

ELIMINATE MISTAKES FROM YOUR PLAY

BLUNDERS

AND HOW TO
AVOID THEM



EVERYMAN CHESS

ANGUS DUNNINGTON

BLUNDERS

AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

No one likes to make mistakes, but all chess players, even those belonging to the world's elite, are prone to blundering. How can this problem be eradicated or, at the very least, kept to a minimum? Read this book and find out!

Experienced chess player and writer Angus Dunnington takes a look at why the good, the bad and the indifferent all make errors, from small positional misjudgements to simply leaving a queen en prise. Dunnington explores the reasons for oversights and the habits one needs to develop in order to banish these problems. This book is crucial reading for those plagued by chess disasters!

- Offers help to blunder-prone players
- Explains techniques to avoid errors
- Written by an experienced competitor

English International Master **Angus Dunnington** is a well-respected and popular personality on the international chess tournament circuit. He is also a successful chess teacher, who has coached many of Britain's top junior players. His earlier works for Everyman Chess include *Attacking with 1 d4* and *Understanding the Sacrifice*.

EVERYMAN CHESS

www.everymanchess.com

Published in the UK by Gloucester Publishers plc
Distributed in the US by the Globe Pequot Press

ISBN 1-85744-344-6



£14.99

\$19.95

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First published in 2004 by Gloucester Publishers plc (formerly Everyman Publishers plc), Northburgh House, 10 Northburgh Street, London EC1V 0AT

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 1 85744 344 6

Distributed in North America by The Globe Pequot Press, P.O. Box 480,
246 Goose Lane, Guilford, CT 06437-0480.

All other sales enquiries should be directed to Everyman Chess, Northburgh House,
10 Northburgh Street, London EC1V 0AT
tel: 020 7253 7887 fax: 020 7490 3708
email: info@everymanchess.com
website: www.everymanchess.com

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EVERYMAN CHESS SERIES (formerly Cadogan Chess)

Chief advisor: Garry Kasparov

Commissioning editor: Byron Jacobs

Typeset and edited by First Rank Publishing, Brighton.

Cover design by Horatio Monteverde.

Production by Navigator Guides.

Printed and bound in the US by Versa Press.

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INTRODUCTION

The chess-board is the world; the pieces are the phenomena of the universe; the rules are what we call the laws of Nature. The player on the other side is hidden from us. We know that his play is always fair, just and patient. But also we know, to our cost, that he never overlooks a mistake, or makes the smallest allowance for ignorance.

Thomas H.Huxley (1825-195), British teacher and biologist. Lay Sermons, addresses and Reviews (1870).

We all make mistakes – in life and at the chess board. This book is aimed at intermediate and club players and is designed to point the reader in the right direction – as opposed to the wrong direction – on the subject of blunders. It is impossible to eradicate mistakes completely; even the best players rarely go through a game without committing some kind of error, so it is important to keep things in perspective.

However, by trying to better understand the nature of blunders, by recognising what kind of mistakes we keep making and why we keep making them, our game will improve (and, in turn, our results). Being conscious of this aspect of the game before we sit down is just as important as being up to date with opening theory – perhaps even more so.

Of course learning as much about chess as possible is helpful in itself, and studying any part of the game is sure to both reduce our blunders and increase the likelihood of recognising the opposition's errors, but only if we include the subject of blunders in our home preparation. There's not much point knowing all about pawn chains, for example, if we spoil our demonstration of this with a silly blunder or bad habit.

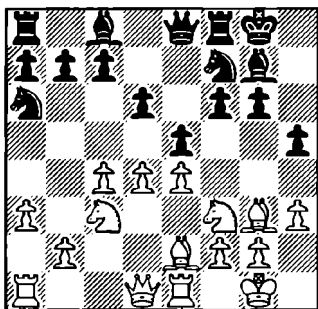
Here's an example. Sometimes we're so tuned into deep and meaningful aspects of the game that mundane factors such as hanging pieces pass us by. We might have a quiet chuckle at the following ridiculous blunder (victim's FIDE rating: 2355), but we have all been – or will be – guilty of equally ridiculous oversights.

Cacho-Rufino

Murcia 1997

(see following diagram)

A King's Indian Defence position, where Black gets busy on the kingside. White, for his part, needs to expand on the other flank, and has just played 14 a3. Anticipating b2-b4 and a general advance of the enemy queenside pawns, Black seeks a more pleasant role for his queen's knight.

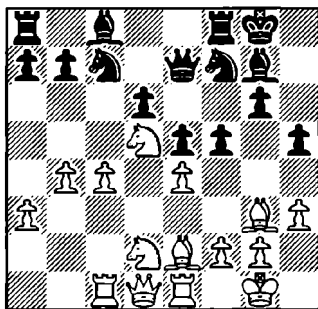


14...c6 15 b4 Qc7 16 d5 We7

Improving the queen.

17 Qd2 f5 18 Bc1 cxd5 19 Qxd5

Black is not willing to trade on d5, which would hand his opponent either a queenside majority or an open c-file on which to operate. Furthermore, either recapture affords White control of the e6-square. Anyway, he has plans for his knight, which now heads for d4.



19...Qe6?? 1-0

Black's strategic considerations led him to forget about the rather major detail of his queen being under fire. Such blunders can be avoided by noting any threats introduced by the opponent's previous move.

However, as we shall see in this book, eliminating blunders is easier said than done and requires some effort. We seem to be too busy either thinking, or not thinking...

CHAPTER ONE

Sense of Danger

I don't make mistakes. I make prophecies which are immediately proved wrong

Attributed to Murray Walker, British television motor racing commentator.

We all have, to some extent, a sense of danger. It just doesn't seem to work as well as it should. While a player's initiative and commonsense afford considerable flexibility regarding the forest of 'golden rules' that is accumulated over time – and which would more appropriately be called golden guidelines – the practical difficulties experienced during a competitive game nevertheless have a habit of catching out even the strongest players. There's not much point actually investing time and effort away from the board in the development of a sense of danger if this preparation is undone during battle through carelessness or a stubborn insistence on ignoring the alarm bells.

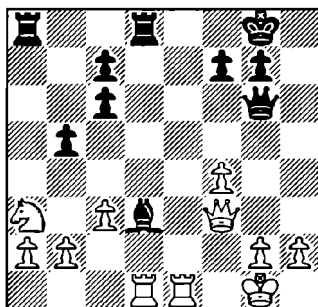
Unless the situation demands risk, it is a good idea to avoid the inclusion of 'dangerous' looking moves as part of an ordinary plan or strategy. A cruel irony on the subject of the sense of danger is that when we fail to hear the alarm bells ringing there is a good chance the opponent is alert, and for him they might be about to produce sweet, sweet music.

Back rank

When the castled king has an escape square available we tend to take the back rank off the possible danger list. This is why the following blunder theme crops up so often.

Em.Lasker-von Scheve

Berlin 1890

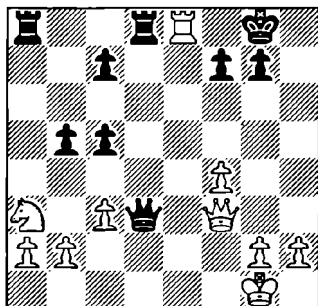


Black has obvious compensation for the pawn in the shape of his vastly superior minor piece, which he now looks to cement on d3.

24...c5?? 25 ♖xd3!

Winning. The recapture with the rook is out of the question as this leaves the other rook hanging on a8 now that the h1–a8 diagonal has been opened.

25... ♖xd3 26 ♜e8+! 1-0



Black cannot escape serious material loss thanks to his failure to spot his vulnerability on the back rank. After 26... ♜xe8 27 ♖xd3 the knight makes a big difference, and 26... ♔h7 27 ♖xd3+ ♜xd3 28 ♜xa8 is even worse. 27 ♖h5 mate isn't bad either.

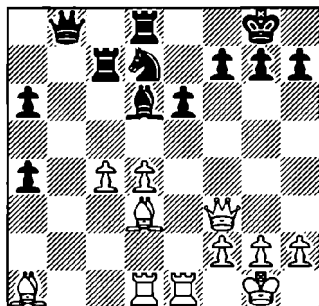
Falling foul of a back rank blunder is an accident we can all make a conscious effort to avoid, for no other reason than we know the rules, and we know what checkmate is. Even my youngest pupils (eventually, of course) learned to appreciate that the embarrassment and pain caused by coming unstuck on the back rank merits a note of caution as the game begins to open up for the heavy pieces and there is still no breathing space for the (usually castled) king. That the following game is from a rapidplay tournament doesn't really detract from the seriousness of White's faulty play – nor does the fact that he is a young teenager – because the culprit is arguably the most talented GM since Kasparov burst on the scene.

Radjabov-Anand

FIDE Grand Prix, Dubai 2002

Black's extra pawn should be irrelevant in view of the direction in which White's pieces are pointing. It is interesting that, rather than play h2-h3, which has both a long-term pur-

pose in that it provides the king with an escape square and, in the short-term, takes the pawn out of the firing line of Black's queen and bishop, White seeks to exploit his united wall of kingside pawns to step up the pressure against Black's king.



23 ♜e4?!

Ftacnik proposes 23 c5! ♗e7 24 ♜b1 as an improvement, with an edge for White.

23... ♗f6 24 ♜h4 ♗e7 25 ♜h3

The point – White uses h3 for his rook. After 25 d5 exd5 26 cxd5 ♖b3 27 ♜h3 ♖xd5 28 ♖g3 White's back rank is vulnerable and Black can head for equality with 28... ♖xd3 29 ♖xd3 ♜xd3 30 ♜hxd3 (threatening ♜d8+) 30... ♔f8 etc.

25... h6

Black sensibly rules out any monkey business involving ♗xh7+ ♗xh7, ♖h5.

26 ♜b1?

Continuing to throw his weight around, but Anand is not one to be bullied. 26 d5 exd5 27 cxd5 ♜c5! 28 ♜g3 ♖d6 favours Black but is a lesser evil. Now White misses the ambitious rook.

26... ♜xc4!

Only now will White have noticed that his own king needed looking after.

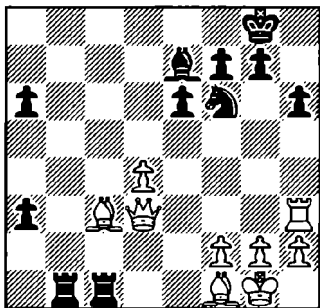
27 ♜xb8

27 ♖d1 ♜b4 leaves White on the back foot without even d4-d5 to fall back on now that the c4-pawn has disappeared.

27... ♜c1 + 28 ♗f1 ♜xb8

Black has only a rook for the queen but White's back rank is the key feature – which is beyond the reach of the h3-rook.

29 ♖c3 ♜bb1 30 ♜d3 a3!



The threat is stronger than the execution. Black keeps his opponent tied down, adding his passed pawn to the mix. The diagram position highlights White's plight, the rook having become separated from its flock.

31 ♜xa6 a2 32 g4

This seems rather late. Nevertheless, apart from freeing g2 for the king the text also invites Black to blunder.

32...♜xf1 +!

Not falling for 32...♘e4? 33 ♜a8+ ♖f8 34 ♜xe4 ♜xf1+ 35 ♖g2 when Black's task is less convenient, e.g. 35...♜f1 (threatening ...♜xc3) 36 ♜a8! and the a-pawn drops.

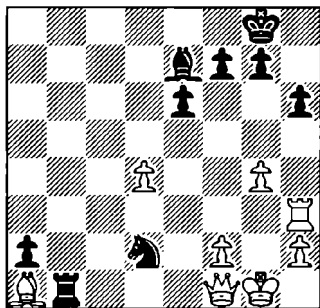
33 ♜xf1

33 ♖g2 ♜g1+ 34 ♖f3 ♜b3 35 ♖e2 ♜xc3 36 ♜xa2 ♜xh3 fails to help White.

33...♘e4! 34 ♖a1 ♘d2! 0-1

It is rather hackneyed, but since arriving on h3 White's rook played no more than a spectator's role. When contemplating sending a rook away from the back rank in a position still populated by most of the pieces there needs to be both a very good reason to do so and sufficient protection available to the king. Failure to appreciate either of these conditions is risky indeed, which is why we tend to see rooks going about their business along the back rank during most of the mid-

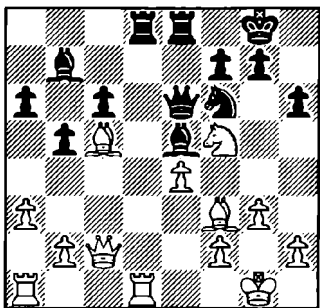
dgame phase.



Don't be fooled by a cluttered diagonal

Golod-Lebedinsky

Beer Sheva 2002



White, who has just nudged his pawn to a3, has the better prospects in view of the extra centre pawn and well posted minor pieces on c5 and f5. What would you consider to be Black's most appropriate course in the diagram position? Comparing the relative merits of the pawn majorities, White is not far from being able to roll forward with f2-f4 followed by e4-e5, whereas Black's queenside is being held back thanks to the hole on c5. Consequently a candidate move here is to address this problem with 22...♘d7, e.g. 23 ♖d6 c5 and liberation has been achieved. However, assuming Black

was not worried about the anyway harmless check on e7, he seemed more concerned with White's advanced knight which, at the moment, cannot be evicted by ...g7-g6 because this leaves the h6-pawn hanging.

22...♖h7?

Perhaps simultaneously avoiding the check and protecting h6 added to the logic of ...♖h7, but the planned remedy is more harmful than the problem itself, for now Black's king shares the same diagonal as the enemy queen. It should not be surprising that such a policy carries with it some risk, a factor that introduces two practical problems: 1) analysing the possible downsides to waving the red flag at the bull eats into our time, and 2) it would not be unusual to anyway miss something! In other words, it makes sense in a reasonably 'normal' situation to look for more sober alternatives, saving time and potential heartache. Moreover, if we make a conscious effort to avoid placing our valuable pieces in the firing line – regardless of how 'safe' it may appear – we automatically reduce the chance of blundering. Ironically, the stronger a chess player, the more likely he is to try to break these sensible rules by using his ability to demonstrate that this or that instance is an exception.

Anyway, Black seems ready to carry out his plan of evicting the knight with ...g7-g6, judging that because this is going to happen on the next move, and because White has both the knight and a blockaded pawn on the same diagonal, there is nothing to worry about as White cannot profitably clear away two pieces to do any damage. And herein lies another important point in this kind of situation – Black should be looking at all ways in which his opponent might exploit the free move afforded by the discovered check. In fact it is fitting that the punishment involves both his advanced pieces.

23 ♖d6!

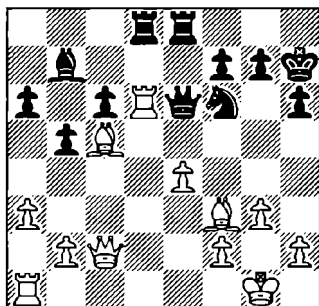
An option hitherto unavailable to White, who now both clears his knight away from

the crucial diagonal and engineers the removal of the blockading bishop, thus liberating the remaining obstacle on e4.

23...♗xd6

Unfortunately for Black after 23...♗e7? 24 ♖xb7 ♗xd1+ White has 25 ♗xd1! ♖xb7 26 f4 and e4-e5+ is coming.

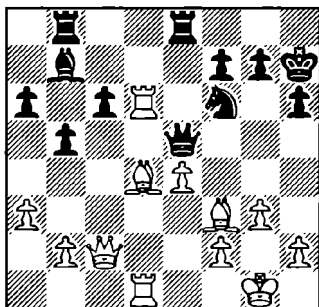
24 ♗xd6!?



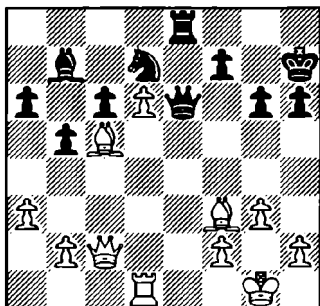
I like this move. Instead of the automatic 24 e5+ White gives his opponent the opportunity to make a further mistake.

24...♗xc4

Rather than alleviate the pressure the offer to trade queens with 24...♗c4 merely leads to a very poor ending for Black after 25 ♗xc4 bxc4 26 e5 ♖d5 27 ♗c1. Meanwhile, 24...♗e5? looks as dangerous as ...♖h7 as we should know to avoid blockading a pawn with the queen: 25 ♗ad1! (25 ♗d4!?) 25...♗b8 (25...♗xd6? 26 ♗xd6) 26 ♗d4!



26...♖e7 (26...♗xd6?? 27 e5+) 27 ♗xf6
 gxf6 28 e5+ and the kingside collapses.
 25 e5+ g6 26 exd6 ♕d7 27 ♖d1



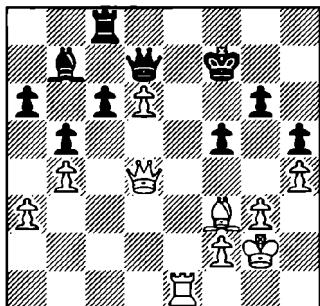
27 b4?! gives Black counterplay after
 27...♗f6! 28 ♖d1 ♕xc5 29 bxc5 ♗c3 etc.
 We can see in the diagram position that
 Black's voluntary step into the danger zone
 has resulted in a difficult defensive task.

By now he must have realised that he had
 been worried about the wrong piece, for
 White's control of the important c5-square
 is still intact. There followed:

27...♕xc5 28 ♗xc5 ♗d7 29 b4 ♖g8 30
 h4 h5 31 ♗g2 f5?

White intended to force this structural
 weakening with ♗h2 and ♗h3, but the text
 seems rather helpful.

32 ♗f3 ♖e6 33 ♖g2 ♖e8 34 ♗b6 ♖f8
 35 ♖c1 ♖c8 36 ♗d4 ♖f7 37 ♖e1



Black's position has gone from quite play-

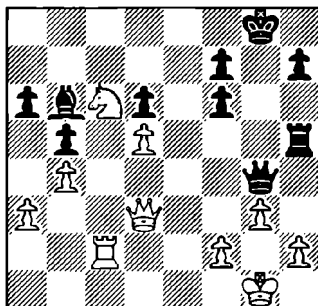
able, to bad, to worse. Under pressure, facing
 a strong, advanced passed pawn and with a
 terrible bishop and accompanying pawns, he
 threw in the towel after another dozen
 moves. Note how White didn't do anything
 special after ...♗h7. In fact he merely appre-
 ciated the potential change in the terrain cre-
 ated by his opponent's lapse, responding
 accordingly after investigating possible means
 to exploit the new avenue on the b1-h7 di-
 agonal – perhaps even random 'clearance'
 ideas initially until concrete variations began
 to take shape.

Watch out for the obvious

We have all found ourselves against a brave
 opponent whose attack on our king seems to
 have come to a standstill, breathing a sigh of
 relief when the danger is over only to leave
 the door open for a final and decisive incur-
 sion. Overlooking brutal attacking possibili-
 ties is another of those faults shared by very
 high and very low rated players, while those
 in the group in between tend to be more
 circumspect. Witness GM Ian Rogers spoil a
 nice position with a calm knight manoeuvre.

I.Rogers-Lane

Australian Ch'ship, Adelaide 2003/04



At the expense of his kingside structure
 Black has placed his heavy pieces in front of
 White's king, but the gamble would come to
 nothing were White to play 32 h4!, when

32.. ♖xh4? runs into serious trouble after 33 ♖e7+ ♜f8 34 ♖f5 with the dual threats of ♜c8+ and picking up the rook for free. This leaves 32... ♜g7 33 ♜h2 and White is sufficiently solid on the kingside to be able to concentrate on his overall advantage (Black's rook is then sitting pretty with nowhere to go; Rogers gives 33... ♜f5 34 f4). However, thinking that Black had nothing White sent his knight on a rip.

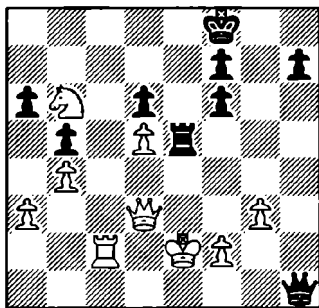
32 ♖e7+? ♜f8 33 ♖c8??

Purposeful but losing. There is still a chance to cut his losses and accept a slightly worse ending with 33 ♜e2! ♜xf2+! 34 ♜xf2 ♜xe7 etc.

33... ♜h3! 34 ♖xb6?!

34 ♜f3 ♜xh2+ 35 ♜f1 ♜h3+! is a lesser evil but still very unpleasant for White, e.g. 36 ♜g1 ♜e5 or 36 ♜g2 ♜f5.

34... ♜xh2+ 35 ♜f1 ♜h1+ 36 ♜e2 ♜e5+



White had intended 37 ♜d2 here but this meets with immediate mate on e1!

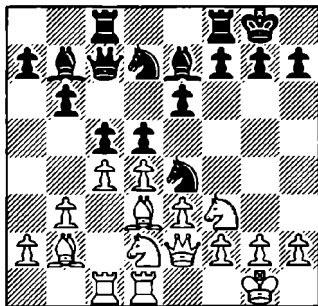
There followed 37 ♜e3 ♜h5+ 38 ♜d2 ♜xe3 39 ♜xe3 ♜e5+ 40 ♜d3 ♜g7 41 ♜c6 f5 42 f4 ♜e4+ 43 ♜c3 ♜e3+ 44 ♜c2 ♜xg3 45 ♜xd6 ♜xf4 0-1

Don't stop analysing

In the next example Black takes a liberty with his queen that is both positionally and tactically suspect.

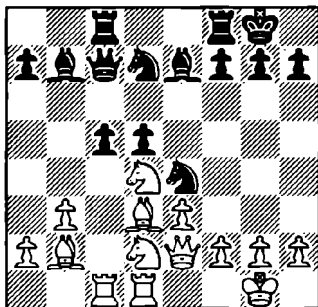
1 c4 e6 2 ♖f3 ♖f6 3 b3 ♜e7 4 ♜b2 0-0

5 e3 d5 6 d4 b6 7 ♜d3 ♜b7 8 0-0 ♖bd7
9 ♖bd2 c5 10 ♜e2 ♖e4 11 ♜ac1 ♜c8
12 ♜fd1 ♜c7



The disadvantage of starting second has seen Black's task during the opening phase made rather awkward by there being no natural square for the queen, thanks to the bishop standing on e7. In order to make way for the second rook to enter the game on d8 Black has shifted the queen to c7, a potentially exposed or inconvenient post given that it shares the c-file with White's rook.

13 cxd5 exd5 14 dxc5 bxc5 15 ♖d4



The pawn exchanges have left White with a comfortable advantage. Black now has a pair of 'hanging' pawns to worry about, and White's latest move exploits the pin on the c-file to activate the knight (f5 already beckons). 15... ♖d6 covers both f5 and b5 (just in case), after which ... ♜f6 can be considered.

Instead Black sees an opportunity for a triple-purpose move (and we all like those).

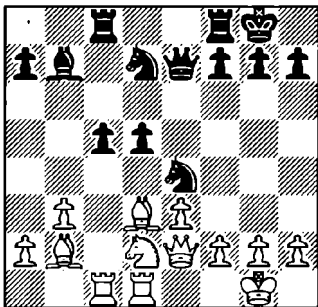
15... ♖e5?

Defending against the strong looking ♖f5, escaping the pin and even setting a new pin on the long diagonal – all the features of a good move, apart from the fact that it leads to trouble.

16 ♖c6!

Not the square Black had been thinking about, perhaps, but by now we should be aware that anything involving an attack on the queen or a vulnerable piece (the e7-bishop in this case) should be considered properly.

16... ♜e6 17 ♖xe7+ ♜xe7



Black has surrendered the dark-squared bishop but solved the problem of finding a decent home for the queen. Unfortunately the mini-skirmish shouldn't end there, as if the point at which the 'deal' has been completed – White securing a potentially influential bishop for a knight, Black improving the queen and alleviating some of the pressure – precludes continued analysis and assessment.

18 ♖xe4!

After succeeding in earning the bishop pair it looks illogical to make this trade, but opening the d-file prepares a geometric tactic that Black can do nothing about. Note that by initiating the exchange on e7 Black handed over the move to White, an important concession that top players try to avoid

if a suitable alternative is available.

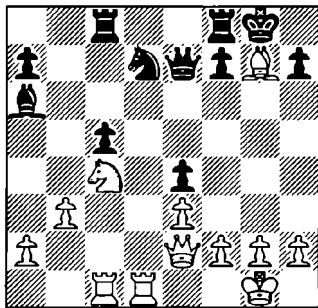
18... dxe4 19 ♖c4

Now Black has to address the threat of ♖d6, hitting the rook and bishop and homing on the f5-square, from where the knight would fork e7 and g7.

19... ♖a6

A defensive pin, but White has another ace up his sleeve.

20 ♖xg7!



Decisive. Since practically inviting White to assume control Black has been powerless against the threats, with no time to organise either defence or a counter.

20... ♜xg7 21 ♜g4+ ♜h8 22 ♖xd7

Winning a pawn and remaining in the driving seat.

22... f5 23 ♜xf5! ♖xf5 24 ♖xe7 ♖xc4 25 ♖xc4 ♖d8 26 g4

The ending is hopeless for Black.

Win the battle, lose the war

Some openings and defences feature a theme or strategy around which the early part of the battle revolves, the success of both sides determined by how they address the struggle. The psychological effect of getting the better of the opposition in the matter of these conventional themes can be detrimental to the overall cause, leading to overconfidence and, consequently, the dreaded blunder.

In the following miniature White sidesteps the critical continuations as early as the 7th

move with an ostensibly harmless theoretical novelty, apparently willing to help Black in achieving his main aim. But Black is oblivious to the meeting point of two straight lines, and fails to make it into double figures.

Sakaev-Delchev

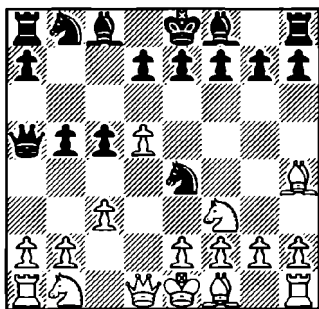
Ohrid 2001

Irregular Benoni

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 c5 3 d5 b5

Black hopes to exploit the d5-pawn's lack of protection by mixing queenside play with pressure against White's centre.

4 ♖g5 ♜a5+ 5 c3 ♗e4 6 ♖h4



6...♖b7

Black wastes no time in his central assault. After 6...b4 play might continue 7 ♜c2 f5, e.g. 8 ♘fd2 bxc3 9 bxc3 ♖b7 10 ♘xe4 fxe4 11 ♜xe4 e6 12 ♜c2 ♖xd5 13 e4 ♖c6 14 a4 with an edge for White in B.Kogan-Alburt, Estes Park 1985. 6...d6 leads to more sober play, e.g. 7 e3 ♖f5 8 ♖e2 ♘d7 9 0-0 h6 10 ♗bd2 ♗ef6 11 a4, Karp-Carreau, Brussels 1993, and Black had problems with c4.

7 e3!?

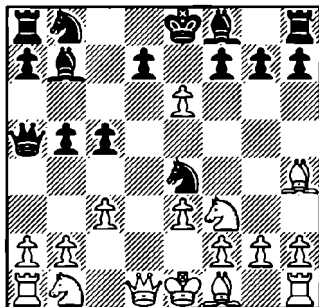
This is the new move. Before White had played 7 ♜d3 f5 8 ♗bd2 or even 8 g4, when the quest for the light squares in the centre continues at pace. Notice that thus far the action is taking place in the centre, with d5 and e4 under the microscope and Black endeavouring to make the most of the h1-a8

diagonal. Black is prepared to make concessions in order to justify the offensive involving the b7-bishop. White's bishop, meanwhile, contributes nothing on h4 (hold that thought – as Black did to his cost).

7...e6?

Obviously we can expect a strong GM such as Delchev to be acquainted with the theory of this tricky defence, and we have seen that Black's f-pawn plays a role should White hit the knight. Now that Sakaev has opted to leave his queen at home and instead prefer a solid looking developing move Black takes advantage by prising open the light squares by more conventional means, thus offering his king a little more security compared with the usual lines. However, interpreting White's quiet 7th move as a means to avoid complex theory is the cause of Black's downfall, as he fails to appreciate that White's new idea is in fact rather sinister. Tsesarsky offers 7...b4 8 c4 e6 9 ♜d3 exd5 10 cxd5 ♘d6 11 ♗bd2 as an improvement, when White has a grip of the centre but Black is not without resources.

8 dxe6

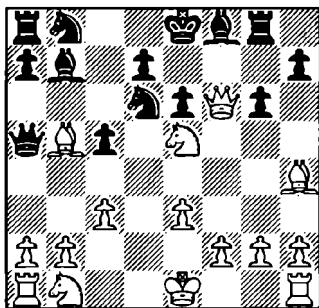


The point. White has been happy to liberate the b7-bishop without a fight because this trade opens lines for his own forces. What would you play in the diagram position?

8...dxe6??

Logical but losing. And if that is the case, then Black had to recapture with the f-

pawn... No – that loses, too: 8...fxe6? 9 ♖e5! and Black's king is suddenly in trouble due to the threat of ♜h5+, while 9...g6 10 ♜f3 ♘d6 11 ♜f6 ♔g8 seems to hold but runs into the crushing 12 ♙xb5!!

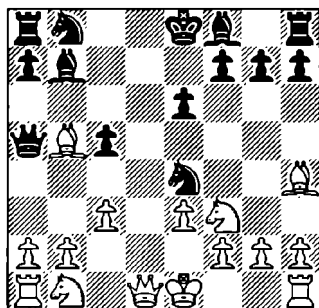


Now 12...♜xb5 and 12...♘xb5 allow mate on d8 and f7 respectively, while White threatens to win with 13 ♜xe6+ thanks to the pin on the a4-e8 diagonal. Blocking on c6 simply invites White to trade there when Black has problems with the defence of e6, and 12...♙d5 13 e4 is great for White (check it out). Since it is not unusual for Black's pawn to leave f7 in this system Black will obviously have considered capturing towards the centre but will have decided on the text because of the problems on the h5-e8 and (consequently) h4-d8 diagonals. I doubt he got as far as 12 ♙xb5 here because this would have alerted him to Sakaev's winner.

In fact the only move is 8...f6!, e.g. 9 ♘bd2 ♘xd2 10 exd7+ ♘xd7 11 ♜xd2 ♔d8 with some kind of compensation for the pawn.

9 ♙xb5!

Oh dear. Black's queen is busy defending against ♜d8 mate. In the variations we have looked at Black succeeds in breathing some life into his bishop on the long diagonal but so many other open lines belong to White. This time the criss-cross of diagonals combines with the d-file to leave Black's king in dire straits.



9...♘c6?

Hastening the end, although at this level the game is effectively over anyway, e.g. 9...♙c6 10 ♙xc6+ ♘xc6 11 ♘bd2 etc.

10 ♖e5 1-0

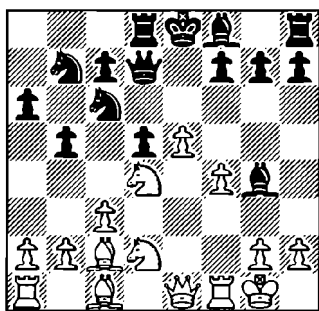
10...♜c7 11 ♜a4 is final. Black paid the price for seeing 7 e3! as a submission rather than a potentially effective – and dangerous – alternative strategy. We are all guilty of this kind of arrogance from time to time, and the accompanying blunders! But a characteristic of chess is its ebb and flow, whether this takes the form of minor concessions, trading one feature for another, or is more extreme and noticeable. Ultimately there is only one result – at the end of the game – and any minor victories along the way are irrelevant, so don't put too much stock in what seems like a considerable gain as doing so has the nasty habit of inducing blunders that are usually completely removed from the original theme.

Look out for the spanner!

During a tactical phase of the game or when analysing a complicated situation we remind ourselves (at least we should) to keep our eyes peeled for the proverbial spanner in the works, the move that manages to interrupt our flow and spoil everything. However, when neither side is on the offensive or when there is no reason to believe the game has entered a danger zone, we are guilty of

dropping our guard a little in this respect. Instead we focus our attention on the (sober) strategy in hand, perhaps seeking to neutralise a potentially troublesome enemy piece or secure a decent outpost. A common scenario in which unexpected interference can be disastrous is when someone is trying to engineer a thematic trade, positional considerations transcending all else to leave the player more vulnerable to an unpleasant surprise.

Vasiesiu-Felecan
Bucharest 1997



White has just pushed his f-pawn which, thanks to the central knight, light-squared bishop and supporting rook, can advance further, after which Black is in danger of being over-run on the kingside. Obviously something needs to be done to keep Black's head above water. He starts on the right foot, eliminating the well placed knight.

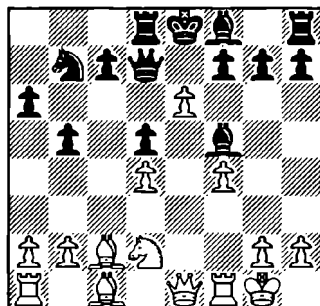
14...♖xd4 15 cxd4 ♔f5?

Continuing with the aim of trading off White's most influential minor pieces. There is another way to challenge the bishop, 15...♝c6! using the tempo gained from the attack to hit out in the centre after 16 ♔d3 ♝b6, e.g. 17 ♖b3 c5 when White is sufficiently distracted, or 17 ♝f2 c5 (17...♖c5!?).

16 e6! 1-0

Both 16...♝xe6 and 16...fxe6 lose to 17 ♔xf5, while 16...♔xe6 17 f5 is decisive. The spoiler is a winner. White's pawn has been

standing on e5 for a while, with its advance hitherto simply useless. But when its partner arrived on f4 Black should have checked out ideas involving any pin on the e-file (resulting from e5-e6) followed by f4-f5. It is irrelevant whether or not there actually is anything there to be afraid of – what matters is that Black should look anyway.



Furthermore, as soon as Black contemplated ...♔f5 he should have double-checked the connection between the bishop and its defender, and here e5-e6 comes into play again. But Black saw his liquidation plan as one which would comfortably nip in the bud White's desired pressure, and as far as he was concerned he had already completed half the task with ...♖xd4. Since the process itself takes only two moves (three including ♔xf5 ♝xf5) it did not occur to Black that it could be interrupted. However, if a one-move plan deserves care, then even a two-mover should merit twice the attention!

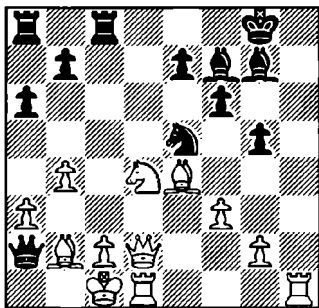
Monitor the opponent's menacing-looking moves

Even the all-seeing Kramnik was recently guilty of failing to appreciate the key threat of his opponent's previous move.

Akopian-Kramnik
Wijk aan Zee 2004

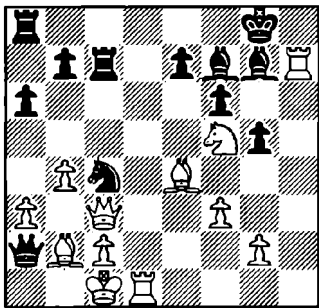
Black's queen has just arrived on a2 and

the obvious ...♖c4 looks like the follow-up. White needs to generate threats of his own.

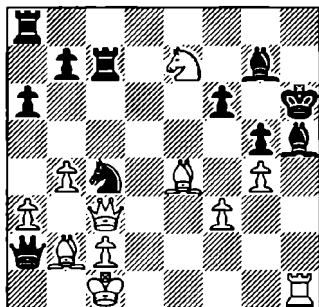


27 ♖f5 ♖c4 28 ♗c3

White's knight has both g7 and (notably) e7 in its sights. Black has two choices – 28...♗xb2+ 29 ♗xb2 ♖xb2 30 ♗xb2 ♖c7, e.g. 31 ♖xg7 ♖xg7 32 ♖h7+ ♖f8 33 ♖h8+ ♖g8 34 ♖d5 ♖g7, or maintaining the tension and keeping the pressure on White's king with the immediate ...♖c7. Believing his king to be safe, Kramnik opted for the latter. 28...♖c7?? 29 ♖h7!!



Since this is the move that White would like to play, and since it sets up a discovered check should the rook be captured, then it is something that Black should at least have considered as a possibility – particularly at this level. In fact in the event of 29...♖xh7 30 ♖xe7+ Black is completely lost, e.g. 30...♖h6 31 ♖h1+ ♖h5 32 g4



The game continued:

29...♗xb2+ 30 ♗xb2 ♖xb2 31 ♖xg7+ ♖f8 32 ♖h1! 1-0

So, while ♖f5 did threaten the fork on e7, the real, albeit hidden, threat was to get at Black's king with ♖h7. If we return to the initial diagram, when White's knight was back on d4 and his bishop monitored h7, it is interesting that ♖h7 would have had no bite. Perhaps, in Kramnik's defence, after deciding the move was ineffective then, it wouldn't enter his analysis a couple of moves later because White didn't even have any influence on h7. And herein lies a common cause of blunders – a hitherto harmless move or idea can so easily be transformed into a game-winner, yet we often make the mistake of dismissing these possibilities once and then deliberately leaving them way down on the list of priorities even when circumstances change.

Avoid over-confidence

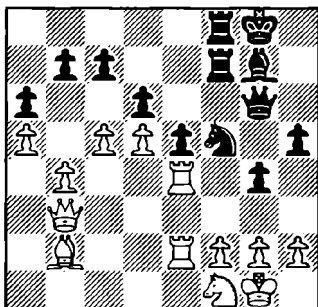
Our next example features an episode from Garry Kasparov's four game match with X3D Fritz in late 2003 in which Man's representative blundered just as he seemed to be in the driving seat.

X3D Fritz-Kasparov

X3D Man-Machine World Championship,
New York 2003

The diagram position arose in the second

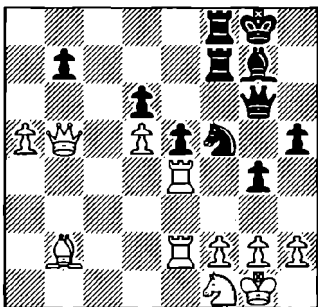
game (the first game was drawn), with the machine (to move) enjoying control of the queenside and Man making his presence felt on the kingside. Most strong players on White's side of the board would continue to pile on the pressure, perhaps improving the queen to c4. However, computers like to get the most out of their pieces, so White's next is aimed at opening lines to facilitate the exploitation of its territorial supremacy.



28 cxd6?!

This trade will have come as quite a relief to Kasparov, who, from here on, doesn't bother himself with the queenside (where White is now reduced to the single plan), instead concentrating all his efforts on a kingside offensive.

28...cxd6 29 b5 axb5 30 ♖xb5



All according to plan for White, but Black is on a mission of his own. Now the direct

30...h4 has been suggested, when Black seems to be doing rather well after 31 ♜c4 ♘d4 32 ♙xd4 exd4 33 ♘d2 ♙e5. Kasparov prefers an alternative build-up.

30...♙h6?! 31 ♜b6

A 'cheap' threat from the machine as the d6-pawn is pinned to the queen.

31...♙h7

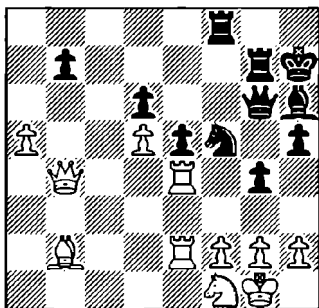
Parrying the threat but setting himself up for a costly blunder. 31...♜f6!? 32 ♜c7 ♜8f7 33 ♜c4 (33 ♜d8+ ♙h7) 33...♜g7 34 ♙c3 h4 35 ♙d2 ♙xd2 36 ♙xd2 has been assessed as good for Black. Note that 32 ♜xb7? runs into 32...♘e3! 33 ♜4xe3 ♙xe3 34 ♘xe3 ♜d3 35 ♜e1 ♜d2 36 ♜f1 ♜xf2 etc. Another possibility is 31...♜g7 32 ♘g3 h4 33 ♘xf5 ♜xf5 34 ♙a3 ♜f6, when 'Black is clearly better' according to Kasparov.

The text defends the queen while nudging the king off the g-file in preparation for lining up his major pieces there. Kasparov was also running a little short of time around this point, but the most important factor appears to be his over-confidence since the machine alleviated much of the pressure for him with the exchange on d6.

32 ♜b4

It is interesting that, according to X3D Fritz programmer Frans Morsch, White, too, had become involved with Black's kingside aggression and coming offensive, the latest move combining queen and rook along the fourth rank to prevent ...h5-h4 by monitoring the g4-pawn. So both players are now wrapped up in Black's quest to come crashing through on the kingside. However, the crucial difference in this specific encounter is that White is a machine that cannot be distracted, has no emotion, no adrenaline, no nerves and, consequently, is not susceptible to making a tactical (numbers) blunder, while Black carries with him – however brilliant he may be – the weaknesses to which all humans are susceptible and which, inevitably, can hinder the thought process at any given time.

32...♠g7??



Uncompromising and aggressive, Kasparov reacts to his opponent's defensive measure by renewing the threat to push the h-pawn. In fact nothing else seems to have been on his mind since we joined the game. Unfortunately, in his efforts to demonstrate which flank attack will be the stronger Kasparov didn't notice the second justification of White's dual-purpose ♖b4.

32...♠g7 has been evaluated as slightly better for White but Black seems fine to me, while Kasparov's proposed improvement is 32...♠g8 33 ♠g3 ♠xg3 34 hxg3 h4! 35 gxh4 g3, e.g. 36 fxg3 (36 f3 ♠f4) 36...♖xg3 37 ♖c3 ♠f3. There is also 32...♠c7. In other words, Kasparov was doing perfectly okay until the diagram position, when emotion played an unfortunate role thanks to his sensing that he had some momentum, that the game was turning in his favour.

33 ♠xe5!

Exploiting another pin on the d6-pawn, this time on the a3-f8 diagonal as the rook which was protected three times only two moves ago is now without any support (this odd fact makes the blunder easier to understand, but we are talking about Kasparov here). 33 ♠xe5 is also possible.

33...dxe5 34 ♖xf8

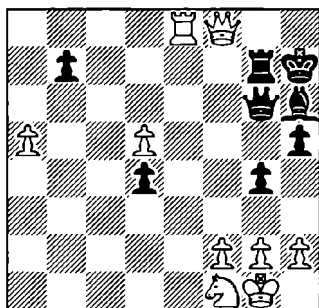
There it goes, and with it Black's hope.

34...♠d4?

Not best, but by now – a pawn down and

in a poor position against a blunder-free machine – the result is practically inevitable. 34...♠d7 35 ♖c8 ♖f7 is a lesser evil.

35 ♠xd4 exd4 36 ♠e8



Adding insult to injury by highlighting another problem created by Black's faulty plan of ...♠h7 and ...♠g7.

36...♠g8 37 ♖e7+ ♠g7

37...♖g7 38 ♖e4+ ♖g6 39 ♠e7+ ♠h8 40 ♖xd4+ ♠g7 41 ♖b6.

38 ♖d8 ♠g8 39 ♖d7+1-0

39 ♖d7+ ♠g7 40 ♖c8 ♠g8 41 ♠xg8 ♖xg8 42 ♖xb7+ ♠g6 43 a6 etc. I should point out – as one of the millions of chess fans in awe of Kasparov's talent – that Gazza bounced back in brilliant anti-computer fashion to level the match, in some ways his failure to win the event tempered by the fact that this terrible blunder was to blame. This time Kasparov had to pay the price for his ambition, drive and (over-) confidence. But he is only human, after all, and we all make mistakes.

