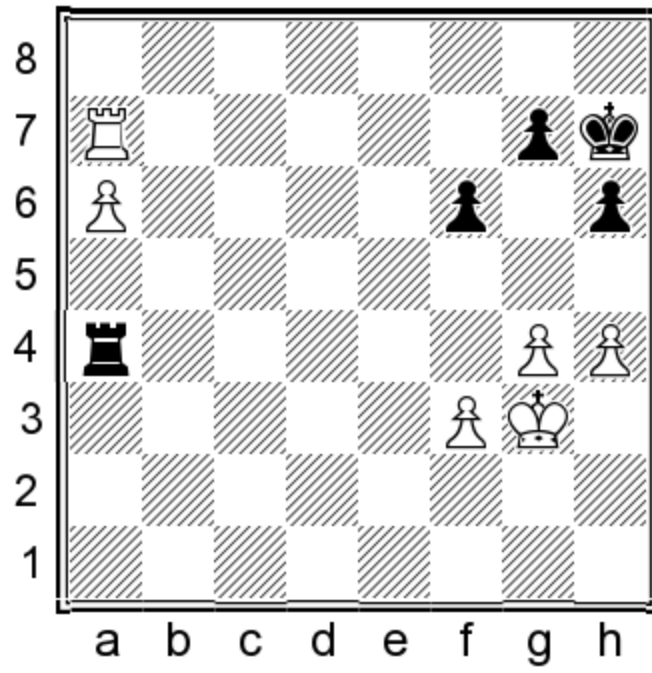
43



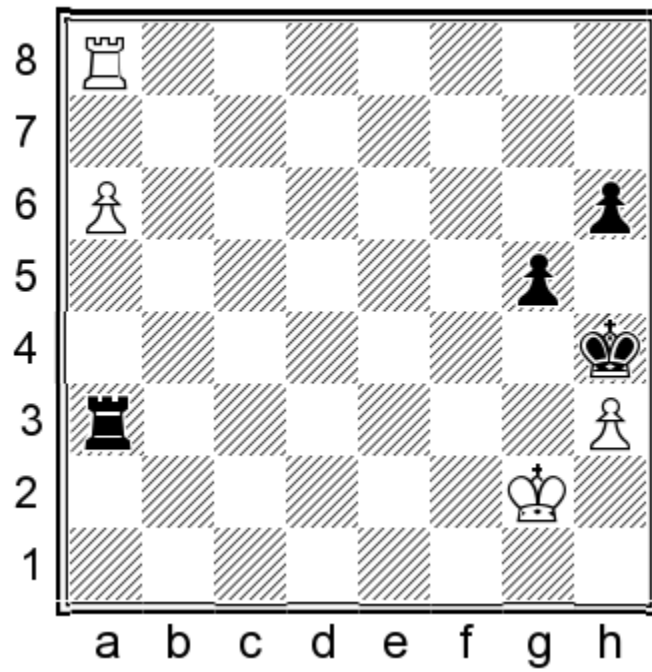
44



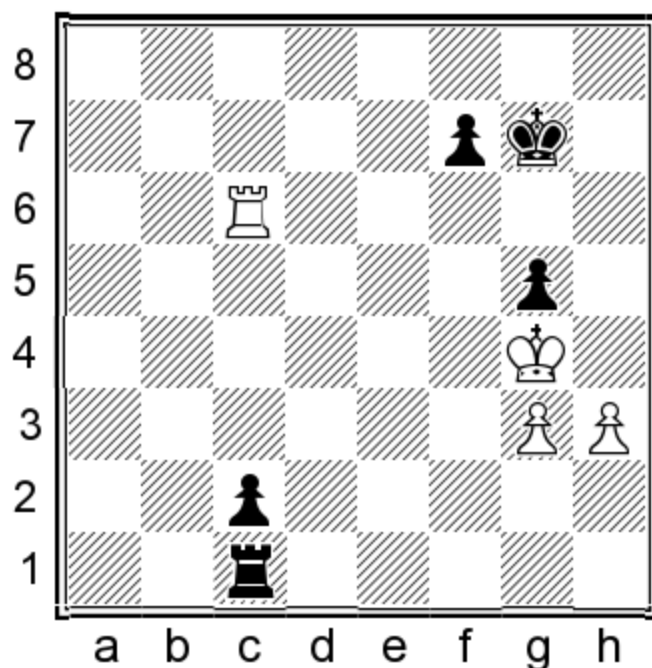
45



46



47



48

Rook endings are not only very common but also very difficult to play. What can be the cause of this difficulty if the rook moves in a straight line?

In my opinion, the main difficulty arises from the great strength of an active rook. There is a vast difference in value between two rooks, one placed attacking a pawn, and the other protecting it. And when the defending side's rook is active, it is almost impossible to win with an extra pawn and often difficult even when two pawns up. The three sections that we are going to study are all related to the rook's activity; the first section is more general, while in the second and third we delve more deeply into some very specific scenarios which occur very often.

Any player who wants to improve in the handling of rook endings should get used to the idea that it is essential to keep your rook active, especially if on the defending side. If you do not accept this

premise, you are going to give away many half-points – and some full ones.

Error 36 - Passive play with the rook

In my experience, **out of all the different types of endings, and at all levels, the most common error is passive play with the rook in rook endings.**

This happens, above all, in endings with a single rook each, but also in endings in which a minor piece accompanies the rook.

Some of the positions analysed in this section are presented differently from the usual way (where the error usually occurs on the first move), because instead of the error being made abruptly, as in most of the examples in this book, the evaluation of the positions remains equal for a long time. Furthermore, some of them seem dead equal and it is hard to believe that one move is better than another.

What usually happens, judging by what I have been told by the players involved in some of the examples, is that once you have decided on a passive defence, it is difficult to change course, especially when the situation seems worse than before; you only change your strategy when the position is starting to get desperate, and by then it is usually too late.

If you have not had the experience of personally suffering an adverse result in a similar situation, after thinking for a long time that you had an easy draw, you will have to take it on faith from me that if you leave your rook defending a pawn against the attack by an enemy rook, you will end up losing. We shall soon see that this is true in many cases.

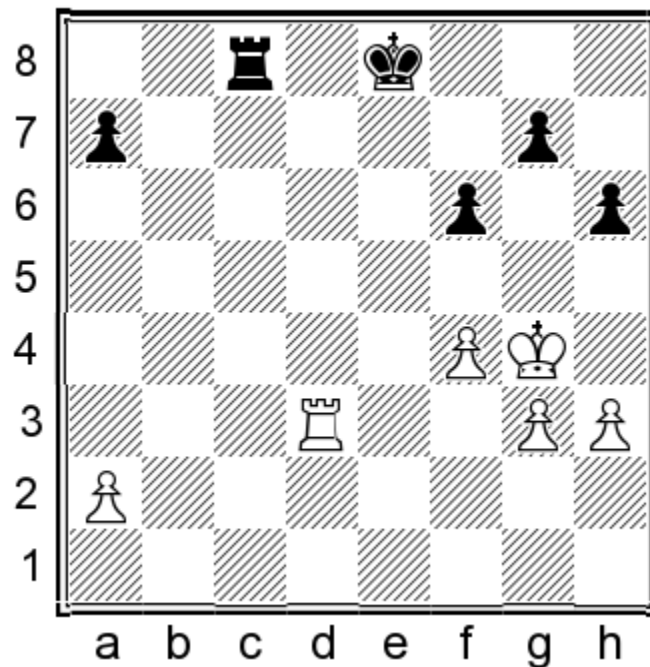
Remember our principal advice, and if it has not happened to you yet, learn from the errors of those to whom it has happened.

In the first example, the decision about how to deploy the rook remains the main issue for many moves.

Álvaro Bayo Milagro (2024)

Iñigo Ortín Blanco (1726)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2014



The diagram position is one of the kind that we have been discussing. It looks dead equal and the engines evaluate it as 0:00, but White ‘is threatening’ to deploy his rook to attack the a7-pawn from the front and create a few problems for Black. This is a good moment to take defensive measures, which would reduce the problems to almost nothing, but it is also an ‘ideal’ time for the problems to be allowed to grow.

34...♖c7?!

In this section, on several occasions we shall see moves that are evaluated as equal by the engines marked by me as dubious. The intention is to highlight the fact that persisting in playing passively

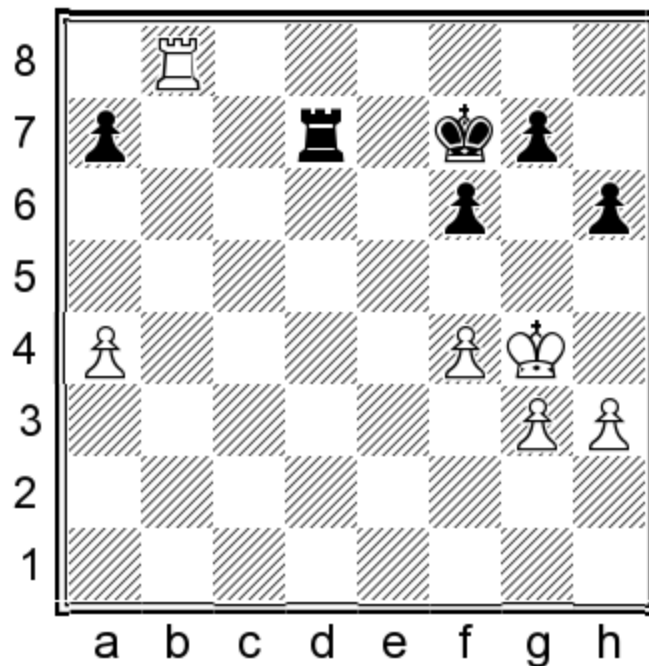
often leads to defeat and that the last moment when that defeat can be avoided is not easy to detect when you are playing.

The move played maintains the balance, but is a step towards having problems. It is simply that the black rook remains more passive than the white one. 34...♖c5! is the best solution; the rook prevents the white king from advancing and will limit the activity of White's rook, in the event that it moves across to attack the a-pawn; for example, 35.♖a3 h5+ 36.♔f3 a5. Instead, Iñigo opted for a strategy of passivity, thinking that this was adequate. And in fact it is, but he was not prepared to change his mind at the right moment.

35.♖b3

This is not the most incisive move. 35.♖a3 seeks out the natural position for the strong rook, attacking the pawn frontally, but then Black could play 35...g6!=, limiting the progress of the white king. Instead, 35.♔h5! is the most challenging move for Black; the white king wants to go to g6. 35...♔f7! 36.f5 and the white rook will be able to take up the active position on a3 on the following move, although Black is still in no serious danger yet.

35...♔f7 36.♖b8 ♖d7 37.a4



37...♔g6

Black should have taken advantage of the relative activity of his rook to improve his kingside pawns; for example, 37...g6! 38.f5 ♖d4+ 39.♔f3 gxf5, but the fear of losing the pawn on a7 stopped him. However, after 40.♖b7+ ♔g6 41.♖xa7 h5, with the idea of 42.h4 ♖b4 43.a5 f4! 44.gxf4 ♔f5, he has activated the rook and now the king too, and has nothing to fear.

38.♖b5 ♖d4 39.♖a5

Finally White deploys his rook in the active position.

39...f5+?!

Here 39...h5+! would have obliged the white king to take an unpleasant decision: 40.♔h4 (40.♔f3 ♖d3+ 41.♔f2 h4!=) 40...a6!? 41.♖xa6 (41.♖xh5 ♖xa4) 41...♔h6 and the threat of mate forces White to return the pawn with 42.g4 ♖xf4= .

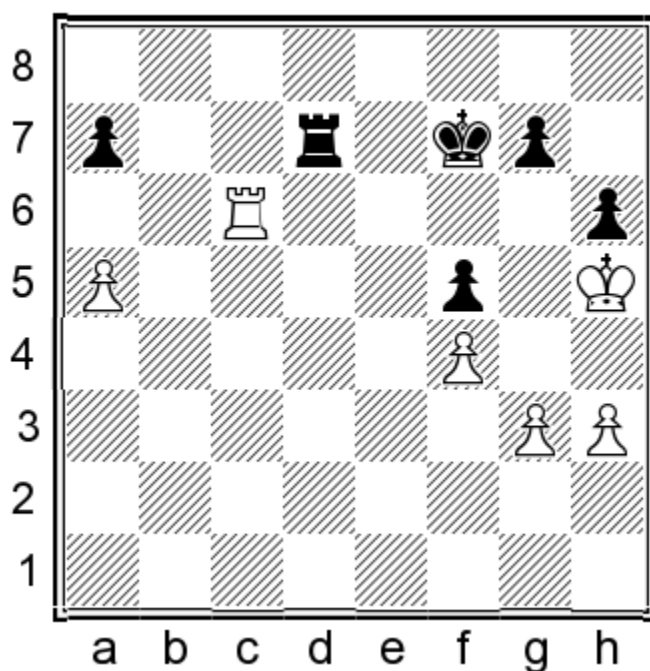
40.♔h4 ♖d7 41.♖a6+ ♔f7 42.♔h5

White has achieved as much as he can, but even so the position is still a draw, although Black has to be more careful.

42...♖c7?!

Giving up the pawn that is enslaving the rook, even with check, is an ideal solution in 90% of these endings; for example, 42...♖d3! 43.♖xa7+ ♔f6 44.♖a6+ ♔f7 45.♔h4 g5+ 46.fxg5 hxg5+ 47.♔xg5 ♖xg3+=.

43.a5 ♖d7 44.♖c6



Once the white pawn has arrived on a5, the plan for making progress is to bring the rook to b8 and then play a6, with the threat of playing ♖b7. But in this case it is also necessary to take into account Black's slight weakness on f5.

44...♖b7?

Until now the errors were not decisive. But, unexpectedly, this move loses. As we have already indicated, **the strategy of remaining passive indefinitely is a bad one, and the last opportunity to make a draw does not warn us of its arrival.**

It was vital to become active with 44...♖d3! 45.♖c7+ ♔f6=.

45.a6?

White should have grasped the opportunity that was presented to him, although it is rather hidden: 45.♖c5! ♔f6 46.g4 fxg4 47.hxg4, threatening ♜f5+ and ♔g6. This variation reflects very well the advantage of having the more active rook.

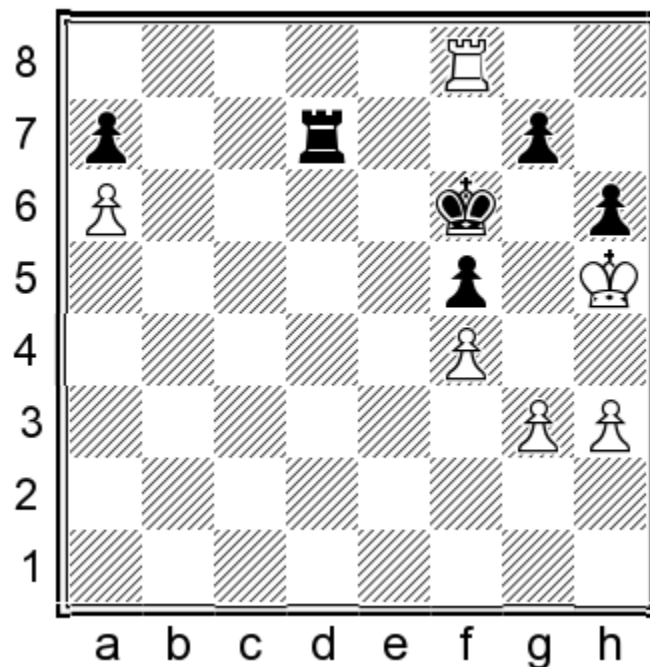
45...♜d7?!

Persisting with the waiting plan, which is still not losing. Black has been really pushed to seek counterplay, and in fact, this is the quickest road to peace: 45...♜b3! 46.♜c7+ ♔f6 and in fact White cannot even capture on a7: 47.♜xa7?? ♜xg3 48.♔h4 ♜a3, followed by mate.

46.♜c8 ♔f6?!

46...♜d3!. Once again the active move draws easily.

47.♜f8+



And finally, Black is faced with a delicate decision.

47...♔e6?

A) 47...♔e7! gives up a pawn, which is not easy at moments like this, after you've spent ages avoiding that, in positions where the

sacrifice was more natural than it is now: 48.♖xf5 ♜d6! 49.♞e5+ ♔f7 50.♞a5 ♔f6 51.g4! and although Black must resort to exceptional measures he can still draw: 51...g6+ 52.♔xh6 ♜d8 53.♔h7 ♜d7+;

B) 47...♖f7 also sufficed; for example, 48.♞b8 ♜c7 49.♞b7 ♜c3!.

48.♔g6!

Finally the entry of the white king decides the game.

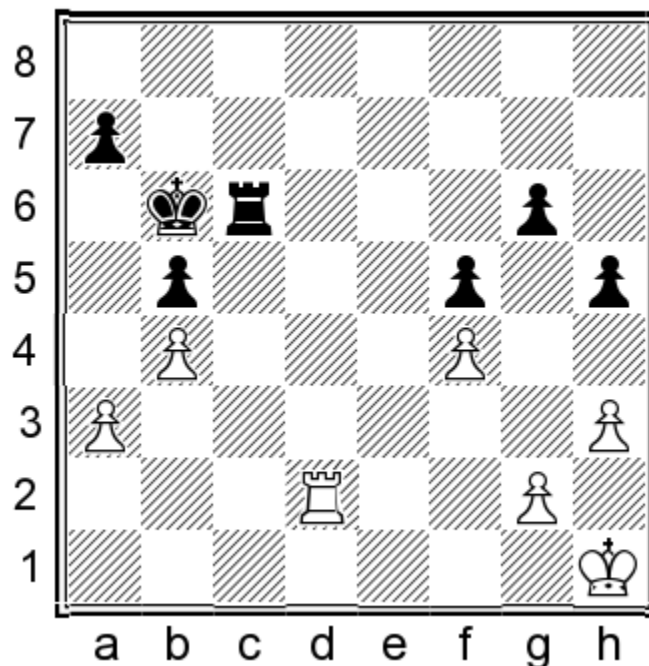
48...♜d6 49.♔xg7 ♜d3 50.♞f6+ ♔e7 51.♞g6 1-0

Only a few months before the previous game, one of the players had played this other game. It is a great temptation to say that he drew his own conclusions from it, but learning is not usually so easy.

Julio Silva Rodríguez (2201)

Álvaro Bayo Milagro (1997)

San Sebastian 2014



An absolutely dead drawn ending, right? This impression was reinforced because Black had been better during the game, and had

not adjusted to the new situation; he continued to think that any move would suffice.

49...♔c7?!

The imprecise (and passive) moves soon begin.

A) Black ought to have played 49...a5! , trying to activate both his king and his rook, after which he would even have some initiative;

B) 49...♖c3 is not a bad move, but it serves no purpose: 50.♗d6+ ♖c6 51.♗d3 and we return to the position but without ...♖c3 being possible now;

C) 49...♗e6 is logical and sound; for example, 50.♔h2 h4 (50...a5!) 51.g3 (51.♗d3=) 51...hxg3+ 52.♔xg3 ♗e3+ 53.♔h4 ♔c6 (53...♗xa3 54.♗d6+ ♔c7 55.♗xg6 ♖b3=) 54.♗g2 ♗xa3 55.♗xg6+ ♔d5 and now White must be careful as 56.♔g5?! leads to a slightly worse queen ending after 56...♗g3+! 57.♔xf5 ♗xg6 58.♔xg6 a5.

50.♗d3 h4

This is not a bad move, but not very useful. It was possible (and consistent with the previous move) to play 50...♗d6, to try to activate the king; for example, 51.♗c3+ (51.♗e3 ♔c6) 51...♗c6 52.♗e3 ♔d6=.

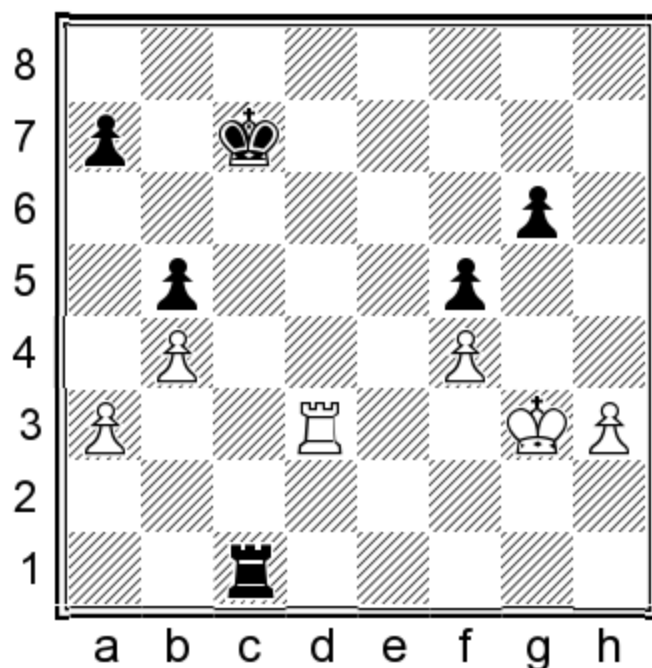
51.g3

White prepares to activate his king as quickly as possible.

51...hxg3 52.♔g2! ♖c1?!

Offering to trade rooks with 52...♗d6!? was still sufficient to draw: 53.♗xd6 (53.♗xg3 ♔c6 and the black king is activated, with the plan of ...♔c6-d5-c4; or 53.♗e3 ♗d4 and here it is Black's rook that is activated: 54.♔xg3 ♔d6) 53...♔xd6 54.♔xg3 ♔e6 (but not 54...♔d5? 55.♔h4 ♔e4 56.♔g5 ♔f3 57.h4 ♔g3 58.♔xg6 and White wins) 55.♔h4 ♔f6 56.♔g3 ♔f7 57.♔f3 ♔e6 58.♔g3 ♔f6 59.♔h4 a6.

53.♔xg3



From now on, the activity of the white king forces Black to take great care.

53...a6?!

This still does not lose, but it does not contribute anything and wastes Black's reserve tempo in the event of a pawn ending.

A) 53...♖g1+?! 54.♔h4! ♖g2 55.♖g3!? creates problems for Black, because the exchange of rooks would lose. After 55...♖f2! 56.♔g5, suddenly White's pressure is evident, although the position remains a draw with correct play;

B) The best move was 53...♖f1!, keeping White's f4-pawn under attack. Now, if 54.♖f3, it's fine to trade rooks: 54...♖xf3+ 55.♔xf3 ♔d6 56.♔g3 ♔e6 57.♔h4 ♔f6!=.

54.♔h4 ♖g1 55.♖g3 ♖xg3?

The final erroneous exchange (see **Error 7**). The pawn ending is losing. 55...♖f1! was essential now, and if 56.♔g5, then 56...♔d6 with a draw.

56.♔xg3 ♔d6 57.♔h4 ♔d5

Or 57...♔e6 58.♔g5 ♔f7 59.h4+–, followed by h5.

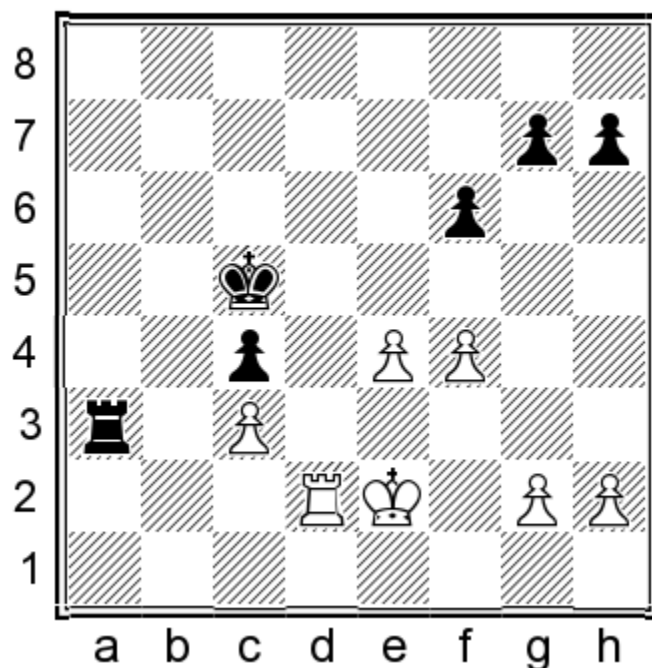
58.♔g5 ♔e4 59.h4! ♔f3 60.♔xg6 ♔xf4 61.h5 1-0

In some cases, such as the following, the decision to play passively can come from deficient calculation of the alternatives. However, we should never cite calculation as an excuse for a bad strategic decision, because this tends to be the perfect formula for not applying self-criticism.

Arman Kocharyan Baghdasaryan (1620)

Luis Vara Soler (1845)

Salobreña ch-ESP U14 2019



Exercise 43

White is a pawn up, but the black rook is menacing the pawn on c3.

36.♖c2?

Defending the pawn is too passive, although White can hope to make further progress and bring his king closer to protect the weakness.

The way to win was the active 36.e5! fxe5 37.fxe5, when Black cannot capture with 37...♖xc3? due to 38.e6 and the e-pawn cannot be stopped: 38...♖a3 39.e7 ♖a8 40.♖d8.

Instead, 36.♖d7? ♖xc3 37.♖xg7 allows Black to activate his king with 37...♔d4 and White can't win.

36...♖a1?

The drawback of this move is that it allows White to return to the correct plan, but this is rare in practice. Waiting with 36...♖b3 or 36...♔c6 was the best option.

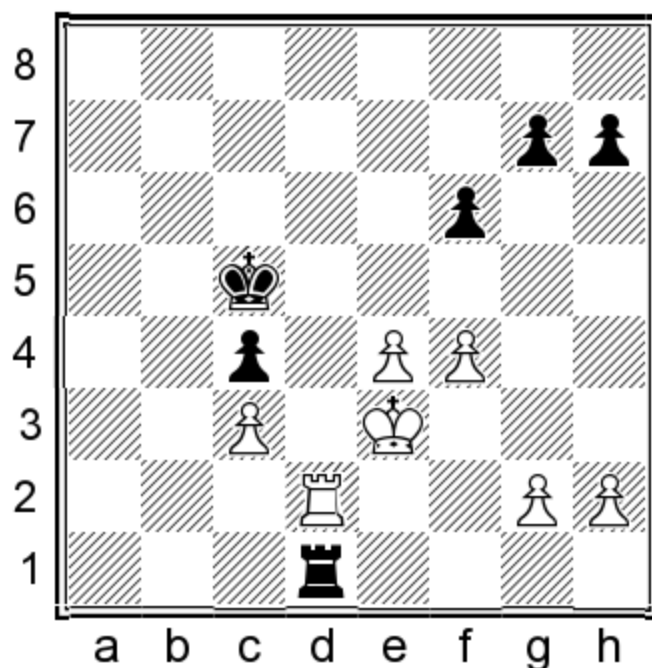
37.♔e3?

Compounding the error. White could have got back on the right track with 37.♖d2! ♖a3 38.e5+–.

37...♖e1+ 38.♖e2 ♖d1?!

38...♖c1 is the most precise; for example, 39.♔d2 ♖a1 40.e5 ♔d5!=.

39.♖d2



39...♖c1?

The immediate attack looks the most active, but it fails to use the important ability of the rook, both one's own and the opponent's, to give timely checks. Here, 39...♖e1+! 40.♔f3 ♜c1 would have regained the pawn, with equality.

40.♜d5+!

Now White is the one to take advantage of a check.

40...♔c6 41.♔d2?

Logically accompanied with the offer of a draw, because 41...♜g1 will follow.

But again, White should have played the active move 41.♔d4! and if 41...♜c2 42.♜h5 (42.♔xc4? ♜xg2 43.♜h5 ♜g4=) 42...♜xg2 43.♜xh7 ♜g4 44.f5, White, a pawn up and with the more active pieces, should win; for example, 44...♔d6 45.h4 ♜g1 46.h5 ♜g4 47.h6.

Error 37 - Not placing the rook behind the passed pawn

One of the most common scenarios in rook endings is the following: one player has a solitary passed pawn, on the opposite wing from the kings, where each player has two or three pawns. In that case, the relative position of the rooks is fundamental: **It is almost always better (for either side) to place the rook behind the pawn.**

This type of position has been played so many times that a theoretical consensus has almost been reached:

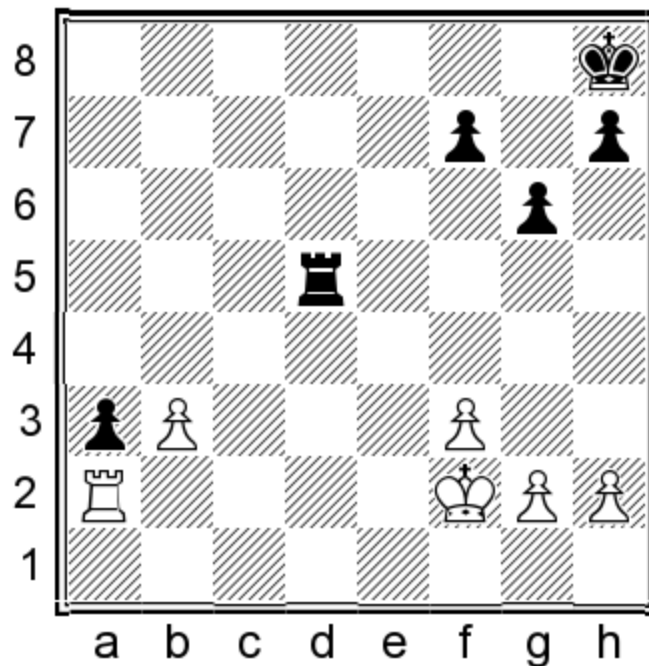
If the side with the passed pawn can place his rook behind the pawn, he will win (even if it is not an extra one), whereas if the defending side can place his rook behind the pawn the game will be drawn (even if the pawn is an extra one).

These rules have been repeated over and over, ad nauseam, but (just as happens with the decision to activate the rook, covered in the previous Error) many players cannot quite believe it, which is why so many mistakes are made in this scenario.

Pablo Lopez Varela (2131)

Cecilia Guillo Longares (1942)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2019



Exercise 44

30. ♖xa3?

This capture seems obvious, and the fact is that often when there is a possible capture, all other options are forgotten. But in this case, it is very clear: the capture allows the black rook to be deployed behind the passed pawn and those endings are usually a draw.

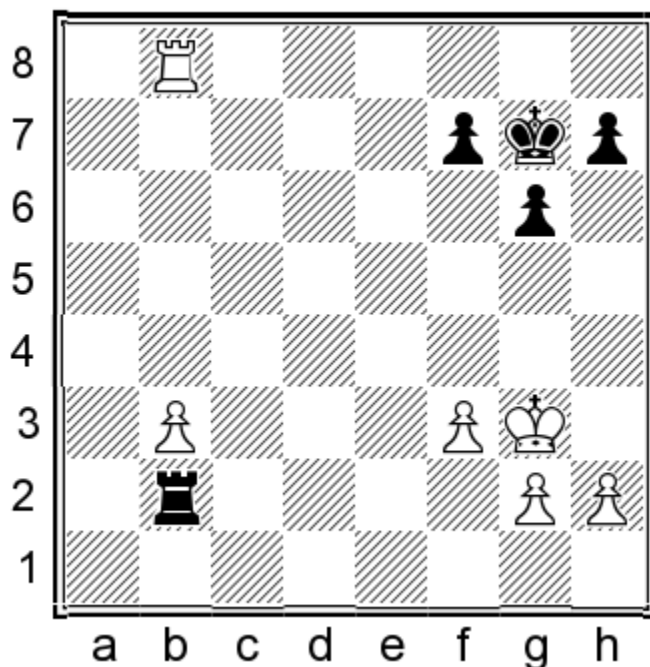
A) 30. ♔e3?! would also allow Black to place the rook behind the pawn, although it requires a bit more precision than in the game: 30... ♜d1! 31. ♖xa3 ♔g7! (31... ♜b1? allows the white king to support the pawn very easily with 32. ♔d4 ♜b2 33. ♔c3 ♜xg2 34. b4) 32. ♜a7 ♜b1 and the black rook is now in the drawing position: 33. ♜b7 ♜b2;

B) The best move was 30. ♔e2!, preventing the black rook from deploying behind the pawn, and it wins easily: 30... ♔g7 31. ♖xa3 h5 (31... ♜b5 32. ♔d3) 32. b4, followed by ♜b3, with the white rook behind the pawn.

30...♖d2+ 31.♔g3 ♜b2

The black rook is now behind the pawn, and it is natural that White wants to release his rook from its boxed-in position on a3.

32.♖a8+ ♔g7 33.♖b8



Now we are in the pattern which is so often repeated and so frequently misinterpreted. Now we shall see an example of how such positions develop, usually with a large number of errors.

33...g5!

An excellent move; Black should gain space, with a view to future counterplay. 33...h5 was another correct way to do this.

34.♖b6 h6

Here it was a bit better to play 34...f6!?, allowing Black to activate his king; for example, 35.♖b8 ♔f7 36.b4 ♔e6 37.b5 h5 and Black holds.

35.b4 ♔h7

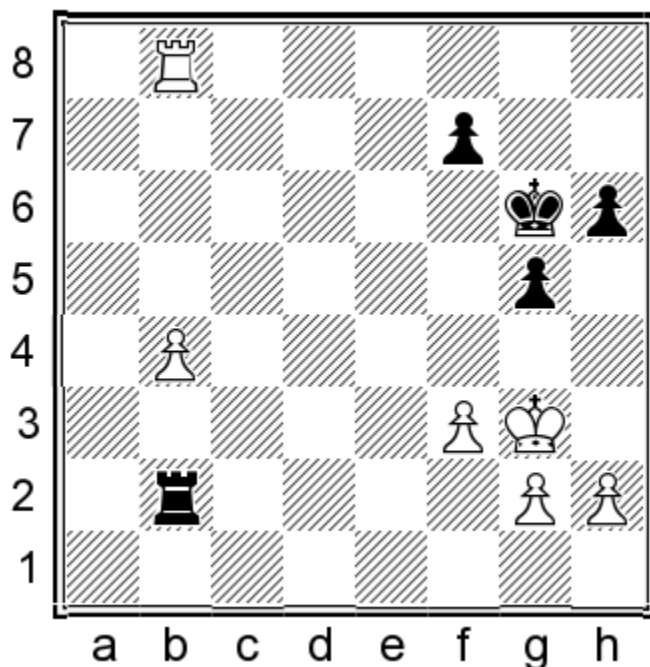
Black can make waiting moves, or else play 35...f5!?, which does not really weaken the pawns because the king is close enough to

protect them, although in this case 36.h4! might be unpleasant:

36...gxh4+ 37.♔h3 ♔h7.

But 35...f6!? is the move I like best, intending ...♔g6 and/or ...h5.

36.♖b7 ♔g6 37.♖b8



37...♔h7?!

One waiting move too many. When the passed pawn advances as far as the sixth rank, which is inevitable, the most appropriate position for the defender's king is as close as possible to the source of counterplay, so 37...♔f5! 38.b5 h5 39.h4 gxh4+ 40.♔h3 f6 41.b6 ♔f4 42.b7 f5, leading to a draw.

38.b5 ♔g7 39.b6 ♔h7?!

39...♔f6 was better.

40.h4 ♔g7?!

Absolute passivity is acceptable in certain situations, which we call 'fortress' positions, but one should never allow the opponent to make progress at no cost. As we have seen in the previous section,

this approach is hardly advisable in rook endings. 40...♔g6! was correct.

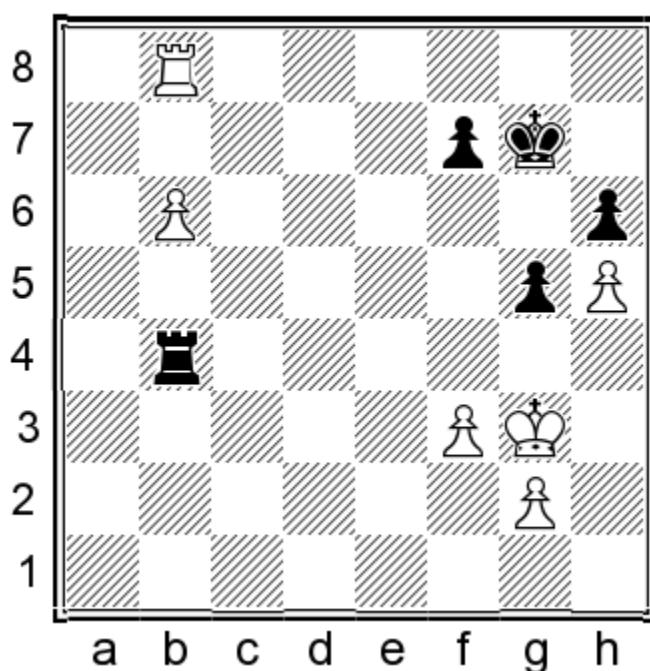
41.h5!

Now there is a small weakness on h6, but this is not important yet.

41...♖b4?

The transition from a position that is drawn but requires care to a lost position is sudden in this case, as in many others. This move liberates the white king, and with the pawn on the sixth rank and the weakness on h6, this is losing.

Instead, 41...♔f6! would have kept Black comfortably within the drawing margin.



42.♔f2!

White immediately chooses the winning plan; the king heads for b7 and there is no good way for Black to oppose this.

42...♖b2+ 43.♔e3!

The only way to win.

43...♖c2?!

Black displays his demoralisation. The rest of the game is simple and no commentary is needed. But if 43...♖xg2, then 44.♞c8 ♜b2 45.♞c6, followed by the march of the king to b7. In this variation we can see the influence of the pawn on h5 against the weakness on h6.

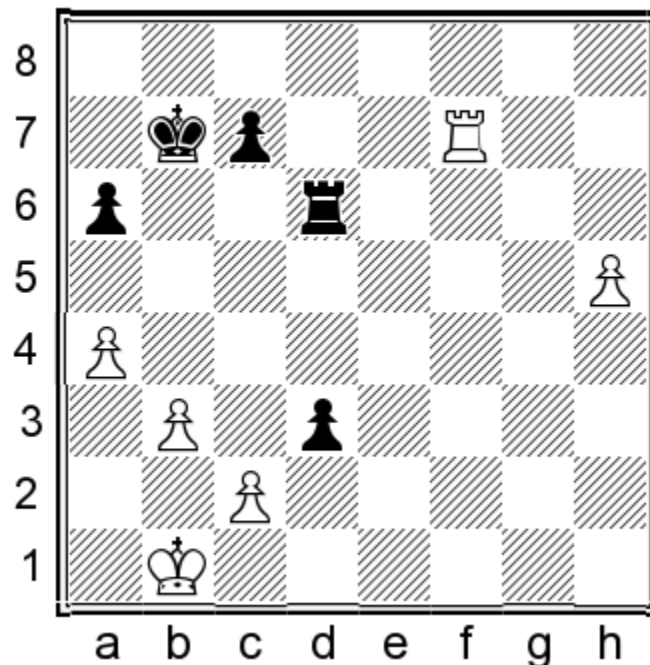
44.g4 ♜c3+ 45.♔e4 ♜c4+ 46.♔d5 ♜c3 47.♞a8 ♜d3+ 48.♔c6 ♜c3+ 49.♔d6 ♜d3+ 50.♔c7 ♜c3+ 51.♔b8 ♜xf3 52.b7 ♜c3 53.♔a7 ♜a3+ 54.♔b6 ♜b3+ 55.♔c6 ♜c3+ 56.♔d5 1-0

Often, the manoeuvre to place the rook behind the passed pawn, or to prevent this, passes unnoticed.

Rubén Domingo Núñez (2205)

Eihartze Buiza Prieto (2095)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2015



This position (Exercise 45) looks drawn. When this is the case, most players stop exerting themselves and nothing interesting happens.

60.cxd3?

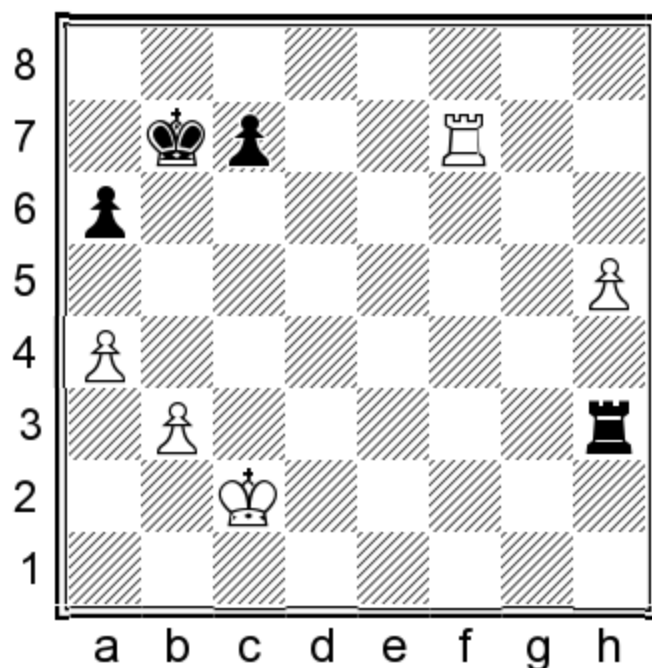
The key to this ending, as with so many others, involves placing the rook behind the passed pawn. With this move, White makes Black's plan much easier to implement, because he had no suspicion that he could make it difficult.

Things would have been very different after 60.♔c1!. Admittedly, Black could still draw, but he would have to find a very precise move and would lose if he made one of the other, natural-looking, moves:

A) 60...dxc2? loses, because White now moves his rook behind the passed h-pawn, starting with 61.♖f1!; this is the cleanest win (61.♔xc2 also wins in this case: 61...♖d4 62.h6 ♖h4 63.h7). With the rook behind the pawn, the winning plan is 61...♖d3 62.♖h1! ♖xb3 63.♔xc2 ♖g3 64.h6 ♖g8 65.h7 ♖h8 66.♖h6, followed by the unstoppable advance of the white king;

B) 60...♖d5! 61.h6 ♖c5! (another necessary finesse; the immediate 61...♖h5? fails to 62.h7 dxc2 63.♔xc2 and White wins by bringing up his king to support the passed pawn) 62.c4 a5 63.♔d2 ♖h5 64.h7 ♖h3! and the white king has to watch over Black's pawn; it's a draw.

60...♖xd3 61.♔c2 ♖h3



The black rook has taken up the correct position and now Black can maintain equality with a minimum of care.

62.♖h7

Here 62.♖f5 would surely have posed more practical problems.

62...♔b6 63.h6?!

Again, 63.b4! might have created a few more practical problems.

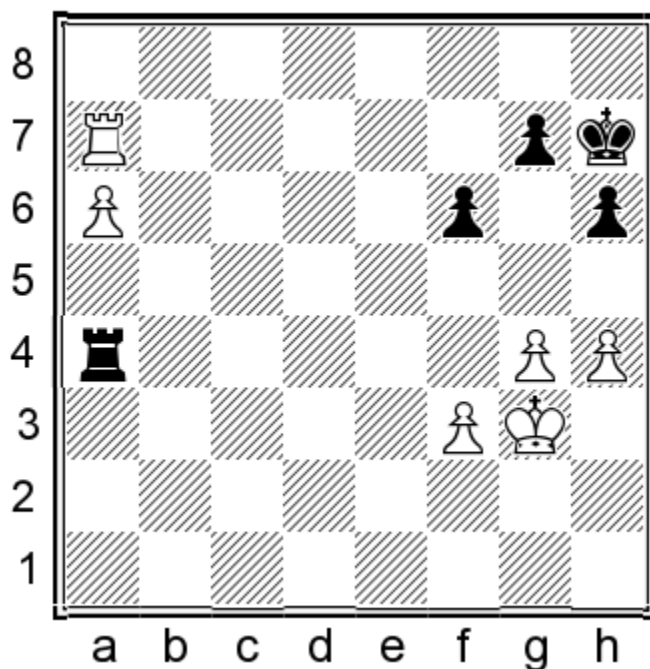
63...a5! 64.♖h8 ♔a7 65.h7?!

Advancing the pawn to the seventh rank makes things much easier for Black, who can easily defend all his pawns. The rest of the game (which went up to move 116) is of no interest: ½-½.

Nevertheless, the deployment of the defender's rook behind the passed pawn does not by itself guarantee a draw, as we shall see in the following examples. A common error by the side that achieves this is then to go to sleep.

Daniel Ledesma Claros (1954)

Biel Horta Gafarot (1826)



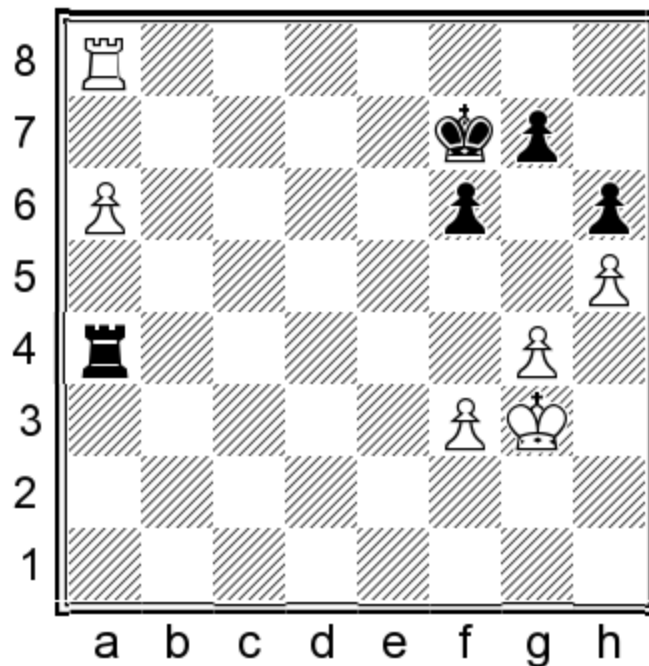
After a series of passive moves, Black arrives at his moment of truth; now, there is only one move to draw (Exercise 46).

44...♔g8?

But this is not it; this move should have lost. Soon, we shall see why.

44...h5! was the only move, preventing White from seizing all the space; for example, 45.♖a8 (45.gxh5 ♔h6 46.♖a8 ♔xh5 47.a7 ♔g6=) 45...hxg4 46.fxg4 ♔g6 47.♔f3 ♔h6 48.♔e3 ♔g6 (48...♖xg4? 49.♖h8+ ♔g6 50.a7) 49.♔d3 ♖xg4 50.♖d8 ♖a4! (50...♖xh4? 51.a7) 51.♖d6 ♖xh4 52.♖d4 ♖h3+ 53.♔c4 ♖a3 54.♔b5 ♔f5 55.♖a4 ♖b3+ 56.♔c6 ♖b8 57.a7 ♖a8 58.♔b7 ♖xa7+ 59.♔xa7 g5 60.♔b6 g4 61.♔c5 g3 62.♔d5 g2! 63.♖a1 ♔f4 and Black holds the draw.

45.♖a8+ ♔f7 46.h5



After this move, White can execute the plan of bringing the king to support the a6-pawn. Black will never have enough counterplay now.

46...♔e7 47.♔f2 ♖a3 48.♔e2 ♔f7

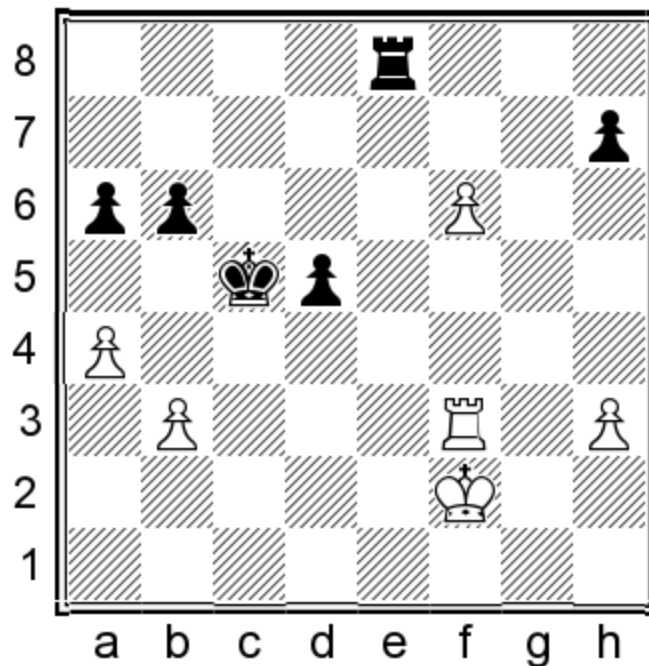
We shall see the rest of the game in the next Error (‘Getting your rook stuck in front of your passed pawn on the seventh rank’).

We shall now see an example in which the attacking side already has the rook behind the passed pawn, which has an extraordinary resemblance to a classic ending.

Laura Toquero Gracia (1551)

Alba Barranco Lopez (1296)

Spanish Team Championship U14 2022



40...♔d6?

In this case, the passive move is with the king. Black is trying to win the f-pawn, but White has a manoeuvre that usually wins in such endings: transforming it into a pawn ending with the dominant king.

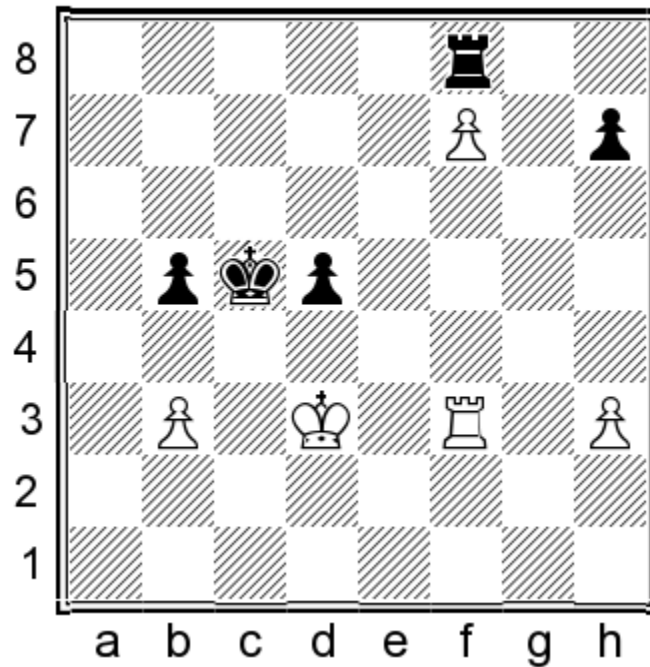
A) 40...♖f8!, keeping the king active, provides good defensive options; for example, 41.f7 ♔d4! and dislodging the black king from its active position is impossible: 42.♔g3 (42.♖f6 ♔c3; 42.♔e2 ♔e4=) 42...♔e4 43.♔g4 h5+ 44.♔g3 d4=;

B) The active king move 40...♔d4?, which looks very logical, curiously loses due to a great finesse: 41.♖e3! ♖f8 (41...♖xe3 42.f7 and the pawn queens) 42.♖e6! and now either White's rook captures a pawn, or her king is able to advance more comfortably: 42...b5 (42...♔c5 43.♔e3 d4+ 44.♔e4 ♖f7 45.♔e5 ♖d7 46.♖e7 ♖d8 47.f7 and White wins) 43.♖xa6 b4 44.♖c6!, preventing counterplay with ...♔c3.

41.f7 ♖f8 42.♔e3 ♔c5 43.♔d3

Now, the resemblance to the classic examples Lasker-Rubinstein and the later game Botvinnik-Euwe is striking. The winning method is the same. I recommend that the curious reader study these games.

43...b5 44.axb5 axb5



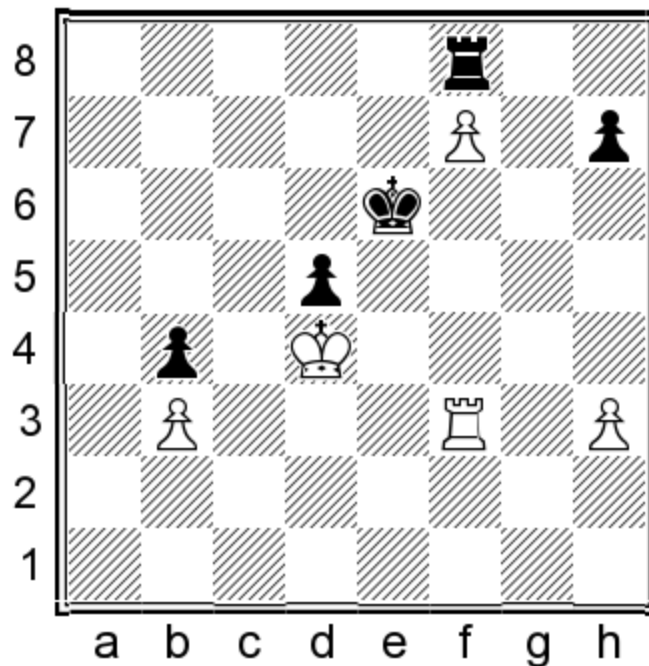
45.♔c3?

There are several winning moves now, but this is not one of them.

A) 45.♖f4! is the simplest, preventing any glimmer of counterplay: 45...♔d6 (or 45...b4 46.♖f6! d4 47.♔e4!) 46.b4 ♔e6 47.♔d4 and since the pawn ending is losing for Black, there is nothing that he can do;

B) 45.♖f6! wins in the same way: 45...b4 46.h4 h5 47.♔e3 d4+ 48.♔e4.