A common cause for our sense of danger to fail us is when lower rated opponents show 'weakness' during the opening phase. Whether this is a lack of theoretical knowledge or an apparent lack of technique or understanding, the result is that we lower our guard. Our thinking goes something like this: If the opposition is unable to demonstrate a degree of competence for the first ten or so

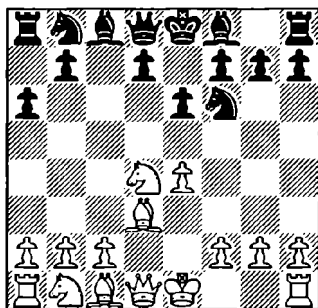
moves, then nor will he be capable of causing us any serious problems, so the plan is to play decent looking moves and simply wait for him to generate losing chances for himself as the game progresses... If only chess were that easy. In reality such overconfidence and relaxation of the sense of danger are perfect ingredients for an embarrassing reverse, as the following example demonstrates. White's FIDE rating is 2290, while Black is over 2500.

Carlsson-Mortensen

Copenhagen 1998

Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 a6
5 ♙d3 ♘f6



The Sicilian Defence can be a dangerous weapon with which to beat weaker players because the main lines have a habit of becoming extremely complex and, against a wicky, booked up opponent, a sizeable difference in rating can easily lose its relevance. The flexible Kan variation has the advantage for the stronger player of denying White easy to learn attacking systems.

6 ♘d2!?

One would imagine that several moves have been tried here but the text is a rarity, the main continuation being the logical 6 0-0, after which White can go for a Maróczy set-up with c2-c4 or get on with matters on the

kingside, perhaps with ♔h1 followed by f2-f4 etc. Both 6...d6 and 6...♗c7 are sensible replies to 6 0-0. It is important to note that staking a claim for the centre with 6...d5 7 e5 ♘fd7?, along the lines of the French Tarasch, is a mistake here as White comes crashing in with 8 ♙xe6!, when 8...fxe6 9 ♗h5+ is curtains for Black, e.g. 9...♔e7 10 ♙g5+ ♘f6 11 exf6+ gxf6 12 ♙xf6+ ♔xf6 13 ♗h4+ etc. But (at least from where Black is sitting) White has already shown his ignorance with the clumsy looking text, misplacing the knight if he is to play c2-c4 (then it belongs on c3) and contributing nothing to the kingside strategy. Consequently Black judges – perhaps after not too much consideration – that White's 6th move is not played because it allows Black to act in the centre.

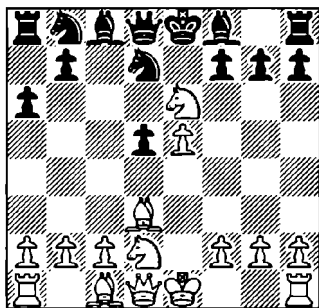
6...d5

6...♗c7 is flexible, and the Kan move.

7 e5 ♘fd7?

No doubt Black was expecting 8 ♘f3 ♘c6 with the usual French struggle around d4 and e5 for which Black's forces are well placed. As we shall see, this is not the case, which is why the few times that 6 ♘d2 d5 7 e5 has been seen in international practice Black plays instead 7...♘e4, the point being that Black follows up captures on e4 with ...♗a5+, picking up the e5-pawn.

8 ♙xe6!



And this is definitely not what Black was expecting because, compared with the sacri-

fice after 6 0-0, above, this time the knight on d2 obstructs the bishop and thus rules out the deadly ♖g5+. Mmm...

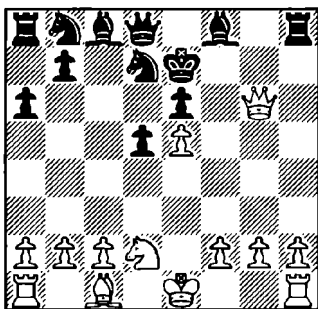
8...fxe6 9 ♖h5+ g6?

Perhaps Black had originally intended 9...♗e7 10 ♖f3 ♖b6 (10...h6 11 ♖h4+ [11 ♖h4? ♖c5 12 ♖g6+ ♗d7 13 ♖xh8 ♖xd3+ 14 cxd3 ♖b4+ 15 ♖d2 ♖xd2+ 16 ♗xd2 ♖xh8 17 ♖f7+ ♗d8 18 ♖ac1 ♖c6] 11...g5 12 ♖xg5+ hxg5 13 ♖xh8 is very good for White) 11 ♖g5+ ♖f6 12 exf6+ gxf6 and had only now seen 13 ♖xf6+! ♗xf6 14 ♖e5+ etc. Consequently he must already be prepared to split the point.

10 ♖xg6+ hxg6 11 ♖xg6+

11 ♖xh8? ♖c7 12 ♖f3 ♖xc2 13 0-0 ♖c6 favours Black.

11...♗e7

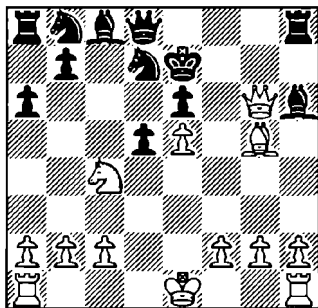


Now White can force a draw with 12 ♖g5+ ♗e8 13 ♖g6+ and so on, but he is aware that strong titled players make serious mistakes and is not afraid to move in for the kill.

12 ♖c4!

12 ♖f3 is the obvious move, but this is even cleaner.

12...♖h6 13 ♖g5+!



13 ♖xh6? ♖g8! lets Black wriggle out.

13...♗f8

After 13...♖xg5 14 ♖g7+ ♗e8 15 ♖d6 mate we see the point behind White's 12th move.

14 ♖xd8 dxc4

Black is in disarray.

15 ♖c7

Threatening 16 ♖d6 mate.

15...♖g7 16 ♖xe6 1-0

Assuming that a player of Mortensen's strength would be well aware of the theory and would therefore make the comparison between 6 0-0 and 6 ♖d2 in terms of ♖xe6, then his 7...♖fd7? cannot be labelled a standard blunder. In this context, if he was indeed already acquainted with ♖xe6, then if he didn't even have to find the move (rather just analyse it) this means the blunder is purely down to the wrong approach. And if we fail to appreciate our own weaknesses – rather than feel empowered by those of the opposition – we will continue to make more blunders.

CHAPTER TWO

Traps and Pitfalls

In an ideal world we learn from our mistakes, logging the necessary details of an unfortunate reverse so that the information can be used to our benefit the next time such a situation arises. Of course this is not a watertight back-up strategy (what if the next similar scenario doesn't come around for twenty years?), but it is useful nonetheless. It follows, then, that we familiarise ourselves with a range of tricky themes and blunders in order to broaden our sphere of experience before we sit down to play, rather than learn the unpleasant way by accumulating avoidable disasters over the years. Here is a selection of tricky situations to get you started.

The tricky quiet move

How many times have we responded to a modest – even passive – move with a natural, no-nonsense answer, only to find that we have fallen into a cunning trap? Too many. In these days of cut-throat opening theory it can be a pleasant change, particularly with the black pieces, to enjoy easy development without the prospect of early skirmishes or of coming under a vicious attack. Some players don't get into their stride until the middlegame, when the landscape of the game has been determined. These so-called solid players breathe a sigh of relief when it is clear

there should be a smooth, trouble-free transition from opening to middlegame, when each new move does not require lengthy analysis of complications. Ironically, the calm looking, insipid opening can be just as dangerous as the Sicilian Najdorf or the King's Gambit if we make the mistake of equating quiet with harmless. Witness the following game.

Sulava-Welling

Andorra la Vella 1999

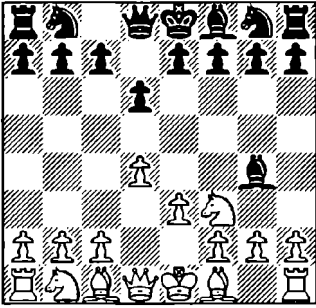
Pribyl System

1 ♖f3 d6 2 d4 ♗g4

This system offers Black good chances of outplaying his opponent and is popular with those players who like to make the opposition think for himself. White can expect an edge, but the game tends to revolve around good old-fashioned strategy.

3 e3

White, too, is not interested in getting involved with the main line, which begins with the natural 3 e4 ♗f6 4 ♗c3. The main alternative to e2-e4 is a kingside fianchetto, designed to exploit the early development of Black's bishop. The text, on the other hand, suggests that White is happy to stroll into the middlegame.



3...d7

Preparing ...e7-e5.

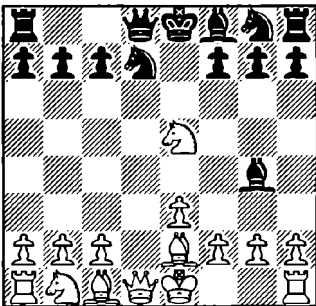
4 e2 e5?

The Dutch IM could be forgiven for this completely natural expansion, the position being similar to so many other standard instances of ...e7-e5 (except this one looks quieter than most). However, White can now win a pawn by force.

5 dxe5! dxe5

Not 5...dxe5? 6 dxe5 e2xe2 7 Wxe2 dxe5 8 Wb5+ and Black loses a pawn for absolutely nothing.

6 dxe5!



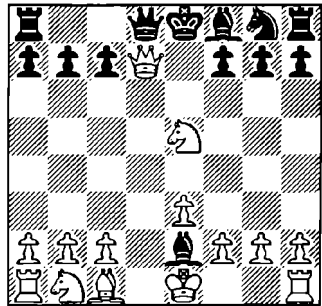
Does White deserve to get away with this? I suppose so. One idea is that 6...dxe5 meets with 7 e2xe5 etc. As a big fan of systems involving 1...d6 (in answer to anything) I have had the dubious pleasure of making the same blunder as Mr Welling, but the funny

thing is I played 4...e5? a number of times before someone actually taught me a lesson! I was totally oblivious to White's cheeky win of a pawn for a long time, until, about a decade ago, an opponent with a modest FIDE rating went into deep thought over his fifth move in a rapidplay tournament (not a good sign). Until then everyone had replied almost instantly with 5 c4 or 5 0-0, but he managed to find the refutation of Black's traditional play. That game went 6...e2xe5! (this looks better than the continuation in the main game) 7 c3 dxe5 8 e2xe5 Wxd1+ (8...d3+ 9 e2 dxc1+ 10 Wxc1 e2d6 is another option, White being a safe pawn up) 9 e2xd1 d3+ 10 d2 0-0-0, which looks okay, but after 11 e2 Black's hoped for compensation was not there as 11...dxf2 12 f1 sees Black run into trouble, e.g. 12...fxd1 13 fx2 etc. A few months later, in the penultimate round of a more serious tournament in Paris, I was sitting next to GM Goldin (now USA) and watched with amusement as he found himself in the same situation after 4 e2. He also pushed 4...e5? (without a moment's thought) but saw the light when his opponent (an IM) took on e5 within seconds.

6...e2xe5

This is the other try, and it gives White an opportunity to carry out the main idea behind the trap.

7 Wxd7+

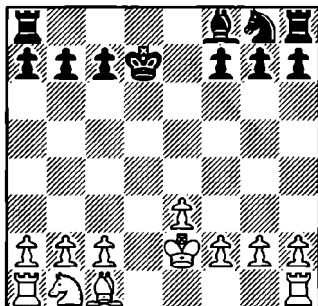


The best traps feature the least likely ideas, and I wouldn't be surprised to see more players fall into this one as the diagram position is a million miles away from the sober, low-key expectations that accompany 4...e5?

7... ♖xd7 8 ♜xd7 ♜xd7

8... ♗a6 9 ♜xf8 doesn't alter the assessment, and White can slot his king into f2 after f2-f3.

9 ♜xe2



White has an extra pawn for which Black has no compensation. Furthermore, imagine the respective moods of the players at this point. Only nine moves have been played and Black is already looking at the prospect of sitting on the wrong side of a near decisive ending.

9... ♗g6

9... ♗f6 looks better, but Black is still stunned.

10 ♖d1+ ♜c6 11 ♗d2! ♗g7 12 ♗c3 ♗xc3 13 ♜xc3 ♜e7 14 ♖d4 1-0

Resignation seems rather premature, but White is well ahead. Apart from there being no hint of anything funny going on, it is worth pointing out that stronger players wouldn't consider 5 dxe5 anyway. In these positions the capture on e5 is known to be a mistake from White's point of view because it releases the tension in the centre, surrenders any chance of engineering a space advantage with a later d4-d5 and also gives Black's dark-squared bishop more scope by

removing the d6-pawn (after ...d6xe5). Consequently we have another situation in which lesser players might avoid the blunder because d4xe5 would then form part of the analysis of 4...e5. Of course the best advice in ostensibly quiet positions is to make doubly sure to keep your wits about you, particularly when your next move introduces captures. Chess is so rich in possibilities that danger is never far away.

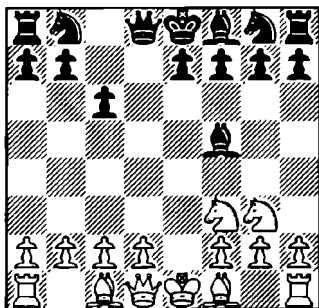
The following is not so much of a trap as a lack of understanding on Black's part.

Em. Lasker-Mueller

Zurich 1934

Caro-Kann Defence

1 e4 c6 2 ♜c3 d5 3 ♜f3 dxe4 4 ♜xe4 ♗f5 5 ♜g3



This game might have been played way back in 1934 but Black's next blunder is still doing the rounds today.

5... ♗g6?

5... ♗g4 is imperative, but Black is obviously used to the main line, which runs (1 e4 c6) 2 d4 d5 3 ♜c3 dxe4 4 ♜xe4 ♗f5 5 ♜g3 ♗g6 etc. However, the key difference here is that by replacing d2-d4 with ♜f3 White gives himself an extra tempo that comes very handy against the unwary.

6 h4!

Threatening to win the bishop with 7 h5.

6...h6

6...h5 7 ♖e5 ♜d6 8 ♗xg6 ♜xg6 9 d4 gives White a dangerous development lead, the bishop pair and a target on h5.

7 ♖e5!

And here is the problem for Black. Usually, with White's pawn on d4 and the knight still on g1, Black is able to anticipate this by meeting ♖f3 with ...♗d7. White has a big lead already, and Black is forced to make a serious positional or material concession.

7...♗h7?!

7...♜d6 8 ♗xg6 ♜xg6 9 d4 is obviously ugly, but the text looks even worse.

8 ♜h5

Obvious and best.

8...g6

8...♜d5? 9 ♗c4 is terrible so Black must lock in his favourite bishop.

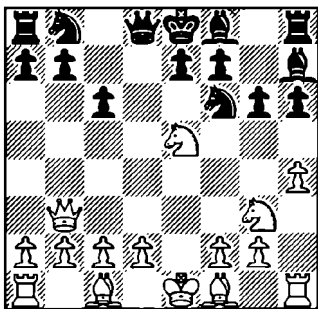
9 ♜f3

There's the mate threat again.

9...♗f6

This time 9...♜d5 loses to 10 ♜xd5 cxd5 11 ♗b5+, when ...♗d8 walks into the fork on f7.

10 ♜b3!



White's latest queen move threatens mate for the third consecutive time(!) and is the finishing touch to White's near decisive strategy, the point being that the b7-pawn is suddenly under fire.

10...♜d5

10...♗d5 11 ♜xb7 ♜c7 12 ♜xc7 leaves

White with a free pawn and the better game.

11 ♜xb7! ♜xe5+ 12 ♗e2 ...1-0

Black's rook is about to leave and there is a fourth threat of mate in one for Black to deal with. White is going to emerge from his opening adventure an exchange and a pawn up. One of my books has Black resigning here but I believe Black dragged the game on for another twenty moves before throwing in the towel. Anyway, this is as far as we need to go. Expect to witness this 'trap' (and this position) during your chess career – hopefully from White's side of the board. Too many players blunder very early on in the game due to a poor understanding of their own pet lines!

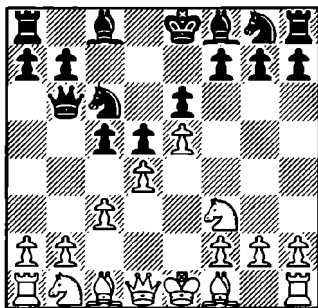
Themes

Here is a popular one which always succeeds in getting a few takers at junior level.

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3

In the Advance variation of the French Defence White endeavours to maintain a stronghold in the centre with d4 and e5 being well supported, the aim being to establish and exploit the extra space.

4...♗c6 5 ♖f3 ♜b6



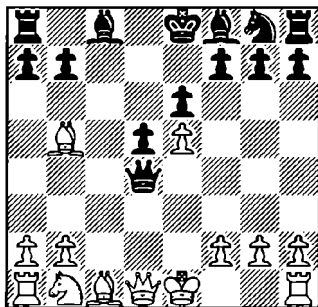
Bringing another piece to monitor d4 and making White think twice before posting his bishop most actively on d3.

6 ♗d3

Does this lose a pawn?

6...cxd4 7 cxd4 ♖xd4?

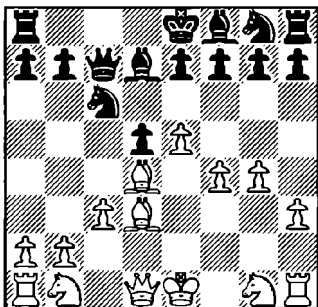
Taking the bait. 7...♗d7 is necessary, when White is usually prepared to gambit both centre pawns for a development lead.

8 ♖xd4 ♜xd4?? 9 ♗b5+

The check announces a discovered attack on the queen, and White is winning.

That **wick**, with which many players are familiar, was easy. But not all these players necessarily play the French, nor meet it with 3 e5. Being aware of these blunders isn't a luxury available only to those in whose openings they feature. Moreover, the same general theme can appear in various situations and in various guises, so it is worth taking time – usually when studying opening theory – to make sure you're familiar with certain 'traps' to avoid or set, as you might be surprised how collectively common they are.

Let's move on to the next one:



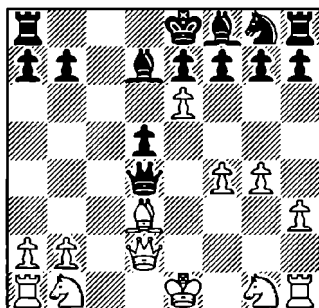
The diagram position started out as a Caro-Kann Defence (1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 ♗f5), with White seeking to steady the centre and let his advanced pawns do the talking in the early middlegame.

10...♖xd4 11 cxd4 ♜xb6

Hitting b2 and d4, neither of which is protected. In fact with no dark-squared bishop around White is in danger of suffering on the dark squares, which helps explain the next move.

12 ♜d2 ♜xd4??

Black has to play the safe 12...e6. The text is losing, but Black figures that this is a safe pawn grab because the bishop on d7 rules out the nasty check on b5 and accompanying discovered attack on the queen. But as better appreciation of the relationship between the key pieces in the previous (Advance French) example – namely White's queen and bishop, Black's queen and king – affords us a useful insight into this current position...

13 e6!

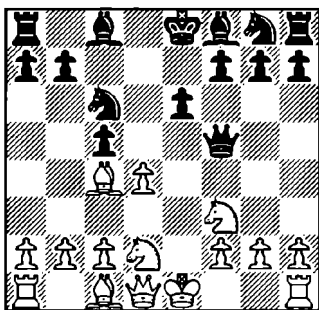
There's more than one way to skin a rabbit, as the saying goes! Black's bishop might be covering the obvious check, but White's latest wins on the spot, e.g. 13...♗xe6 14 ♗b5+, 13...fxe6 14 ♗g6+ or 13...♗c6 14 exf7+, when 14...♗xf7 15 ♗g6+ still drops the queen. This means Black must part with his bishop after 13 e6.

Once we become well acquainted with a

specific theme we are able, during a game, to anticipate those times when it might become a feature and act accordingly.

Medina-Zapuseck
 Siegen Olympiad 1970
French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Qd2 c5 4 Qgf3 Qc6
 5 exd5 Wxd5 6 Qc4 Wf5?!

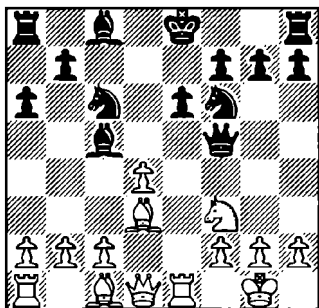


Black wants to keep his queen in play, and dropping back to d6 allows Qe4, but returning to base with 6...Wd8 is appropriate.

7 0-0 Qf6

7...cxd4 8 Qb3 c5 9 Qe1 (or even 9 Qg5) is awkward for Black, whose plan is simply to mobilise his kingside.

8 Qb3 a6 9 Qe1 Qe7 10 Qxc5! Qxc5 11 Qd3!



A crafty relocation of the bishop.

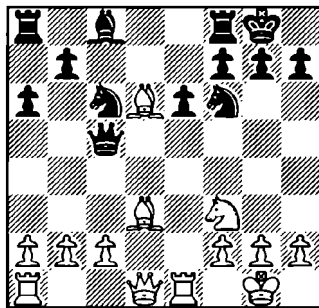
11...Wh5 12 dxc5 0-0?

Effectively kissing goodbye to the planned recapture on c5. Nevertheless, considerable damage has already been done by Black's poor opening play, and 12...Wxc5 13 Qe3 We7 14 Qf4 sets up almost the same trap as the game and leaves White with a large advantage thanks to his command of the dark squares.

13 Qf4!

Threatening to plant the bishop on d6 with a decisive lead. With the previous examples in mind, can you see what's coming?

13...Wxc5?? 14 Qd6!



Completely different situation, but exactly the same theme. Black cannot afford to take the bishop due to 15 Qxh7+ and 16 Wxd6, so he is forced to surrender the exchange on f8, for which there is no compensation.

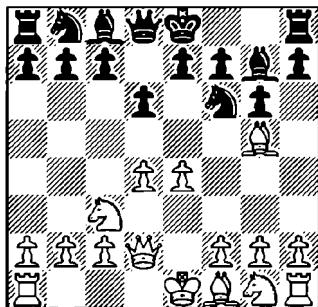
Chain reaction

It is not unusual to see a pawn win the game doing nothing more complicated than taking pieces. Here is a nice trap based on a 'Hoover' pawn.

1 e4 d6 2 d4 Qf6 3 Qc3 g6 4 Qg5 Qg7
 5 Wd2

White isn't hanging around. The menacing stance and the threat to rid Black of the 'important' bishop might be blunt but these systems are not easy to deal with. Those Pirc players who have grown attached to the

companion on g7 might try 5...h6 6 ♖h4 g5 7 ♙g3 ♘h5 8 0-0-0 ♝d7 9 ♚ge2 e6, although it might not be to everyone's taste (at least it rules out any funny business involving e4-e5). After 10 h4 a6 11 ♙h2 gxh4 12 e5 ♝b6 13 ♚f4 ♚xf4 14 ♙xf4 White had an edge in Leko-Svidler, Groningen 1996.



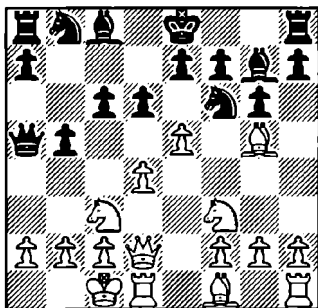
5...c6 6 0-0-0 ♖a5

6...0-0 is slightly better for White after 7 ♙h6. The text saves a tempo and is designed to exploit White's early castling.

7 ♚f3 b5?

Black sets off on the road to disaster, the point being to slow White down by undermining the protection of e4 and d5 thanks to White's queen being within threatening distance of b-pawn. Even 7...h6 is worth a thought here if Black is content to leave the king in the centre. 7...♙g4 looks logical.

8 e5!



Ignoring – in fact welcoming – Black's aggressive thrust.

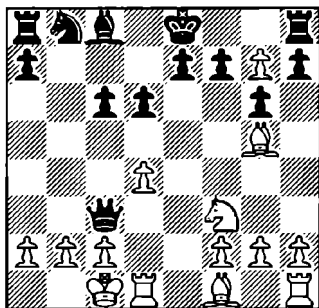
8...b4??

Consistent and losing, although 8...dxe5 9 dxe5 ♚fd7 didn't inspire much confidence in P.Helbig-Wojtczik, Correspondence 1967: 10 ♚b1 (White should avoid 10 ♙xb5? cxb5 11 ♖d5 ♖b6 12 ♖xa8 ♙b7 etc.) 10...b4 (10...dxe5 11 ♚xe5 ♙xe5 12 ♙xe7 ♚xe7? 13 ♚d5+ cxd5 14 ♖xa5) 11 ♚e4 ♚xe5 12 ♚d6+! etc.

9 exf6 bxc3?

9...exf6 10 ♚e4 fxg5 11 ♚xd6+ is a lesser evil which is anyway decisive, e.g. 11...♚e7 12 ♚e5! and Black is in dire straits.

10 ♖xc3! ♖xc3 11 fxg7!



Black is about to lose on points. It is quite common for us to give an attack on the queen a check-like status so that only those moves which address the attack are considered, leaving strong alternatives to go unnoticed. But remember that the queen is just a piece like all the rest.

Now for an ingenious exploitation of the concept by Tal.

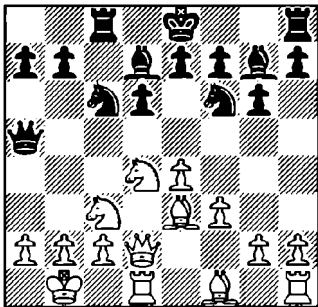
Tal-NN

Simultaneous Exhibition, Stuttgart 1958

Sicilian Defence

N.B. Depending on the source this game was played in 1958, 1969 or 1970, while a

couple of quite different names have been offered for Tal's victim. Anyway, the moves themselves serve as an instructive example of the simplicity of a multiple capture blunder.

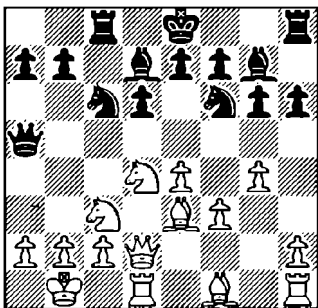


In the tricky Sicilian Dragon Black has done without castling, using the tempo saved to get to work on the queenside. Another point behind refusing to castle is to avoid coming under the traditional attack down the h-file.

11 g4

White is ready to launch the kingside pawns, having taken time out to place his king on b1 (this offers protection to the a2-pawn and also has tactical implications...).

11...h6?!



This does look like it slows White down but the consistent follow-up to Black's opening strategy is to continue with active operations on the queenside with 11...d5,

unleashing the rook, monitoring the f3-pawn and introducing ...d4 as a possibility.

12 h4 a6 13 e2 d5 14 g5

White has been given time to strike first, although the last few moves have been part of Black's plan to trade the kingside rooks and leave himself with the more active one on the other flank.

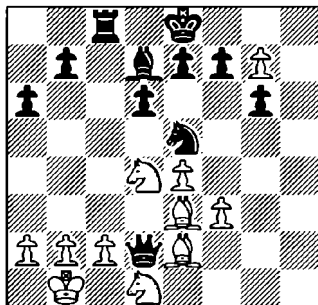
14...hxg5 15 hxg5 xh1??

An amusing blunder, albeit perfectly natural on the surface. The alternative 15...d5 16 b3 d8 17 d5 b5 18 b6 d7 19 d4 looks miserable.

16 gxf6!!

We are about to see the significance of White's king being b1 rather than c1.

16...xd1+ 17 dxd1! d2 18 fxg7!



Brilliant yet simple. What might have seemed like an automatic recapture of the queen when analysing the line several moves ago is now nothing of the sort thanks to White's threat of immediate mate on g8. Meanwhile White is ready to pick up the stranded queen next move.

18...d8 19 g8+ c7 20 xc8+ 1-0

White emerges with a lead of two pieces. I admit that this example has an unusual, problem-like flavour but, returning to the position after 15 hxg5, it is certainly not beyond the average club player to find White's apparently remarkable idea – as long as each move is treated with the same level of consideration. The point is to look out for the opposi-

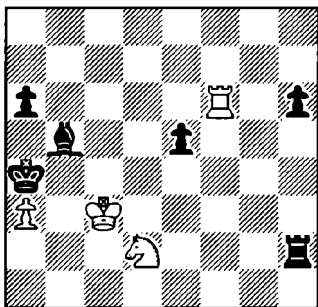
tion's most dangerous looking possibilities even after what appears to be a forcing move – in this case both 15...♖xh1 and 17...♗xd2. Only a check interrupts the game (even then we can't afford to relax, as the Check chapter cruelly demonstrates), while all other moves, however demanding of the opponent's attention, offer a degree of scope in terms of the reply. Failure to give these possibilities the respect they deserve can lead to a nasty surprise, and although such reverses tend to be explained away as bad luck caused by a bizarre, lucky break for the opponent, not seeing what are essentially rather obvious moves is nothing more exotic or unfortunate than a good old-fashioned blunder.

The stalemate swindle

This is not as rare as we might think...

Balogh-Castaneda

Budapest First Saturday GM 2001



Black, to move, has two extra pawns and the superior minor piece. White could resign but then he would be passing up an excellent swindling opportunity.

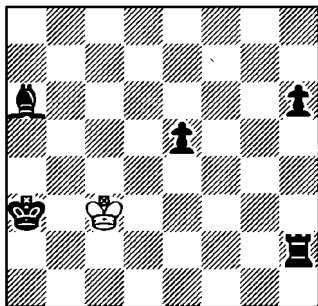
60...♗xa3?!

60...♖h3+ 61 ♖b2 ♗d3 62 ♖e4 ♖b3+ is another option, but the text looks tidy and adds to the pawn collection.

61 ♖c4+! ♗xc4??

The rook ending should be even easier...

62 ♖xa6+! ♗xa6 ½-½

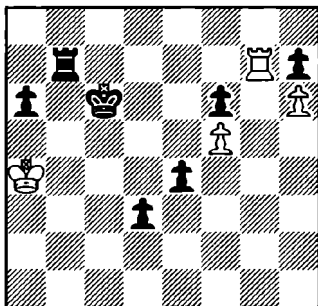


The stalemate has crept up on Black when he certainly wasn't expecting it.

The following example is included for your entertainment but is still instructive.

Striebich-Baeuschlein

Baden 2001



White is completely lost and cannot hold back both centre pawns. I'm guessing that Black, at least, was very short of time here (or White possesses hypnotic powers) for the game ended as follows:

53 ♖a5!

The exclamation mark is awarded as part of the whole package. If White had planned everything already, then he probably deserves a couple more.

53...d2 54 ♗g1 e3 55 ♗xa6 ♗d7

There is nothing wrong with 55...e2 here.

CHAPTER THREE

Psychology

Nerves and butterflies are fine – they're a physical sign that you're mentally ready and eager. You have to get the butterflies to fly in formation, that's the trick.

Steve Bull, British sports psychologist.

Whereas specific moves trigger mistakes, often it is the general state of play that can have a detrimental effect on our thinking. Different types of situation call for different approaches, and from a practical point of view – particularly with more restrictive time-limits being introduced – it is flexibility that plays an increasingly greater role. We need to be able to handle scenarios from across the spectrum without getting into trouble.

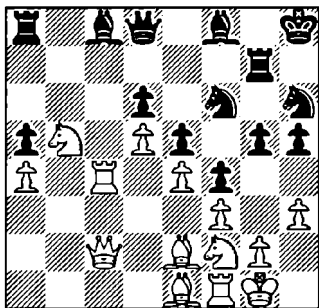
The pressure of defending

A good chess truism is that an attack directed against the king (typically a kingside attack) is more promising than, for example, pressuring a weak square in an otherwise quiet area of the queenside. This is because a mistake in maintaining the king's defences can lead effectively to the loss of the game, whereas parting with material or a key square might be a loss of a battle rather than the war. When the king is under fire there is always a bit of extra pressure, of additional responsibility and tension. The defensive task is ac-

centuated by the fact just one slip, overlooking a single, simple factor, could be disastrous. Here is a good example of a top GM voluntarily sitting on the uncomfortable side of a kingside attack but getting himself into trouble.

P-H.Nielsen-Kotronias

Hastings Premier 2003-4



Some openings and defences are more likely than others to throw up situations in which accurate defence is of paramount importance. In such cases the middlegames can be so tense that, at every move, the line between winning and losing is wafer-thin, and a player's fortune depends on how well he copes under pressure. The diagram position

is a typical main line of the King's Indian Defence in which White pins his hopes on the queenside initiative afforded him by a territorial advantage there while Black drums up a far from subtle kingside attack. Not surprisingly both sides have excellent winning chances. Let's see how the game heated up a few degrees.

25...g4

After building up forces on the kingside Black is ready to actually launch the attack.

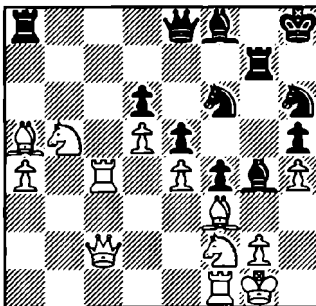
26 ♖xa5

Meanwhile, White has been mixing anticipatory play on the kingside with active manoeuvres on the other flank.

26...♖e8

Taking on a5 and allowing ♖xc8 is completely wrong. Black often finds himself practically abandoning the queenside in his quest for glory.

27 h4 gxf3 28 ♖xf3 ♖g4



Renewing the pressure on the g-file. Note the importance of the g7-rook in Black's attack.

29 ♖xg4

29 ♖c7? ♖xf3 30 ♖xe8 ♖xg2+ 31 ♖h1 ♖g3+ 32 ♖h2 ♖fg4+ mates.

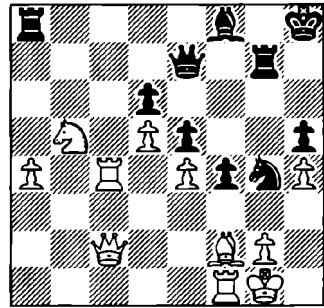
29...♖fxg4 30 ♖b6

White's busy bishop, having removed the a5-pawn, plays a key role in the defence.

30...♖e7

Hitting h4.

31 ♖xg4 ♖xg4 32 ♖f2



The bishop covers both e3 and h4 and the trade of a couple of minor pieces has alleviated some – but not all – of the pressure. Since we joined the game White has also managed to pocket an extra pawn and, considering the f8-bishop (which often plays a holding role in this line as Black has enough forces with which to attack), keeping things together on the kingside should be enough to emerge with a decent ending. For example the immediate 32...♖xf2?! 33 ♖xf2 ♖g4 34 ♖a1 ♖xh4? 35 ♖xh4 ♖xh4 36 a5 ♖g4 37 ♖f1 is quite unpleasant for Black. But Black has no intention of taking his foot off the pedal and White must expect the assault to continue. How confident would you feel in White's shoes?

32...f3!

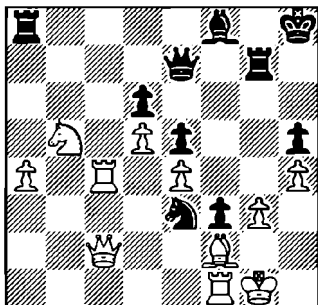
Black still has sufficient resources to set White further defensive problems, the text once again highlighting the influence of the rook. White's best is now 33 ♖c7 ♖g2 34 ♖a1, effectively using the enemy pawn as cover, preparing to eliminate the rook and switching focus to the queenside. Perhaps White didn't relish the prospect of Black's queen coming to f4 or even h3, or perhaps he hardly considered this possibility because his next was simply part of the kingside containment strategy.

33 g3??

White now has e3, the g-file and h4 all covered, and apart from ♖c7 followed by

$\text{f}7$ still being on, there is also $\text{c}3$ to consider. However, given that Nielsen is happy to sit on White's side of this violent line and prepared to deal with the steady flow of enemy pieces coming towards his king, then he should really have considered Black's next.

33...d3!

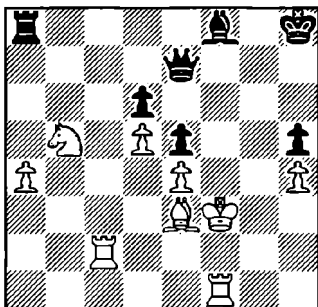


This was even shouting out to be played as soon as the pawn had reached f3, which makes White's blunder more confusing. We have a case of an overloaded piece – the knight has gone to e3 anyway, undermining the defence of g3, and to add to White's plight the h4-pawn is also hanging due to the pin.

34 dxe3 Exg3+ 35 f2

35 $\text{h}1$ $\text{h}3+$! leads to forced mate so White must part with his queen.

35...g2+ 36 fxf3 Exc2 37 Exc2

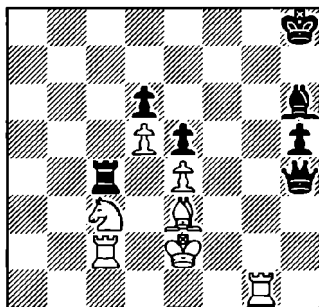


White's rook and knight are no match for the queen, and his king remains exposed. Black concludes the game clinically.

37...Wxh4 38 Egl

Or 38 $\text{c}4$ $\text{g}4$ + 39 $\text{d}2$ $\text{e}7$ 40 $\text{e}1$ $\text{h}4$ + 41 $\text{f}2$ (41 $\text{d}2$ $\text{g}2$ +) 41...f8 with a decisive advantage, e.g. 42 $\text{h}4$ $\text{h}4$ + 43 $\text{e}2$ $\text{g}4$ + 44 $\text{e}1$ $\text{g}3$ + 45 $\text{e}2$ $\text{g}2$ + etc.

38...Exa4 39 d3 Ec4 40 e2 h6!



A nice touch.

41 d b6

41 $\text{h}6$ $\text{h}2$ +; 41 $\text{g}c1$ $\text{e}3$ 42 $\text{e}3$ $\text{g}3$ + 43 $\text{e}2$ $\text{h}4$.

41...Exe4+ 0-1

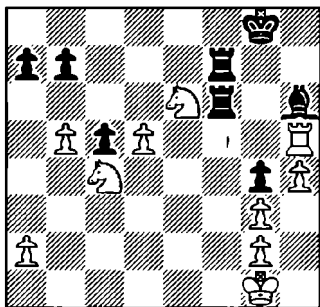
If a player is willing, in return for an initiative or positive strategy in a particular sector of the board, to allow his king to be attacked, then he must be prepared to walk a very thin line. If experience suggests that you are prone to overlooking the occasional tricky move or tactic, then the best advice is to avoid openings which require such defensive duties altogether. But this is rather negative and, as usual, a happy medium makes more sense.

It is impossible to avoid having your king come under fire regardless of your opening repertoire, so be prepared and be aware of situations in which more circumspect defence than usual is called for. In this example it is interesting that White's blunder came just as he seemed to have weathered the

storm, with Black's attacking force reduced and White's queenside lead becoming more noticeable. It is at this stage, when we are beginning to sense the reward for a job well done, that we are prone to missing something.

Another problem is when we are in check and have more than one option. We tend to treat these decisions as special, even critical, because the target is the king (despite the fact that a check is just a move like any other), and this additional tension can then induce mistakes. Kasparov fell foul of this against a young Kramnik in Linares 1994.

Kramnik-Kasparov Linares 1994



We join the game with White enjoying an advantage, with two pawns for the exchange and a healthy duo of knights, particularly the one on e6. Before getting to work White denies his opponent a tempo-gaining check.

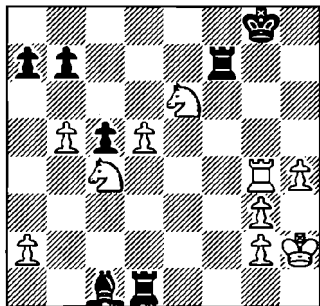
35 ♖h2

Not 35 ♖xc5? ♜f1+! 36 ♖h2 ♜b1 with the threat of ...♜ff1.

35...♙c1 36 ♜e5

Kramnik prefers to keep his active pieces on the board and target the g4-pawn rather than allow exchanges with 36 ♖e5 ♜f5 37 ♜xf5 ♜xf5 38 ♖xg4 (38 d6 ♜xe5 39 d7 ♜d5 40 d8♖+ ♜xd8 41 ♖xd8 c4) 38...♖f7 39 ♖xc5 ♜xd5 40 ♖xb7 ♙a3, which is not clear.

36...♜f1 37 ♜e4 ♜d1 38 ♜xg4+



Black has two squares for king, and one looks safer than the other. Kasparov opts for the more sensible looking choice.

38...♜h7?

Keeping out of the corner, but in fact Black seems to be lost(!) after this mistake and 38...♖h8 is the only move. 39 ♖e5? is good enough only for a draw after 39...♜ff1 40 ♖g6+ ♖h7 41 ♖g8+ ♖h8 due to the threat of mate on h1, which leaves 39 ♜e4 ♜xd5 (39...♜ff1 40 ♖h3) 40 ♖e5 (40 g4 ♜e7 41 ♖xc5 ♜xe4 42 ♖xe4 ♜d4 43 ♖cd6 ♙f4+) 40...♜f6 41 ♖f3! with the easier game for White (note that 41...c4 42 ♜xc4 ♜xe6 43 ♜xc1 ♜xb5 44 g4 makes life worse for Black).

39 ♖e5

Sending in the cavalry. 39 ♖g5+? serves only to return the favour as 39...♙xg5 40 ♜xg5 ♜ff1 41 ♖h3 ♜h1+ 42 ♖g4 runs into 42...♜d4+.

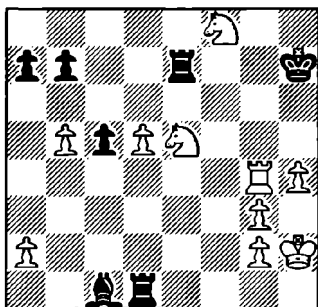
39...♜e7

Tantamount to resignation, but 39...♜ff1 40 ♜g7+ ♖h6 changes nothing, e.g. 41 ♖g4+ (or 41 ♖f7+ ♜xf7 [41...♖h5 42 g4+ ♖xh4 43 g3 mate] 42 ♜xf7 etc.) 41...♖h5 42 ♖f6+ ♜xf6 (42...♖h6 43 ♖g8+ ♖h5 44 g4+ ♖xh4 45 g3 mate) 43 g4+ ♖h6 44 g5+ ♖h5 45 gxf6.

40 ♖f8+! 1-0

White's knights have proved too strong, 40...♖h6 avoiding the fork on g6 but walking

into more serious trouble after 41 ♖g6+ ♕h5
42 g4+ ♕xh4 43 g3 mate.

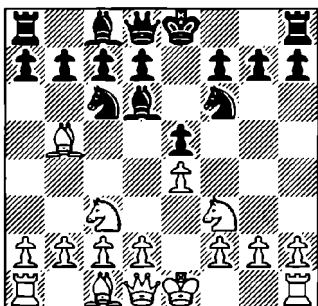


Mixing it – who's fooling who?

There is a risk when departing from conventional lines in order to confuse your opponent – you might well fall foul of your own strategy...

Yemelin-Kharlov
Moscow 2002
Four Knights Game

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 ♗f6 4 ♘c3
♗d6?!



The Russian GM (FIDE rating 2638) turns down 4...♗b4, 4...♗c5, 4...♗d4 and even 4...d6 and opts for the unusual looking blockade of the d-pawn. Against an unsuspecting, preferably weaker player this is not a bad idea but in this case White's FIDE rating

is comfortably over 2500 and he is quite capable of finding his way around the opening. Consequently Black's approach in itself is dubious.

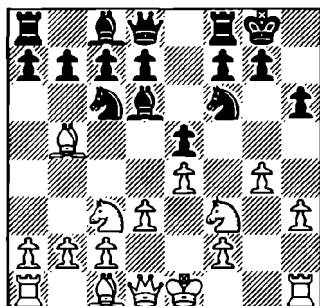
5 d3 h6

Having committed the bishop to d6 Black should not allow the knight to be pinned.

6 h3

Same move, different idea.

6...0-0 7 g4!?



Far from being thrown by his opponent's sideline, White homes in on a logical treatment of the position. Since the thematic reply to an offensive on the flank involves a counter in the centre White judges that this is a good opportunity to launch his g-pawn, given that Black's d-pawn is impeded. Now Black's best seems to be 7...a6 8 ♗xc6 dxc6, with a Spanish Exchange flavour in Podlesnik-Pavasovic, Ljubljana 2002, when Black had at least aided development by liberating the c8-bishop. For some reason not content with 7...a6 (too orthodox?), Black is intent on going his own way.