45...b4+! 46.♔d3 ♔d6 47.♔d4 ♔e6



And now Black is threatening to capture the pawn, because the pawn ending is drawn by a single tempo, thanks to the counterplay against the h-pawn, which did not exist in the game Lasker-Rubinstein.

48.♔c5

48.♖e3+!? is a good try, but it does not work: 48...♔d6! (now 48...♔xf7? would indeed lose: 49.♖f3+ ♔e7 50.♖xf8 ♔xf8 51.♔xd5 ♔f7 52.♔c5) 49.♖e5 ♖xf7 50.♖xd5+ ♔c6 51.♖h5 ♖f4+ 52.♔d3 ♖f3+ 53.♔c4 ♖f4+ 54.♔d3 ♖f3+ 55.♔c2 ♖f2+ with a draw.

48...♖xf7 49.♖xf7 ♔xf7 50.♔xd5 ♔g6 51.♔c4 ♔g5 52.♔xb4 ♔h4 53.♔c4 h5 54.b4 ♔xh3 55.b5 ♔g2 56.b6 h4 57.b7 h3 58.b8♔ h2
With a theoretically drawn endgame.

Error 38 - Getting your rook stuck in front of your passed pawn on the seventh rank

Rook endings are so frequent that this very specific situation occurs countless times. It is almost impossible that it has not happened in one of your games.

The position of a pawn on the seventh rank is very promising. But if the attacker's rook is in front of the pawn, it is often impossible to benefit from it. It is normal for any player to have experienced this for themselves. But it is quite another thing to draw the right conclusions from it instead of just writing it off as bad luck. The advance of the pawn to the seventh rank keeps happening in games, and sometimes it is correct, because it wins, making it more complicated to provide guidelines for this decision.

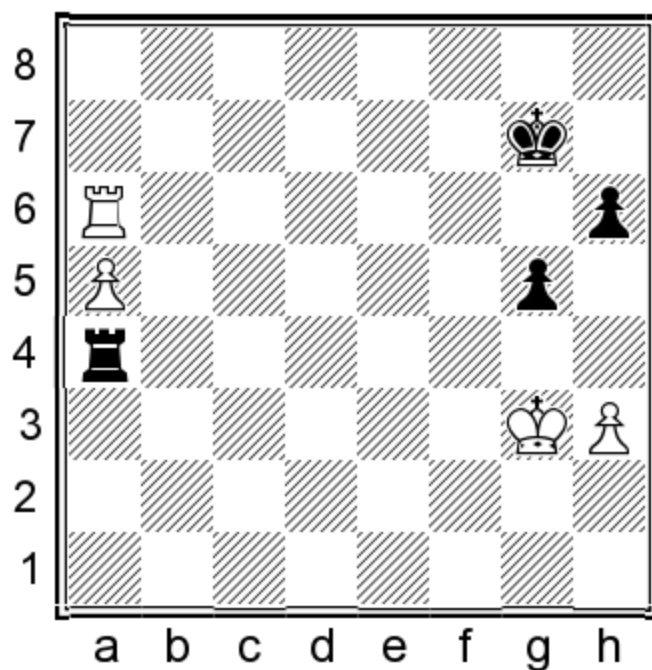
The aim of the following examples is to see the errors that were made in relation to this circumstance and in different situations and, by studying them, draw some conclusions.

In the first example the player with the very advanced pawn even puts himself in danger of losing the game.

Yingrui Lin (2324)

Martin Pascual García (1930)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2021



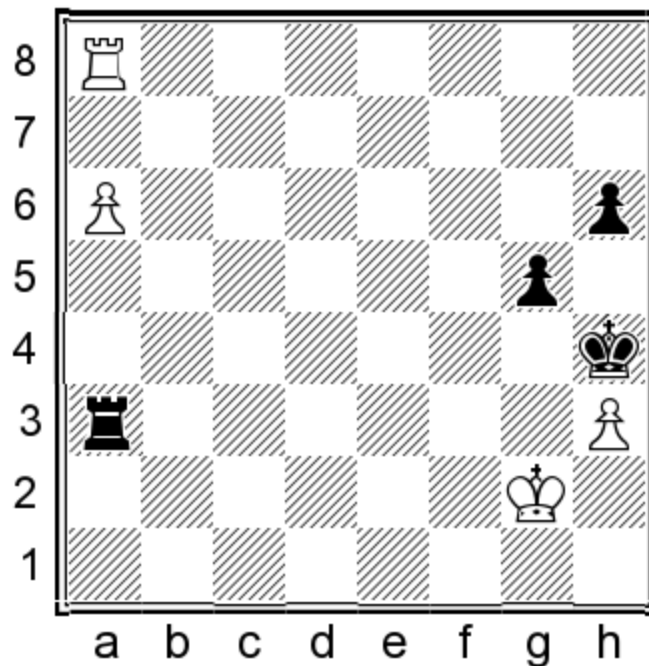
47. ♖a7+?!

Few examples illustrate more clearly than this one that placing the rook in front of the pawn brings nothing.

For White, it was better to wait and not let the black king become active.

47... ♔g6 48. a6?! ♖a3+ 49. ♔g2 ♔h5 50. ♖a8 ♔h4

Now, we have arrived at Exercise 47.



White has made life absurdly complicated for himself. Now he has to find an ‘only move’ to avoid loss, and it’s not an easy one to find.

51.a7?

And he fails to find it. Fortunately for him, his opponent is in conformist mode. The right way to play was 51.♖f8! ♜xa6 (51...♜a2+ 52.♖f2=) 52.♖f3!, going into an ending a pawn down, but with little danger for White. 51.♖d8?, with the same idea, does not work due to 51...♜a2+, followed by ...♔xh3.

51...h5?

This looks like a zugzwang, of course, but it has a flaw. The way to win was 51...♜a2+! 52.♔g1 ♔xh3 53.♖h8 ♜xa7 54.♖xh6+ ♔g3 55.♔f1 ♜a1+ 56.♔e2 g4, reaching a theoretically winning position, one that occurs quite often but is insufficiently known.

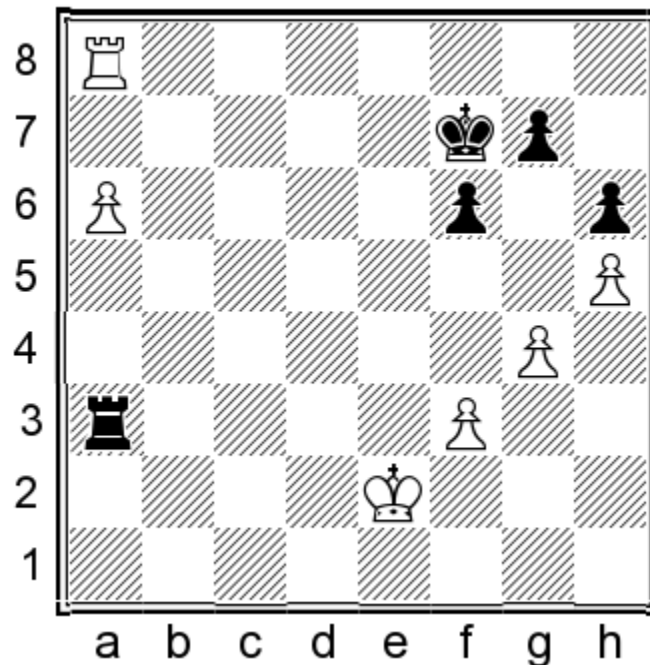
52.♔f1 ♔xh3 53.♖g8 ♜xa7 ½-½

In the next position, which we left earlier in the previous section, the advance to the seventh rank spoils a very easy win.

Daniel Ledesma Claros (1954)

Biel Horta Gafarot (1826)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2018



49.a7??

White voluntarily places himself in the exceptional position, where a pawn on the seventh is harmless. The white rook is completely stuck and White cannot do anything positive to free it from a8.

The right plan, easily winning in this case, was to send the king to the a7-square. If, in the meanwhile, the black rook captures a kingside pawn, to extract the white rook and defend the pawn from the side; for instance, 49.♔d2 ♖xf3 50.♖a7+ ♔g8 51.♖b7 ♖a3 52.a7 ♔h7 53.♔c2.

49...♖a2+ 50.♔e3 ♖a4 51.♔d3 ♖a3+ 52.♔e4 ♖a4+ 53.♔d5 ♖a1 54.♔c4 ♖a2 55.f4 ♖a4+ 56.♔d5 ♖a5+ 57.♔c6 ♖a1 58.g5 fxg5 59.fxg5 hxg5 60.h6

An interesting try, but Black does not ‘bite’.

60...♔g6!

60...gxh6? loses to 61.♖h8, but this is already a familiar story.

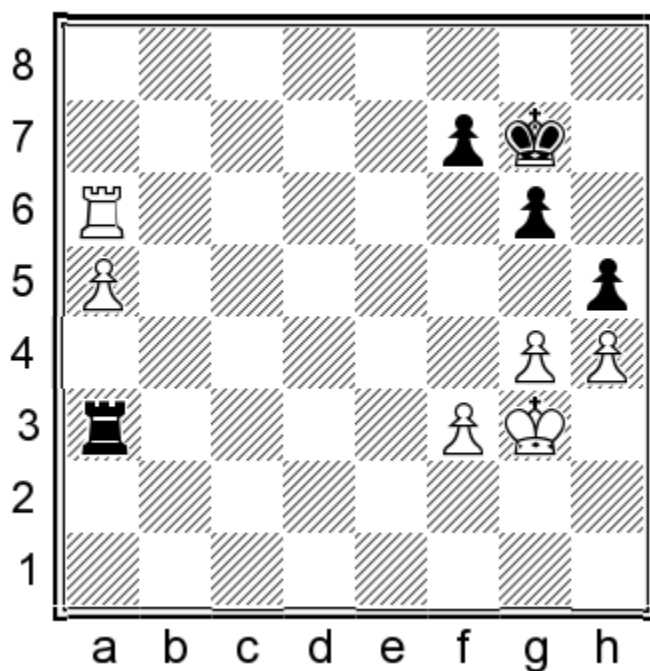
61.hxg7 ♔xg7 62.♔b7 ♖b1+ 63.♔c7 ♖c1+ 64.♔b7 ♖b1+ ½-½

The manoeuvres which we have seen are the most frequent, and the errors are the most common, but they do not exhaust all the possibilities. Despite the apparent simplicity of the position, many subtleties remain to be deciphered.

Daniel Arjol Lopez (1856)

Pablo Barragán Arriaza (1714)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U12 2015



Black has just played 46... h5 and White is faced with a decision that could be important.

47.gxh5?!

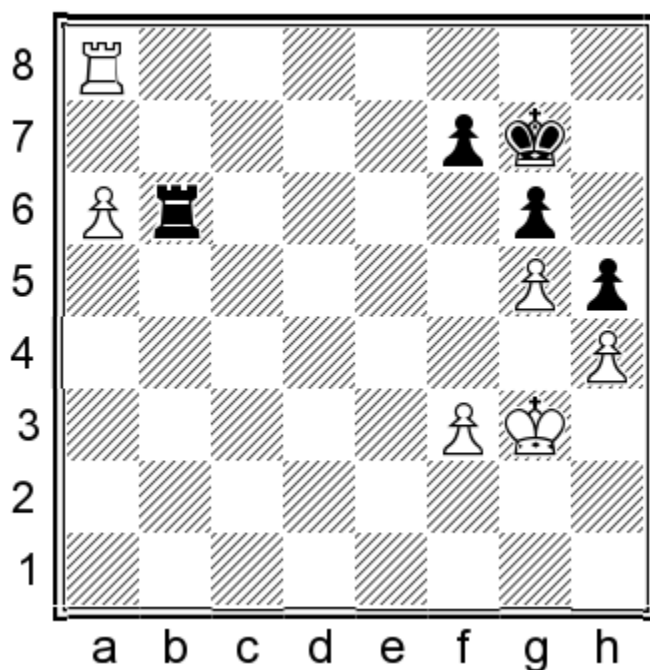
Played with the intention of advancing the a-pawn to the seventh rank, which allows a very easy draw.

47.g5 would have created more problems for Black, shutting the black king in a sort of capsule and planning to send White's king to

support the passed pawn on the a-file, even though this would entail the loss of some pawns. In theory, Black can defend this position, but in practice it would be more difficult, as we can understand by considering the following analysis: 47...♖a4 48.♖a8 and now:

A) 48...♔h7?. Waiting tactics lead to defeat: 49.a6 ♕g7 50.f4 ♖a3+ 51.♔f2 ♔h7 52.♔e2 ♕g7 53.♔d2 ♖a4 54.♔c3 ♖xf4 55.♔b3! ♖f1 56.♖c8 ♖a1 57.♖c6, followed by the advance of the king;

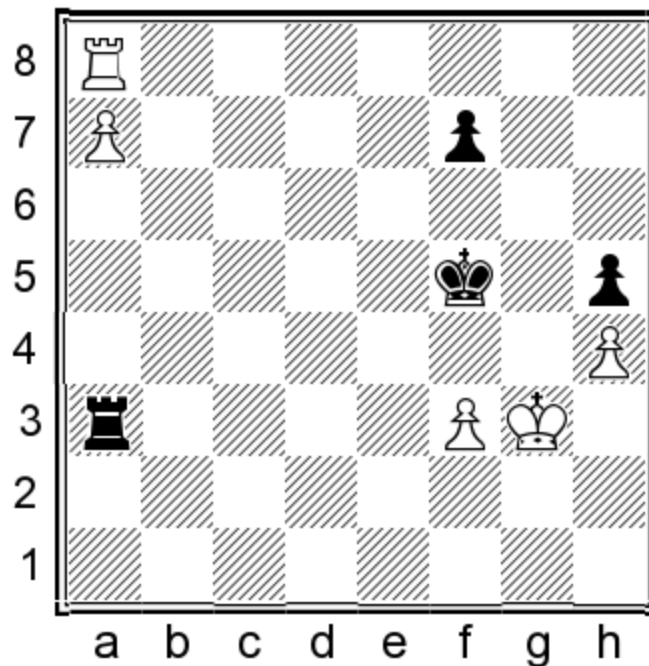
B) 48...♖b4!. Moving the rook from the position behind the pawn is not an easy decision: 49.a6 ♖b6!.



analysis diagram

This defence is inspired by the Vancura theme, but it is not the same in every detail. If the a-pawn advances, the rook will move back behind it, while if the white king tries to go to a7 the rook will prevent it by stationing itself on e6: 50.f4 (50.a7?! ♖a6! and White's rook is stuck) 50...♖c6 51.♔f3 ♖e6! and the white king cannot get out: 52.f5 gxf5 53.♔f4 ♔h7 54.♔xf5 ♔g7=.

47...gxh5 48.♖a8 ♕f6 49.a6 ♕f5 50.a7?! ♖b4!



Now the rook is stuck. There is nothing to be done... without some help from the opponent!

50...f6 51.♖h8

White opts for immediate simplification and obtains an unexpected success:

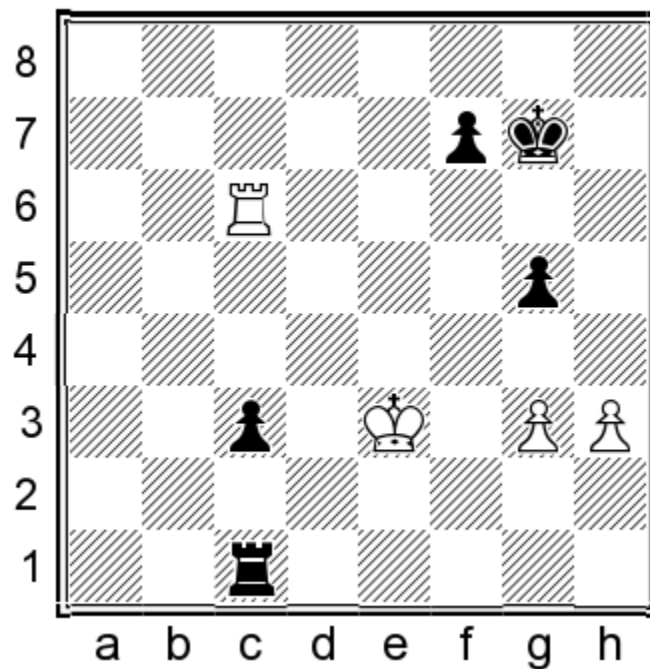
**51...♖xa7 52.♖xh5+ ♔g6 53.♖b5 ♖h7 54.♔g4 ♖f7 55.♖b6 ♖h7
56.♖a6 ♖f7 57.h5+ ♔h6 58.♔f5 ♔xh5 59.♖xf6 1-0**

Here, 59...♖a7 , to give checks from the side, draws. Black trusted in his opponent's simplification and resigned in a drawn position. With nerves, shortage of time and a lack of basic knowledge, the defender was overwhelmed by the sensation that there was no alternative but to exchange the rooks.

In a few cases, advancing the pawn to the seventh rank is correct and winning. But to achieve this, it is essential to know the procedure, and this is not always the most basic.

Roger Bernardo Lopez (2110)

Javier Sainz Allo (1804)



50.♔f3?

White engages in the sort of passive play which is so common in rook endings. In this case, the justification was that he thought he had a fortress. But the construction of the fortress is incomplete, so it was better to eliminate the c3-pawn, for instance with 50.h4! gxh4 51.gxh4, followed by ♔d3, with an easy draw.

50.g4!? also works, but the variations are strange; for example, 50...♖h1 51.♔e4! ♖xh3 52.♔f5.

50.♔d3? is, logically, premature: 50...♖g1 51.♖xc3 ♖xg3+ and wins.

50...c2!

The advance to the seventh rank is not always an error, and when it is correct, as in this case, it usually wins easily. But, as we have already mentioned, to achieve this you need to know the procedure.

51.♔g4

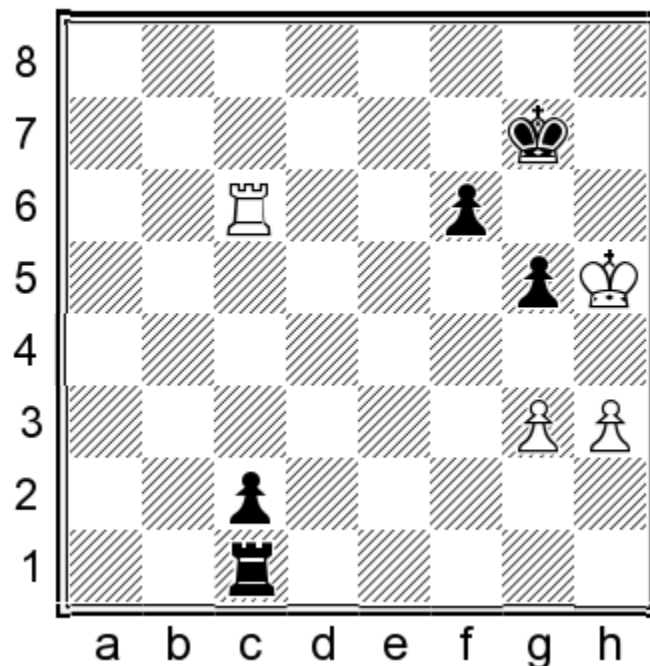
The white king is forced to advance, because if it heads for the classic drawing zone on g2/h2, after 51.♔g2 Black can play 51...f5!, creating a passed pawn on the f-file, which is one of the possible systems to breach this type of fortress.

Now, we have arrived at Exercise 48.

51...f6!

At the moment, everything is fine.

52.♔h5

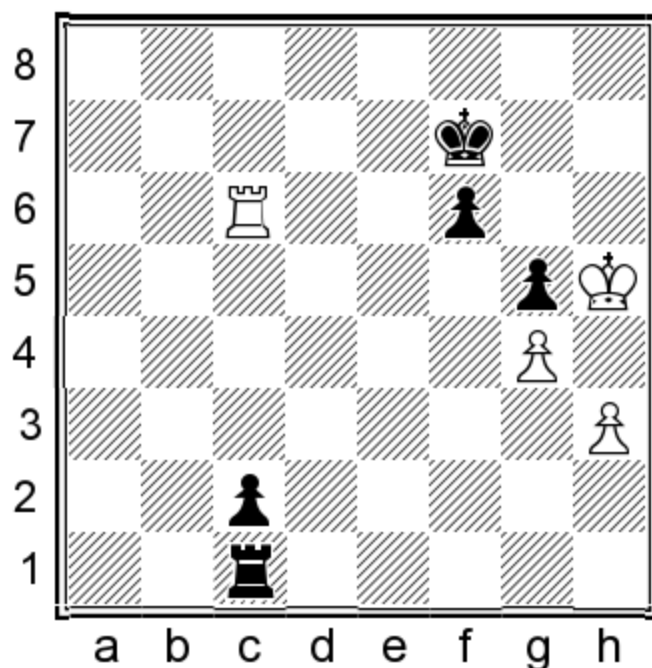


And now Black needs to force the white king to leave its refuge, where it is sheltered from checks. This is easy to achieve, although it requires precision.

52...♖g1?

Acquiescing to the draw.

A) The winning move was 52...♔f7!, with the threat of ...f6-f5-f4, and in the event of 53.g4,



analysis diagram

Black can execute a brilliant, but typical, double pawn break, which exposes the white king to checks from the black rook: 53...f5! 54.gxf5 g4 (similarly, if 53.♔h6, then Black plays 53...f5 54.♔xg5 f4);

B) But Black should eschew the immediate 52...f5? in view of 53.♔xg5 f4 54.♖c7+ ♔f8 55.♔f6, and thanks to the threat of mate, the white king is able to hide in the shade of the f-pawn after 55...♔e8 56.gxf4.

53.♖c7+ ♔f8 54.♖xc2 ♖xg3 55.♔g6 ♔e7 56.♖e2+ ½-½

How to avoid Errors 36, 37 and 38

If we carefully observe the examples in this chapter, one of the things we can discover is that they are all different versions of the activity of the rook. In **Error 36**, the priority was to avoid leaving the rook defending a pawn; **Error 37** highlighted the importance of placing the rook favourably behind the passed pawn; and **Error 38**

was about avoiding (or knowing when to exploit) the rook getting stuck in front of the passed pawn.

Therefore, the first recommendation, as we suggested in the introduction, is to become convinced that the rook is the piece that is most in need of an active position in the endgame; or, seen from the other side, it is the piece that suffers most from being in a passive position. And if you have become truly convinced of this, then you should act accordingly, even if this means sacrificing a pawn.

The second recommendation is to make a serious analysis of all the rook endings you encounter, starting with your own games (including rapid games) and continuing with your friends' games and games played in tournaments that you follow live. Rook endings are so common that you will soon be able to encounter these situations, and some other interesting ones as well.

The third is to analyse and solve practical endgame exercises from the books we recommended in the conclusions of the previous chapter. Here are a few specific suggestions: Chapters 72 to 76 in *100 Endgame Patterns You Should Know*, Chapter 9 in Dvoretsky's *Endgame Manual*, and the chapter devoted to Rubinstein in *Learn from the Legends* (Mihail Marin).

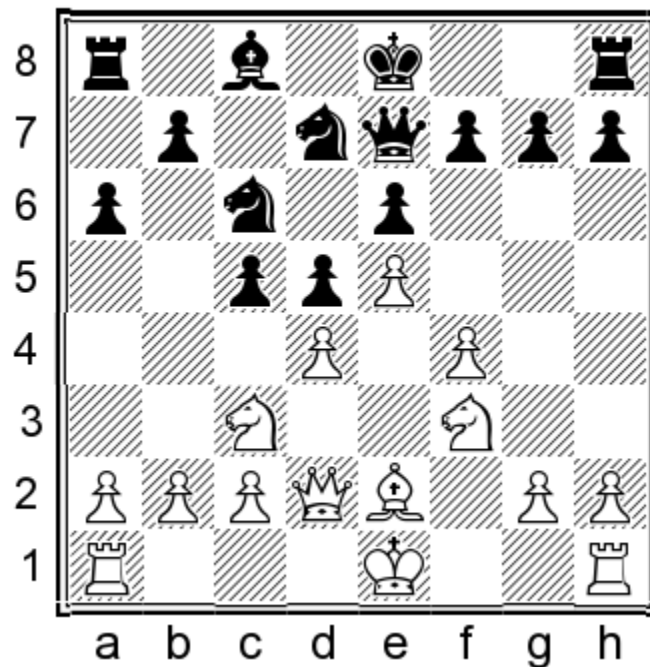
Fourthly, and this is very applicable to other errors covered in this book but ideal for this one: train against your friends or against the engine, by playing out rook endings that appear interesting to you, starting with those arising in your own games. It is very easy to provide yourself with examples for this task.

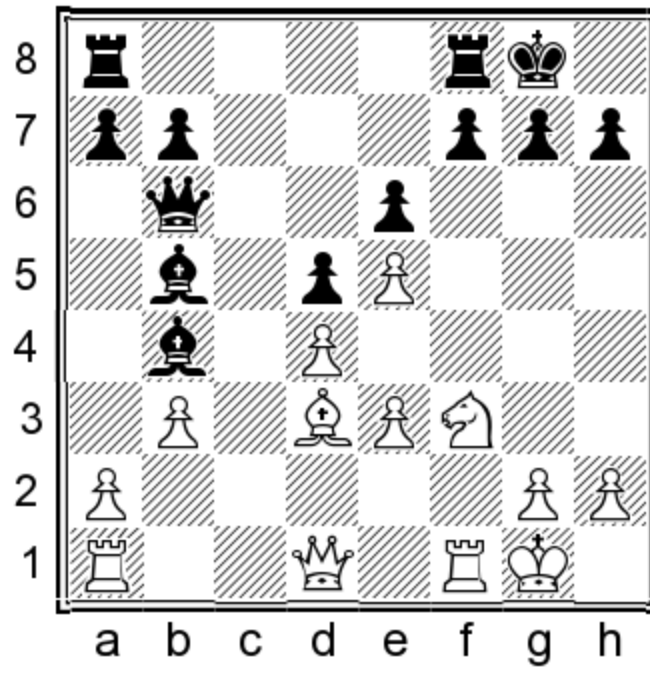
Chapter 9

The opening

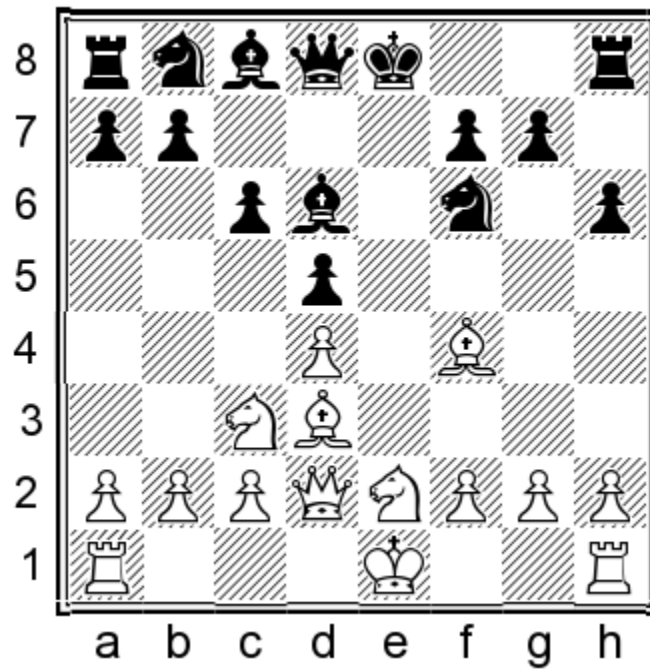
- Error 39 - Ignorance of typical tactical ideas
- Error 40 - Mistimed castling
- Error 41 - Unenergetic play with a lead in development

Exercises for Chapter 9

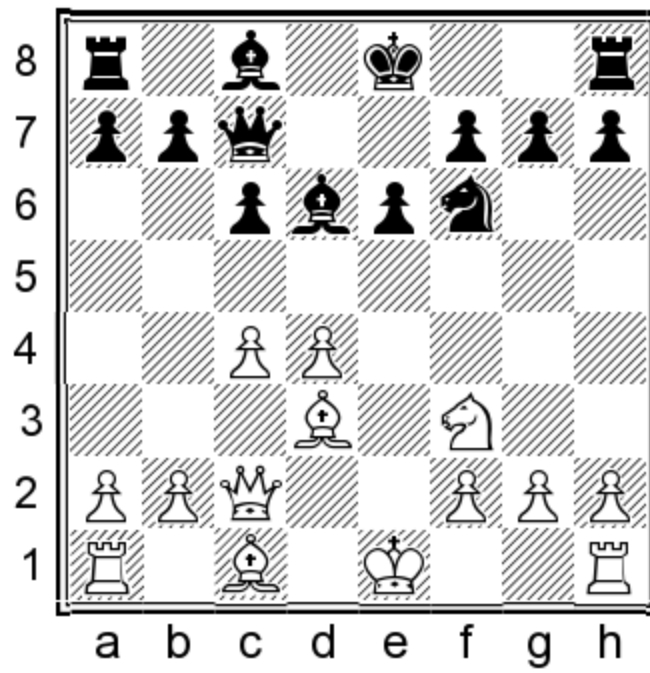




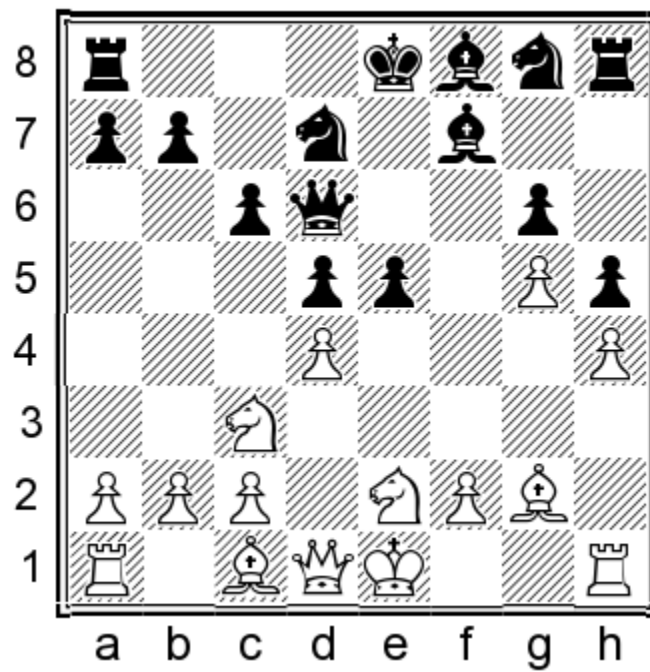
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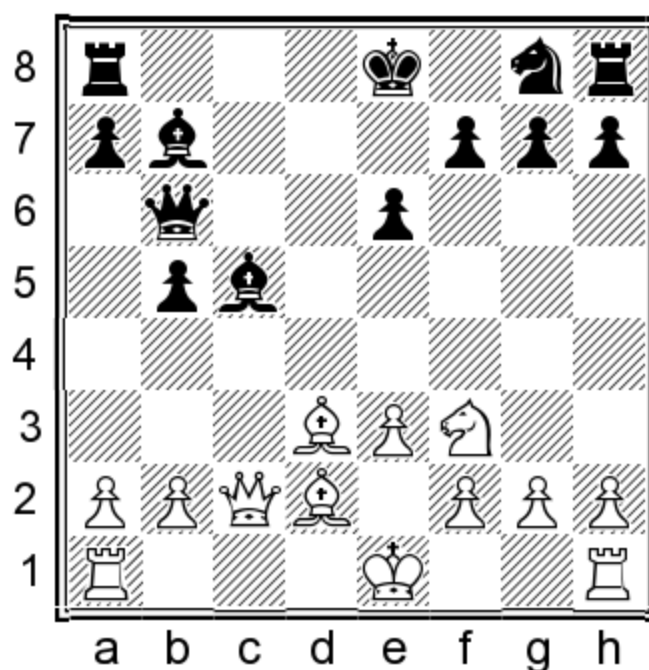
51



52



53



54

Many players spend most of their time studying openings, but this is not a good approach in the early years of their chess education. In fact, of the three phases of the game, the opening is the one on which a player should spend the least time until reaching a certain level. What level should that be? There is no consensus regarding the correct answer – some trainers place it at 2400. But there is definitely a consensus that it should not be below 2000. At a more advanced age, with a complete chess culture, the detailed study of opening variations can be done with a lower rating, because by then the player has greater strategic knowledge which will enable him to understand them.

Another important question is what aspects of the opening should be studied in the early stages. Here, the consensus is greater, and the recommendation is to avoid the study of specific variations and to focus instead on the ideas which are important for understanding the

play and on the tactical details which have an immediate impact on the result.

What are the reasons for renouncing knowledge of the moves of theory? There are too many: that the moves are not going to be remembered; that it takes up too much time; that it is arid; that it hinders flexibility.

And if we are not going to consider it an error to be ignorant of specific opening theory, then what are the most frequent errors made in the opening? There is no doubt that one of them, and the most striking in its effects, is the lack of knowledge of basic traps. The other two errors we shall study arise from **the misapplication of basic principles**, because we assume that ignorance of these is almost impossible: piece development and king safety, which almost always takes the form of castling.

Error 39 - Ignorance of typical tactical ideas

The less experience a player has, the more frequently he or she will fall into a trap, whether one cunningly set by the opponent, or just arising by chance. We shall present an ample number of cases, but I am not claiming to conduct a survey of typical traps. There are many instructive and entertaining books devoted to these, and I recommend reading them.

What I do want to do though is to defend the study of traps. For many years, this aspect of chess education has been viewed with some suspicion, perhaps because it has been considered an unworthy shortcut to achieving a result. But I believe that it is one of the basic stages in the development of any player. If you do not master these ideas, you will not only lose a lot of games frustratingly, you will also have fewer tools with which to understand the strategic concepts of the game.

Perhaps due to this bad press, the study of traps is not treated correctly, and thus many club players, even quite strong ones, are left with gaps in their knowledge.

The study of traps should not be made simply to have a few easy wins or to prevent some disappointing losses; this should be a secondary effect. The main reason is to become familiar with the tactical ideas which arise in the first moves of the game and which are common to all the openings, as well as the concepts of development and attack which emerge from these.

Thus, the examples we are going to see are not of well-known traps but of typical tactical ideas, ones which inevitably appear in the famous traps, but also arise in other positions, from different openings.

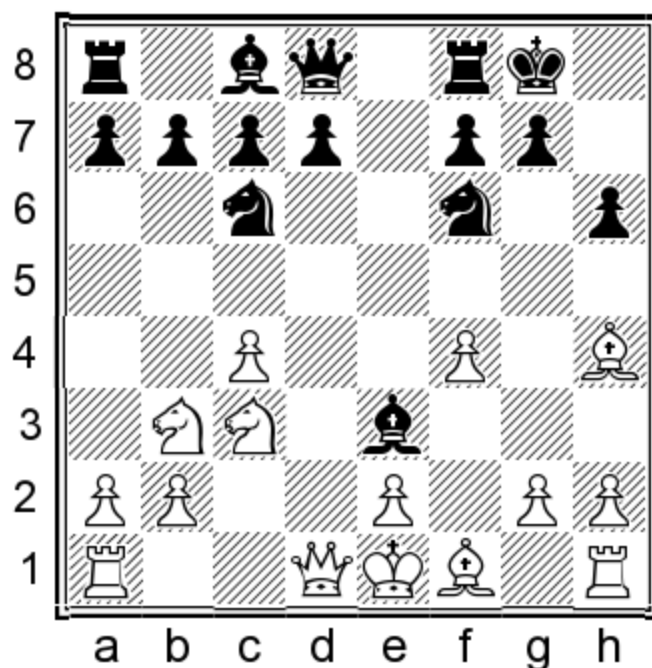
In some cases, the positions selected have only ever arisen in that particular game, whereas others have arisen many times. The common factor, however, is that the tactical ideas should be known. And as we have already mentioned, being attentive to these ideas will provide, as an added benefit, some easy points, as well as preventing many disappointments.

We begin with an example reminiscent of Legall's mate and pin-breaking combinations in general, which we discuss in the chapter on tactics. From this first example onwards we have chosen cases in which the idea is a well-known one, but the position is not one occurring in one of the famous traps. 'The important thing is to know the idea.'

Viviana Galván Cipriani (1963)

Pablo Conde Chamizo (1593)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2019



White is much better thanks to a tactical detail, but it is not the pin on the f6-knight.

10. ♘d5?

Overconfident; if White had been familiar with the idea she would have found the continuation 10. ♖xf6! ♔xf6 11. ♘d5 ♔e6 12. ♔d3 ♖e8 13. ♘xc7, winning material.

10... ♞e4!

Black saw the difficult move, but then failed to exploit the idea and ended up losing the game.

11. ♖g3

11. ♖xd8? ♞f2#.

11... ♞xg3?

A bad exchange. The knight on e4 was far superior to the bishop, and the main reason for Black's advantage lay in the variation 11... ♖b6! 12. e3 ♖e8.

12.hxg3 ♖e8 13.♔d3 ♘b6=

In the following example, we shall also encounter a typical idea, but in a less common opening variation.

Martin Pascual García (1810)

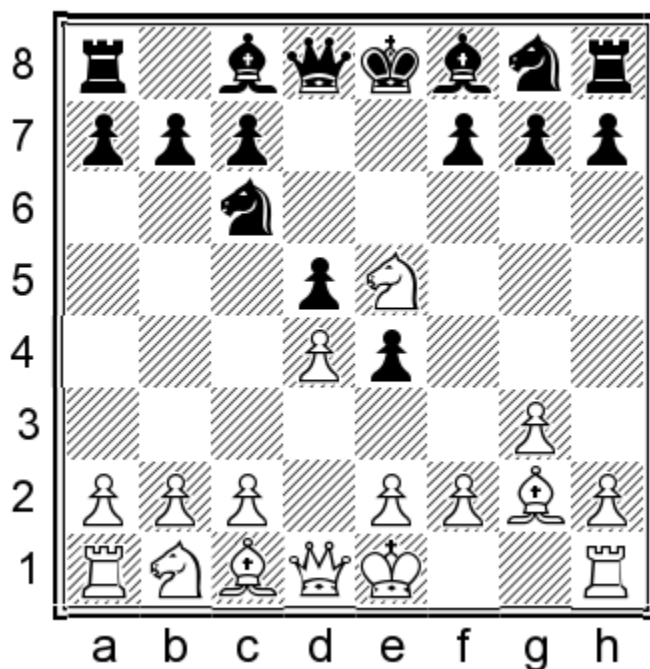
Pedro Tabuenca Mendataurigoitia (1945)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2020

1.g3 d5 2.♘g2 e5 3.♗f3 ♘c6

This position has occurred several thousand times, including a few dozen in which White has continued as in this game.

4.d4?! e4 5.♗e5



White has gained reasonable results here, owing to the fact that Black has usually failed to exploit the drawback of White's last move.

5...♗xe5?!

It appears that the idea of 5...♗ce7!, intending to trap the white knight with the move ...f6, is not sufficiently well known, despite

occurring in a large number of openings: 6.f3 f6 7.♘g4 ♕xg4 8.fxg4 h5 9.gxh5 f5 with a clear advantage.

6.dxe5

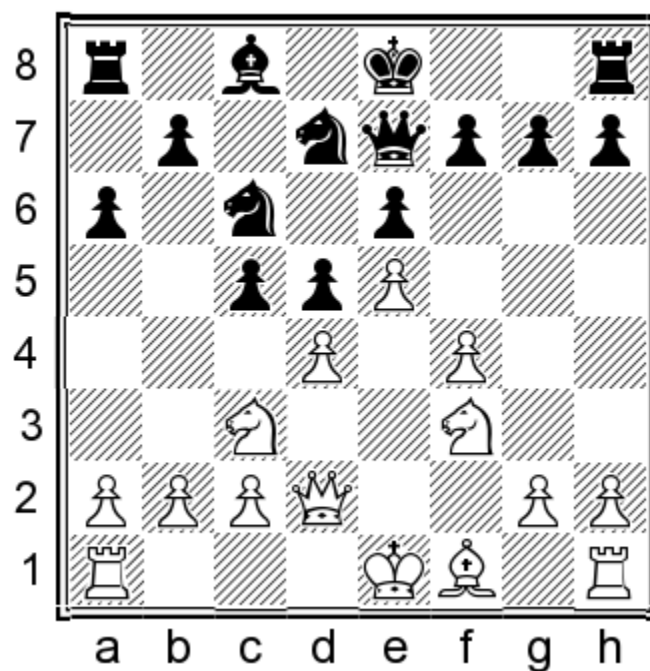
This position is attractive for White, but still level.

The diagonal check is a tactical mechanism to which trainers constantly draw attention. Nevertheless, every year huge numbers of mishaps occur.

Andrea Jausas López (1598)

Brais Gerpe Vilas (1763)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2014



In this theoretical position, the best move is 10.dxc5, but what interests us here is that there is a very natural and frequently played move which overlooks a well-known tactical idea.

10.♕e2?!

This is often played, with more than 200 games in MegaBase, including a couple involving players over 2400, which suggests that knowledge of typical tactical ideas is not so extensive, or that players' attention is relaxed in the opening phase. We have arrived at Exercise 49.

10...♖b8?

Black does not see it either. The right move was 10...cxd4!, luring the white knight to d4 so that it is in range of a check on h4, a case of the famous diagonal queen check in the opening, which has won so many pieces: 11.♞xd4 ♞dxe5!. Black has won a pawn and although White is still in the game, it is clear that this was not what she was seeking when she played her last move; now if 12.0-0-0, then 12...♞g6! ♞.

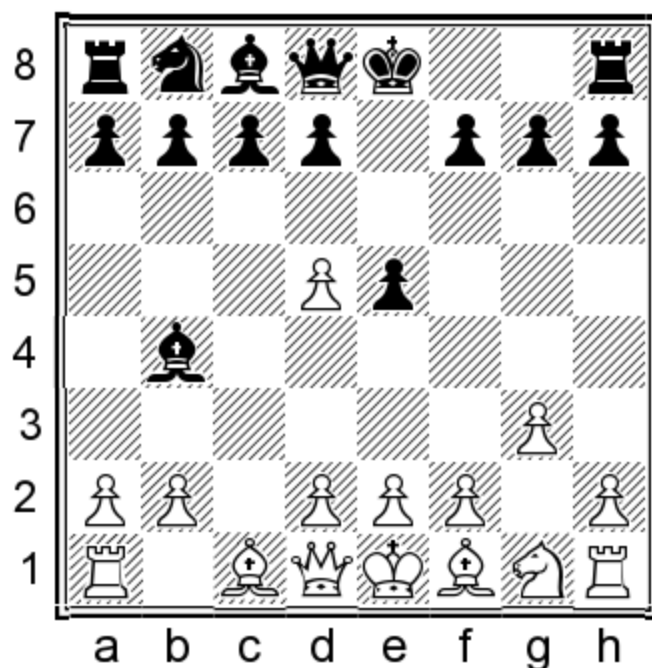
11.0-0±

Let us look at another apparently simple example of the diagonal check.

Catalina Colloridi (1517)

Parnian Jolani (1651)

Spanish Team Championship U14 2022



In this position, on move five of the English Opening, no less than eleven games have continued with:

5...d6?

The most notable thing is that in only five of these games did White win the piece:

6.♔a4+!

It is also curious that this game ends in a win for Black, which is all too common in games featuring a serious mistake in the opening, possibly because the lucky recipient fails to concentrate.

6...c6 7.♔xb4 cxd5 8.♙g2 ♘c6 9.♔b5 0-0 10.e3 a6 11.♔a4 e4 12.♘e2 ♘e5 13.0-0 ♔g5 14.f4 exf3 15.♙xf3 ♙h3 16.♙g2 ♙d7 17.♔f4 ♔h5 18.♘d4 g5 19.g4 ♙xg4 20.♔g3 ♙e6 21.♘f3 g4 22.♔h4 ♘xf3+ 0-1

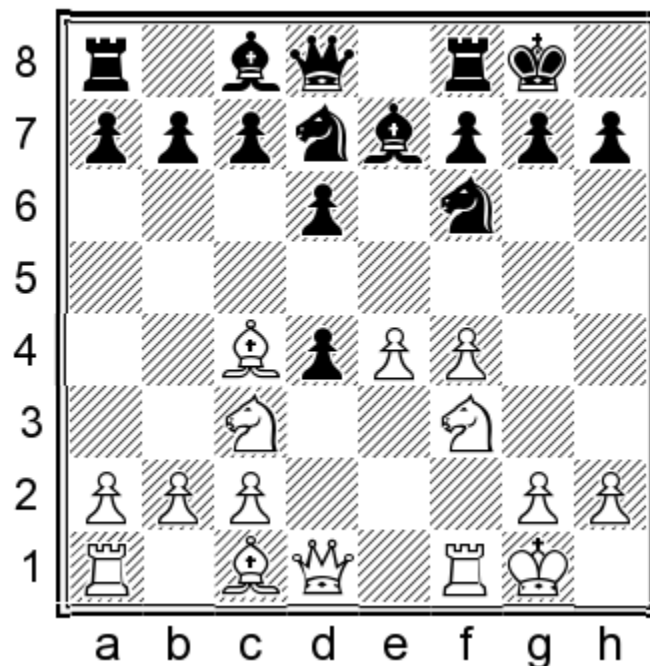
Víctor Álvarez Albiol (1819)

Lance Henderson de La Fuente (2104)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2015

1.e4 e5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.f4 d6 4.♘f3 ♘bd7 5.♙c4 ♙e7 6.0-0 0-0
7.d4?! exd4

Now, we shall see a trap which is popular only with the connoisseurs of this opening. However, everyone should know the tactical idea.



8.♙xd4??

The queen and the king are now on the same diagonal; this is a clear case of disregarding this motif (see **Error 42**). Instead, White should play 8.♘xd4=.

8...d5!

Now there is no good defence against both threats, ...♙c5 and ...dxc4.

9.♘a4 dxc4 10.e5 ♘e8 11.♖d1 c6 12.e6 fxe6 13.♙e3 ♙h8 14.♘e5 ♙c7 15.♙h1 ♘ef6 0-1

We will now see an example in which knowing a tactical idea allows us to gain strategic advantages in a theoretical position.

Juan Plazuelo Pascual

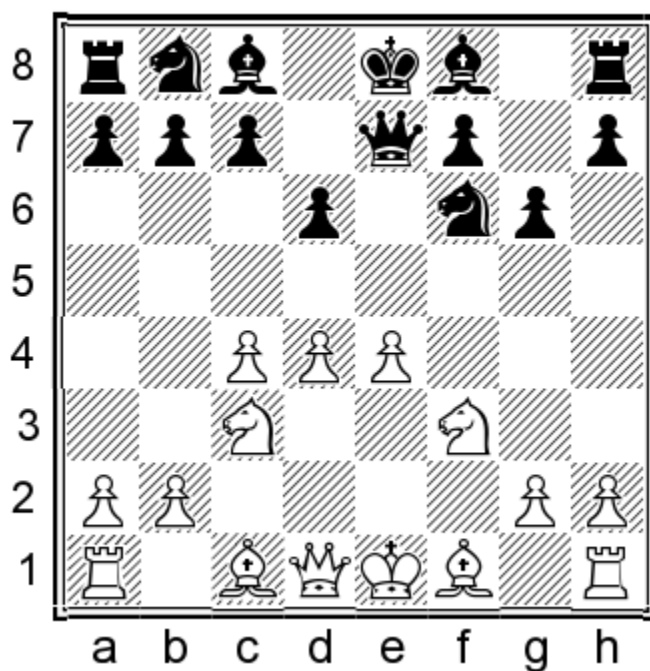
Jose Carlos Redondo Benavente

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2014

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 d6 3.♘c3 e5 4.♘f3 e4 5.♘g5 ♔e7 6.f3 exf3 7.♘xf3!

Based on a tactical idea that we shall see two moves further on, this move practically refutes the opening line chosen by Black. 7.gxf3 is used to be played here, but it is much inferior.

7...g6 8.e4!±



8...♘xe4?

Ignoring White's reply, despite it being thematic. Black had to play 8...♙g7 9.♙d3, as in another game by the player with the white pieces.

9.♘d5 ♘c3+

9...♔d8 loses to 10.♔e2 f5 11.♙g5.

10.♘xe7 ♘xd1 11.♘xc8 1-0

The trap in the following game is very new, but it has already caught hundreds of unwary victims. It has been fuelled by the recent popularity of the London System, and the widespread idea that it is

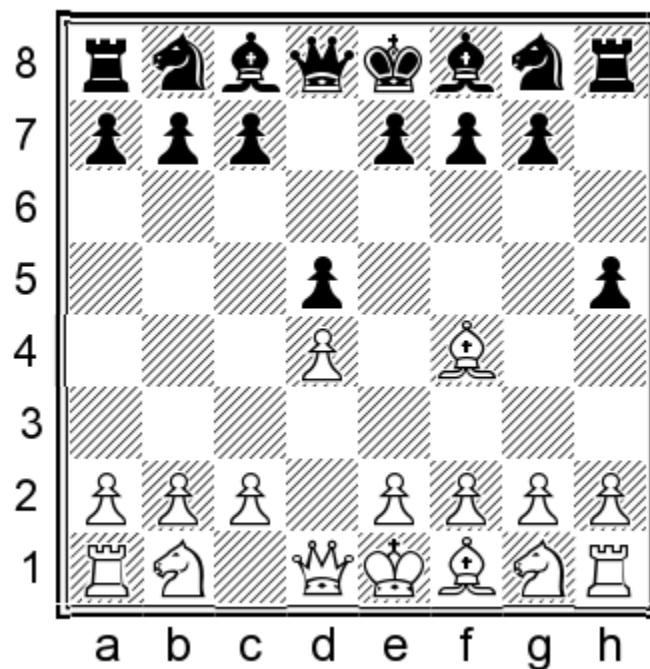
better to play ♖f4 followed by e3, before developing the g1-knight. I want to emphasise that its presence here serves to illustrate two ideas that we will highlight later, not for readers to put it into practice.

Michael Leonov (1899)

Michail Gkegkas (1415)

Germany teams 2021/22

1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 h5?!?

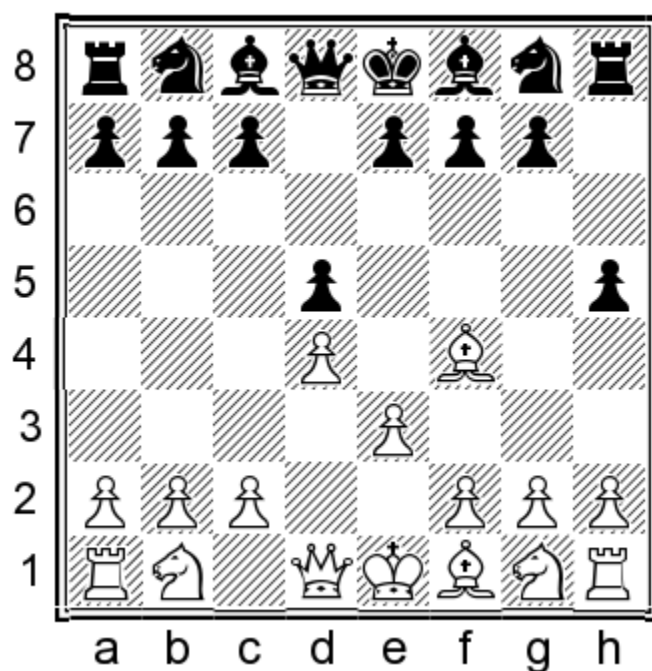


If, in one of your own games, you find yourself surprised by such an outrageous move, then after seeing this game, you will know what **not** to do.

But if, on another occasion, you are surprised in the first few moves by some other extremely absurd move, learn to mistrust it, and try to work out what the tactical intention behind it might be. Above all, think whether there is any dangerous response to your natural move or any of your natural moves. This is the first lesson that we should learn from this.

3.e3?

There are more than forty games with this continuation in MegaBase (as for chess.com, I do not even want to think about it). White loses a piece. Of course, White suspected nothing, but do you know the so-called ‘Noah’s Ark trap’? If you have seen a few examples of it, perhaps you should be wary of this move, which cuts off the retreat of the bishop. This is the second lesson from this game. Instead, 3.♘f3! is solid and good, naturally.



3...e5!

The **unnatural candidate move**.

4.♙xe5 f6 5.♔d3

An attempt to salvage something; the other way was to play 5.♙d3, but after 5...♘e7! the white bishop is lost.

5...♖h6

No one has played 5...♘e7, but it is even better than the text move.

6.♙f4 g5 7.♙e2 ♘e7 8.♔d1 gxf4 9.♙xh5+ ♖g6—+ ... 1-0 (...)