7...♗e8?! 8 g5 hxg5 9 ♗xg5

So White gets his pin in place anyway (introducing the threat of ♗d5), as well as chances of generating something on the g-file.

9...♗d4?

No doubt the point behind ...♗e8, but White has a surprise in store. 9...♗b4 is more appropriate, when 10 ♖g1 ♗d4 11 ♗c4 ♗e6

12 ♖xe6 ♜xe6 13 ♛d2 should be easier to play for White, while 11...c6 12 a3 ♖xc3+ 13 bxc3 ♚e6 14 ♖xe6 ♜xe6 15 ♚h4 gives White a definite plus.

10 ♚d5!

With the pin and White's coming occupation of the g-file to contend with Black really should have given his f6-knight more consideration, even if the text was overlooked because it leaves the bishop on b5 unprotected. After all, White has been looking to hit f6 with both bishop and knight since Black's bishop arrived on d6. Now 10...♚xb5 11 ♖xf6 ♖e7 12 ♚xe7+ ♜xe7 and White adds fuel to the fire with 13 ♜g1, while 11...gxf6? 12 ♜g1+ leads to forced mate, e.g. 12...♚f8 (12...♚h7 13 ♚h4) 13 ♛d2.

10...♖e7

Tsesarsky gives 10...c6? 11 ♚xd4 exd4 (I would say that Black is hanging on after 11...cxd5 12 ♚f5 as long as he plays 12...♖f8 and avoids 12...♛a5+ 13 c3 ♛xb5? 14 ♚xd6) 12 ♚xf6+ gxf6 13 ♖h6 ♜e5 14 ♜g1+ ♜g5 (14...♚h7 15 ♛g4) 15 ♖xg5 fxg5 16 ♛h5 ♖f4 (16...cxb5 17 ♜g5+ ♚f8 18 ♖f5 ♛a5+ [18...♛e8 19 ♛h8+ ♚e7 20 ♛f6+ ♚f8 21 ♜h5]) 19 ♚e2 ♚e8 20 ♛h8+ ♚e7 21 ♛f6+ ♚e8 22 ♜g1) 17 ♖c4 with a decisive advantage to White.

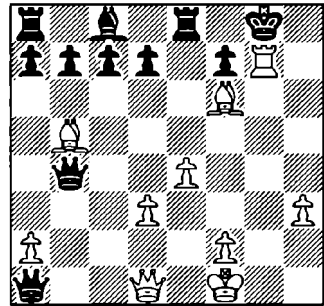
11 ♚xe7+ ♛xe7 12 ♚xd4 exd4 13 ♜g1!

Perhaps Black was expecting White to do something about his carefree bishop this time in view of the threatened fork on b4, but again White presses ahead with the king-side strategy. In fact by now Black must have been regretting his opening experiment.

13...c6

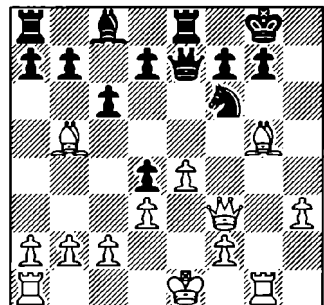
Apart from the obvious, Black prepares ...d7-d5. Accepting the invitation with 13...♛b4+ works out badly, e.g. 14 c3! dxc3 (14...♛xb5 15 ♖xf6 g6 16 ♛d2 and now evicting the bishop with 16...♛b6 17 ♖xd4 c5 18 ♖e3 leaves Black a pawn down and still with defensive problems to overcome in view of his weak dark squares) 15 ♖xf6!? cxb2+ 16 ♚f1 bxa1♛ (16...g6 17 ♖b1 ♛xb5

18 ♜xb2 ♛c6 19 e5 looks like a lesser evil) 17 ♜xg7+



17...♚f8 18 ♛xa1 ♛xb5 (18...♜e6 19 ♜h7 ♚e8 20 ♜h8+ ♛f8 21 ♖d8!?) 19 ♜h7, or 15 a3 ♛d4 16 ♖e3 ♛e5 17 ♜g5 ♛e6 18 bxc3 c6 19 ♖c4 d5 20 exd5 ♛xh3 21 ♚d2 cxd5 22 ♖xd5 ♜xe3 23 fxg3 ♚xd5 24 ♛g1. At best Black is fighting hard to survive in these lines, which is indicative of the mess he has got himself in. The only confusion Kharlov has succeeded in creating thus far revolves around how Black should protect his king-side.

14 ♛f3!



Did White not read the script? The related squares f6 and g7 are all he seems to care about, anything on the queenside being the last thing on his mind. And good luck to him. The latest attacking gesture piles yet more pressure on Black, who is beginning to

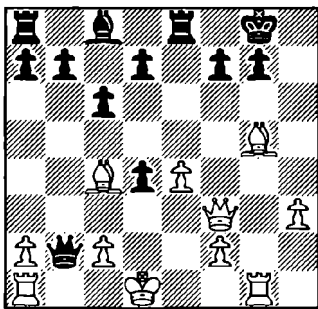
miss the guardian of the dark squares. It must be time for 14...♔f8 in order to knock some of the shine from White's enjoyment on the g-file, e.g. 15 ♖g3 d5! 16 ♔a4 (16 ♔h6? ♔g4!) 16...♗b4+ (16...dxe4 17 0-0-0) 17 ♔d2 ♗xb2 and White can choose between 18 ♗xg7+ ♔e7 19 ♔g5 ♗xa1+ 20 ♔e2 ♗xg1 21 ♔xf6+ ♔e6 22 ♗xg1 ♔xf6 23 f4 and the 'simple' but perhaps more effective 18 ♔e2. Black could try his luck with 17...♗xa4 18 ♗xg7+ ♔e7 19 ♔g6 ♔xe4 20 dxe4 ♔e6, which is not pleasant but looks stronger than the game continuation.

14...♗b4+?

Black can resist no longer, sufficiently frustrated by events on the kingside that he is willing to take his chances elsewhere. He could have avoided the present recklessness by sticking to a more sober opening variation, but now desperation – a sure-fire environment for blunders – has set in, and he has only himself to blame.

15 ♔d1

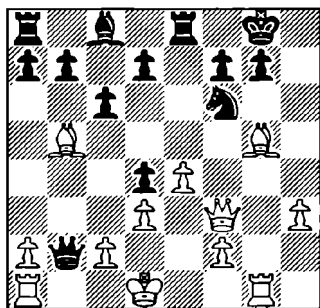
It seems that White has everything worked out, the strategy still revolving around Black's knight on f6. With this in mind he would have investigated 15...♔xe4 16 dxe4 ♗xb2 17 ♔c4!



17...d5 (17...♗xa1+ 18 ♔e2 ♔xe4+ [18...d5 19 ♔xa1 dxc4 20 ♔g1 merely prolongs the torture] 19 ♗xe4 ♗xg1 20 ♗e8+ ♔h7 21 ♔d3+ with mate to follow) 18 ♔c1 ♗c3 (18...dxc4 19 ♔f6 g6 20 ♗h5) 19 ♗xc3 dxc3

20 exd5.

15...♗xb2



Black is on the ropes, with his kingside ready for the taking. Despite his opponent's unexpected fourth move White has managed to conduct the game very well, his thematic, positive reaction succeeding in completely turning the tables on Black, who used a strategy designed to unsettle the opposition and consequently induce jittery, poor play. Instead Black's nerves have been found wanting and it is he who has made the mistakes...

16 ♔c1??

Oops. Right idea, wrong execution. Attacking the queen in fact loses a tempo as Black's queen is forced to retreat to a square from where a defence can be organised. The more immediate 16 ♗xf6 features a crucial difference in that 16...gxf6 17 ♔c1+ ♔h7 18 ♔xb2 cxb5 19 ♔xd4 is awful for Black, while other variations see the bishop stay on g5 – thus gaining valuable time – unless otherwise required (when White wins). 16...♔e6 gives White a pleasant choice between 17 ♗d8+! ♔h7 18 ♔c1 ♗xb5 19 f4 and 17 ♗xg7+ ♔xg7 18 ♔c1+ ♔g6 19 ♔xg6+ ♔xg6 20 ♔xb2 cxb5 21 ♔d2 d5 22 ♔g1+ ♔h5 23 exd5 ♔xh3 24 ♔xd4. Putting the queen in the corner with 16...♗xa1+ 17 ♔c1 g6 loses to 18 ♔g4, e.g. 18...♔e6 19 ♗d8+ ♔g7 20 ♔h4. As for 16...♗xb5 White uses the saved tempo with 17 ♔h6.

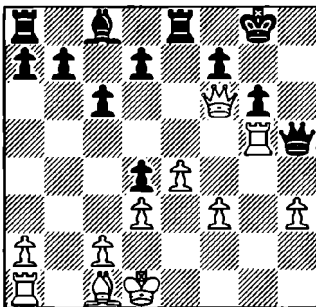
It is interesting that when White's blunder

comes it is not a result of a sudden surprise from Black requiring an analysis update – White must have had the diagram position (above) in his head before he embarked on this course. Nor, presumably, can the mistake be blamed on time-trouble as only 15 moves have been played. In fact the blunder is focused on f6 and the g-file (as everything else has been). So what did White miss, and why? One possibility is that he might have been unconvinced by the ending that results from 16...gxf6 17 ♖c1+ and so on. If so, he shouldn't have been. Alternatively he may have overlooked Black's 17th move and – with Black's queen proving to be such a poor piece in so many other variations thus far – had seen only 17...g6?? (see note to Black's 17th move). Or he could have become distracted by the hapless queen and decided (incorrectly) to kill two birds with one stone and simultaneously attack the queen and open the g-file with the 'dual-purpose' ♖c1. Or was it nerves, after all – the prospect of teaching GM Kharlov a lesson for his lack of respect...?

16... ♖xb5! 17 ♗xf6 ♖h5+!

17...g6?? 18 ♜xg6+ fxg6 19 ♗xg6+ ♔f8 20 ♖h6+ ♔e7 21 ♖g5+ etc.

18 f3 g6 19 ♖g5



19... ♖h7?

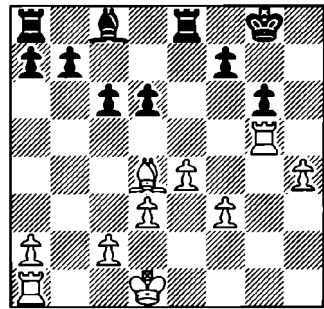
Missing 19... ♖xh3! 20 ♜xg6+ (20 ♗xd4 ♗xf3+ 21 ♔d2 d5 22 ♖b2 ♗f4+ 23 ♔d1 is equal) 20...fxg6 21 ♗xg6+ ♔f8 22 ♖a3+ (22

♖h6+ ♔e7) 22...♜e7 23 ♗f6+ ♔g8 24 ♖xe7 ♗f1+ 25 ♔d2 ♗f2+ 26 ♔c1 ♗e1+ 27 ♔b2 ♗c3+ with a perpetual.

20 ♗xd4 ♖g7 21 ♖b2 ♗xd4 22 ♖xd4 d6??

No doubt Black now considered the worst to be over and the potential embarrassment of losing so quickly and brutally with 4...♖d6 skilfully avoided. However, the pain is to begin again because, in fact, the only way to prevent a second nightmare is with the more aggressive 22...d5!.

23 h4



22...d6?? was way too passive. Black's mind-set seems to have followed the apparent peaceful direction of the game, the adrenaline levels matching the coming ending – hence the posting of the pawn on d6 in order to shore up the vulnerable dark squares. White's latest move, however, announces a new kingside offensive, this time with the plan of exploiting the control of the long a1-h8 diagonal to send the h-pawn home.

23... ♔f8

Escaping the pin. 23...d5 is too late: 24 h5 dxe4 25 fxe4 ♜e6 26 ♔d2 and the second rook swings into action.

24 ♔d2 ♔e7 25 f4!

White – once again – proves difficult to shake off. The threat is f4-f5, when ...g6xf5 clears the path for the h-pawn.

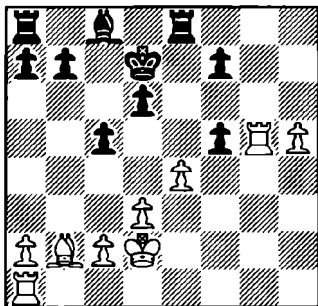
25...c5 26 ♖b2 ♔d7

26...b6 27 f5 gxf5 28 exf5 ♖b7 29 h5 d5
30 ♖e1+ ♗d6 31 ♜xe8 ♜xe8 32 ♗f6 and
26...♗d7 27 f5 ♜g8 28 ♜ag1 don't help
Black.

27 f5 gxf5

27...♗c6 28 f×g6 f×g6 29 ♜xg6 ♗e6 30 h5
♗f7 31 ♜g7! ♗xh5 runs into 32 ♜h1 ♗f3 33
♜h3 ♜f8 34 ♜gg3.

28 h5!



28 exf5 is simple and strong.

28...fxe4 29 h6

Onward.

29...♗c6

29...e3+ 30 ♗e2 f5 31 ♜xf5 ♗c6 32 ♜f4 d5
33 ♗f6 d4 34 h7 ♗e6 35 a4 ♗d5 36 ♜h4.

30 h7 e3+

30...exd3 31 h8♜ ♜xh8 32 ♗xh8 dxc2 33
♜g8.

**31 ♗e2 f6 32 ♗xf6 ♗e6 33 ♜h1 ♜h8 34
♗xh8 ♜xh8 35 ♗xe3 b5 36 a3 a5 37
♜h6 a4 38 ♜xe6 ♜xh7 39 ♜gg6 1-0**

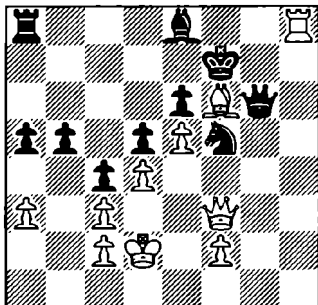
An instructive game. Black paid heavily for his game-plan, which completely backfired. Mistakes on his part and positive play from his opponent left him struggling throughout the game. The psychological effect of this on Black was to be satisfied with the ending after retreating the queen all the way back to h7 (as opposed to finding 19...♜xh3), after which White continued in the role of aggressor. Not only did Black have his bluff called, but his standard of play also suffered.

Readjustment

In the next example White's only chance is to hope his opponent fails to adjust to being in charge.

Lutz-Yusupov

Essen 2002



Whatever fun White may have had is about to come to an end – bad news when the price to harass Black's king was a whole piece.

32...♗c6

Evicting the rook and preparing to finally bring his own into the game. White could think about resigning, but at least his bishop cannot be challenged and Black might go wrong (and we don't win games by resigning).

33 ♜h3 ♜g8

The natural post, doubling on the g-file in order to dominate with the threat of trading queens. Psakhis suggests 33...♜f8 and 33...b4!? as good alternatives, the latter even using the rook's present position on the queenside.

34 ♜h1

White also teams up the heavy pieces.

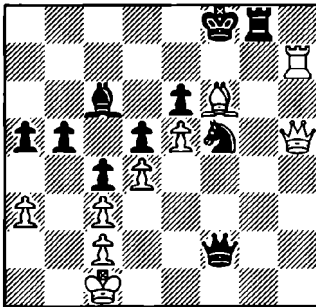
34...♜g2

Black throws his weight around, giving White a taste of his own medicine by targeting the king. Opening a front on the other flank with the advance 34...b4 again seems sensible.

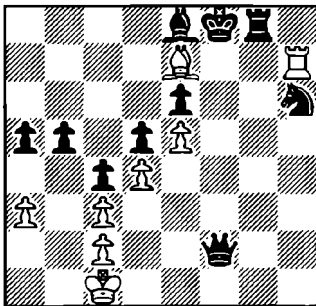
35 ♖h7+ ♣f8 36 ♛h5

Black might have a decisive material lead, but with three enemy pieces parked in front of the king and a threat of immediate mate there is no margin of error. Even steadying the ship by dropping the queen back to g6 would be fine (particularly if Black is short of time), e.g. 36...♛g6 37 ♛h2 b4, perhaps with ...♙a4 to follow.

36...♛xf2+ 37 ♣c1



Black has grabbed the pawn and the mate threat still looms. The f-pawn means nothing but Black could have got away with his greedy detour had he returned to the g-file with 37...♛g1+ 38 ♣b2 ♛g6, again meeting the retreat of White's queen with ...b5-b4. Note that 37...♙e8?? loses on the spot to 38 ♛h6+! ♞xh6 39 ♙e7 mate.



It would appear that Black overlooked this cheeky mate theme because his next relies on

defending with the bishop.

37...♛f4+??

One check too many, after which the queen is unable to help defend, and Black is completely lost!

38 ♣b2 ♙e8 39 ♛xf5!

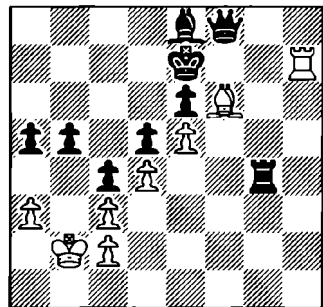
An impressive and witty queen 'sacrifice' but in reality very simple – White merely removes the piece that defends against the mate on e7 (in the event of either recapture on f5). Black does have a desperate looking attempt to survive in the form of the counter-sacrifice 39...♛c1+, but after 40 ♣xc1 ♖g1+ 41 ♣d2 exf5 42 e6 ♖g6 43 ♖h8+ ♖g8 44 ♙e7+ ♣g7 45 ♖xg8+ ♣xg8 46 ♣e3 Black is struggling in the resulting ending in view of the coming infiltration of White's king.

39...♖g4?

Freeing g8 but allowing White a number of choices with which to complete the turnaround.

40 ♖h8+

There is nothing wrong with this, nor with 40 ♛xe6, but my favourite final position comes after the slightly slower 40 ♙g7+? ♣e7 (40...♣g8 41 ♖h8+ ♣xg7 42 ♛h7 mate) 41 ♛f8+! ♛xf8 (41...♣d7 42 ♙f6+) 42 ♙f6 mate



40...♣f7 41 ♛h7+ 1-0

Butterflies

Regardless of a player's strength and ability,

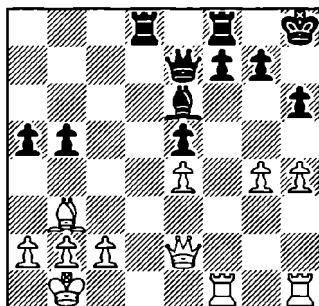
he or she will always be susceptible to nerves. How we react to pressure is a key factor in determining success or failure. We must accept – as the examples in this book often brutally demonstrate – that mistakes and the occasional outright blunder are inevitable at all levels, in which case when we go wrong in a game we should try to be realistic in order to remain focused – just in case we are given the opportunity to fight on.

The chess 'proverb' that he who makes the last mistake loses the game might sound simplistic – even comical – but it is nevertheless true in most cases. Making poor decisions does not necessarily lead to the loss of the game because blunders might go unnoticed, the opposition might blunder right back or even be unable for whatever reason to latch on to the appropriate response. When this happens it is imperative to maintain some kind of equilibrium as far as nerves are concerned, thus maximising your chances of re-establishing a foothold in the game, acclimatising to any changes. As the tension increases so will the likelihood of mistake-inducing scenarios, and in these circumstances it pays to constantly reassess the significance of this or that feature in order to facilitate the decision-making process. Remember to put any previous blunders and missed opportunities out of your head and focus on the position on the board.

Our next example, between two GMs, features several blunders (from both sides) but is still not untypical of play at this level. With the help of a few comments (for ChessBase) from the entertaining and talented GM Gershon we get a picture of the emotional ups and downs experienced in a competitive game. This is not the number-crunching, cold, calm, calculated and effortless clear thinking that some club players mistakenly believe is the hallmark of GM chess, rather the same fears, hopes, misunderstandings and miscalculation with which we are all familiar. Hold on tight...

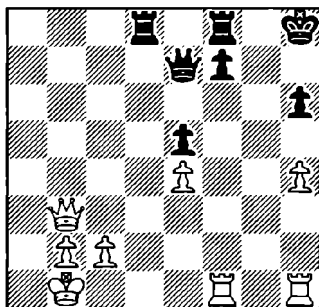
Grünfeld-Gershon

Israel Team Championship (play-off),
Tel Aviv 2002



Here we have a typical mutual attacking situation in which the players have castled on opposite flanks and subsequently launched their pawns to open lines against the enemy king. White, to move, is not interested in 26 ♖xb5, e.g. 26...♗xg4 27 ♜xa5 ♗e2, when 28 ♔f2?? loses to 28...♜xh4, although there is 28 ♔xf7! ♔xf7 29 ♗xf7 ♜xh4 30 ♔g1 ♜g5, when White stands better but Black is not without chances. Nor is 26 ♗xe6 ♜xe6 27 ♜xb5 ♜xg4 28 ♜xa5 ♜xe4 desirable if White is playing for the win. Instead he continues with kingside operations.

26 g5!? ♗xb3 27 axb3 a4 28 gxh6 gxh6 29 ♜xb5 axb3 30 ♜xb3



The tempo of the game has risen sharply thanks to the recent exchanges, and although

White has an extra pawn it is irrelevant for the time being as both kings are exposed, so a long ending looks unlikely. Whatever the mindset of the players was before, the present situation is sure to see both players come under pressure.

30...♖a8

Gershon gives 30...♖b8 31 ♖g3! ♖g8 32 ♖f3 ♖b7 33 ♖hg1 ♖gb8 34 b3 as clearly better for White, judging that the a-file is the best place for the rook. As we shall see, this is an accurate decision.

31 ♖b6!

Hitting h6.

31...f6 32 ♖hg1 ♖f7?

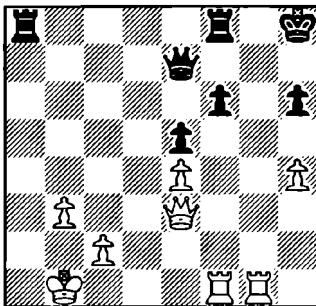
Gershon: 'The wrong plan, missing White's simple 34th move.'

Black should play 32...♖h7 followed by ...♖a7 and doubling rooks, or by ...♖f7.

33 b3 ♖e7??

Black has failed to spot his opponent's plan, analysing only 34 ♖g6?? ♖a3! 35 ♖xh6+ ♖g7 etc. It is interesting that, having seen how hitting the h6-pawn with the rook spells trouble for White, Gershon allowed his contemplation to end there – where he is winning – rather than checking that h6 might offer his opponent something more. Perhaps this confidence is a trait of stronger players. Again the only move is 33...♖h7, when 34 ♖e3 ♖a6 35 ♖f3 ♖fa8 shifts attention to the discomfort suffered by White's king.

34 ♖e3!



34...♖h7

Now White's more deadly threat to h6 earns him a vital tempo to accelerate his kingside offensive.

35 ♖g3 ♖f7 36 ♖g4!

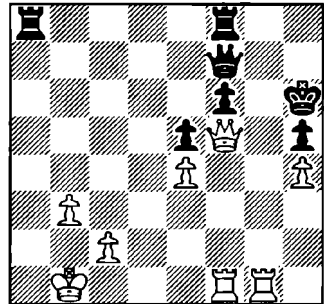
Introducing a new threat – ♖f5+ followed by ♖g6. Things are not looking good for Black compared with a few moves ago, but he has come to terms with his mistake and must now deal with the matter at hand. With this in mind, his next is an excellent reply.

36...h5!

Gershon: 'Trying my last chance. This hopeless looking move has, in fact, a nasty idea.'

36...♖g8 37 ♖f5+ ♖h8 38 ♖xg8+ ♖xg8 39 ♖xf6+, on the other hand, is simply too negative, leaving Black in a terrible ending with no realistic chance of salvaging the draw.

37 ♖f5+ ♖h6



We can safely assume that White was feeling good about life around this point. A pawn up and with his pieces close enough to whisper to Black's king, White seems to have everything under control. Indeed he does. Consequently this is understandable and even excusable, but it is the very frame of mind Black will have been hoping for from his opponent. Had Black reacted to his carelessness/poor judgement in overlooking 34 ♖e3 by being defeatist, blaming his predicament on his blunder and merely going through the

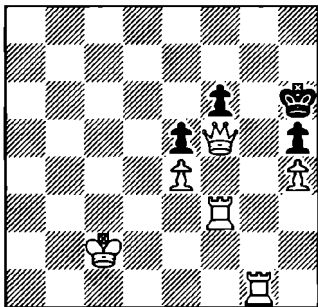
motions by defending until a futile ending comes along, then he would not have been sufficiently optimistic and realistic to notice an interesting feature in his set-up.

38 ♖f3??

With the simple and effective plan of doubling rooks on the g-file followed by accepting Black's resignation. This is the correct, winning plan, but, remarkably, White had to begin with 38 ♖g3. Can you see why?

38...♗a6??

Ironically, Black, despite being the only player to actually see what is so unusual about the position, nonetheless fails to realise the difference between 38 ♖g3 and 38 ♖f3. Had time not been running out he would have played 38...♗a1!!, exploiting the fact that the rook on g1 is unprotected to unleash a terrific drawing resource. Due to the hanging rook (which would not be the case after 38 ♖g3 because then the rook on f1 would be defended by the queen) White must oblige: 39 ♖xa1 ♗a8+ 40 ♖b1 ♗a1+ and now Gershon's dream position (which he saw when he played 35...h5) appears after 41 ♖xa1 ♗a7+ 42 ♖b2 (42 ♖b1 ♗a1+) 42...♗a3+ (but not 42...♗a1+?? 43 ♖xa1!, releasing Black's king) 43 ♖c3 ♗xb3+ 44 ♖d2 ♗d3+ 45 ♖c1 ♗xc2+ 46 ♗xc2

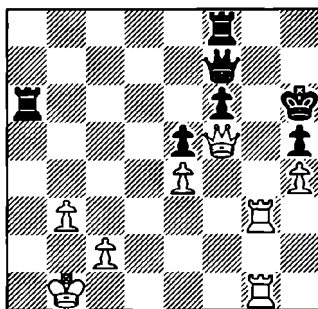


Stalemate!

Of course White can also try 41 ♖b2 ♗a2+ 42 ♖c1 ♗xc2+ 43 ♖d1 ♗c1+ 44 ♖e2 ♗xg1 45 ♗xf6+ ♗xf6 46 ♖xf6+ ♖g7 47 ♖f5

♖g4 48 ♖xe5 ♖xh4 but the resulting ending is drawn. Should we forgive White for not contemplating any outcome other than a quick 1-0 when he prepared to double rooks? Probably. Stalemates at this level are extremely rare. However, as can be seen elsewhere in these pages, the warning signs are there and pretty easy to see as long as we keep a mental note of such possibilities tucked away in the memory banks.

39 ♖fg3

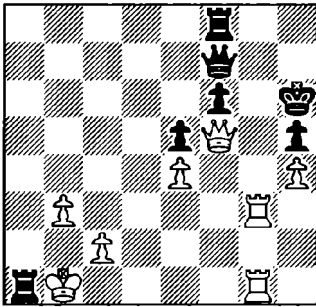


39...♗a1+!

Gershon: 'Had a bomb exploded in the playing hall it would have had less effect on my opponent than this move, in a position he was sure Black would resign! This psychological fact had a lot to do with White's next mistakes.'

Precisely. The question now is whether White, awoken from his reverie by this shocking check, can quickly adjust to the new situation, draw the right conclusion and subsequently take the right path? What might be going through White's mind in these circumstances? Remember that Black's missed opportunity in playing 38...♗a6?? at least formed part of an important plan, of which the theme is exactly the same as what we have now, albeit, admittedly, with a couple of changes in detail. Consequently Black is playing on his own terms, according to his specific agenda, whereas White suddenly finds himself on unexpected, alien terrain. In these

circumstances the actual state of play, the likely result assuming 'best play' from both sides, can be of lesser significance than the relative psychological states of the players themselves. Even the recent series of moves – including two quite different outright blunders – plays an important psychological role. White, believing (quite correctly) that he was on the verge of victory, prepared to decisively double rooks on the g-file, after which Black responded with ...♖a6; but when White then completed the transfer he saw Black's same rook pounce, as if Black had set a trap and was waiting for ♖f3-g3 after all. Indeed Black had waited but shouldn't have, but White is completely oblivious to this part of the story!

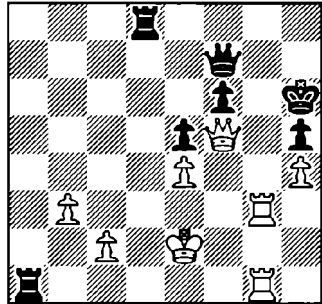


40 ♖b2?

Given recent events and the fact that White is a pawn up with the better position this blunder is understandable. However, would White have been so trusting were he not sitting opposite a strong young GM approaching an early career milestone of 2600? I guess not. Against a much lower rated opponent White might well have been less accommodating, and in fact after 40 ♖xa1 ♖a8+ 41 ♖b2 ♖a2+ 42 ♖c1 Black's bluff can be effectively called: 42...♖xc2+ 43 ♖d1 (note that 43 ♖xc2?? ♗xb3+ demonstrates why Black would have had to wait after 38 ♖g3 for White to double on the g-file as, with a rook on f1 here, the simple 44 ♖xb3

would free Black's king!) 43. ♖c1+ (43...♖d2+ 44 ♖xd2 and Black has no useful check because 44...♗d7+ 45 ♗xd7 frees the f-pawn and 44...♗d5+ 45 exd5 frees the e-pawn) 44 ♖e2 ♖c2+ 45 ♖f1 ♖c1+ 46 ♖g2 etc.

40...♖a2+ 41 ♖c1 ♖a1+ 42 ♖d2 ♖d8+ 43 ♖e2



43...♖xg1 44 ♖xg1

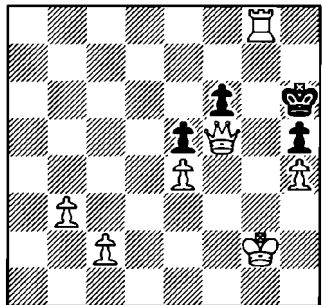
White remains in front after this flurry of checks, but the game needs winning all over again...

44...♖g8!

Setting another small trap.

45 ♖g5!

Not falling for 45 ♖xg8?? ♗c4+! 46 ♖f3 ♗c2+ 47 ♖g3 ♗g2+ 48 ♖xg2



Stalemate.

45...♖d8 46 ♗f3 ♖d6 47 ♖f5 ♗g6 48 ♖f1 ♖a6 49 ♖f2 ♖d6

Both players were short of time for the rest of the game, which added to both the tension and to the blunder count.

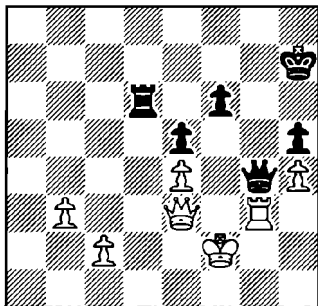
50 ♖e3+ ♜h7 51 ♠f3?

51...c3 is necessary.

51...♗g4

Missing 51...♞d4!, e.g. 52 ♠f5 ♗g4 and Black is better. Consequently White might consider c2-e3 here.

52 ♠g3??



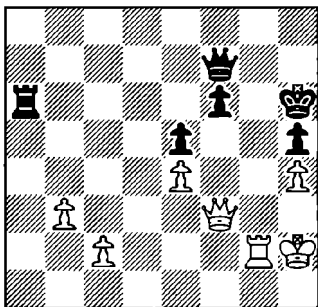
Consistent, aggressive and losing, in view of 52...♗d1! 53 ♠f3 ♞d2+ 54 ♜g3 ♠xc2 when 55 ♗a7+ (Black was worried about his own king) 55...♜g6 does not help White – 56 ♗e3 ♠e2 etc. Again 52 c3 looks sensible.

52...♗d7??

Gershon: 'Returning the favour.'

This time Black believes his opponent.

53 ♗f3 ♗a7+ 54 ♜f1 ♗f7 55 ♠g2 ♠a6 56 ♜g1 ♜h6 57 ♜h2!



Gershon: 'White has finished regrouping his pieces! Black is lost again..'

57...♞d6 58 c4

White can finally mobilise his passed pawns, thereby heralding the win.

58...♞d4 59 c5 ♠b4 60 ♠g3 ♠b8 61 ♗d3 ♠g8 62 ♗d2+?!

62 ♗d5 wins. White is still doing very well after the text but it makes sense to Hoover off the queens when possible in these endings, thus removing the defender's most annoying piece.

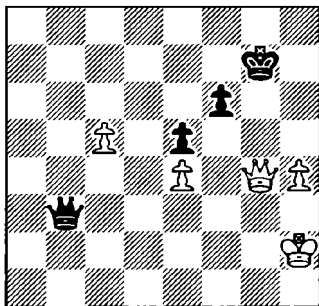
62...♜h7 63 ♠xg8?

Time trouble seems to have been a factor here, but White is already aware that queen endings are notoriously awkward to convert due to the many checking possibilities afforded the defending queen by so many open lines and spaces. Consequently the text is indicative of White's frame of mind.

63...♗xg8 64 ♗d7+ ♜h6 65 ♗d2+ ♜h7 66 ♗e2 ♗xb3 67 ♗xh5+ ♜g7

Gershon: 'Black was never so close to a draw in this game!'

68 ♗g4+



Now Black should play 68...♜f7 69 ♗d7+ ♜f8 70 ♗d6+ ♜g7 'with many checks..' – Gershon.

68...♜h6??

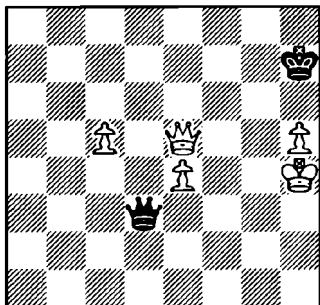
...Gershon: 'Black relaxes and gets himself into a mating net!'

69 h5! ♜h7

69...♗f7 70 ♗g6+ ♗xg6 71 hxg6 ♜xg6 72

c6 sees the pawn promote.

70 ♖g6+ ♘h8 71 ♜xf6+ ♘g8 72 ♜xe5
 ♜c2+ 73 ♘g3 ♜d3+ 74 ♘h4 ♘h7



Gershon: 'The agony...'

75 ♜f5+ ♘h8 76 h6 1-0

Gershon ends his frank annotations with 'One of the strangest games I have ever played' but, as I said when introducing the game, it is not so unusual. However, the (recurring) stalemate theme was obviously unusual, yet the existence of these stalemates and Black's being subsequently so tantalisingly close to the draw ultimately contributed to Gershon's final, losing blunder. The drawing possibilities, even if not resulting from accurate play, were sufficiently extreme to 'downgrade' Black's genuine drawing prospects near the end to such an extent that no more effort was required in the simple, seemingly calm ending. In his own words, he relaxed. All the hard work had been done – the same blunder-inducing state of mind in which White had been when the game took its wayward course...

Pride

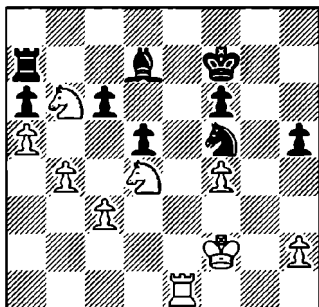
In the next example Black displays nothing worse than human nature.

Gligoric-Stahlberg

Split (Match, Game 3) 1949

After struggling for a long time with a

'bad' bishop Black automatically takes the opportunity to liberate it when a better defence would have been to return it to a passive post. Black's bishop has seen better days, and White now grabs the chance to remove a key defender.



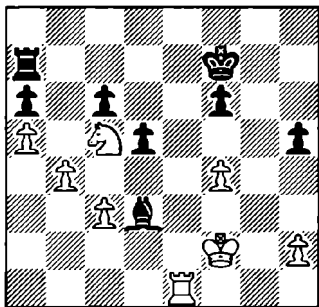
39 ♘xf5

This is preferable to 39 ♘xd7 ♘xd4 40 ♘b8 ♘b5 41 ♘xc6 ♜c7 42 ♘b8 when White nets a pawn but helps activate the enemy pieces. It also makes sense from a psychological perspective for White to leave Black with the traditionally 'bad' bishop.

39...♘xf5 40 ♘a4 ♘d3

Freedom! Suddenly Black's bishop enjoys what seems an active role of its own which, ultimately, is Black's undoing.

41 ♘c5



Here the game was adjourned, with Black sealing his move. What would you do in

Black's shoes? His knight has disappeared but so has one of White's. Black's rook is passive – unlike White's – and there is the problem with the bishop, which is dominated by the knight. Then we have the pawns – White's are looking perfectly safe, with every one out of the bishop's reach, while Black's require considerable attention. But at least the bishop can now contribute to the cause, having been allowed out of the cage on d7. All this sounds quite reasonable.

This is what Gligoric had to say in *I Play Against Pieces*: 'I didn't share the opinion of the spectators who criticised me for having hurried with simplification and allowed the activation of the black bishop, estimating that this increased Black's chances for a draw... It would be more difficult for White after 41...♙f5, although with this move the bishop returns to prison...'

41...♙b5?

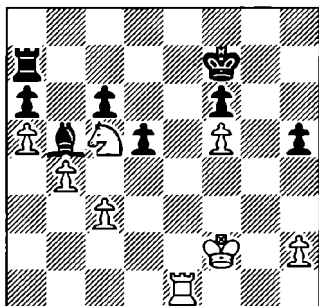
Gligoric: 'A characteristic example of an optical illusion in chess! Quite frankly, it was the only move that I expected (although I also analysed 41...♙f5), because hardly anyone would let pass such a rare chance to get the bishop out of prison and instead return it to where it had just come from.'

Whereas it is true that a computer (theoretically) plays the best move available at the time and is not influenced by other factors, nor can it ever make judgements based on psychology which, more often than some players would care to admit, can be an important part of the game. As for 41...♙f5!, White's job is made that more difficult because the kingside is well protected, the threat of ...h5-h4 inducing 42 h4, after which White must look for the breakthrough on the queenside. Now the bishop looks bigger than before but actually contributes nothing as White is able to operate much better on the kingside.

42 f5!

White helps himself to an immediate benefit of his opponent's 'style over sub-

stance' sealed move. Already Black's king has less breathing space.



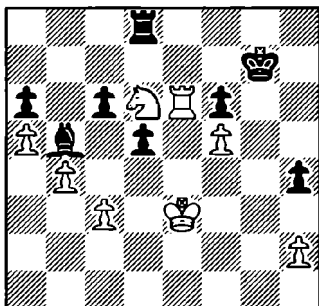
42...♙a8

42...♙e7 meets with 43 ♖e6 (intending ♗g1), e.g. 43...♙d3? 44 ♘d8+. Waiting on the rank with 42...♙c7 merely gives White time to further improve his rook, e.g. 43 ♙e3 ♙e7 44 ♖e6 ♙e8 45 ♗g3 ♗g8 46 ♙xg8 ♘xg8 47 ♘e3 etc. The bishop is indeed powerless.

43 ♘b7! ♘g7 44 ♗g1+

Just testing – Black might (incorrectly) choose the h-file, after which all his pieces would be awful.

44...♘f7 45 ♙e1 ♘g7 46 ♘d6 h4 47 ♘f3 ♙d8 48 ♙e7+ ♘g8 49 ♙e6 ♘g7 50 ♘e3!



Maintaining the grip rather than being tempted into 50 ♘g4, when 50...d4! 51 cxd4 ♙c4! sees the bishop jump to action. White should also avoid 50 ♖e8+ ♘f7 51 ♘xf6 d4!,

which still looks poor for Black but is not as hopeless as the game.

50...♖a4

White threatened to win with ♖xb5.

51 ♖d4 ♔g8 52 ♖c5

With all three of White's pieces in prime locations something is sure to give. Note just how comical the bishop is now!

52...♖h7 53 ♖e8! ♔g2 54 ♖xf6+ ♖g7

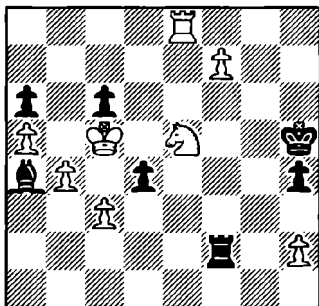
55 ♖d7 ♜f2 56 ♖f6+ ♖g6

56...♖f7 57 ♖d6.

57 ♖e5+ ♖h5

Or 57...♖f5 58 ♖d6 etc.

58 ♖f7 d4 59 ♜e8 1-0



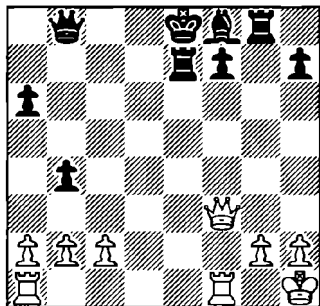
Black didn't only miss his bishop on the kingside, the shift over to b5 lost the game – a blunder that would not have been played had Black been looking at the position after 41 ♖c5 for the first time.

Make your own decisions

Just as we should remember that 'any plan is better than no plan', it is also useful to not be afraid of your own decisions. The opposition's body language (or behaviour of spectators if you're game has generated such interest) or other people's general opinions shouldn't distract you from your own convictions. Otherwise you might consciously adopt an approach you don't believe in, or refrain from making certain kinds of moves. Here's an amusing example involving the young Fischer.

Fischer-Tal

Candidates Tournament, Bled 1959



White, to move, has obvious compensation for the piece. The following is taken from Tal's notes in *The Life & Games of Mikhail Tal*: '... it was here that a widely-known psychological duel took place between us... Fischer wrote down the move 22 ♜a1!, without doubt the strongest, and wrote it not in his usual English notation but in European, almost Russian! Then he not very deftly pushed the scoresheet towards me. 'He's asking for an endorsement', I thought to myself, but how was I to react? To frown was impossible, if I smiled he would suspect 'trickery', and so I did the natural thing. I got up and began to calmly walk up and down the stage. I met Petrosian, made some joke to him, and he replied. The 15-year-old Fischer, who was essentially still only a large child, sat with a confused expression on his face, looking first at the front row of spectators where his second was sitting, and then at me. Then he wrote down another move: 22 ♜c6+?, and after 22...♜d7 23 ♜a81+ ♖e7 24 ♜xf7 ♖xf7 25 ♜e6+ ♖f8! 26 ♜xd7 ♜d6 I held on to my extra piece and won.'

When Tal later asked Fischer why he hadn't played 22 ♜a1, he replied: 'Well, you laughed when I wrote it down!' Fischer went on to have enough confidence to let nothing change his mind, which is a good attitude. Uncertainty can easily lead to blunders.

CHAPTER FOUR

The King's Defences

*In play there are two pleasures for your choosing;
The one is in the winning and the other the losing.*

Lord Byron (1788-1824), British poet.

We all learn to get the king to safety by castling early, but once this is done we then compromise the king's defences by being too free with the barrier of pawns. Either the pawns themselves can become more susceptible to attack or weaknesses are created on neighbouring squares. In this chapter we look at the seriousness of cover for the castled king.

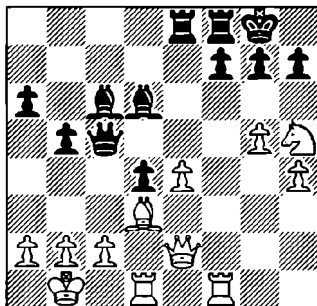
Castling on opposite flanks

Perhaps the most uncomfortable time for the king is when castling has been carried out on opposite flanks and both players are free to launch their pawns at the enemy. In these circumstances it is important to maintain a defensive wall as moving a pawn in front of the king either accelerates hand-to-hand combat with opposition pawns or surrenders a potentially critical square. In the following example the mere presence of an enemy knight and the prospect of falling foul of a sacrifice prompts Black into compromising the defensive barrier in front of his king. 'If it's not broken, don't fix it' were the wise words of my dentist some years ago when I

had an unfortunate experience with a sandwich.