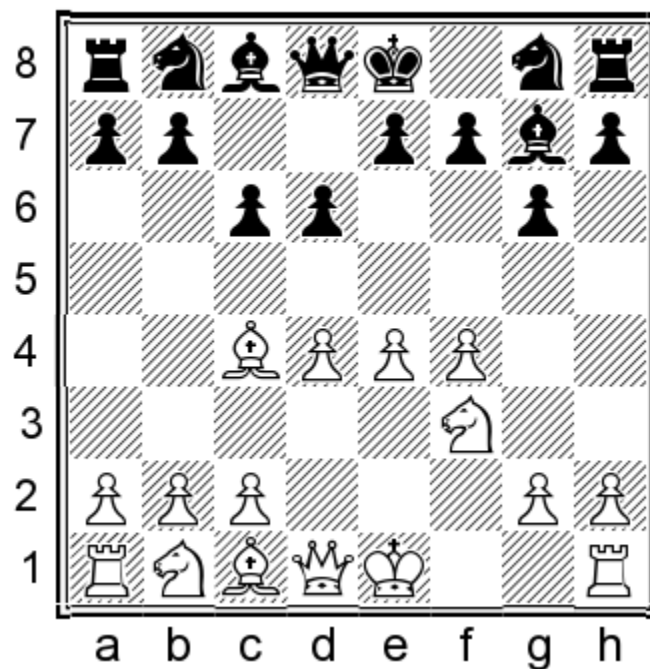
I do not want to miss out on an example of the most common tactical idea in the opening, especially in the games of the youngest players, even if it is elementary. This is the pin-breaking combination based on the concept of the **inappropriate pin**.

Álvaro Bayo Milagro (2024)

Isaac Lozano Osorio (1767)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2014

1.e4 d6 2.d4 g6 3.f4 ♖g7 4.♗c4 c6 5.♞f3



5...♗g4?

With unfounded faith in the pin.

6.♗xf7+!

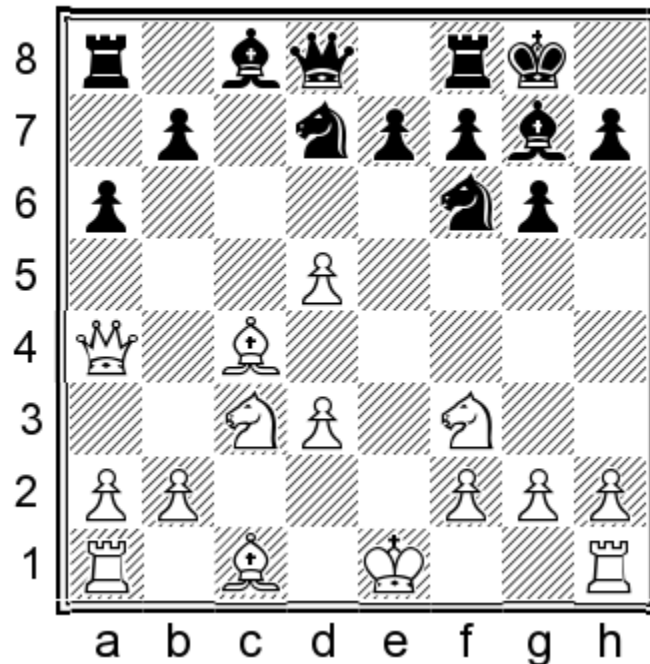
Four games reached this point, featuring all the possible replies; White did not always win but did so in this case.

Daniel Motos Abellán (2077)

Ferrán Solé Pijuan (2306)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2018

1.c4 c6 2.e4 d5 3.cxd5 cxd5 4.exd5 ♖f6 5.♔a4+ ♘bd7 6.♘c3 g6
7.♙c4 ♙g7 8.d3 0-0 9.♘f3 a6



10.0-0?

Even some very strong players have fallen into this trap. There is such great faith in the pin. It was essential for the queen to retreat with 10.♔a3!, with equal play.

10...b5!

And only now does White see that the pin on the a6-pawn can be relieved by means of the intermezzo ...♘b6.

11.♔c2

11.♙xb5 ♘b6, followed by ...axb5.

11...bxc4 12.dxc4 ♘c5 13.b4 ♙f5 14.♔b2 ♘fe4 15.♙d2 ♘a4 0-1

We are approaching the final examples of this theme, and we shall now look at a less well known tactical idea. Once again, I should emphasise that ignorance of the idea is the main cause of this type of error.

Alejandro Perez García (2358)

Guillem Porta Tovar (2202)

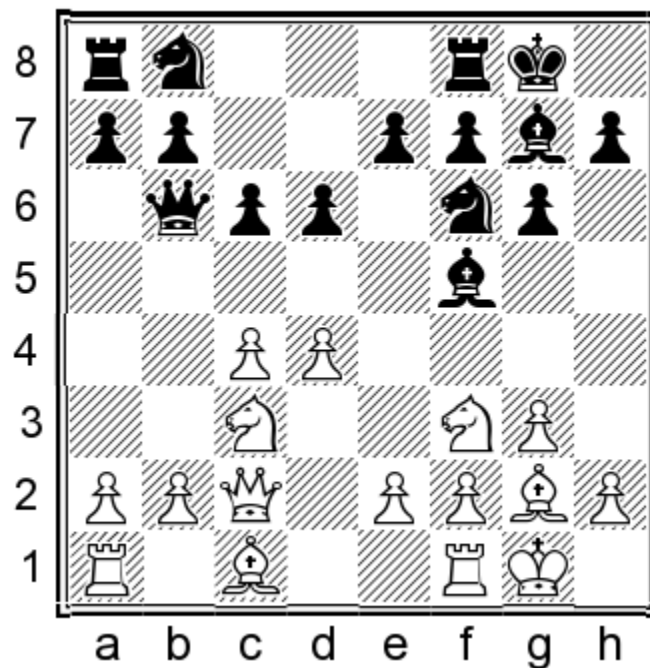
Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2017

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.g3 ♙g7 4.♙g2 0-0 5.♘c3 d6 6.♘f3 c6 7.0-0
♚b6 8.♚c2

So far, everything is quite normal, albeit within a sideline, so both sides would be nearing the end of their theoretical knowledge.

8...♙f5?

We can say that this is quite a serious error, although at the moment, it is only of a strategic nature. 8...♚a6! is the best continuation.



9.e4!

In order to play this, White has to have seen the continuation.

9...♘xe4?

With this move Black completes the error, which was already ‘foreseen’ on the previous move. There are six games in the online database, in only half of which White exploited the opportunity presented.

10.g4!

A move which is difficult to see, above all because it advances one of the pawns in front of the castled king (see the list of **unnatural candidate moves** in **Error 9**). White wins two pieces for the rook and gains a large advantage, although not all the games that have reached this point have been won by White. Instead, 10.♖xe4 d5 leads to equality.

10...♖g3 11.gxf5 ♖xf1 12.♙xf1 e6 13.fxe6 fxe6 14.♚e4+—

We should include typical opening tactics here that sometimes arise a little later in the game but which essentially belong to the first phase. The most popular, although perhaps not the most frequent, is the Greek Gift sacrifice, of which we present two examples, one positive and the other negative. There are other typical sacrifices, and all of them should be known, but that is not our goal here.

Imanol Toledo Sanz (1853)

Ricardo Rodríguez Del Cerro (2041)

Spanish Rapid Championship U16 2018

1.♖f3 ♖f6 2.d4 e6 3.e3 ♙e7 4.♙d3 0-0?! 5.e4 d5 6.e5 ♖fd7?

6... ♖e4 is necessary.

7.h4!

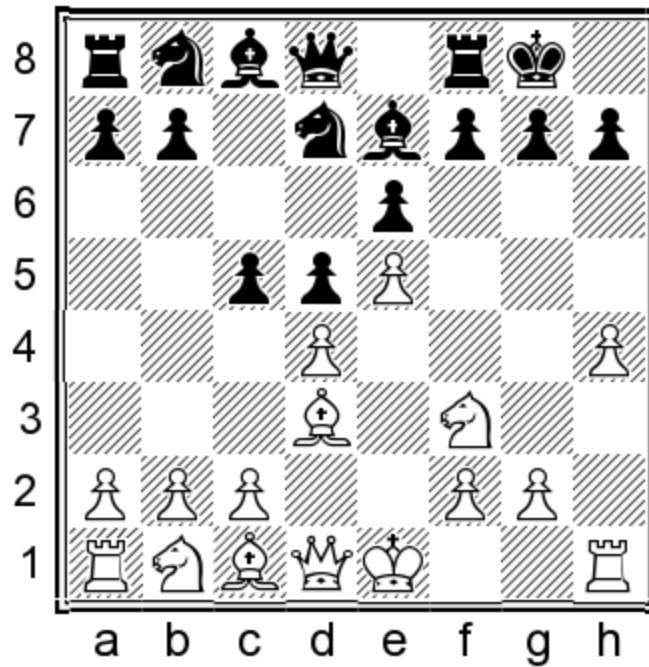
White brazenly prepares a typical version of the Greek Gift sacrifice.

7...c5?

And Black seems to ignore it. The excuse that this was a rapid game is invalid with such a common idea.

7...f6? is not a solution either: 8.♖g5 and 8.♙xh7+ both win.

7...h6 is now the best move, but after 8.♖h3, the white attack is tremendous.



8. ♖xh7+! ♔h8

If 8...♔xh7, then 9. ♘g5+ ♔g8 10. ♕h5 ♖xg5 11. hxg5 f5 12. g6, followed by mate.

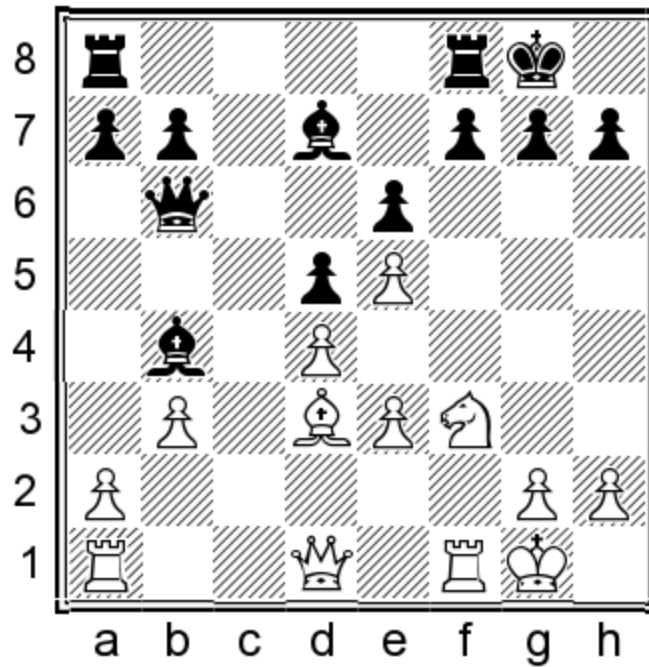
9. ♖d3 cxd4 10. ♗xd4 g6 11. ♖f4 ♘c6 12. ♗f3 1-0

Knowledge of the typical sacrifices should also include awareness of the circumstances in which they do not work. Now, we shall see an example that illustrates this in the case of the Greek Gift.

Joseph Quinn

Pawel Stankiewicz

Mureck U10 2005



Black's position is not bad, but it requires a degree of care. For example, he can play ...h6, or ...♗e7, or ...♖ad8. But Black thought that he could defend against the Greek Gift with the following move, and in practice, he was successful.

15...♗b5?

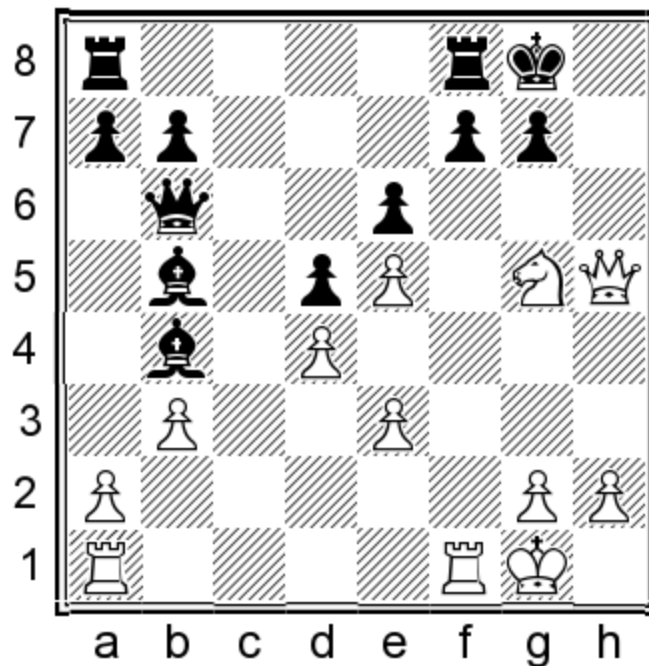
Now, we have arrived at Exercise 50.

16.♗xh7+!

White is correct in sacrificing, but he soon shows that he does not know Black's defensive idea.

16...♖xh7 17.♘g5 ♔g8 18.♙h5?

18.♙c2! would have neutralised the typical defence and won the game.



18...♞d3!

The presence of the defender's bishop or queen on the diagonal b1-h7 is one of the typical defences against the Greek Gift and it is equally necessary to know this.

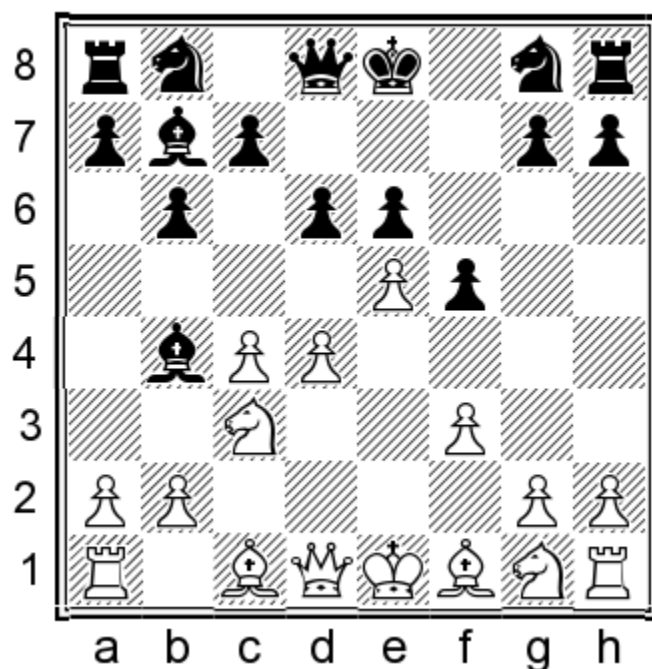
19.♞xf7 ♞h7 20.g4 ♞c7 21.♞g5 g6 22.♞xe6 ♞e7 23.♞g5 ♞xe6 24.♞f6 ♞xf6 25.exf6 ♞f7 26.♞f2 ♞e8 27.f7+ ♞xf7+ 0-1

We shall end with the most amusing (as well as instructive) scenario in this sort of situation. So far, we have focused on what normally happens: a player overlooks a tactical detail and is duly punished (or not). However, the situation can have another twist: a player thinks that his opponent has overlooked an obvious tactical idea, but there is a catch. Or, what comes to the same thing, the trap appears to be an error with a certain degree of subtlety, but it isn't.

Benedikt Briem
Stephan Briem
 Reykjavik 2018

1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.e4 ♞b7 4.♞c3 ♞b4 5.f3 f5 6.e5

In this unusual position, several players have tried the curious move **6...d6!?**, which seems to lose a piece.



7.♔a4+

It is curious that only two players have taken the bait. Of course, it would be interesting to know whether the others saw the trap.

7...♞c6 8.d5

What happened next must have been a tremendous surprise:

8...exd5 9.cxd5 ♔h4+ 10.♔e2?

A surprise often generates new errors, like this one. Of course, 10.g3? is even worse due to 10...♞xc3+ and the white queen is hanging, but 10.♔d1 presented much greater resistance; for example, 10...♔d4+! 11.♞d2 ♞xc3 12.♔xd4 ♞xd4 13.dxc6 ♞xc6 14.♞c1 with a slight edge for Black.

10...♔c4+ 11.♔f2 ♞c5+ 12.♞e3 ♞xe3+ 13.♔xe3 ♔xa4 14.♞xa4 ♞xe5+

How to avoid Error 39

It is not difficult to correct this error; in fact, almost all players manage it, sooner or later, even though they might occasionally relapse.

It is necessary to eliminate the two causes: not knowing the tactical ideas of the openings and making the first few moves of the game in a manner that is too casual. We shall highlight the second in the final two chapters and the first in the following chapter.

The first recommendation is to read several books on opening traps, enjoy them and familiarise yourself with all the themes, not with the idea of winning games effortlessly, although that effect will be achieved from time to time without striving for it, and I must admit that this is very pleasant. Among the tactical ideas that arise in the opening we should include the typical sacrifices, even though these sometimes occur in the middlegame. I am not going to recommend any specific books, because they all seem good to me, but I am going to insist that you should read more than one of them.

The second recommendation is to concentrate harder in the first few moves of the game and to be suspicious of any strange move made by your opponent. Remember the following rule:

If you cannot work out why your opponent made that strange move, you will almost certainly regret it!

Turning the argument around, to be successful in setting our own traps (in the opening and indeed in any phase of the game), it is an important skill to be able to hide our intentions.

Error 40 - Mistimed castling

This is an error you surely were not expecting to find in this book. Logically, I wasn't expecting it either, but I ended up being convinced. Castling quickly is another postulate of classical chess. It is one of the rules that all beginners have heard thousands of times

and broken even more times, with a few disasters as punishment in each personal experience.

But again, this rule has a more limited application in today's chess. Of course, it remains true that castling quickly is appropriate in most positions, or at least not wrong. But now, the positions in which you should not castle, without a little thought, are much more numerous than before, although such positions have always existed.

In the examples we are about to analyse, we will survey various scenarios in which castling is not only not necessary or useful, it is also an error. The purpose of this is to help you recognise such situations when they arise in your own games.

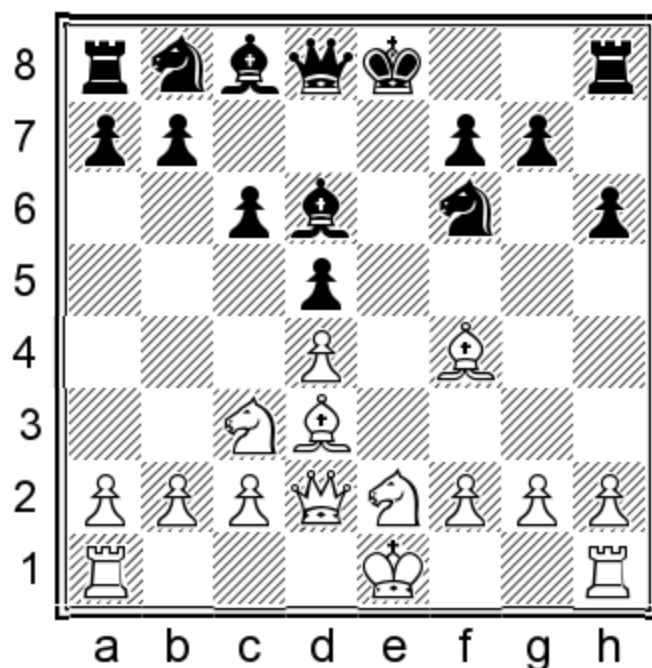
Let us remember that castling is the third type of **irreversible move**, and we have already seen that the other two types (pawn advances and piece exchanges) can lead to a multitude of errors.

Some of the following positions could be considered as belonging to the middlegame, but the decision to castle is typical of the opening, and it is often considered that castling marks the end of the opening phase. That is why I have preferred to include it in this chapter, although it could fit equally well in the chapter on strategy.

Francisco Orantes Taboada (1939)

Daniel Motos Abellán (1679)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2014



This position (Exercise 51) is even more surprising than usual because the e-file is open, Black can castle kingside, and queenside castling would require slow preparation.

9...0-0?

Black agrees to a scenario of opposite-side castling, which clearly works against him due to the superior activity of the white pieces and the position of the pawn on h6. Despite the fact that kingside castling can be executed in one move and the e-file is open, there are several better moves:

9...♙xf4! is the most logical move: 10.♚xf4 (10.♘xf4 ♚e7+ 11.♘fe2 ♙e6 12.0-0-0 ♘bd7 followed by ...0-0-0 with an acceptable position) 10...♙e6 (10...♘bd7 11.0-0-0 ♘f8 12.♖de1 ♘e6 13.♚d2 0-0 is a rather more solid version of kingside castling, but it is still dangerous) 11.0-0-0 ♘bd7 12.♖de1 ♚b6±, followed by queenside castling.

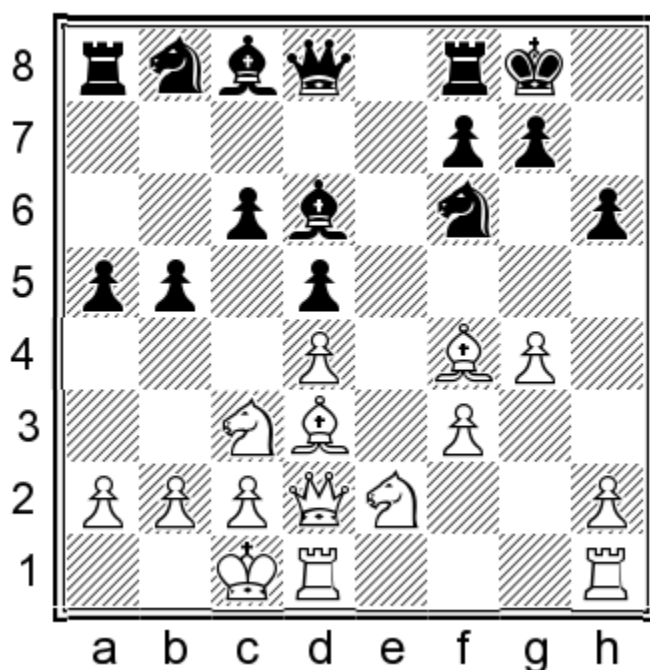
Nevertheless, the reader might be surprised that kingside castling is such a bad move here. It is interesting in such cases to apply the

routine of investigating similar positions and consulting the judgement of the engine, as we suggested in the introduction.

10.f3?!

10.0-0-0 b5 11.g4! is preferred by the engines, focusing immediately on the g5 break, without worrying about the g-pawn being captured: 11...♞xg4 (11...♙xg4? 12.♙xh6!) 12.♖dg1, with a strong attack.

10...b5 11.0-0-0 a5 12.g4



White's attack is much faster, thanks to the 'hook' on h6.

12...♙xf4?!

This exchange accelerates the enemy attack, although giving Black any good advice was already hard:

A) 12...a4?! allows a rapid assault with 13.♖dg1 b4 14.♘d1 b3 15.a3 and White continues with the g5 break;

B) 12...♘a6 is scarcely any better due to 13.♙xd6 ♛xd6 14.♘g3 a4 (14...b4?! allows 15.♘a4, blocking the attack) 15.♙b1 a3 16.b3 ♙d7 17.♖dg1± , followed by h4 and g5.

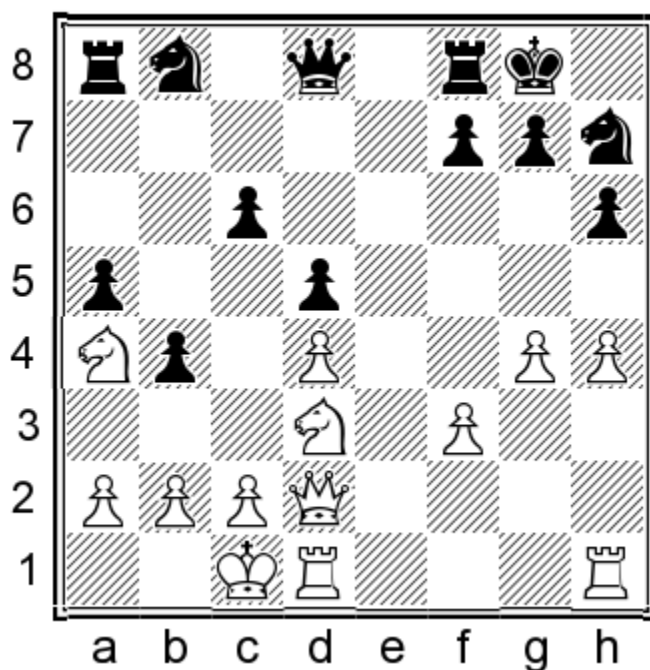
13. ♖xf4 b4?!

13...a4 14. ♖dg1 b4 15. ♗ce2 was slightly better, but although the black pawns have also arrived quickly, there is a big contrast in the activity of each sides' pieces.

14. ♗a4 ♕a6 15. h4!

Preparations for the break are now complete, and the effect of g5 will be devastating.

15... ♖xd3 16. ♗xd3 ♖h7



17. ♖dg1

The immediate 17. g5! appears stronger, and if 17...h5, then 18. f4 is winning.

17... ♕d6

And now, instead of the game continuation 18. f4?!, which creates a weakness on e4, White could have gained a decisive attack with

18. g5 h5 19. ♗e5

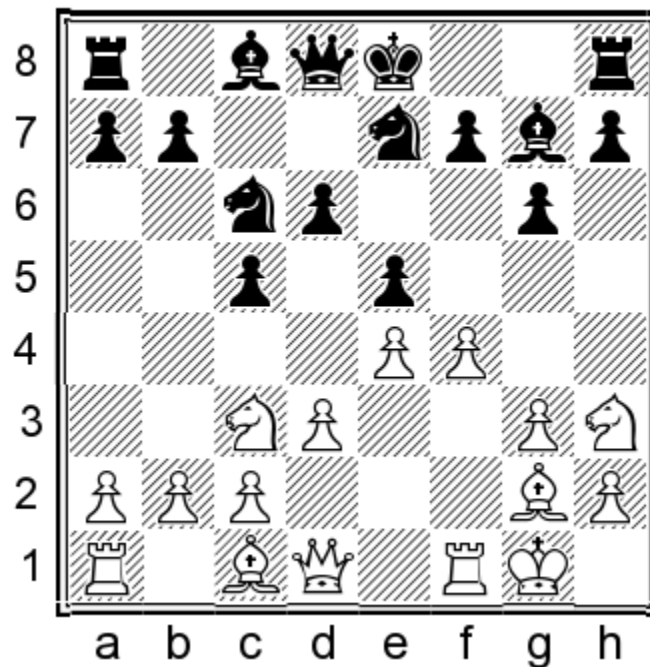
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The decision about castling usually occurs in the first few moves. Therefore, in this section, we shall encounter positions which have been played quite a few times, though they are not a popular part of opening theory.

David Lariño Nieto (2371)

Marcos Perez Felipe (2118)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2006



This position has occurred in hundreds of games and the most popular move, by far, has been to castle, confirming that this is an automatic decision that is often made even when it is an error.

8...0-0?

In this case, Black should not castle because White has a move which either gains space against Black's castled position or opens lines for various white pieces to attack the black monarch.

In order to castle, Black should have first assessed the consequence of 9.f5 – a very strong move. Furthermore, it turns out that Black has a very good alternative, which contrasts very instructively with

the game decision (which was the decision of the majority of players): 8...exf4! 9.♖xf4 (9.gxf4 f5!±) and only now 9...0-0!, which is pleasant for Black and scores only 44% for White in the MegaBase (in contrast to White's 63% score following 8...0-0).

9.f5!

This is the problem with Black's castling on move 8. White offers to sacrifice a pawn and then the exchange. For years, this was considered to be no more than interesting, but it has now been confirmed as very advantageous for White. From the strategic viewpoint, Black has to choose between getting crushed by the pawn or providing the white pieces with important squares.

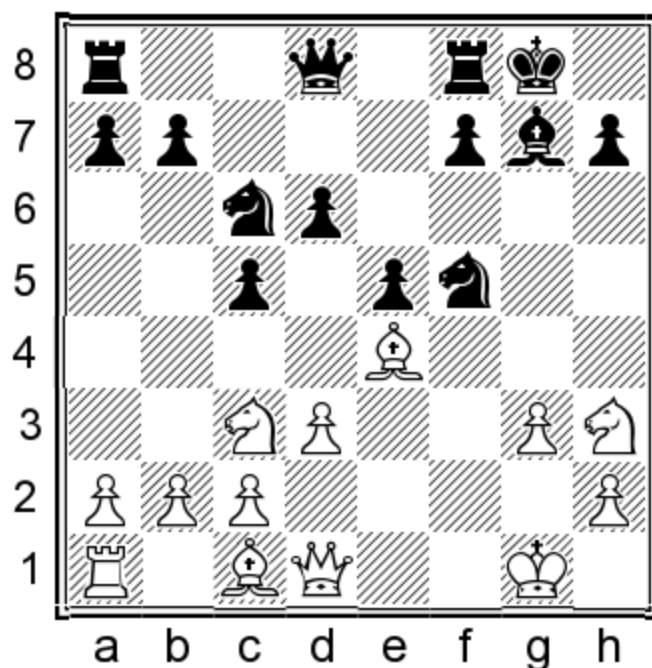
9...gxf5

If 9...f6, then 10.g4 ±; we shall not continue the analysis any further, but it is well known to be dangerous for the king to be situated on a flank where space is lacking.

10.exf5 ♗xf5 11.♖xf5!

This exchange sacrifice, which leaves Black weak on the light squares in the centre and around the black king, is the key to White's attack (see **Error 27**).

11...♘xf5 12.♙e4



Here Black has tried several alternatives, but none of them are completely satisfactory. We shall consider the most important ones and illustrate most of them with an example by the same player with White.

12...♘fe7?

A) 12...♘xg3 13.hxg3 f5 14.♙g2! (everyone has played 14.♙d5+?!, but it is not the strongest move) 14...♔e8 15.♘d5 ♖g6 16.♙g5 and White is better;

B) 12...♘fd4? 13.♔h5! (now the attack is unstoppable) 13...f5 (no better is 13...♖e8 14.♔xh7+ ♔f8 15.♙g5 f6 16.♖f1 ♘e6 17.♙xf6 ♙xf6 18.♙g6 ♘g7 19.♘d5 and mate with ♔h8 cannot even be delayed, 1-0 Lariño Nieto-Vidarte Morales, Catalunya teams 2012) 14.♙d5+ ♔h8 15.♘g5 ♙h6 (15...h6 16.♔g6! ♘f3+ 17.♙xf3 hxg5 18.♔h5+ and mate in a few moves) 16.♘xh7 f4 17.♔xh6 ♘f5 18.♔xf8+, with an extra piece, 1-0 Lariño Nieto-Alcázar Jiménez, Mondariz 2003;

C) 12...♘h4 13.♙h5 ♘g6 14.♕d5! ♘b4 (14...h6 15.♙xg6!+-) 15.♘g5 h6 16.♘ge4 ♘xd5 17.♘xd5 and ♕xh6 cannot be prevented, since 17...♔h7 loses to 18.♕g5 f6 19.♘dxf6+ ♖xf6 20.♘xf6+;

D) 12...♘cd4 has been the most frequent response: 13.♙h5 ♙f6 14.♘d5 ♙g6 and now 15.♙d1!, with the simple threat of c3 (15.♘e7+ ♘xe7 16.♕xg6 fxg6 is less clear): 15...h5 16.c3 ♙g4 17.♙xg4 hxg4 18.♘f2 and White wins a piece.

Viewing this exhibit gallery makes it easy to understand why many of us know this variation as ‘Lariño’s sacrifice’.

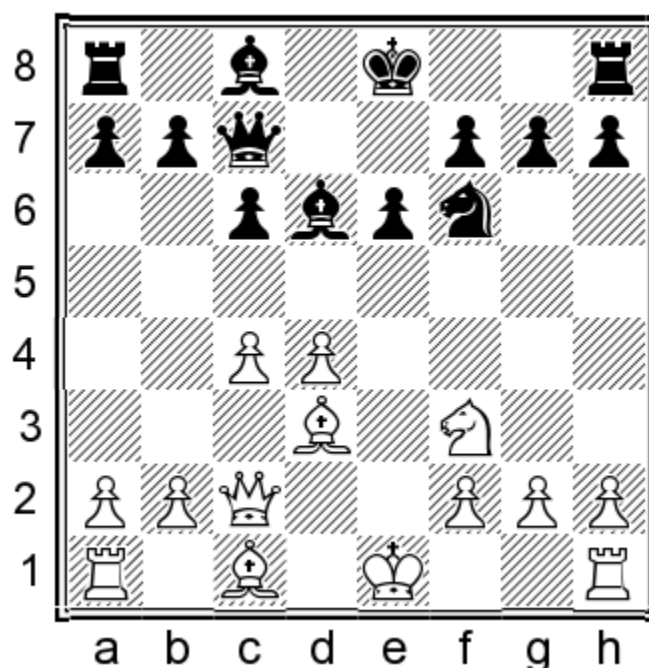
13.♕xh7+! ♔xh7 14.♙h5+ ♔g8 15.♘g5 1-0

Some positions in which castling is dangerous appear so natural that it is almost impossible to avoid the almost automatic decision.

Gabriel Quispe Arteaga (2011)

Aimer Del Carmen Hernández (1399)

Salobreña Spanish Team Championship U12 2015



Exercise 52

Who would not castle here as Black? We could say this is the twentieth-century postulate. Nevertheless, it is a weak and risky move.

11...0-0?

The problem is that the king comes under attack and the c8-bishop is unable to participate in the defence. It is as if Black is resigned to this scenario, although there were several other ways to confront it.

11...c5! is one of the ways to bring the bishop into play before castling: 12.dxc5 ♖xc5 13.0-0 b6 (13...♗d7 is also possible; even 13...0-0 is not so bad now) completes the bishop's liberation, and now Black will soon be able to castle kingside, but will not always do so; for instance, 14.a3 ♖b7! 15.♔e2 ♗d6.

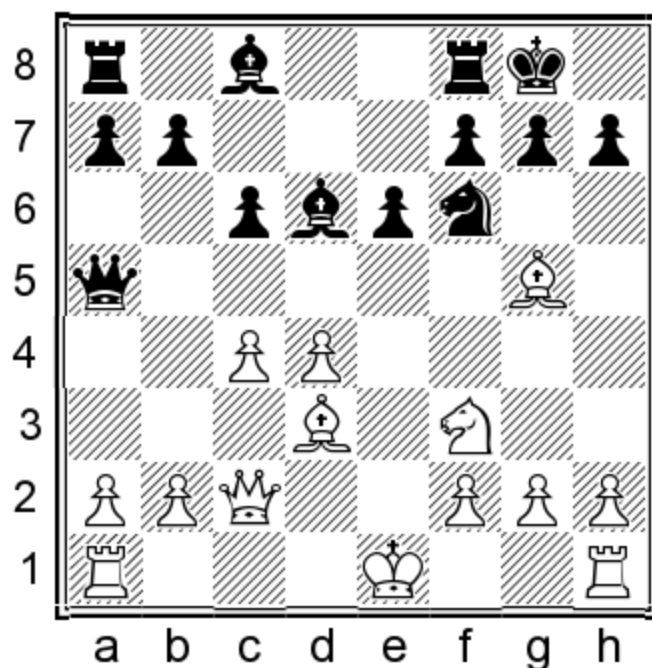
11...b6!? is the other way, which is also better than castling.

12.♗g5

This move highlights Black's discomfort, having castled, but possibly 12.c5! ♗e7! 13.♗d2 b6 14.b4 ♖b7 15.0-0 was stronger.

12...♔a5+

This moment once again reveals what the players think about the position and their respect for the idea of castling. Black gives check (which is correct) with the idea of liberating his position, and I do not think that he considered any other response than the one that occurred. But in reality, unless Black was considering the possibility of White moving his king, it was more natural to play 12...♗b4+?!, which equalises against normal moves. What happens, though, is that White can disregard the right to castle and play 13.♔f1! (or 13.♔e2) and all White's pieces are attacking.



13.♙d2?!

It was stronger to play 13.♔f1! (or 13.♔e2), followed by 14. ♖e1, keeping control of e5, which is the natural move for avoiding piece exchanges and maintaining the pressure; after 13...♔h8! 14.c5 ♙e7, without needing to develop his king's rook, White can mobilise it to attack Black's kingside with 15.h4 ♙d8 16.♖e1 b6 17.♖h3, with an accumulation of attacking forces that I do not think can be parried.

13...♙b4 14.0-0?!

Closing the cycle of inaccurate castling in this game, three moves after Black, and allowing him to free his position. It was better to play 14.a3 ♙xd2+ 15.♙xd2 ♙xd2+ 16.♔xd2, with a slightly more comfortable position in the ending.

14...♙xd2 15.♙xd2

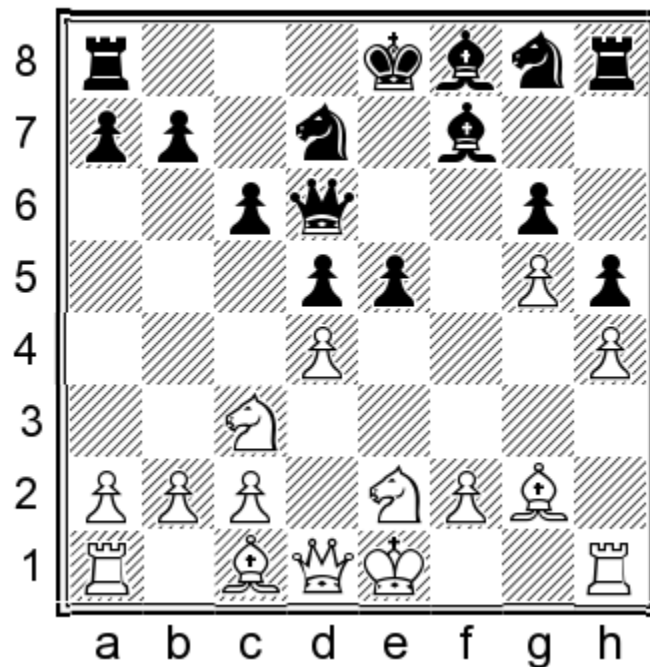
With the exchange of bishops, Black has gained some relief, but only if he seizes the moment to free himself. Now he should have played 15...e5!, as was discussed in **Error 21**.

Now, we shall see an example (Exercise 53) that shows that the quickest castling is not always the safest.

Mateo Díaz Gómez (1689)

Ricard Bosch Jorda (1948)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2019



Black stands very well, and it is clear that his king would be better hidden on the kingside, but he would have to move two pieces out of the way to accomplish this, which prompted him to opt for a quicker solution:

11...0-0-0?

This dramatically changes the evaluation of the position. It was much better to play 11...♖g7! 12.0-0 ♘e7, followed by ...0-0 and ...♘f5, when Black is much better.

12.dxe5!

12.f4 e4 13.f5 gxf5 14.♕f4 was also advantageous, which refutes the idea that the problem is just a small tactical detail.

12...♖xe5 13.♔d4!

White finds the weak point in Black's strategy. To defend the a7-pawn Black has to weaken his position even more:

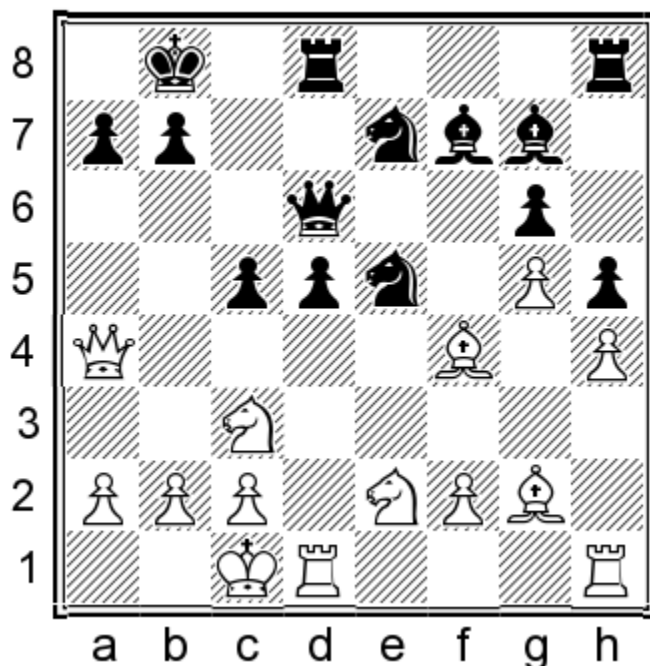
13...c5

Or 13...♙g7 14.♔xa7 ♘e7 15.♙f4± .

14.♔a4 ♔b8 15.♙f4

The action of the white bishops shows that the black king is not safe on the queenside.

15...♙g7 16.0-0-0 ♘e7



17.♖h3!?

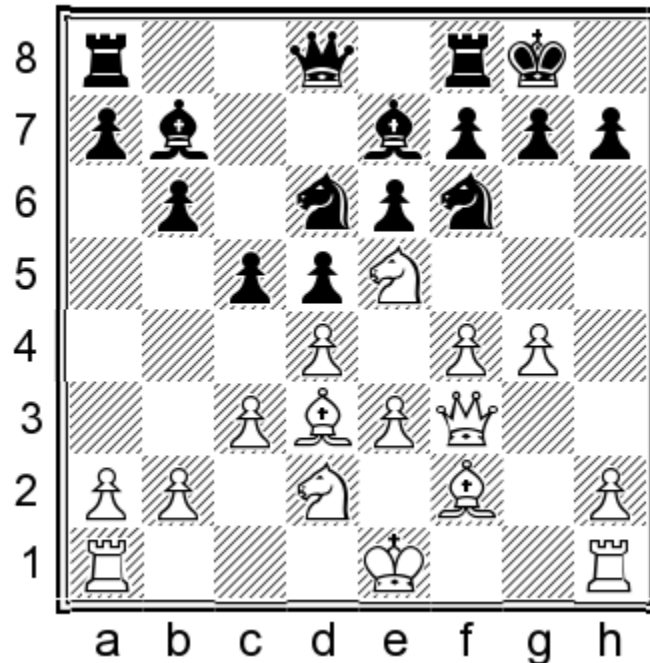
A playable and original move, but 17.♘e4! was almost decisive; for example, 17...♔b6 (17...♔c6 18.♔xc6 ♘7xc6 19.♘xc5) 18.♘f6! ♙xf6 19.gxf6 ♔xf6 20.♙g5 ♔e6 21.♖he1 and there is no defence against the multiple pins and direct attacks.

Finally, we shall see a case in which a bad castling decision is crowned with success.

Santiago Benito Olmedo (1752)

Aimer Del Carmen Hernández (1929)

Spanish Team Championship U18 2019



14.0-0-0?

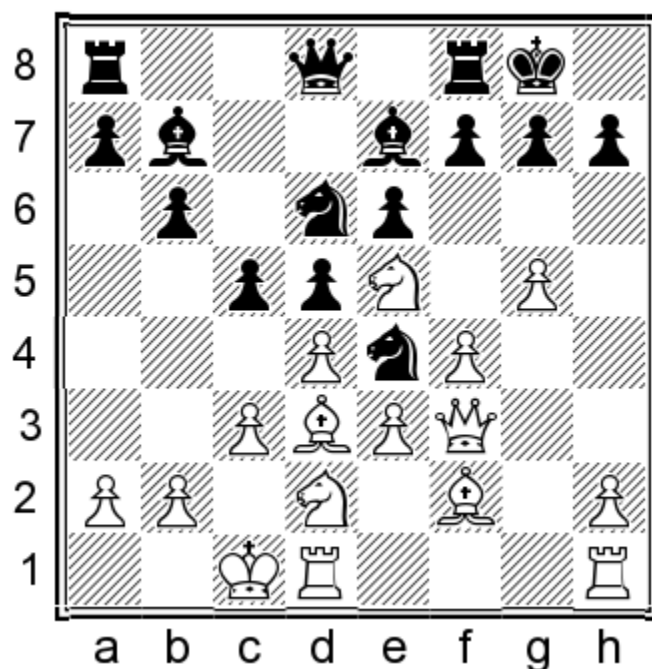
Although we have given this move a question mark, it is one of the most excusable errors in this book, if only because it has been committed by some very high-level players, including Karjakin, in classical chess. White has already launched his attack on the kingside, so what could be more natural than to castle on the other wing, protecting the king and connecting the rooks?

The problem is that the white king is now the white piece furthest to the left. It is located in a zone that has been somewhat forgotten by his other pieces and, in fact, it is in great danger on the queenside. It was better in the centre and even on the kingside.

A) 14.h4!? is the most logical move, although Black is already fine after 14...♞fe4! 15.h5 ♞xd2 (15...f6?! 16.♞g6!?) 16.♔xd2 ♞e4+ Gustafsson-Betaneli, Chicago 2017;

B) 14.g5?! ♖fe4 15.0-0-0 was played by Karjakin in the 2016 Tata Steel tournament, no less, as well as by some other players. In the online MegaBase White scored just one point out of thirteen games in this position.

14...♖fe4 15.g5



15...♖xd2?

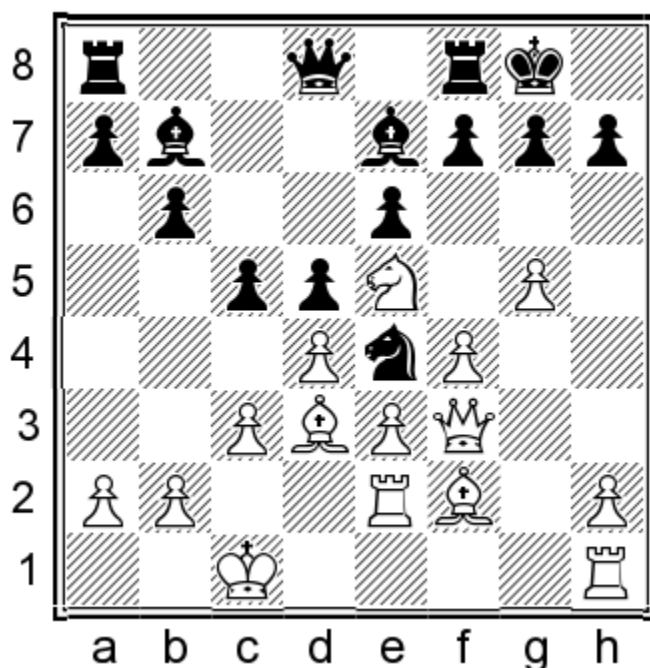
Black is also unclear about how to punish White's play. He fails to execute the gain in space (see **Error 25**), which would have condemned the enemy king's position to a ferocious siege. Instead, he exchanges one of his best pieces for a passive enemy piece; of course, in doing so, he relies on the fact that he has another one that will carry out the same function.

15...c4! is the right move; we shall look what happened to Karjakin, who is known as a great expert in defence: 16.♖c2 b5 17.♗h3 b4 (the pawn break has already arrived) 18.♖xe4 dxe4 19.♖e1 ♖d5 20.♖g1 (20.cxb4 a5! 21.b5 c3 (every move is a break!) 22.♖xc3 ♖xb5 23.♗g2 ♖c7 24.♖d2 ♖ab8—+ followed by ...♖xc3 and ...♖b2/...♖fc8) 20...b3 (another, even stronger, break) 21.axb3 cxb3

22.♙b1 f5 23.gxf6 ♙xf6 24.♖g4 ♘f5 25.♔d2 ♚a5 26.♔e2 ♙xe5
 27.dxe5 ♖ad8 28.♔f2 ♚a1 29.♙d2 ♙c4 30.♚h5 ♚xb2 31.♔e1 ♖xd2
 0-1 Karjakin-Adams, Wijk aan Zee 2016.

16.♖xd2 ♘e4 17.♖e2?!

There was no need to move the rook since the knight is Black's best piece, and we are in an attacking race: 17.♖g1! ♘xd2?! (or 17...c4 18.♙xe4 dxe4 19.♚h3 b5 20.♖g4 b4 21.♖h4 h6 22.♘g4 bxc3 23.♘xh6+ gxh6 24.♖xh6 cxd2+ 25.♔d1, again with mate in a few moves) 18.♙xh7+ ♔xh7 19.♚h5+ ♔g8 20.♖g3, with mate soon to follow.



17...c4?

Now, the gain in space is slow. It is worth comparing it with the game in the previous note.

17...b5!, preparing a quick ...b4, opening lines, would have provided good counterplay. Black should not worry that this move constitutes a pawn sacrifice since 18.♙xb5? would be suicidal after 18...♚a5 19.a4 a6 20.♙d3 ♚xa4.

18.♙xe4! dxe4 19.♚h5

White's pieces keep arriving. His strongest threat is a rather slow one (♖h1-g1-g3-h3), but Black has no counterplay and no defence either.

19...♙d5 20.♖g1 f6?

Or 20...g6 21.♚h6 ♖e8 22.♘xf7! ♔xf7 (22...♙f8 23.♘xd8 ♙xh6 24.♘xe6) 23.♚xh7+ ♔f8 24.♚xg6, winning.

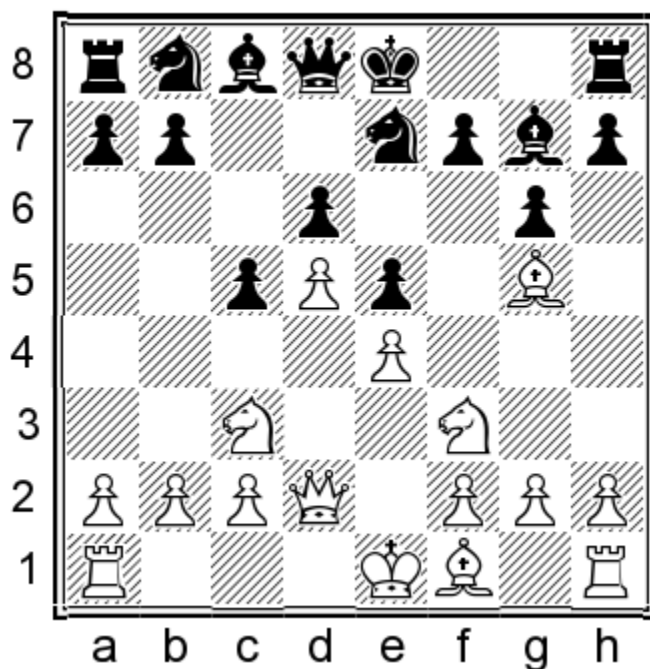
21.g6 h6 22.♘f7 ♖xf7 23.gxf7+ ♔h8 24.♙h4 ♙f8 25.♖g6 ♔h7 26.♖eg2 e5 27.♖xh6+ 1-0

Castling with a closed centre deserves special attention. Doing so with a disadvantage in space, and on a wing where the opponent has not castled, is always tricky and sometimes dangerous.

Thorsten Banik (2178)

Martin Siepmann

Recklinghausen 2000



Although we are at move 7, there is only one game with this position in the MegaBase. White has not chosen any of the strongest plans against Black's unusual opening, and now Black can obtain a reasonable position with 7...h6! 8.♔e3 f5; instead, he lets himself get carried away by the impulse to castle automatically:

7...0-0?

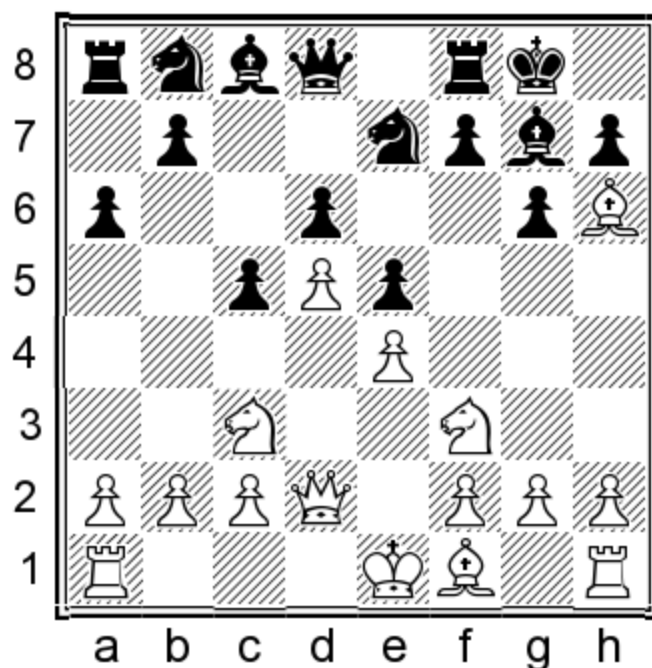
This sends the black king into the area of the board where it can be most easily attacked. The scenario is one of the clearest for making castling inadvisable: the centre is closed, White's king's rook is still on its initial square, and there is a 'hook' in Black's castled position.

8.♔h6

8.h4! gives Black's queen's knight no time to reach f6 and was surely stronger, because if 8...h5 (8...♘d7 9.h5!±), then 9.♘h2, followed by g4, would open up Black's kingside.

8...a6?!

Black fails to take advantage of the opportunity to deploy his knight to the kingside with 8...♘d7! 9.h4 ♘f6, although White is better and can even play h5 immediately.



9.h4! f5

A natural reaction that can enable Black to block the white queen's path and bring pieces (queen and rook) to aid the defence along the second rank.

10.h5 ♔e8

The most logical move is 10...f4!?, which closes off the white queen's access, but the pawn break g3 will reopen it; for example, 11.♙xg7 ♔xg7 12.0-0-0 ♘d7 13.g3! and it is difficult to offer Black any good advice in the face of the coming torrent of attacking moves (hxg6, gxf4, ♘e2, ♘g5, ♙h3, ♖dg1).