Bologan-Obodchuk

Poikovsky 2002



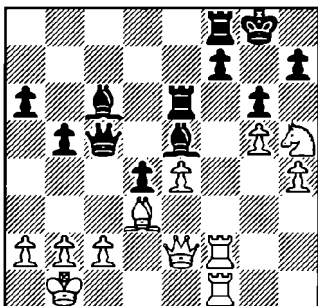
White's knight has just arrived on h5 to make a nuisance of itself, if only by monitoring f6 and g7 and letting Black (to move) come up with scary stories of his own. In fact it would be careless of Black not to consider possible sacrifices, and it turns out that 27...♙d7, for example (intending to give the bishop a dual role of attacker and defender on e6) does indeed meet with 28 ♘xg7!! ♙xg7 29 e5 when White threatens ♖h5, e.g. 29...♜xe5 30 ♖h5 ♙f5 31 ♖h6+ ♙g8 32 ♙xf5 ♜xf5 33 ♜xf5 ♖xf5 34 ♖xd6 with a

definite advantage. But this doesn't mean that Black should panic, and Tyornkin's suggestion of 27...a5 28 ♖f2 a4 dishes out some of the same treatment on the queenside and generates sufficient counterplay.

27...♗e5

Keeping an eye on both g7 and f6.

28 ♖f2 ♗e6 29 ♖d1 g6??



Black gives into temptation despite his hitherto circumspect play. Perhaps the size of White's army on the kingside combined with the size of White's FIDE rating (2652 at the time of the game; Black's was 2435) to conjure up demons, and the bishop came to e5 only to force the removal of the knight. Instead of handing over the f6-square on a plate and asking for trouble by coming into closer contact with White's pawns (and therefore practically leaving the door open in view of a later h4-h5 etc.) it was possible to carry out an effective regrouping with 29...♗d7 followed by switching the rook to c6 and the bishop to e6. With a successful blockade of the e4-pawn Black also keeps the enemy bishop locked away on d3.

30 ♖f6+

White has enough pieces left to trade his good knight for Black's good bishop, particularly when he has such good control over f6.

30...♗xf6 31 ♗xf6

Establishing the pawn on f6 – when White can entertain mate threats involving ♗h6 – gives Black time to hit e4 with 31

gxf6? ♗fe8. The text keeps Black on his toes by hitting f7, to which Black now turns his attention.

31...♗d7 32 ♗f2 ♗xf6 33 ♗xf6

Threatening the a6-pawn for good measure.

33...♗e6 34 h5

As if the gaping hole on f6 were not enough, Black also has to contend with another consequence of ...g7-g6.

34...gxf5

Of course this looks awful, but so does the ultra-passive 34...♗e8 35 h6 ♗f8 36 ♗xd4 etc.

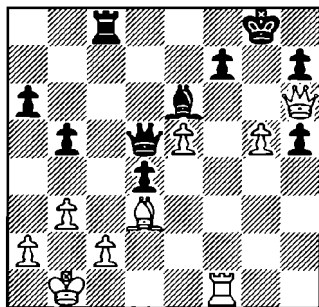
35 e5!

Liberating the bishop, which has done nothing thus far but is a key player. Even this latest development can be attributed to Black's 29th move blunder.

35...♗d5

Black is defenceless against the threat of ♗h6, and challenging the bishop with 35...♗c4 loses to 36 ♗xh7+ ♗xh7 37 ♗h6+ ♗g8 38 g6 with forced mate.

36 b3 ♗c8 37 ♗h6



Black's kingside has completely fallen apart. If imaginary fears prompted Black into inviting doom and gloom with 29...g6?, then the predicament now facing Black as a result of the move itself is absolutely real.

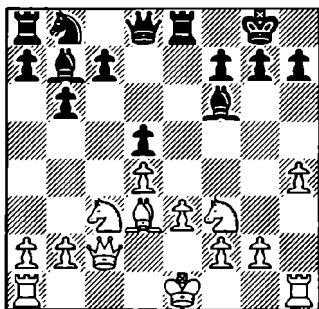
37...♗xe5 38 ♗xh7+ ♗h8 39 ♗g6+ 1-0

39 ♗g6+ ♗g8 40 ♗h7+ ♗f8 41 ♗xf7+ mates. All pawn moves create weaknesses,

and although we are aware of this, the extent to which the consequences can lead tends to be underestimated, particularly when the protection of the king is concerned.

Which pawn?

We are often given the choice (usually rather early in the proceedings) when the opposition makes an inquisitive threat of some sort that requires us to commit a pawn in front of the castled king. Such decisions might appear to be fairly routine and down to a matter of taste, but the implications of even nudging a pawn forward just one square can be considerable. Here is a classic mating theme made possible only by the wrong side of a 50–50 choice.



This is a position from the Queen's Gambit Declined. Earlier White voluntarily played $\text{♙g5x} \text{♟f6}$ before Black could support the knight with $\dots \text{♞bd7}$. This trade reduces Black's defence of h7, prompting White's latest move, 11 ♛c2 . Black's kingside has remained intact thus far but now a decision must be made between $11\dots \text{g6}$ and $11\dots \text{h6}$. The former invites a further question with h4-h5 but looks solid enough and has the advantage of shortening the enemy bishop's diagonal. The latter, on the other hand, escapes the threat but allows White full control of the b1-h7 diagonal. Additionally, selecting the h-pawn keeps the h-file closed, although it might invite a future g2-g4-g5 etc.

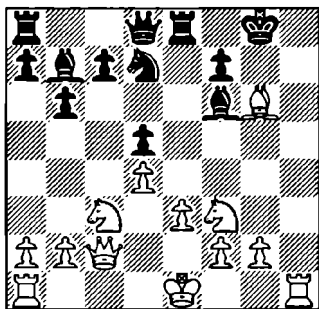
11...g6?

In fact after $11\dots \text{h6}$ 12 g4?! c5! (thematically responding to a flank offensive with a counter in the centre – all the more effective with White's king still on e1) White's thrust is seen to be unjustified because $13 \text{ g5 cxd4! 14 gx} \text{f6 ♜xf6}$ exploits the pin on the e-file.

12 h5 ♞d7?

The defensive job that began on the previous move has not finished. $12\dots \text{♞g7}$ is imperative, when White enjoys a pull because the fate of the kingside is effectively in his hands – Black cannot seriously contemplate opening lines with $\dots \text{gxh5}$ and must therefore wait for White to act (after 0-0-0 and further preparations).

13 hxg6 hxg6 14 ♙xg6!



A common scenario. Black's logic in the many times that this kind of sacrifice is allowed is that if any immediate threat can be parried the inconvenience is worth the material gain. As for missing ♙xg6 altogether, there is really no excuse, particularly straight after placing the pawn on g6.

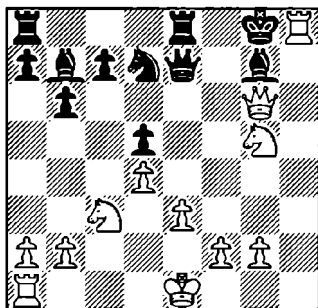
14...fxg6 15 ♛xg6+ ♙g7

$15\dots \text{♟f8}$ fails to help Black: $16 \text{ ♞g5! ♙xg5 (16\dots ♞e7 17 ♞h7+ ♞xh7 18 ♞xh7 ♜e8 19 ♜f5) 17 ♞h8+ ♟e7 18 ♞h7+ mates}$.

16 ♞g5 ♜e7 17 ♞h8+!

This is the key part of this mating theme, and the move that catches out the victims. After $17\dots \text{♟xh8}$ Black is mated on h7. Hopefully, now that you've seen this mate, you will

be careful in future in related situations when considering ...g7-g6 (or g2-g3 as White) to inhibit the enemy bishop while the opposition's rook still stands on the h-file.

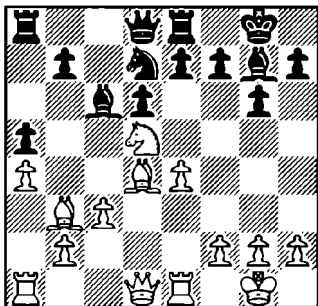


The empty fianchetto

Kingside fianchetto fans (myself included) have a special affection for the king's bishop, and there is a tendency to feel uncomfortable and insecure in the event of the important piece being exchanged. In the following example even Kiril Georgiev reacts to the missing g7-bishop with a dubious damaging of his kingside structure.

Shirov-Ki.Georgiev

FIDE Grand Prix, Dubai 2002



White has manoeuvred his bishop to d4 in order to rid Black of the Dragon bishop and then put his territorial advantage to good use.

15 ♖xg7 ♜xg7 16 ♜d4+ ♜g8

Black is unwilling to spoil the current Dragon formation with 16...f6, when 17 ♖ad1 gives White a comfortable edge. Both of White's minor pieces are within a move of the new hole on e6, while a trade of the knight would fail to sufficiently reduce White's access.

17 ♖ad1 ♖xd5

A committal decision given the scope of White's remaining minor piece. 17...♖c8 is the alternative.

18 ♜xd5

White's pressure against f7 is unsophisticated but effective nonetheless, tying Black down and accentuating the space advantage.

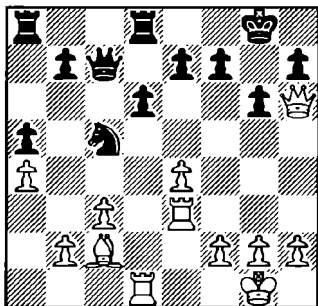
18...♗f8 19 ♜g5

Threatening e4-e5 to engineer a more open position for his minor piece, which Black now forces to a less active post.

19...♝c5 20 ♖c2 ♜c7 21 ♖e3!?

White could still insist on pushing the e-pawn: 21 e5! ♜xe5 22 ♜xe5 ♜c6 and now 23 ♜xe7 ♜xa4 24 ♖d6 ♜e8 25 ♖xa4 ♜xa4 looks okay for Black, but 23 b4 axb4 24 cxb4 ♜xa4 (24...♜a6 25 ♖e4) 25 ♖e4 is interesting. White prefers to keep more pieces on the board because he wants to see how Black responds to more attention on the kingside.

21...♗fd8 22 ♜h6



Having lost sight of f7 – which was only a temporary theme anyway – White looks further afield to h7, the queen's arrival on h6 a

typical problem for the defender in the absence of the dark-squared bishop. This time the coming threat (to h7) packs more punch because it is not as easy to protect as f7. Consequently Black's handling of the situation is critical as there are only two defensive themes, each involving the state of Black's structure.

22...e6?

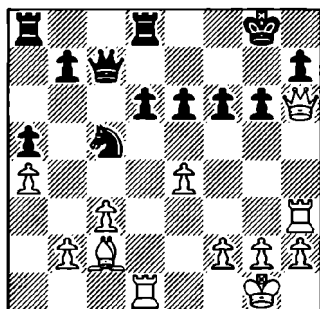
The wrong decision from a 50–50 choice. Black must either sit and wait for White to look for other inroads after 22...d7 23 ♖h3 d6 or 23...d8 or make an irrevocable alteration to his conventional pawn formation that stretches from h7 to d6. Passivity is not the most enjoyable way to play chess, but with the onus on White to find something concrete with the knight sitting on f8 or f6 – when Black's position is nevertheless sound – nor is it too difficult. After the text, on the other hand, White has at least one ready-made target in the shape of the d6-pawn, and many players would be right in believing that the inconvenience suffered in messing with Black's structure is one problem, but another could well be that, ultimately, it might not even be enough to provide the king with adequate defence. Obviously it is much easier delving into the pros and cons of this or that idea in hindsight. However, a good tip that should help the next time your kingside is under pressure and part of the decision-making process concerns the defensive pawn barrier is to actually count the weaknesses involved. Black's knight would clearly be much better off travelling the board than being rooted to f8 or f6, but at least that is it, whereas each pawn move in the vicinity of Black's king after ...e7-e6 contributes to a fresh weakness and breeds liabilities. Furthermore, before committing your pawns remember that if you choose another strategy it might be possible to switch to Plan 'B' later anyway.

23 ♖h3!

Forcing another concession. White should

be happy to see Black's pawns move forward as each relinquishes any influence it had over squares on the third rank.

23...f6



In just a couple of moves Black's formation has been transformed from the original traditional Dragon set-up to one which features four pawns sharing the third rank, each – to a certain degree – looking rather vulnerable. Consequently White has more to aim at, and Black more to worry about.

24 b4!?

Typical Shirov. White is spoiled for choice here. With the text he plans to hit the e6-pawn, but a good alternative is 24 ♖h4 to first target f6, e.g. 24...g7 25 f4 ♖ab8 (25...♖a6? 26 e5 and both pawns are pinned to the d8-rook) 26 b4 axb4 27 cxb4 ♖a6 28 ♗b3 and White enjoys an advantage.

24...axb4 25 cxb4 ♖a4 26 ♗b3 ♖e8 27 g4

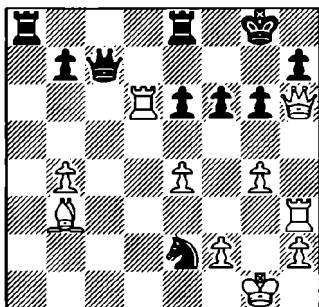
White judges that his opponent's ugly kingside structure affords him such a luxury, providing breathing space for the king without leaving the rook stranded on h3 (after g2-g3, for instance).

27...dxc3 28 ♖xd6!

A strong exchange sacrifice made possible thanks to Black's mistake on the 22nd move.

28...dxe2+

Forcing White to bring his king to e2, although Black's king is about to be the busier of the two.



29 ♖f1 ♜xd6

Not 29...♘c1? 30 ♙xe6+ ♜xe6 31 ♜xe6 ♜c4+ 32 ♚g2 ♜xe6 33 ♜xh7+ ♚f8 34 ♜xg6 etc.

30 ♜xh7+

Another pawn bites the dust.

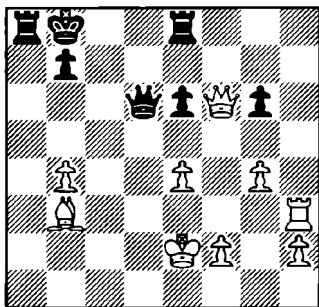
30...♚f8

The king, not so long ago quite safe, begins an unwanted flight to the queenside.

31 ♜h8+

31 ♜xb7? ♜a1+ 32 ♚xe2 ♜a6+ 33 ♜xa6 ♜xa6 is certainly not what White had in mind. Instead the process of stripping away the enemy king's defences continues – a process Black began himself by voluntarily damaging the pawn chain.

31...♚e7 32 ♜g7+ ♚d8 33 ♜xf6+ ♚c8 34 ♚xe2 ♚b8



Let's have a look at the trouble Black's blunder caused his own king. White's king

might run into a check or two on e2 but there are no security problems, whereas Black lacks protection in general after the fall of three members of the once proud collection of pawns (and the remaining two look doomed).

35 ♜d3

Relocating the rook.

35...♜xb4 36 ♜e5+ ♚a7 37 ♙xe6

There goes another. White's growing pawn majority – which also acts as a haven for the king now that the bishop offers extra protection – should prove decisive as the ending approaches.

37...♜ad8 38 ♜a1+ ♚b8 39 ♜e5+

Absolutely not 39 ♙d5?? ♜xd5! etc.

39...♚a7 40 ♜xd8 ♜xd8 41 ♙d5

Black has a passed pawn but the bishop helps White dictate the game from the middle of the board.

41...♜c8 42 ♚f1!? ♜c3

The alternative is to rid White of his superbly centralised queen with 42...♜c3 but after 43 ♜xc3 ♜xc3 44 h4 White should win the race, e.g. 44...b5 (44...♜h3 45 h5 gxh5 46 g5 ♜h4 47 f3 ♜f4 48 ♚f2) 45 ♙f7! b4 46 ♙xg6 b3 47 e5 etc.

43 ♚g2 ♜b2?

A lesser evil is 43...♜d3!? 44 ♜a1+ ♜a3 45 ♜g7 ♜a6 46 h4, although Black is struggling.

44 ♜d4+ ♚b8 45 ♜e5+ ♚a7 46 h4 ♜b4 47 ♜f6 ♜c2 48 ♜xg6

Apart from the fact that 22...e6? backfired because it added weight to White's would-be kingside offensive by providing the aggressor with more to bite on, Black also managed to lose every single one of d6...h7 pawn chain. If only he had settled for the solid ...♘f8/f6 defence...

The game ended:

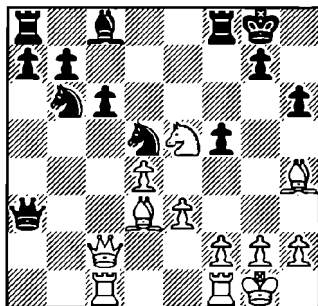
48...♜d4 49 ♜f7 ♜b2 50 g5 ♜b1 51 ♜f3 ♜h8 52 h5 ♜a1 53 g6 ♜e5 54 ♜a3+ ♚b8 55 ♜g3 ♜xg3+ 1-0

Punish the opponent's rash advances
White appears to have left his positional un-

derstanding at home in our next instalment. Not only does he fail to punish Black's (voluntarily) weakened king position following the over-aggressive ...g7-g5, he contrives to make a far more serious error with his own g-pawn!

Dorfman-Lamprecht

Bundesliga 2001



White is a pawn down but has no weaknesses, excellent outposts for his pieces, the bishop pair (dark squares) and a handy pawn mass (with presence in the centre). Black should await developments and bring his bishop into the game with ...♗e6, but he gets ambitious on the kingside, where he is not sufficiently represented.

17...g5?

In one move Black neglects a collection of potentially important squares directly in front of his king, as well as advancing his pawn to a dark square that could prove difficult to support without his dark-squared bishop. We would expect a 2600 GM such as Dorfman to engineer some kind of refutation of Black's unsubtle, faulty strategy with relative ease.

18 ♖g3 ♜f6

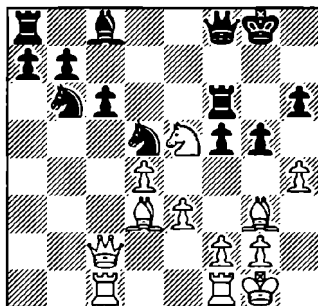
Activating the rook and freeing f8 for the queen to regroup. Pushing the g-pawn has practically forced Black to go on the offensive anyway, as reverting to sober development fails to address the new situation on the kingside, e.g. 18...♗e6 19 ♜fe1 a5 20 ♜e2

and White homes in on h5.

19 h4

Although this is a thematic response to Black's shaky kingside structure, there is no need to rush (Black's pawns aren't going anywhere). Perhaps White might consider 19 ♖c4 ♖xc4 20 ♗xc4 ♗e6 21 ♗e5 ♜f7 22 ♜e2, again with h5 in his sights.

19...♜f8

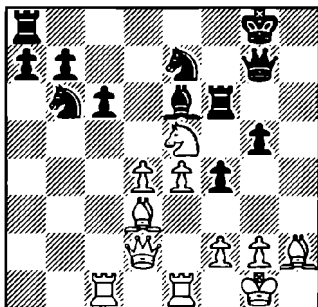


Black is careful not to be too loose. The blunt counter 19...f4 sees his king look rather lonely after 20 hxg5 hxg5 21 exf4 gxh4 22 ♗h4.

20 ♜d2?!

White starts to drift around this point. Tsesarsky suggests the clean 20 hxg5 hxg5 21 ♜fe1, intending to punish Black's audacity by stepping up the pace with e3-e4.

20...f4 21 ♗h2 ♗e6 22 ♜fe1 ♜g7 23 e4 ♖e7 24 hxg5 hxg5



Black's stock has increased during the last few moves, with more influence on the kingside and his earlier weaknesses less noticeable as a result. It would be interesting to know how White assessed the diagram position. His next suggests a note of dissatisfaction with the way he has conducted the game since his opponent's misdemeanour, perhaps with genuine concerns about Black's steady build-up of forces on the kingside. However, Tsesarsky offers an instructive piece of analysis that is a good illustration of the implications of recklessly transforming the defensive wall of pawns in front of the castled king into an attacking unit. Black might have paped over the cracks, but the weaknesses remain – 25 ♖a1! ♜h6 26 ♖a5 and the g5-pawn/square is about to come under fire, e.g. 26... ♜h8 27 ♘f3 g4 28 ♙g5+ ♙g6 29 ♜b4 ♜e8 (29... gxf3 30 ♜xe7 ♜g7 31 ♜xg7+ ♝xg7 32 ♙xg6+ ♝xg6 33 ♘xf4) 30 ♜d6 ♜g7 31 ♙xg6 ♘xg6 32 ♘g5 ♜f8 33 ♜xf8+ ♝xf8 (33... ♘xf8 34 ♘xf4 ♘c4 35 ♘c2) 34 e5 ♝g7 35 ♖a1 ♘c4 36 ♘xc4 ♘xc4 37 ♖xa7 ♜e7 38 ♘e4, or 30... ♘f7?! 31 e5 ♙g7 32 e6 ♘h5 33 ♜e5 gxf3 34 ♖xh5 ♙xg2+ 35 ♝f1 ♜g7 36 ♘h7+ ♝h8 37 ♘e4+ ♝g8 38 ♘xf3. Of course Black is still fighting in these lines but White is in the driving seat, something which cannot be said after White's next.

25 g3??

It is rather ironic that Black has been able to get away with his kingside liberties only to see White commit a much more serious positional crime. Either White still thought he was chipping away at the kingside by hitting the dark squares, or he decided he was in trouble. Whatever the case, g2-g3 only makes matters much worse. Even on h2 the bishop was holding back Black's pawns (and there might be more profitable opportunities to

nudge the g-pawn forward), but now the picture is quite different as his own pawns have been compromised.

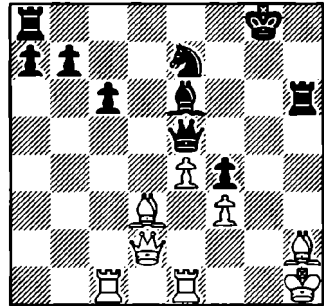
25... ♜h6!

Now Black means business. Not 25... ♜d8? 26 gxf4 gxf4+ 27 ♝h1 ♜xd4 (27... ♘g6 28 ♙g1) 28 ♙g1 ♘g6 29 ♜c3 ♜d8 30 ♘e2 with ♘h5 coming. This might have been what White had considered when deciding on 25 g3 but, if so, he had ignored the advice he will have given many others over the years – respect your king.

26 f3

Unfortunately for White after 26 gxf4 gxf4+ 27 ♝h1 ♘g6! 28 ♙g1 Black forces mate – 28... ♖xh2+ 29 ♝xh2 ♜h8+ 30 ♝g2 ♜h3 mate, while 28 f3 ♘xe5 29 dxe5 ♜xe5 is decisive.

26... ♘d7 27 gxf4 gxf4+ 28 ♝h1 ♘xe5 29 dxe5 ♜xe5



Black should be well on the way to victory but the battle is far from over, and a spectacular blunder is still to come... (see Chapter Eight)

Somehow White managed to make Black's initial mistake look like the beginning of a powerful, long-term kingside offensive – all because of one little pawn move.

CHAPTER FIVE

Checks

The game is never lost till won.

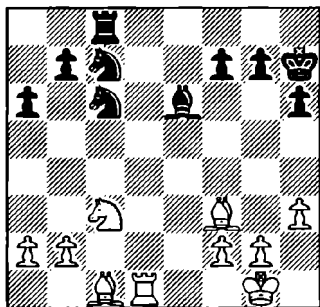
George Crabbe (1754-1832), British poet.

The check has a special significance to both non-players (every time chess is on a film, for instance, you can guarantee someone will announce 'Check!') and beginners. Obviously, being a move that demands an immediate response, the check is indeed unique, and the cause of many a heartache...

We start with a comical yet common blunder. It is always necessary to watch out for checks, particularly when your king is unsafe.

Volkov-Sargissian

European Championship (3rd play-off),
Batumi 2002



The symmetrical nature of the diagram position points to a draw, Black's only cause for concern being his opponent's 'extra' dark-squared bishop, with which White now sets about teasing his opponent in amusing fashion.

28 ♖e3 ♜e8 29 ♖b6 ♝f6 30 ♖e3 ♞d7 31 ♖f4

Rather than try to demonstrate whatever advantage his control of the dark squares might confer White goads his opponent. This proves to be a successful psychological ploy.

31...♞b6

Black 'exploits' the availability of the b6-square. There is nothing wrong with 31...♞f6.

32 b3 ♞b4 33 ♖e5 ♞d7

33...♞c6 looks fine, but Black plans to use his pressure on the c-file to hunt down the annoying bishop.

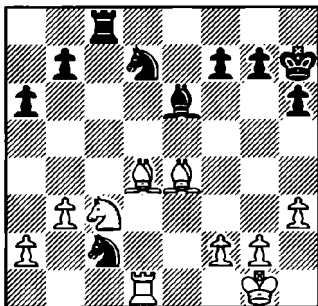
34 ♖d4 ♞c2??

34...♞c6 is equal but obstructs the rook, whereas the text is aimed at forcing the bishop to stay on d4 and await capture...

35 ♖e4+ 1-0

Six out of White's seven moves since we joined the game were made by the dark-squared bishop, and this seems to have had a hypnotic effect on Black, whose apparent

obsession with its removal led to him overlooking the other bishop!

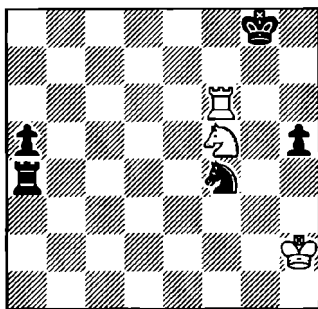


The careless check

In the following example White is in bad shape, and doesn't help himself with his next.

M. Gurevich-Shirov

Eurotel Trophy, Prague 2002



56 ♖g3

Either '?' or '!' could be tagged on to this move, depending on what Gurevich had or hadn't seen before playing it.

56...♗d5?!

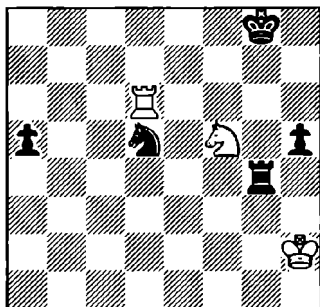
As this is a rapidplay game and we've passed 50 moves we can assume that time-trouble had reared its ugly head by now. Nevertheless it is surprising that Black misses 56...h4+, when 57 ♖xh4? ♗h5+ and 57 ♖xh4? ♗d5+ drop the rook, while 57 ♖h2

h3 sees the pawn advance.

57 ♗d6 ♗g4+??

Throwing in this check also throws away Black's big lead, allowing White to draw. After 57...♗c3 White's unenviable defensive task would continue.

58 ♖h2



Unfortunately for Black his knight is attacked and the check has left his rook on the worst possible square in view of the additional threat of the knight fork on h6. Was White's 56 ♖g3 a crafty ploy in a poor position?

58...♗f4 59 ♖h6+ ♖g7 60 ♖xg4 hxg4 ...½-½

As the standard rook versus knight scenario is completely drawn Black doesn't even need his pawns here, but this didn't stop Gurevich playing on until the 100th move.

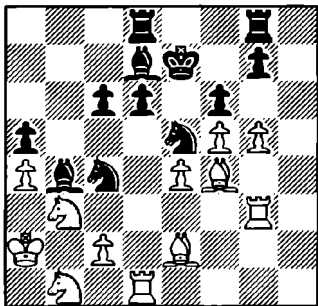
When delivering a 'blunder' check also involves a capture or an exchange it seems to have magical powers when it comes to attracting our attention. Before we know what's happened the move has been played!

L.Milov-Galdunts

Griesheim GM 2002

White is slightly better here, the tension created by the stand-off on g5 and f6 putting Black on the defensive. Gofshtein recommends 40...d5 41 exd5 cxd5 42 c3 (42 ♗xd5

♙xa4 is equal) 42...♙d6 43 ♜xd5 ♙xa4 44 ♜xa5 as a means of keeping White's lead to a minimum. Instead Black 'activated' a rook.



40...♞b8?

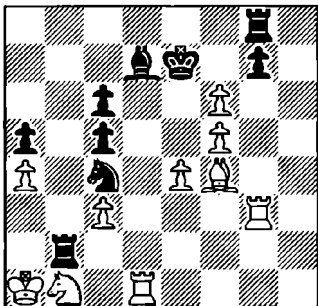
The b-file might look like a good home but the text places the rook on the same diagonal as White's bishop.

41 c3!

The beginning of a strong forcing sequence.

41...♙c5 42 ♙xc4 ♜xc4

The h2-b8 diagonal, which seemed irrelevant a couple of moves ago because of Black's knight cemented to the e5-square, now offers White a decisive lead with 43 ♜xc5! ♞b2+ 44 ♙a1 dxc5 45 gxf6+!



White is winning because of the pin on the g-file and the awkward placing of Black's king and bishop. This is quite an easy variation to find (especially for a 2500 player), and

all White had to do was continue down the forcing sequence in the right order. Nice and simple.

43 gxf6+??

With ♜xc5 crying out to be played first White throws in the check, thus removing the decisive pin which should win the game. Now after 43...gxf6 44 ♜xc5 ♞b2+ 45 ♙a1 the situation is totally different as Black has 45...♞xg3, when the best White can find is 46 ♙xd6+ ♜xd6 47 ♙xb2 with an extra – albeit backward – pawn, although this looks a better winning try than the game continuation: 43...gxf6 44 ♜1d2 ♞xg3 45 ♙xg3 ♜xd2 46 ♞xd2 ♞g8!? 47 ♙h2 ♞g4 48 ♜xc5 dxc5 49 ♙d6+ ♙e8 50 ♞e2 ♙c8! 51 ♙b3 ♙a6 52 ♞e3 ♙f1 and the activation of Black's bishop was enough to secure a draw ...½-½ (63).

I'm sure White noticed his mistake soon after taking on f6. But the apparently mystical prospect of a pawn exchange with check succeeded in distracting a strong player from a clear route to victory on the other side of the board, as if White was momentarily taken back to the first time he announced 'check' when learning the game. Certainly the examples in this chapter do show that nobody – however strong and experienced – is safe from this basic instinct.

What a difference a check makes

Checks have a nasty habit of not featuring in our analysis and then rudely announcing themselves once we've embarked on an irrevocable course. The most common scenario is during a sequence of exchanges.

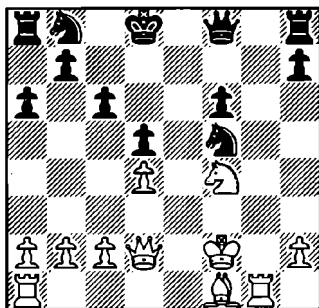
Sutovsky-Stohl

Kaskady 2002

(see following diagram)

Both kings have been displaced and White hopes that his superior development more than compensates for the pawn. Lukacs offers 22...♞d6 as Black's best, with a promis-

ing position for White after 23 ♖h3 ♘e7 24 ♜ae1 etc. However, faced with the knight fork on e6, GM Stohl decided that two could play at this game...



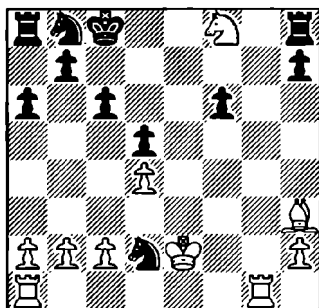
22...♘d6??

Introducing his own fork threat. Volunteering to follow your opponent in this manner is fraught with danger because you are always playing catch-up and can therefore afford no mistakes. Better safe than sorry should have been Black's motto here, as White was only too willing to demonstrate.

23 ♗e6+

Thank you.

23...♙c8 24 ♖xf8 ♘e4+ 25 ♙e2 ♖xd2 26 ♖h3+ 1-0



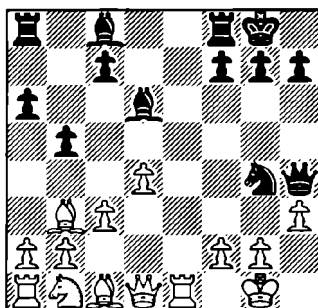
Thanks to this check White will get a bonus tempo (another check) for his attacked knight next move, after which he simply picks up the hapless intruder on d2. Keeping

a lookout for checks when analysing multiple exchanges should be second nature for any player, so make sure to keep your eyes peeled.

Here is an entertaining example of the unexpected check.

Steiner-Helling

Bern 1928



White, to move, is under considerable pressure, with all his pieces sitting on the kingside while his king is under attack. Black had obviously seen that after 15 hxg4 ♖xg4 16 f3 ♖g3 17 fxg4 ♜h2+ 18 ♙f1 ♜h1+ 19 ♙e2 ♜ae8+ 20 ♖e3 there is the decisive 20...♗xe1, which leaves White's alternative attempt to defend.

15 ♜f3

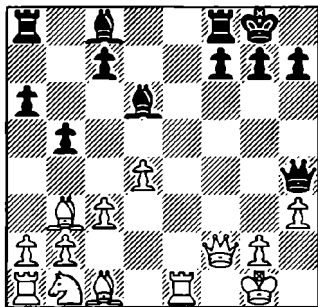
Coming to the aid of f2 (and hitting a8 just in case), or so it would seem.

15...♖xf2?

Black could offer to share the point by repeating with 15...♖h2+ 16 ♙f1 ♖d6 17 ♙g1 and so on, but White can try 17 ♖f4 (17 hxg4 ♖xg4 18 g3 ♜h5 19 ♜d5 ♜h2 20 ♖e3 ♖xg3 is far from clear) 17...♖b7 18 ♜xg4 ♜xg4 19 hxg4 ♖xf4 20 a4 and the extra pawn is getting bigger.

16 ♜xf2?

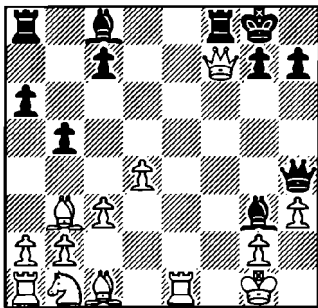
16 ♖e2! is calm and strong, e.g. 16...♖xh3+ 17 gxh3 ♖xh3 18 ♖e4 ♜g3+ 19 ♜xg3 ♖xg3 20 ♖g5! with a clear edge. The text appears to fall in with Black's plan.



16...♔g3??

Black could still be reasonably content with his position after throwing in 16...♔h2+! 17 ♖f1 before 17...♔g3. A plausible continuation after 16...♔g3 is 17 ♜f3 ♕xe1 18 ♜xa8 ♔xh3 19 ♜d5, when White should be able to wriggle out eventually but there is still much work to be done, e.g. 19...♔f2+ 20 ♖f1 ♔g1! 21 ♖xg1 ♜e1+ 22 ♖h2 ♜xc1 23 ♖xh3 ♜xb2 etc. But now Black is in for a shock and a half.

17 ♜xf7+! 1-0



Ooh! Never miss a check... Black has been so busy looking at ways to get at the enemy king that he has made the age old mistake of forgetting about his own. Furthermore, with everything taking place on the kingside, and White's queenside forces (apart from the c1-bishop) playing no part in any of the variations analysed, there is a tendency to demote

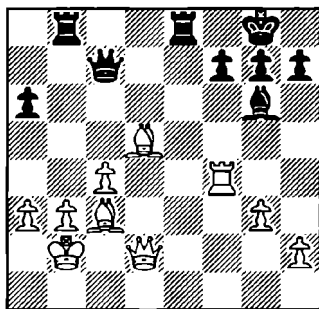
these pieces to spectator status. But the b3-bishop now plays a leading role, pinning the rook after 17...♔xf7 and allowing mate on e8. Returning to move sixteen, had Black opted for 16...♔h2+ 17 ♖f1 ♔g3 White's resource would be useless because then ...♔xf7 would be check. Even 17 ♜f3 loses its point because after 17...♔xe1 18 ♜xa8?? there is a mate on f2.

The tempting king chase

One of the most satisfying ways to win a game is to flush out the opponent's king, drawing it away from the guards and towards your awaiting forces. Once it seems clear that the enemy king is reaching a point of no return there is a temptation to zoom in on that particular area of the board, taking it for granted that all appropriate variations revolve around the opposition's (poor) chances of survival. The danger in such a situation is to overlook a resource that can turn the tables and end in unexpected, embarrassing defeat.

Asylguzhin-Citak

Batumi 2002

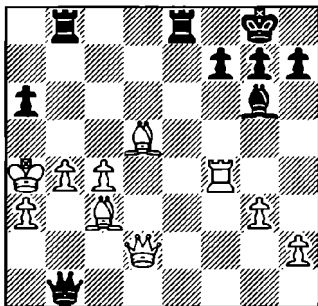


White hopes that the collective influence of the bishops will offer some compensation for the exchange, a possible trump card being the threat of ♜d4, when g7 cannot be protected in view of the pin on the a2-g8 diagonal. With this in mind Black's next serves two purposes.

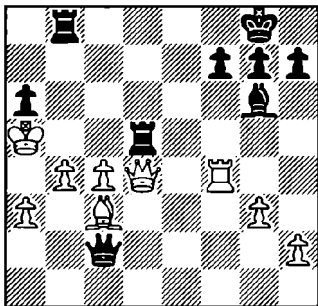
40... ♖b6 41 b4 ♜g1

The infiltration begins, the immediate threat being mate on b1. White has no choice but to advance the king.

42 ♜b3 ♜b1+ 43 ♔a4



With so many pieces left in play we would expect a king on the fourth rank to either be successfully hunted down or the cause of material loss. And we would be right. Atlas now recommends 43... ♖e8!, the point being that 44 ♜d4 'is elegantly refuted' by 44... ♜c2+! 45 ♔a5 ♖xd5+!

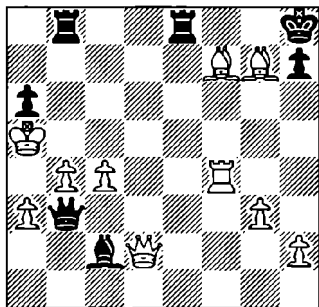


After 46 ♜xd5 ♜xc3 White can resign, while 46 cxd5 ♖b5+ is mate in two. But Black goes for the direct – and, to be fair, the most obvious – finish.

43... ♔c2+?? 44 ♔a5 ♜b3

Black figures that ♜d4 is irrelevant now due to the threat of instant mate. But White's pieces are still pointing at Black's king...

45 ♔xf7+! ♔h8 46 ♔xg7+

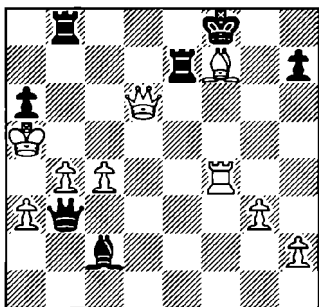


Hardly a surprise given that White needs to find something anyway. Mate is forced, but Black's king is the victim.

46... ♔xg7 47 ♜d4+ ♔f8 48 ♜d6+

48 ♔e6+ is quicker, e.g. 48... ♔e7 49 ♜d7 mate.

48... ♖e7



Or 48... ♔g7 49 ♜f6+ ♔f8 50 ♔c6 mate.

49 ♜xb8+

49 ♜h6 mate does the job, but maybe White felt greedy.

49... ♔g7 50 ♜g8+ 1-0

At last. White's choice of assorted checks and mates makes Black's blunder even more painful.

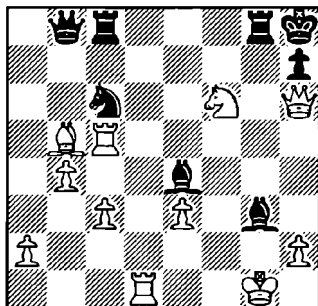
Beware the deadly discovered check...

We should be particularly wary of discovered checks, which are quite fearsome. Because

the free move afforded the piece which unmasks the check can be devastating, these discoveries are best avoided, and if that is not possible, utmost care is required to minimise the damage.

Karyakin-McShane

Pamplona 2003



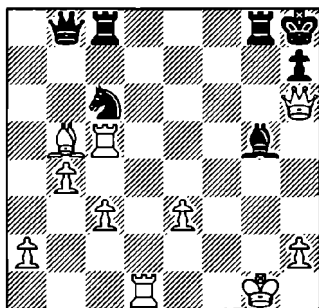
White, to move, has four pawns for a piece and there are captures to be made across the board, but our attention is drawn to the g-file, most notably the bishop on g3. White's defences have been cleared and hxg3 leads to mate after ...Wxg3+. Sidestepping the discovered check with 33 ♖f1 and leaving two pieces hanging should be good for White, e.g. 33...♔e5 34 ♜xc8 ♜xc8 35 hxg3 ♜f5+ 36 ♜f4 ♜h3+ 37 ♔e2 ♜g2+ 38 ♜f2 ♔f3+ 39 ♔e1 ♜xf2+ 40 ♔xf2 ♔xd1 41 ♔xg8 ♔xg8 with a bunch of pawns for the piece in the ending, while 33...♔d4! is another possibility, but 33 ♔xg8 looks logical and strong. Play might continue 33...♜xg8 to maintain the threatening stance on the g-file, but after 34 ♜f6+ ♔g7 35 ♔xc6 ♔e5+ 36 ♜xg7+ ♔xg7 37 ♔xe4 White has a decisive lead in material and too big an army for the queen to cope with. This leaves the immedi-

ate 33...♔xh2+ 34 ♔f1 ♜f8+ 35 ♔f6 ♔g6, but Black is running out of fire-power and 36 ♔e2 ♜xf6 37 ♜g5 ♜f8 38 ♜xc6 ♔f2+ 39 ♔e1 is final. Convincing stuff, and by no means taxing to find over the board, especially for a young teenager many believe will be a future world champion.

33 ♔xg4?? ♔f4+

Obviously.

34 ♔g5 ♔xg5



35 ♜e6?

As if one discovered check in a day isn't enough, White remarkably allows his opponent a second, deadlier throw of the dice, which are clearly loaded in Black's favour. Perhaps White didn't rate his chances of survival after 35 ♜xg5 ♜xg5+ 36 ♜xg5 ♜g8, but at least there is an albeit faint glimmer of hope here as 37 ♜xg8+ ♜xg8+ 38 ♔f1 ♔e5 is not a completely trivial win for Black and 38...♜xa2? 39 ♔xc6 ♜c4+ 40 ♔f2 ♜xc6 41 ♜d4 even draws because White already has a fortress in place.

35...♔xg3+

The second discovery sees White lose too much material, the game ending...

36 ♔h1 ♔xc5 37 ♔xc6 ♜g6 38 ♜f7 ♜xc6 39 bxc5 ♔cf6 40 ♜d5 ♜c7 0-1

CHAPTER SIX

Faulty Plans

Unless I'm very much mistaken... I AM very much mistaken.

Murray Walker, British television motor racing commentator.

A blunder does not necessarily have to be a single move – an entire strategy that is unsound or inappropriate, for example, can be equally disastrous. Think of the number of times you have lost a game but don't fully understand where or why you went wrong, or when your blunder turned out to be the move you had thought would be strong, part of a deep plan.

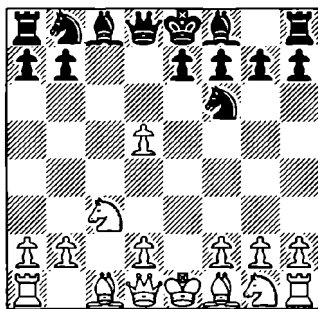
In the following miniature a 2600+ GM is so wrapped up in his faulty plan that he has to resign before making his 10th move.

Lautier-Bologan

3rd Enghien les Bains 1999
Caro-Kann Defence

1 c4 c6 2 e4 d5 3 cxd5 cxd5 4 exd5
dxf6 5 dxc3

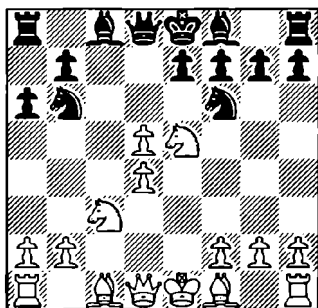
The transposition to the Caro Kann has a Queen's Gambit flavour once White acquires the IQP. Black's most natural and sound move now is 5...dxd5. Bologan now decides that he can deny White a bit of activity by capturing the d5-pawn on his own terms.