11.♙xg7 ♔xg7 12.hxg6 ♙xg6 13.♘h4 ♙f6 14.exf5 ♙xf5 15.♘xf5+ ♘xf5

Black has been successful in bringing pieces to the defence, but his king is very open and he will be unable to cope with the arrival of White's reserves.

16.♙d3 ♘h4 17.0-0-0 ♔h8 18.♘e4

In the last three moves, White has brought three more pieces into the attack, and now he is already winning.

18...♔e7 19.♘g5 ♖xf2 20.♔xf2 ♕xg5+ 21.♔b1 ♘g6 22.♖xh7+

Black resigned.

How to avoid Error 40

First recommendation: I think we have seen enough examples to show that castling can be a crucial decision. **We should therefore avoid making it automatically**, and we could devise the concept of Reckless Automatic Castling (RAC) to help us avoid it.

Second recommendation: never follow any postulate blindly. The castling postulate is clearly overrated, and in the modern game, there are many situations where it should not be applied.

Third recommendation: we should decide on castling based on our strategic plan.

I want to repeat, not to take a new idea to extremes, that more often than not, castling, on the side where this is easier, will still be the correct move.

Error 41 - Unenergetic play with a lead in development

Among club players, one of the most common errors in the opening phase is not taking advantage of the opportunities that arise when you have a lead in development by playing energetically and converting a promising position into one with a great advantage.

The effect of this is that a series of natural but slow moves allow the advantage to dissipate slowly and finally disappear.

The policy to follow in such cases consists of selecting moves that ‘give no respite’ to the opponent while at the same time gaining

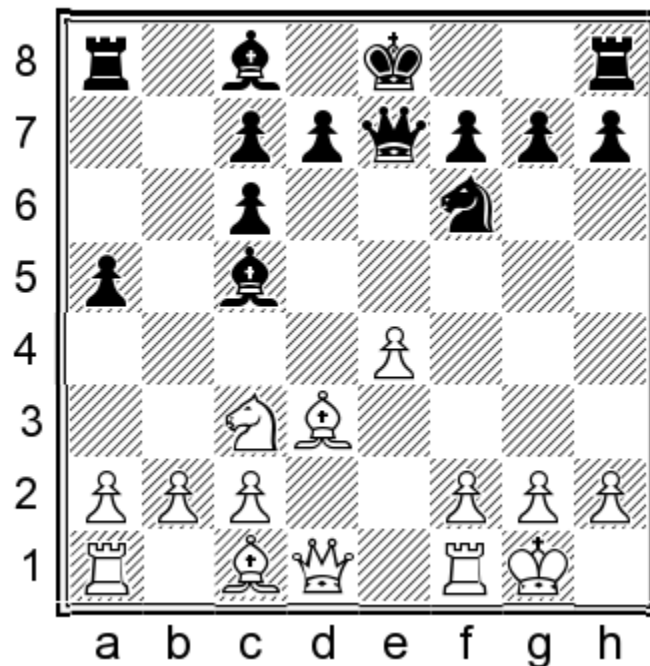
small objectives with each one of them. ‘Strike while the iron is hot!’ is the appropriate motto.

Some of the positions that we shall look at in this section have occurred several times (although it would be going too far to say that they form part of opening theory), and we shall reflect upon the different decisions that different players have taken.

Mikel Ortega Lopéz (2088)

Juan Miguel Perez Torres (1935)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2014



In this position, Black has made a couple of indifferent moves, and his development, which at the moment does not appear to be particularly backward, can be made to suffer, but only if White plays energetically over the next few moves.

9. ♔f3?!

This might appear to be an active move, but it loses almost all the advantage, as we shall see in the note to the next move.

The most forceful move is 9.e5!, attacking the knight before Black has castled. After 9...♘d5 (the alternatives are worse) 10.♘e4! (again the most energetic) 10...♙a7 (10...0-0 can be punished severely, and the following line is not the only way to gain the advantage, with 11.c4 ♘b4 12.♘f6+ gxf6 13.♙xh7+ ♔xh7 14.♚h5+ ♔g8 15.♚g4+ ♔h8 16.♚h4+ ♔g8 17.exf6 and Black has no defence) 11.♖e1 (threatening things such as ♘d6+) 11...0-0 12.♙g5! (12.c4 is not as strong now due to 12...f5) 12...♚e6 (if 12...♚xe5, 13.♘f6+ wins the queen, although at the cost of some material) once again White has the winning sequence 13.♘f6+ gxf6 14.♙xh7+ ♔xh7 15.♚h5+ ♔g7 16.♙xf6+ ♘xf6 17.♚g5+ ♔h7 18.exf6.

9...♙b7?

Black continues to undervalue the importance of completing development. Here, 9...0-0 is necessary, but possibly Black was more afraid of 10.♙g5, which would result in spoiling his pawn structure, than of the line that White could have played in the game. After 10...h6 11.♙xf6 ♚xf6 12.♚xf6 gxf6 it is questionable whether White has any advantage at all. This is the frequent dichotomy in this scenario:

A small evil which is about to happen is more feared than an absolute disaster which seems far away.

10.♙f4?!

Once again, a slow move. White should play 10.e5! and if 10...♘d5 (10...♚xe5? 11.♙f4, followed by ♖e1(+)), then 11.♘e4 0-0?! is once again suicidal due to 12.c4 ♘b4 13.♘f6.

10...d6 11.♖fe1?!

Unnecessary and slow preparation; 11.e5! dxe5 12.♙xe5 was better.

11...♙d4 12.♘e2?!

Here, 12.e5 was still best.

12...♙e5! 13.♙xe5 ♚xe5 14.c3 c5 15.♘g3 0-0

Black has castled in a fairly safe position and the opportunity for White to win by attack has disappeared. This game is continued in **Error 17**.

One of the most common reasons for not playing energetically in the opening is thinking you are still in theory and perhaps your opponent knows more than you, which is what happened in the next game, which we shall see from the start.

Álvaro Bayo Milagro (2024)

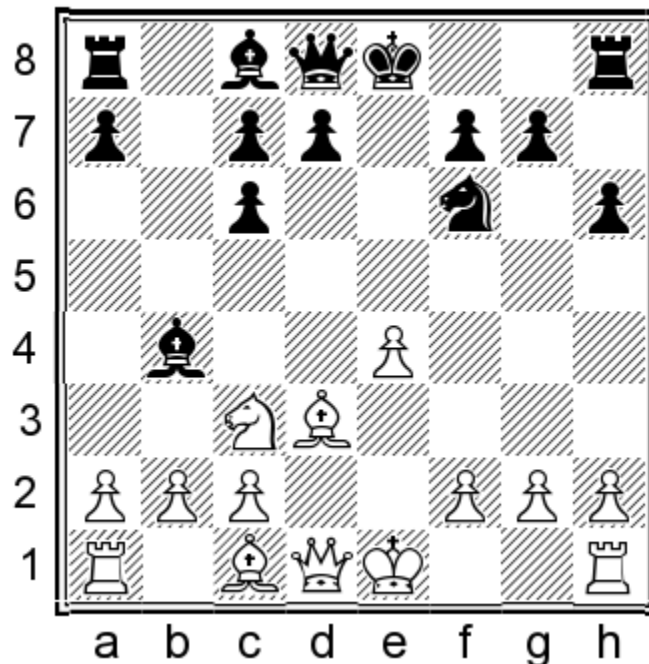
Adrià Mari Copa (1837)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2014

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.d4 exd4 5.♘xd4 ♖b4 6.♘xc6 bxc6 7.♙d3 h6?!

No doubt the idea of this move is to prevent the ♙g5 pin. In the MegaBase, out of the 330 players who made this move, only one was rated over 2400.

7...d5! is the correct move.



8.0-0?!

Once again, we see an unenergetic treatment of an advantage in development. However, this is very common; in fact, castling is the most frequent choice in the MegaBase. Álvaro thought that ...h6 would be a bad move, but he worried that perhaps it was theory, and his opponent had prepared it.

8.e5!. Energetic play can be described as play that gives no respite: 8...♘d5 9.♔g4! (again attacking, now on g7) 9...♘xc3 (9...g6 10.0-0± ; 9...0-0? 10.♙xh6+-) 10.♔xb4! ♘d5 11.♔g4± .

8...0-0?

You might think that castling would end any immediate dangers, but this time it is not the best move. It was essential to prevent e5 with 8...d6! 9.h3 0-0±, but once again, castling is the most common move.

9.e5!

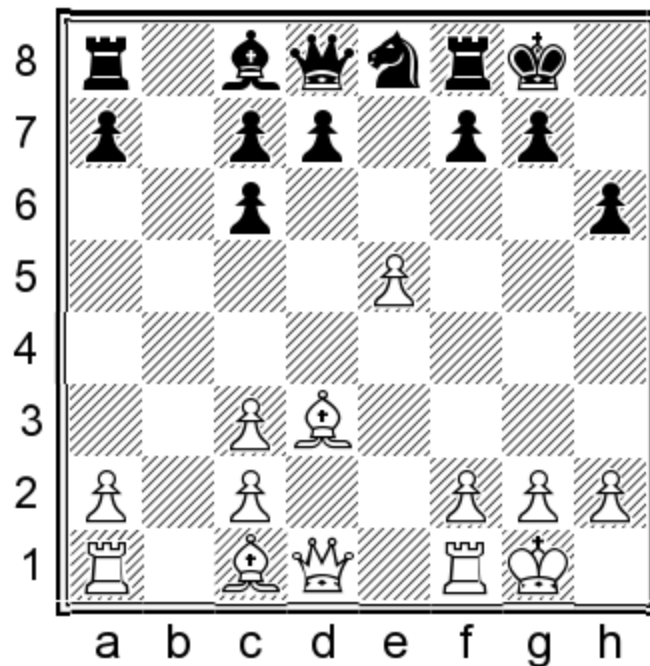
Now White makes up his mind to make the energetic move, which is still sufficient to give him a big advantage. Curiously, he plays this at the moment when it is the most frequently played move in the database.

9...♙xc3

Or 9...♘e8 10.♙xh6 ♙xc3 11.♔h5+-.

10.bxc3 ♘e8?

10...♘d5 is clearly better, although White can gain a significant advantage with most queen moves towards the kingside; for example, 11.♔h5.



11. ♔f3!

A very strong move, with the threat of ♕xh6, followed by ♔f5.

11. ♔g4, and if 11...d6, then 12. ♔e4, is also decisive.

11...f5 12. ♖a3 d6 13. ♔xc6

Black has lost material, without any lessening of the pressure on his position. We can consider the game over.

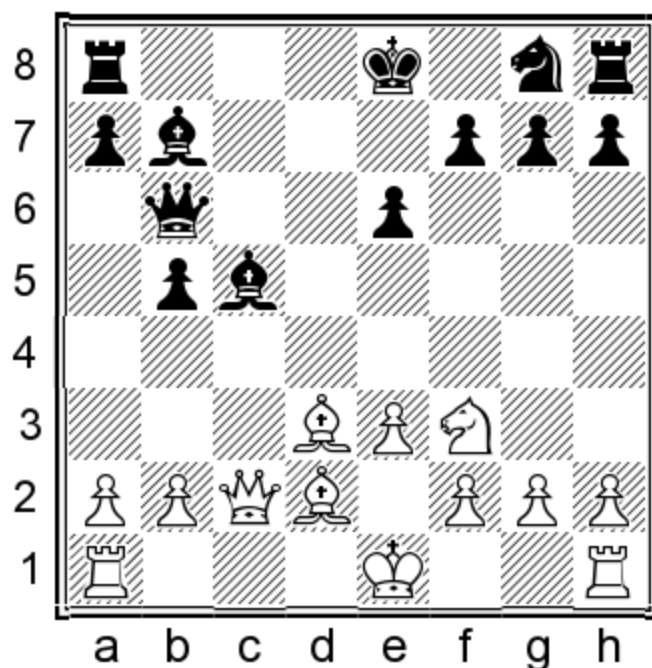
A small advantage in development and some vulnerable points in the enemy position can be a reason to start energetic play. In fact, some players play like that in any position and it does not do them much harm ☺.

However, it is more common for the player who lags in development to be fearful, whereas his opponent is not as tense and limits himself to playing normal moves.

Juan Plazuelo Pascual (2140)

Álvaro Bayo Milagro (2140)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2014



Exercise 54

The opening is almost over. White has a good lead in development, but within a couple of moves, it can come to nothing. Some players would say that White's advantage is minimal or unimportant. Naturally, with such an assessment, it is normal not to look for energetic moves and to settle for natural ones.

14.♖e4?

White moves an already developed piece; admittedly, it sets up some threats, but Black can deal with these. The strongest move here was 14.a4!, immediately joining battle with the enemy forces and not allowing Black any time to prepare to castle. Álvaro told me he was very afraid of this move, but of course he was the side in danger, and thus more alert. Each of the possible responses needs to be analysed:

A) 14...bxa4 15.♔xa4+ ♕c6 16.♔c2 and both black bishops are on the same line and, in addition, there is the unpleasant threat of 17.♖a6; after 16...♕b7 17.0-0 ♘f6 18.♖fc1 ♕e7 19.♔a4+ Black loses the right to castle, which will be serious in this position;

B) 14...a6 15.axb5 axb5 16.♖xa8+ ♕xa8 17.0-0 ♘e7! (17...♕xf3?! 18.gxf3 ♘f6 19.♖c1 ♘d7 20.b4 ♕e7 21.♔c8+ ♕d8 22.♕c3 – relentless; now loss of material cannot be prevented) 18.♕a5! ♔c6 19.♖c1 (allowing no respite) 19...♕d6 20.♔d2 ♔d7 21.♘e5!! ♕xe5 22.♕xb5 and White wins.

14...♖c8!

Perhaps unexpected by White, but 14...♕d6!? was also close to equal.

15.♕xb7 ♔xb7 16.♖c1 ♘e7 ½-½

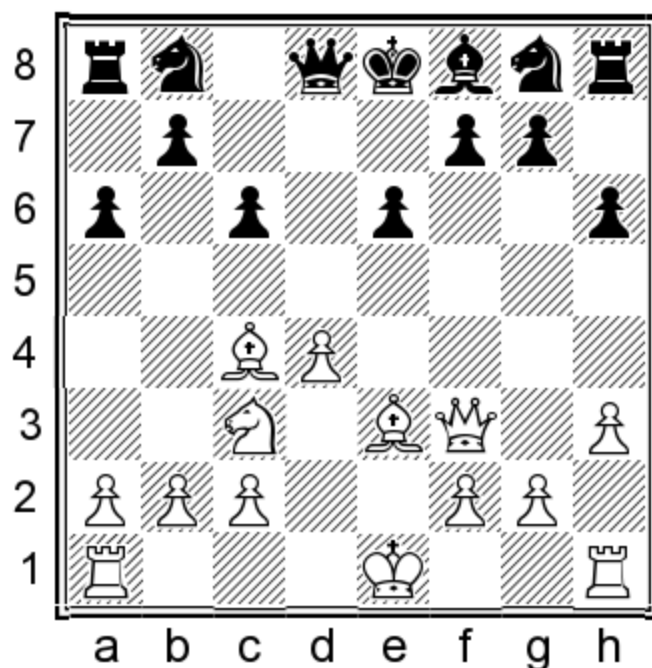
Black has solved all his problems.

When there is a great advantage in development, and the game cannot be opened up by means of pawn breaks, that is the moment to consider sacrifices.

Pedro Viñal Gutiérrez (1847)

Jose Manuel Cepeda Fuentes (1699)

Sevilla 2023

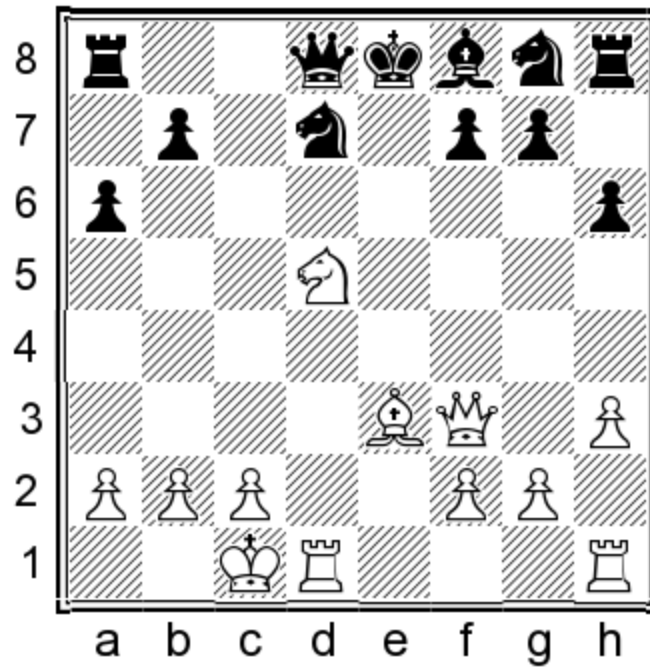


White has an enormous lead in development, but Black's position is structurally sound and normal moves would allow him to gradually equalise, which is what happened in the game.

10.0-0

This is a natural move, but hardly energetic.

A) Instead, the immediate break 10.d5!, followed by sacrificing a piece, is possible: 10...cxd5 11.♔xd5!. The question frequently arises as to which piece to sacrifice, but in this case, both are good; now, after 11...exd5 12.♘xd5, there is no good defence against ♕b6: 12...♘d7 13.0-0-0



analysis diagram

and now, as well as 14. ♖b6 there is the threat of 14. ♖he1;

B) It is also possible to prepare the sacrifice with 10.0-0-0!?!; for example, 10...♘f6 11.d5 cxd5 12.♘xd5 exd5 13.♙xd5 ♘xd5 14.♖xd5 ♔c8 15.♖e1 ♙e7 16.♔g3 0-0 17.♙xh6 ♙f6 18.♙xg7 ♙xg7 19.♖g5 and White wins.

10...♘f6 11.♖ad1 ♘d5 12.♘e4 ♙e7 13.c3 ♘d7 14.♙c1 ♘7f6
15.♘g3 0-0±

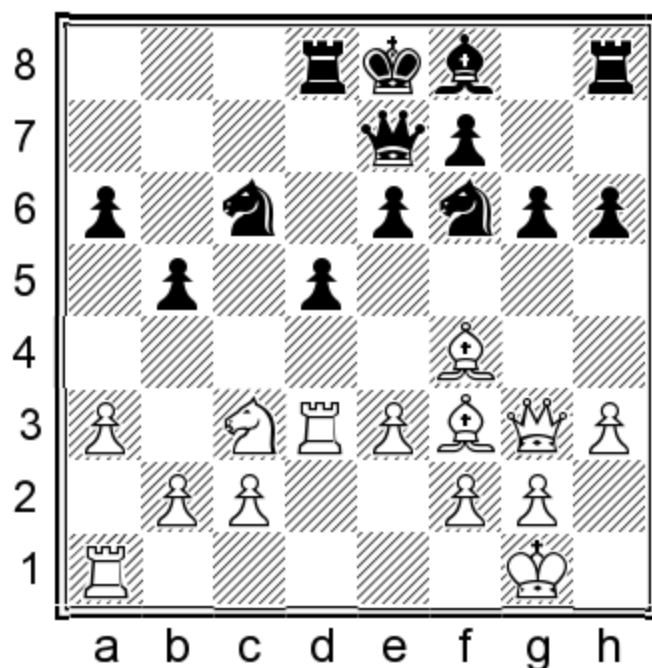
Black has removed his king from the centre and has a position typical of various semi-open defences.

The greater the defects of your own position, the more need there is to exploit whatever advantages you have.

Marta Elena Jiménez Carrazoni (1648)

Ángela García González (1371)

Spanish Team Championship U14 2022



White has a development advantage but an ugly position statically. Therefore, he has double reason to play energetically.

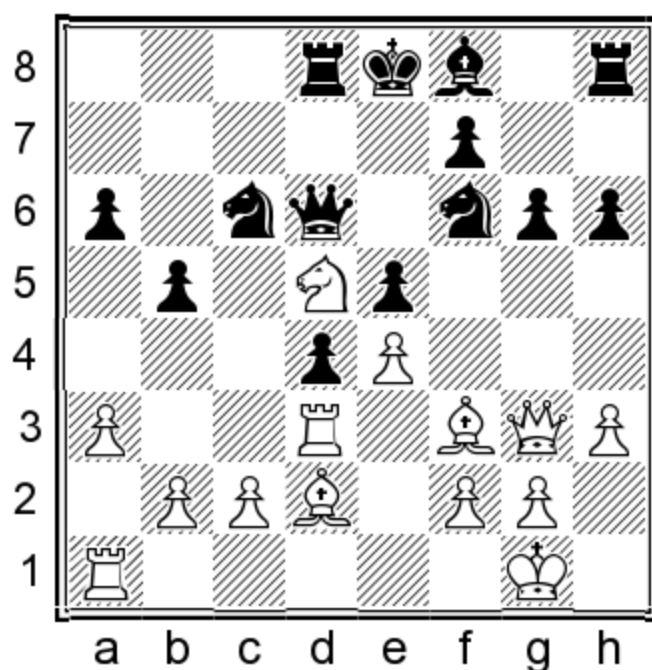
16.♙c7?

16.e4! is a favourable pawn break, which will quickly enhance the activity of White's pieces. Black must choose between trading on e4 and closing the position, because simply allowing the exchange on d5 would be destructive:

A) The immediate 16...d4 fails to 17.e5! ♞d5 18.♞xd5 exd5 19.c3;

B) If 16...dxe4? 17.♞xe4 ♞xe4 18.♙xe4, there is no good way to defend the knight; for example, 18...♞d4 19.♞xd4 ♞xd4 20.♙c6+ ♔d8 21.♙e5 and White wins;

C) 16...e5 would be relatively best: 17.♙d2 d4 18.♞d5 ♔d6 (18...♞xd5 19.exd5 ♞b8 20.♞e1 ♙g7 21.♙b4, followed by ♞xd4, and wins)



analysis diagram

19.c3!. White must continue to play energetically: 19...dxc3 (19...♙g7 20.cxd4 and Black cannot recapture) 20.♙xc3 ♙g7 (Black is close to completing his development) 21.♘b4! ♔e6 22.♖xd8+ ♘xd8 23.♚xe5 with a decisive advantage.

16...♖d7?

Although this attacks the bishop, it again allows the central break. Instead, 16...♖c8! would have repelled the attack; 17.e4? ♚xc7.

17.♙e5?

17.e4! with the strategy explained in the note to the previous move, also works here; after 17...♖xc7 18.exd5, at the very least, White will regain the piece and be a pawn up.

17...♘xe5 18.♚xe5 ♙g7

Black will be able to complete his development and keep the better position:

19.♚g3 0-0 20.♖ad1 ♖fd8

How to avoid Error 41

The first recommendation is not to play the opening with a bored expression and in an automatic manner. This applies to all three of the errors covered in this chapter.

The second is to try to recognise positions where there is an advantage in development and an element of dynamism in the position that will allow you to exploit it.

You should try to do this at every opportunity, until you are able to interpret the situation correctly, which is something you will not achieve if you let the opportunities pass you by because you are unsure. That is to say, once again: do not be fearful or lazy but curious and resolute.

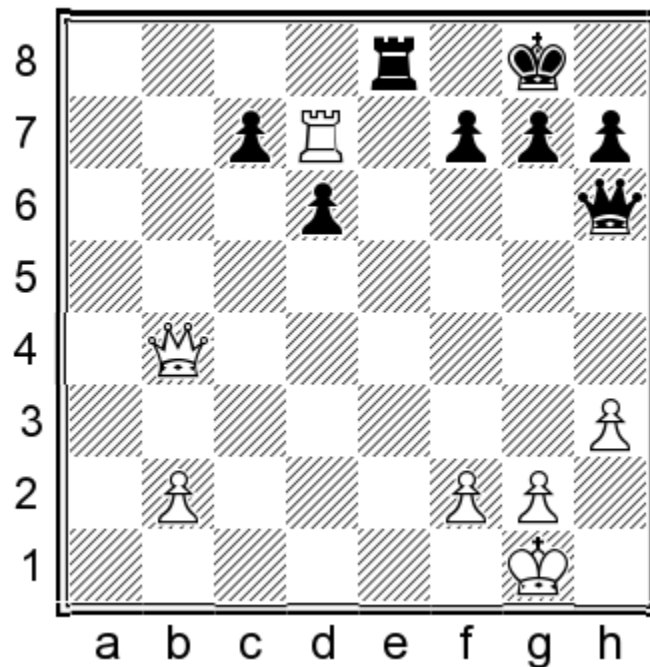
Finally, you should look at classic games in which this theme has been exploited. Here, books on the attack and opening traps go hand in hand, and you can also find such games in books of miniature games. I recommend 101 Brilliant Chess Miniatures by John Nunn, but it is easy to find many other such books. I remember with great affection how much I enjoyed 100 Soviet Chess Miniatures in my youth, and I hope my readers will find some similar inspiration.

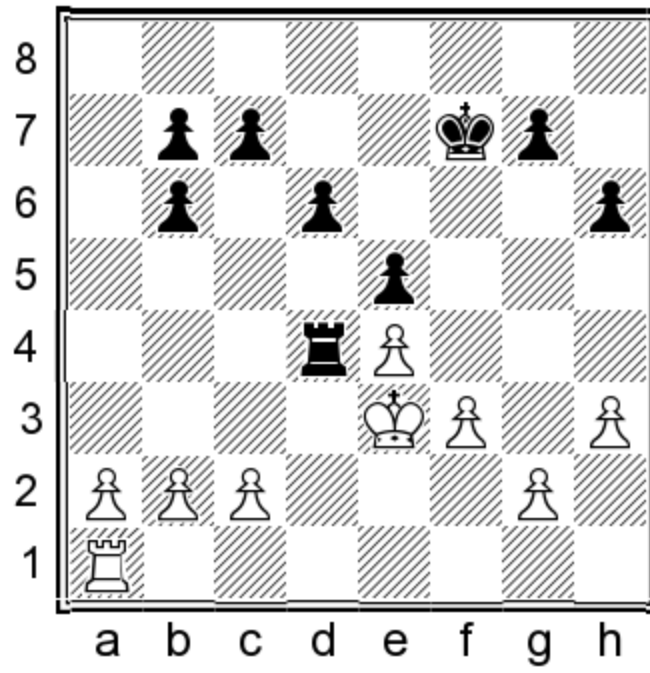
Chapter 10

Basic tactics

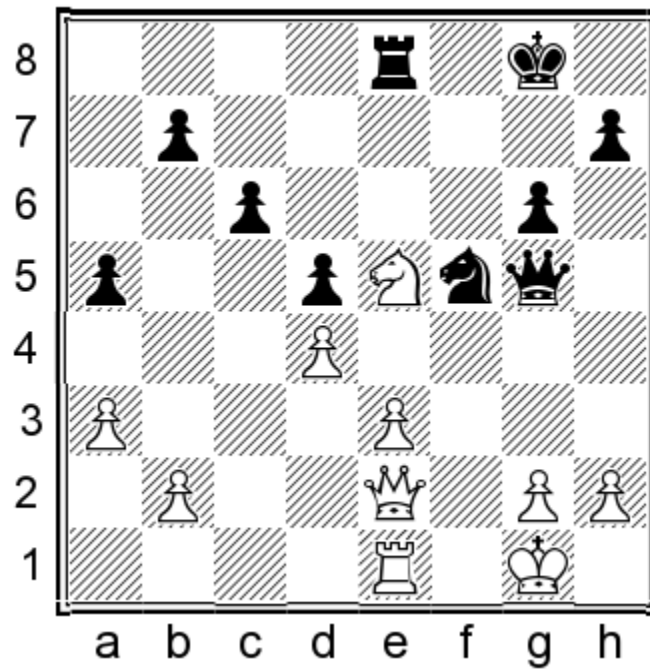
- Error 42 - Failure to see the tactical idea
- Error 43 - Overrating a pin
- Error 44 - Failure to see emerging tactics

Exercises for Chapter 10

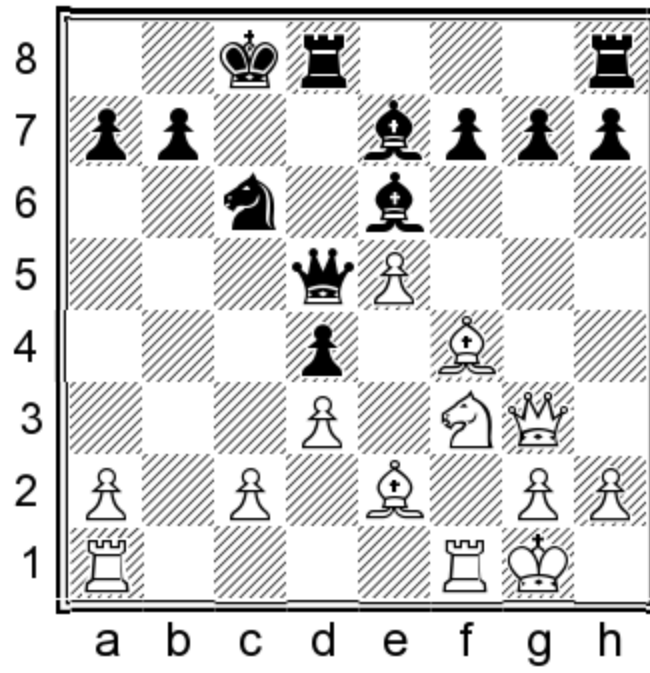




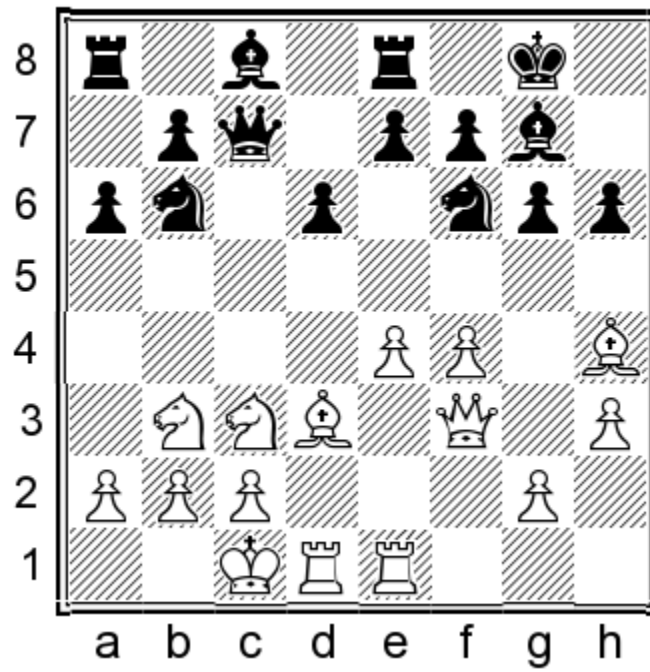
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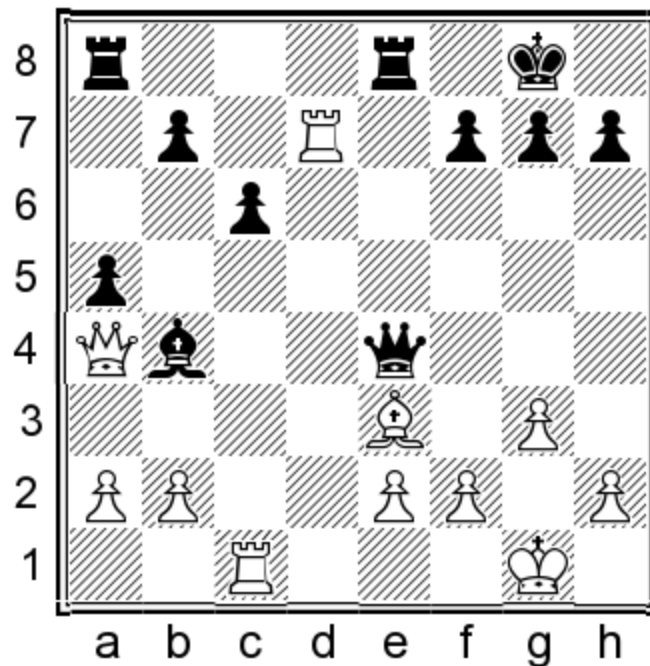
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Simple tactical errors are, and will continue to be, the most common in chess praxis. This idea is present in many basic-level books and in the following pearl of wisdom, whose original author I do not know: ‘Chess is a strategic game, in which 99% is tactics’. The final part (the 99%) is attributed to the master Richard Teichmann, but the complete phrase already contains the question we will inevitably ask ourselves. If chess is 99% tactics, why not just study tactics? Perhaps because 99% is an exaggeration. There is another explanation, but it is not an easy one until you have gained a certain amount of experience. Strategy is a guide and makes it easier to reduce the number of tactical errors, but we do not see it until we have played thousands of games.

In any case, it will be difficult to change the influence of tactics on the final results of our games. It is of very little use to us to understand the subtle strategic principles if we are unable to see our

opponent's threats, and even more so, as sometimes happens, if we enhance them with our own moves.

Tactics continue to be 'unfinished business' for many players, and therefore, the work to be done as a priority in order to keep making progress is to solve a lot of exercises, and here 'a lot' means many thousands.

There are authors who are (a little) distrustful of the usefulness of solving exercises, arguing that a practical game is a different situation and that, no matter how many exercises a player does, he will continue to make errors and, therefore, experience is more effective. And they are not wrong. My own opinion is that solving exercises is very useful, but it is not enough, and it **never** achieves decent results unless accompanied by continuous practice.

But although basic tactics form an important element in making progress, this is not one of the most important chapters in this book for the following reasons: first, because of the level of the players at whom it is directed, a little above the stage in which basic tactics is the main subject; and secondly and especially, because the best way to avoid tactical errors is to repeat a great many exercises, rather than to reflect upon their causes. Here, we are going to focus on that second issue, leaving the first for other places already designed for that purpose, such as books on tactical exercises and collections of tactical puzzles on the Internet.

For the selection of the errors studied in this chapter, I relied more on my experience as a trainer than on theoretical works on chess tactics. I have tried to draw attention to those errors which reoccur most often in the practice of my students, and have tried to discover at least some of the causes.

Error 42 - Failure to see the tactical idea

It often happens that a player overlooks a small manoeuvre that requires no complicated calculation; or, to put it another way, the player overlooks something which ought to be easy for him and, furthermore, which he would have solved easily if it were an exercise.

Of course, the lower the player's strength, the more this happens because their **tactical antennae** are poorly developed. But, with varying complexity, it happens at all levels, even the highest.

I believe that if we rule out accidental external causes (time shortage, tiredness, extreme nervousness, overconfidence), one of the main causes is failure to recognise the reason behind the manoeuvre.

There is no tactical variation without a tactical motif, and the motif is a signal, warning us that we should look for something.

In fact, the words motif and signal can be used as synonyms, and for once, it does not seem to me to be harmful for both to be used, beneficial even, because they can help focus attention.

If our tactical antennae are not developed or well-connected, they do not detect the signal, and then it is not that we do not find something, but that we do not look for anything. Not all motifs are equally easy to 'mask'; some are obvious (such as an endangered king or a pin), but others are more prone to be ignored, which is what we shall see in the following examples.

Basic list of tactical motifs

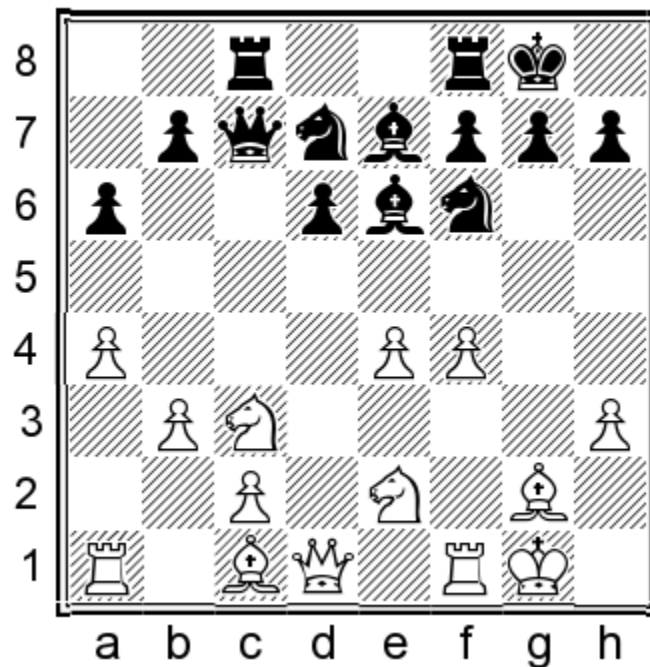
- King in danger
- Pin
- Unprotected pieces
- Overloads
- Passed pawns
- Pieces with few squares
- Pieces on the same geometrical lines (alignment)

One of the easily overlooked motifs is a piece that is short of moves, which makes it susceptible to being trapped.

Katharina Bangiev (1494)

Nicolás Martín Cabeza (1694)

Spanish Team Championship U14 2022



In this position, a quite normal one for the Sicilian Defence, Black is unable to solve the problem of overcrowding among his pieces because he is not aware of the motif.

14...♞c5?

The knight jumps to a square from where it cannot go to any new square. It is logical that the best move, 14...♞b8!, still with advantage to White, was rejected as a candidate, because it is a retreat of the knight to the back rank, but I feel obliged to repeat that, when we are faced with a tactical question, we cannot let ourselves be carried away by natural moves; this is a disastrous method.

15.f5!

In contrast, White notices that the knight is short of squares and it happens that the only square it has is also the only square for the bishop.

15...♔b6?!

As usual, now that Black has become aware of the danger and of the mistake he has made, with the consequent blow to his ego, he desperately tries to fix it. Instead, with 15...♔d7 16.b4 b5!, even though Black's position is still losing, he wins a few pawns for the piece.

16.a5 ♔a7 17.♔e3 ♔d7 18.b4

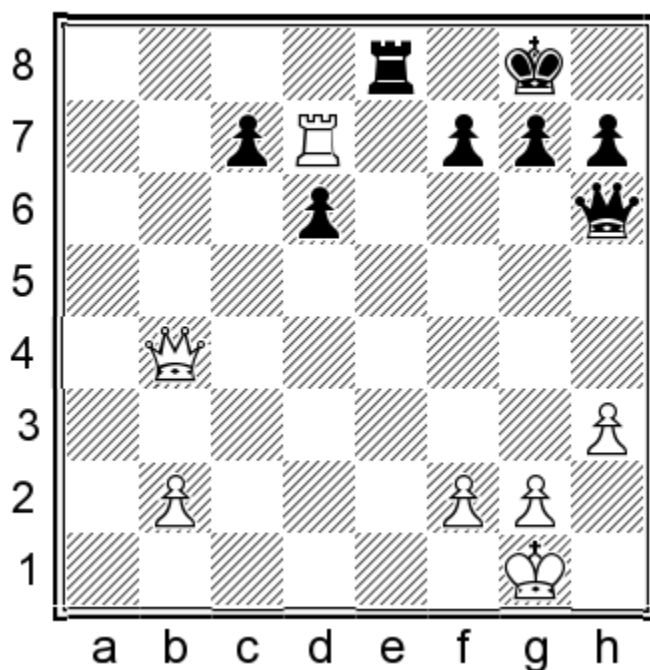
And the piece is lost in any case.

Let's see another example of the same motif (Exercise 55).

Roger Bernardo Lopez (2110)

Javier Sainz Allo (1804)

Spanish Team Championship U16 2021



In this case, the motif is the white rook's lack of mobility. Once this has been identified, the moves to exploit it are easy, and White's attempt to save himself can be refuted.

32...c5?

This is sufficient for equality and perhaps a little more, but there was a much better candidate in 32...♔c1+!. In this case, the difficulty is in seeing the motif of the trapped white rook because this is not a very frequent theme, especially with the rook in such an active position. After 33.♔h2 ♔c6 34.♔g4 g6 (threatening ...f5 or ...h5) 35.b3!? (preparing ♔a4) 35...♔f8! 36.♔a4 ♔xa4 37.bxa4 ♖c8 Black wins.

33.♔c4?

White seems to be ignoring the weak back rank motif, perhaps through shock or relief. Again, the **unnatural candidate move** 33.♔e4! is overlooked; after 33...♖b8 34.♔e7 Black can force a draw with 34...♔c1+ 35.♔h2 ♔f4+.

33...♔f6

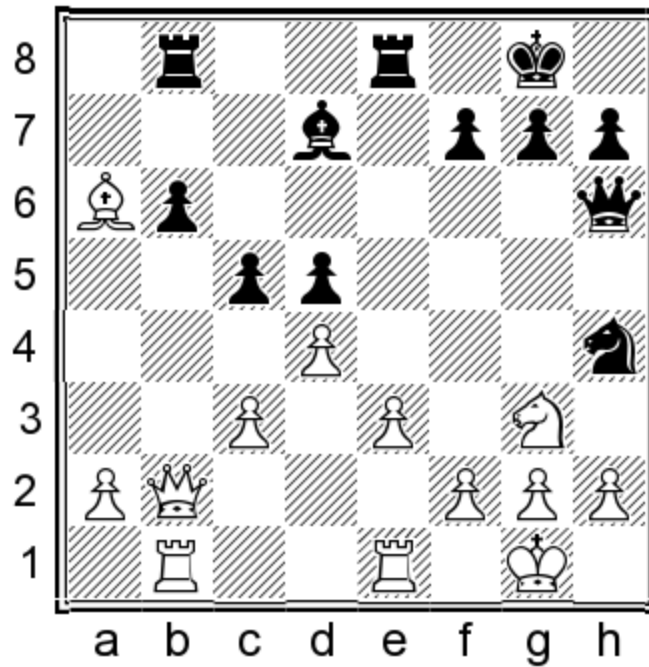
And Black is a clear pawn up. The ending of this game is discussed in **Error 38**.

Another of the motifs that tends to be hidden is the alignment of pieces.

Alina Prochaieva (1543)

Irati Perez Azanza (1074)

Spanish Team Championship U14 2022



White is much better, but she does not see the motif of the alignment of the black queen (on h6) and the white bishop (on a6). The reality is that Black is threatening ...b5.

26.dxc5?

White is even fortunate that she accidentally opens a line (the fourth rank), which will allow her to avoid losing a piece. But 26.♘b5! was the ideal solution, after which White's advantage is very great.

26...b5!

Now the bishop on a6 has problems.

27.♙b4!

Fortunately, White finds this resource and is not lost, but after

27...♘xg2! 28.♙xg2 ♙xa6

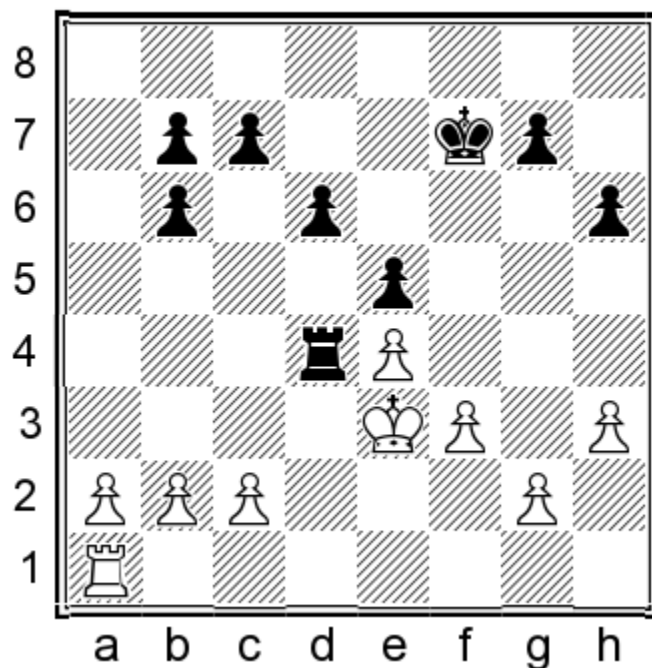
her advantageous position has become a double-edged one.

We have just indicated that one of the most frequently overlooked motifs is that of a trapped piece, especially in cases where it appears that the piece is not short of moves.

Oscar Torcal Miguel (1697)

David Blanco Diez (1697)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U12 2013



We start with a case that is both simple and very attractive (Exercise 56). White has just played ♔f2-e3 , which could have served as a warning, but a very masked one, because it seems to simply prevent $\dots\text{♖d2}$. We should observe that **one of the most dangerous types of moves is those that threaten something while appearing to defend against an enemy threat.**

28...♔e6?

The simplest way was to play $28...\text{♖a4!}$, although there are a few other moves which allow the rook to escape without any problems. However, here it was necessary to see that the rook is in difficulties.

29.b3!

And now the rook is doomed. Suddenly it becomes clear that 30.c3 is threatened and there is only one square.

29...♖b4 30.c3 ♜b5 31.b4 c5 32.a4

And the rook is lost.

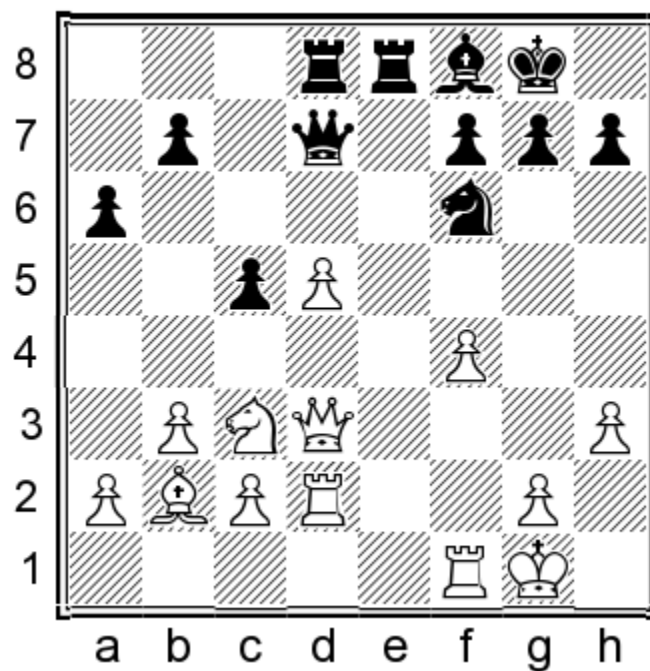
In the next three examples, we shall be more specific: a special case of a trapped piece is when it concerns the queen. This is often striking, because the queen always seems so full of possibilities, but precisely for that reason, its entrapment is one of the most overlooked occurrences. It is enough to remember the eighth game of the Anand-Gelfand World Championship Match in 2012.

The first example of trapping the queen is simple but striking because it takes place in the centre, with many open lines.

Mikel Ortega López (2088)

Eihartze Buiza Prieto (1896)

Salobreña ch-ESP U16 2014



White is fine here. Black does not have full compensation for White's extra pawn, but White was excessively concerned about Black playing the useful move ...b5.

19.a4?

This could have been a good preventative move, and in the short term it was successful, but in fact, it was a big mistake.

Black overlooked...

19...c4!

Instead, Black played 19...♔d6?, and the game ended in a draw.

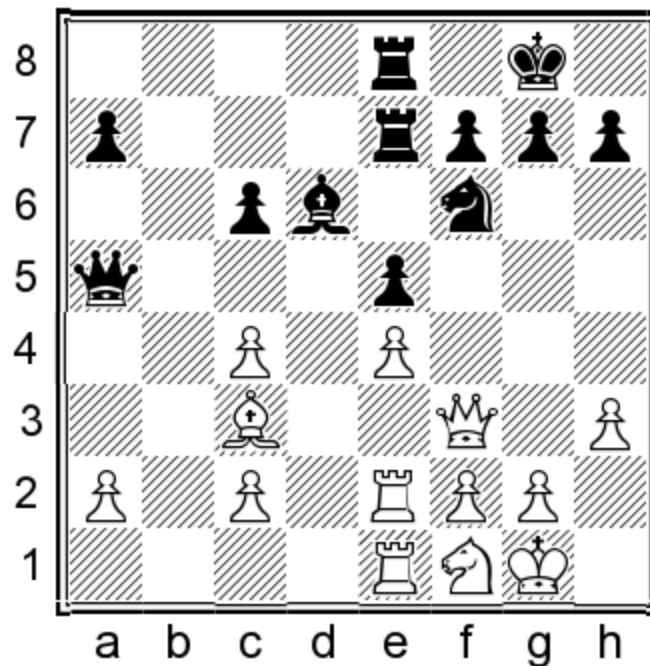
20.♔xc4?

The most likely response, but it is a mistake that should have been decisive.

20.bxc4?! is slightly better, as after 20...♙c5+ White can save the queen with 21.♖df2! (21.♔h2? ♖e3).

20.♔g3 is best, but Black could then play 20...♔c8 21.♔h2 b5 22.axb5 axb5, threatening ...b4, with good compensation, since 23.♘xb5? is impossible due to 23...♘e4, winning.

20...♖c8



19...♙xa2??

19...♙a3± was necessary. Now, the black queen will be trapped.

When we have discovered the motif, and the enemy queen has very few moves, the best technique for trapping it is to observe all its escape squares and see if they can all be controlled at the same time as attacking the queen.

In this case, the only escape square (if White plays ♖a1) is c4, which can be covered with tempo by attacking Black's bishop.

20.♙d3! ♖d7 21.♖a1 ♘b4

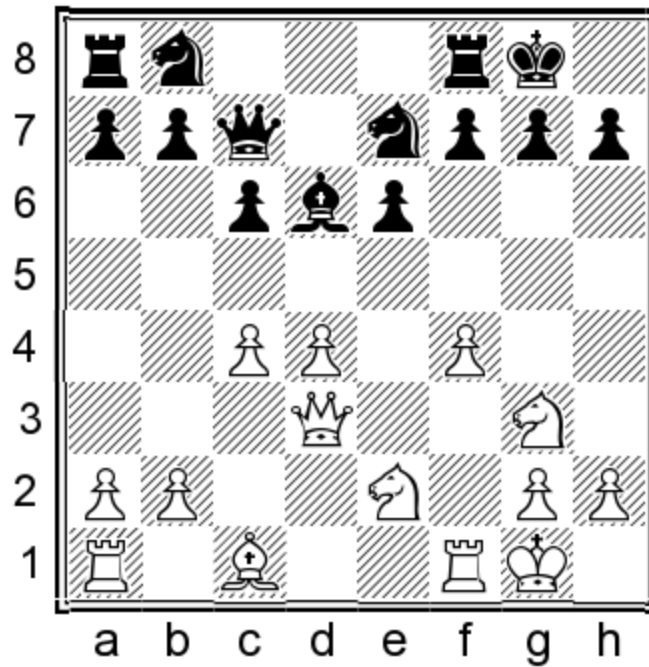
The difficulty in trapping the queen means that, in many cases, it can escape at the cost of other material, but this can still be decisive.

22.♖xa2 ♖xd3 23.♘xb4 ♖d4 24.♞d2 1-0

Adrian Martínez Fernández (1902)

Pedro Antonio Ginés Esteo (2115)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2015



Here Black played

12...c5?!

, ‘deliberately’ ignoring a signal; I say deliberately, because Black has played ...c5 to protect the bishop, therefore he has seen that it has no squares. Instead, 12...♖d8!, which is really a defence by counterattack, was better.

13.b4!

Brilliant and rather unexpected, gaining a clear advantage.

13...b6?!

Again, it was necessary to defend by means of a counterattack, taking advantage of the exposed position of the white queen on the d-file; for example, 13...♕d7!? 14.bxc5 ♗xc5 15.♔h1 ♘bc6 16.♙b2 ♖ad8 17.♖ad1, when the white pieces are looking dangerously towards Black’s kingside; or 13...♖d8! 14.♕e4! b6! 15.dxc5 bxc5 16.b5, with the better structure and better pieces for White.

14.dxc5 bxc5 15.b5

White has a considerable advantage.

How to avoid Error 42

If you have detected this error in your own play, you should tackle it immediately because it is one of the errors that will do the most harm to your results, your self-confidence and your possibilities of making progress, including your possibilities of correcting other errors. The remedies are very clear:

The first remedy is to solve a lot of tactical exercises.

The second is to read a few books on the theory of tactics, in case you have not fully understood some basic concept or other, which keeps leading to errors. I specifically recommend these two books: *Tune Your Chess Tactics Antenna* by Emmanuel Neiman and *Chess Tactics from Scratch* by Martin Weteschnik.

I always recommend being very meticulous when reading chess books, but it is even more important in this case, if you are going to derive any benefit. It is not enough to just read them; you need to get involved, try to solve the positions, and follow the variations all the way to the end.

Error 43 - Overrating a pin

Another important group of basic tactical errors is related to the pin. At lower levels, many errors arise from not seeing a pin. But a little later in your chess career, others appear, which are very striking and difficult to eradicate, arising from overestimating the strength of a pin.

We could say (although it is a superficial evaluation) that as a player progresses, he begins to see the pins (he overcomes the material postulate), and in some cases he is impressed by the new and very powerful postulate of the pin.

This error is probably also due (like some strategic errors or those related to material) to deficient education in the concept. It can be

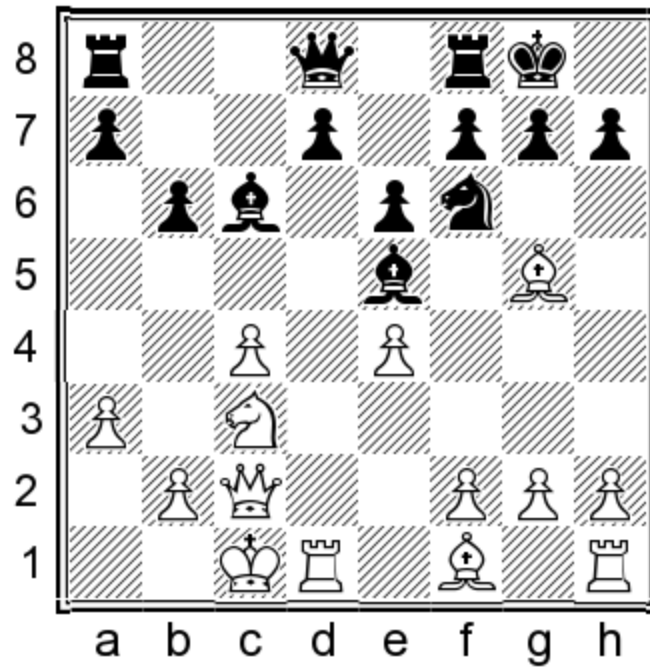
explained in different ways, but what is certain is that the ‘**pin**’ concept includes different situations, which all tend to be lumped together. Then, despite the effort to differentiate them (using expressions such as absolute or relative, partial or total), the correct, flexible picture is not created.

An important case of the pin, to which I would like to draw particular attention, is when the piece being shielded by the pinned piece moves in the same way as the piece doing the pinning. The most frequent occurrence of this is when the piece being shielded is the queen, and the pinning piece is a bishop. In this case, the pin can often be transformed into a ‘boomerang’ by means of a discovered attack. For many years now, I have been asking other professionals for a more inspiring name for this phenomenon, but I accept that I have not found an ideal name, and I encourage others to search for one. For now, we shall call the situation described as a ‘**rebounding inappropriate pin**’.

Pablo Baquedano Coarasa (1998)

Juan Plazuelo Pascual (2335)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2015



The curious thing is that most discovered attacks arising from a pin are typical since they arise in the first few moves of the game, and yet they keep finding victims, such as in this game.

13.♙d3?!

Ignoring Black's response.

13.f3! was necessary.

13...♙xc3!

And since White cannot recapture with the queen, he has to accept a wretched pawn structure.

14.bxc3

After 14.♙xc3 ♞xe4! Black wins a pawn, in addition to gaining the better structure: 15.♙xd8 ♞xc3 16.bxc3 ♜fxd8.

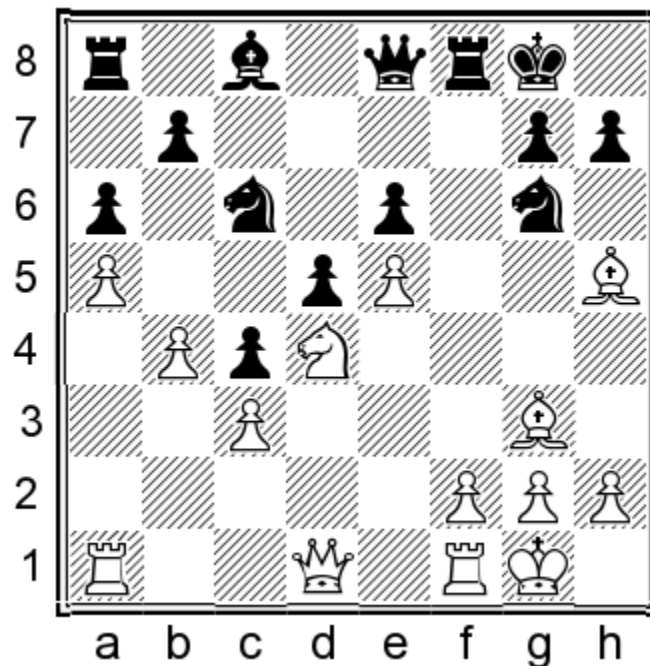
14...h6 15.♙h4 ♞e7 16.♙b2 e5±

This error has the effect of converting subjectively some moves into **unnatural candidate moves**, which makes it difficult to calculate accurately and select the right move.

Raúl Perez Guerra (1846)

Mencia Montes Giménez (1332)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U12 2016



White has a big advantage, but if he had paid a modicum of attention, he might have discovered that Black is threatening to gain some freedom by exchanging on d4, followed by the tactical blow ...♘f4.

21.♔d2?

A natural move, although it does not contribute much to White's plan. But the bad thing is that it allows a somewhat hidden freeing manoeuvre. Notice that the relationship between the bishop on h5 and the queen on e8 constitutes an **'inappropriate pin'**, meaning there is the potential for a pin-breaking combination, which should always put us on our guard. Instead, both 21.♘xc6!? ♔xc6 (

21...bxc6 22.f4±) 22.f4 ♖d7 23.♙xg6 hxg6 24.♙h4, and especially 21.f4!± were better.

21...♘xd4! 22.♙xd4 ♙f7?

But Black does not discover the tactical resource either; 22...♘f4! would have reduced White's advantage to a comfortable level.

23.f3 ♙f5 24.♙g4

White remains much better.

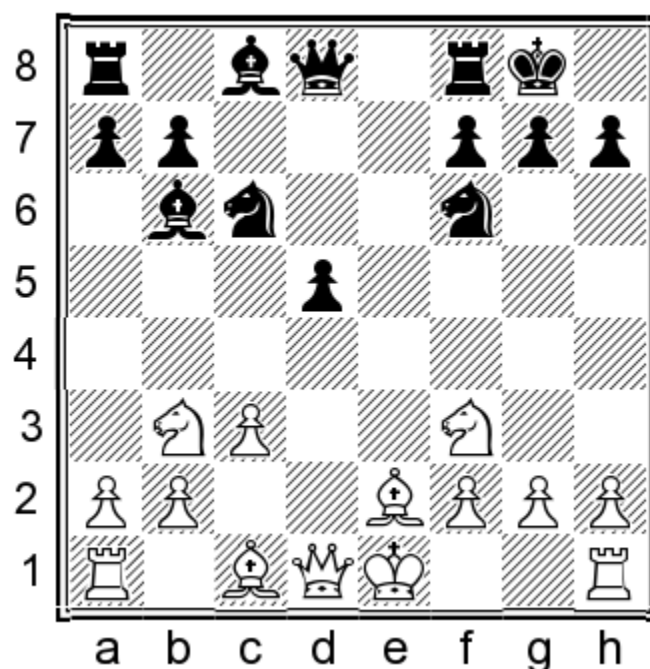
Overrating a pin happens much more among very young players, even when they have plenty of ability and knowledge. I suspect this is due to their limited experience of things going wrong.

I do not want to end this section without presenting the following example, which could equally well have been included in the section on the tactics of the opening.

Aketza Fernández Arce (1366)

Rafael Pujante Martínez (1479)

Salobreña ch-ESP U12 2014



White has no advantage, but he has no problems either. Now, castling, instead of a rash move (see **Error 40**), was the obvious thing to do, but he thought he saw a better move.

11.♔g5?

This leads to the best-known scenario for the **inappropriate pin**, allowing a pin-breaking combination.

11...♕xf2+!

And Black takes full advantage.

12.♔f1

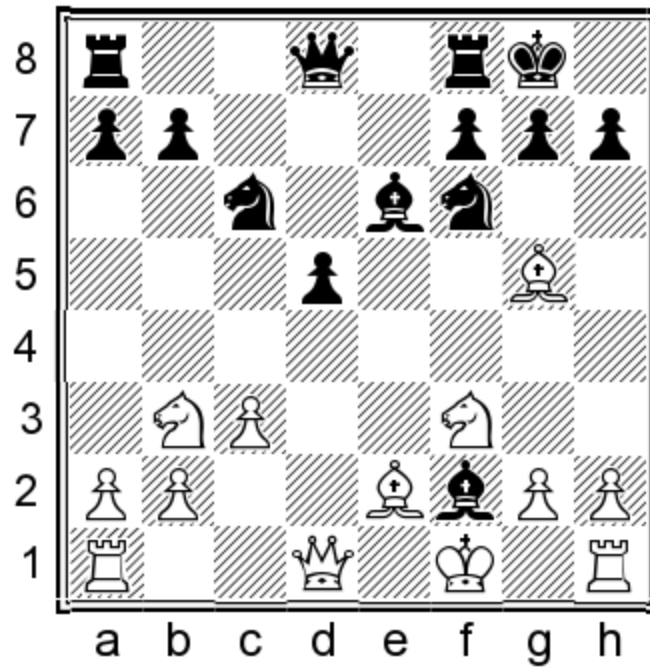
Of course, if 12.♔xf2, then 12...♘e4+ wins.

The disaster has already happened, but we shall continue for a couple more moves in order to be able to reflect upon another error, this time by the Black player.

12...♕e6?

Just as White relied too much on his beautiful pin, Black does the same regarding his attractive discovered attack.

Instead, 12...♕b6! would have maintained Black's decisive advantage.



13.♟xf6! ♔xf6 14.♔xf2

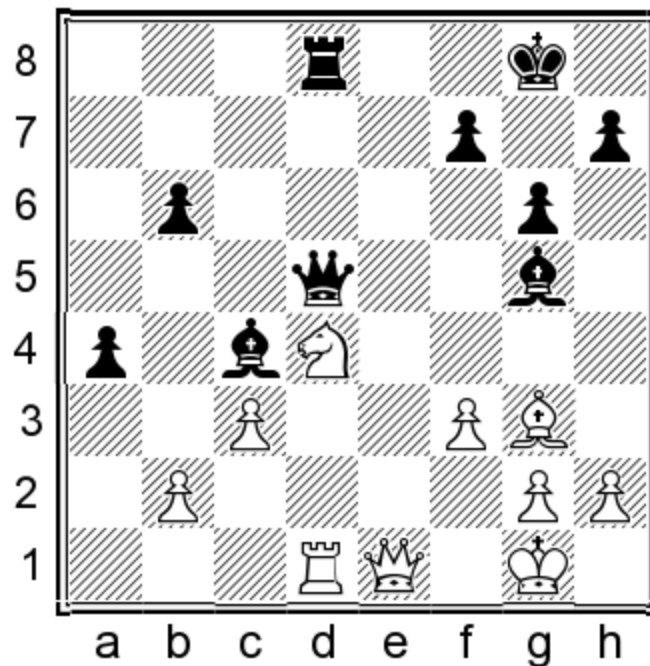
And Black had lost a piece.

Although experienced players, usually based on their own misfortunes, know very well what can happen to them as a result of a **rebounding inappropriate pin**, they are not immune from suffering from the over-relaxation that a pin can induce.

Valentín Bueno Del Amo (1822)

Salvador Guerra Rivera (2185)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2016



Black is slightly better, but he oversteps the mark here and allows a dangerous check while maintaining the dangerous alignment on the d-file. This was probably due to overestimating the power of the pin.

31...♖d7?

31...♔d7!, preparing ...♖e8, was the best move.

32.♔e8+ ♕g7 33.♘e6+?

Settling for very little. 33.♙e5+ would have finished the game on the spot.

33...♔xe6 34.♔xd7

With a clear advantage, but White ended up losing.

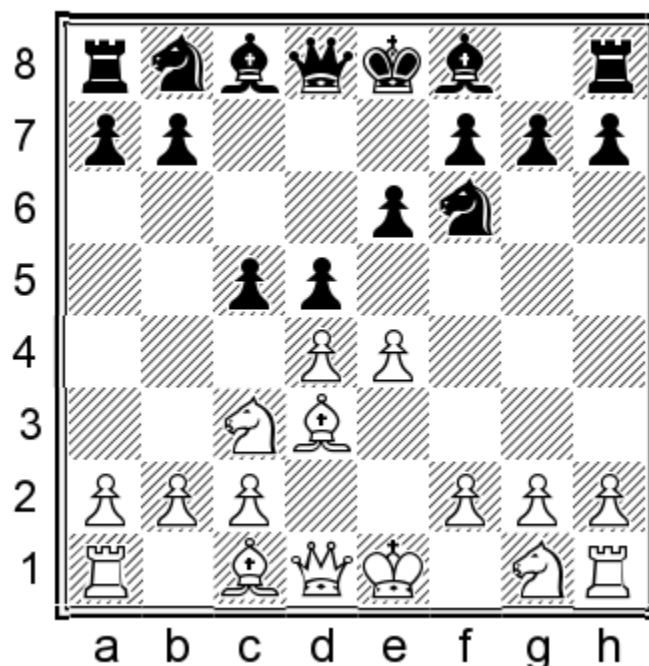
The next example is shown right from the start because the errors relate to typical thoughts in the opening.

Adrián Ponce Cano (2089)

Henrique Rey Malde (1960)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2013

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♙d3 c5



In the opening, it is common to counter the pressure being exerted on a particular square by means of an **inappropriate pin**; we are very used to this being effective, but it does not always work. In this position, after four moves of the French Defence, White insists on supporting his centre (already under great pressure) by means of an indirect solution:

5.♙g5?

This move has been played 14 times in the MegaBase (which does not contain this game), but the highest rating of the players is 2100. Instead, 5.♘f3= is the right move.

5...cxd4!

From now on, Black responds with great precision until he manages to consolidate his advantage.

6.♙b5+

Trying to recapture on d4, with a very attractive deployment of his pieces.

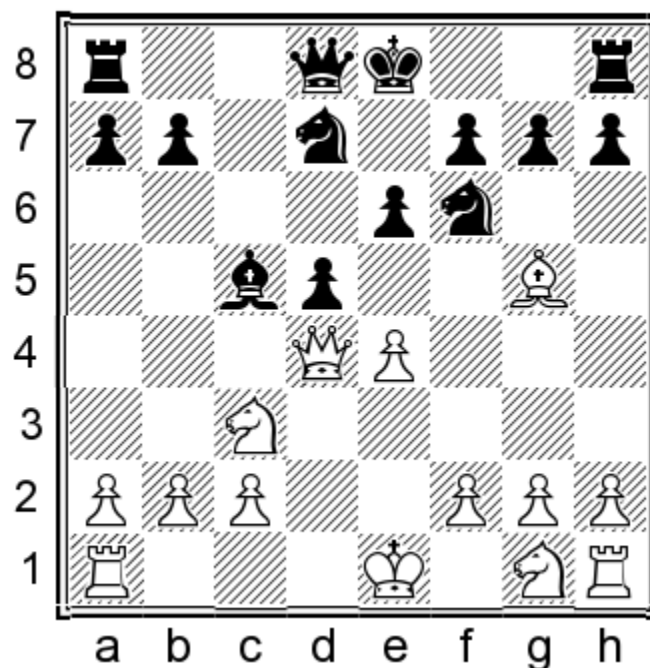
6...♙d7!

Not 6...♘c6?! 7.♚xd4 which is equal.

7.♙xd7+

Now, 7.♚xd4 is not so good in view of 7...♙xb5 8.♙xf6 (8.♘xb5 is even worse, due to 8...♚a5+ 9.♘c3 ♘xe4) 8...gxf6 9.♘xb5 ♘c6 10.♚d2 dxe4.

7...♘bxd7 8.♚xd4 ♙c5



9.♚a4

White probably now saw what was going to happen, but having reached this position, he had no good solution.

A) 9.♙xf6 is the most logical move, which forces Black to find a good **unnatural candidate move**: 9...♚b6! 10.♚a4 (10.♚d2?! ♘xf6—+) 10...♙xf2+ 11.♙f1 gxf6+;

B) 9.♚d2, defending both f2 and the bishop, is answered with 9...♚b6! 10.0-0-0 ♙b4+.

9...♙xf2+ 10.♙xf2 ♘g4+ 11.♙g3 ♚xg5 12.♘f3 ♚g6!+ 13.exd5 ♘ge5+?!

Black began to lose the advantage here and ended up drawing. It was better to play 13...♘gf6+!.

How to avoid Error 43

Everything said regarding the previous error is valid with respect to its diagnosis and the importance of solving exercises.

However, I think that the most important way to avoid this error is to overcome the pin postulate. For this, the main recommendation is to make an effort to differentiate the type of pin that I have called **inappropriate** in our classification and even consider it a simple, favourable alignment.

Error 44 - Failure to see emerging tactics

This has happened to all of us numerous times: we carefully select a move, and we check it very carefully until we are sure that there is nothing wrong with it, but the moment after making the move, we discover that it has an obvious tactical flaw... to our fresh eyes.

We have probably all wondered why this happens to us when we have already moved and not before, which is quite frustrating. The easiest answer is to put it down to bad luck. A more likely cause is the one suggested by Alexander Kotov in his book *Think like a Grandmaster*: our concentration routine leads us to delve very deeply into some moves, to the point where we ignore basic responses on the first move.

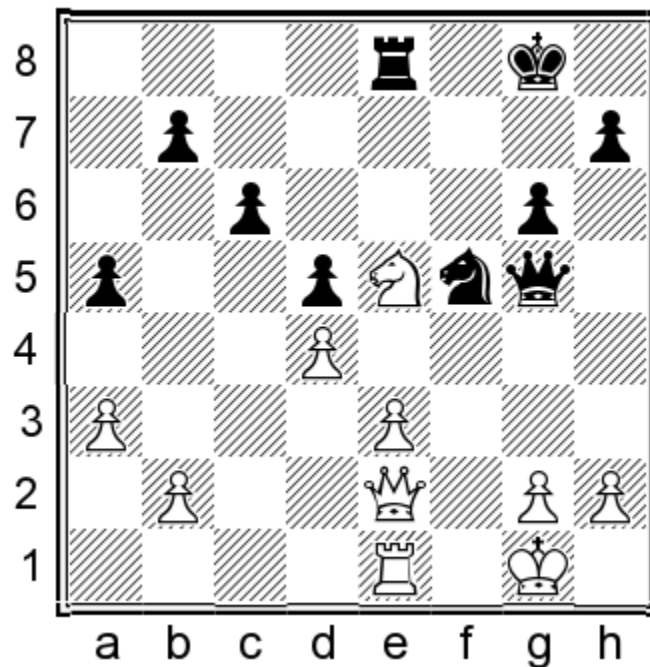
But I am going to suggest another cause. The position we see while we think is not the same as the one we see after we have moved. It is quite possible that the new move has created new tactical motifs, making our decision erroneous. It is clear that there are players who are more vulnerable to these ‘oversights’ than others. For years, I have been collecting such cases, and I have created batteries of exercises where the question was: ‘What is the natural move you should not make here?’; or ‘Discover the move that loses’, but I

must admit that I have not had the success that I had hoped for, probably because my exercises fail to replicate the conditions of a real game. Now, I only hope reflecting on this phenomenon will help readers reduce the percentage of frustrating moments.

Carlos Cribilles Perez (1756)

Manuel Muñoz Peláez (1946)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2014



In this position (Exercise 57), White covers up his structural defects with the good position of his knight on e5. But it is normal for him to feel uncomfortable and try to improve the coordination of his pieces:

28. ♔d2?

This threatens the pawn on a5, but it places the queen suspiciously on the same line as its black counterpart, creating a new tactical motif.

Instead, 28. ♔d3 would have maintained equality.

Black detected the drawback of White's move and played

28...♞xd4!

, which is the typical elegant move, but with basic calculation.

29.♔xd4

Black settles for gaining material and offers the exchange of queens:

29...♔xe5?!±

Instead, the black pieces would have achieved better coordination with 29...♖xe5! 30.♔b6 ♔e7 and the e3-weakness suffers greatly with the queens on the board, with both major black pieces focused on attacking it. Now with

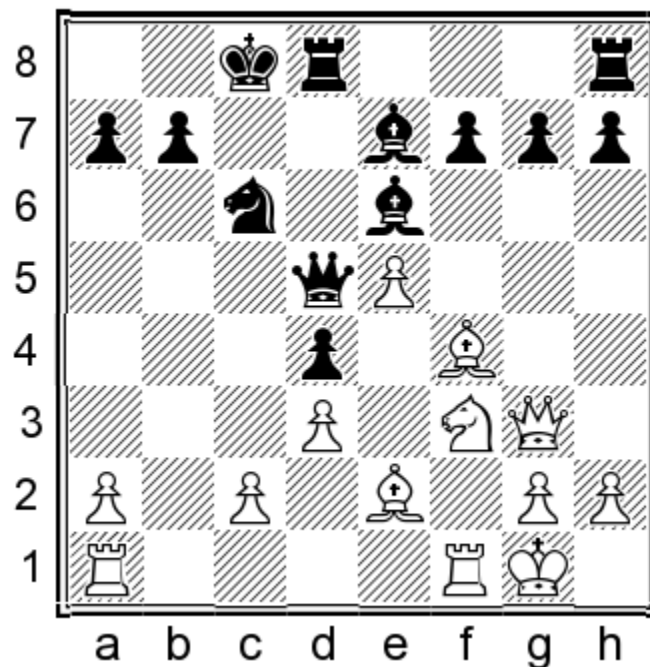
30.♔b6!

, White reduced his disadvantage, but Black won anyway.

Alex Arrese-Igor Royuela (1568)

Hector Laiz Ibanez (1934)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2014



Exercise 58

White decides to make a move to improve his e2-bishop (to f3) and perhaps his knight (to e4 or c4); a good decision strategically, but one which fails due to tactics.

14. ♖d2?

This leaves the f4-bishop without any squares. Instead, 14. ♘g5! ♕xg5 15. ♖xg5 would have given White a small advantage.

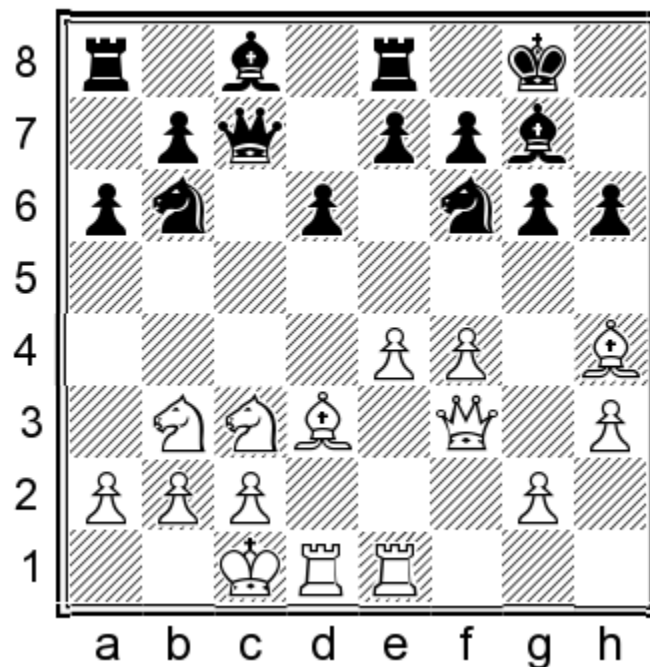
14...g5!

And Black wins a piece.

Ricardo Perez Pacheco (1965)

Juan Plazuelo Pascual (2140)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2014



Exercise 59

Black has no serious problems.

14...♞c4?

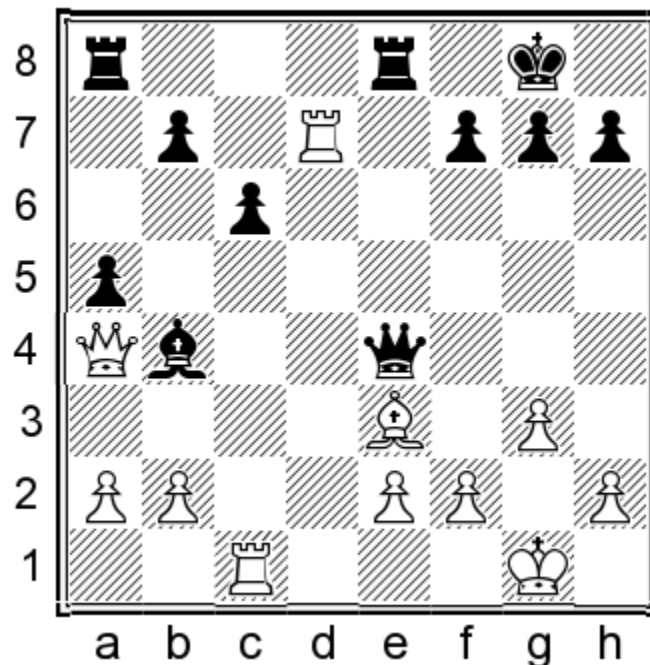
But this triggers a series of forcing moves (exchanges and attacks), ending in a fork. 14...♞fd7± was correct.

15.♙xf6! ♙xf6 16.♞d5! ♚c6 17.♙xc4 ♚xc4 18.♞b6+-

Mikel Santos Usúa (2004)

Gonzalo Martino Gironés (1898)

Pamplona 2023



We have arrived at Exercise 60.

White has just played 21. ♖d7, which could have been a very clever move, as Black's response was automatic. The only threat in the position is against the pawn on b7, but with Black's reply, some new tactical themes appear; however, as often happens, both players missed them.

21...♖e7?

Black needed to defend with the passive 21...♖ab8±.

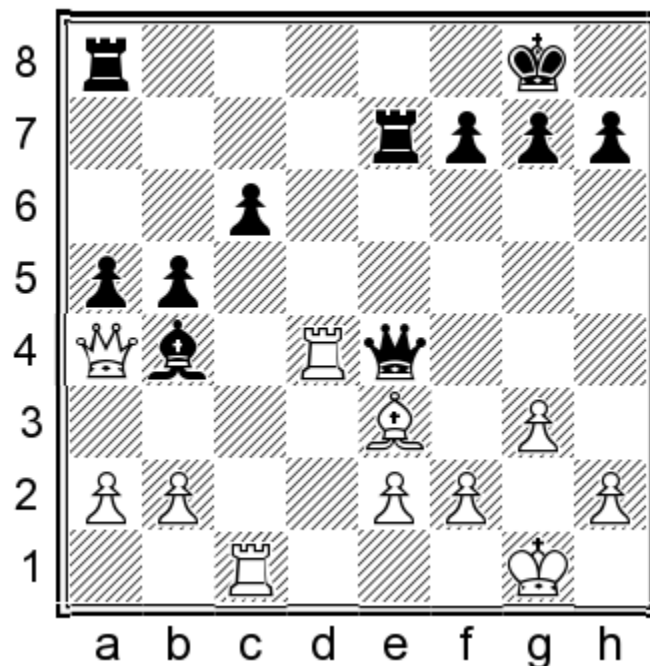
Now White could have won a piece with

22.♖d4!

, exploiting the fact that the rook on a8 is now unprotected, and, therefore, the a5-pawn is pinned. Instead, there followed 22.♔d1? ♕e6=.

22...b5!

An intermezzo that attempts a solution in extremis, because if 22...♕e6, then 23.♖xb4 wins a piece.



23.♔d1

But now the bishop on b4 remains trapped; another unwanted and unexpected effect of the position of the rook on e7.

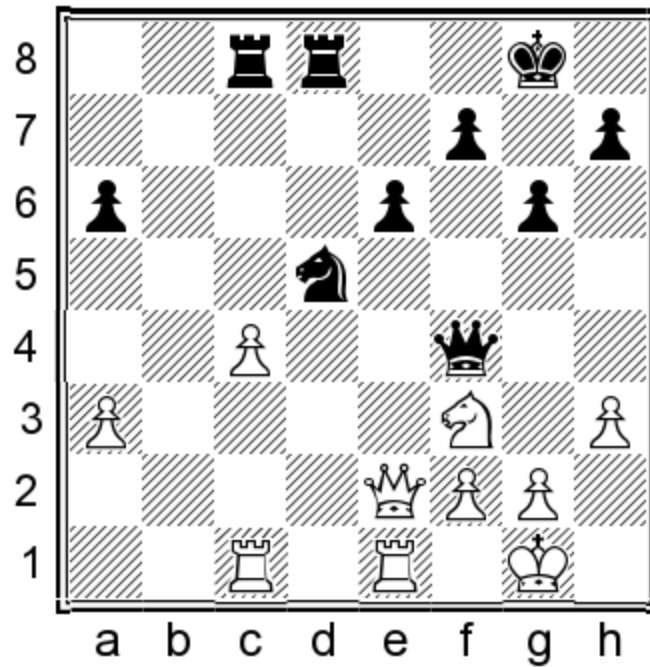
23...♕g6 24.a3

And the bishop is lost.

Julio Suarez Gómez (2400)

Bernat Serarols Mabras (2094)

Salobreña 2014



Isn't 32...♖c5 an attractive move? It certainly is.

32...♖c5??

32...♞e7!=.

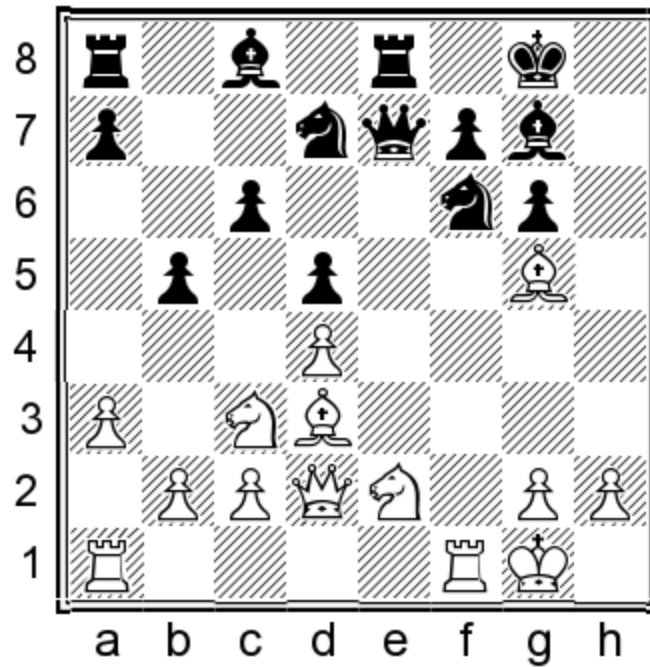
33.♞e5!

But now the rook is in range of a fork. Black loses material, as on the next move, 34.♞d3 also covers c1.

Luis Miguel Lechuga Cabrero (1680)

Rafael Pujante Martínez (1479)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U12 2014



Black's position might well be uncomfortable, but it is not bad. He can continue pursuing his plan on the queenside with 14...a5 or unpin with 14...♔d6.

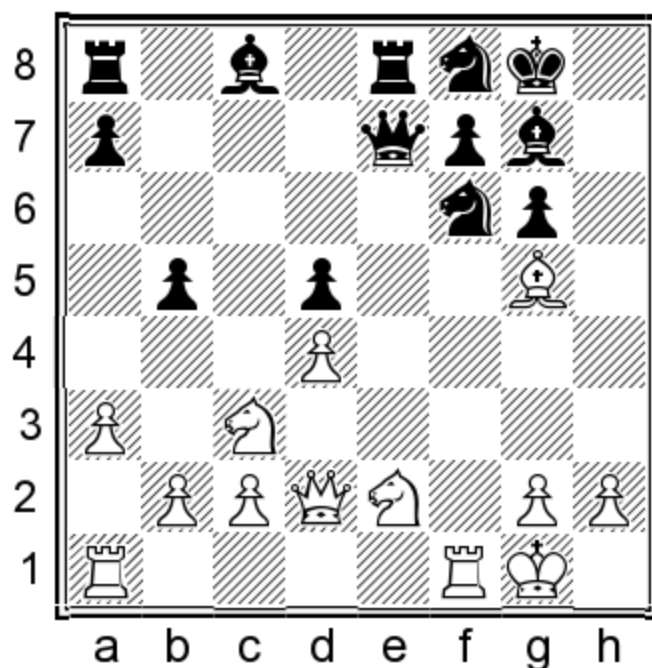
14...♞f8?

But he wanted to open the diagonal for his c8-bishop and eliminate the annoying pin with ...♞8h7, and in doing so, he left himself open to a new tactical theme. As we have already suggested in the introduction and will repeat in the conclusions of this theme, Black should have asked himself what it is that his chosen move no longer defends.

15.♙xb5!±

Fortunately for Black, White did not play this.

15...cxb5?



16. ♖xf6!

But not 16. ♘xd5?? ♔xe2.

16... ♖xf6 17. ♘xd5+-

How to avoid Error 44

Let us not forget that for all the errors in this chapter, the first remedy is to do a lot of exercises. All books and platforms are useful, and we have mentioned two in particular.

If your most frequent error is the third one, I could tell you that you are an absent-minded repeat offender, a very common characteristic amongst chess players and others whose minds are mathematically inclined. But that would only be a small provocation for you to focus more strongly on correcting it.

If you are aware of your absent-mindedness, do not use it as an excuse or accept it as something inevitable, so deeply rooted in your nature that you will never be able to eliminate it.

Of course, the third error is related to a thinking routine that can be improved, and possibly to a certain difficulty in controlling small

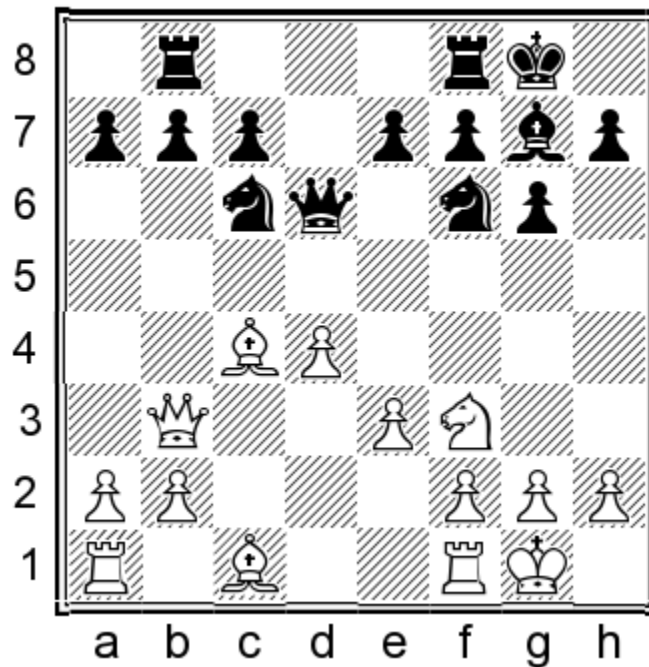
emotions. **The final recommendation is to be very aware of the error and make an effort to organise your thinking better.** In this case, I fear doing plenty of exercises will only help to a limited extent.

Chapter 11

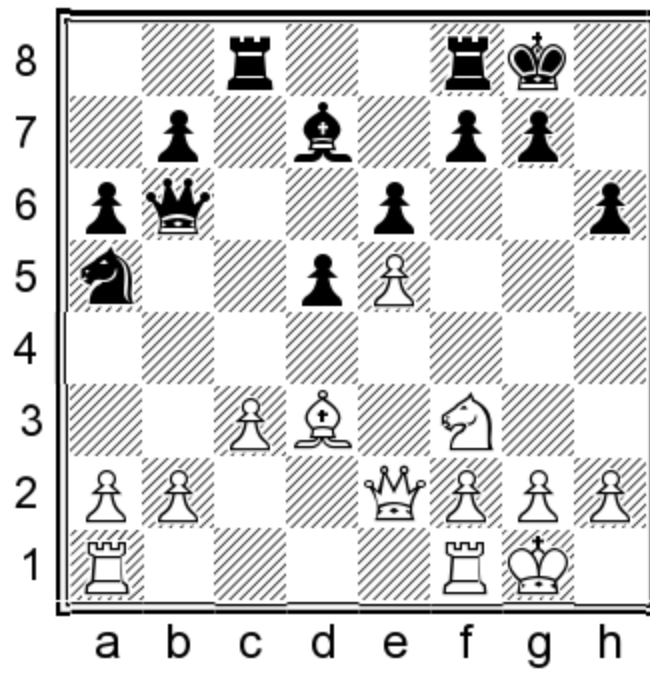
Prophylactic thinking

- Error 45 - Failure to prevent the opponent's plans
- Error 46 - Failure to employ automatic prevention
- Error 47 - Failure to prepare active moves properly

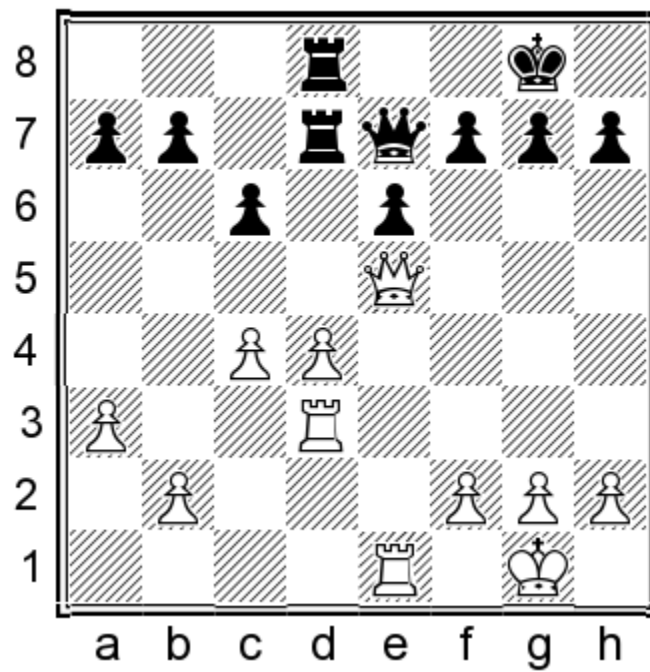
Exercises for Chapter 11



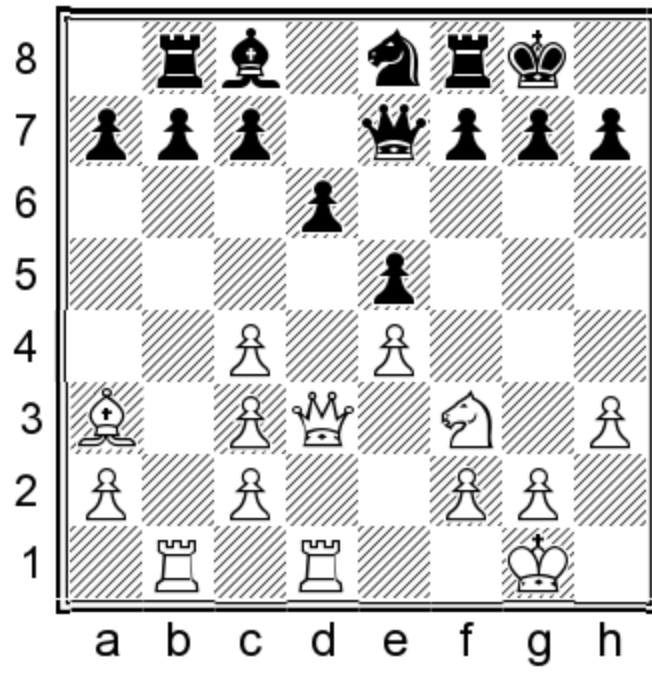
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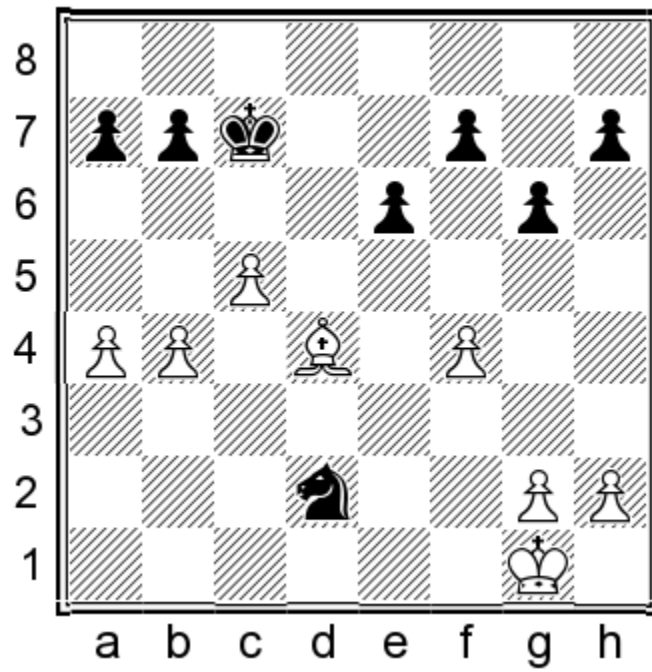
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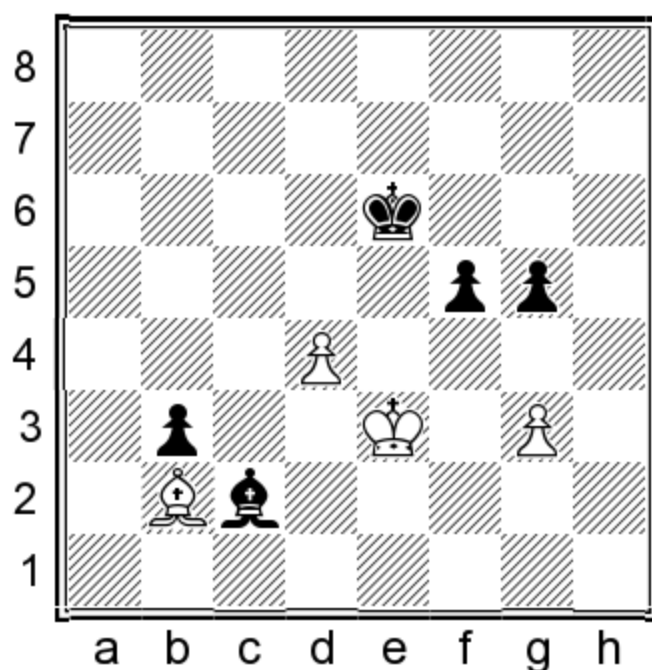
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64



65



66

The best chess trainer is yourself. (Tigran Petrosian, 9th World Chess Champion)

Prophylaxis is a relatively modern concept, at least in its generalised application, although Aron Nimzowitsch was an early advocate. It is not difficult to understand, once it is explained to you, but developing it yourself is another story, although some players apply it instinctively and from an early age. In my opinion, its definition and its range of application are still subject to debate. But what is certain is that it is not possible to reach a good level of play without internalising it and applying it intuitively.

Many definitions of prophylaxis have been given. One of the most convincing is the following: ‘Prophylaxis consists of preventing moves, plans or intentions on the part of the opponent before these

represent a threat.’ I also like the following one, which I put forward provocatively: ‘Prophylaxis is defence without calculation.’

In any case, it is not a concept related to the strength or movement of the pieces. It is part of the thinking routine during the game, although some players go so far as to turn it into a style of play. But although defining prophylaxis is easy, despite it being a subtle concept, it is not easy to decide when and how it should be applied. Prophylaxis is more related to defence and playing in strategic positions where there is no need to hurry. This tends to be frustrating for attacking players, who can find themselves disarmed and disorientated before the battle even begins. In fact, some players (Petrosian, Karpov) have used it extensively as a weapon of mass confusion. However, players of an active style can also benefit from it in various manifestations, making their attacking plans more difficult to parry.

It is important to be aware that playing purely prophylactically can lead to passivity and that, in certain positions, it is better not to apply it.

I will make an exception here and put forward some suggestions on how to avoid errors that could have been placed at the end of the chapter. I am doing this because I think it will be more effective to mention them now, allowing us to analyse the examples with the appropriate focus.

It is preferable to apply prophylaxis to sound positions with no static disadvantage, which could benefit from defensive measures. In contrast, prophylaxis is not applicable to positions with a dynamic advantage where energetic play is required.

I identify three ways to apply it:

1) attention to (or vigilance in the face of) the opponent’s intentions;

- 2) prevention of the opponent's plans;
- 3) preparation of one's own plans.

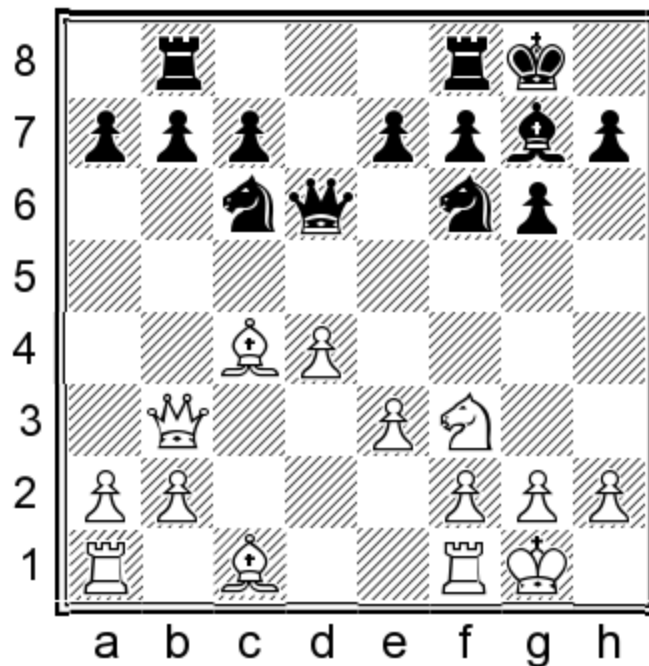
The examples in these final two chapters are intended to illustrate the most typical errors that are made due to forgetting or misapplying these concepts.

Error 45 - Failure to prevent the opponent's plans

One of the functions of prophylactic thinking, I would even say the most obvious one, is to prevent the opponent's plans. The balance between applying our own plans and preventing our opponent's is a constant throughout the game and is sometimes difficult to get right. However, there are some positions where it is very clear that the priority should be to consider the opponent's plans first.

We begin with an example in which prophylaxis is required, and it is not a defensive strategy.

Daniel Roldan Marques (1814)
Francisco Orantes Taboada (1939)
Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2014



In the diagram position (Exercise 61), either White is slightly better (bishop pair, centre pawn) or Black can equalise by eliminating the bishop pair with ... Na5 or else freeing his position with ...e5.

16. Qc2 ?

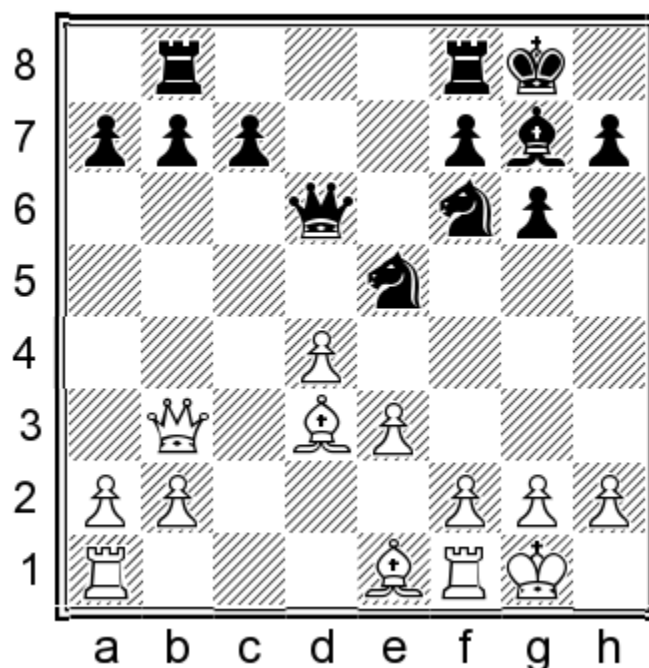
White attends to one of the opponent's plans but ignores the other, the freeing move ...e5; or perhaps he could not see how to prevent it.

A) 16. Qd2 ! was the best move, preventing not only 16... Na5 but also the other freeing move 16...e5?! , which now has various tactical problems but only one that clearly refutes it: 17. Ng5 ! (attacking f7) 17... Qe7 18. d5 Nd8 19. $\text{Bb4}+-$.

The other resource 17. Nxe5 ? Nxe5 18. Bb4 is unclear due to an exchange of dissimilar material, which would perhaps not have been played (see **Error 30**), namely 18... Nxc4 ! 19. Qxd6 Nxd6 .

16... Ne4 is natural and slightly better, but White can continue calmly with 17. Qe1 , which prepares to play Rc1 , as well as to expel the knight with Qc2 , but the important thing is that ...e5 still does not work at all; for instance, if 17...e5, White has a few promising

continuations: 18.♔d3! (18.d5!? ♞c5 19.♞c2 ♞e7 20.♔b4±)
 18...♞f6 19.♞xe5 ♞xe5,



analysis diagram

and now White has the important intermezzo 20.♔b4 c5 21.♔xc5
 ♞c7 22.dxe5 ♞xc5 23.exf6 ♔xf6 24.♖ac1 ♞e5 25.♖c2 with a clear
 plus;

B) 16.♞c3!? is another move that prevents both of Black's plans,
 but it allows a new idea: 16...♞d7!= and the knight can be
 transferred to b6, gaining time. In addition, it increases control of
 the e5-square, with four pieces, which will make ...e5 unstoppable.

16...e5!

Freeing his position and equalising.

17.dxe5 ♞xe5 18.♞xe5 ♞xe5

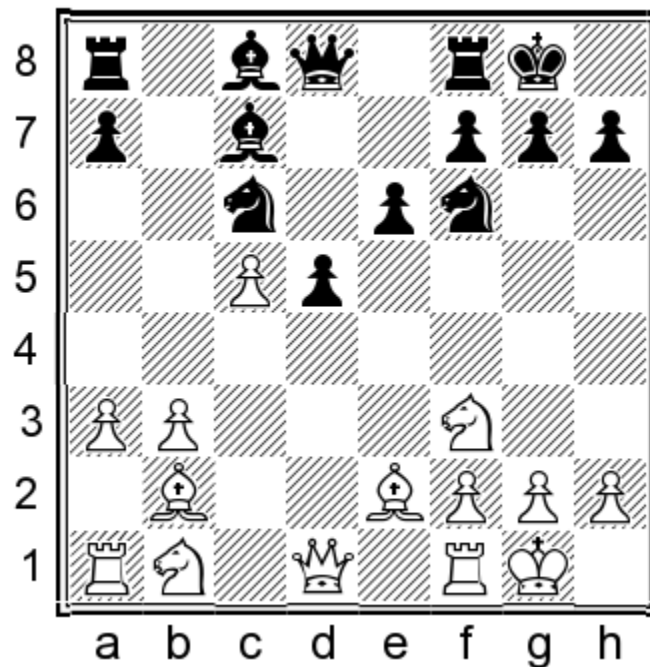
And despite the bishop pair, White has no advantage, as the black
 pieces are very active. Black ended up winning.

In the next example, I want to show how effective it can be to pay attention first to the opponent's plans and then only to our own.

Diego Macías Pino (2355)

Javier Montero Olmos (1751)

Salobreña ch-ESP U16 2022



With pawn majorities on opposite wings, the position is almost always double-edged. If Black's centre is able to advance, he will be better, but if not, he will be worse. It is hard to believe that the key lies in prophylaxis in a position like this, but if we apply progressive thinking, it seems very logical.

12...a5?

With this move, Black tried to apply direct prophylaxis, preventing b4, but it failed for tactical reasons. If he had foreseen the game continuation, it would have been easier for him to think about 12...a6! , which prevents ♖b5 (the first step is to see that 12...e5? is not possible due to 13.♗b5 when White is clearly better) and reduces the force of b4. White would then be unable to prevent ...e5,

with the better game for Black; for example, 13.b4 e5 and now 14.b5 works badly due to 14...axb5 15.♙xb5 ♖b8! 16.a4 e4.

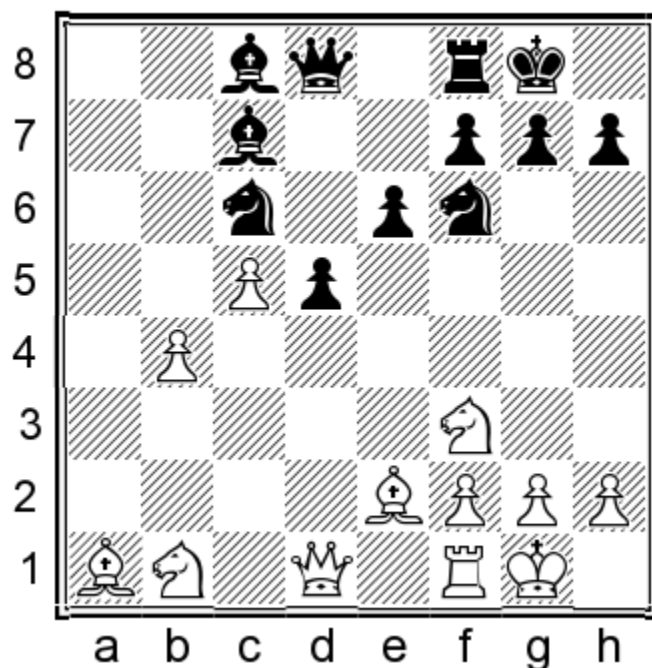
13.b4!

The move that Black wanted to prevent arrives with greater force, based on some subtle tactical details.

13...axb4

Black cannot allow b5.

14.axb4 ♖xa1 15.♙xa1



15...♘e4

Black abstains from 15...♘xb4? 16.♙a4 ♙a5 17.♙c3 ♙d7 18.♙b5 and finally the piece is lost.

16.b5 ♘e7 17.♙c2

But now White's two passed pawns decide the game.