5...dxd5 6 dxf3 a6

Ruling out an awkward check on b5 and preparing to meet dxc4 with ...b7-b5.

7 d4 b6 8 dxe5



Simple development with 8 ♖d3 or 8 ♖e2 makes sense in view of the time Black is taking to carry out his plan (remember that Black could have spent just the one tempo to plant a knight on d5). But it doesn't take a genius to spot what Black is doing, so White sets a crafty trap just in case his opponent is unaware of the danger. The text is logical anyway as Black's focus on d5 has left White the e5-square.

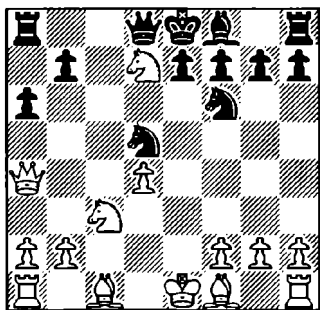
B...♟bxd5??

Continuing with the plan which, presumably, involved further control of d5 with ...b7-b5 and ...♟b7, after which Black's grip on the centre might then allow for a choice between e7 and g7 for the other bishop. Of course if Black could so comfortably engineer such a promising anti-IQP position we would not see 5...♟xd5 so often. This simple piece of logic obviously didn't occur to Bologan, who is known for his creative approach. Unfortunately this was not one of his better ideas. Black should take on d5 with the king's knight but this obstructs the b-pawn and looks wrong.

9 ♖a4+!

The point, exploiting the unprotected a8-rook to render the block with ...b7-b5 useless after ♟xb5+.

9...♟d7 10 ♟xd7 1-0



An amusing final position, Black's undoing brought about by his impressive looking knights, the d5-outpost suddenly a liability.

Now 10...♜xd7 11 ♟b5! sees Black lose too much material after 11...axb5 12 ♜xa8+ ♜d8 13 ♜xb7. It would seem that Black carried out the bulk of his analysis when he first hit upon the plan to send the queen's knight to capture on d5, the idea being to avoid coming under early pressure after, for example, 5...♟xd5 6 ♟c4. Along the way Black addressed ♟b5+ with 6...a6 and 7...♟b6 prevented ♜a4+ en route to d5, but as soon as White played 8 ♟e5 Bologan should have been looking at the implications of this advanced posting, particularly in view of the fact that White could have increased his development advantage.

Black's strategy was purely positional, and any assessment he made will have been based on standard play, everything revolving around d5. Yet 8 ♟e5 moves a piece for a second time and puts d7 (and f7) in the spotlight, introducing possible tactical factors that merit an interruption of the automatic execution of Black's long-winded plan. Of course **planning** is a very important part of the game and it does seem impractical to set the ball in motion and then restart analysis after each subsequent move, but it is worth remembering that the longer the plan then the greater the risk, because circumstances can so easily change.

Even when you have gone over the finer details of a strategy it is time to look at the situation anew when the opposition gets active or (no less dangerous) produces an apparently harmless but unexpected move. Making a conscious effort to keep in touch with events as they happen – as opposed to racing through a pre-planned sequence of YOUR moves – will save you from extra embarrassment in the future.

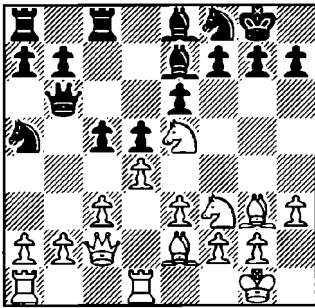
The Dangers of Mass Migration

Some of the most instructive, 'model' games were made possible only through the victim's selection of a dubious strategy. When a blunder meets with immediate punishment we

mentally file away the result somewhere (hopefully) with a view to keeping our eyes peeled for similar situations in the future. But when a faulty plan leads to a gradual demise the learning process is quite different, for here an understanding of why the loser's poor play does in fact collectively amount to a blunder is required. Some of the notes to the following example, in which the often outspoken Tarrasch is given a chess lesson by Janowski, are based on those in *Chess Brilliances* by Iakov Damsky.

Janowski-Tarrasch

Ostend 1905



A fairly quiet Queen's pawn opening has resulted in the level diagram position, with nothing much happening and Black's pieces reasonably placed to deal with any White aggression on the kingside.

15...c4?!

Lasker – 'Up to here, Tarrasch, true to his usual style, has maintained the tension without making any positional concessions. But here he begins a highly dubious attack on the queenside, where White has no obvious weaknesses. The pressure on the d4-pawn is released, whereas the d5-pawn soon (after e3-e4!) becomes weak.'

In itself Black's advance, albeit of questionable merit, is not a blunder, but the manner in which Black conducts the rest of the game is most definitely wrong. Perhaps from

a psychological point of view we can in fact add a '?' to the text because now White no longer has to concern himself with analysis of lines involving ...cxd4 (Black's rook is on c8, after all), e3-e4, in turn, now promises to have more bite and, importantly, Black's move is tantamount to an announcement of his general strategy from here on in. Consequently White's task is made that much easier.

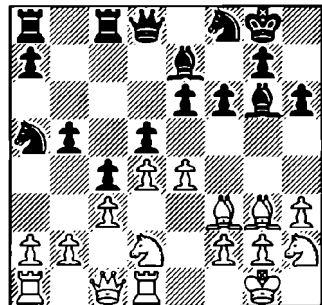
16 ♖d2

Immediately monitoring the c4-pawn in order to add weight to e3-e4. Black now pushes his opponent back on the kingside, although this is just a temporary phase before concentrating on the justification of his 15th move.

16...f6 17 ♜ef3 ♙g6 18 ♜c1 h6?!

As we can see from Chapter Four each pawn move in front of the castled king should be made with caution, and here Black seems buoyed by his forcing the issue during the previous couple of moves. The point is to insist on being able to keep the bishop on the b1-h7 diagonal but, in the long-run, the text merely serves to weaken the light squares. Black could drop his queen back to d8 immediately to free the b-pawn, or offer a trade of bishops with 18...♗d6.

19 ♜h2 ♜d8 20 ♙f3! b5 21 e4



The battle between White's influence in the centre and on the kingside versus Black's queenside offensive gets under way. Note

just how useful White's bishop is on g3, preventing the desirable posting of a rook on b8.

21...♖c6 22 exd5 exd5 23 ♖e1

Simple and effective.

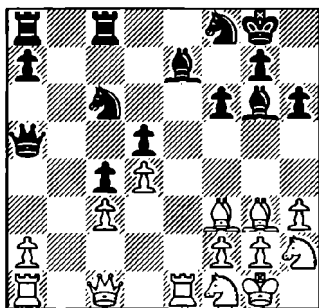
23...b4 24 ♖df1

White continues to improve his pieces, which don't look too threatening but are all within firing range of Black's king as well as the centre. Black, meanwhile, is unable to actually generate any pressure on the queenside without committing some pieces there, and this is the problem with the simplistic strategy characterised by ...c5-c4 in these positions – relieving the tension in the centre helps White as far as this sector is concerned and consequently accentuates White's superiority on the kingside.

24...bxc3?

24...a5 is an improvement, continuing the pawn assault and allowing for ...♞a7 if necessary. The text is part of a plan but is nevertheless another example of relieving the tension, easing White's defensive task.

25 bxc3 ♖a5?



Tartakower – 'Black is still regarding the queenside as the main battlefield..'

In fact Tartakower recommends 25...♞d7 as 'more circumspect' and this does make sense, but Tarrasch continues to make the same strategic mistake we see so often at amateur level, interpreting his space advantage and menacing build-up on the queenside as a genuine initiative when, in reality, the

most important features are over on the other flank.

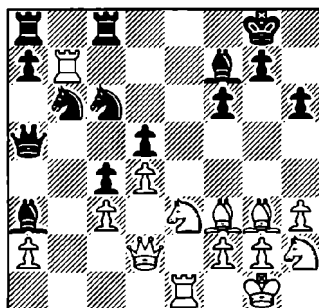
26 ♖e3 ♖f7 27 ♞d2

27 ♖xc4? backfires after 27...dxc4 28 ♖xc6 ♖a3! etc.

27...♖a3?

The would-be thematic exodus to the queenside continues. 27...♞d8 is negative but safer.

28 ♖ab1 ♖d7 29 ♖b7! ♖b6



The problem with latching on to completely the wrong plan and then committing a series of consistent but inappropriate errors is the ease with which the opposition is able to conduct his correct strategy. Incidentally, note how White's bishops have attacking potential on the kingside but continue to tie Black down in the centre and on the queenside. White's next is an obvious reaction to his opponent's neglect of the kingside.

30 ♖f5 ♖a6

Asking for trouble, but by now a defensive move such as 30...♖f8 offers only token respite as White brings another of his massed kingside forces into play with 31 ♖g4, threatening a decisive breakthrough on h6 – another product of Black's faulty play.

31 ♖xh6+!

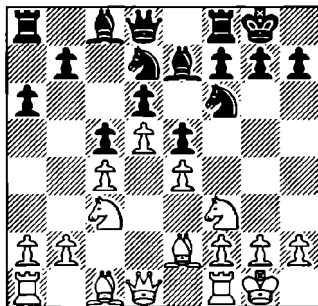
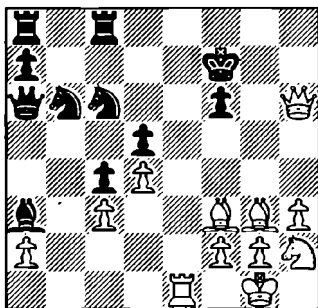
Inevitable. Just count the pieces.

31...gxh6 32 ♖xf7!

The queenside might as well be a million miles away.

32...♖xf7 33 ♖xh6

e4 ♖bd7 6 ♜f3 a6 7 ♙e2 ♚e7 8 0-0 0-0



A brief glance at the comical distribution of Black's forces is enough.

33...♙g8

33...♙f8 34 ♚h7+ ♙g7 35 ♙h5+ ♜f8 36 ♙d6+ ♜e7 37 ♙xe7 mate is an impressive demonstration of White's potential.

34 ♙g6+ ♜h8 35 ♙xf6+ ♙g8 36 ♙g6+ ♜h8 37 ♚e5! 1-0

Black's whole approach from 15...c4! onwards is, strategically, as big a blunder as a one-mover.

Avoid creating weak squares

With so many squares and so many enemy pieces it is not always easy to avoid weaknesses, but voluntarily creating a hole which can be used exclusively by the opposition is risky, particularly when the square is near your king. A common mistake is to make an irrevocable pawn advance when fully aware of the negative positional or structural implications but finding justification in the form of essentially short-term pluses. The problem here is that the 'interest' on the loan can be an uncomfortable, long-term burden on the resources. Even the great Tigran Petrosian was guilty of this in the following game.

Gligoric-Petrosian

Belgrade 1954

Czech Benoni

1 d4 ♜f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5 4 ♜c3 d6 5

This game also demonstrates that a positional blunder on the wrong side of an unambitious opening can have more serious consequences than is the case in a more combative system. In the diagram position White has a useful space advantage which, combined with the closed centre, leaves Black rather passive.

9 ♜e1

A standard transfer of the knight to d3, from where both thematic pawn breaks (b2-b4 and f2-f4) can be helped along.

9...♜e8

Black also frees the f-pawn and entertains the plan of pushing the b-pawn, while the bishop is free to come to g5 for the traditional exchange.

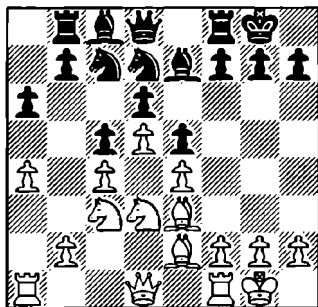
10 ♜d3 ♜c7?!

In view of the difficulties Black experiences later perhaps the immediate 10...♙g5 is better, waiting to see where the knight should go from e8. A plausible continuation is 11 f4 exf4 12 ♙xf4 ♙xf4 13 ♚xf4 ♚e7 14 ♚d2 ♜e5 15 ♜xe5 ♚xe5 16 ♜af1 ♜f6 17 ♚e3 ♙d7 when Black was doing okay in Kristins-son-Ciocaltea, Halle 1967, for example.

11 a4

For the moment this is a reaction to Black's support of the b5-square, but the advance of the a-pawn is also part of White's containment strategy.

11...♚b8 12 ♙e3

**12...g5**

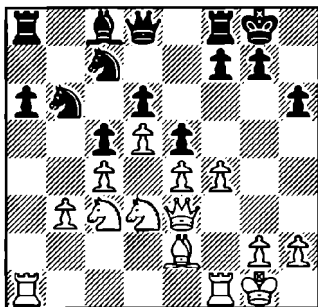
A thematic trade, ridding White of a 'good' bishop. Note that 12...b5?! 13 axb5 axb5 14 cxb5 Qxb5 15 Qxb5 Bxb5 16 Qxe5 Bxb2 17 Qc4 Bb8 18 g4 favours White.

13 Wd2 gxe3 14 Wxe3 h6?!

I prefer 14...We7 here as in the game Black doesn't follow up with ...Wg5 and ...h7-h6 seems like a waste.

15 a5!

Taking the sting out of a future ...b7-b5 by being able to play a5xb6 in order to leave the a-pawn isolated. The text also adds weight to White's own break with b2-b4 should the status quo continue on the queenside because now the support of c5, caused by White's influence over b6, has been undermined. Black chooses to act immediately.

15...b5 16 axb6 Qxb6 17 b3 Ba8 18 f4!

With the queenside to some extent under

control White can turn to the kingside, accentuating his territorial superiority. Thanks to the location of Black's knights White need not be concerned about the e5-square.

18...exf4

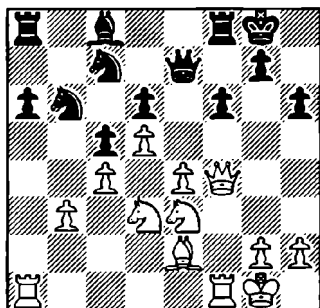
18...f6 is way too passive, presenting White with a pleasant choice between the steam-roller beginning with f4-f5 and a subsequent breakthrough on g5 or the simple 19 fxе5 fxе5 20 Qxf8+ Wxf8 21 Qf1 We7 (21...We8 22 Qxc5, and 22...dxc5 23 Wxc5 embarrasses Black's knights) 22 g4 etc.

19 Wxf4 f6

Forced. Otherwise White has e4-e5, leaving Black with a liability on c5. Unfortunately for Black the text is a backward step as far as his light squares are concerned.

20 Qd1!

Now the other knight is given a more positive role, heading for e3 to monitor f5 now that Black's kingside has been slightly compromised.

20...We7 21 Qe3

Comparing the respective influence of the knights, Black's rather delicate pawn structure (all three pawn islands need support) and White's space advantage (which affords him more room for manoeuvre and therefore permits him to enjoy a level of harmony that Black can only dream of), it is safe to say that Black's situation is not easy. However, Black's next turns a difficult position into one that is practically lost.

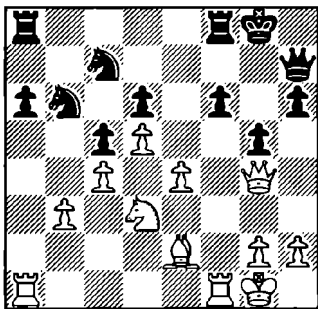
21...g5?

'An impulsive move demonstrating that Black overestimates his position. In wishing to gain more space and increase the pressure along the e-file, Black seriously weakens his king position.' – Gligoric. The short-term attractions have clouded Black's judgement. 21...♖a7 might come in handy but looks passive, so Black might try 21...a5, when 22 ♖xc5 ♖e8 should be fine, e.g. 23 ♙h5 dxc5 24 ♙xe8 ♖xe8 or 23 ♖e6 ♙xe6 24 dxe6 ♖xe6. But the text brings with it serious positional consequences in the shape of the gaping hole on f5, not forgetting Black's generally compromised pawns in front of the king.

22 ♖f5 ♙xf5

Forced. And causing further defensive difficulties for Black.

23 ♗xf5 ♗h7 24 ♗g4



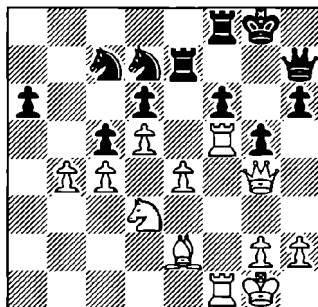
It is clearly in White's interests to keep the queens on the board. In these situations, where one side is defending weaknesses, the attacking side has more freedom and should therefore maximise his attacking potential.

24... ♖ae8 25 ♙f5

Gligoric: 'Now it can be seen that Black's expectations have exceeded his capabilities and that his 21st move has been of more benefit to his opponent.'

Note that in such circumstances the damage, being structural, cannot be undone.

25... ♖d7 26 ♖af1 ♙e7 27 b4!



It is not unusual to see domination on one wing culminating in a breakthrough on the other.

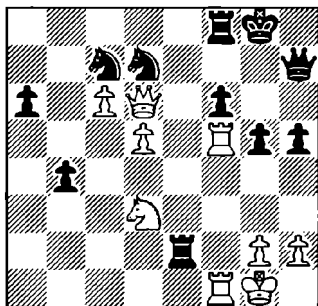
27...cxb4 28 c5! h5!

Capture(s) on c5 allow the fork with d5-d6. The text tempts White into 29 ♗hx5? ♗hx5 30 ♙hx5 ♖xe4 etc.

29 ♗g3 ♖xe4 30 c6

Effectively Black's most useful defender, the knight, is put under pressure, e.g. 30...♖b6 31 ♗xd6 ♖xe2 32 ♖xg5+! or 30...♖e5 31 ♖xe5 dxe5 32 ♙d3 ♖g4 33 ♗xg4! hxg4 34 ♖xg5+ fxg5 35 ♙xh7+. Note the role played by White's f5-rook in these lines, as well as the g5-pawn itself – all thanks to Black's poor 21st move.

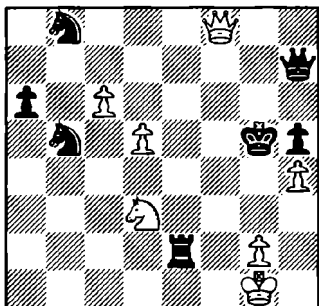
30... ♖xe2 31 ♗xd6!



Exploiting the fact that the d7-knight is rooted to the spot in view of ♖xg5+ again.

31... ♖b5 32 ♗xb4 ♖b8 33 ♖xg5+ ♔f7

34 ♖xf6+! ♔xf6 35 ♗xf8+ ♔xg5
 35...♗f7 36 ♖f5+.
 36 h4+ 1-0



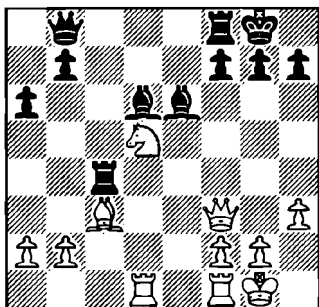
Mate on the next move is unavoidable.

Misplaced pieces

When a plan involves making our pieces work too hard, forcing them to unnatural or insecure squares, then this plan is best avoided if there is a sound alternative. At a certain level voluntarily putting pieces on unnatural or insecure squares is just as inexcusable as losing them to a one-mover. Remember that blunders and poor play created through planning can be more frustrating than simple oversights.

Kasimdzhanov-Bacrot

FIDE Grand Prix, Moscow 2002



White has just answered ...♖xc4 by im-

proving his bishop from d2 to c3. This monitors the potentially important long diagonal and unleashes the d1-rook. Meanwhile White's knight is very well placed.

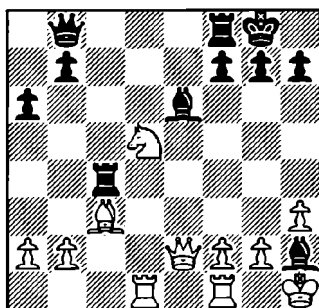
26...♗e5?

An attempt to nip in the bud any dangerous threats on the long diagonal. However, Black's pieces are about to go to unsuitable squares, so the appropriate neutralising try is 26...♖c5! with the intention of equalising by trading twice on d5.

27 ♗e2

A simple fork that forces Black to send his bishop to h2.

27...♗h2+ 28 ♔h1



Now Black's queen is tied to the defence of the bishop, which is in danger of being trapped, and the rook needs to run.

28...♖h4

Directed against g2-g3, which would have been the reply to 28...b5, for example 29 g3 ♗xg3 30 fxg3 ♗xg3 and now 31 ♗xe6! is the typical annoying announcement of the 'extra' trouble often experienced after making a mistake. The point is that 31...fxe6? 32 ♖e7+ sees Black walk into a quick mate, while 31...♖h4 32 ♖d3! is also final, e.g. 32...♗xd3 33 ♖e7+ ♔h8 34 ♗xg7+ ♔xg7 35 ♗f6 mate. Nor is Black helped by 29...♗xd5+ 30 ♖xd5 ♗xg3 31 fxg3 ♗xg3 32 ♖d3 ♗h4 33 ♗g2 etc.

After 28...♖h4 Black's forces look menacing because they are aimed at White's king

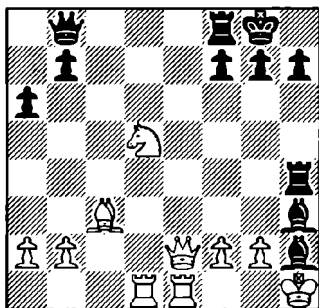
but, in reality, this is far from the truth. It is White's much superior pieces that dominate, with control over the important squares.

29 ♖fe1!

Nice. When simple, unassuming moves contribute to a big advantage it is a sign that something has gone wrong for the defender.

29...♗g4?

Consistent with Black's play thus far, and bringing another piece into the attack. However, it also puts another piece on an insecure square. Even worse than the text is 29...♗xh3??



Again the line-up on the h-file might give the impression that Black is on the ascendancy, but the fact that a situation seems dangerous or uncomfortable doesn't preclude a logical approach, as would be afforded a more sedate position.

Too many players – myself included – would be incapable of demonstrating that Black's original 26...♗e5? was indeed faulty for the very same reason that White answered with 27 ♖e2 – Black's pieces find themselves hovering around White's king. There is little point trying to get acquainted with blunders if we lack the courage to fully appreciate the nature of subsequent punishment.

Anyway, in this particular case White has 30 ♖e7+! ♗h8 31 g×h3, when 31...♖xh3?? loses to 32 ♗xg7+ ♗xg7 33 ♖g4+ etc. Instead of compounding his problem Black

should address it and return the wayward bishop to the fold with 29...♗d6, when White stands clearly better after 30 ♖d2 ♗xd5 31 ♖xd5 due to Black's lack of coordination.

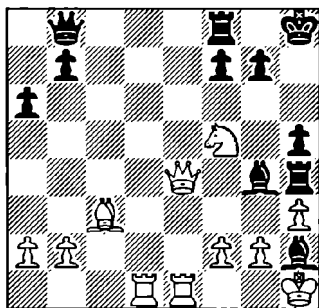
30 ♖e4

Pinning and winning. Black's latest mistake actually threatened nothing in the case of the text as now 30...♗xd1 31 ♖xh4 ♗c2 invites 32 ♖e7+ ♗h8 33 ♖f6! ♗g8 (33...gxf6 34 ♗xf6 mate) 34 ♖xf7 etc.

30...h5

30...♗f4 31 ♗xg7! ♗xg7 32 ♖d4+ f6 (32...♗e5 33 ♖xe5) 33 ♖xf4 is decisive, e.g. 33...♗xd1 34 ♖e6+ ♗h8 35 ♖xh4 ♗c2 36 ♖c1! ♗f5 37 ♖c7.

31 ♖e7+ ♗h8 32 ♖f5 1-0



What a horrible mess.

(Lack of) Development

In the following miniature Black neglected development, wasted time, created holes, gave White too much space and, for good measure, did nothing to defend his king – all in the space of just twenty moves.

Gligoric-Velimirovic

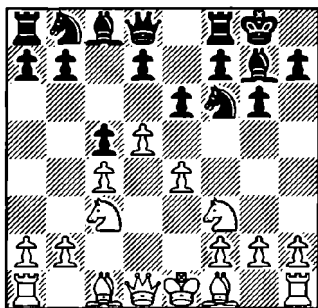
The Hague 1966

Benoni Defence

1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 g6 4 ♖c3 ♗g7 5 e4 0-0 6 ♖f3 e6?!

To be fair to Black, famous for having an

exciting variation of the Sicilian Defence named after him, the text is the beginning of an unsuccessful experiment.



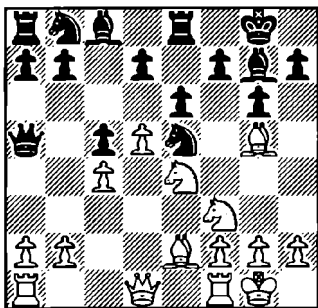
7 ♖e2 ♜e8?

Trying to do without the usual ...d7-d6. In *I Play Against the Pieces* Gligoric writes: 'The idea of organising early pressure on the e4-square is interesting, but it makes too great demands on Black who still hasn't solved the problem of how to develop his pieces.'

8 e5!

Sometimes we have to be prepared to invest a pawn or two in order to refute the opposition's mistakes in the opening. This is particularly relevant with the white pieces as this is the part of the game in which Black is least able to adequately organise a defence.

8...♗g4 9 ♖g5 ♜a5 10 0-0 ♝xe5 11 ♖e4

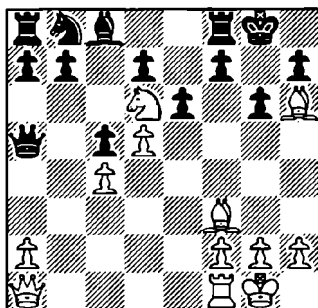


Now we see the logic behind White's sacrifice – the e4-square is free and the knight is

suddenly homing in on the holes on d6 and f6, as well as monitoring c5. Black is already lagging behind in development and his queenside pieces don't look like being able to contribute in the near future.

11...♝xf3+ 12 ♖xf3 ♜b6

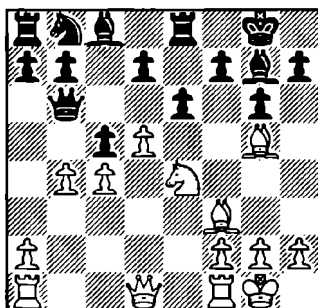
The queen has had to move again because White threatened 13 ♖d6 ♜f8 14 ♖e7, e.g. 12...♖xb2 13 ♖d6 and now 13...♖xa1 14 ♜xa1 ♜f8 15 ♖h6 is the end.



Alternatively, 13...♜f8 leaves White with a few options, one being 14 ♖b1 ♖e5 15 ♖xc8 ♜xc8 16 dx e6 dx e6 17 ♖xb7 etc. After 12...♜b6 Gligoric sees the situation as follows: 'Black is now very late with his development so the position need only be opened and the black fortress will collapse.'

So, with gaping holes at d6 and f6, White's next should not be too difficult to find.

13 b4!



Decisive.

13...cxb4

13...♙xa1 14 ♖xa1 is tantamount to resignation, and after 13...♗xb4 14 ♘d6 ♜f8 15 ♜b1 ♗a5 White has 16 ♙e7 or the aforementioned plan ending with the capture ♙xb7.

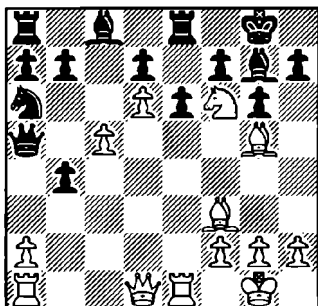
14 c5

The torture continues.

14...♗c7 15 ♜e1 ♘a6

Even Black's belated development is painful to watch. He must have been regretting 7...♜e8 by now! 15...exd5 16 ♘f6+ even gets Black mated.

16 d6 ♗a5 17 ♘f6+



17...♗f8

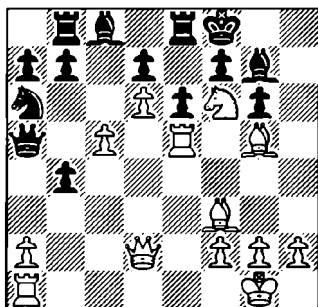
17...♙xf6 18 ♙xf6 only postpones the fi-

nal result. Black cannot hope to survive without his dark-squared bishop, e.g. 18...♗xc5 19 ♜e5 ♗c4 20 ♜h5! ♙e5 (20...gxf5 21 ♗d2; 20...♗f4 21 ♙e5 ♗c4 22 ♗d2) 21 ♜xe5 ♜xe5 22 ♙xe5 ♗h4 23 ♙d5 ♘c5 24 ♜c1 ♘e6 25 ♜c4 ♗g5 26 f4 ♗d8 27 ♜xb4 or 27 f5.

18 ♘xh7+ ♗g8 19 ♘f6+ ♗f8 20 ♜e5

Taking the rook is also decisive but the knight is a strong piece here.

20.. ♜b8 21 ♗d2 1-0



Black is defenceless against ♙h6. Just one mistake was enough to put Black in trouble, although on the surface 7...♜e8 doesn't seem so bad. A closer inspection, however, provided by White's powerful treatment, reveals otherwise.

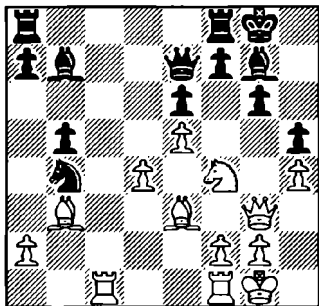
CHAPTER SEVEN

The Dangers of Simplification

The simplification approach – by definition a little passive – is certainly not the easy answer to the defender's problems (real or otherwise) that many players believe it to be. Apart from the fact that it often takes time to engineer, during which the opposition might anyway improve his lot, such a policy might well fail in reducing the pressure. Look for simplification possibilities when feeling uncomfortable, but remember that the operation itself can be far from simple, and in fact quite dangerous. A blunder is one thing – investing time in its preparation is another.

Gligoric-Tukmakov

USSR-Yugoslavia Match, Odessa 1975



Black, to move, has been under pressure

since the opening. Therefore after ruling out h4-h5 by putting his own pawn on h5, forcing White's queen from g4 to g3 in the process, he is eager to reduce White's forces.

20... ♖fc8 21 ♔d2!

Of course White cannot surrender the c-file just to avoid exchanges. Meanwhile, the text uses a bit of psychology to set a cunning trap.

21... ♖xc1?!

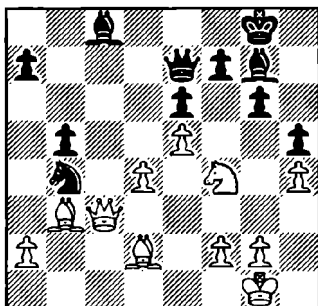
As expected Black finally takes the opportunity to begin steering the game towards the draw. 21... ♔d5 is better, when exchanging all four pieces on d5 gives Black an isolated d-pawn but also hands over the c4-square. Instead White is doing well after 22 ♔d3! followed by ♔c5.

22 ♖xc1 ♖c8??

The psychology here is interesting and will not have gone unnoticed by White. Clearly in need of relieving the pressure, and practically telegraphing his intentions, Black was most likely so intent on getting rid of all the rooks that it is quite possible he placed the second rook on c8 without thinking. Moreover, having decided on this course before White played the harmless looking ♔d2 it is unlikely he will have stopped for a reassessment (perhaps he considered 21... ♔d5 but he would then have returned to the job in

hand).

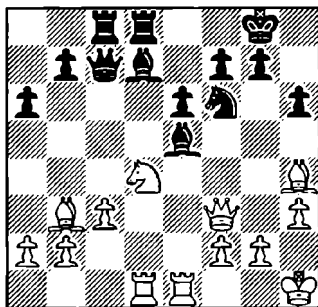
23 ♖xc8+ ♗xc8 24 ♛c3 1-0



Black loses a piece. Note also that when Black will have been looking forward to ...♖c8 White's queen was still on g4 (and the bishop on e3) – in other words playing no part in matters on the queenside.

The urge to carry out wholesale exchanges in the next example led to the immediate blunder of a pawn to a basic two-mover.

Adams-Bareev
Wijk aan Zee 2004

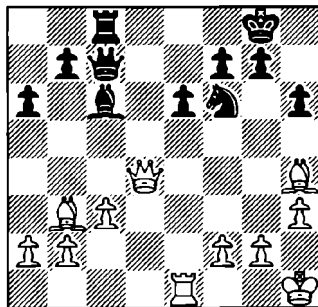


White, who has just nudged his pawn to h3, enjoys the more active forces and has a definite pull. Black latches on to a plan to fast-forward straight to a tenable ending.

19...♗xd4

The domineering knight is the first to go.

20 ♖xd4 ♗c6 21 ♛e3 ♖xd4 22 ♛xd4



Thanks to White's reduced army Black can now breathe a little easier, and a sensible continuation would be 22...♗d5 23 ♗g3 ♛d8, e.g. 24 ♖d1 ♛g5 with a solid set-up and decent outposts for his pieces. Instead Black continues with the hoover strategy.

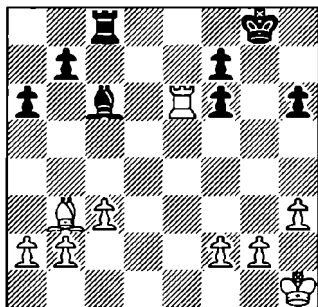
22...♛d8?!

The point is that after, for example, 23 ♛xd8 ♖xd8 24 ♗xf6 gxf6 the onus is on White to demonstrate the significance of Black's damaged kingside structure. White goes along with the plan, but in a slightly different fashion.

23 ♗xf6! ♛xf6??

Bareev seems only to be counting the pieces as they leave the board and further the cause of emerging with a level ending. He set himself on this short but busy journey with 19...♗xd4 and has made the mistake of not sufficiently analysing the final destination. The text is designed to force the trade of White's most dangerous piece by simultaneously keeping his kingside intact and activating his queen, with the added 'threat' of ...♖d8 should White turn down the exchange. This makes more sense than 23...gxf6, when White might swing over to the kingside with 24 ♛h4, although after 24...♗h7 Black is doing fine, the g-file even affording him a manoeuvre such as ...♛g8-g5. Unfortunately for Black the thematic execution of his overall plan has got in the way of detail.

24 ♖xf6 gxf6 25 ♜xe6

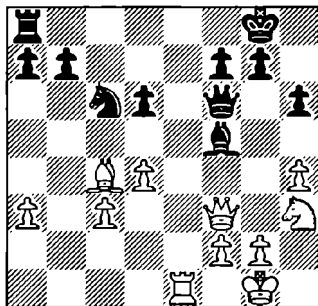


Whoops. Black loses a vital pawn (and the game) in view of 25...fxe6 26 ♜xe6+ and 27 ♜xc8 etc. Bareev managed to achieve exactly what he was looking for but the whole plan had a fatal flaw. To be fair, we don't expect a nasty little tactic like this to appear here, and as Black's idea was to alleviate the pressure and the potential for coming under attack – and of blundering in the face of White's aggressively posted pieces – by a series of exchanges, it is logical to assume that with each trade the danger decreases. Logical, yes, but not an invitation to stop analysing or looking ahead for specifics.

But here we have a good example (considering the players involved) of how, once we select a plan and subsequently establish that it is indeed sound, it is the opposition's alternatives to the desired continuation that receive all the attention. Bareev's main priority before embarking on the course was weighing up the implications of ...gxf6 in the ending, concentrating – as he should – on general, long-term details. Once he was satisfied with this he will then have looked at ways for White to avoid the exchanges. With each trade interpreted as a minor success on the way to securing a draw, so Black's sense of danger will have relaxed.

Anand-Karpov

Eurotel Trophy, Prague 2002



White enjoys a pull thanks to his more active forces, with the superior bishop (monitoring f7) and control of the e-file. In such situations the defender tends to seek to alleviate some of the pressure through exchanges, but 23...♗h3 24 ♖h3 (as opposed to 24 ♖xf6! gxf6 25 gxf6 ♗f8) will not have appealed to Black due to the knight's inability to deal with the open lines. Consequently Karpov elects to address the simplification task through an offer to trade rooks.

23...♗f8! 24 ♖f4

24 g4 ♗d7 25 ♖xf6 gxf6 26 f3 ♜c8 damages Black's kingside but permits Black to concentrate on his own targets on the other flank, while 24 ♗a6 bxa6 25 ♖xc6 ♜c8 26 ♖f3 ♖g6 27 ♖f4 ♖g4 looks only marginally better for White. The text improves the knight and maintains the pressure. Indeed, with Black's previous move in mind, Anand leaves the door open for his opponent to blunder.

24...♗d7

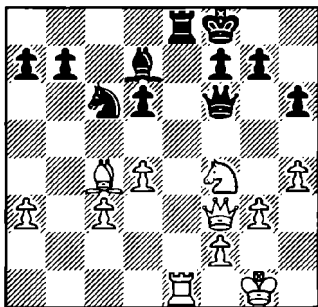
Having set out on the path to contest the e-file most players would automatically follow ...♗f8 with the immediate 24...♜e8?? but this is in fact a serious mistake as 25 ♜xe8+ ♗xe8 26 ♖h5 ♖g6 walks into 27 ♖xf5 thanks to the fork on g7. Karpov was also careful not to go in for 24...♖h4? 25 ♗xf7!, when 25...♗xf7 26 ♖d5+ ♗f6 27 ♜e6+ ♗xe6 28 ♖xe6+ ♗g5 29 ♖h3+ ♗h5 sees Black meet a sticky end after 30 ♖f5+ g5 31

♖f7+♔g4 32 ♖f3 mate. Instead 25...♖g4 26 ♖xg4 ♙xg4 27 ♙d5 (threatening mate on g6) 27...♗e7 (27...g5 28 ♗e6+ ♙xe6 29 ♖xe6) 28 ♙xb7 leaves White a clear pawn ahead.

25 g3

Stohl suggests 25 ♖g3! with a slight edge for White. However, the psychology of blunders plays a role here, for Black has practically telegraphed his next with his previous two moves. With this in mind White simply supports the knight in order to free the queen for more attack oriented duties.

25...♗e8?

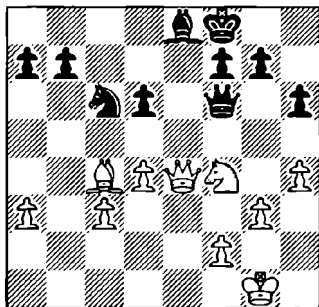


25...♗c8 restricts White to an edge, but the text is a consistent follow-up. Unfortunately the simplification plan is faulty and serves to promote the slight pressure to a far more problematic level.

26 ♙xe8+ ♙xe8

The alternative recapture 26...♙xe8 does not help Black after 27 ♖e4+, e.g. 27...♙f8 (27...♙d8 28 ♗h5, or 27...♖e7 28 ♖h7 ♖f8 29 ♗h5) 28 ♖h7 ♗e7 (after 28...g5 29 ♗h5 ♖g6 30 ♖xg6 fxf6 31 ♗f6 White wins something, 31...gxf4? 32 ♗xd7+ ♙e7 running into 33 ♙b5! etc.) 29 ♙d3! (threatening ♗h5) 29...♗g8 (29...♙f5 30 ♖h8+ ♗g8 31 ♗h5 is decisive) 30 ♗h5 ♖f3 31 ♖xg7+ ♙e7 and now White should avoid the horrific blunder 32 ♖xg8?? ♙c6 with a win for Black(!) in favour of 32 ♗f4! ♙c6 33 d5 ♙xd5 34 ♗xd5+ ♖xd5 35 ♙f1 etc.

27 ♖e4



The queen comes to e4 anyway, the point being to begin an offensive with ♖h7. This new weak spot exists only because Black latched on to the wrong course with ...♙f8, and the king is unable to return to g8 because this leaves the bishop hanging.

27...g5

As is often the case, Black's mistake has created a situation in which a subsequent defence involves a positional concession. 27...♙d7 28 ♖h7 transposes to 26...♙xe8, while the attempt to close out the queen with 27...g6 invites 28 ♗d5 (28 h5 is also possible) when 28...♖d8 29 h5 is excellent for White, 28...♖e6 29 ♖f4 h5 30 ♗e3 ♖d7 31 ♖h6+ ♙e7 32 ♗d5+ ♙d8 33 ♖h8 is decisive and the lesser evil is the ugly 28...♖f5 29 ♖xf5 gxf5.

28 hxg5

28 ♗d5!? is another option.

28...♖xg5

Accepting isolated pawns, but 28...hxg5 29 ♗d5 is hardly an improvement, e.g. 29...♖g6 (29...♖e6? 30 ♖h7, or 29...♖g7 30 ♖f5 and now 30...♖g6 is forced) 30 ♖xg6! fxf6 31 ♗f6 ♙e7 32 ♗xe8 ♙xe8 33 ♙g2 (33 ♙d5!?) 33...♗e7 34 ♙f3 and the ending is quite unpleasant for Black.

29 ♙d5 ♙d7?

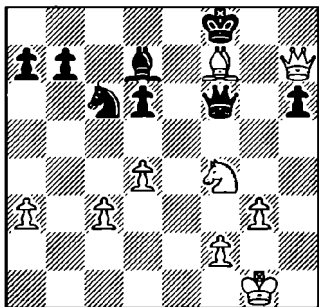
Things have not gone according to plan for Black and this makes life even worse, although the superior 29...♖f6 is anyway

poor for Black.

30 ♖h7 ♜f6

Returning with 30...♙e8 runs into 31 ♜h8+ ♜e7 32 ♙c4 followed by ♘d5-f6, while 30...♜g7 31 ♜b1! b6 32 ♜b5 ♘b8 33 ♜c4 is a nice switch.

31 ♙xf7!



Nice. The point is to meet 31...♜xf7? with 32 ♘g6+, when 32...♜e8 33 ♜h8+ is curtains. There followed:

31...♘e7 32 ♙b3 ♙f5 33 ♘h5 ♙xh7 34 ♘xf6 ♙g6 35 ♘g4 ♜g7 36 ♘e3 ♙e4 37 g4 ♜f6

37...♘g6 38 ♙d5 ♙xd5 39 ♘xd5 ♜f7 40 f4 ♜e6 41 f5+ ♜xd5 42 c4+! would be an amusing finish.

38 ♜h2 b6 39 ♜g3 ♜g5 40 ♙f7

40 f4+ ♜f6 comes to the same thing.

40...♜f6 41 ♙c4 ♜g5 42 ♙b3 ♜f6 43 f3 ♙g6 44 f4 and White won on move 59.

Returning to the initial position, it transpires that White's well placed rook was in fact a 'red herring' in that Black's erroneous decision and subsequent efforts to remove it proved to be the cause of Karpov's downfall. Of course the description of ...♙e8 in this example as a blunder seems harsh because the vast majority of players would fail to either spot or appreciate the reason why. However, the rather automatic decision making process – and the subsequent execution of the plan – certainly deserves the '?' tag. Black seemed so intent on neutralising his opponent's potentially menacing stance that he failed either to look for or entertain an alternative strategy such as 25...♜c8. (Had Karpov been less worried he might have contemplated the immediate 23...♜c8.)

CHAPTER EIGHT

Draw

I read on a chess bulletin board recently that the draw spoils the game. However, the draw is an intrinsic part of chess and sharing the point is often the only fair result. This, in itself, is not a negative end to a well played, interesting game.

The mere fact that a draw is a possible outcome can have an interesting affect on the game. For example the player on top wants to win and the player struggling to survive is eager to avoid leaving the game with nothing. Of course they don't always get what they want.

Waiting to Shake Hands...

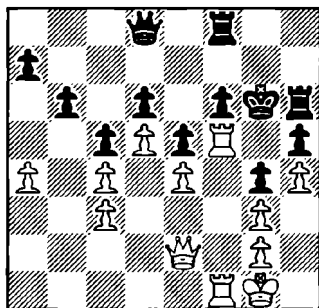
If you think the game is drawn and there is nothing constructive left for either side you should still give the game your full attention. Otherwise effectively switching off gives the opposition a potentially serious edge.

Kamadadze-Urushadze

European Team Championship,
Batumi 2002

The last two pairs of minor pieces have just been traded off on f5, resulting in one of those major piece endings in which the sheer mass of pawns severely restricts mobility. A brief look at the diagram position is enough

to conclude that only White has any hope of winning the game, with a4-a5 being the only available pawn break and the f-file providing his rooks with at least a semblance of activity. However, with sufficient defensive resources to come to the aid of the very targets that might come under pressure Black must have been confident of holding out for the draw at this point. Let's see how the battle continued:



37 ♖b2

White immediately has a look at the queenside, with a5 and b6 the potential action spots from here on.

37...♠h7

With the f6-pawn adequately protected Black drops his rook back to within swinging range of the other flank.

38 ♖b1 ♜d7 39 ♜a3

Toying with a4-a5. Note that White should be wary pushing the a-pawn as there is always a danger of being effectively a (passed) pawn down thanks to the doubled c-pawns.

39... ♜c7 40 ♖b5 ♖b8!

Now White must consider how the opening of the b-file might help Black activate – hence the following precautionary move.

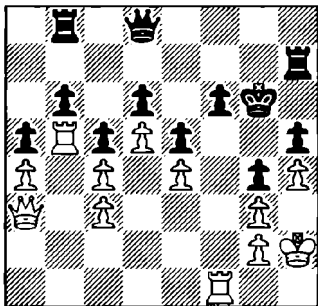
41 ♘h2 ♜d8

Black's sensible rearrangement allows the queen to support b6 and f6 – as well as b8 – while leaving the king's rook free to switch to the queenside if necessary.

42 ♖f1

The migration continues.

42... a5



Despite the fact that a4-a5 has thus far failed to prove effective, Black is aware that at some point, with sufficient preparation from his opponent, the break might indeed be dangerous. From a practical viewpoint it is never easy to sit, wait and constantly contemplate such an ostensibly troublesome possibility, so Black decides to make one problem disappear at the price of the creation of a new one in the form of the backward b-pawn. Of course it is easy to see that Black can comfortably defend b6, as well as cover any tricks on the b-file involving ♖xa5. The text is also an indication of Black's confidence in the game ending peacefully, this

blockade removing the final pawn break. White can now do nothing more positive than move his rooks and queen about in a would-be menacing fashion, and to continue for too long would be pointless. The draw is in the bag.

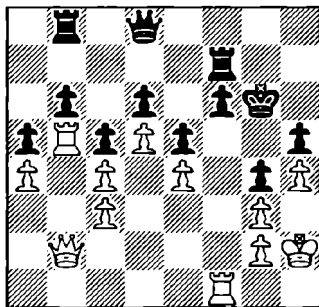
43 ♜b2 ♖f7 44 ♜f2 ♜c8

There is no need to allow ♜f5+, just in case.

45 ♖fb1 ♖fb7 46 ♖f1 ♖f7

White's alternating between easily protected targets seems rather pointless. With these 'threats' easily addressed and a4-a5 no longer a concern, Black must have pressed the fast forward button somewhere in a corner of his mind, perhaps thinking about where to relax in the evening (after such a calmly defended middlegame and ending).

47 ♜b2 ♜d8



Can't White take a hint? Both b6 and f6 are in no danger of falling, regardless of the order in which White places his pieces. And Black wasn't even prepared to allow an anyway harmless check on f5. Isn't White being a little cheeky, wasting his opponent's time? Well – it shouldn't matter. During the game the only discussion or debate should take place on the board and, if the eventual outcome comes a long time after it was 'supposed' to then so be it. Playing on and on is often frowned upon as unsporting (even 'greedy') but is a perfectly legitimate and quite fair option if there is the chance that a

situation arises in which a player's weakness can in some decisive way manifest itself – whether this is in the form of a blunder made under pressure (albeit self-imposed), a lack of understanding of a fundamental element of the game or even poor technique in a conventionally simple situation. Countless 'extra' points are won and lost in this way. Some players have become proficient in grinding out wins and recognising which opponents might be more likely to struggle in these circumstances, while (many) others unwittingly find themselves on the opposite end of the spectrum, going through their chess careers accumulating one 'bad luck' story after another. Blunders are almost always the sole creation and responsibility of the blunderer, and there is no excuse for missing an otherwise obvious move or falling for a simple trap after the opponent has unfairly continued in a completely drawn game (or – worse – when he should have resigned).

48 ♖f5

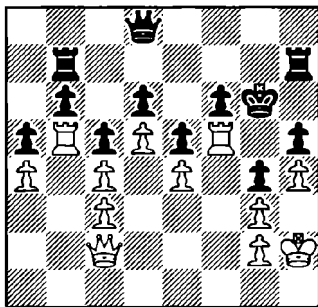
Having failed to make any inroads on the queenside White sends the rook back to f5.

48...♜bb7

Black, too, prepares for the coming shift.

49 ♜c2 ♜h7

With b6 about to be given a rest and f6 easily guarded Black offers the h5-pawn a bit of extra protection just in case.



50 ♜b1 ♜h7

So – which restaurant tonight? Chinese?

Indian? Italian?

51 ♜b1 ♜a7

Italian. Pasta? Pizza?

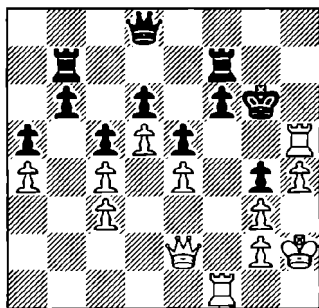
52 ♜e2

Apart from the king being on g1 instead of h2, this is where White's pieces stood when we joined the game. Meanwhile any funny business on the queenside with the a4-a5 break has been taken care of.

52...♜ab7??

White has tried his luck on the queenside, seen the drawbridge go up and now returns for a token trip to the kingside. Black's job is done. No reason to actually offer a draw after all this. In fact White can be the one to lower himself and admit that the last fifteen or so moves have merely wasted time. Pizza.

53 ♜xh5!



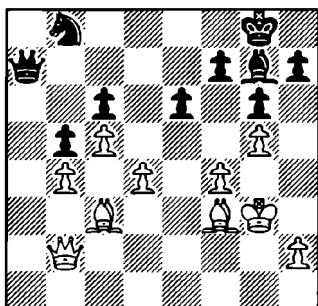
Make that a large helping of humble pie. White's forces might have returned to their earlier posts but Black's placement had changed, most notably the rook on f7. Thus White had one final throw at the dice but Black had already signed the score sheet in his head and might have been contemplating other matters (extra cheese and pineapple?). The blunder in this case is not in failing to appreciate the danger, rather in his not bothering to look properly. Had he done so after 52 ♜e2 he would have simply played 52...♜f8, dropping the rook back to clear the h5-e8 diagonal so that h5 can be covered by the queen from e8. Now 53...♜xh5 ends in

forced mate after 54 ♖f5+ ♔h6 55 ♗xg4 and ♖h5. Unfortunately the fall of the h5-pawn has left g4 hanging, and 53...♗c8 does not help in view of 54 ♖ff5 etc.

53...f5 54 ♖fxf5 1-0

Korchnoi-Dautov

Essen 2002



Black seems passive but, given what few pieces remain, and considering that the c6-pawn is the only weakness, all Black needs to do to ensure the draw is sit tight. White can't afford to neglect the queenside because Black controls the only open file. Consequently White made an effort to exploit the extra bishop by advancing on the other flank.

32 h4 h5!

Black prefers to prevent h4-h5 and also tempts White into automatically opening up the game.

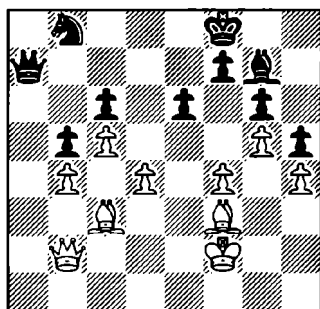
33 ♔f2

33 gxxh6? ♗xxh6 draws attention to f4 and therefore helps only Black. Instead, with the kingside now closed, White sends his king to the centre.

33...♔f8?

Black is getting ready to split the point (which would follow shortly after something like 33...♗a4, for example), perhaps expecting to shake hands once both kings arrive in the centre, when there will no longer be anything constructive to do now that the queenside is safe and the kingside is closed. More-

over Black's anticipation of a peace agreement might have been heightened by 33 ♔f2 as White is less likely to try anything speculative with the king more exposed to attack. In fact this kind of scenario, when the work has been done and the water is safe, is where so many blunders are made. Even strong players seem to stop thinking, secure in the knowledge that the opposition's potential means of pressing for an advantage have been addressed, thus accentuating the equilibrium. Ironically the period that immediately follows the opponent's final attempt to utilise a would-be advantage can often be crucial. The player who has been 'earning' the draw tends to relax a little – or a lot – which prompts the deliberate, adrenaline fuelled defence mechanism to wind down and, as a result, switches the focus of attention away from the possible danger spots around which the game has hitherto revolved and instead to more mundane but less taxing matters. However, the 2600+ GM has just made a serious mistake...

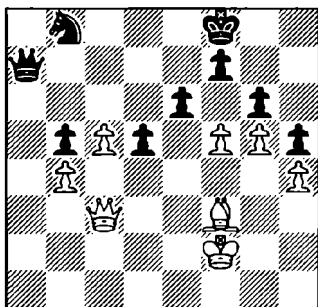


34 ♔e3?

... But the former world championship challenger – well known for his gladiatorial approach and desire to win – has also scaled down operations and automatically plants the king on the intended outpost. More attentive readers (helped along by the title and subject matter of this book) might have spotted 34 d5! here, the point being that after the forced 34...♗xc3 35 ♗xc3 it is worth investigating

what damage the queen can do upon arriving on h8. An amusing line is 35...exd5 36 ♖h8+ ♜e7 37 f5! gxf5 38 g6! when the pawn is immune because the check along the rank picks up the queen. Here 37...♙c7 38 ♖f6+ ♜e8 39 fxg6 requires minimal analysis, e.g. 39...♗h2+ 40 ♜e3 ♗g1+ 41 ♜e2 ♗h2+ 42 ♜d3 fxg6 43 ♗xg6+ ♜e7 44 ♖f6+ ♜d7 45 g6, or 42...♗xh4 43 gxf7+ ♜f8 44 ♗d8+ ♖xf7 45 g6+ etc.

This leaves 35...cxd5 36 f5!



Nice and thematic, but useless with the king still on g8. Now 36...♜g8 37 fxe6 fxe6 38 ♗e5 is decisive and 36...gxf5 37 ♗h8+ ♜e7 38 g6 ♗a2+ 39 ♜e2 doesn't look appetising, so 36...exf5 37 ♗h8+ ♜e7 38 ♖f6+ ♜e8 39 ♜xd5 ♗c7 is the lesser evil, when Black is struggling.

It is possible that both players had long since (correctly) dismissed d4-d5 and, satisfied that the more realistic avenues had been exhausted, 'forgot' about it.

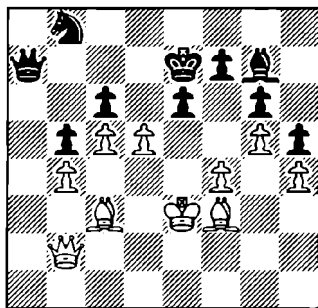
34...♜e7??

Even worse than his previous mistake, this blunder suggests that Black was – by now, at least – oblivious to d4-d5 and thinking only of the expected draw. Simply returning the king to g8 restores the balance.

35 d5

Korchnoi, however, is a former world championship challenger – well known for his gladiatorial approach and desire to win and, just as I didn't need to write this twice,

he tends not to need two bites at the cherry. Perhaps he had belatedly spotted the blunder and was hoping that Black would not notice. Anyway, White had just completed a mini-strategy with the relocation of the king and could now have a 'fresh' look at the position. In fact with Black's king so close the text is not difficult to find, making Black's blunder even less excusable.

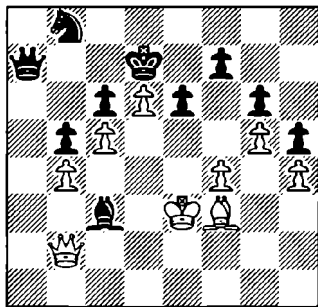


35...♜xc3 36 d6+

What a transformation; White's once backward d-pawn is now protected and passed.

36...♜d7?

Perhaps thrown off balance by the sudden turn of events, Black finds another blunder, although after the preferable 36...♜d8 37 ♗xc3 ♗d7 the end is merely postponed.

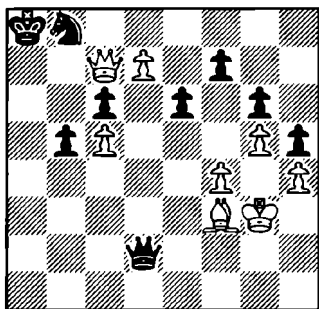


37 ♗xc3 ♜c8 38 ♗h8+ ♜b7 39 ♗d8

The d6-pawn makes all the difference, af-

for White the luxury of allowing Black a token collection of checks.

39... ♖a3+ 40 ♜f2 ♜xb4 41 ♜c7+ ♜a8
42 d7 ♜d2+ 43 ♜g3



Now the c6-pawn, which should have been easy to defend, is a genuine problem.

43... ♜e1+

43... ♜xd7 44 ♜xd7 ♜xd7 45 ♜xc6+.

44 ♜h3 1-0

Black's blunders in this example could have had several causes if taken in the context of a 'normal' situation but, with the draw so close after 32...h5, overlooking d4-d5 (twice) can be put down to the faulty assumption that the game could follow only a short path to a draw. Had the position been more tense, with other difficulties to overcome, then he would have been alert to any such pawn break. Black had managed to keep the great Korchnoi at bay for a few hours and needed only to continue in the same vein for a few more moves. Instead he relaxed and went into automatic.

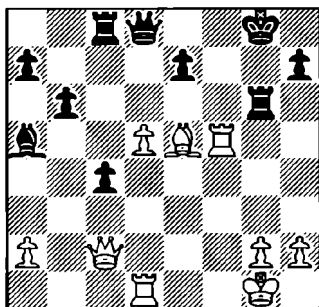
When only a win will do...

One of the worst times for a draw to present itself is when we have been pressing for the win – perhaps even winning at some point – in a complex battle. In these circumstances, when the initiative seems to be slipping away but the situation remains 'busy', it is not unusual to latch on to the completely unjustified notion that, since we have had the mo-

mentum thus far, any tactics or aggressive themes from this point on will still be in our favour. After all, why should the roles suddenly be reversed? Of course this way of thinking is quite natural, but allowing past events to dictate matters is going to help only the opposition. Avoiding a draw simply because there seemed to be a win out there earlier is illogical, impractical and often the prelude to disaster. In the following example, from the excellent *Khalifman: Life and Games (Everyman)* by Gennady Nesis, we see how a combination of White's unwillingness to accept the draw after being on the offensive and his opponent's resourceful play lead to a brutal win for the 'defender'.

Khalifman-Tseshkovsky

53rd USSR Championship, Kiev 1986



At the cost of a pawn and much of his queenside White has succeeded in generating a dangerous looking attack against the enemy king. To this end, the most direct course is 26 ♜h5! with the threat of 27 ♜xg6! hxg6 28 ♜h8+ ♜f7 29 ♜f1 mate. Then play might continue 26... ♜e8 (26...e6 27 dxe6 ♜e8 28 ♜d7) 27 ♜d4, bringing the final piece into the attack and introducing the threat of ♜xh7!, e.g. 27... ♜g7 28 ♜xh7! (even 27...h6 runs into 28 ♜xh6 ♜xh6 29 ♜g4+ ♜f8 30 ♜g7+).

26 h4?

White's domination of the kingside is such

that the choices increase the likelihood of a mistake. Khalifman: '26 h4? does not lose the game, of course, but we all know that mistakes do not happen in isolation.

26...e6!

A good response from a practical point of view.

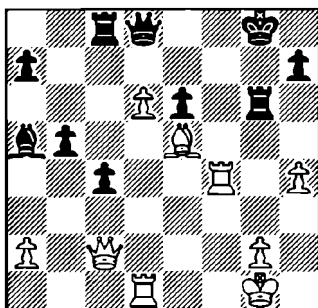
27 ♖f4

White has plans for the d-pawn and he wants to hang on to the h-pawn. However, an improvement is 27 dxe6! ♖xh4 28 ♖f4 ♗g5 29 ♗e4 and 30 ♗b7, or 28...♗e7 29 ♖xc4.

27...b5!

Bringing the bishop back into play. 27...exd5? 28 h5 is what White had been planning.

28 d6



Still part of the plan, whereas 28 dxe6 ♗b6+ followed by taking on e6 and 28 h5 ♖b6+ are best avoided. After the text the d-pawn accentuates Black's problems by simply threatening to keep going, a possibility Black must factor in to his defensive task on the kingside.

28...♖b6+ 29 ♔h1 c3

It is imperative that Black comes up with activity of his own, if only as a means of distraction – otherwise White would simply win at leisure. Now with each improvement of Black's position White's margin of error decreases.

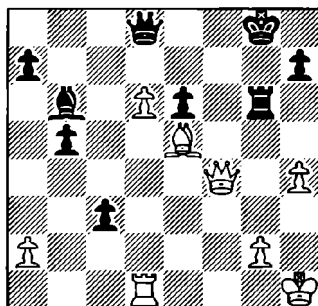
30 ♗e4?

And here is an error. Perhaps White considered the kingside to be the appropriate scene of his aggression. What is clear is that time is not a feature of White's advantage. Therefore the anyway obvious 30 d7 is correct, e.g. 30...♖c4 (30...♗c5 31 ♖xc3) 31 ♖xc4 bxc4 32 g3! and Black is tied down.

30 ♖c4!

Forcing the exchange of White's active rook and making way for an unlikely activation of the queen.

31 ♗f3 ♖xf4 32 ♗xf4



We can appreciate that White's prospects don't seem to have diminished since we joined the game, the advanced d-pawn offering sufficient compensation for the removal of his rook. The c-pawn has lost its support and White threatens to bring the rook to f1, while h4-h5 is also in the air. Grounds for feeling confident.

32...♗f8?

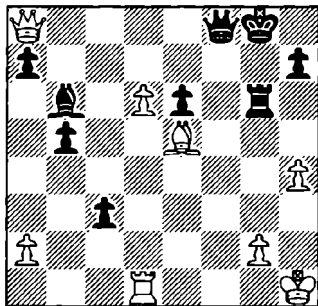
Black, too, is aware of the potential problems in front of his king. However, after 32...♗a8! White's king suddenly comes under fire, and after 33 ♗f3 (33 ♗h2 c2 34 ♖c1 ♗d5) 33...♗xf3! 34 gxf3 c2 35 ♖c1 ♖g1+! it is Black's passed pawn that proves the more significant.

33 ♗e4

White is in winning mode and is therefore not interested in simplifying with 33 ♗xf8+ ♔xf8 34 ♖xc3. Khalifman gives 33 d7 ♗xf4 34 ♖xf4 ♖d8 35 ♖g5 ♖xg5! 36 hxg5 a5 as

favouring Black.

33...♖f5 34 ♖a8+ ♖f8 35 ♖e4 ♖f5 36
♖a8+ ♖f8



Inviting a share of the spoils with a three-fold repetition of position in the case of 37 ♖e4.

37 ♖c6??

No draw. Khalifman: 'What was it that forced me to reject the draw, I do not recall. Whether it was an overestimation of my position, a striving for victory at any price, an underestimation of Black's following combination, or anger at myself for my feeble preceding play – in any case the move 37 ♖c6 deserves two (certainly no less!) question marks.' It is interesting that Gennady Nesis refers to this blunder as a 'passionate rejection' of the repetition. There is certainly no mention of White being short of time.

37...♗g4! 38 g3

Creating a new weakness on f3, currently protected by the queen – hence Black's next.

38...♞c4

A second rook comes to c4 with purpose.

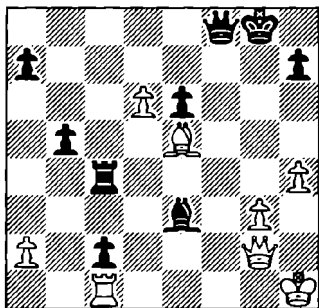
39 ♖g2

By now White must have realised his mistake. The text is forced as 39 ♖xb5 ♖f3+ 40 ♖h2 ♖e2+ 41 ♖h3 ♞xh4+ drops the queen, and 39 ♖d7 c2! 40 ♖xe6+ ♖f7 41 ♖xf7+ ♖xf7 42 ♞f1+ ♖e6 43 ♖b2 ♖e3 is decisive.

39...c2 40 ♞c1 ♖e3

The adjourned position. Khalifman sat at the board for a long time, nearly everyone

assuming he was contemplating resignation.



41 d7! ♖xc1 42 ♖h3 ♖a8+!

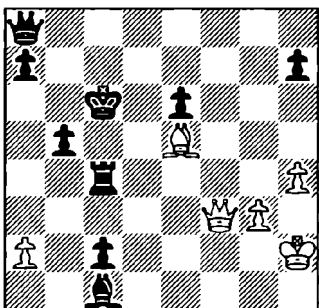
42...♖f7! 43 ♖f1+ ♖f4 44 ♖xf4 ♖d8! is also enough to decide, but the natural and tidy 42...♖f3? 43 ♖h2 ♖d5?? is the blunder White was hoping for, when 44 d8♖+! ♖xd8 45 ♖xe6+ ♖f8 46 ♖f5+ ♖e8 47 ♖e6+ draws, e.g. 47...♖e7 48 ♖g8+ ♖d7 49 ♖d5+ ♖c8 50 ♖a8+ etc. Even with an extra rook, imminent promotion and a king to target Black must still keep his eyes peeled!

43 ♖h2 ♖f7 44 ♖f1+

White is not finished just yet...

44...♖f4!

Black wisely avoids another disaster: 44...♖e7?? 45 ♖f6+ ♖xd7 46 ♖f7+ ♖c6 47 ♖f3+



Play might continue 47...♖b6 48 ♖xa8 ♖a3 49 ♖b8+ ♖a6 50 ♖f4 ♞xf4 51 ♖c8+ and White finally catches the pesky c-pawn.

45 ♖xf4 ♔e7 46 ♙g5+ ♜xd7 47 ♜f7+
 ♜d6 48 ♖f4+ e5 49 ♜f6+ ♜d7 50
 ♜f7+ ♜c6 51 ♜e6+ ♜b7 52 ♜e7+

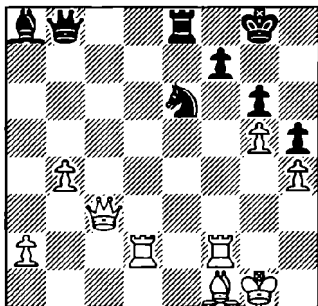
52 ♜d5+ ♜a6 53 ♜xa8 exf4.

52...♜a6! 53 ♜a3+ ♜b6 54 ♖e3+ ♜c6
 55 ♜a6+ ♜c7 56 ♜h6 ♜e4 57 ♜g7+
 ♜c8 0-1

A good demonstration of how fortunes can quickly change – not good news if you stubbornly refuse the half-point believing that the winning chances are all yours and the draw is to be earned by the opponent.

White was also unwilling to share in the next example.

Kallio-Blehm
 Bermuda 2002



As well as being an exchange and a pawn up White also has two connected passed pawns and active pieces. We join the game ten moves before White's key blunder in order to better appreciate his circumstances. Black's only claim to any kind of compensation is the lack of pawn cover for his opponent's king. Having said that, White could now have added the finishing touches to the game with 44 ♖d7 to hit f7. For example after 44...♜f8 45 a4 Black is way too passive, while 44...♗d8 45 ♖f6 (threatening 46 ♖xg6+ fxg6 47 ♜g7 mate) 45...♜e6 runs into 46 ♜c7 ♜xc7 47 ♖xc7 with the deadly threat of ♜c8 etc.

44 ♖de??!

This in itself is not a blunder (White is still close to winning), rather the introduction to one.

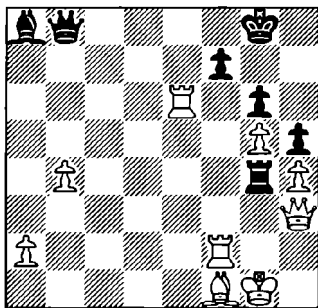
44...♜c8 45 ♜h3??

We don't know how much White saw but we can quite easily work out that 45 ♜b3 is decisive. The text has the right idea but allows Black strong counterplay.

45...♜c4! 46 ♖xe6

The point, but Black can throw in an annoying check before recapturing.

46...♙g4+!

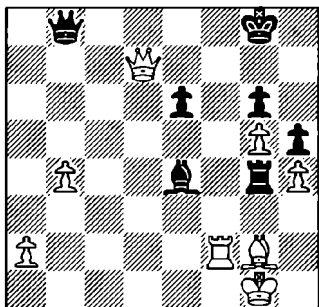


Already the boat is rocking, so much so that White is no longer winning. It is always a good idea when the game takes a sharp turn in the wrong direction to look at the new situation from a new perspective. If the expected good result isn't a serious prospect any more, then face facts, stay calm and home in on the new key factors. This often means having to steady the ship by steering the game to a draw, which might seem like a loss of a half a point. Nevertheless, matters could be worse, so be realistic. In fact White could have baled out now with 47 ♜xg4 hxg4 48 ♜e7! (48 ♜e3 g3 49 ♜b2 ♜f4 50 ♜be2 ♖f3 51 ♖xf3 ♜xf3 52 b5 ♜g7 might be a shade preferable for Black) 48...♜b6 49 ♜exf7 g3 50 ♜f8+ ♜g7 51 ♜8f7+ and so on, but he chose an equally sound alternative.

47 ♖g2 fxg6 48 ♜d3

With the diagonal to e6 obstructed White sets his sights on g6.

48...♔e4! 49 ♖d7



49...♜b6!

Active defence, which has the advantage of giving White an opportunity to find a further mistake. Given what has happened during the last few moves this is a good policy, rather than shutting White out with the solid 49...♔f5, when the best continuation is 50 ♜xf5 exf5 51 ♜e6+ ♔g7 52 ♜f6+ ♔h7 53 ♜f7+ ♔h8 54 ♜f6+ etc. It is true that after the text Black appears to be vulnerable on the back rank, but remember that White's queen is the only piece that can move right now as the other two are pinned.

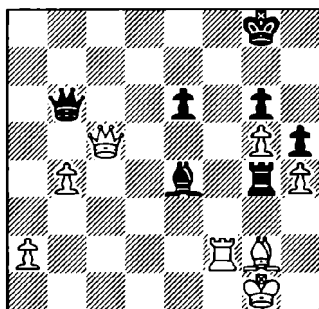
50 ♜f7+ ♔h8 51 ♜f8+ ♔h7 52 ♜e7+ ♔g8

And so White can force a draw. With b4 under pressure, h4 hanging and two-thirds of his attacking force pinned, this should be the only option.

53 ♜c5??

No draw. That White was winning when we joined the game is no longer relevant, but some players find sharing the point with an opponent who was on the brink of defeat a bitter pill to swallow. Unfortunately, in this stubborn frame of mind we tend to look around for a plan – even a single move – that doesn't necessarily help in pressing for an advantage or an initiative but does prevent the opposition from stealing 50% of our whole point. This particular example is quite common, with the aggressive side interpret-

ing his earlier decisive lead and his present power to effectively decide the course of the game as signs that he is in control and must therefore be justified in continuing to play on. White believes he is in the driving seat and should be winning. Consequently, rather than take a backward step and fail with the generous perpetual, White manoeuvres his queen back to c5, both lifting the pin and keeping an eye on f8 (now available to the liberated rook). This is probably as far as White's analysis went, denying his opponent the draw being a big enough attraction.



53...♜d8!

Strong retreats are notoriously difficult to notice. White did indeed have the power to influence the result but, in his endeavours to continue to assume the role of aggressor he failed to take into account the fact that one such ending might be 0-1. Not only is White now unable to get at the enemy king, his rook is still of little use because it is practically rooted to the spot anyway because it must defend the (pinned) bishop. Black threatens to deliver a very nasty check on d1, and White's roomy kingside now looks shaky.

54 ♔h2

54 ♜c1 ♔xg2 55 ♜xg2 ♜d4+ 56 ♔h2 ♜xh4+ 57 ♔g3 ♜g4+ 58 ♔f2 ♜xb4 doesn't help White.

54...♜xh4+ 55 ♔g1 ♜g4 56 ♔h2

White is in a much more peaceful mood

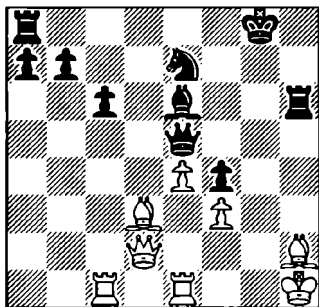
now, but it is too late.

56... ♖b8+ 57 ♔g1 ♕xg2 58 ♜xg2 ♜xb4
 Black is a pawn up with the better pieces and the safer king. White collapsed completely after **59 ♖e3 ♜b1+ 60 ♔f2 ♖f8+ 61 ♔g3 ♖d6+ 62 ♖f4? h4+! 63 ♔f3** (63 ♔g4 ♜b4) **63... ♜f1+ ...0-1.**

Note that some players, prompted by signs that their opponent is not satisfied with a draw for whatever reason, throw in a draw offer (perhaps with a little acting for good measure) when playing a move like 49... ♖b6. White could force a perpetual anyway, so what is there to lose? As we shall see below, the act of offering a draw in itself can have interesting results.

The great stalemate that never was...

The diagram position should be familiar because this is where we left the game Dorfman-Lamprecht, Bundesliga 2001, in Chapter Four.



Black had unjustifiably pushed his g-pawn in front of his castled king and, instead of gradually taking control by pinpointing the positional shortcomings of such a risky plan, White managed to find a bigger blunder when he, too, pushed his g-pawn. Anyway, by this stage Black is winning. The game continued as follows:

30 ♕c4 ♔f7

30... ♕xc4 31 ♜xc4 ♔f7 is very good, followed by swinging the other rook over to the h-file.

31 ♕xe6+ ♔xe6 32 ♜e2 ♜ah8

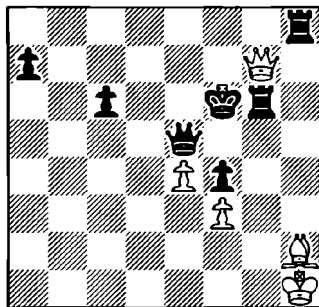
Part of the plan to tiptoe down the h-file, but with three connected passed pawns on the other flank Black could also leave its rook at home and play 32...a5.

33 ♜g2

Now 33... ♜h3 34 ♜f1 ♔f6 35 ♔g1 ♔g6 is final. Note the seriousness of the pin on the h-file...

33... ♔g6??

Black doesn't bother with ... ♜h3, no doubt figuring that White was sufficiently tied up anyway, the bishop being enough of a problem. In fact to a certain extent this would be correct, but only because White can now save the game in spectacular fashion: 34 ♜xg6+!! ♜xg6 35 ♜xc6+ bxc6 36 ♖d7+ ♔f6 37 ♖g7+!



Stalemate results however Black removes the queen. Note the seriousness of the pin on the h-file... A wonderful stalemate opportunity brought about by a careless blunder on Black's part. In the game White played 34 ♜d1?, allowing Black to maintain his winning position (the rest of the game – including the final result – makes very little sense).

CHAPTER NINE

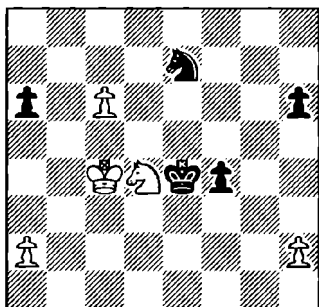
Endings

The endgame is often considered to be the most difficult phase to study, both before and during the game. The fact that fewer pieces are in action than in earlier stages tends to make some players less concerned about potential mistakes (from either side), but it is the eagle-eyed player who benefits in these situations.

In the first example White must have been thinking of the maxim something along the lines of 'The king is an active piece in the endgame' but would have been better off with 'Passed pawns should be pushed'...

Lane-Solomon

Australian Championship 2003/04,
Adelaide



Knight endings are tricky, but at least here White, to move, should be safe.

41 ♖c5??

Of the two feasible choices White opens the wrong envelope – 41 c7 is necessary.

41... ♜xc6!

I have always said that knights have short legs when it comes to these endings, and here Black weighs up the respective values of the passed pawns to leave himself with the key player on f4.

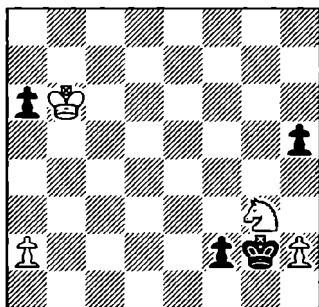
42 ♜xc6

42 ♜e2 ♜e5 looks futile.

42... f3 43 ♜d4 f2 44 ♜e2

Not expecting Black to fall for the fork on g3 after 44... f1♚??, but who knows?

44... ♜f3 45 ♜g3 ♜g2 46 ♜b6 h5!

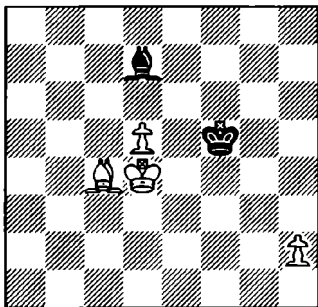


After the further advance ...h5-h4, dislodging the knight, White is finished.

Watch out for book draws

Vera-Quezada

Cuban Championship, Holguin City 2002



White is winning. Some negative players might resign as Black but even in this situation that would be a mistake. White now carries out quite a deliberate relocation of his bishop.

52 ♖a6 ♜f6 53 ♖b7?!

In conjunction with White's next the text probably deserves a '?' but, thus far, the win is still very much in place. Black would be justified in giving up after 53 ♜c5 ♜e7 54 ♖b5! ♖h3 55 d6+ ♜d8 56 ♜d5 followed by ♜e5-f6 and, with Black's king needing to hold position on d8 forcing the bishop to move, White's h-pawn runs, supported by the king.

53... ♖h3 54 ♖c6??

54 d6 ♜e6 55 ♜c5! is easily winning, but the experienced GM's play has suddenly taken on a comical air.

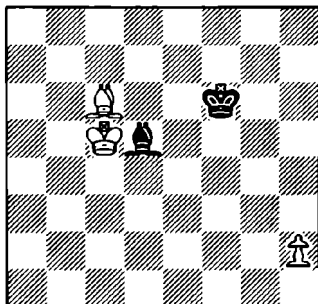
54... ♖g2!

Pinning the pawn and forcing the draw. Can you see why?

55 ♜c5 ♖xd5! ½-½

White has either the wrong bishop or the wrong rook's pawn, depending on how you look at it. What is clear is that Black can sim-

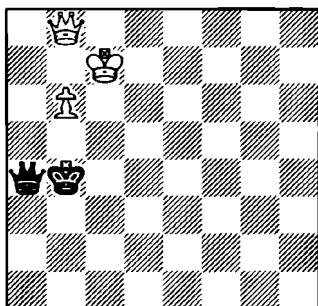
ply head for h8 with a smile, knowing that the king cannot be flushed out.



If Black was smiling in the previous example, then how about this?

Cruz-Santos

Lisbon 2001



The pawn is close to the finish line but White must be careful not to allow a perpetual check. For example after the hasty 85 b7 White's queen is poorly placed and Black can pounce with 85... ♜a5+, e.g. 86 ♜d7 ♜f5+ (not 86... ♜d5+?? 87 ♜d6+) 87 ♜e7 ♜g5+ etc.

85 ♜f8+! ♜a5? 86 ♜c5+?

Perhaps White was enjoying himself too much to finish the job immediately with 86 ♜a8+, but he wouldn't be smiling soon...

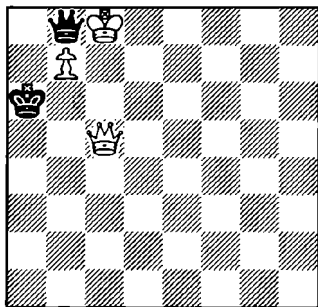
86... ♜a6 87 b7??

Threatening mate on b6 as well as promotion.

87... ♖f4+! 88 ♖c8

Always expect the unexpected...

88... ♖b8+!



And there it is, as expected.

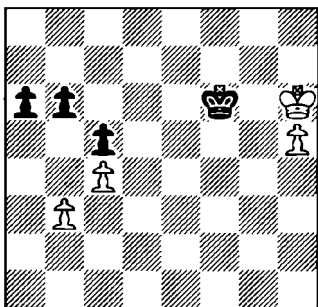
89 ♖xb8 ½-½

Such embarrassing moments in these 'hopeless' endings can be avoided if we keep our eyes peeled for hopeless moves.

Pawn endings are notoriously tricky, particularly when passed pawns feature. Take a look at the following example.

Krasenkow-Macieja

FIDE World Championship (Knockout),
New Delhi/Tehran 2000



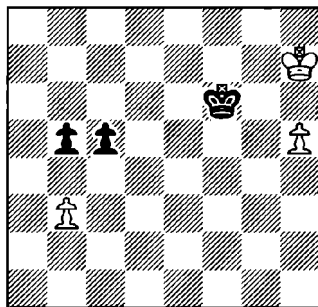
White has problems mobilising his rook's pawn but there is nothing to obstruct Black

on the queenside.

58...b5 59 cxb5!

59 ♖h7 helps only Black after 59...♖f7 60 h6 b4 61 ♖h8 a5 62 h7 a4 63 bxa4 b3 etc.

59...axb5 60 ♖h7



Decision time for Black, who has a couple of obvious and good looking moves available. The least obvious candidate is 60...♖f7!, when after 61 h6 there is either 61...b4 62 ♖h8 c4 63 h7 ♖f8 64 bxc4 b3 65 c5 b2 66 c6 b1♖ 67 c7 ♖a1 mate or the amusing 61...c4 62 b4 c3 63 ♖h8 c2 64 h7 ♖g6 65 ♖g8 c1♖ etc. Also good is 60...b4!, e.g. 61 ♖g8 ♖g5 62 ♖g7 ♖xh5 63 ♖f6 c4 64 bxc4 b3 65 c5 b2 66 c6 b1♖ etc.

However, Black prefers the most obvious:
60...c4??

Note that this is also the most forcing move. In an effort to minimise possibilities – and, by doing so, the likelihood of our going wrong – we often look for the most direct route. Unfortunately for Black the text forces the game in the wrong direction.

61 bxc4 bxc4

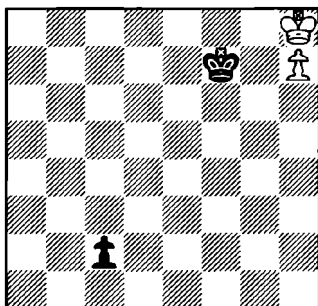
Tantamount to a draw offer. Perhaps Black intended to follow up with 61...b4 62 c5? b3 63 c6 b2 64 c7 b1♖+ but then noticed that White can still put the h-pawn to good use, as a decoy, and draw the race and the game by inserting 62 ♖g8! ♖g5 63 c5.

62 h6

The rest is funny but forced.

62...♖f7

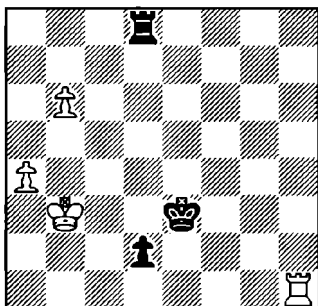
62...c3 63 ♖g8.
63 ♖h8 c3 64 h7 c2 ½-½



Here's an example of the importance of the king in the final phase.

Jiganchine-Sokourinski

Canadian Championship Zonal,
Richmond 2002

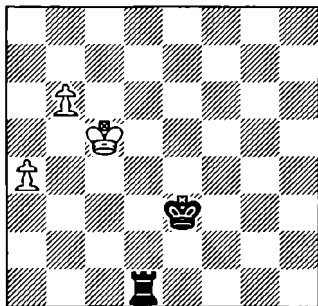


A tricky rook ending. White's king is near enough and Black's too far from the connected pawns to net White the full point with 44 a5 d1 ♖+ 45 ♙xd1 ♙xd1 46 ♖c4! ♖e4 47 a6!, when an entertaining finish is 47...♙c1+ 48 ♖b4! ♖d4 (48...♖d5 49 a7 ♙b1+ 50 ♖c3) 49 a7 ♙b1+ 50 ♖a3 ♖c3 51 ♖a2 ♙b2+ 52 ♖a1.

44 ♖b4??

The king certainly doesn't belong on the b-file here. Now the game should end in a draw with best play.

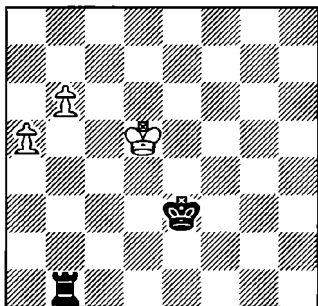
44...d1 ♖ 45 ♙xd1 ♙xd1 46 ♖c5



46...♙c1+

Black loses this ending because he is using the wrong piece, relying too heavily on the rook when the king needs to take an active role. In fact there is a nice draw here: 46...♖e4! 47 b7 ♙b1 48 ♖c6 ♙c1+ 49 ♖b6 ♖d5! 50 a5 (50 b8 ♖ ♙b1+ 51 ♖c7 ♙xb8 52 ♖xb8 ♖c5) 50...♙b1+ 51 ♖c7 (51 ♖a7 ♖c6 52 a6 [52 b8 ♖ ♙xb8 53 ♖xb8 ♖b5] 52...♖c7 53 ♖a8 ♙b2 comes to the same thing) 51...♙c1+ 52 ♖b8 ♖c6 53 a6 ♙b1! 54 ♖a8 ♖c7 55 a7 ♙xb7 with a cosy stalemate.

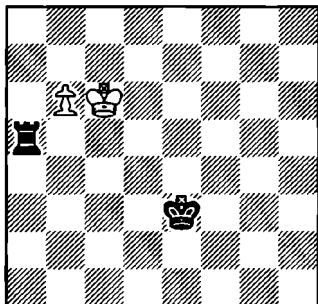
47 ♖d5 ♙b1 48 a5



48...♙b5??

Losing. Again Black overestimates the power of the rook. And – again – giving the king a role secures the draw – just in time. The correct course is 48...♖d3! 49 ♖c6 (49 ♖c5 ♙a1 50 a6 ♙a5+! and now 51 ♖c6 ♙xa6

pins and draws) 49...♖c1+! 50 ♔b7 (50 ♔d7 ♖b1) 50...♗c4 51 a6 ♗b5 52 a7 ♖a1! etc.
49 ♗c6 ♖xa5



50 b7

The pawn threatens to queen but White's king prevents the rook from coming to the b-file.

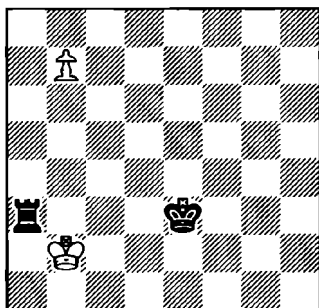
50...♖a6+ 51 ♗c5 ♖a5+ 52 ♗c4

White's winning process lasts until Black runs out of ranks.

52.. ♖a4+ 53 ♗c3 ♖a3+ 54 ♗b2 ...1-0

The party is over, and promotion is inevitable. White won the queen versus rook ending after another 20 moves. Depending on

how much time Black had when contemplating 48...♖b5+, the diagram position shouldn't be too difficult to arrive at, which should have steered Black in the direction of the (accurate) alternative – if not take him straight there. Moreover, this very scenario can be found in a decent endings book, and being acquainted with both the doomed checking sequence and the drawing procedure beforehand is probably the best way to avoid a serious blunder (at least 'textbook' endgame theory is finite and therefore of more practical use than opening theory).