17...♘g6 18.♘bd2 f5 19.b6 ♙b8 20.♖b1 ♘f4 21.♙f1 ♙e7 22.c6 ♙d6 23.b7 ♙c5 24.♘xe4 fxe4 25.b8♙ exf3 26.g3 ♙d6 27.♙bb3

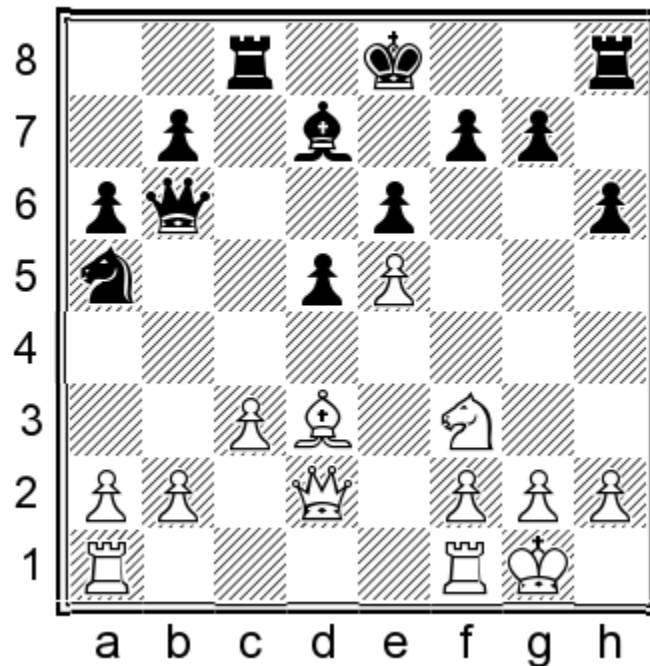
And Black resigned.

In the following game, during the first moves of an attack we are going to reflect upon how it can be prepared and how it can be prevented – the two sides of prophylaxis, represented by each of the two players. This phase is related to **Error 17**: ‘Facilitating the opponent’s attack’, but here we shall focus on the typical prevention manoeuvres.

Pablo Soto Martin (2130)

Marcos Lianes García (1953)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14. 2015



A typical position in the French Defence structure has been reached; the same structure also arises frequently in the Sicilian. It looks quite normal, but in fact, this is a critical position. White is better, but not with just any move.

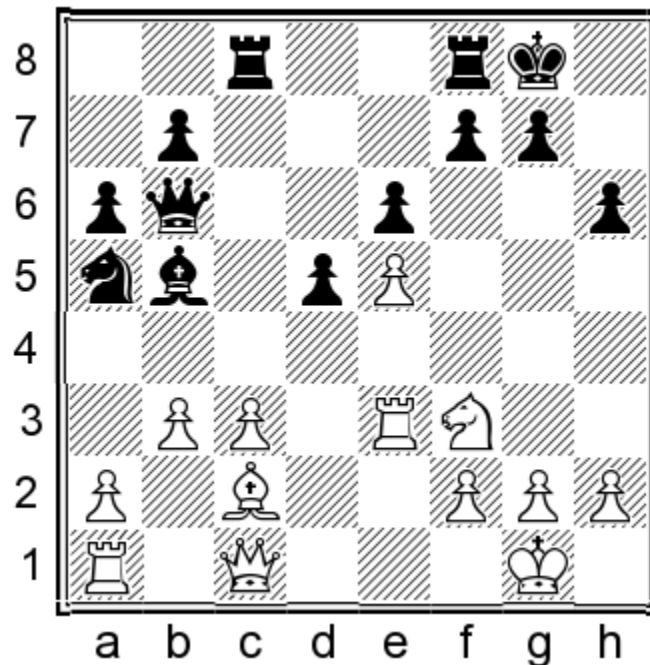
17. ♔e2?

It is not usual to castigate a move of this type, but it loses all the advantage. It was necessary to apply prophylaxis, to prevent ‘the opponent’s prophylaxis’, and specifically to prevent the exchange of

White's attacking bishop. More concretely: White wants to attack, while Black wants to prevent this with ...♘b5; therefore, White should prevent the exchange of bishops in order to continue with his attack.

17.♖fe1!! was the natural and correct move. This conclusion is reached by the following reasoning: White's main attacking piece is the bishop, so it is essential to prevent its exchange, which is what Black wants to achieve with ...♘b5:

A) If 17...♘b5, then 18.♙c2 ♘c4 19.♚c1 0-0 20.b3 ♘a5 21.♖e3,



analysis diagram

followed by ♙d2, ♖ae1 and attacking moves. It is very common for the attacker to have to accept a weakness, in this case on c3, rather than allow the exchange of an important piece, but this is not always a correct strategy; flexibility is essential;

B) 17...♘c4 18.♙xc4!. Exchanging the bishop for the knight does not eliminate White's advantage because he remains with an unopposed knight: 18...dxc4 19.♘d4.

There are other candidate moves to consider, but these are not as good:

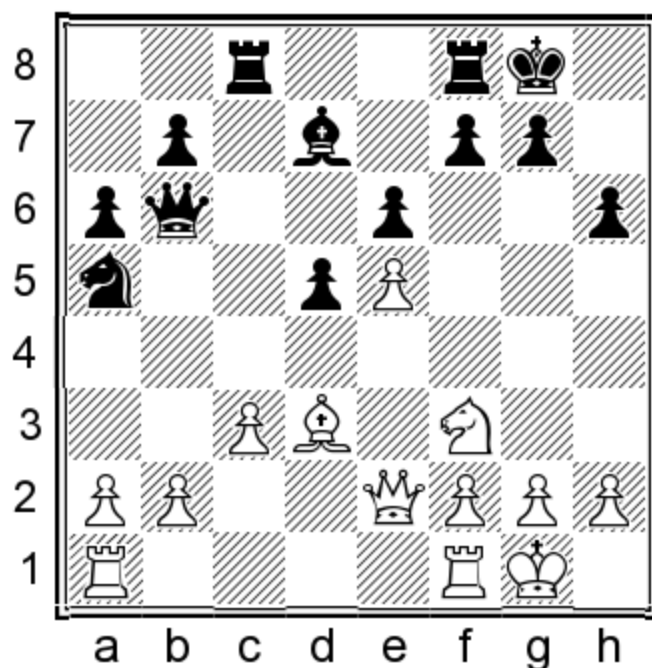
17.♘d4!? fails to prevent 17...♙b5!; 17.b3 leaves the c3-pawn very weak and also does not prevent 17...♙b5!; 17.a4? is not possible due to 17...♘b3.

Now, we have arrived at Exercise 62.

17...0-0?!

This move comes close to being a case of **mistimed castling** (see **Error 40**).

Contrary to what we have seen in most examples in Chapter 1, the exchange of pieces with 17...♙b5! is good for Black and is the only way to prevent White's attack, so it is a prophylactic decision. It trades a passive bishop for an active one which stands ready to attack Black's king position. Black probably rejected it due to the doubling of his pawns, but this weakness is not serious, although this needs to be verified with some variations: 18.♙xb5+ ♔xb5! (18...axb5 is not bad either) 19.♔xb5+ axb5 20.a3 (20.♘d4 is the move that might be unpleasant, but after 20...♘c4! 21.♘xb5 ♔e7 Black regains the pawn with the more pleasant position) 20...♘b3 21.♖ad1 ♖c4 with equality.



Once again, we are facing a critical moment.

18.♖fe1?

Now, prophylaxis against the exchange of bishops was more difficult, but it had to be applied: 18.♙b1!! (an exceptional decision) 18...♙b5?! 19.♔c2! g6 20.♖e1, followed by the attack against Black's weakened king position.

Again, 18.♘d4!? was possible, but it would allow Black to redeploy the knight with an offer to trade: 18...♘c6! with equality;

But 18.a4! is interesting now; for example, 18...♘b3 19.♖a2 ♘c5 20.♙c2±, with the same plan of attack as in the game.

18...♘c6?

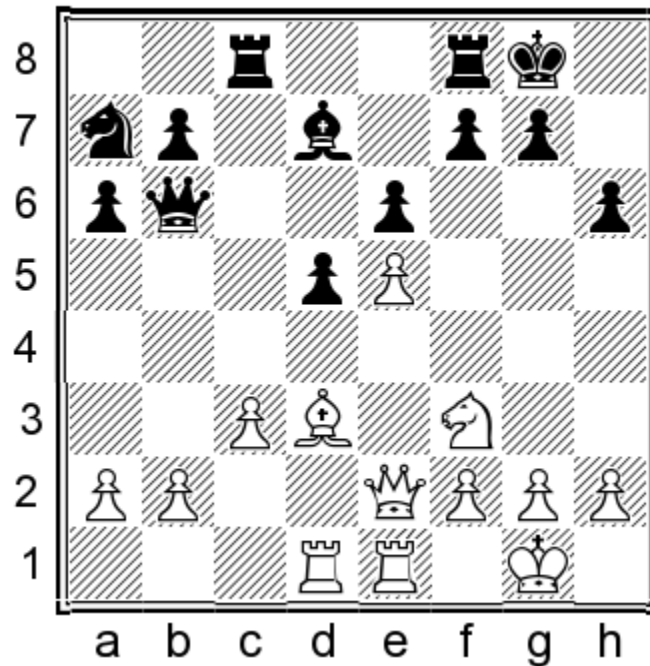
Black seems to reject the option of trading bishops definitively, condemning himself to face the attack; 18...♙b5!=.

19.♖ad1

Here, 19.♙c2!, preparing ♔d3, was stronger; for example, 19...f6 20.exf6 ♖xf6 21.♔d3±.

19...♘a7

Now, it is finally revealed that Black does indeed want to trade the bishops, but without changing his pawn structure. Instead, 19...f5! was a bit better: 20.exf6 ♖xf6±.



20.♗b1!

But now White avoids the trade, and as well as ♔d3, he can contemplate bringing his rook into the attack via d4.

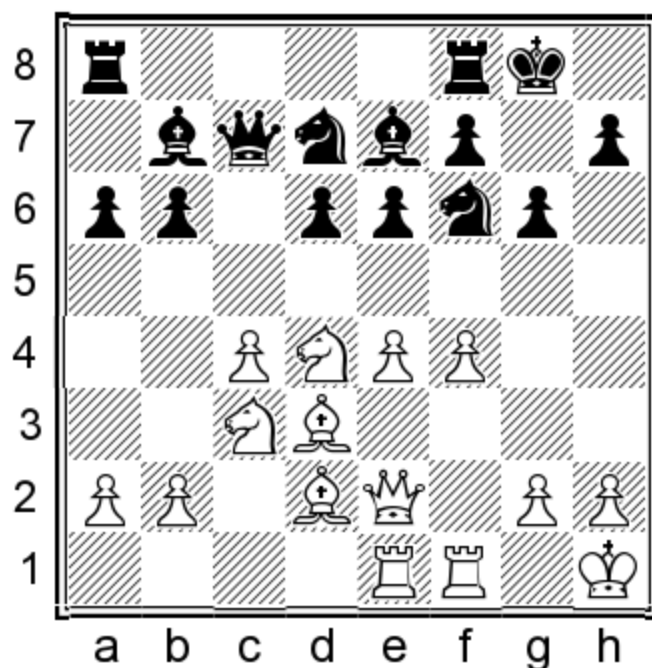
20...♞c6 21.h4! g6 22.h5 ♔g7 23.♞h2!

The knight seeks new targets. White's attack is winning, but subsequent errors brought about the opposite result.

Jenny María Sanabria Taskila (1938)

Noé Fuentes Perez (2061)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2020



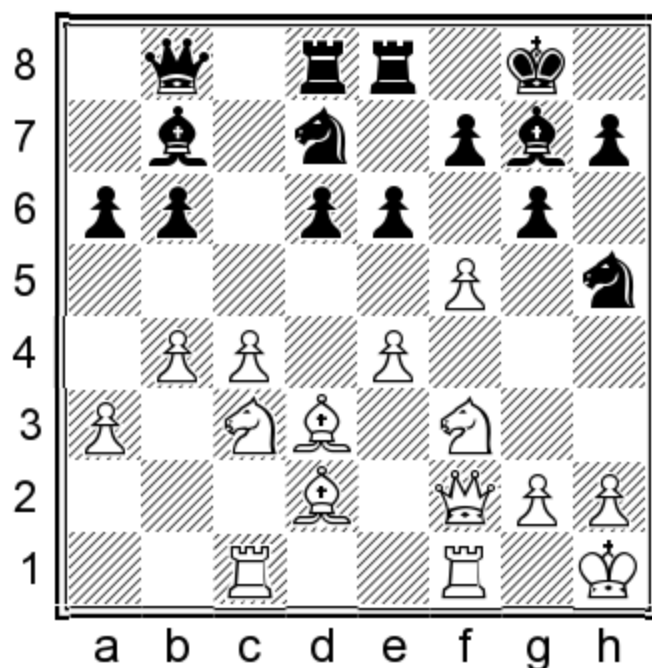
The black position might appear dangerous, and indeed it is, but it occurs about ten times in the MegaBase and is typical of the Sicilian Defence.

It is clear that White is preparing f5. Therefore, Black should take measures against this, although it cannot be prevented. In this case, we are going to see a rather different approach to the one taken in the previous examples, but one that is no less common: observe the bad aspects of the opponent's threat and get ready to exploit them.

15...♖fd8?

The move in the game has no positive effects against the opponent's plan. Black had a whole series of interesting moves available, which are worth breaking down to see their consequences:

A) Most people have played 15...♖fe8!, which is quite sound and at least deters f5: 16.♘f3 ♖ad8 17.b4 ♙f8 18.a3 ♙g7 19.♙f2 ♘h5 20.♖c1 ♙b8 21.f5.



analysis diagram

Black has played perfectly until White makes this break; the feeling of being attacked in spite of everything disconcerts him, or everything simply becomes more difficult, and he makes an error: 21...♖c8? (21...exf5 22.exf5 ♔a8 was unclear) 22.♘g5± , Naiditsch-Predojevic, Serbia teams 2008;

B) 15...♖ac8!? renounces prophylaxis and opts instead for a counterattack, which might well arrive in time: 16.f5 ♘e5! 17.fxe6 ♘xd3 18.♔xd3 ♔xc4;

C) 15...e5?! is not such a good idea, as it allows a knight jump to the d5-square, which is unpleasant for Black; for instance, 16.fxe5 dxe5 17.♘b3 ♖ad8 18.♘d5! ♘xd5 19.cxd5 and White accumulates a series of small advantages: the strong pawn on d5, the h6-square for his bishop, the f-file and the eventual capture on a6;

D) 15...♖ae8!? can also be considered, because winning the exchange with 16.f5 exf5 17.♗h6? allows Black a tremendous reaction with 17...♘g4 18.♗xf8 d5!, winning.

16.f5!

Threatening to take on e6.

16...e5

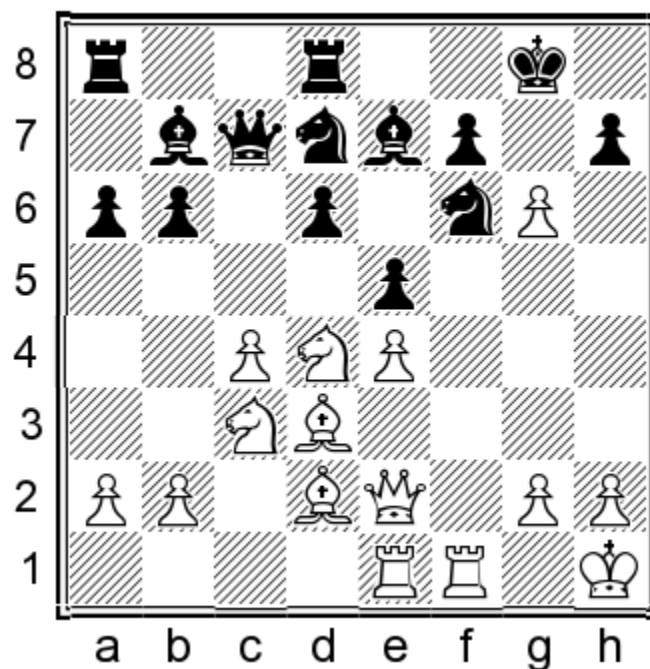
16...♞e5? does not defend the pawn: 17.fxe6.

16...♞f8 also fails to hold the position for very long: 17.fxe6 fxe6 18.♞d5! (or 18.♚h6) 18...exd5 19.exd5 ♖e8 20.♚f2 and White wins.

17.fxg6?!

White lets herself get carried away by this attractive move, but all three retreats of the knight were much stronger; for example, 17.♞c2 ♞c5 18.♞e3 ♞xd3 19.♚xd3, threatening, among other things, fxg6, followed by ♖xf6.

There was also 17.♞f3, intending ♞d5.



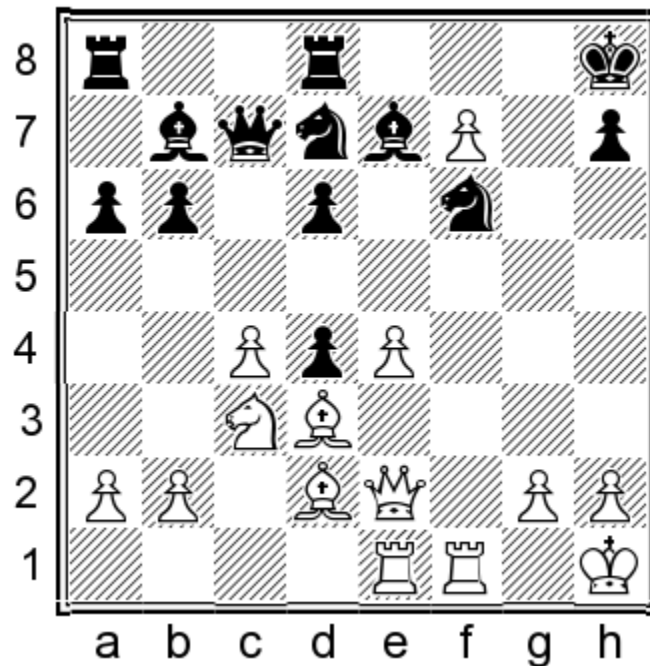
17...exd4!

A brave and necessary capture. If 17...hxg6?, then 18.♞f5, starting a decisive attack.

18.gxf7+ ♔h8??

But now, Black gets carried away by the instinct to place the king in the corner, which prevails over cold calculation.

Much less clear was 18...♔xf7! 19.♘d5 ♙xd5 20.exd5 ♞e5 21.♙xh7 ♔g7, which keeps Black in the game, although after 22.♙f5 the white position is promising.



19.♘d5! ♙xd5 20.exd5 ♞e5 21.♙g5 ♞fg4 22.♙xe7 1-0

For if 22...♔xe7, 23.♔xg4 decides.

How to avoid Error 45

I think there are only two things one can do, although there are numerous ways to do them: pay more attention to the opponent's plans and analyse positions where this occurs.

I do not know of a single book that is devoted exclusively to prevention. I think such a book would be very useful. The trainer who has emphasised this the most has been Mark Dvoretsky. I recommend his *Recognizing Your Opponent's Resources: Developing Preventive Thinking*, which is useful for all the errors covered in the last two chapters, and the corresponding chapter in

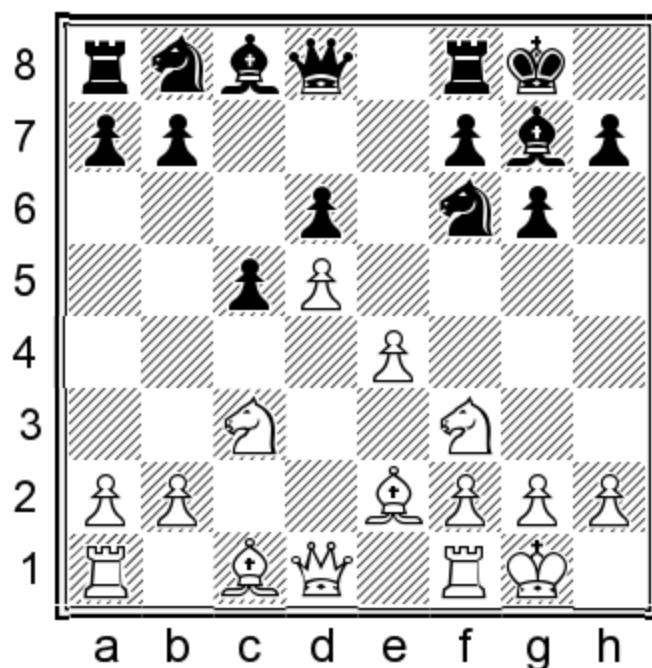
his earlier book Positional Play. I also recommend the short but useful sections in the books Chess Café Puzzle Book 2 and 4 by Karsten Müller.

The main recommendation is to try to apply prophylaxis in your own games. Do it progressively, don't overdo it and find your correct balance. Never underestimate prophylactic players; if you do, they will beat you, and the worst thing is... you won't know how it happened.

Error 46 - Failure to employ automatic prevention

In this section, we will study another situation related to prophylactic thinking, which is not very important in chess strategy but is definitely important in its influence on the errors made by club players.

First, let us describe it: sometimes we find ourselves in a position where our opponent is going to make a move that simply improves his position and has become an obvious one, based on the experience of many years of chess praxis and strategy. We can prevent this with a simple move that is also obvious and has only that function. It is not only the best move, but also a very practical decision. Perhaps the most common example in opening theory arises in the Modern Benoni Defence, where White should respond (or rather almost always responds) with a4 to Black's attempt to expand, starting with ...a6.



If Black plays ...a6, on an almost overwhelming percentage of occasions White responds with a4. This is something that we have all assumed naturally. However, if you bother to check, you will see that here, White can play ♕f4, and in that case ...b5 is not a good reply.

If it were only a question of positions in the opening, it would depend on knowing or not knowing the theory. But what happens is that decisions of this type occur mainly in middlegame positions, and we shall see that they can even arise in endgame positions.

Another similar situation is when we can fix a small defect in our position with one simple move, although we are not forced to do it right away.

In such cases, the simplest course of action is to make that move (preventively), and that is it (i.e. then we can move on to something else). **I usually call this situation Simple Automatic Prevention or its acronym SAP. The SAP is neither necessary nor obligatory, and sometimes it is no better than other moves, but it is almost always the most practical decision.**

Here is a short list of situations where it is appropriate to apply it:

- preventing expansion on a wing;
- preventing an unpleasant pin;
- neutralising/eliminating a pin;
- preventing an obvious pawn break;
- removing the king from an open line;
- after castling queenside, moving the king to b1;
- hiding the king, which has had to come out for some reason;
- and a very important one that arouses some controversy: opening an escape hole for the king.

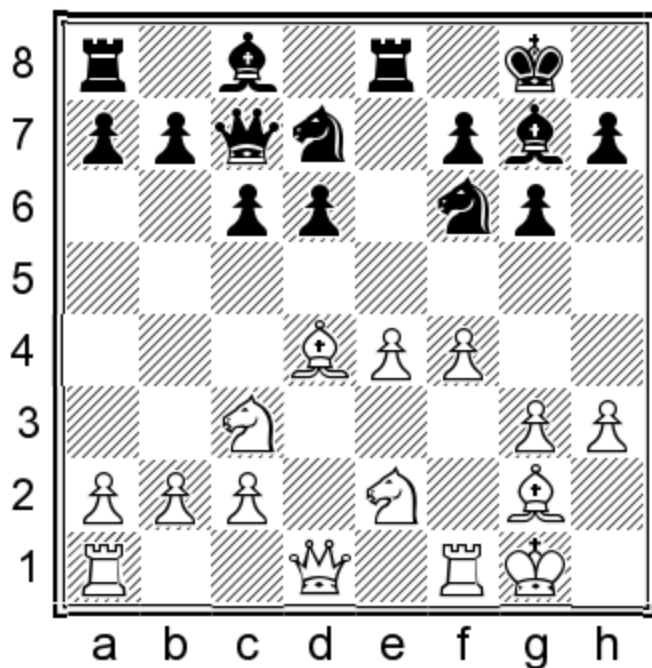
Now, let us see some examples. The concept is simple and easy to apply when we are conscious of it, but I have selected some examples that present some difficulties. Furthermore, in the positions presented, the reader does not know the opponent's last move, which almost always puts us on track of what they intend.

We shall begin with one of the most typical cases, which involves preventing expansion on a flank. Sometimes (generally at the start of the middlegame), we witness a constant interchange of moves of prevention and expansion on the part of both players, as in the following example:

Mikel Ortega López (2088)

Sergio Calvo Ruiz (1752)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2014



The diagram position is a simple example of automatic prevention of an expansion. Although the move g4 by White is attractive, there is no reason not to postpone it by one move and first hinder Black's expansion with ...b5.

12.g4?

It is curious that in the MegaBase we find just four games with this move, from all levels and all periods.

In this case, the automatic preventive move is also the best option: 12.a4! b6 (12...a5) and now 13.g4±. It is important to point out that although the move ...b5 by Black is unclear and might even be bad, White loses nothing by preventing it right now because otherwise he will have to do it later anyway, and then the benefit might be small.

12...a5?

In this game, Black was too ambitious in preparing his queenside expansion and he decided to play ...b5 on the next move; it was his bad luck that White now prevented it. Or perhaps he failed to

calculate properly the consequences of the natural expansion. Let us look at this. In fact, 12...b5! was perfectly correct:

A) It was essential to check that 13.e5? does not work: 13...dxe5 14.fxe5 ♞xe5 15.♞xb5 cxb5! 16.♙xa8 h5, with terrific compensation for the exchange due to the weakness of the area around the white king;

B) The immediate 13.g5 also needed checking, but this is harmless due to 13...♞h5 14.♙f3 b4!;

C) So 13.a3 and now Black should play 13...h6!, preventing the g5 advance and at the same time intending to play ...a5 on the next move.

13.a4!

Now White quite correctly prevents ...b5.

13...b6?

Black, on the other hand, continues without preventing g5. Instead, 13...h6! would now be an example of **SAP** and the best move. Now White could have secured a big advantage with:

14.g5!

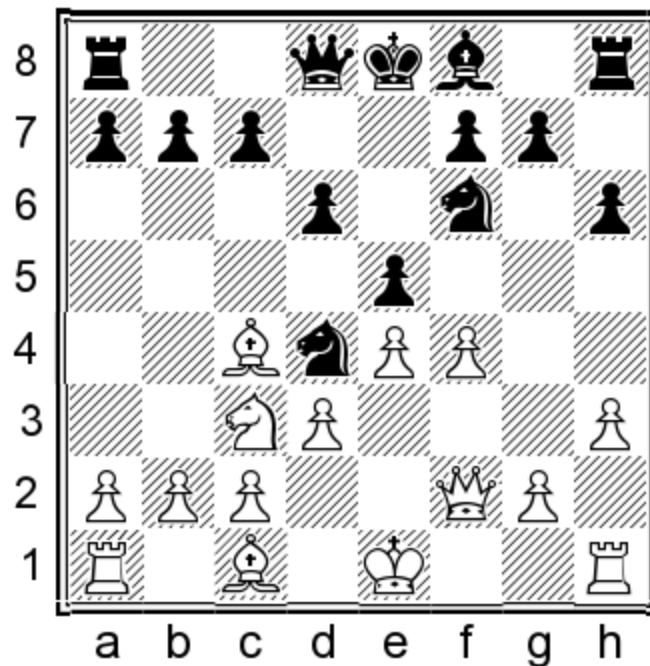
(instead of preparing it further with 14.♞g3?!, as White did in the game)

14...♞h5 15.♙f3

Julio Centeno Mendoza (2071)

Javier Ruiz Vazquez (1654)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2021



White has accumulated various advantages (the bishop pair, the f-file), and just here Black played

9...c6

, which is an unmistakable signal that he is preparing an expansion.

10.♘e3?!

White responds with a natural developing move, but this loses almost all his advantage. There was no reason to allow the expansion since it could be easily prevented, at no inconvenience to White, with 10.a4!.

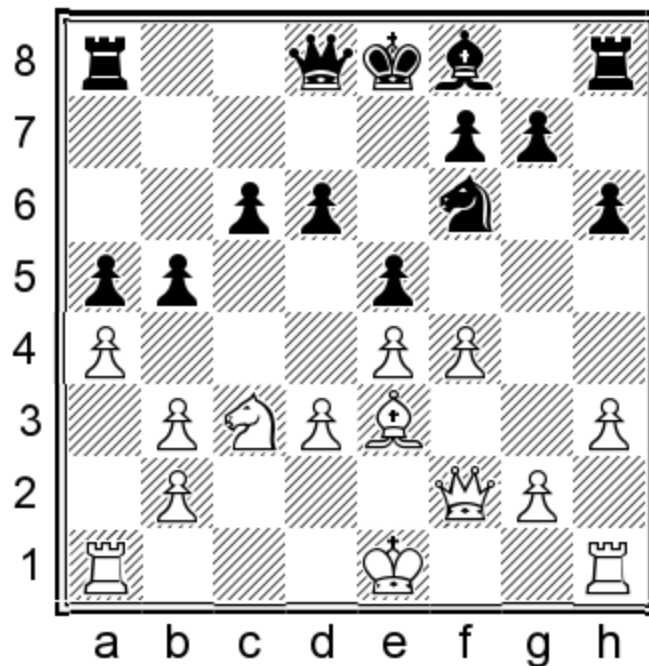
10...b5! 11.♘b3 a5

The white bishop now has problems.

12.a4

Instead, 12.fxe5 dxe5 13.♙g3 ♖b8 14.a4 is similar.

12...♞xb3 13.cxb3



And now, instead of 13...b4? 14.♘e2 ♔d7, which was played in the game, helping the white knight on its way to join in the attack and resulting in a quick win for White, Black could have gained promising counterplay with:

13...bxa4 14.bxa4 ♖b8

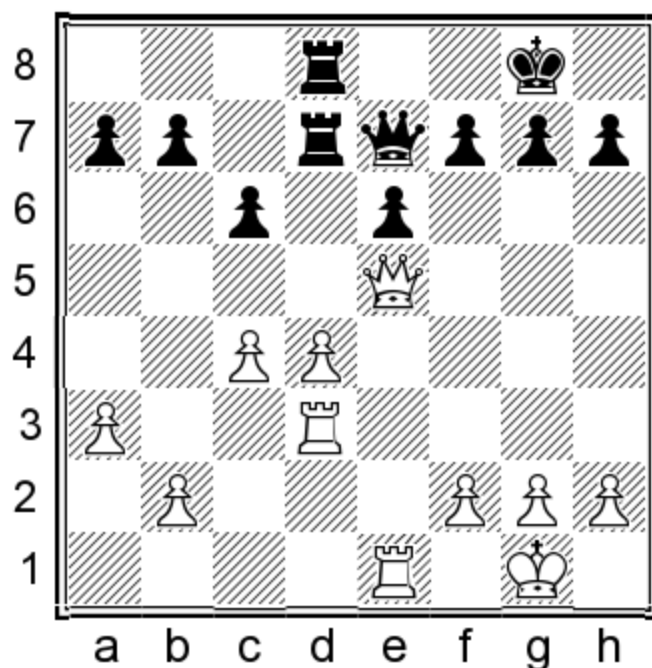
Pawn breaks are one of the principal elements of strategy, and they belong to the group of irreversible moves.

Although the pawn break concept weighs heavily in the next example, which could have been included in **Error 21**, I want to present this case from the viewpoint of prevention.

Valentín Bueno Del Amo (1614)

Javier Aledo Yanguas (1772)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2014



The diagram position (Exercise 63) looks boring, which is often an ideal time to reduce vigilance and become worse. The fact is that Black is threatening ...b5, which would give him control of the d5-square; it would not be a pawn sacrifice, thanks to the intermezzo ...♖d5. Another thing is that both players would have considered it.

22.♖ed1?

Sure enough, White does not prevent it. Admittedly, the move ...b5 contains various subtleties, but one of the fundamentals of simple prevention is that it is applied for practical reasons, and it is not essential to check all the details. In other words, if you see that ...b5 is unpleasant, you should prevent it forever and can then forget about it.

A) In short, prophylaxis against ...b5 should have been applied, and although there are various ways to do it, the simplest one is 22.a4! (which would represent a case of **SAP**); for example, 22...♙b4 (22...♙f6!) 23.b3 ♖xd4 24.♖xd4 ♖xd4 25.♙b8+ with equality;

B) Unsurprisingly, another of the cases of simple prevention, i.e. creating an escape hole for the king, has an important role here, because only the major pieces remain. The fact is that after 22.g3!?, which we could consider as an example of **SAP** to create an escape hole, the break loses strength; for instance, 22...b5?! (Black should apply the same principle and play 22...h6, which converts ...b5 into an important strategic threat and could persuade White to play 23.a4?!, a third consecutive **SAP** move, but which is not the best option now, due to some tactical details (it was preferable to play 23.♔e4!): 23...♔b4 24.b3 ♖xd4 25.♖c1! c5 24.d5! with even chances.

22...♔d6?

And Black fails to take advantage of the gift, – probably because he thinks that with the exchange of queens, the d4-pawn might fall. Instead, after 22...b5!, to gain the d5-square, 23.cxb5 (23.♖c1 does not work well due to 23...c5!) 23...♖d5! 24.♔e4 cxb5 Black is better.

23.♔e4!

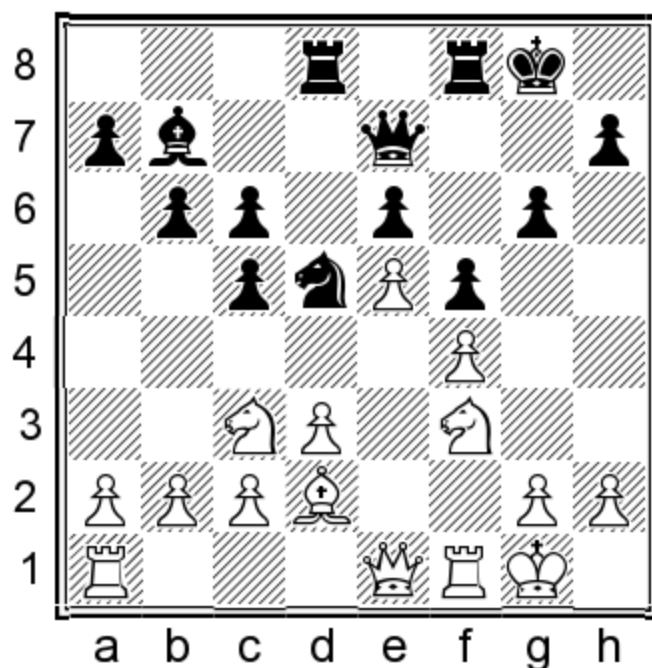
Finally, White manages to defend his pawns and contain the danger of ...b5 (thanks to the attack on c6).

A situation in which it is very appropriate to prevent (or at least keep a close eye on) a pawn break is in structures with doubled pawns.

Iñigo Ayucar Núñez (1394)

Carmen Menéndez Osorio (1220)

Spanish Team Championship U14 2019



With this structure, White will be better as long as Black cannot play ...c4 in favourable circumstances. Therefore, **SAP** indicates that White should play 16.b3, which, in fact, is the best move here.

16.♔g3?!

Trying to attack. I suggest that the reader now consults his engine to ascertain Black's best two moves. It was necessary to play 16.b3!, with a big advantage.

16...♖d7?!

16...c4! eliminates the doubled pawn, and as a consequence, the bishop on b7 will come into play. And it is not a pawn sacrifice:

17.dxc4 ♘xc3 18.♙xc3 ♔c5+ 19.♔h1 ♔xc4.

16...♘xc3 17.♙xc3 c4 was also correct.

17.♘g5?

Once again, 17.b3! was the right move.

17...♖fd8?!

And here Black had two good moves, both based on the ...c4 break: 17...♞b4! 18.♠ac1 c4 or 17...c4!, both with better play.

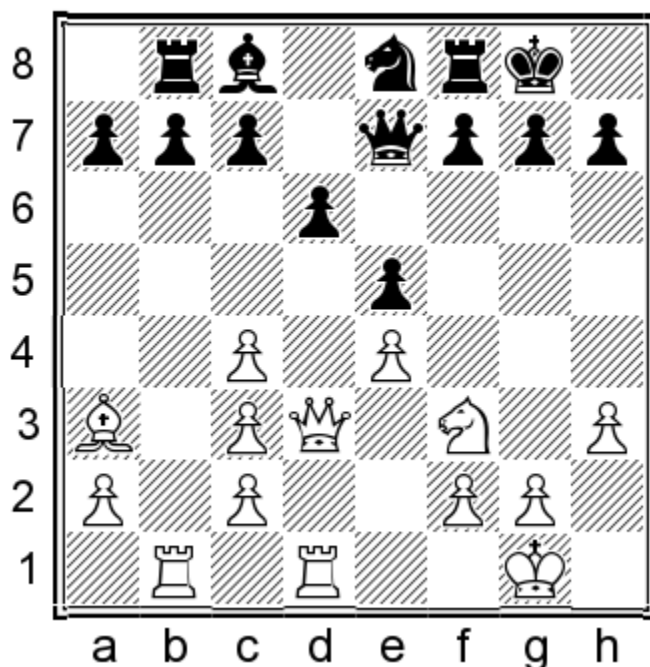
As we have seen, everything revolves around Black's ...c4 break. There would be no need to think too much and evaluate it on every move if White prevented it with b3.

One step further in the argument of the last example (Exercise 64); with tripled pawns, there are even more reasons to prevent the break.

Alberto Portela Peleteiro (2050)

Beatriz García Porlan

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2014

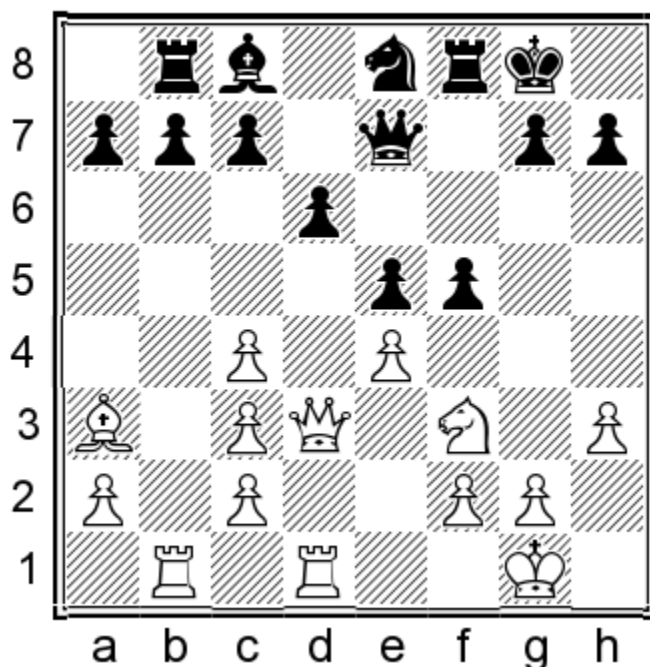


Black is much better, thanks to White's tripled pawns. That advantage is static in nature, making prophylactic moves more logical, but in this case it is unnecessary to do any deep thinking. Black should apply **SAP anti-break measures** in the most forceful way possible.

13...f5?

Forgetting about prevention and destroying his own defences, Black makes a very logical pawn break, but without taking the necessary precautions – perhaps with the intention of attacking by means of a rook lift.

13...b6 is the move that slightly more experienced players suggest, and it is quite good, but even in that case, 14.c5 is possibly White's best move. So I would play 13...c5!♞, leaving the a3-bishop out of play for a long time.



14.c5!

With tripled pawns, this move is always on the agenda, but thanks to Black's previous move it achieves maximum effectiveness.

14...♖f6!?

Continuing the plan began with ...f5, which would work very well if it were not for the unpleasant events on the queenside.

15.♙d5+ ♚f7 16.cxd6 cxd6 17.♙xf7+ ♔xf7 18.c4

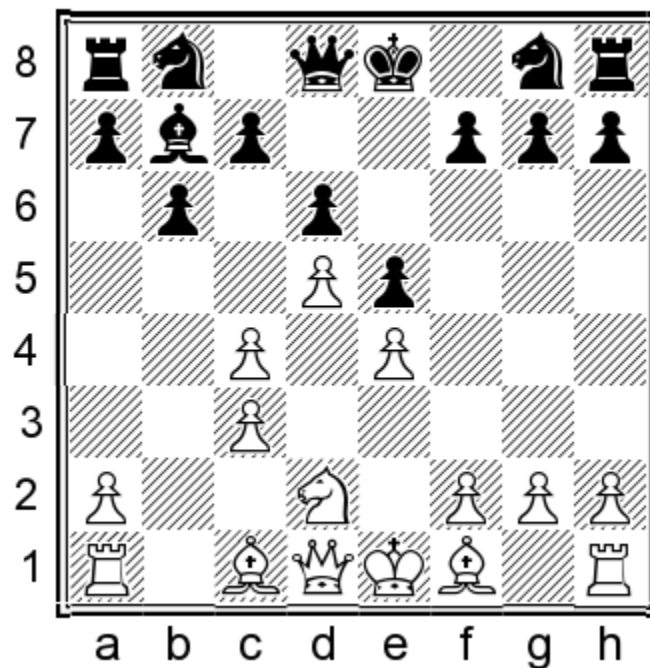
Preparing to play c5 again. White is now a bit better, and went on to win.

One more example with doubled pawns.

Ainhoa Ortín Blanco (1788)

Cesáreo Arrese-Igor Sánchez (1952)

Pamplona 2015



Black has the better structure (a static advantage). Therefore, as we have already indicated in the introduction, he is in an ideal scenario for prophylaxis.

8...♞f6?

Better was 8...♞d7!. It is important to control c5, although it might not seem like it, because there are already two pawns guarding that square. 9.♞b3 a5 10.a4 ♝c8 11.♝d3 ♞e7 12.0-0 0-0 and Black has an edge; he will play ...f5 sooner rather than later.

9.♝d3?!

9.c5! is the classic pawn sacrifice, to acquire squares for his own pieces (see **Error 28**) and, in this case, also to take away squares from the enemy pieces. After 9...dxc5 (9...bxc5 10.♖b1±) 10.♙d3 White has good compensation because the white bishops will end up having open lines, following the advances c4 and f4.

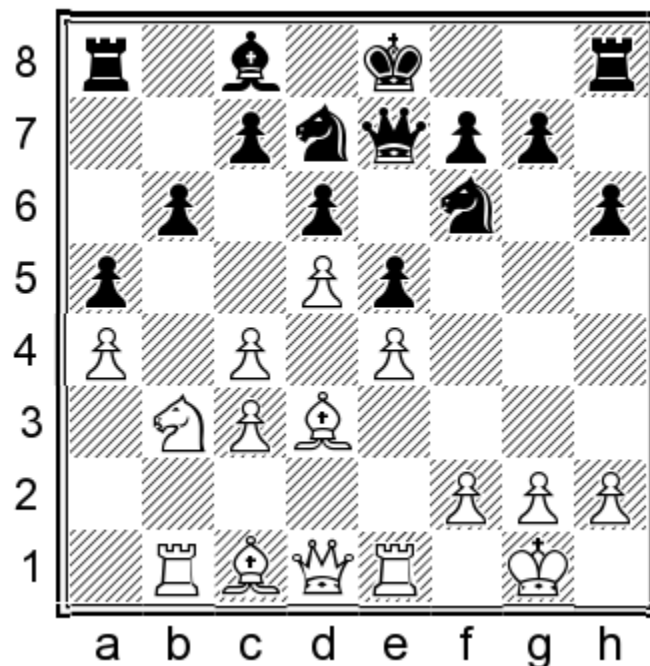
9...♞bd7!±

Let us follow the game a little further.

10.♞b3 a5! 11.a4 h6!? 12.0-0 ♔e7 13.♖b1 ♙c8!?

Here, Black could also have applied **SAP anti-break measures** on the other wing with 13...g5!?.

14.♖e1



Black has skillfully constructed a statistically advantageous position, but now he should pay attention to prophylaxis.

14...♞f8?

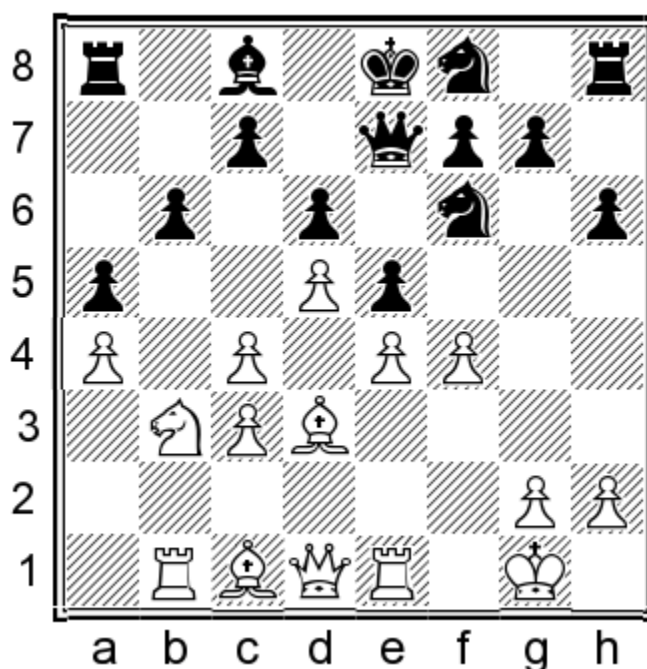
Ignoring the two dangerous pawn breaks.

Instead, 14...g5!, followed by ...♞c5, would have kept the position well under Black's control, to the point that White's best move might well be 15.♞d4!.

15.f4!?

White contents himself with the most natural break, which is already quite strong. But 15.c5! was perhaps even stronger, although it sacrifices a pawn. Let us take a look at this: 15...dxc5 (15...bxc5 16.♞b5+ ♞d7 17.c4 with a clear advantage, intending to continue with ♞d2 and capture on a5) 16.f4 and now the e5-point is weaker: 16...♞g6 (16...exf4?! 17.e5 ♞xd5 18.♞b5+) 17.f5 ♞f8 18.♞d2, followed by ♞b5+ and ♞c4.

Also interesting was 15.♞d4!?.



15...♞d7?

15...♞8d7! is the logical move to support e5, but after 16.♞d4! (16.♞a1? exf4 17.e5 ♞xe5!±) 16...exd4?! 17.cxd4 0-0 18.e5 White has an overwhelming pawn mass, which will open the way for the white pieces; for example, 18...♞e8 19.♞b3 f5 20.♞c2± , intending ♞g3 or ♞h3.

And now, White would have gained a crushing attack by playing

16.♘d4

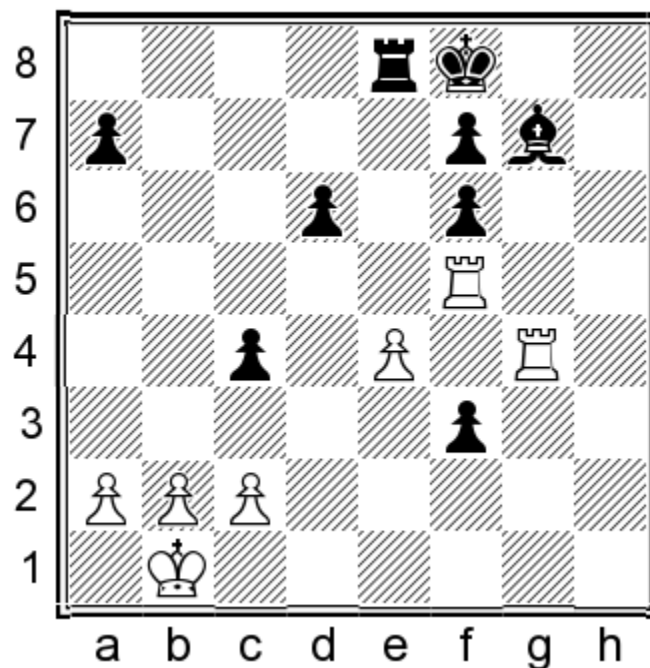
instead of the move in the game, 16.♘a1?, as can be seen in **Error 29**.

The concept of providing the king with an escape hole is very well known, but it is difficult to find a position in which not doing so is a strategic error. It usually is either a tactical error or something that makes little difference to the evaluation compared with other moves. Once again, the most useful thing is to understand that it is a practical move.

Ciro Revaliente Montoya (2056)

Killian Díaz Reyes (1874)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2021



Curiously, White's five best options here are all pawn moves in front of his castled position. The reason is that removing any back-

rank mate threat makes it much easier for White to deal with any counterplay.

31.♖xf3?!

This move is winning according to the engines, but for a human player it provides the opponent with a source of counterplay, which must then be neutralised.

31.a3 was possibly the simplest, although the other pawn moves in front of the king are also winning; now if 31...♗h6, then 32.♖xf3.

31...d5!

31...f5 was less inspired; for example, 32.♖xf5 ♖b8 33.b3 and wins.

32.c3 dxe4 33.♖fg3

White is winning, but the counterplay created by Black's passed pawns requires greater precision, and the game ended in a win for Black. We shall show the whole game to illustrate how it evolved:

33...♗h6 34.♖g8+ ♔e7 35.♖xe8+ ♔xe8 36.♔c2 f5 37.♔d1 f4
38.♖g8+ ♗f8 39.♖g5 ♗d6 40.♔e2 f3+ 41.♔f2 ♔e7 42.b3 ♔e6
43.♖b5 ♗e5 44.bxc4 ♗xc3 45.♖d5 f5 46.a4 a5 47.♖d8 ♗b4 48.♖d5
♗e7 49.♖b5 ♗h4+ 50.♔e3 ♗e1 51.♖b6+ ♔e5 52.♖b5+ ♔f6 53.♖d5
♔e6 54.♖d1 f4+ 55.♔xe4 f2 0-1

How to avoid Error 46

It is clear that this is an error of a similar nature to the previous one; we could even say that it is its little brother. So, all the thoughts and recommendations from **Error 45** are also applicable here.

I have presented them separately because I want to make a small reflection which differentiates them. If you have detected **Error 46** occurring frequently in your games, there are two possibilities:

a) If you commit numerous other strategic errors, you are probably just in a phase of developing your knowledge of strategy and with time (and study), you will correct them.

b) Otherwise, it must be a clear case of impulsiveness, which can easily masquerade as ‘love of attack’.

If your errors fall into the second category, you are facing a personal and voluntary decision. Remember: most of the time, losing a tempo is not going to spoil your plans and will be beneficial. It is in your interest to do it.

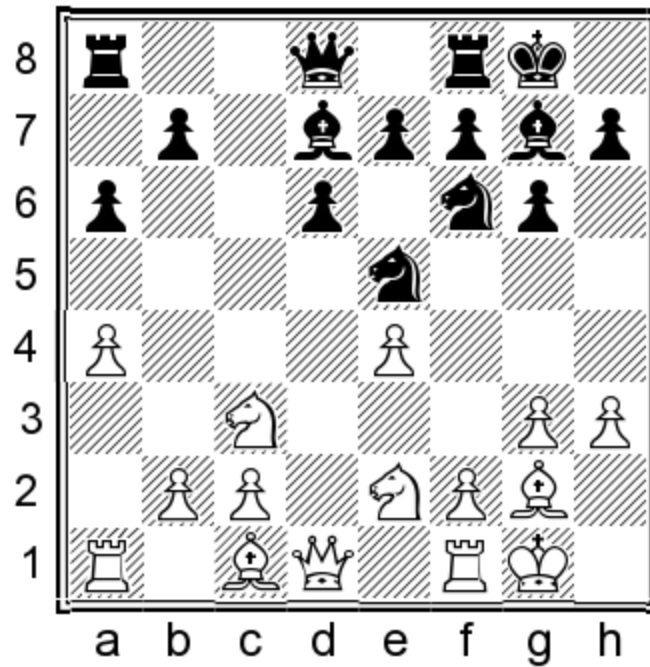
Error 47 - Failure to prepare active moves properly

The concept of preparation is normally lumped together with prophylactic thinking, which makes some sense, but I would say that the debate is not closed. Preparation precedes attacking (active) moves, and sometimes it is necessary. It is curious to hear many players say that they need more preparation before going to a tournament, yet they do not apply that ‘sensible’ thinking when it is most needed: when they are about to make a move.

Alberto Portela Peleteiro (2050)

Adriá Mari Copa (1837)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2014



In the diagram position, which has been reached a dozen times, White has a space advantage, although the centre is not closed. This type of advantage has an effect: it makes it difficult for the black pieces to find stable posts. This is the typical scenario where there is no need to proceed quickly. ‘Careful’ expulsion of the enemy pieces, to cramp them, without letting them sneak into favourable positions, is the best strategy.

12. ♘d5?

Hasty occupation of the strongpoint, which dissipates all White’s advantage. All the best moves in the position focus on preparation:

- A) 12. ♖h2!?, preparing f4;
- B) 12. b3!?, controlling the c4-square and preparing ♕e3, as well as f4.
- C) 12. f4! ♘c4 13. ♖h2 (preparing b3) 13... ♙b6?! 14. ♙d3, again preparing b3, but more forcefully;

12... ♘xd5

Black exchanges a piece, which makes his space disadvantage less oppressive. But we shall see more examples of basic errors.

13.exd5 ♞c4?

Once again, a hasty occupation of a square, in this case one that cannot be maintained. Here too it was necessary first to play 13...♔c7!, preparing ...b5: 14.♞d4 b5 15.axb5 axb5 16.♖xa8 ♜xa8 17.b3 ♜a1 with equality.

14.♖a2!

Again preparing b3; now this is definitely correct.

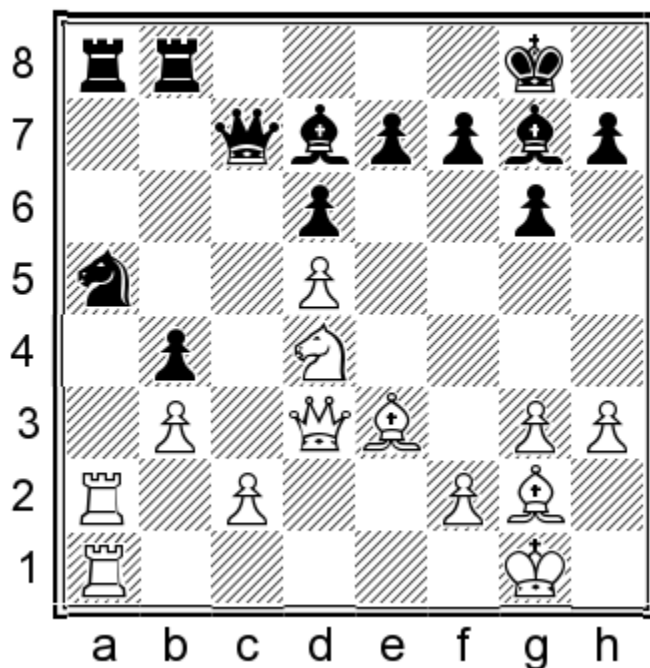
14...b5

14...♜c8 15.b3 ♞b6 16.c4 ♞a8 (Seyhanoglu-Degirmenci, Antalya 2013) and now the best move is 17.a5! with a clear advantage.

15.b3! ♞a5

Or 15...♞b6 16.a5 ♞c8 17.♙e3 when White is also clearly better.

16.axb5 axb5 17.♙e3 ♔c7 18.♞d4 ♜fb8 19.♔d3 b4 20.♜fa1



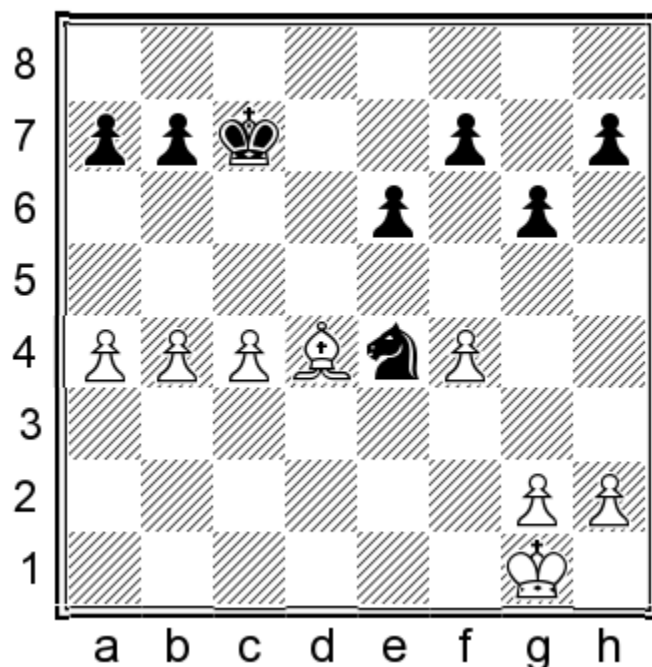
White has a crushing advantage; the black pieces can hardly move.

Now we are going to analyse a very pretty endgame with several attractive themes. The rejection of preparatory moves doomed Black.

Eihartze Buiza Prieto (2165)

Guillermo Santos Martínez (2003)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2016



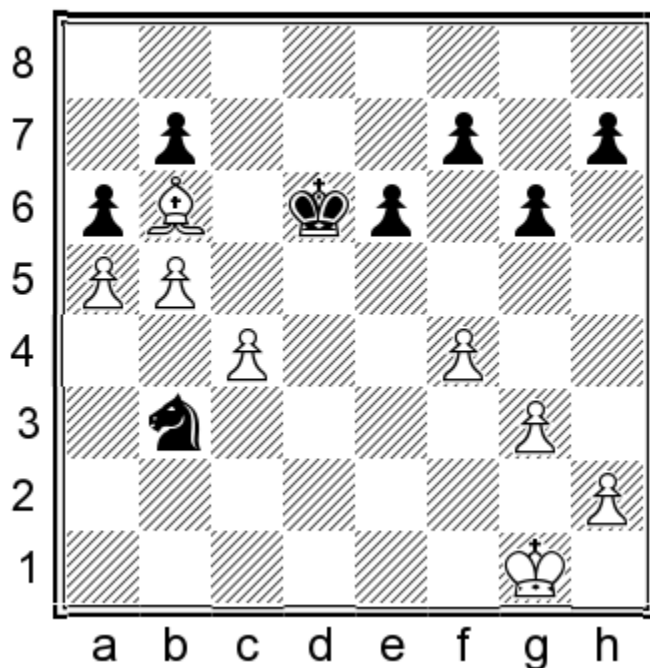
Black is much better, with a better king and a very flexible knight. White has some possible tricks with his queenside pawn majority. The correct plan for Black is to attack those pawns and win at least one of them with a coordinated action of his king and knight. But they should ‘prepare’ it very carefully.

29...♞d2?!

This seems obvious, but it is too hasty. It was necessary first to play 29...a6!, which would threaten ...♞d2, as we can understand by examining the variations:

A) 30.h3?! is no problem, as after 30...♞d2 31.c5 ♞b3 32.♙e5+ ♙c6 33.♙f2 a5! the white pawn chain falls;

B) 30.b5 offers the greatest resistance and once again forces Black to take care: 30...♙d6! (preparing ...♞c5) 31.g3 ♞c5! 32.a5 ♞b3 33.♙b6, reaching another critical position, where the concept of preparation is again crucial.



analysis diagram

Now Black needs to prepare the move ...♞d2 with 33...♙d7! (the immediate 33...♞d2? fails to 34.c5+ ♙d7 35.c6+ ♙c8! 36.bxa6 bxa6 37.♙f2 and White cannot lose): 34.♙f2 ♞d2!. Now if 35.bxa6 bxa6 36.c5 ♙c6 37.♙e3 ♞b3, the pawns finally fall.

30.c5!?

If 30.♙xa7, then 30...♞xc4 and Black still has some advantage. Now, we have arrived at Exercise 66.

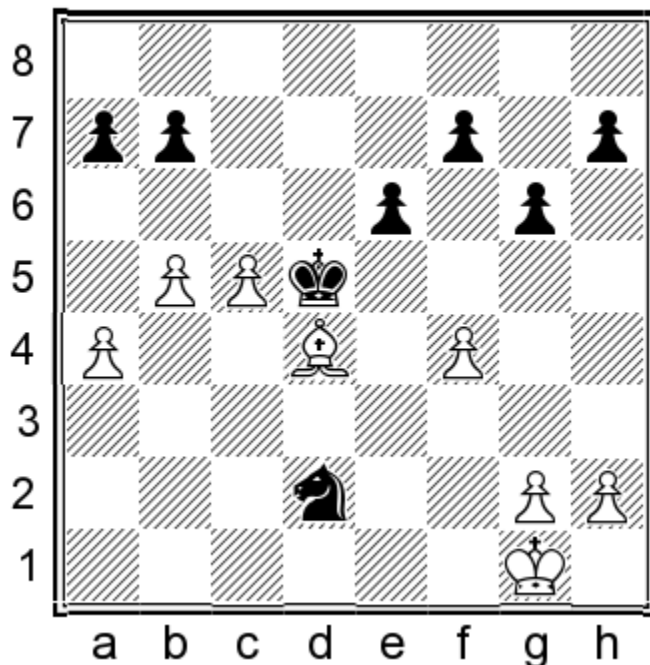
30...♙c6?

We already know that often one error leads to another because it creates a bad mood and uncertainty. Once again, it was necessary to

make a preparatory move, this time to avoid losing: 30...a6! 31.♔f2 and now if 31...♔c6 32.♔e2 ♔d5 33.♔d3 ♞e4 the position is equal but more comfortable for Black.

Also adequate was 30...♞b3 31.♙e3 ♔c6.

31.b5+ ♔d5?



This is already losing, although it deserves a third diagram. It could be included under **Error 12**.

32.a5!!

Totally unexpected; now Black loses material. An example of the surprises passed pawns can hold (in this case, potential passed pawns).

32...♞c4

Or 32...♔xd4 33.c6 bxc6 34.b6! and the knight cannot arrive in time.

33.c6! ♞d6

If 33...bxc6, then 34.b6 axb6 35.a6 wins – a very elegant resolution.

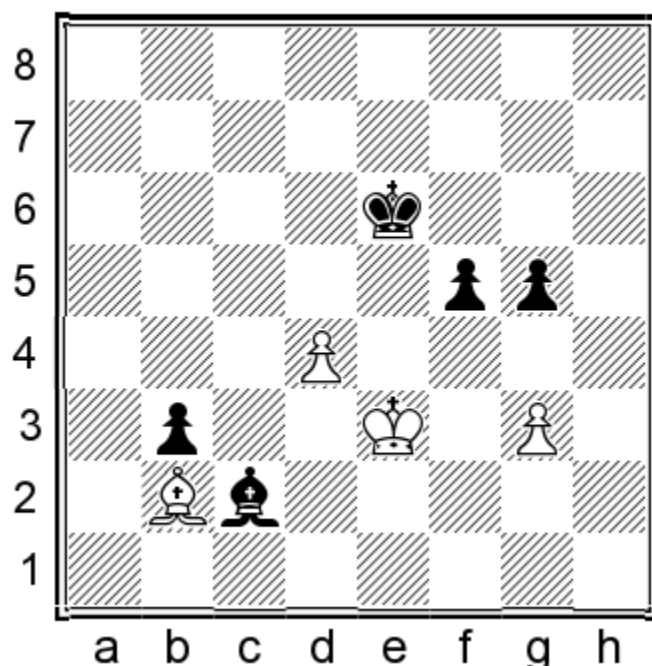
34.♙xa7 bxc6 35.b6 c5 36.a6 ♔c6 37.b7 ♞xb7 38.axb7 ♔xb7
39.♙xc5 1-0

In chess, as in life, preparation is the opposite of haste. This situation occurs in all the phases of the game, but can be perceived most clearly in the endgame, especially in cases where one side has no option other than to await his fate, which sometimes favours him in the form of a serious error by the opponent.

Pablo García Acín (1592)

Pablo Cayón Peláez (1812)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2020



Black has a typical winning scenario for opposite-coloured bishops endings: a passed pawn on one wing and the possibility of making another one on the other wing (see **Error 34**).

42...♔f7?

But he rushes and allows his opponent a resource, which, since it is the only one possible, should have been foreseen and prevented.

Instead, 42...♙e4!, controlling d5, was correct, and only then following up with the winning manoeuvre ...♔e6-f7-g6-h5-g4.

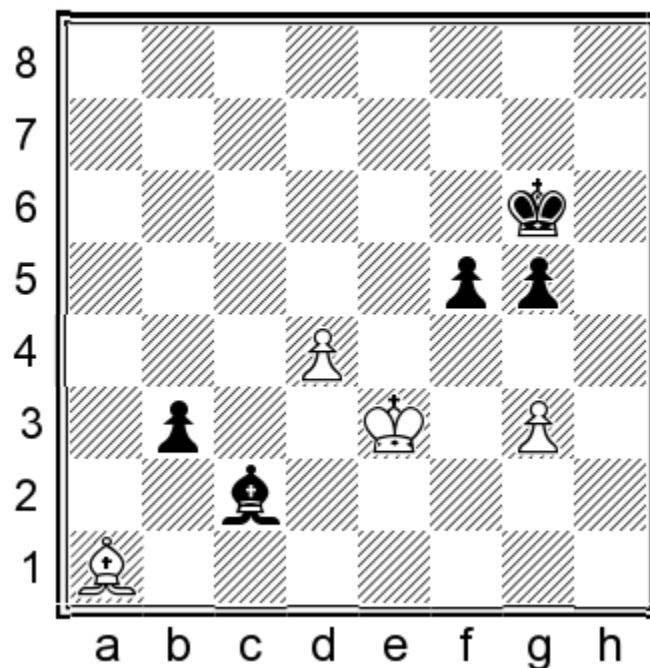
43.♙a1?

White fails to take advantage of the resource at the first opportunity. He has little excuse, as there was nothing else to think about.

43.d5! was correct.

43...♔g6?

43...♙e4! was still the winning move. Possibly now White realised that the black king was heading for g4, and he started searching.



44.d5!

This pawn diverts one of the black pieces, in a way that allows White to eliminate a pawn or else provoke it to advance to a square of the wrong colour.

44...♙e4

44...♔f7 would have made things a little more difficult for White:

45.♙b2! (45.d6? is hasty because the king can come back: 45...♔e6

) 45...♔e7 46.♙a3+ ♔d7 47.♙b2 ♙e4 48.♔d4 and there is no progress possible.

45.d6 ♙c6

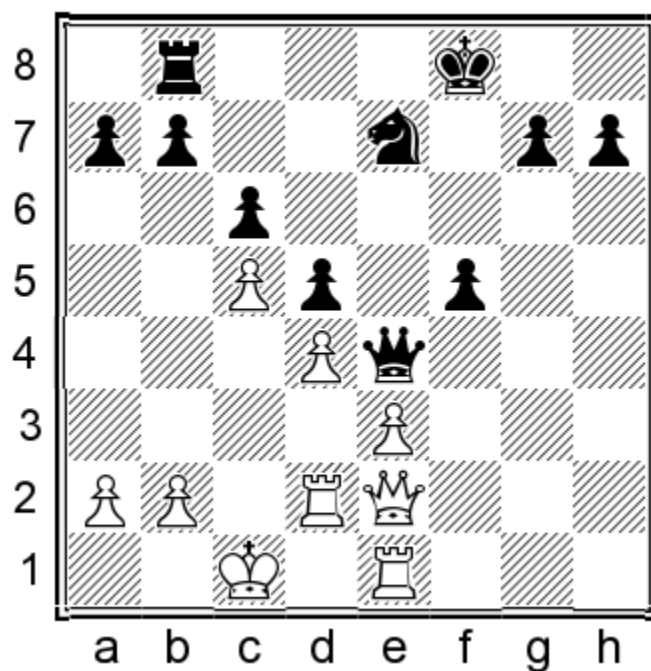
Or 45...♔f7 46.♙b2 ♔e6 47.♙a3 with a draw.

**46.♙b2 ♔f7 47.♙a3 ♔e6 48.♔d4 f4 49.gxf4 gxf4 50.♔d3 ♔f5
51.♔e2! ♔e4 52.♙b2 ♙b5+ 53.♔f2 ♙c6 54.♔e2 f3+ 55.♔f2 ½-½**

Yingrui Lin (1901)

Raúl Perez Guerra (1846)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U12 2016



Black has an excellent position here.

26...b6?

Enthusiasm for the attack sometimes makes us forget to take the minimum precautions. It happens in all sports and all competitive activities. The best solution here, although not the only one, was 26...♔g8!, guarding the h7-pawn and vacating the f8-square for the rook.

27.♔h2

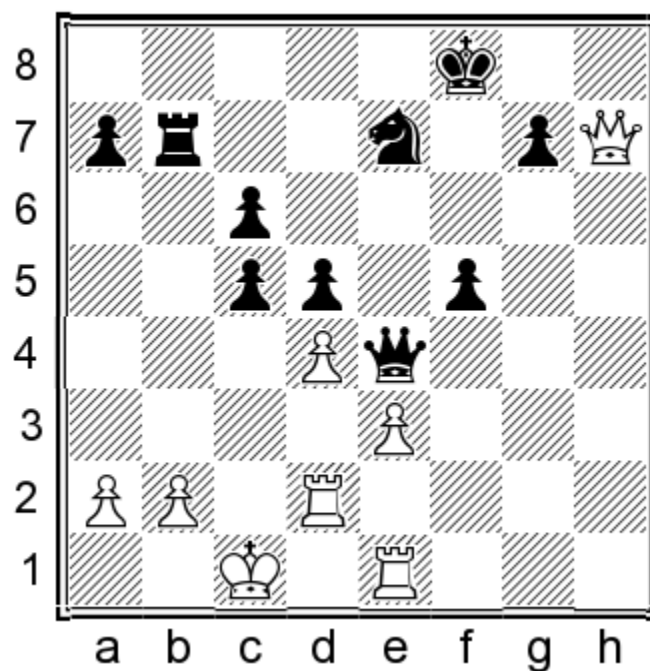
With a double attack.

27...♖b7 28.♔xh7?

Curiously, it is now White who lets himself get carried away with enthusiasm for the attack.

It was necessary to play 28.cxb6! ♖xb6 first and only then 29.♔xh7.

28...bxc5!



Now Black's counterplay is sufficient.

29.dxc5 ♔c4+?

Black gives the most obvious check, but he could have prepared another, much stronger, one with 29...♖b5! and if 30.♖c2, then 30...d4, with equality. Of course, by this stage, Black would have lost his sense of balance and would be playing for a win.

30.♔b1

Now White is much better, and he went on to win.

How to avoid Error 47

Like all the errors in the last two chapters, the common psychological factor is haste. If this error shows up in your diagnosis, keep in mind that it is one that is usually corrected (or at least moderated) with experience. But do not sit down and wait for this to happen; intervene actively in the process.

First recommendation: when you are about to launch some active operation, adopt the habit of considering the opponent's options, and when you discover that starting it right away allows some unpleasant response, then you should simply prepare it better. If your position is good, there should be time to do this.

I think that it is now time to reveal the significance of the quotation at the start of this chapter. Choosing a quotation by the player with the reputation of being the most prophylactic in history makes sense, but it has nothing to do with positions. I think that it fits better here, among the conclusions, because you can avoid the errors covered in this chapter if you delve deeper into your own play and if your subsequent decisions are consistent with that analysis.

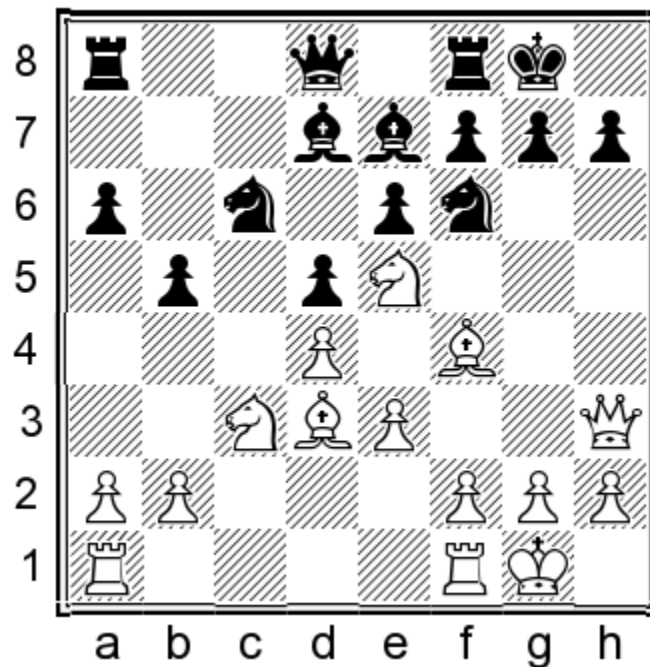
People used to say of Petrosian that he never embarked on tactical manoeuvres, because he could see hidden defences for his opponent. And of Tal they used to say that all his combinations were unsound, but his opponents were unable to refute them. No doubt these are exaggerations. The most correct play lies somewhere between these two extremes. Do not choose one of the two. You can learn from both.

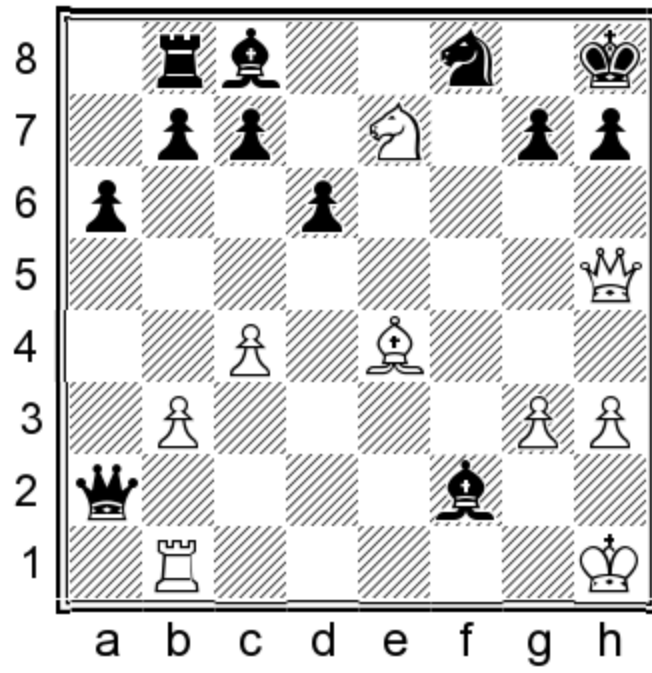
Chapter 12

Paying attention to the opponent

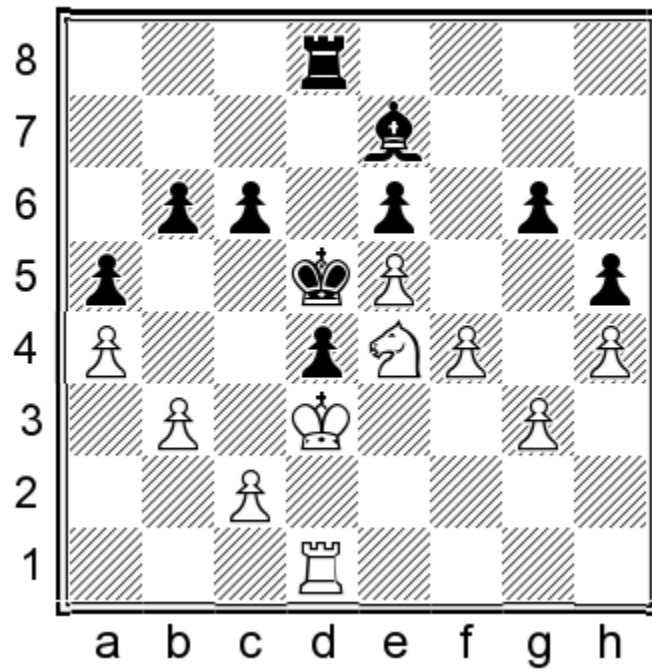
- Error 48 - Failure to see the intention behind the opponent's last move
- Error 49 - Failure to consider what will change with our move
- Error 50 - Allowing unnecessary counterplay

Exercises for Chapter 12

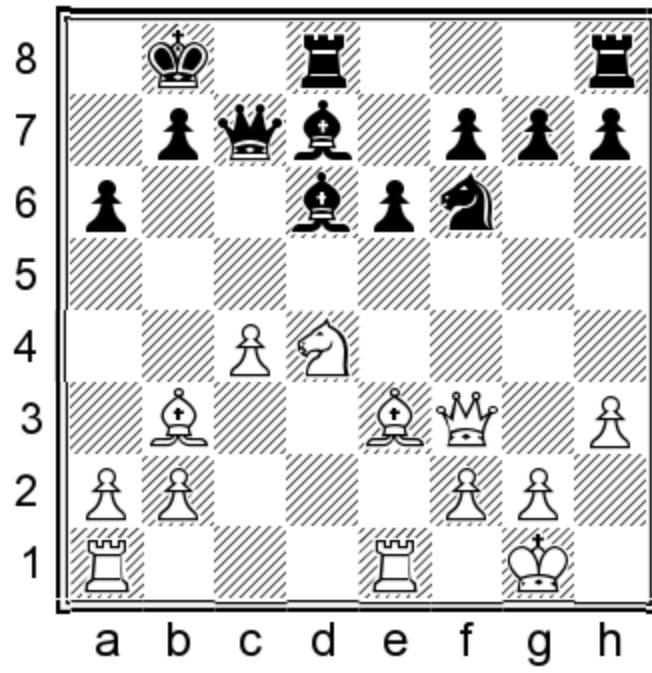




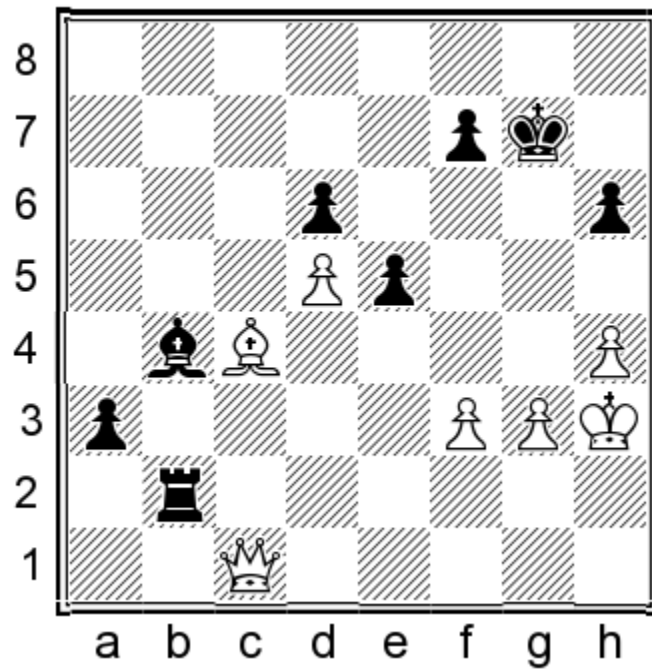
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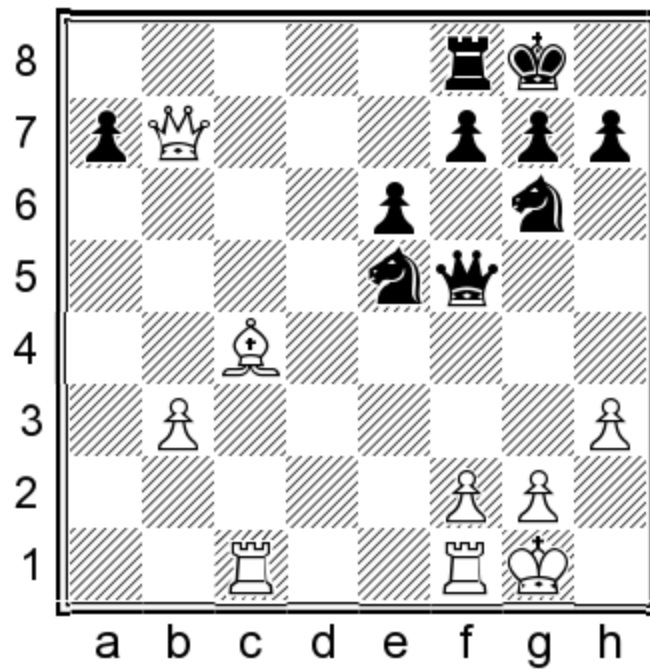
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72

Paying attention to the opponent is a universal theme that applies (or rather should apply) to strategy and tactics, as well as attack and defence, in all phases of the game.

Perhaps owing to the inspiring book by Mark Dvoretsky, *Recognizing Your Opponent's Resources*, paying attention to the opponent has become linked to prophylactic thinking, but it is essential to keep it in mind even when you are making the most aggressive moves.

Paying attention to the opponent's intentions is an intuitive activity; a habit that develops with experience and is jettisoned in situations of 'weakness', such as over-confidence, time shortage, demoralisation or tiredness. In the very frequent case of over-confidence, it can be a reaction to one's own position or a personal characteristic of the player, but both can be corrected.

Lack of attention to the opponent causes striking and characteristic errors, and when it is persistent, it ruins all possibilities for a player to compete effectively and enjoy tournament chess.

We shall try to identify and classify some errors related to this theme.

Error 48 - Failure to see the intention behind the opponent's last move

The first situation we are going to discuss concerns vigilance regarding the intention behind the opponent's last move. For this, I recommend reflecting upon the following thought, which, with a small personal adaptation, I have taken from poker:

If you think your opponent is stupid, why don't you understand his last move? It's quite probable that the stupid one is you.

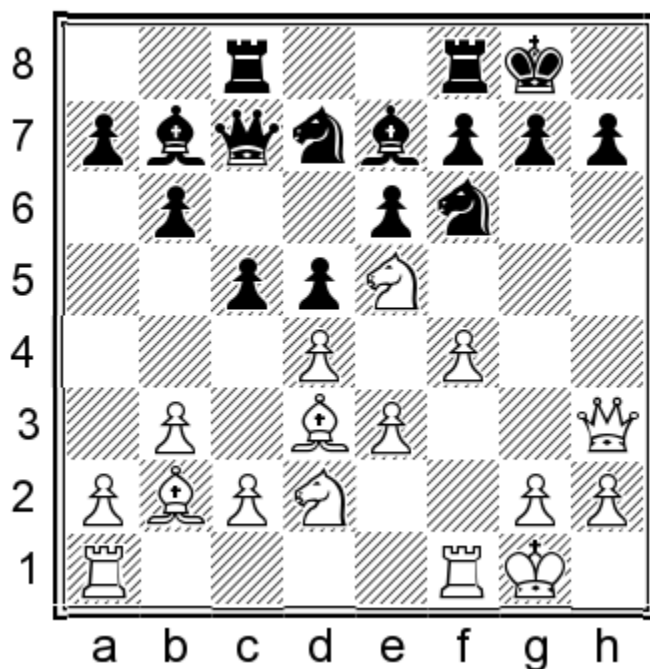
Each time our opponent makes a move, it is appropriate (and almost always possible) to guess its purpose. Most of the time, it is an automatic observation, and we see the answer at a glance, but sometimes it requires a more serious effort. If we do not want (or are in no condition) to make that effort, it is possible that we will pay dearly for our laziness.

Recently, I read with great pleasure David Smerdon's book *The Complete Chess Swindler*. One of the clearest lessons I believe I extracted from it is that swindlers have one principal virtue: their ability to mask their intentions. Only in this way do they succeed, very often, in obtaining favourable results from lost positions.

Placing ourselves on the other side, we can conclude that the best way to avoid being swindled is to become experts in discovering our opponents' intentions. For that, the first step is always to pay attention.

Alejandro Perez García (2142)

Marina Zuñiga Arrarás (1712)



White has just played ♔f3-h3. What does he have in mind?

12...♗d6?

Black completely ignores White's manoeuvre. As the white queen has just moved to h3, we should think that it is to threaten mate on h7. And that objective can be attained by exchanging on d7, c5 and then f6. Only a few moves will prevent this, and one of them should have been chosen.

12...g6?! prevents the immediate threat but weakens the long diagonal. This does not look like a good idea, and indeed it is not: 13.f5!! (13.dxc5 opens the diagonal for the bishop and is sufficient for some advantage) 13...exf5 14.♗xf5 gxf5 15.♖xf5, with a strong attack and the immediate threat of ♖g5+, as well as the possibility of bringing the other rook into the attack.

12...cxd4! is the best defence; for example, 13.♘xd7 (13.exd4?! allows a solid defence with 13...♞e4=, but 13.♞df3! is very

promising after 13...♖xe5 14.fxe5 ♘e4 15.♘xd4±) 13...♔xd7
14.♙xd4 ♘e4.

13.♘xd7! ♔xd7 14.dxc5 ♘e4

Black notices the threat when it is already too late for a solution.

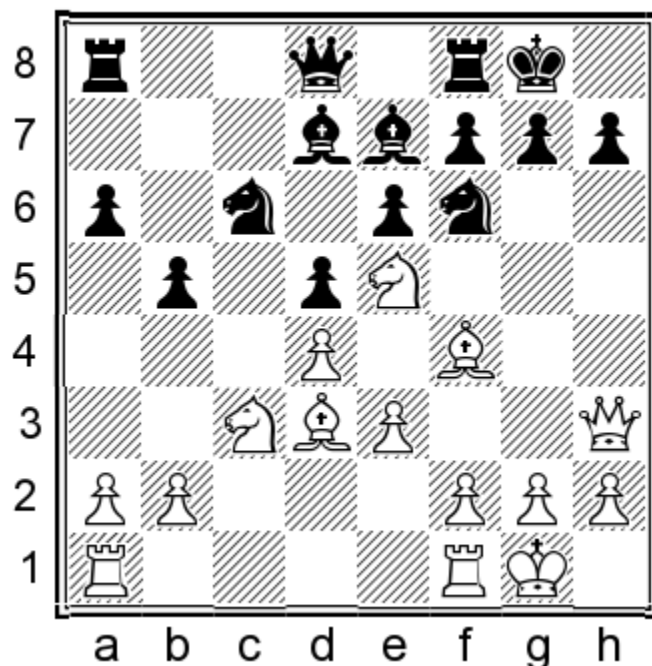
15.cxd6 ♔xd6 16.♙xe4 dxe4 17.♘c4 ♔d8 1-0

I want now to bring in another game (Exercise 67) with a similar theme, and make some reflections.

Chang Gee Khoo (1976)

Natasha Renggalis Angela (1788)

George Town 2013



Again, White has just played ♔h3. We should never think that an opponent's move was made for no purpose, but even less so if it concerns a move pointed at our king position.

If we consider the move has some intention, we may see the threat and deal with it.

12...b4?

Black even pushes White into carrying out his combination. Much better was 12...g6, although White remains better.

13. ♖xd5!

Now, we could comment that this idea is known and that if Black had been familiar with it (or had remembered it), she would not have made this error. Then, we would work on these ideas, using books on attacking chess or tactics in the openings.

However, we cannot know every possible combination, although most of them have identical, or at least similar, antecedents, and it is appropriate and enjoyable to have studied them.

We have to develop our vigilance and discover the threats to our position, at least those within our level of difficulty.

13...g6

Naturally, after a blow like 13. ♖xd5, Black ‘understands’ what is happening, but now it is rather late for survival. Of course, if 13...exd5, then 14. ♖xd7 ♔xd7 15. ♕xh7+ ♔h8 16. ♕f5+, winning.

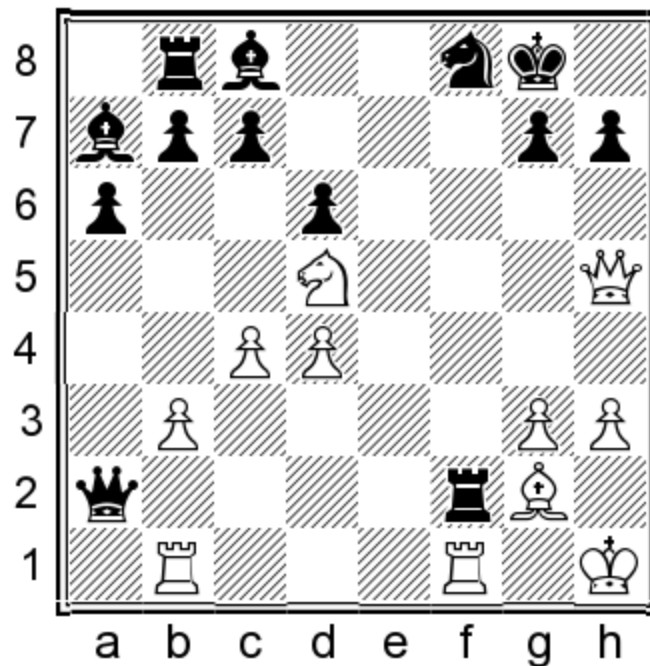
14. ♖xe7+ ♖xe7 15. ♕g5

Some games deserve to be remembered, but there are too many in the databases. How can we know which ones they are?

Martín Pascual García (1790)

Viviana Galván Cipriani (1963)

Salobreña Spaniosh Championship U16 2019



Here, White has lost a piece, but now he has his queen close to the enemy king, whereas the opponent's queen is a long way away. These are sufficient signals for Black to keep paying attention. We simply have to accept that there are some dangerous variations, and we should have confidence that we shall discover them and defuse them. We should never think that they are moves we can negotiate with our eyes shut, with 'the hope' of not stepping on the mine that will destroy us.

If three circumstances occur:

- 1) we are playing heedlessly;
- 2) there are complications; and
- 3) our opponent is imaginative, then the mine will probably explode.

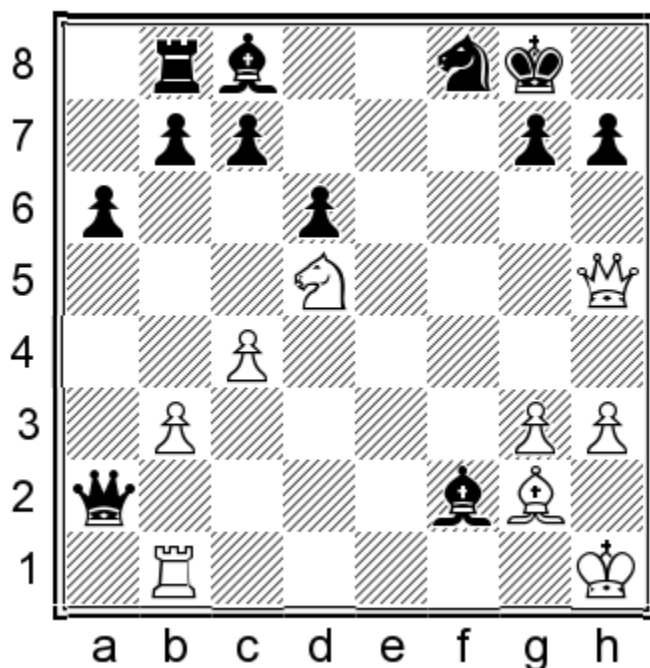
Of these three circumstances, we only have control over one (the first). Let's go to it.

25...♗xd4?

This move brings the bishop closer to the defence, but it is not the piece that is needed. Instead, 25...♔e6! brings Black's last two pieces into play, and this is sufficient to prevent any complications. Then Black can continue with ...♕f7 or the desirable ...♕e2!, which is not possible right now: 25...♕e2? 26.♖xf2! ♕xh5 27.♞e7+ ♔h8 28.♖xf8# would have been another epic finish.

26.♖xf2 ♕xf2

26...♕xf2? 27.♞e7+ ♔h8 28.♖f1 would have forced Black to give up her queen.



27.♞e7+?

27.♖f1 was slightly better, but might have had the effect of provoking Black into finding the best defence, 27...♔e6!, returning the piece but ending White's attack; for example, 28.♞xc7 ♕xg3 29.♞xe6 ♞xe6 30.♕f7+ ♔h8 31.♕xe6 ♖c2+.

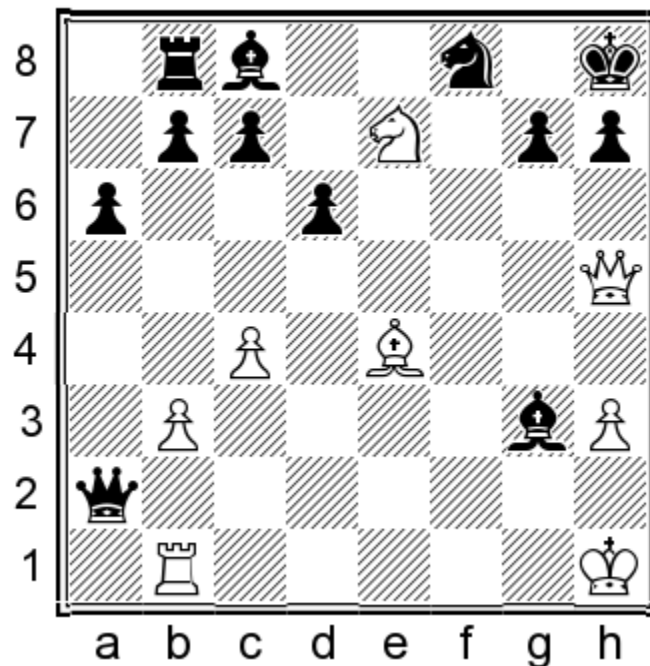
27...♔h8 28.♕e4

As mentioned, any move aiming at the king should be investigated, and if it threatens a check, all the more so. But the virtue of this

move is that it conceals its main intention as its aim seems to be to defend the white rook.

28...♗xg3??

Black misses what her opponent wants, but this move does have one virtue: it gives her opponent an unforgettable moment. Instead, 28...♗e6! was one of two winning moves, and the most natural. Now, we have arrived at Exercise 68.

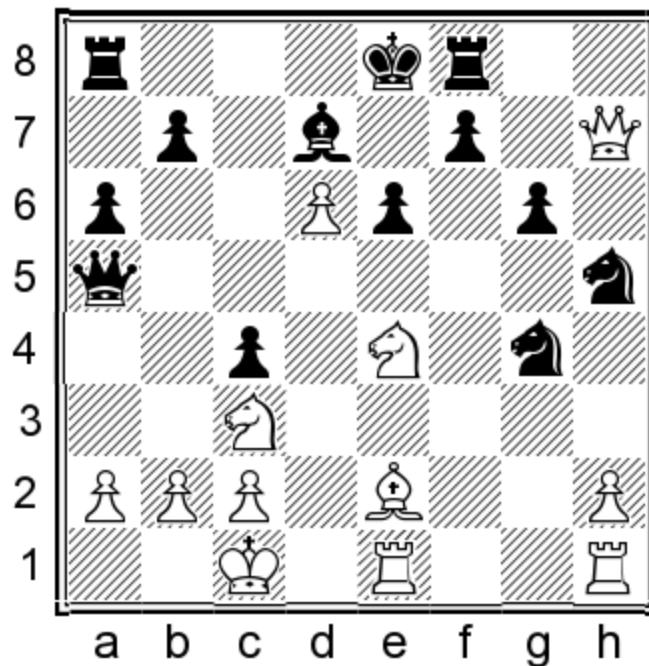


29.♙xh7+ ♘xh7 30.♘g6+ ♔g8 31.♗d5+ 1-0

Felix Antonio Ilinca Ilinca (2184)

Dinh Nho Kiet (1977)

Batumi World Championship U12 2022



White has a big advantage and is threatening the knight on g4.

21...♔e5!

Black plays the best move, but does not defend the g4-knight. This is an obvious reason for us to redouble our attention. When our opponent fails to defend a piece we are attacking, normally something is going on – people do not let their pieces be taken just to be friendly.

22.♙xg4?

22.♖hf1!, putting pressure on f7, and therefore preventing ...♖h8, was the only move that kept the advantage (although the same move with the other rook maintains at least equality). The newly threatened knight must now move: 22...♘e3 (22...♘h2?! is worse: 23.♖xf7 ♖xf7 24.♔g8+ ♖f8 25.♔xg6+ ♔d8 26.♙xh5) 23.♙xh5 ♘xf1 24.♖xf1 0-0-0 25.♙e2 f5 26.♔e7! with a clear advantage to White.

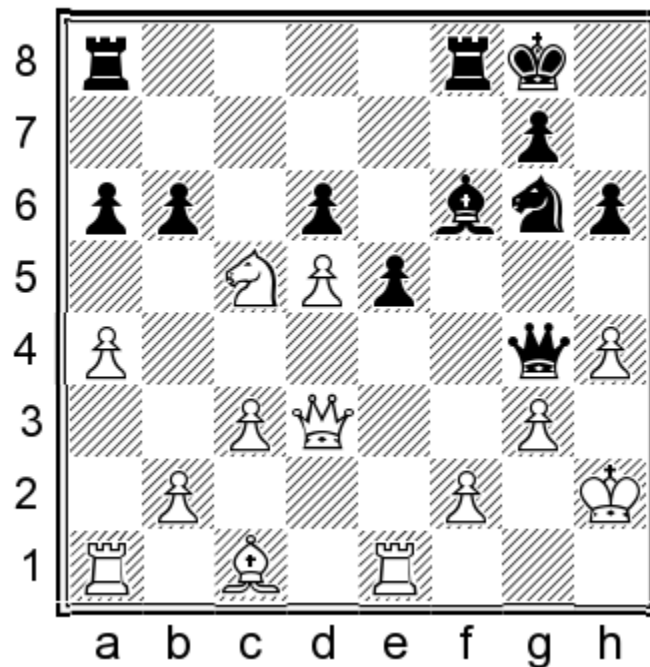
22...♖h8

The white queen has been trapped. As we have indicated in **Error 42**, this is one of the most frequently overlooked tactical motifs.

Marta García Martín (2257)

Pablo Vidal Fernández (1916)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2016



White has a big static advantage, with an extra pawn and control of the e4-square, but there are four black pieces on the kingside, with three of them aimed at h4, so White should pay attention and see if something is going on. The fact that the knight is attacked is not an excuse, as there are intermediate moves available; in fact, Black has just played ...♔d7-g4, instead of taking on c5.

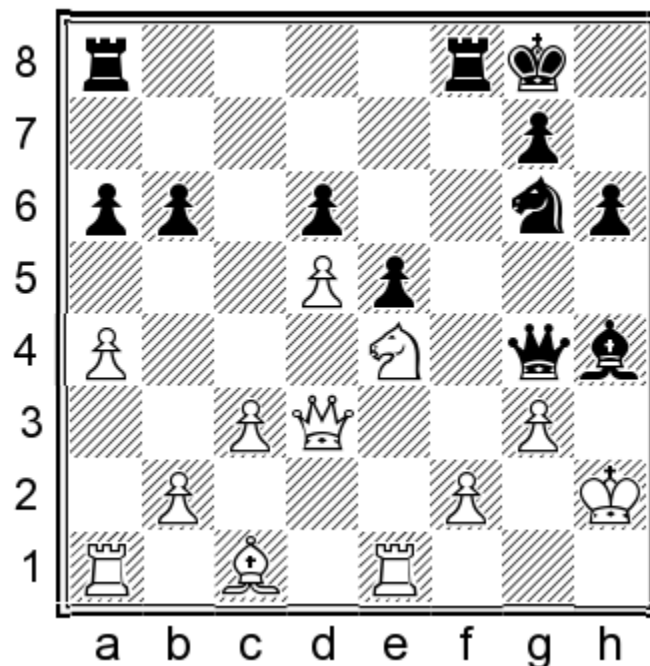
28. ♘e4?!

However, White seems to ignore what her opponent wants to do, and this is met with punishment.

28.♖e4?! was more solid; after 28...♔f5 Black has a double attack (c5 and f2) and White has to find 29.♖e2, but after 29...♔h5! Black has unpleasant pressure on h4.

28.♔e4! was best, but after 28...♔h5?! (28...♘f4 29.♙xf4 exf4 30.♔e6+ ♔xe6 31.♘xe6; or 28...♔xe4 29.♘xe4) 29.♘e6! ♘xh4 White has to find something special; for example, 30.♖h1 ♖f7 31.♙e3 ±, since 30.gxh4? ♙xh4 31.♘xf8 ♖xf8 gives Black a strong attack.

28...♙xh4!

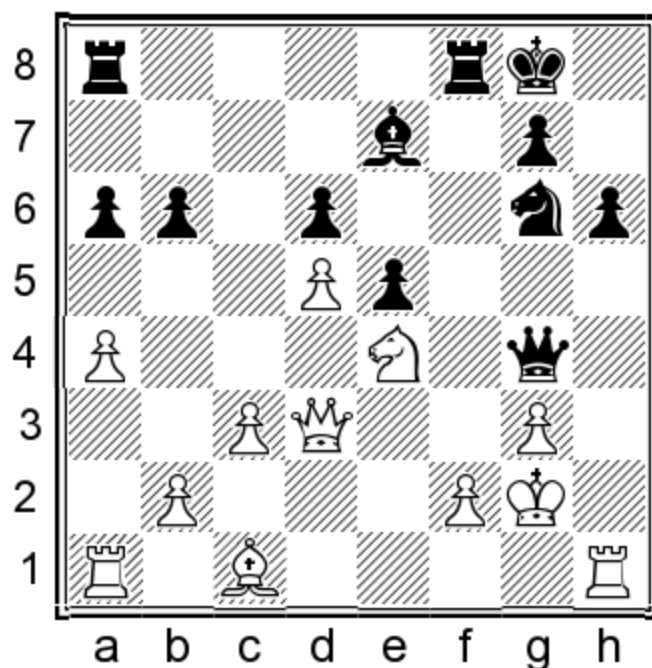


29.♔g2?!

An error due to overlooking one of the opponent's possibilities often leads to a phase of disorientation, which leads to further errors. We have been seeing this again and again in the last few examples.

Here, White still had a solution with 29.♔e2! ♖f3 30.c4=.

29...♙e7! 30.♖h1?



Completing the hat-trick of errors. And fortunately for White, her opponent abstained from a very attractive check:

30...♘h4+!

Instead, he played 30...♖f7?± .

31.♔f1 ♖f3 32.♕e2 ♘f5+

, followed by ...♖f8 (assuming that White will defend against the immediate threat on g3 by playing ♖g1 or ♔e1).

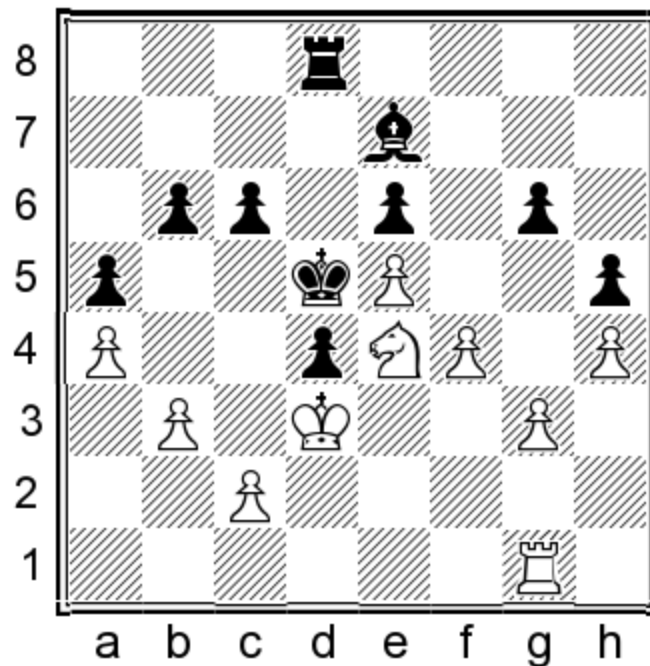
In the following examples, the opponent's intentions are obvious. In some of them it is even clear that the opponent had discovered them, yet paid them no heed, or only partially did so. We are going to think about this.

In the first game, Black remained blind to White's intentions, even though they were crystal-clear.

Gerard Ayats Llobera (2225)

Jesus Muñoz García (1909)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2016



White played

30.♖d1

, placing the rook opposite the black king, a good reason to be vigilant (Exercise 69). But Black did not take this into account.

30...b5??

30...c5! was the only move.

31.c4+ 1-0

Mate will follow on the next move.

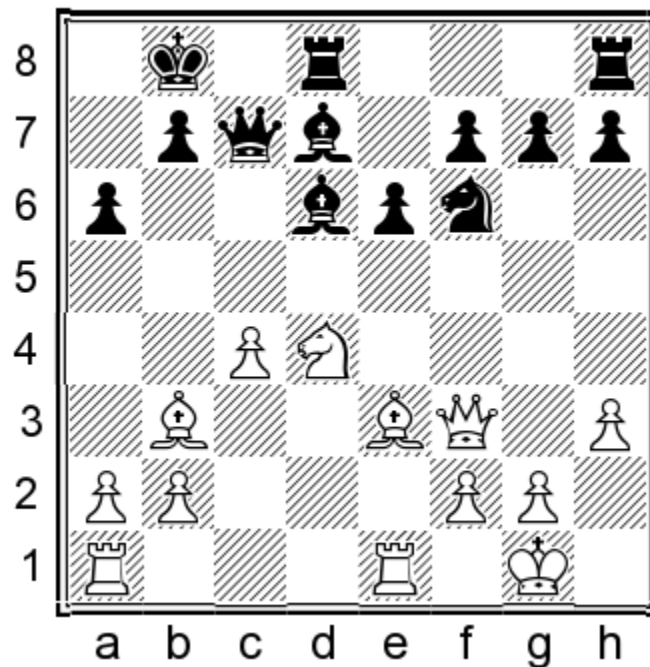
When the opponent's intention has been discovered, and it contains a tactical idea, then it is a good idea to check whether you can allow it and cause it to fail. This was a strategy that World Champion Mikhail Tal liked to employ. When he discovered that his opponent had set a trap for him, he actively looked for a way to fall into it, but in a way that the trap would fail. Admittedly, this is a very subtle

strategy, but it is available to everyone, even in positions of different levels of complexity.

Jose Carlos Redondo Benavente (1931)

Julio Suarez Gómez (2307)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2014



Exercise 70

White has just played c4, so his intention is quite transparent, because it is unlikely that he did this to close the diagonal of his bishop on b3. Black allowed c4-c5, and was worse, but he had a way of allowing it that would have given his opponent a surprise.