CHAPTER TEN

Time Trouble

I was tempted to not even include any examples featuring time shortage as a factor, basically because we can avoid making mistakes in time-trouble by avoid getting short of time. This is the best advice anyone can give and – if we're being honest – the easiest to follow. As a decent IM for whom one of his excuses for not scaling more lofty heights in the chess world is because too many points were blown away in time-trouble, I believe that in most cases I could have comfortably avoided this illogical, silly situation by not playing so slowly – and at no cost to my standard of play.

Most players become short of time because they lack confidence, analyse too much and are afraid of ghosts and demons when contemplating even the simplest of lines. But it is far better to play at a 'normal' and sensible pace – otherwise, when you are down to a few minutes (or seconds) you will then see all these demons appear simultaneously!

Anyway, here are a few examples in which time is a factor in one form or another.

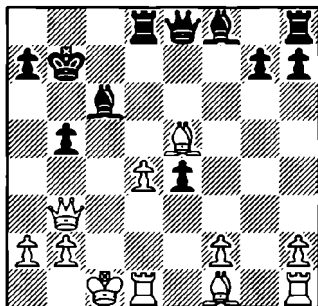
The urge to attack when short of time

Even the quieter players find themselves abandoning their usual long-term, well thought out (no wonder we get in time-trouble) approach when very little time re-

mains on the clock. The need to limit our range of analysis to a manageable level prompts us to find ways of forcing the issue in order to narrow down the opposition's options. Unfortunately such aggressive play needs certain conditions to be met to be justified when time is not an issue, and can easily come unstuck even then. It is not surprising, then, that so many losses caused by running short of time seem so brutal and sudden.

Dautov-Krasenkow

Essen 2002



White, short of time, has just played his queen from d3 to b3 when 20 ♖e3 ♗d6 would have been equal. This is active and

forcing.

20...a6 21 ♖c4?

Exploiting the pin on the b-file and activating the bishop, continuing in the same positive vein as the previous move. An improvement is 21 ♖b1, when 21...e3? 22 d5 is clearly better for White because – unlike in the game – his queen is not tied down to the defence of the c4-bishop by having to maintain the pin, e.g. 22...♗d7 23 ♖xe3 etc. Black's best is 21...♗d5 22 ♖e3 ♖f7 23 a3 ♗d6 24 ♗g2 ♖f5 with a balanced game.

21...e3!

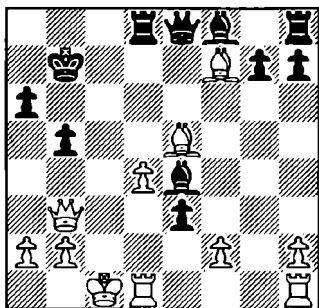
This time after 22 d5? ♗d7 White cannot play ♖xe3, leaving Black in the driving seat after 23 ♗c3 (22...♖xe5 23 dxc6+ ♖c7 24 ♗xd8 ♖xd8 25 ♖d1+ is unclear) 23...exf2.

22 ♗f7??

It appears that the bishop manoeuvre had been White's intention when playing ♖b3, making it unlikely he would have properly entertained 22 ♖he1 (forced but effective), when 22...♗f3 23 ♖xe3 ♗xd1 24 ♖xd1 offers White enough compensation thanks to his grip on the centre and strong bishops, and 22...exf2 23 ♖e2 ♖c8 24 ♖b1 is at least equal.

The point here is that White was doing fine anyway without getting heavy, but he felt compelled to assume what looked like an initiative to cover up the practical problem of being short of time.

22...♗e4!!

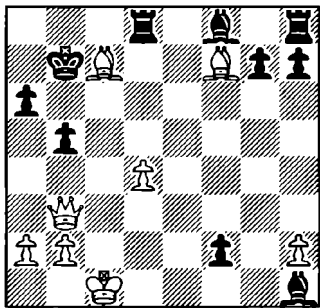


The helpful 22...♖e7? 23 fxe3 ♗xh1 24 ♖xh1 looks nice for White, but the text – which at first glance threatens nothing (it's not even a check) – is consequently a typical spoiler for the time-trouble victim. It also furnishes Black a decisive advantage because 23 ♗xe8 ♖c8+ 24 ♖c3 walks into the cruel 24...♖xc3+ 25 bxc3 ♗a3 mate.

23 ♖d3

Ironically White has to do Black's work for him, volunteering to put a second rook in the firing line.

23...♖e7 24 ♖c3 ♗xh1!? 25 ♖c7+ ♖xc7+ 26 ♗xc7 exf2 0-1



White's queen and bishop still rule the a2-g8 diagonal but much has changed elsewhere. White resigned rather than see 27 ♗c4 (27 ♖d1 ♗g2) 27...♖c8 etc.

Angels (with dirty faces)

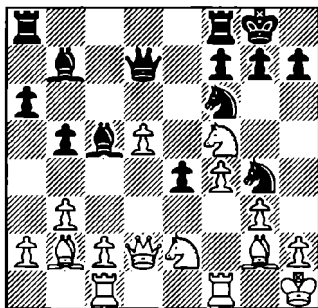
Being afraid of ghosts might be one problem, but a shortage of time can also lead us to see angels. Lines that usually seem too good to be true take on a much more attractive character when the seconds are running out. Witness the following example:

Savon-Spassky

USSR Championship, Yerevan 1962

Black has just played 18...♖d7, hitting White's most active piece. After 19 ♖fd4 e3 followed by 20...♗xd5 Black is doing well.

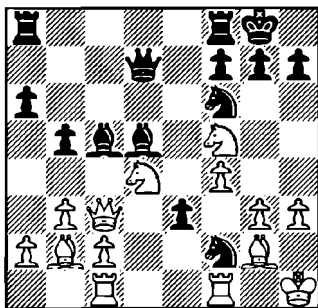
Spassky was apparently worried about 19 Qxg7 Qxg7 20 c4 with some pressure for White, but the materialistic 19... Qe3 looks okay, e.g. 20 We1 Qxc1 21 Wxc1 Qxd5 22 h3 Qxg7 . Anyway, events took a different turn because White had seen a mate...



19 Qed4? Qxd5 20 h3?

As per plan, and the beginning of a 'forcing' line. Preferable is 20 Qe3 to erect a blockade and settle for being slightly worse, even inserting c2-c3 if necessary.

20... e3 21 Wc3 Qf2+



22 Wxf2

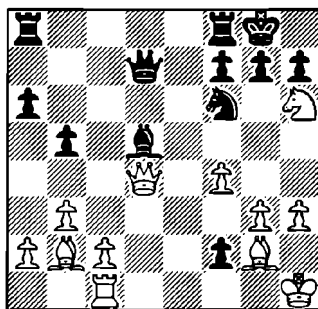
Who's fooling who here? After 22 Qh2 Qxg2 23 Qxg2 Qxd4! 24 Qxd4 Wxh3+ 25 Qf3 White's king is too close to the enemy, e.g. 25... Qd5 26 Wc6 Wg4+ 27 Qg2 Qxf4+ with mate to follow. The text is aimed at getting back the move in order to deliver a knockout blow. Remember there is no time

to sit back and take stock after each move, and White judges that he has all the pieces he needs to secure the point.

22... Qxd4 23 Wxd4 exf2

Now 24 Qxd5! Wxf5! 25 Qg2 Qae8 26 Wxf2 Qe4 is a long road to defeat for White – or a short one if he plays 27 Wd4? as this runs into 27... Qxg3+ 28 Qh2 Qh5 etc.

24 Qh6+?? 0-1



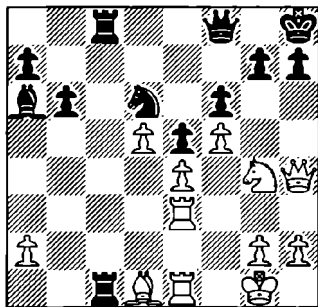
The point. But having come this far on the journey White resigns! Unfortunately he has been racing in the wrong direction, for after 24... gxh6 25 Wxf6 the would-be key a1-h8 diagonal suddenly comes to nothing as the other long diagonal comes into play thanks to the pin on the g2-bishop that makes 25... Wxh3 mate possible. There is certainly an irony in time-trouble situations that the more you see, the less you see.

Keep count of the moves

Getting short of time is one thing, losing track of the number of moves played then compounds the problem. How many of us have made the same mistake as White in the next instalment?

Dobrov-Gold
Pardubice 2002

Both players are in time-trouble, which helps explain Black's dubious knight manoeuvre.



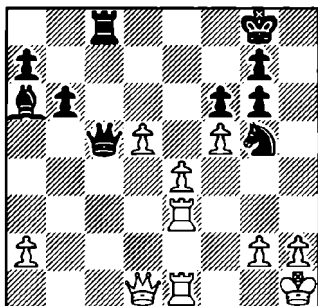
35...♠f7?!

35...♞8c3! favours Black.

36 ♖h5 ♕g5?! 37 ♜xe5! ♜c5 38 ♙h1
♜xd1?

A typical short-term tactical try in time-trouble, and a typical short-term tactical oversight. 38...♞c3 is preferable.

39 ♕g6+! ♙g8 40 ♜xd1 hxg6



The time control has been reached but, as so often happens, White was not so sure. Consequently he made another move just to be on the safe side (at least as far as the clock is concerned). Put yourself in his shoes and take a (quick) look at the diagram position with a view to doing the same. And many of you will have immediately locked on to...

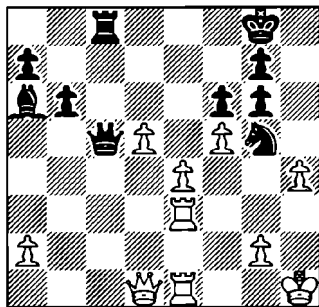
41 h4??

The talented junior finds a forcing move to do the job, thus denying Black the move himself and leaving White to be the first to

contribute to the next, post-time-control phase of the game (which he probably expected to be fxg6). The major alternative is 41 fxg6, but this seems to give Black a free hand in terms of making his own play.

However, had White properly kept note of how many moves he had played he could have gathered his thoughts a move earlier, which would have provided ample time to notice that taking on g6 first leaves the knight without a retreat square and, as it happens, without a defence against the threatened h2-h4.

Incidentally the game continued:



41...♠h7 42 fxg6 ♠f8 43 ♜g4 ♜d6 44
e5! fxh5 45 ♜xe5 ♜c4! ½-½

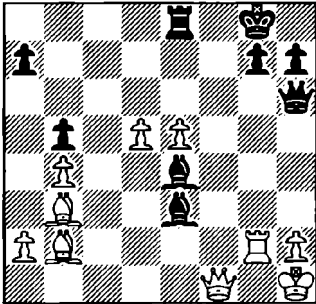
A draw was agreed in view of 46 ♜g3 ♜xg6 (46...♠xg6?? 47 ♞e8+) 47 ♞g5 ♜f6 48 h5 being well balanced.

Blundering in the opponent's time trouble

This is a chess sin. And one that has gifted me many points (of course I've given away more because of time trouble). If your opponent has run very short of time but you still have plenty in hand, speeding up yourself is a recipe for disaster, and quite inexcusable. In some cases the effect of forcing a quick reply might well be favourable, but the opposition always has the practical disadvantage of very limited thinking time anyway, and a quick response is obligatory regardless of whether

you spend ten minutes or ten seconds over a move. At least make an effort to avoid blundering away the game.

Tozer-Mortazavi
Oakham 1990



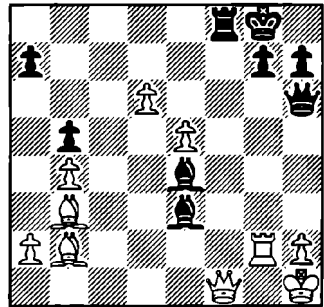
In the diagram position White was under considerable pressure on the kingside which, combined with the fact that he had only twenty seconds or so to make the five remaining moves to the time control, doesn't say much for his chances of survival. Black, to play, might consider 35...♙f4, when White must choose between two awkward looking ways to prevent mate on h2. For example 36 ♖g1 ♜f8 37 d6+ ♗h8 is deadly, which leaves 36 ♗g1 ♞h3, e.g. 37 d6+ ♗h8 and Black is about to cash in a material lead, or 37 e6 ♙e3 38 d6 (38 ♗f1 ♜f8) 38...♙xg1 39 e7+ ♗xb3! (39...♗h8?? 40 ♙xg7 mate) 40 axb3 ♙b6 41 ♙d4 ♙d8 42 exd8 ♗xd8 43 ♙c5 ♗f7 etc. In other words, we can safely say that Black is close to winning on the board, and the time situation is irrelevant.

35...♜f8??

We saw in the previous note that bringing the rook to the f-file can be strong, but doing it this way around introduces an additional

possibility. Had Black used some of his extra hour(!) on the clock he would have seen this, as well as the benefits of 35...♙f4.

36 d6+



36...♗h8 37 ♗xf8 mate

In his entertaining book *The Fine Art of Swindling*, IM Ali Mortazavi has this to say of his embarrassing experience: 'A few months after the game, a dose of honesty brought me to the unhappy conclusion that ... I was playing far too quickly in my opponent's time trouble. It was not until a game I had later that year that I completely reviewed my 'technique'... With little over five minutes left to make 32(!) moves, I responded with a move which I saw lost by force. My opponent missed his chance... The interesting point was that at first, my opponent was playing reasonably slowly when I had four minutes left on my clock. I remember trying to analyse variation after variation as quickly as possible but my clock situation would not allow any concrete assessments – I was seeing ghosts. As my clock situation became more and more acute, my opponent started to speed up and instinctively I started playing good moves. On move 40, I made my final move in a winning position.'

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Snatching Defeat from the Jaws of Victory

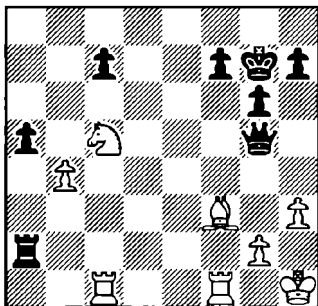
It signifies nothing to play well and lose.

Thomas Fuller (1654-1734), British physician and writer. *Gnomologia* (1732).

The own-goal when leading 1-0 in the last minute of the match, the sucker punch in the final round, falling at the final hurdle with a fifty yard lead, out-of-bounds at the 18th hole... This chapter features a collection of instructive hard luck stories.

Before coming to the crucial point in our starter let's see how the perpetrator first earned his would-be moral victory.

Volkov-Tkachiev
Moscow 2002



White has a rook and two very good

pieces for the queen which, here, is a good deal. Indeed White's advantage soon reached decisive proportions.

34 ♖e4 ♜d8 **35** ♝c3! ♠a3 **36** ♝b5 ♜d3

36...♠a2 37 ♜xc7 axb4 38 ♙e4 is a good illustration of the bigger army overpowering the smaller one.

37 bxa5 c6 **38** a6!

White is aware of his trump card on the a-file.

38...cxb5

38...♜xf3 is futile: 39 ♜xf3 cxb5 40 a7 h5 41 ♠a1 ♜a8 42 ♜b3 and the rook soon comes to b8 to flush out the queen.

39 ♠a1! ♜f6!

39...♜xf3 40 ♜xf3 ♜d4 41 ♠fa3 ♜a7 42 ♜b3 takes slightly longer for the pawn to get home than the previous note. The text, on the other hand, is a final throw of the dice before resigning – an option Black would take after 40 ♙e2! with a simple double attack on Black's remaining pieces...

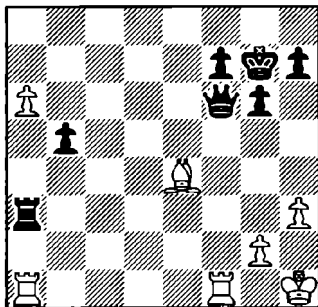
40 ♙e4??

A simple double attack on Black's remaining pieces...

40...♠a3!

... And Black is winning. The queen cannot be taken because Black has ...♠a1+ followed by the capture of the other rook, while 41 ♠xa3 ♜xf1+ 42 ♙h2 ♜f4+ 43 g3 (43 ♙g1

♖c1+ 44 ♔f2 ♜xa3) 43...♜xe4 wins for Black. Consequently White must surrender the pride and joy on a6, for which he earlier sacrificed the knight. Oops.



41 ♖ad1 ♜xa6 42 ♙d5 f5 43 ♙f3 ♔h6
44 ♖b1 b4 45 ♜fd1 ♜xf3!

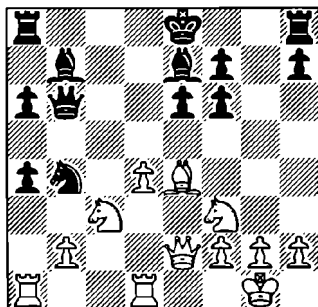
Circumstances certainly have changed.
46 ♗xf3 ♜e2 47 ♜f1 ♔g5! 48 ♔g1 ♔h4
49 ♜f2 ♜e3 50 ♔g2 ♜f4 51 ♜bb2 g5 52
♔h1 ♜d6 53 ♜fd2 ♜f4 54 ♜f2 h5 and
Black broke through to win on the 65th
move.

How do we explain away White's blunder?
Obviously he saw 40 ♙e2! but was too busy
noticing just how winning he was to see the
danger. As if threatening both queen and
rook wasn't enough, he wanted to keep the
promotion square in his sights, too. But this
is overdoing it somewhat and the time White
spent making sure he squeezed the most out
of the expected final position could have
been put to better use double-checking (or
just checking) for a banana skin.

Again, rather than jumping straight into
the next fiasco it would be better to get an
idea of the skill which with the guilty party
approached the winning line. In doing so we
can to some extent have an idea of his frame
of mind at the time he self-destructed.

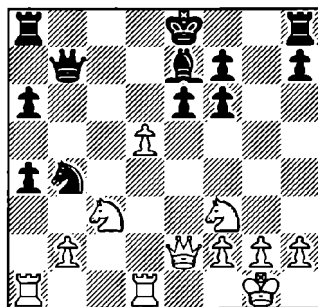
Sagalchik-L.Kaufman

USA Championship, Seattle 2002



Perhaps the first move to spring to mind
in the diagram position is 16 ♘a4, gaining
time on the queen. Then 16...♜a7 17 ♘c5
♙xe4 18 ♜xe4 ♜c8 19 ♖a4 ♜b6 looks a
shade preferable for White, as does 16...♜b5
17 ♜xb5+ axb5 18 ♙xb7 ♜xa4 19 ♖xa4
bxa4 20 ♖a1 ♔d7 21 ♖xa4 ♔c7 22 ♙e4
♔b6. Instead White produces a textbook
example of how to exploit the opponent's
king when it still resides in the centre due to
a damaged kingside structure.

16 ♙xb7 ♜xb7 17 d5!



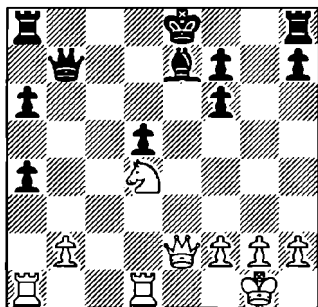
The experienced Queen's Gambit practi-
tioner should always be on the lookout for
this thematic pawn sacrifice, which can have
a number of uses. In this case prising open
the e-file is the idea, after which Black will
have serious problems with his king.

17...♙xd5

17...exd5 18 ♘d4 is similar to the game.

17...e5? 18 d6 ♔d8 19 ♖xe5 and the recapture on e5 walks into a fork. Black prefers to take the opportunity to remove a potentially dangerous attacking piece.

18 ♖xd5 exd5 19 ♖d4



Phase One is complete. This is stronger than 19 ♖xa4 0-0 20 ♖d4 because after the text Black cannot play 19...0-0? as then 20 ♖f5 threatens both the win of the bishop and (with ♖g4+) the win of the king. It is also not yet clear where White's queen's rook is best placed, so it makes sense to plant the knight on the desired d4-post first.

19...♖f8

We know that 19...0-0? loses to 20 ♖f5 but Black might prefer 19...♖d7, protecting – albeit temporarily – f5 (as well as the a4-pawn, for what that is worth). Then 20 ♖h5 is a suggestion of Huzman, when White's initiative comfortably outweighs the two pawns. The same assessment can be made after 20 ♖f3 or 20 ♖e1.

20 ♖f5

20 ♖h5? is a possibility here, too, which seems to have been Black's thinking if his next is anything to go by.

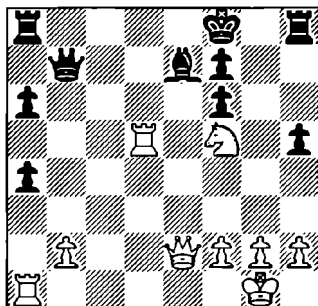
20...h5?!

20...♖g8 offers better chances of slowing White down, although the game has become difficult for Black.

21 ♖xd5!

Phase Two. This cheeky move highlights White's superiority, the point being that

21...♖xd5? 22 ♖xe7+ ♖g8 23 ♖xf6 threatens both the mate on g7 and the fork on e7, forcing Black to part with his queen. By removing the d5-pawn White clears the way for his rooks to team up to add their weight to the coming attack. Meanwhile, Black is reduced completely to addressing the threats.



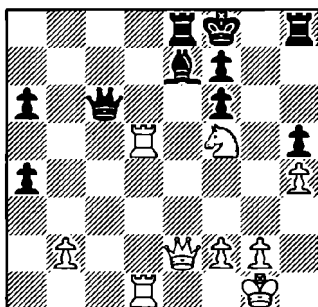
21...♖e8 22 ♖ad1!

Black's last move supported the bishop but also introduced a token threat of a discovered attack. By doubling rooks White intends the decisive incursion on d7, but is also more than happy to see the bishop move, e.g. 22...♖b4?? 23 ♖xe8+ ♖xe8 24 ♖d8 mate.

22...♖c6

Anticipating ♖d7 and defending the rook in order to free the bishop.

23 h4!?



A sure sign that White is in absolute con-

trol of proceedings. Even the ending looks good (but Black shouldn't survive that long), and White gives his king some breathing space to avoid any disaster on the back rank. White has played excellently thus far.

23...♖b4 24 ♖d8

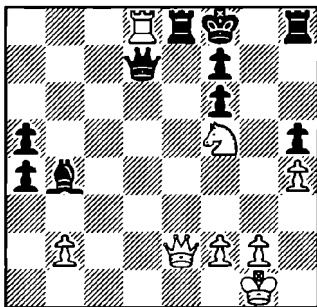
Phase Three should be the final part of the game, effectively leaving White a rook up and facilitating the winning process.

24...a5 25 ♖1d7??

Within a couple of moves of victory White manages to find an even quicker way to lose. The simple 25 ♖xe8+ ♗xe8 26 ♗a6! followed by ♗xf6 with the dual threats of ♗xh8 mate and ♖d8 is the easiest part of White's entire campaign, 26...♙e7 losing to 27 ♖e1.

But since we joined the game Black has not made a genuine threat, being too busy dealing with defensive duties. Black has had to constantly react to his opponent's relentless build-up, which featured numerous threats along the way, and even the relative states of the pawn structures would have boosted White's ever-increasing feeling of empowerment. Consequently the game reached a point at which White can see his opponent's moves as no more than defensive resources – hence the blunder.

25...♗xd7 0-1



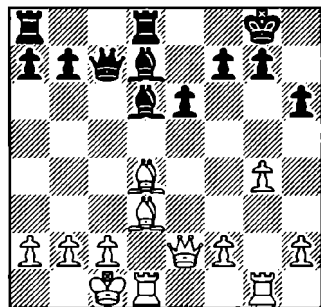
The only way to defend against mate, but this very obvious capture wins.

Moving in for the kill

The psychology of a mating attack is such that whatever doubts the aggressor might have had before or during the earlier part of the offensive, as the enemy king becomes increasingly exposed, so the attacker's confidence grows. Consequently, when it is time to move in for the kill or collect a material reward the 'confirmation' that the attack was indeed correct and successful precludes negative thoughts such as a defensive resource or some other proverbial spanner in the works. Here we see an IM's well conducted kingside offensive culminating in two (progressively more serious) blunders.

Konguvel-Mohota

Goodricke Open, Calcutta 2002



Opposite sides castling, and White has certainly made more progress in terms of launching an attack. Here goes...

19 g5! hxg5 20 ♖h5

Not 20 ♖xg5? ♙f4+.

20...f5

20...♙e5 runs into 21 ♙xe5 ♗xe5 22 ♖xg5 etc.

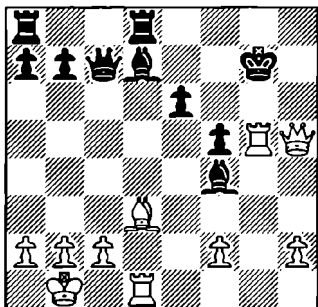
21 ♙xg7!

Black's king is already rather lonely so White is prepared to invest material to strip away the defensive barrier.

21...♙f4+ 22 ♖b1 ♙xg7 23 ♖xg5+!

No doubt this further sacrifice, which is the key, was what convinced White to push

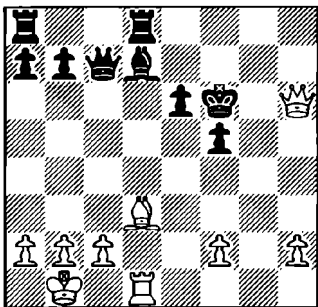
his g-pawn in the first place.



23... ♖xg5 24 ♜xg5+ ♔f7 25 ♜h5+

At first glance it looks as though White has nothing better than a draw with a perpetual, but the IM has seen further and, importantly, has no intention of sharing the point with his considerably lower rated opponent who, since we joined the game, has done no more than go along for the ride in a series of forced replies.

25... ♔f6 26 ♜h6+



26... ♔f6

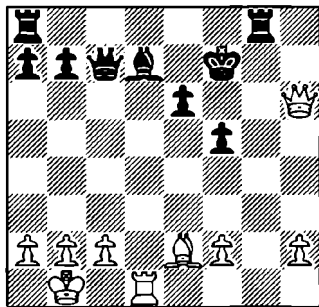
26... ♔e7? soon gets Black mated after 27 ♜g7+, e.g. 27... ♔e8 28 ♖xf5 (followed by ♖g6 mate) 28... exf5 29 ♖e1+ or 27... ♔d6 28 ♖e2+ ♔c5 29 ♜c3+ ♔b6 30 ♜b4+ ♔c6 31 ♖f3 mate.

27 ♖e2!

The point. 27 ♜h7+? ♔f6 28 ♜h6+ ♔f7 only draws, but the text reroutes the bishop

to set up the killer blow on h5 (forcing mate). White is a rook down but it is the number of pieces with access to the kingside that should decide the game.

27... ♔g8

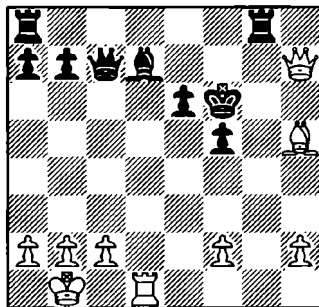


The only move, even if Black is powerless to prevent the check.

28 ♖h5+?

The first blunder, after which White must take a draw. The way to wrap up a well played attack is to first play 28 ♜h7+! before bringing the bishop in on the act. For example after 28... ♔f6 29 ♜h4+ ♔f7 30 ♖h5+ mate is forced, as is the case in the event of 28... ♔g7 29 ♖h5+, while 28... ♔f8 29 ♖h5 ♖e8 30 ♜xc7 ♖xh5 might have put White off if he believed he deserved more for his sacrificial attack. However, after 31 ♖e1 ♖e8 32 ♜xb7 he would have an easy points win.

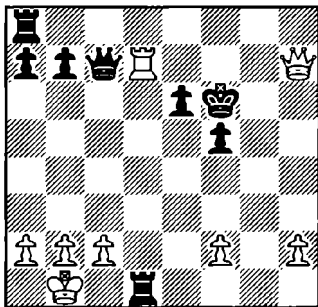
28... ♔e7 29 ♜h7+ ♔f6



30 ♖xd7??

We can assume that this is still part of the overall plan, the coming check on the back rank merely postponing the end for Black. 30 ♖h6+ draws after 30...♔e7 31 ♖h7+ ♔f6 and 30...♔e5? 31 ♖e3+ ♔f6 32 ♖h6+, although with the latter White might try for more with 31 f4+, perhaps.

30...♖g1+ 31 ♔d1 ♖xd1+ 0-1

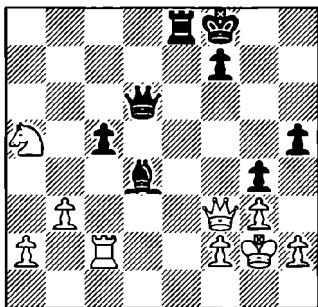


Just as White adds his finishing touch to the attack he has to resign, as 32 ♖xd1 ♖xh7 leaves him a queen down.

Throwing away a win is one thing, but committing a blunder when an immediate win was available is incredibly frustrating.

I. Farago-Acs

Hungarian Championship,
Balatonlelle 2002.



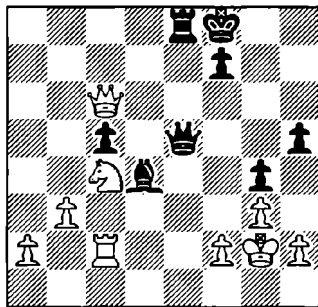
With a clear extra pawn (which disappeared after a recent ♖xa5) White has good winning prospects and can throw his weight around by forcing Black to avoid exchanges.

39 ♖c6 ♖e5

39...♖xc6+ 40 ♖xc6 is futile, so Black must hope for something on the kingside.

40 ♖c4

Reactivating the knight with tempo.



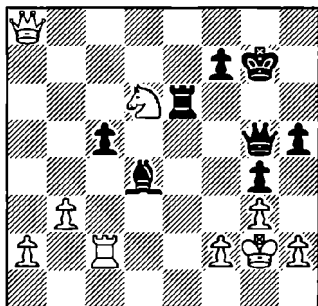
40...♖g5

40...♖f5?? 41 ♖xe8+ ♔xe8 42 ♖d6+.

41 ♖d6 ♖e6 42 ♖a8+

Now after 42...♔e7 White has the simple 43 ♖b5, when 43...h4 44 ♖xd4 h3+ 45 ♔f1 cxd4 46 ♖a7+ is decisive, so Black prefers not to expose his king.

42...♔g7

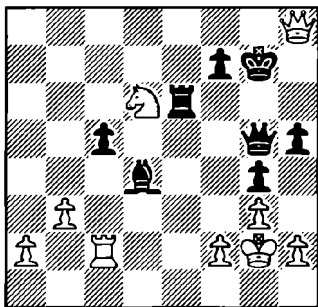


White has done well to increase his advantage. In fact the diagram position offers a chance for a finish with a flourish, using a

motif seen in the 1966 Petrosian-Spassky world championship match. Can you see it?

43 ♖b5??

If you missed White's win, so did Farago, who meets ...♔g7 with the same move that would have done against ...♔e7. However, after forcing 40...♖g5 because of the fork that would meet ...♗f5, White should have been capable of seeing another – 43 ♗h8+!



43...♔h8 (43...♔g6 44 ♗g8+ ♔f6 [44...♔h6 45 ♖x7 mate] 45 ♗x7+) 44 ♖xf7+ ♔g7 45 ♖xg5 when the loss of a second pawn would almost justify resignation at this level.

43...h4!

Unfortunately for White there is a crucial difference between this and the note to White's 42nd move in that now White has no check on a7. Consequently White's queen is too far away from the mate threats.

44 ♔f1

44 ♖xd4 h3+ 45 ♔f1 cxd4 and the threat of ...♗e5 decides (46 ♗b8 ♗d5).

44...h3 45 f4 ♗f5 0-1

Perhaps 42...♔g7 should have a '?' but since the alternative anyway leads to a fairly trivial loss at least Black's choice gives White a chance to go wrong. As for White, we can see from other examples in this book that it pays to systematically investigate checks!

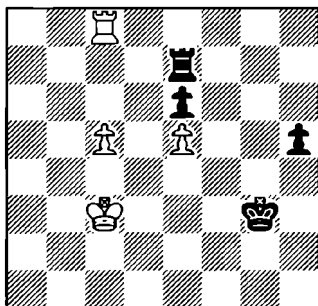
The thin line in the ending

Below we see a typical rook ending that

could appear from novice to world championship level. Each side has a passed pawn, and passed pawns should be pushed, right?

Socko-Zilberman

Moscow 2002

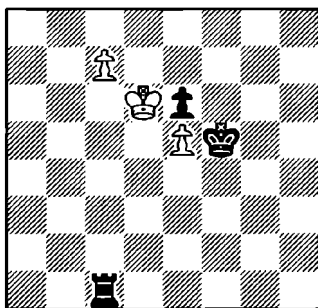


67...h4

Black is winning because his king is nearer his passed pawn.

68 c6

After 68 ♔c4 Black should play 68...♗h7!, when 69 c6 h3 70 ♗a8 h2 71 ♗a1 h1 ♗ 72 ♗xh1 ♗xh1 exploits White's poor king, which isn't far enough advanced, e.g. 73 ♔c5 ♔f4 74 ♔d6 ♔f5 75 c7 ♗c1



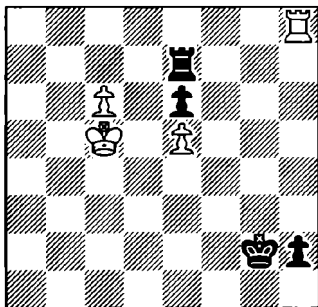
White has come to a standstill.

68...h3 69 ♔d4 h2??

The race continues. However, this automatic push turns the players' fortunes around 180 degrees, as now White can win by force.

It is rather frightening that such a natural move can be so damaging with so few pieces on the board (there are no mates to walk into, no queens to lose, no forks etc.), and at this level (Black is an experienced GM). However, the fact that this is a rook ending also means that options are limited, in turn facilitating the task of looking ahead. In this case Black can expect White's rook to come over to the h-file immediately, a simple observation that should prompt 69...♖h7!, after which White has nothing better than 70 c7, when 70...♙g7! threatens to push the pawn but this time with White's rook tied to the c7-pawn.

70 ♖g8+ ♔f3 71 ♖h8 ♔g2 72 ♔c5!

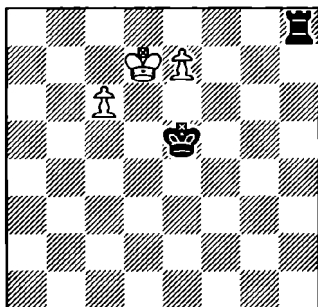


Now White has an easy winning plan – give up the rook, win the e-pawn after driving Black's rook away and then shepherding one of the pawn duo to glory.

72...♙e8 73 ♖h6 h1♖ 74 ♖xh1 ♔xh1 75 ♔d6

Black would have preferred to take on h1 with his more agile rook and leave the king nearer the action. Compare this position with the one after 75...♖c1 in the note to White's 68th move – there White's king was also on d6, but Black's rook was behind the passed pawn and his king stood on f5. Black rushes back with his king, but to no avail.

75...♔g2 76 ♔d7 ♖h8 77 ♔xe6 ♔g3 78 ♔d7 ♖h7+ 79 ♔d6 ♔f4 80 e6 ♔f5 81 e7 ♖h8 82 ♔d7 ♔e5



83 c7 1-0

White manages to avoid 83 e8♖+?? ♖xe8 84 ♔xe8 ♔d6 with king versus king.

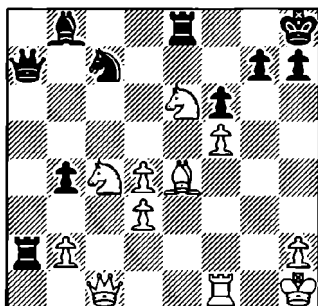
Chess has no bonus points for entertainment

Winning is nice. Winning with style is nicer. And so we find ourselves, when the game is going very well and a decisive lead is within our grasp, pleasantly surprised as a direct, brutal and more impressive means of winning the game presents itself. For example, rather than grind away for the full point in the ending we have been working on, why not go for the new, albeit unexpected alternative of crashing through the opponent's kingside? Sometimes this new course will be perfectly sound, but too many times it won't, and the problem is finding out the hard way when a couple of hitherto quiet enemy pieces that you've brought back to life yourself – by-products of the new flashy win – will strike a killer blow of their own. Given two very different would-be winning strategies, in the long-run it pays to choose the safer option. The flashier the win, the greater the risk of a mistake. Witness the following all-Dutch encounter from Wijk aan Zee 2004.

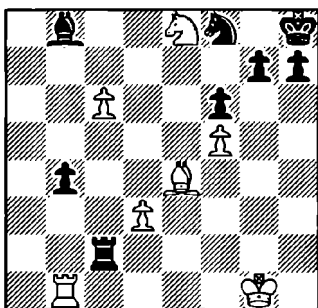
Timman-van Wely
Wijk aan Zee 2004

Black has a slight material lead but White's

minor pieces dominate, all three in excellent central positions with access to either flank.



Meanwhile, Black's forces lack cohesion and even the queen and advanced rook are harmless. Consequently Black has just returned his knight from a6 to c7 in order to challenge the e6-knight. White can now send his other knight into enemy territory with 37 ♞d6! , hitting the rook (which has no safe square as $\dots\text{♜g8}$ allows a smothered mate on f7) and threatening simply 38 ♞xe8 ♞xe8 39 ♜c8 etc. Therefore play should continue 37... ♞xe6 38 ♞xe8 ♞f8 39 ♜c5! ♜xc5 (39... ♜f7 40 ♞d5 ♜xe8 41 ♞xa2) 40 dxc5 ♞xb2 41 c6 ♞xh2+ 42 ♚g1 ♞c2 43 ♞b1



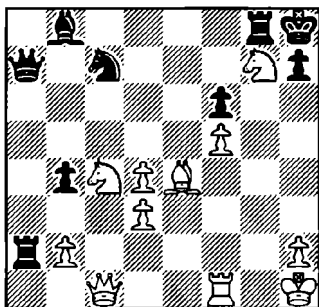
White is temporarily a pawn down but will soon emerge with a serious points lead thanks to the passed c-pawn and the awkward placing of Black's bishop. This forcing line is by no means difficult to work out for a

club player and is easy for someone like Timman, who had probably seen it a number of moves earlier. Furthermore, it is a completely safe route to a very promising ending because after the exchange of queens on c5 Black has nothing better than $\dots\text{♞xb2}$, alternatives leaving him a pawn down as well as passively watching the c-pawn. So we have established that White could have secured excellent winning chances with relative ease.

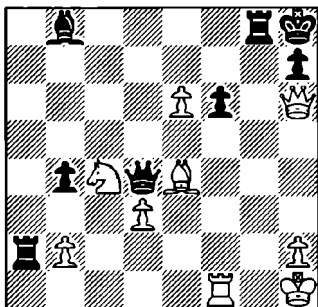
37 ♞xg7??

But Timman's attention had been drawn to an ostensibly crushing assault on Black's king, the text being a brand new avenue made possible only now because $\dots\text{♞c7}$ severed communication along the rank between Black's queen and the kingside. When new doors open (revealing tempting, tasty looking spoils) we have to begin the analysis afresh. This requires a new base, new direction, new focus and – when the original intention was to follow a more sober course – a shift in emphasis to a tactical, complex mindset. Throw in a mix of nerves and perhaps time shortage for one or both players and we have a healthy breeding ground for a blunder.

37... ♞g8!



The first line that will have attracted White to his new plan is 37... ♚xg7 38 ♞g1+ ♚h8 39 ♜h6 ♞d5 40 ♞xd5 , e.g. 40... ♞a6 41 ♞e5! ♞xe5 (41... fxe5 42 f6) 42 dxe5 ♜d7 43 ♞e4 and Black's kingside problems continue. 38 ♞e6 ♞xe6 39 fxe6 ♜xd4 40 ♜h6



The point. This position is all part of the winning procedure, the threat of mate apparently decisive as now 40...♖g7? invites 41 ♙xh7, when 41...♙f4 42 ♜h5 ♖xh7 43 e7! ♖xh5 44 e8♚+ ♜g7 45 ♜xh5 and 41...♜f4 42 ♜xf4 (42 ♖xf4?? ♖a1+) 42...♙xf4 43 ♙e4 leave Black in trouble. However, rather than throw in the towel, Black played what proved to be a winning move.

40...♖a7! 0-1

Unfortunately for White, as well as the crowd, he had also managed to please his opponent. Now h7 is protected without compromising the back rank, and the threat is simply to turn the tables on White by lining up on the g-file with ...♖ag7, homing in on g1! (note that the f6-pawn is taboo: 41 ♜xf6+?? ♜xf6 42 ♖xf6 ♖a1+ etc.). White resigned rather than be tortured in the ending after 41 ♜e3.

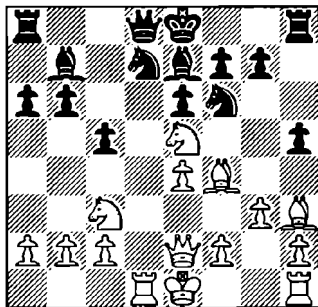
The following example was used in Iakov Damsky's entertaining book *Chess Brilliancy* (Everyman) and illustrates that brilliancy can occasionally work to the detriment of those players gifted enough to create chess art on the chess board.

Tal-Sveshnikov

41st USSR Championship, Moscow 1973

Both kings still reside in the centre but White has the more active forces, the initia-

tive and the move. And White is Tal...



12 ♖xf7!

...So what else can we expect?

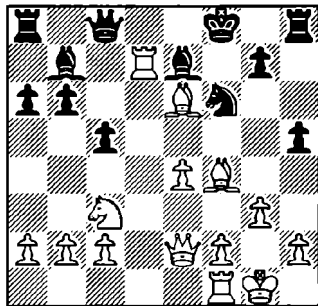
12...♜xf7 13 ♙xg6+

The point – the bishop is immune in view of the check on c4 so, with the defensive wall broken, White is about to come crashing through.

13...♜f8 14 0-0

Threatening e4-e5 now that White no longer has a rook on the h1-a8 diagonal.

14...♜c8 15 ♖xd7!



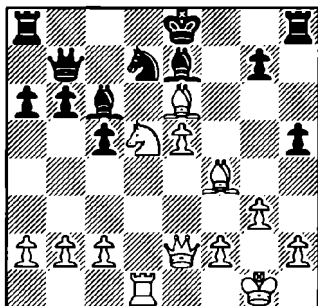
With the move 15...♜c6 White switches instead to 'Plan B', investing more material to maintain the momentum that began with the initial sacrifice on f7.

15...♖xd7 16 ♖d1 ♙c6 17 ♖d5 ♜b7

After 17...♙xd5 18 ♖xd5 ♖a7 White reminds his opponent why he changed gear in

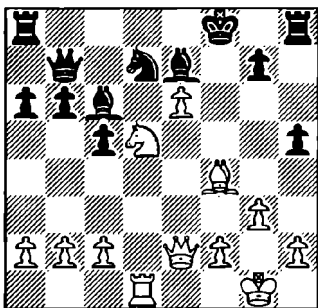
the first place: 19 ♖xh5! ♜g8 20 ♙xg8 and
20...♗xg8 21 ♚c4+ is mate.

18 e5 ♖e8



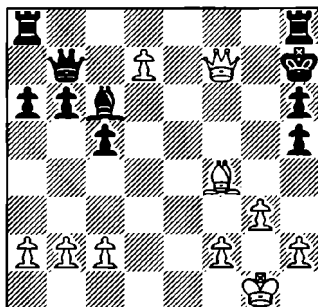
Tal – ‘The following simple variation seemed to me too prosaic: 19 ♙xd7+ ♚xd7 20 e6 ♚xd5 (otherwise 21 ♘c7+) 21 ♖xd5 ♙xd5 22 ♚e5 ♙c6 23 ♚c7 ♙b5 24 c4 ♙xc4 25 ♙d6!, winning...’ Consequently White was attracted to a more deserving way to wrap up the game.

19 ♙f7+?? ♗xf7 20 e6+ ♗f8



21 ♘xe7

The whole point of White’s grandstand finish hinged on 21...♗xe7 22 exd7+ ♗f7 (22...♗d8 23 ♙g5+ ♗c7 24 ♚e5 mate) 23 ♚c4+ ♗g6 24 ♙d6+ ♗h7 25 ♙h6+! gxh6 26 ♚f7 mate.