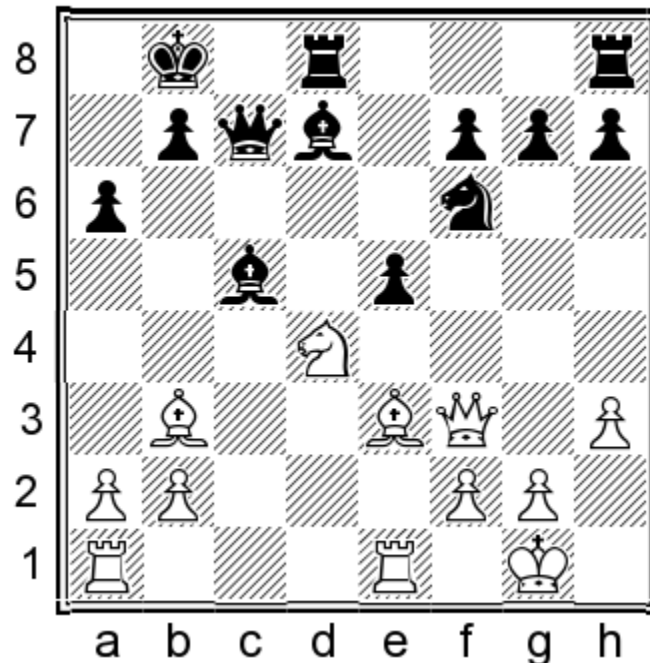
16...e5?!

This is not the best response; perhaps Black did not consider c5 as an intermezzo. The move I recommend is 16...h5!, which would be an ideal solution, because it seems to allow c5 but now if 17.c5?! (17.♖ad1! is better, with equality), then 17...♙h2+ 18.♔h1 ♕e5,

threatening 19...♞g4, and now let us see what happens if White continues with his previous intention: 19.c6 ♞xd4 20.cxd7 ♞g4 21.♞f4 e5 22.♞e3 ♞xe3 23.fxe3 ♞b6 and the d7-pawn will fall.

17.c5! ♞xc5

Forced, since if 17...exd4?, then 18.cxd6 ♞b6 19.♞f4± .



18.♞f5?

White does not cap his manoeuvre properly: 18.♞ac1! ♞b6 (18...exd4?? 19.♞f4+-) 19.♞f5 (19.♞xc5? ♞xc5 20.♞g3 ♞d6) 19...♞xe3 20.♞xe3 ♞xf5 21.♞xf5 gave him an edge.

18...♞xe3 19.♞xe3 e4

And Black ended up better, although the game eventually ended in a draw.

Error 49 - Failure to consider what will change with our move

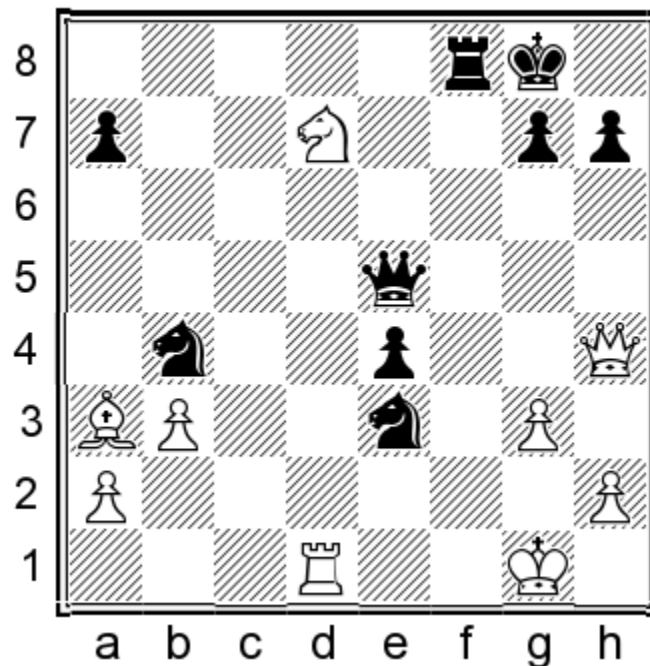
We are going to reflect on another situation related to paying attention to the opponent, but of a somewhat different nature, although very common. A player has the advantage (sometimes a large one), but the position is replete with tactical complications (this second element is subjective, of course). In his anxiety, the player tries to resolve it immediately and overlooks some detail or other, which comes back at him like a boomerang.

In the aforementioned book *Recognizing Your Opponent's Resources*, Mark Dvoretsky presents a large number of striking examples, but my favourite (which I have tested in countless classes) is the following one.

Joseph Bradford (2305)

Robert Byrne (2530)

Greenville U.S. Championship 1980



The grandmaster playing with the black pieces decided to settle the game once and for all:

30...♔d4?

This is also the move suggested by most of my students, but it was met with the unexpected:

31. ♔xh7+ ♚xh7 32. ♞xf8+ ♚g8 33. ♖xd4 ♞bc2 34. ♖xe4 1-0

30... ♔d5? also fails for the same reason, but 30... ♔d6! would have won brilliantly.

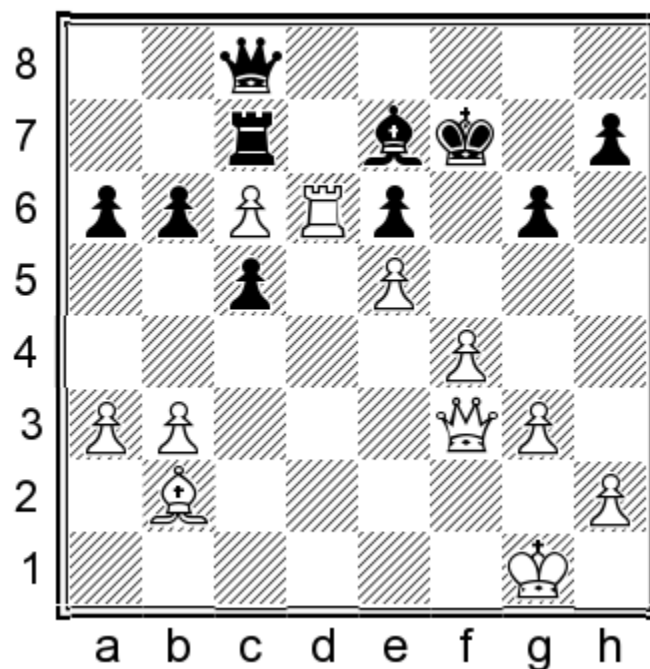
It is interesting to note that White's winning move was not a threat in the initial position. If you present this position to some of your friends, they will probably all see 30... ♔d4? before 30... ♔d6!.

We shall end the section by discussing how to avoid this type of error. But first, a few more examples.

David Aledo Yanguas (2020)

Daniel Mamani Beltrán (1827)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2019



White is a pawn up, and has a very dominating position as long as Black is unable to capture on d6. Now, White should prepare the destruction of the enemy position.

30.g4?

But White does so in a way that allows unwanted reactions. Instead, there were several ways he could have prepared it; for example, 30.♔f2! b5 (30...♙xd6? is impossible due to 31.exd6 ♖xc6 32.f5! ♖xd6 33.fxg6+!, while 30...♚f8 attacks the rook but allows 31.♖d7!) 31.g4 and now 31...♙xd6?! 32.exd6 ♖xc6 33.f5.

30...♙xd6 31.exd6 ♖xc6 32.♚c3

White was relying on the long diagonal. Anyway, here 32.f5 doesn't work due to 32...gxf5 33.gxf5 ♚g8+! 34.♔f2 ♖xd6 35.fxe6+ ♔xe6 and White has no more than perpetual check with 36.♚e4+ ♔d7 37.♚b7+.

32...♖xd6?

After this, it turns out well for White, but 32...e5!, opening the line for the queen to attack g4, would have made the game double-edged; for example, 33.♚xe5 ♚xg4+ 34.♔f2 ♚e6 35.♚g7+ ♔e8 36.♙e5.

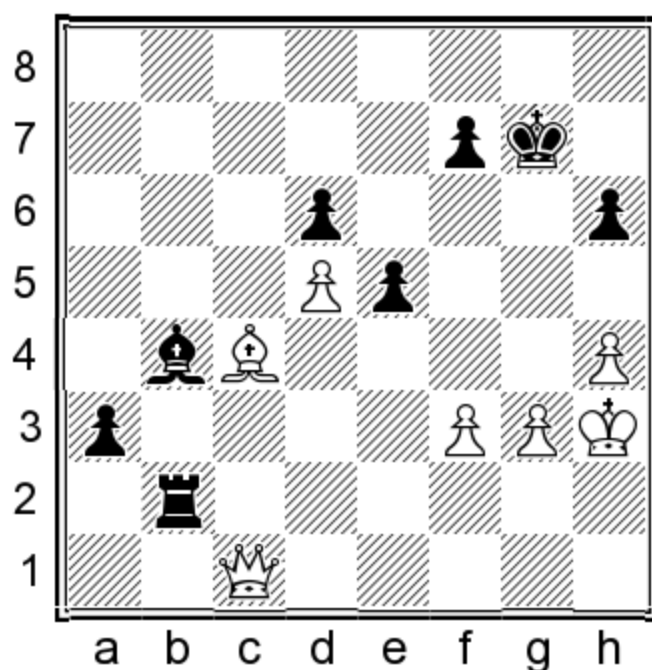
33.♚g7+ ♔e8 34.♙f6! ♖d1+ 35.♔f2 ♖d2+ 36.♔e3 1-0

Let us first reflect on how to limit these annoying situations. Some errors of this type could be avoided if the player making them only reflected first upon the tactical circumstances that are changed by the planned move.

Adrian Galiana Fernández (2004)

Alberto Portela Peleteiro (2105)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2015



Exercise 71

White has held a material advantage for a long time, but Black still has some counterplay. Now, White should open lines against the black king, but he does it in the wrong way and it all ends immediately, and surprisingly:

44.g4??

Here we encounter an unnecessary weakening with record consequences. The dark squares will be exploited by Black to threaten mate and force victory. Instead, 44.f4! would inevitably open lines against the black king; for example, 44...♗d2 45.♔a1 ♗b4 (45...exf4 46.♔xa3) 46.fxe5.

44...♗d2!

Gaining time to play ...♗f4 and threaten mate; Black now has an advantage.

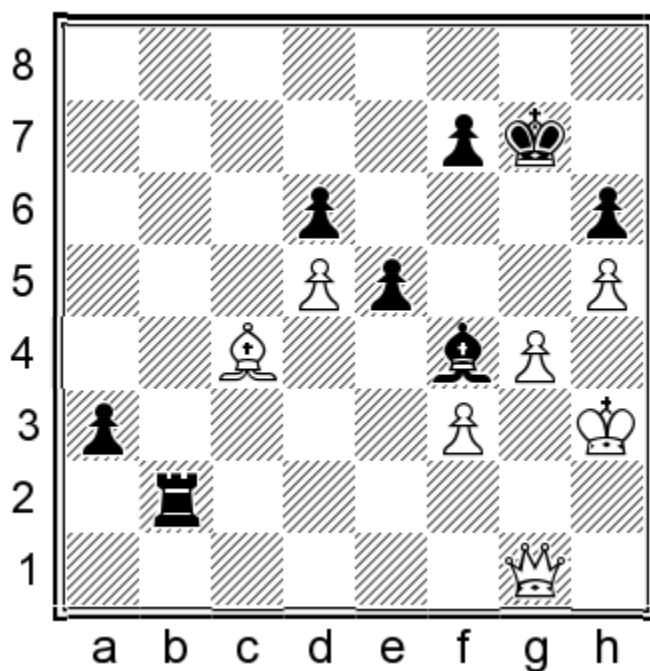
45.♔g1??

Compounding the error, as often happens, but, in this case, it was very difficult to decide to give up the queen to make a draw.

45...♙f4

The white queen is paralysed. The bishop will be captured in return for the pawn. White's only hope is that the opponent makes a mistake.

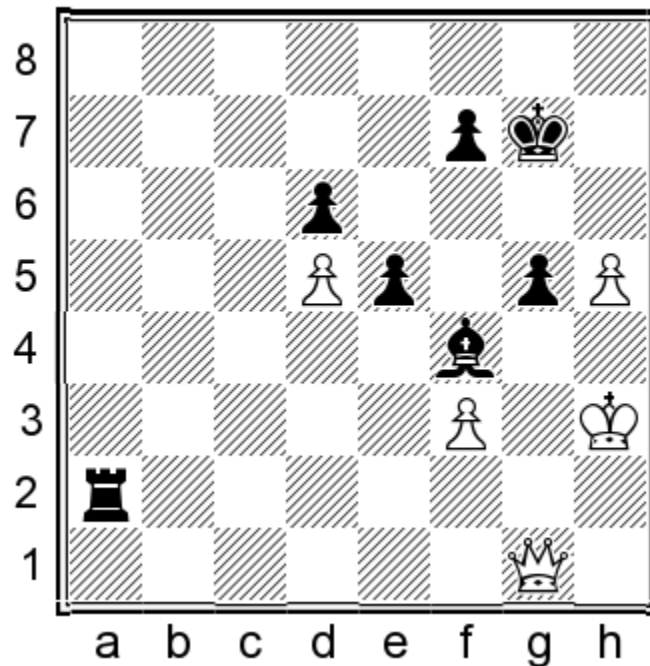
46.h5



46...a2?

A classic case of bad calculation, caused by rushing after such a brutal turn of events. With a cool head, Black would have found 46...♙f6! and if 47.g5+ hxg5 48.h6, then 48...♖h2+! (this is better than 48...♙g6?! 49.♙d3+ f5? (49...e4 still wins) 50.♙xf5+! ♙xf5 51.♙g4+ ♙g6 52.♙e6+ ♙h7 53.♙f7+ ♙xh6 54.♙g4 and Black's king is the one that gets mated. It is impressive how the two paralysed pieces come back to life following the sacrifice of the bishop) 49.♙xh2 ♙xh2 50.♙xh2 ♙g6, with a winning endgame. Black's three extra pawns will be too much for the white bishop.

47.♙xa2 ♖xa2 48.g5! hxg5



49.♔g4?

The difficult part is over, but now White errs. The right move was 49.h6+!; defence by elimination (and the only check, so logical), after correctly identifying Black's threat, which is ...f5; after 49...♙xh6 (49...♙g6? 50.♙b1+) 50.♔g4 the white king hides among the black pawns, with a probable draw.

49...♙f6

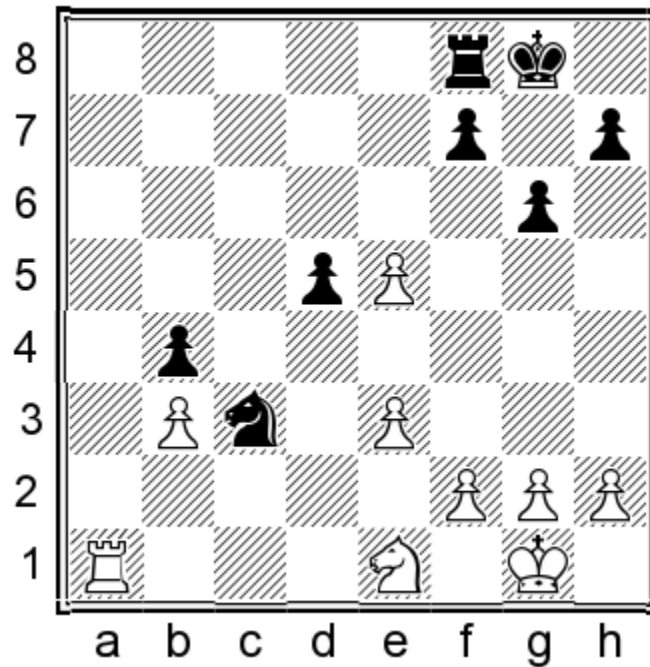
And once again, there is a mating net, now with h4 as the mating square.

50.h6 ♖h2 0-1

A truly dramatic finish.

Now, we shall see two examples in which a player can choose between moves of seemingly equal merit, the difference being in a resource available to the opponent. In the first example, the resource is a move that his opponent was already threatening.

Xulio Del Prado Rodríguez (2174)
Steve Badillo Ramos (2051)
Spanish Team Championship U14 2019



White is a pawn up, and Black's pawn on b4 is weak.

28. ♖d3?

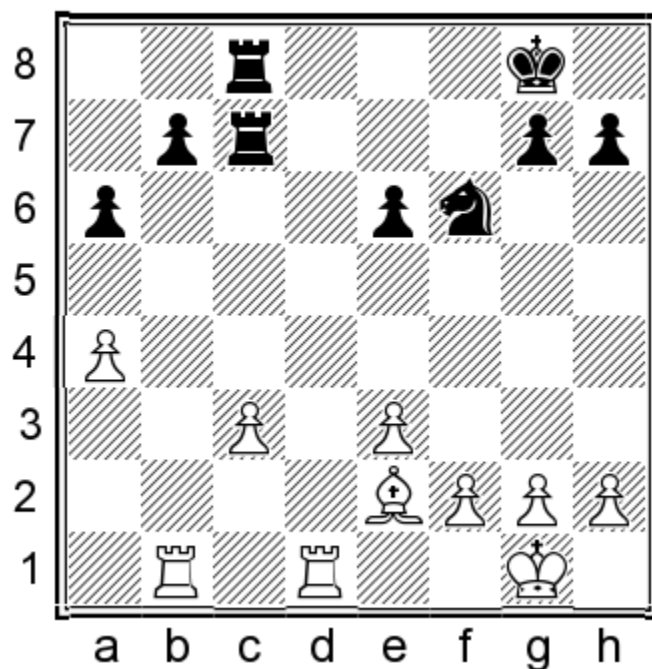
This move allows counterplay, which could have been prevented with 28. ♖c2!+–, but he ignores it because White is attacking b4. This would not have happened to him if, before moving, he had checked all the opponent's active moves.

28...d4! 29. exd4 ♘e2+ 30. ♔f1 ♘xd4

And the game ended in a draw.

In the second example, the opponent's resource appears as a result of the player's own move.

Miguel Picos Maiztegui (1874)
Marina Zuñiga Arrarás (1712)



White is a pawn up, but the c3-pawn may soon disappear.

22...♞d5?

On this square the knight might become the victim of a capture.

Instead, 22...♞e4! regains the pawn and almost equalises, because if 23.♙g4 ♜e8, nothing happens.

23.♙g4!

And now it turns out that none of the ways to defend e6 are any good.

23...♞xc3

A) If 23...♜e8? 24.♙xe6+ ♜xe6 25.♜xd5; or

B) 23...♚f7? 24.♜xd5! exd5 25.♙xc8 ♜xc8 26.♜xb7+.

In both these variations, the position of the white knight on d5 is decisive.

24.♙xe6+ ♚f8 25.♙xc8 ♜xc8 26.♚f1

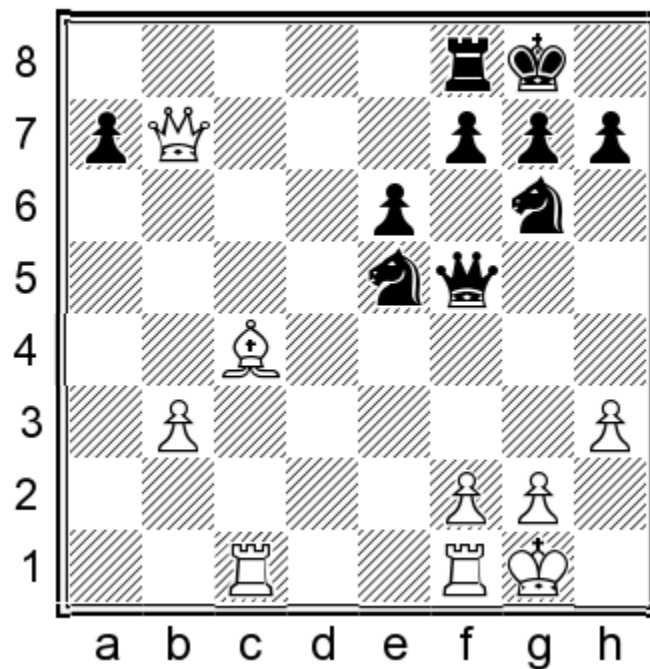
White has a winning endgame, although the game ended in a draw.

Let us now look at a case (Exercise 72) in which White ignores the opponent's possible counterplay and makes it stronger with his own move.

Francisco Orantes Taboada (2242)

Ainhoa Ortín Blanco (1951)

Salobreña 2017



White is the exchange up and, given the abundance of open lines for his rooks and the excellent placement of his queen and bishop, he ought to be able to win without any stress. Nevertheless, he should have shown some respect for the three black pieces situated near his king. He committed not only the sin of lowering his guard, confident on seeing that Black is not threatening anything, but also, especially, the sin of not observing how the tactical themes change following his intended move.

25. ♔xa7?

The queen strays a long way from the defence. We shall see this many times; it is a signal for an attack and a decision that should always be double-checked.

A) The correct preventive move was 25.♖c3!, to provide better cover for the kingside before taking any active measures; for example, 25...♖d8 26.♙xa7, winning; or

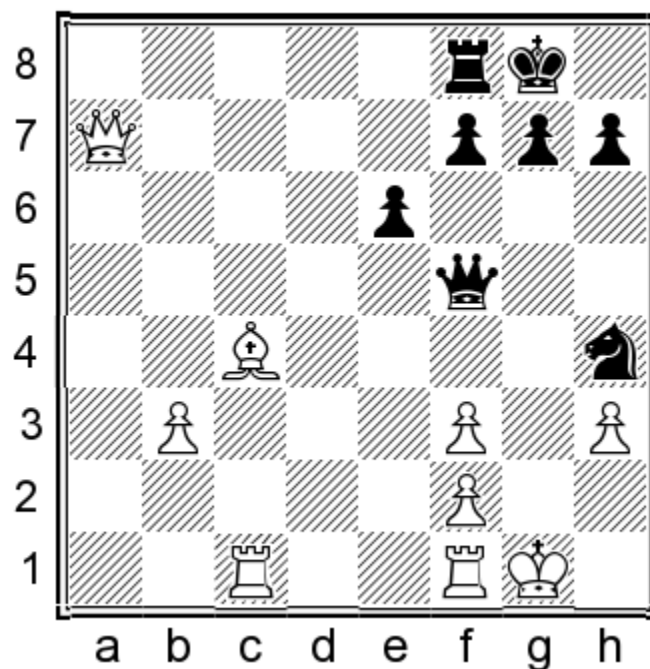
B) 25.♖fd1! ♘f4 26.♙f1 and White wins; another elegant and effective solution.

25...♞f3+!

The black pieces take immediate advantage.

26.♔h1?

As often happens, a second error completes the disaster created by the previous move. Admittedly, by now, the defence was difficult: 26.gxf3 ♞h4



analysis diagram

27.♙xe6!!. An example of a defence that can be found by considering all the possible moves (see **Error 15**) 27...fxe6 28.♖c4 and White is still in the game.

26...♙f4! 27.g3 ♖f5 28.♙xe6

It is curious that White has seen this resource, but here it does not work; of course, it is possible that he saw it too late.

28.♔g2 leads to mate in five: 28...♘gh4+ 29.gxh4 ♘xh4+ 30.♔h2 ♙f4+ 31.♔g1 ♙g5+ 32.♔h2 ♙g2#.

28...fxe6 29.g4 ♙f4 30.♙c7 ♘ge5

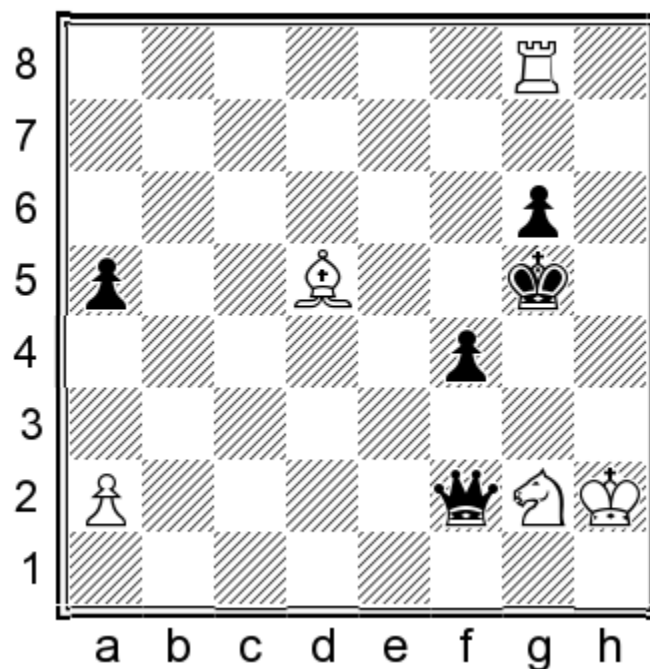
White resigned.

Regarding the following example, let us make another reflection: ‘If our opponent (who is losing) is not threatening anything, at least let us keep a close eye on his active options (forcing moves) available against our planned move.’

Rubén González Tamarit (1954)

Daniel Roldan Marques (2300)

Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2017



Black is winning, but he needs to avoid some tactical resources. If we want to be on our guard against such resources, we should at least take into account all the forcing moves.

42...f3?

But Black fails to do this. He should simply have considered the opponent's dangerous moves, mainly the checks and captures. One of the winning variations is 42...♔g3+!, and with all the white pieces exposed, it is not a difficult task to force a double attack, but it requires work and concentration: 43.♔g1 ♔c3 44.♕f7 (or 44.♕a8 ♔c5+ 45.♔h1 f3 46.♕xf3 ♔c1+ 47.♔h2 ♔c7+ 48.♔g1 ♔a7+ 49.♔f1 ♔f7) 44...♔f6 45.♕b3 f3 46.♘h4 ♔e1+, finally winning material and with mate not far off. But it is not really necessary to find the best move: it is enough not to enhance the opponent's resources.

43.♕xf3! ♔xf3 44.♖xg6+!

White was alert, but it is normal for the defender to keep looking for resources of all kinds.

44...♔h5 45.♖g3 ♔e2 46.a3

Draw.

How to avoid Errors 48 and 49

If analysis reveals that you suffer from these two errors, and you have already reached a respectable age, you should start by getting angry with yourself. Only then will you seriously face up to the problem, instead of minimising it with a smile of comprehension. It's not about suffering and feeling sorry for yourself but about taking the necessary measures so that it does not happen again. And the measures are simple: in the case of **Error 48**, each time your opponent makes a move, **keep wondering about it until you discover what its intention is**, and for **Error 49**, each time you are

going to make a move, **ask yourself what tactical aspects are changing in the position** and which of them might create an unexpected possibility. From experience, I can tell you that it will not be easy, but it is in your hands.

In any case, you should tackle the exercises in Dvoretsky's Recognizing Your Opponent's Resources; it will be a great help to you.

Error 50 - Allowing unnecessary counterplay

There must be very few chess players (if any) who have not experienced a few times the following situation, which we shall narrate from now on in the second person.

You have played very well, you have worked hard and gained a big advantage; you have, as they say, a won game. Imperceptibly, without taking any decision about it, your thinking becomes more relaxed, you do not make the effort to find strong moves, and you expect that little by little the game will end in your victory by itself. It is almost inevitable that your opponent will soon make a move that you did not foresee and which sets you some small problems. Perhaps you feel irritated; perhaps you do not give it any importance. You keep playing a bit more attentively, you think, but a few moves later, you overlook another move and the problems are more serious. Now you really want to pay more attention or perhaps solve the small problems at a stroke, but it is not that easy any more. As a result of playing hastily, you make a really bad move. Shortly after this, you realise that the game can no longer be won, or that you need to start again from scratch, or even that you are worse. Finally, and as a consequence of your bad mood, you start to play badly and lose.

Few sporting scenarios produce greater frustration. Of course, you promise yourself that it will never happen again. But a few days

later, in your next advantageous position, you will have forgotten. Perhaps this time you are luckier, and you win, despite some inaccuracy.

Errors are repeated, and not always by different protagonists. Often, we ourselves repeat the same errors, and allowing counterplay is one of the most persistent. In some cases, it will be due to overconfidence, but almost always present are the desire not to exert yourself further and anxiety about the result, perhaps aggravated by tiredness and poor time management.

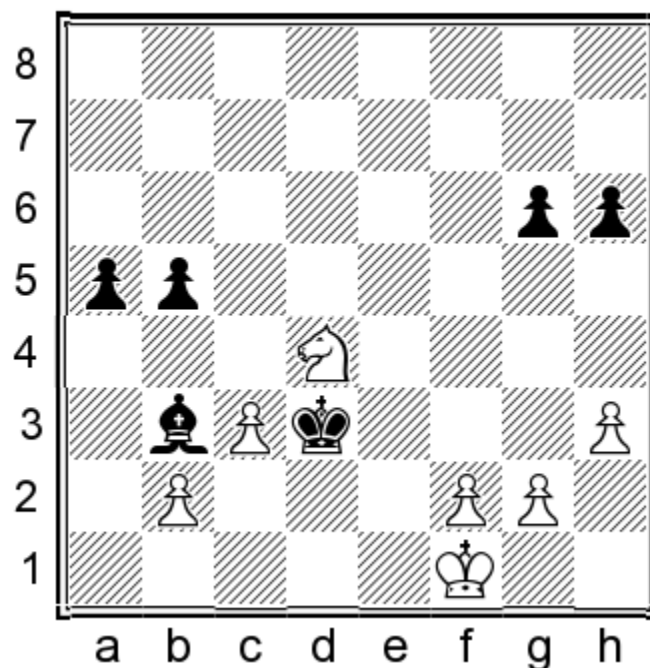
Let us look at a few examples of different levels and severity, although it would be easy to fill a whole book with them. Then we shall try to draw some useful conclusions.

In our first example, Black ended up winning, although he had already squandered the advantage.

Álvaro Bayo Milagro (2024)

Gerard Ayats Llobera (1919)

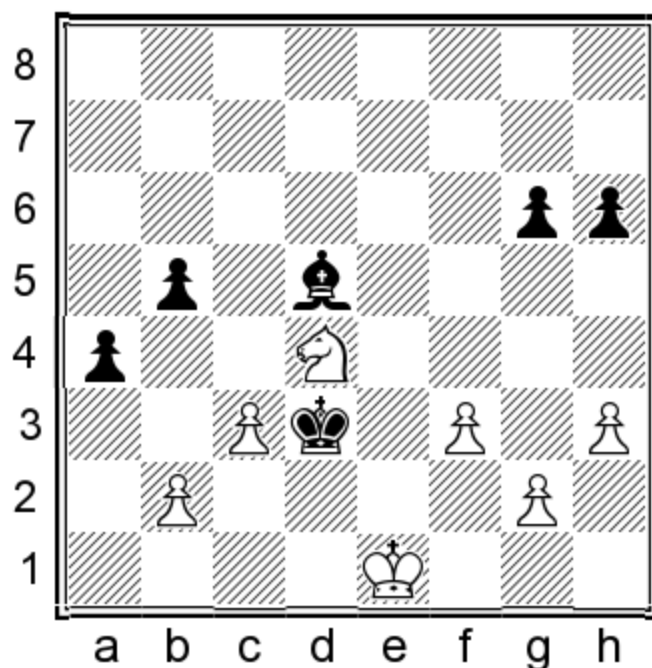
Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2014



Despite being a pawn down, Black is very close to victory. His king is tremendously active and White's b2-pawn might fall, which would leave the path clear for the a-pawn.

43...♔c4?!

This is a winning move, in spite of which we evaluate it as dubious. The reason is that the win will now be more difficult for Black, i.e. Black will have to find moves which are less obvious. Black understandably wants to defend his pawn on b5 (perhaps with the intention of not giving the opponent options), but with this little retreat, he allows the white king to be activated, not by much, but just enough to prevent the black king from reaching the b2-pawn. The most direct path to victory was with 43...a4!. Now, White can play 44.♔e1 (44.♘xb5?! would create no problems for Black due to 44...♔c2, capturing the b2-pawn and forcing White to give up his knight for the a-pawn), controlling the d2-square with his king, while the c2-square is controlled by the knight. Furthermore, White has an extra pawn and his kingside is more or less defensible. But after 44...♔d5 45.f3



analysis diagram

45...b4!, a passed pawn will inevitably appear on the a-file and this will decide the game; for example, 46.♘e2 a3 47.♘c1+ ♔c2. It is easy to argue that this variation is very concrete and that Black did not want to go in for it, just in case. The fact is that to prevent counterplay and avoid ‘subsequent hard work’ you have to be willing to calculate and play energetically when this is necessary.

44.♔e1!

If the king reaches d1, it is possible that the position is not lost, and in any case, White will be out of extreme danger.

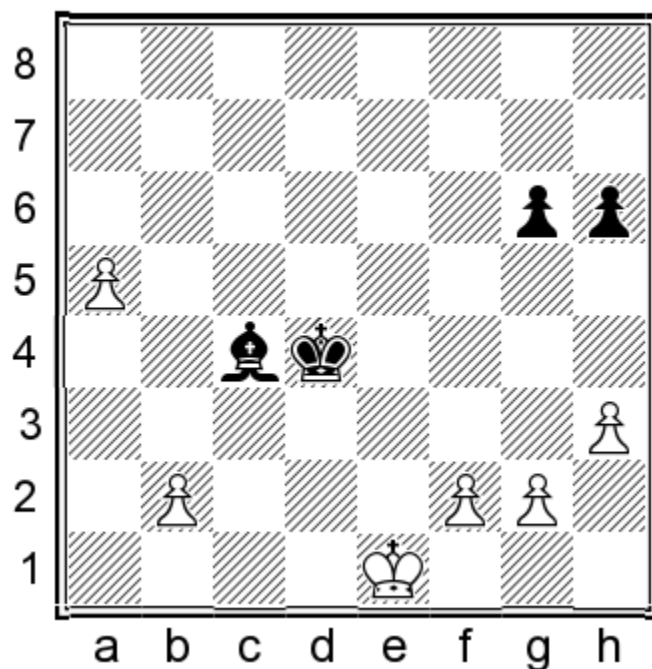
44...b4!

The best move, and by now almost the only winning one (combined with the previous move ...♙d5), but it is precisely the one that gives White the opportunity of counterplay (and this is what makes Black’s previous move dubious).

45.cxb4!

This is the resource that Black should have foreseen. Objectively, it loses, but it is certain that Black would have preferred to avoid it.

45...♔xd4 46.bxa5



This is the type of situation that occurs when unnecessary counterplay is allowed. Black has to readjust, search for a winning plan and take care, something for which he is sometimes not psychologically prepared, and often he will fail.

46...♔c5?!

The second small error, when there were still some winning moves. Black moves the king away in order to restrain the pawns, but this now allows White to form a clear plan for seeking a draw.

It was necessary to realise that the bishop can take charge of the queenside pawns and help the king from afar, although this is not at all easy. 46...g5! is the best move in the new plan, although some other moves also work: 47.g3 (47.♔d2?! ♕f1!) 47...♔e4, followed by ...♔f3, when the bishop deals with the queenside pawns while the king invades the kingside.

47.f4

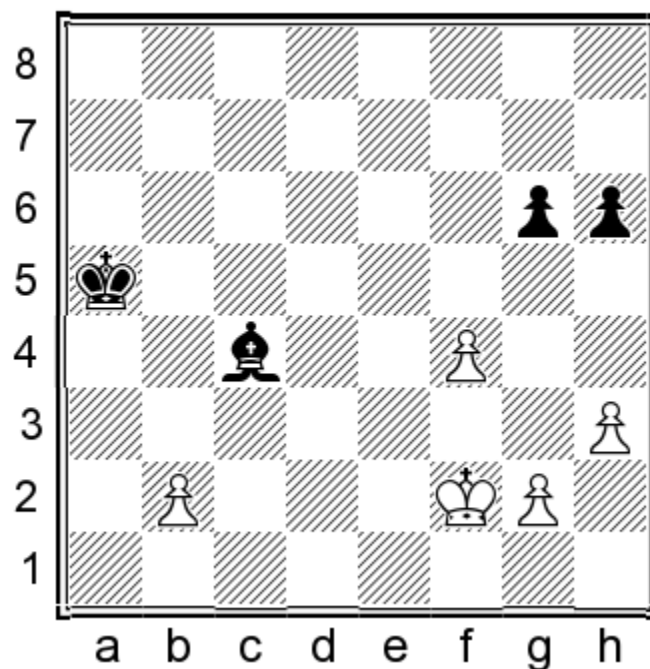
The logical move, since it will only fail due to a change of plan by Black, which it might perhaps provoke.

47...♔b5?

Now the king definitely goes where it is not needed. Black makes a bad **division of labour**. Now the position is a draw.

With 47...♔d4! Black could still have implemented the plan indicated in the previous move: 48.♔f2 (48.g4 ♔e4 49.f5 gxf5 50.gxf5 ♔xf5 51.♔f2 ♔f4) 48...♔e4 49.g3 ♚b5 and now White is doomed thanks to a series of zugzwangs; if 50.♔g2, then 50...♔e3 and Black wins.

48.♔f2! ♔xa5



And now White could have forced a draw with

49.f5!

. Instead White played 49.g4 ♔b4 50.♔e3 ♚f1 51.♔e4 ♚c4 52.♔d4 and in this unclear position, White lost on time.

49...gxf5 50.g4 fxf4 51.hxf4 ♔b4 52.♔e3 ♖c5 53.♔f4 ♔d6 54.g5 h5 55.g6 ♖e7 56.♔g5 ♙e2 57.b4

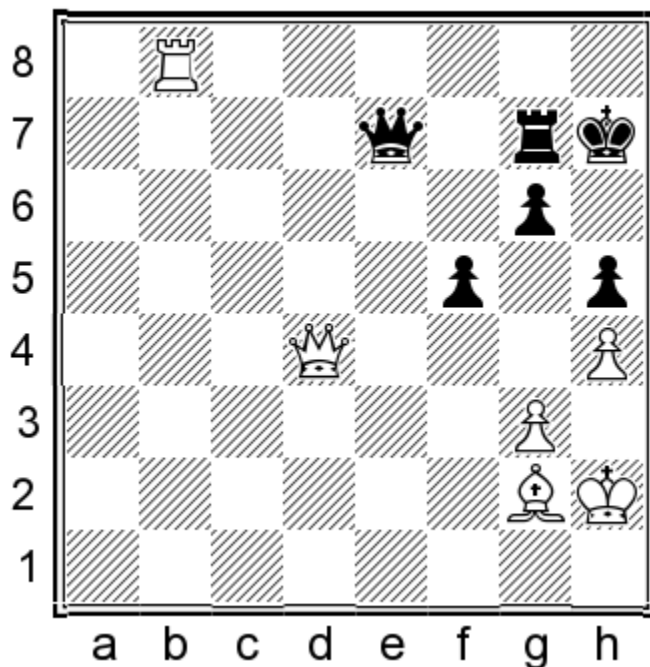
And the b-pawn will divert the black bishop from the defence of his last pawn, with an inevitable draw.

Inattention frequently allows immediate counterplay, ending in a draw. This is often considered a tactical error, but it falls within the same psychological spectrum as overconfidence.

Marta García Martín (2166)

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Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2015

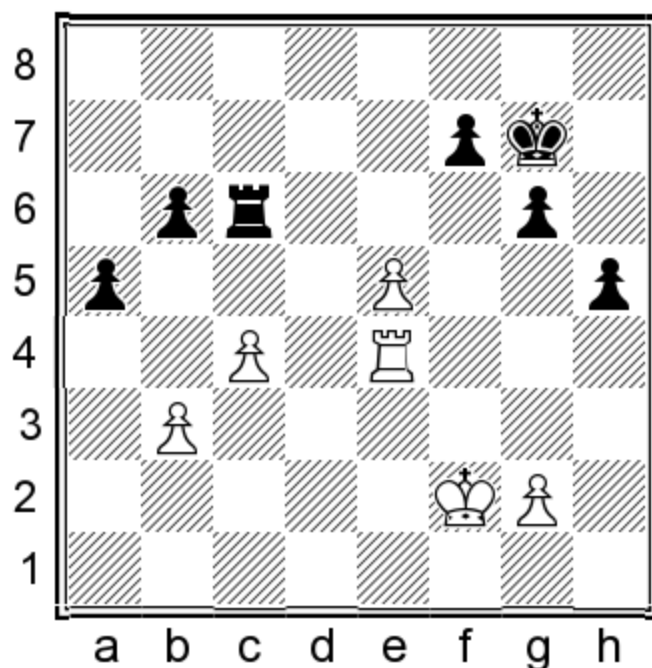


Black can hardly move (in addition to the fact that he is a piece down), but his position is solid and there are not many pawns left.

55.♔b2?

The queen should not have strayed from the control of f4.

A cruder error was 55.♔xg7+? ♔xg7 56.♖b7, when Black can easily leave his opponent with the useless h-pawn by playing 56...g5



This is a surprising story. Black ended up losing this ending, where he is a pawn up with the better structure.

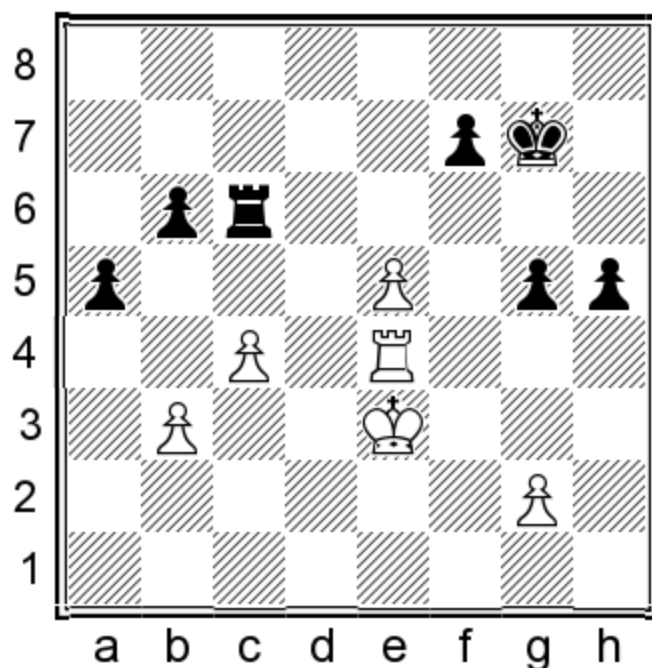
37...g5?!

This prepares ...♔g7-g6-f5 but it fails to take the opponent's moves into account.

37...♖e6! was not the only way to win, but it fits in with what we want to discuss. With the black rook attacking the e-pawn, with ideas of a possible ...f6 or ... g5, ...♔g7-g6-f5, the white king can neither cross the e-file nor approach the pawn, and the white rook is tied to its defence. Once the passivity of the enemy pieces has been established, we are in better circumstances to continue with our plan after 38.♔f3 (38.♔e3 f6!-+) 38...g5 39.♖e2 ♔g6 40.♔e4 f6.

38.♔e3!?

The king is heading for d4 and d5, but also takes a step towards f5. 38.♖d4!? ♔g6 39.♖d5 would have prevented ...♔f5 and also gained some activity with the rook. Even in that case, though, White is lost.



38...♔f8?

Taking a step back with the king is always strange, but after clearing the g6-square, it seems doubly inconsistent.

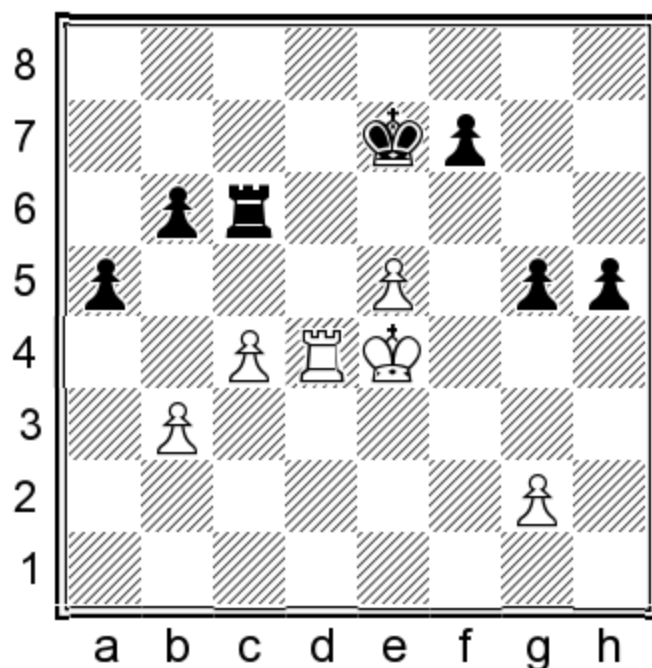
A) Again 38...♖e6! would have completely ruled out White's little attempt at counterplay because if 39.♕d4, then 39...f6!;

B) 38...♔g6!? was still good, when 39.♕d4 ♕f5 40.♖e1 prepares ♖f1 with check, as well as ♕d5, which forces Black to play a precise move, 40...f6! , eliminating both of White's threats and maintaining Black's decisive advantage after 41.♖f1+ (or 41.♕d5 ♖c5+, followed by ...♖e5) 41...♔g6!.

39.♖d4

Permitting the white king to move to e4 and then f5.

39...♕e7 40.♕e4



40...g4?

This is already very serious and loses the advantage. The white king should not be permitted to advance to f5. The right move was 40...♔e6!, which was probably not played in order not to allow White's rook to invade the eighth rank (counterplay, but deceptive), but if 41.♖d8?, then 41...a4!, creating new weaknesses and activating the rook to decisive effect.

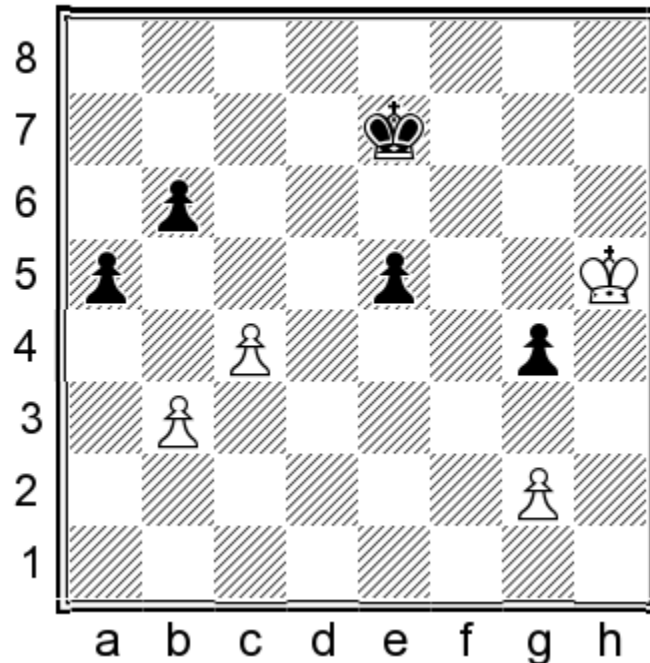
Admittedly, after 40...♔e6! 41.g3!, the position is almost one of mutual zugzwang. White would lose easily if she had to move, but now, with her opponent to move, Black's mishandling of his rook's activity is highlighted – right now, it cannot move. Nevertheless, Black can win with 41...h4!, which is the only way to break the equilibrium; after 42.gxh4 gxh4 43.♔f4 h3 44.♖d2 ♔e7! 45.♖h2 ♖h6 46.♔f5 ♖h8 White is the only one in zugzwang.

41.♔f5 f6

A rather unexpected pawn break, which comes late and only serves to keep the game level... if continued accurately. It seems clear that now Black was only thinking about saving himself and was not in

the best frame of mind to face up to this. The transition to a pawn ending is always dangerous if not calculated precisely. It was safer to play 41...♖c5! 42.♗d6 b5 43.cxb5 ♖xb5 44.♗a6 ♖xb3 45.♗xa5 ♖b2 46.♗a7+ ♔f8 47.♔f6 ♖f2+.

42.♖e4 ♖c5!? 43.♔g6 ♖xe5 44.♖xe5+ fxe5 45.♔xh5

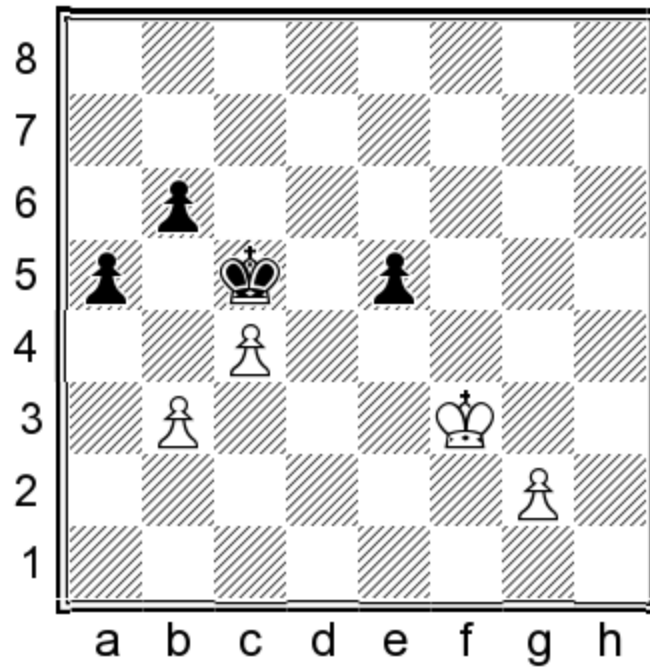


The pawn ending is a draw, but, as often happens, it hides a few surprises. Black must now play more accurately than before.

45...g3 46.♔g4 ♔d6 47.♔xg3

Now White has a more distant passed pawn.

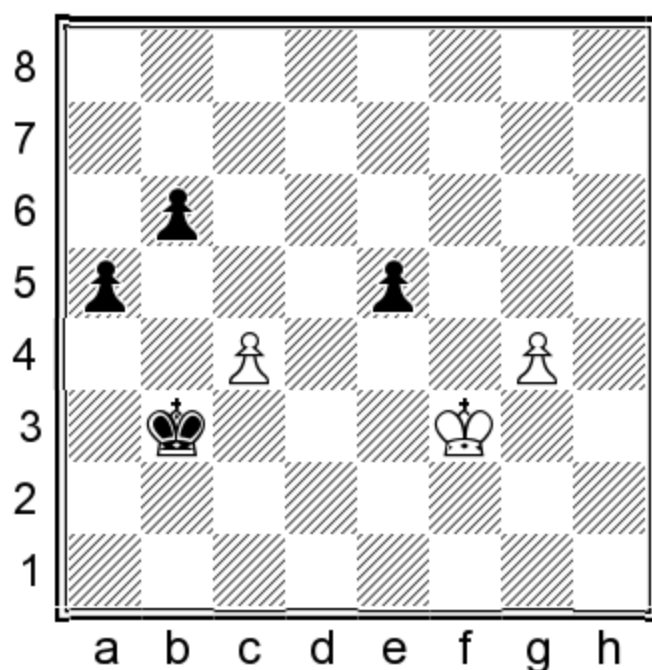
47...♔c5 48.♔f3



48...♔b4?

Black must have calculated and settled for an ending of queen against rook's pawn on the seventh, without realising the harmful effect of his other two pawns, but he overlooked White's 50th move. The way to keep the balance now is very subtle: 48...♔d4! 49.♔e2 (49.g4 ♔d3 50.♔f2 ♔d2 51.♔f3 ♔d3=) 49...♔e4 50.g3 ♔d4 51.♔d2 ♔e4 52.♔e2.

49.g4 ♔xb3



50.c5!

In order to queen with check.

50...bxc5 51.g5 a4 52.g6 a3 53.g7 a2 54.g8♔+ ♔b2

The ending would be drawn if it were not for Black's extra pawns, but with them, it is a well-known loss.

How to avoid Error 50

The examples of this error have been long, because it is an error which is committed in instalments. The recommendations are also going to be long because this error embraces many others, and it is not by chance that I have placed it last. Like some others that we have commented on, it requires changes in attitude during the game, rather than studies or training tasks away from it.

Nevertheless, there are a few technical improvements possible and we shall begin with these:

- Make a serious study of your own games and see if the error described here occurs very frequently in your games. If this is the case, there is no reason to despair, because you are part of a very

large group, but there is reason to take note, recognise it, and take decisive action against it (we shall give a few recommendations in this respect further on).

- Read some books that present examples and cover this topic, specifically *Practical Endgame Lessons* by Edmar Mednis and *Endgame Strategy* by Mikhail Shereshevsky.
- Analyse some games by players known for their technique in the phase where they have a big advantage and try to understand the patterns behind their way of playing.

But as we have said, with respect to this error, the most important thing is to improve your attitude during the game, to which we dedicate the following pieces of advice (which would also be useful in regard to several other errors):

- Never be in a hurry to win. The way to finish the game sooner is to make the strongest moves.
- Make sure you enjoy each phase of the game, and the phase in which the game is won should be the most enjoyable.
- Your vigilance should always be greater than the difficulty of the task to be performed. If, instead, it is your self-confidence that is greater, it does not match reality and will lead you to make mistakes.
- Do not settle for easy moves or think that because you have a great advantage, you are allowed to avoid the calculation of variations. ‘To prevent counterplay and sometimes avoid tiresome exertions later in the game, you should be prepared to calculate and play energetically for as long as necessary.’
- If you become aware that you have relaxed, acknowledge it and get back to hard work, even though it is difficult to achieve a conscious change of attitude during the game.
- Winning material requires effort, and we tend to think that it belongs to us now, but it is better to be flexible. The objective is not to end up with extra material, but to win. Sometimes it is best to

return the (recently won) material in order to continue to dominate the position.