This is spectacular stuff, and the kind we all dream of. It is also impressive to spot the conclusion eight or so moves in advance.

Unfortunately, Sveshnikov, himself a creative player, had read another script, and found a big improvement.

21...♘f6!

And the game began another phase (White, apparently, was lucky to later escape with perpetual check).

Given that Tal’s expected reply to 21 ♘xe7 brings Black’s king closer to the enemy forces, allows White to take a knight with check and, in the process, invites him to establish a useful pawn on the seventh rank(!), then Sveshnikov’s alternative should hardly come as a surprise (even allowing for the fork on g6; by now Black has a rook for two pawns and White is running out of artillery). But White’s priorities after 18...♖e8, when Black was effectively a sitting duck, were no longer in securing the win, rather the most appropriate win in terms of a consistent, worthy follow-up to the cavalier theme he started on the 12th move. Damsky writes the following: ‘Thus the simplest way to win is in fact the truth. Therefore we can and must criticise the former world champion: at the board he saw a win, and he chased after something more spectacular quite deliberately...’

CHAPTER TWELVE

Expect the Unexpected

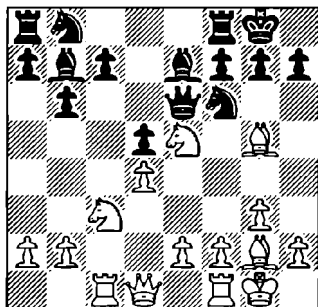
There is no rule that says we must play only sensible looking moves. Indeed chess is so rich in possibilities that just about every game will have an unusual feature – whether played or hidden away in an alternative scenario – that came as a surprise to one of the players. And when the unexpected is also very strong the game tends to end right there. Consequently it is worth keeping your eyes peeled for unpleasant surprises before they actually happen.

The strong retreat

In the following position White, with a slight pull thanks to his development lead and pressure against the centre, has just played 11 ♖c1 .

Spassky-Korchnoi
World Championship Zonal,
Moscow 1964

Note how White's advanced knight both monitors key squares and leaves the g2-bishop unhindered. The threat is 12 ♘b5 , against which Black must play the unattractive 11...c6. Korchnoi – never one to turn down an aggressive continuation, even as Black – naturally goes for the more forcing option.



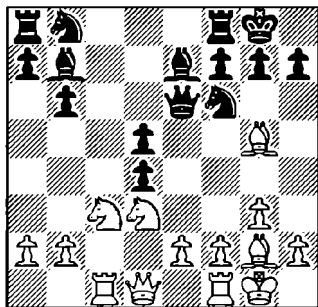
11...c5?

White's appropriate candidate moves now are 12 e3 and 12 f4 in order to maintain the influential outpost on e5.

12 ♘d3 !

At this level this unexpected retreat (which even ignores the challenge to d4) is almost decisive. The e5-square was such a good spot that the notion of the knight looking for fresh pastures can easily be overlooked. The point of dropping back is to pile more pressure on the d5-pawn, which is currently protected by the queen, bishop and knight. Meanwhile White threatens to also bring to three the number of attackers, and he can eliminate a defender with ♙xf6 .

12...cxd4

**13 ♖xf6**

13 ♖f4 ♜e5 14 ♖xf6 is also good, but not 14 ♖xd5?! ♖xd5 15 ♖xe7? (15 ♖xd5 is level) 15...♖xf4! 16 ♖xb7 ♖xe2+.

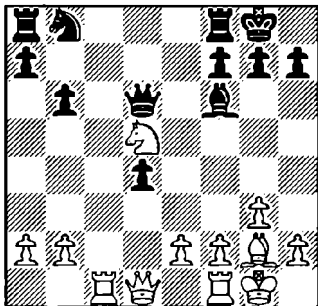
13...♖xf6

After 13...dxc3 14 ♖xc3 ♖d6 Black has a miserable position due to a genuinely weak isolated pawn and the harmony and flexibility of White's forces. For example White could rob Black of his only decent minor piece with 15 ♖b4 ♖xb4 16 ♖xb4 (16...♖d8 17 ♖c7 etc.) or begin the middlegame torture with 15 e3.

The game continuation rules out any long-winded unpleasantness for Black.

14 ♖xd5! ♖xd5 15 ♖f4 ♖d6

15...♖xg2 16 ♖xe6 ♖xf1 17 ♖xf8 ♖h3 is futile: 18 ♜d3 ♖xf8 19 ♜e4 and Black comes unstuck on the long diagonal.

16 ♖xd5

Black continues to suffer on the long diagonal, the prospect of a deadly discovery being impossible to properly address. He should have settled for 11...c6.

16...♖g5

16...♖d8 17 ♖f4.

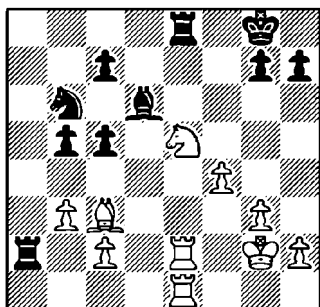
**17 f4 ♖d8 18 ♖c3! ♖e6 19 ♖xa8 ♜b8
20 ♖d5 ♜xa8 21 ♜xd4 ♖c5 22 b4 ♖e6
23 ♜d3 ♜e8 24 e4 1-0**

Timing

Some unexpected moves are, in fact, quite simple. Rather it is the timing that is unexpected because the blunderer believes he has just played a move to which replies are restricted.

Santo Roman-Spasky

French Teams Cup Final, Paris 2002



White, to move, is doing fine, with the healthier pawn majority and centralised forces. Black's rook has just arrived on a2, a harmless incursion that could be sensibly met with 35 ♜f3, when 35...♖d5 36 ♖a1 ♜e8 37 c4 is level.

Instead White, with a firm grip on the e5-outpost, prefers to address his opponent's token queenside activity.

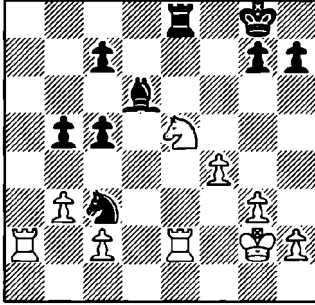
35 ♜a1??

The point is to either remove an enemy rook or lure the other over (after ...♜e8) and away from the centre (when White can even bring his king to e4); the e1-square is also

free for the bishop to take up a post on f2 if appropriate.

35...♖d5! 0-1

Black plays neither of the supposedly forced options, winning immediately because the bishop is attacked and 36 ♖xa2 ♖xc3 produces the following amusing position:



Black's winning move was far from mysterious or shocking, and even appears in a simple analysis of the initial diagram position. But we have a habit of putting such possibilities on hold when another, specific element of the game needs addressing.

Heavy pieces – heavy blows

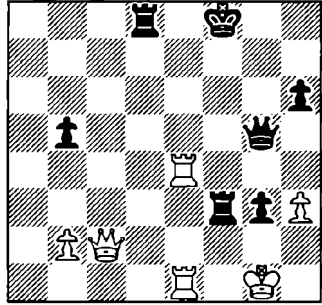
As the game progresses and pawns and pieces are cleared away the major pieces become more involved. And as the range of these big hitters increases, so does their punching power. Consequently it pays to monitor open lines more closely once the major pieces come into their own if we are to reduce the probability of blunders surfacing.

Bologan-Akopian

FIDE Grand Prix, Moscow 2002

White (to move) is a pawn down but there are more pieces remaining than pawns and Black's king is exposed, so drawing prospects look positive. In fact in the diagram position the best continuation is 47 ♖c6 with the threat of ♖e8+. After 47...♖f7 48 ♖e8+ ♖xe8

49 ♖xe8+ ♖g7 50 ♖c3+ ♖f6 (50...♖f6 51 ♖xg3+) 51 ♖c7+ the checks cancel out the pawn deficit.



47 ♖e5?

The '?' is there only in the context of White's coming mistake, although it does damage White's drawing chances.

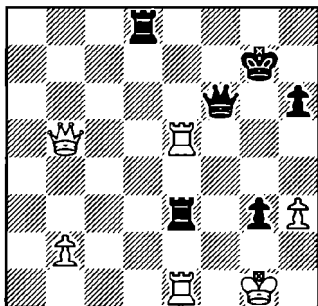
47...♖f6 48 ♖c5+ ♖g7 49 ♖xb5??

White certainly wouldn't have placed the queen on b5 were the square empty, so the sole purpose of the text is to level the points score. But this is not the kind of situation that justifies taking time out to take a pawn. Moreover, White's means of earning the draw revolve around harassing Black's king, a strategy to which ♖xb5 contributes nothing. The logical course is 49 ♖c7+ which, in fact, not only takes the move away from Black but also gives him an opportunity to go wrong with 49...♖g6? 50 ♖e6 ♖f1+ 51 ♖f1 ♖xe6 52 ♖xd8 (unlikely, perhaps, yet there all the same). This leaves 49...♖f8 when White can try 50 ♖5e4! followed by relocating the rook on g4, or head for the safer waters of a sober ending with 50 ♖c5+ ♖g8 51 ♖e6 ♖f1+ 52 ♖xf1 ♖xe6 53 ♖f5 ♖xf5 54 ♖xf5 ♖d1+ 55 ♖g2 ♖d2+ 56 ♖xg3 ♖xb2 57 h4.

49...♖e3!!

The impudent rook is immune as its capture allows mate in two with ...♖f2+. Note that however brilliant Black's move is, he didn't need to have found it several moves earlier because White's blunder kindly threat-

ened nothing immediate, thus giving Black the time to have a fresh look at the position for something positive which, given the capabilities of the pieces involved, is by no means unrealistic. We can expect the unexpected winner here more than would be the case, for example, in a knight ending with a couple of slow pawns each.



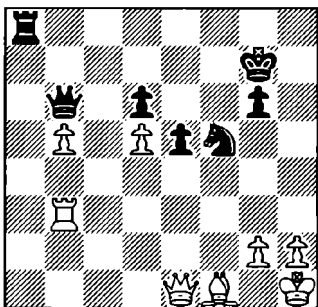
50 ♖b7+ ♜h8 ...0-1, 53

Nothing has changed and White must lose a rook.

Ranks and Files

Concentrating on his passed pawn and back rank causes Karpov to walk into a trap.

Karpov-Taimanov
Leningrad 1977



White is a passed pawn up with no worries. Black logs on to swindle mode.

36...♖d4

Big pieces make uncomfortable blockaders, but the queen was keeping the pawn at bay nonetheless.

37 b6? ♖a1

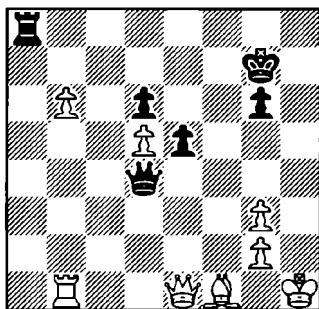
We can assume that White had considered this move but that he had concentrated mainly on 37...♖xd5, when 38 ♖c3 ♖b8 39 ♖c7+ ♜f6 (39...♜h8? 40 ♖c3! ♖d1 41 ♖h3+ ♖h5 42 ♖xh5+ gxh5 43 b7) 40 ♖c4 ♖d4 41 ♖f7+ ♜g5 42 ♖c1+ ♖f4 43 ♖xf4+ ♜xf4 44 b7 e4 45 ♜g1 looks a terribly difficult position for Black.

38 ♖b1??

Losing immediately, but the game has already gone pear-shaped from White's point of view, e.g. 38 ♖e2 ♖xd5 39 ♖d3 (39 ♖f3 ♜d4) 39...♜d4 40 ♖f2 ♖c4, or 38...♖c5!? 39 b7 (39 ♖h3 ♜d4 40 ♖f2 [40 ♖d3 e4] 40...♖b5) 39...♖c2.

38...♜g3+! 0-1

39 ♖xg3 ♖xb1 40 ♖f3 e4 41 ♖e2 ♖d3 is hopeless, and 39 hxg3 – after seeing White's problems on the back rank – invites a nice, long switch over to the newly exposed h-file with the backward move 39...♖a8

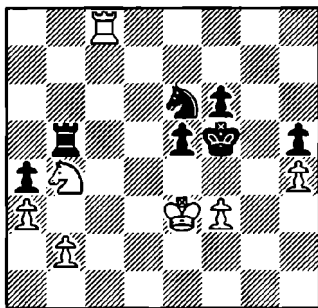


Beware the immobile piece!

There is no excuse for Black's blunder in the following example. Instead of holding firm for the draw (against Tal, which I would have thought was a sensible approach) he manages to engineer a ridiculous help-mate in an ending, and with his king fairly centralised.

Tal-Averkin

USSR Championship, Moscow 1973



In this level ending Black has just dropped his knight back from c5 to e6, perhaps planning to trade rooks by threatening to activate with ...♞c5.

68 ♖a8

Forcing the knight to return to c5 to protect the a4-pawn, when a draw is the likely result as White's knight is also tied down.

68...♞c5?

Black is still looking to improve his rook.

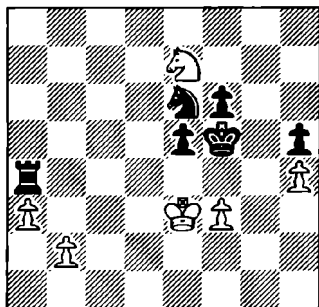
69 ♖xa4 ♞c4??

69...♔d4 is a lesser evil, although the extra pawn is significant at this stage. But Black's rook now threatens h4, this time pinning the

knight along the rank in order to slow White down.

70 ♕d5! 1-0

That must have been a nasty surprise. An amusing final position results after 70...♞xa4 71 ♕e7 mate



One knight is enough. Unfortunately for Black preventing mate with 70...♞c7 merely postpones defeat as 71 ♕xc7 ♕xc7 leaves Black's helpless knight facing two (connected) passed pawns. What is interesting about this blunder is that White's knight (with Black's on c5) was pinned to the b-pawn and Black, understandably, continued to believe it would be rooted to the spot because the next pin was to a rook.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Typical Blunders

Most games are lost, not won.

Charles 'Casey' Stengel (1890-1975), US baseball player and manager.

This chapter features a selection of typical blunders that are common amongst club players (and by no means uncommon with those who some would think are above making elementary mistakes!). Some examples are genuine mistakes, while others are the result of a bad habit.

Castling

'Castle because you will or because you must – but not because you can' are very wise words I once read somewhere. As soon as we have learned the basic principles we are taught to get the king to safety, to connect the rooks and so on. There is no shortage of examples of the dangers of leaving the king in the centre for too long etc. Of course we should concern ourselves with the well-being of the king, but not to the point where castling becomes automatic.

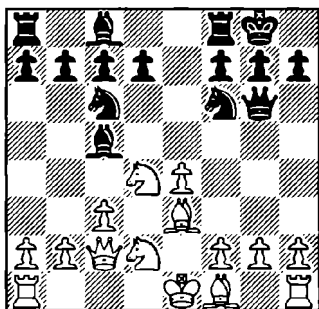
1 e4 e5 2 f3 c6 3 d4 exd4 4 Qxd4
xc5 5 e3

Threatening 6 Qxc6 and 7 e5, but Black doesn't fall for this.

5...Wf6 6 c3

6 Qxc6? e3.

6...Wg6 7 Qd2 Qf6 8 Wc2 0-0??



'Castle ...not because you can' would certainly be good advice here.

9 Qxc6!

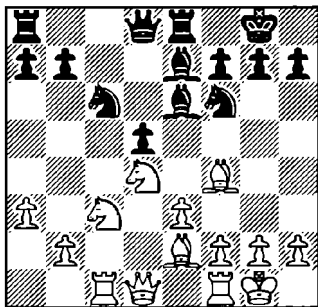
And White wins a piece for nothing as this time 9...e3 loses the queen to 10 Qe7+ with a deadly fork.

The natural blunder

We can't be pleased with any kind of blunder, but playing a perfectly natural move based on understanding – even skill – only to find after the opponent's reply that it loses is particularly annoying. Some players make mistakes on what seems a regular basis, while here we are, applying experience and natural

talent to a standard, pure position and paying the price for our knowledge of where the pieces should go. Where's the justice? Of course, regardless of what looks appropriate, in any given situation the characteristics must be afforded a collective uniqueness in our deliberations. Furthermore, what is considered by some as an unfortunate blunder that in normal circumstances would be a good move or plan might be seen as inexcusable by others.

M. Gurevich-San Segundo
New York Open 1998



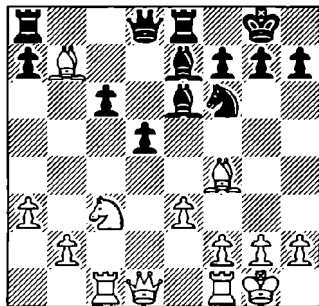
Here we have a typical Queen's Gambit Declined 'IQP' situation in which Black's compensation for the potential target on d5 comes in decent development and a fairly solid set-up. White's knight has just arrived on d4, and while Qxc6 shouldn't be a problem as $\dots\text{fxe6}$ strengthens Black's centre, the capture on c6 is a more thematic idea because the new c-pawn might require some help. After $13\dots\text{Wd7}$ 14 b5 Bac8 15 Wa4 White has a clear advantage, so Donev suggests $13\dots\text{Qxd4}$ 14 Wxd4 Wa5 and $13\dots\text{bd6}$ 14 bxd6 Wxd6 15 Qcb5 We5! with an edge for White in both cases.

13...Bc8?

Bringing the last piece into play. Instead Black opted to leave his queen at home for the time being, preferring to address the c6-square with the most logical looking move.

14 Qxc6

But here Black resigned. Unfortunately after 14 Qxc6 bxc6 ($14\dots\text{Bxc6}$ 15 ab5) White has 15 a6 , when $15\dots\text{Ba8}$ meets with 16 ab7 and the rook is trapped:



How could Black, a strong GM, walk into this mess? The chief reason in this case is through stereotyped play in an ostensibly safe position. At this level, during the opening phase, and in a traditionally sober line, Black merely continued in conventional fashion. He believed he was improving his worst placed piece while anticipating a change in the pawn structure – quite a logical approach.

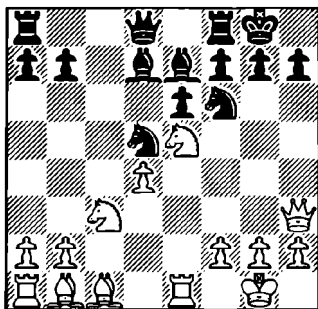
Far from being mistake-free, a GM is in some respects at least as likely as a lesser player to make this kind of blunder. It is rare for GM versus GM encounters to end like this, years of experience at a high level of competition gradually relegating to low priority the possibility of giving away material in very familiar, calm waters. In unusual circumstances or tricky openings there is a conscious effort to look out for potholes but here Black's analysis – what little there might have been – concerned positional aspects.

A much weaker but nevertheless decent club player, on the other hand, used to being on the wrong side of blunders yet less used to conducting the early middlegame with a view to weighing up structure and long-term strategy, would approach the position in the initial diagram quite differently. This time he

would consider the merits of $14... \text{♖c8}$ but – unable (or lacking the confidence) to automatically appreciate the various strategic implications, try to investigate all possibilities, including obvious attacking moves such as 15 ♕a6 . As we improve we notice that more and more choices arrived at automatically are actually rather good, but this does mean we are leaving behind such mundane necessities as scanning the board for the opposition's unsubtle but unpleasant moves. The stronger the player, the more embarrassing are the elementary mistakes, as titled players are occasionally reminded.

More natural thinking

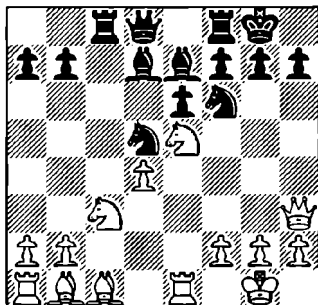
The diagram position is a typical isolated queen's pawn scenario in which White prefers to keep the pieces on the board to facilitate the exploitation of his space advantage and more active forces, whereas Black puts his faith in his structural superiority, focusing on maintaining a firm hold of the centre.



These 'IQP' positions can be reached via a number of different openings and defences and, consequently, feature countless common characteristics. Here Black's minor pieces seem to be sensibly posted and d5 is well monitored. White has just played ♞h3 to add pressure to the h7-pawn, which is adequately defended. Nevertheless, when a queen and bishop combine to threaten a would-be mate the alarm bells should make

some kind of warning, if only to remind us to be extra circumspect. But ♞h3 is not unusual in these positions and h7 is covered, so Black can turn to the queenside in order to continue in thematic fashion.

14... ♖c8??



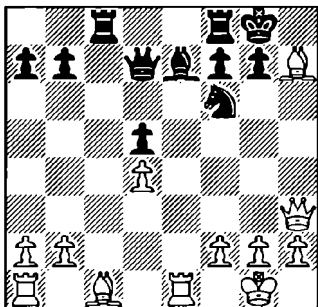
With the d4-pawn not going anywhere and therefore nothing happening on the d-file Black often seeks to generate play on the c-file, and the c8-square for the rook is no less standard in these positions than any of White's postings (even the b1-bishop is logically placed, as we will soon see). However, conventional methods of handling this kind of position by Black are $14... \text{♟xc3}$ (inviting White to accept another imperfect centre after bxc3); and $14... \text{♙c6}$, when Black should not be the least bit worried about ♟xc6 as the new c6-pawn cements his grip on d5. So we have (at least) three very natural moves available to Black. Unfortunately the text loses immediately.

15 ♖xd5! exd5 16 ♖xd7

Black's light-squared was poorly placed after all in this specific example. The problem is the overloaded knight, which is tied to the defence of h7. Now we see why both $14... \text{♟xc3}$ (ruling out ♟xd5) or $14... \text{♙c6}$ (supporting d5) is called for.

16... ♞xd7 17 ♙xh7+!

Even when the knight defends h7 it cannot now help as taking the bishop drops the queen.



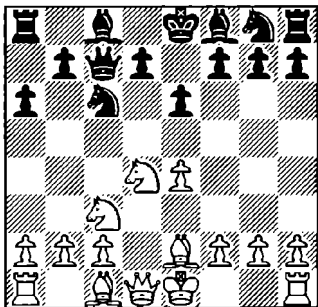
17...♙h8 18 ♖f5+

Even familiar situations and themes should be handled with care. While 'Player A' might claim that losing like this is unlucky and that he has automatically played moves such as ...♞c8 in similar circumstances before without any problems, 'Player B' could just as easily reply that, as far as he is concerned, White's winning method here is also a natural possibility with the given respective set-ups.

Context

Witness the following.

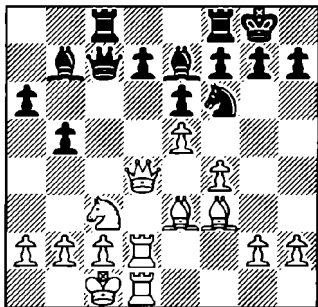
1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 ♘c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♗xd4
a6 5 ♘c3 e6 6 ♖e2 ♛c7



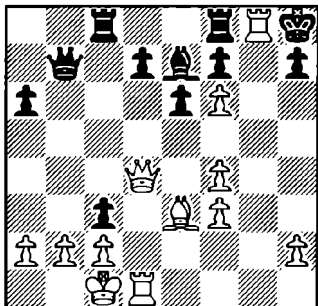
A key feature of the Taimanov Sicilian is Black's use of the c-file, characterised by an early posting of the queen on c7 and the quick mobilisation of the queenside forces.

7 f4 ♗xd4 8 ♛xd4 ♖e7

Heading for a tempo-gaining ...♗c6, but theory prefers the immediate 8...b5, when 9 ♖e3 ♖b7 10 0-0-0 ♞c8 11 ♗d2 ♖f6 brings about a position that could spell trouble for the careless or easily confused after 12 ♖f3 ♖e7 13 ♗hd1 0-0 14 e5



Both sides have been busy accumulating the forces for combat, and the time has come to cross the fourth rank. Black has concentrated on the c-file, while White has combined the initially defensively oriented ♗d2 with pressure of his own on the d-file. Whereas e4-e5 is White's aggressive advance, Black has ...b5-b4 ready. Ehlvest-Andersson, Belfort 1988 continued 14...♖xf3? 15 gxf3 b4? 16 exf6 bxc3 17 ♞g2! with a decisive advantage for White that culminated in 17...♛b7 18 ♞xg7+ ♙h8 19 ♞g8+! 1-0



Now 19...♙xg8 20 ♞g1+ ♙h8 21 fxe7+ f6

22 exf8 ♖+ ♜xf8 leaves Black a piece down for nothing, while 19... ♜xg8 leads to forced mate after 20 fxe7+ ♜g7 21 ♜g1 ♜xb2+ 22 ♜d1 ♜b1+ 23 ♜c1 etc.

The correct way for Black to play is 14...b4!, when it is White who needs to avoid the banana skin: 15 exf6? (15 ♘a4 ♜xf3 16 gxh3 ♘d5 17 ♘b6 is unclear) 15...bxc3 and there is no open g-file, Hector-Cramling, Valby 1991 giving Black too big a lead after 16 ♜xc3 ♜xc3! 17 fxe7 ♜xe3.

This is obviously a tricky variation, and we see that the c-file is indeed a key factor, ...♜c8 being an essential part of Black's set-up. Remember this.

9 ♜e3 b5

The immediate 9...♘c6 leaves Black rather cramped after 10 ♜b6.

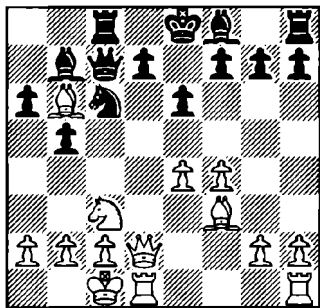
10 0-0-0 ♘c6

Compared with the line discussed in the note to Black's 8th move, where Black chose f6 for the knight, here ...♘c6 has forced White's queen to retreat from the centre.

11 ♜d2 ♜b7 12 ♜f3 ♜c8??

And here it is. For the moment the knight obstructs the queen and rook but from c6 (rather than f6) at least more force can be given to Black's queenside with ...♘a5, when c4 beckons. Anyway that's the plan. There's just one very major flaw.

13 ♜b6!



Unfortunately for Black the present collection of pieces on the queenside means that

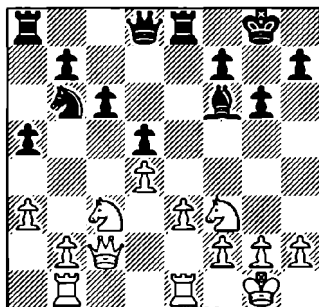
the conventionally thematic, even desirable arrival of the rook on c8 takes away from the queen the only retreat square. Consequently Black can kiss any hopes of an offensive down the c-file goodbye for 13...♜xb6 allows mate on d7.

Spot the threat

Always check to see if the opponent's previous move introduced a new threat.

Almeida-Abreu

Cuban Championship, Holguin City 2002



We have here a typically peaceful Queen's Gambit Declined scenario in which the exchange of two pairs of minor pieces has practically done away with any hopes White might have had of causing his opponent problems in the middlegame. But in ten moves Black will resign.

16... ♜g7 17 h4!?

Black's previous move cannot be criticised because this thrust should not give White anything, but by leaving the bishop on f6 Black could have avoided what follows and, in doing so, denied his opponent the facility to alter the flavour of the game.

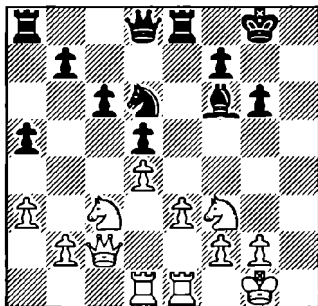
17... ♘c4

17...h5 can be considered, although there was no reason for Black to fix his kingside.

18 h5 ♘d6

18...gxh5 serves only to compromise the king's defensive wall.

19 hxg6 hxg6 20 ♖bd1 ♗f6



It is ironic that Black's anticipation of the newly opened h-file is to become the major factor in his undoing.

21 g3 ♕g7 22 ♕g2 ♛d7 23 ♖h1 ♖f5

23...♖h8 looks sensible and safe.

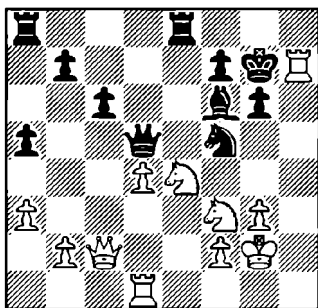
24 e4

A necessary opening up of the centre in order to bring another piece within range of the kingside.

24...dxe4 25 ♖xe4 ♛d5??

Black has managed to transfer his knight over to the kingside and now he seeks to make maximum use of the queen by posting it on the same diagonal as White's king. However, 25...♛e7 would have been a more sober option.

26 ♖h7+! 1-0



The end. Capture of the rook allows a nasty fork on f6. You may have noticed that

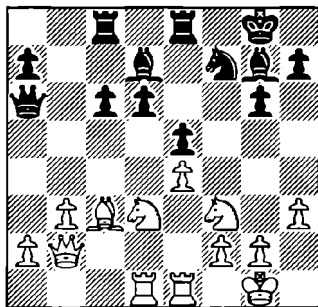
when White recaptured on e4 he had already introduced the threat of ♖h7+ thanks to the location of Black's queen on d7. So what was Black thinking when he moved the queen to the other danger square? Presumably he did consider the significance of the knight's arrival on e4, but only in terms of the 'threat' to displace Black's king with ♖xf6, or the relocation on c5. But the geometry of the position after ♖xe4 should have set the alarm bells ringing, and even this failure in the warning process would not have mattered had Black automatically looked at the check on h7, just to make sure...

Scan the board

Because the playing area in chess is quite small considering the number of pieces involved it is imperative that we constantly monitor all sectors, even if it seems that only one part of the board is relevant for one reason or another.

Akopian-Ponomarev

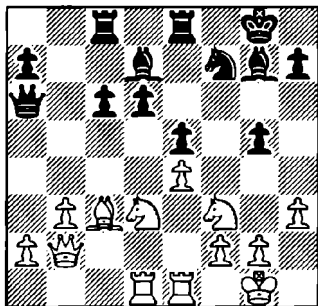
FIDE Grand Prix, Moscow 2002



White has just retreated the knight from a potentially menacing outpost on f4 ('safe' from capture in view of the pin on the long diagonal) to the ostensibly awkward d3-square. Consequently Black took the opportunity to exploit what he saw as a semi-closed, stable centre by stepping up the pace on the kingside...

21...g5??

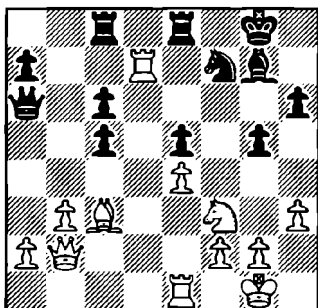
Unfortunately for Ponomarev there was indeed a genuine threat on the other flank.



22 ♖c5!

A deadly fork in view of Black's inability to drop the queen back to defend the bishop.

22...dxc5 23 ♜xd7 h6



The price for Black's failure to even scan the queenside for threats is severe, with scattered, weak pawns, poor pieces (the bishop is terrible) and an unwelcome visitor on d7.

24 ♖ed1 ♖e6 25 ♘d2

Another effective plan is 25 ♘e1! with a view to hitting the c5-pawn, e.g. 25...♜ce8 26 ♘d3 ♙f8 and now the arrival of a second knight on d3 facilitates the transfer of the queen to the kingside with 27 ♜e2. The text is aimed, quite sensibly, at practically forcing Black to part with his knight, thus leaving the sorry piece on g7.

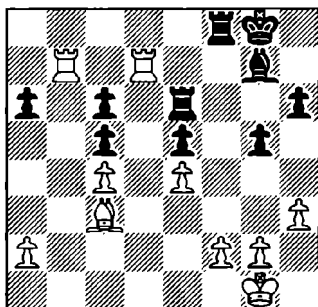
25...♘d6 26 ♘c4! ♘xc4 27 bxc4 ♜f8

27...♜xc4? loses to 28 ♜b7.

28 ♜b7

With such a dominating position White has other options, but this seems simplest.

28...♜xb7 29 ♜xb7 a6 30 ♜dd7



Black's situation is hopeless and White went on to convert the ending. What is striking in this example is the speed with which Black's position deteriorates. When we joined the game it was quite playable, but a careless error led to the disastrous plight above in a mere ten moves.

The dangers of 'automatically' attacking an enemy piece

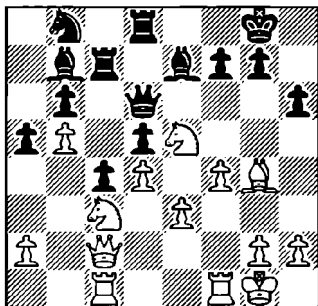
Being faced with a well advanced, well posted enemy piece can be a bit of a conundrum. A good outpost can form the foundation of an attack or simply make our own manoeuvres difficult. The best remedy is usually to challenge that piece, either trading it off or inviting a retreat. Another option is to attack the piece with a pawn, which might well do the trick but can also create a weakness far more serious than the initial problem.

Zvjaginsev-Kasimdzhanov

Essen 2002

White's key player here is clearly the well supported e5-knight, which monitors both

flanks and generally keeps an eye on several important squares. Whether it actually contributes to a concrete, effective plan is another matter. Perhaps White might look to the kingside for an attack, bringing the rook into play to g3 via f3. But it doesn't look like Black should be concerned just yet. At the moment Black is unable to contest e5 with ... Qd7 because White has d7 covered with two minor pieces, so Dautov suggests the logical 23... Qc8 . Of course Black would be more than happy to see these bishops removed, while after 24 Qf3 he can simply return with 24... Qb7 , defending d5 and renewing the threat of ... Qd7 . Instead Black was sufficiently worried to take more forceful action.



23...f6??

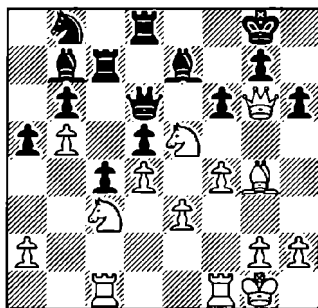
Rather than passively move to and fro, and perhaps unwilling to replace White's advanced knight with an advanced pawn (in the case of a future ... Qd7xe5 , f4/d4xe5), Black makes a no-nonsense threat. The price is the creation of a hole on g6, but Black will have made sure that 24 Qg6 achieves nothing despite sending the knight further forward. Black can also look forward to targeting the backward e3-pawn.

24 Qg6! 1-0

So much for forcing White to give ground. It transpires that giving away g6 is indeed a big mistake. The arrival of the queen instead of the knight is decisive, and the

knight is taboo, 24 Qg6 fxe5 25 Qe6+ Qh8 26 fxe5 Qa3 27 Qf5 leading to forced mate, e.g. 27... Qg8 28 Qh7+ Qf8 (28... Qf7 29 Qe6+ Qxe6 30 Qf5 mate) 29 Qe6+ Qf6 30 Qg8+ Qe7 31 Qf7 mate.

Nor does 24... Qf8 help Black as 25 Qf5 fxe5 26 Qh7+ Qf7 27 fxe5 wins White a queen or king: 27... Qa3 (27... Qe7 28 Qe6+) 28 Qg6+ Qg8 29 Qb1 etc.



With most of his pieces over on the queenside Black should have given special attention to anything involving a compromise of his kingside cover. Returning to the point where we joined the game, let us imagine that White's e5-knight was somewhere less threatening, with Black having no worries at all. Would Black then seriously consider playing the odd looking ...f7-f6? No, of course not. So the next time you're contemplating an irrevocable pawn move with the sole purpose of attacking an annoying piece, think about whether the same move would be a good idea from a structural point of view.

In the following example White comes unstuck after being attracted to the bonus of gaining a tempo by 'improving' his king while attacking an enemy intruder.

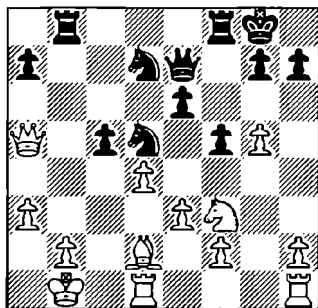
Gelfand-Kramnik

European Club Cup, Berlin 1996

(see following diagram)

Black has just sacrificed a pawn in order

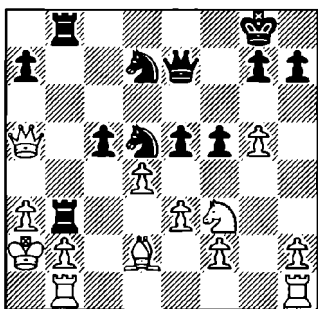
to open a line of attack on the b-file.



20...Bb3 21 Qa2?

'Perhaps the decisive mistake' – Kramnik. Killing two birds with one stone. It certainly makes sense to vacate the b-file and it is natural to want to limit Black's choices. However, had he looked closer at the implications of the potentially more exposed a2-square as a haven for the king, White would have used a1, e.g. 21 Qa1 c4 (threatening 22...c3) 22 Rcl Bc8 23 Qc3, when Kramnik recommends 23...Qb8! in order to increase pressure with ...Qc6. Even 24 Qe5 Qc6 25 Qxc6 Bxc6 maintains the momentum.

21...Bfb8 22 Bb1 e5!



With the focus on the queenside White might have been busy with 22...c4, but the text opens up a new front, Black being quick to spot the downside to Qa2 – the e-pawn makes way for ...We6.

23 Qhc1

23 dxe5 Qxe5 24 Qxe5 We5 25 Qc3 Qxc3+ 26 bxc3 We4 wins in view of 27 Bxb3 Wc2+ 28 Qa1 Wxb3 with mate to follow.

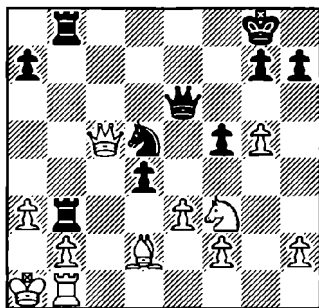
23...We6

By lining up his queen against White's king Black introduces the threat of 24...Qc3, 25...Bxb2+ and 26...Wa2 mate. White must have wished he'd settled for 21 Qa1 now because his next is forced.

24 Qa1 exd4 25 Qxc5

A last chance to rock the boat.

25...Qxc5 26 Wxc5



White's idea is to meet 26...dxe3 with 27 Qd4, but Black has bigger game in his sights.

26...Qc3!

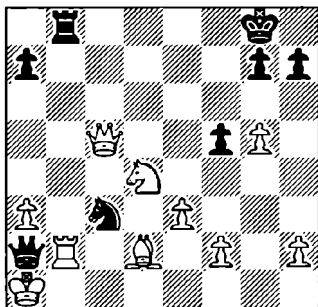
The winner.

27 Qxd4

The alternative 27 Qxc3 dxc3 can't save White: 28 Qd4 cxb2+ 29 Qa2 Bxa3+ 30 Qxa3 Wa6+, or 29 Bxb2 Bxb2 30 Qxe6 Bb1+ 31 Qa2 Bb2 mate.

27...Bxb2! 28 Bxb2 Wa2+ 0-1

'The first purely problem-like mate in my career. I myself liked it...' – Kramnik. So, when addressing the safety of the king – particularly in cases of castling on opposite flanks – try to minimise the lines on which it might come under pressure. In this example, with queens still on the board, White would not normally choose a2 over a1, but the apparent gain of tempo clouded his judgement.

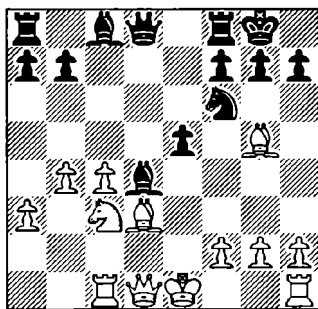


The automatic reply

As well as randomly hitting a piece having serious consequences, the equally automatic reply is another bad habit.

Rustemov-Lugovoi

Russian Championship,
St Petersburg 1998



Here the bishop has just landed on g5 because it was hit by ...e6-e5, Black freeing the c8-bishop and supporting its partner by clamping down on d4.

14...h6

Yet another immediate reaction to the pin.

15 ♖h4??

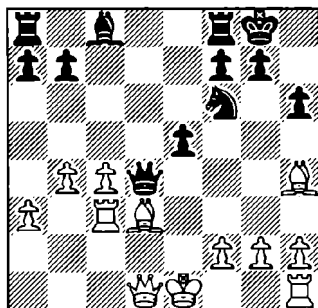
Pins, of course, are useful for us and a cause of inconvenience for the opponent, so unless there is something to be gained by taking on f6 in this kind of position the text

is a typically natural response. White will have concluded that with Black's all-seeing bishop making its presence felt in the middle of the board it would be a concession to surrender the guardian of the dark squares, upon which much looks like happening and where Black already enjoys more control. Perhaps Rustemov didn't much like 15 ♖xf6 ♜xf6 16 ♜d2, while the otherwise desirable 16 0-0? ♖xc3 17 ♜xc3 e4! is a poor advert for helping Black's queen.

Anyway, throwing in these two moves shouldn't alter anything other than perhaps compromise Black's kingside, so the ball is once again in Black's court. Let him deal with the pin or find something constructive to do...

15...♖xc3+ 0-1

Black wins a piece after 16 ♜xc3 ♜d4



The fork exploits a crucial difference in geometry thanks to the hapless bishop on h4. There were two important reasons why simply dropping the bishop back to h4 was the automatic choice here. White wanted to maintain the pin, thus effectively tying down both Black's queen and knight, and he was averse to handing over the dark squares, no doubt being particularly conscious of its opposite number firmly entrenched on d4. In fact the bishop is so perfectly placed in the centre that White might have been unable to contemplate d4 being used for another piece for a long time to come. In any case he failed

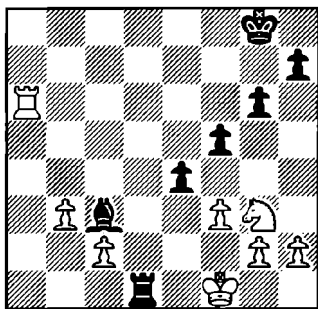
to make the distinction between maintaining a pin and maintaining a whole position, and was guilty of routine play.

The 50-50

When faced with a choice between only two moves, it is always possible to choose the wrong one...

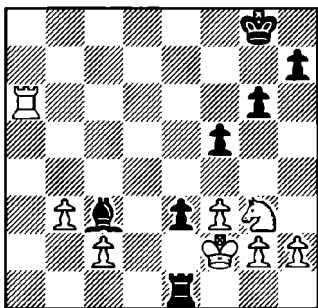
Kozakov-Maksimenko

Lvov 2001



Resigned to the fact that he is about to lose his c-pawn, White should send his king to e3, and after 39 ♔f2 ♕d2+ 40 ♖e3 exf3 41 gxf3 ♜xc2 (41... ♜xh2 42 ♕e2 ♖e1 looks risky) 42 ♖d3 ♜c1 43 ♜c6 ♖d2 44 ♜xc1 ♖xc1 45 b4 ♖f7 he is not worse.

39 ♖e2?? ♖e1+! 40 ♖f2 e3 mate



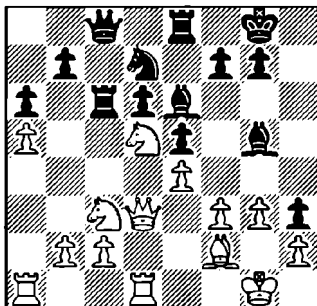
The forgotten piece

In the following position, nobody can argue

with the fact that White is in control, thanks mainly to the iron grip on the influential d5-square – a perfect outpost for a knight (accentuating the weakness on b6).

Bologan-Karyakin

Pamplona 2003



23 ♖b4?? ♖c4

White's queen has nowhere to hide. While clearly a terrible oversight by the extremely talented GM (FIDE rating: 2673), we could put it down to the knight on d5 having such a restrictive effect on Black's pieces that ... ♖c4 – hitherto not even legal – was simply unavailable as far as White was concerned. Moreover, the c4-square was an option for the rook before as well as now, so hitting the rook with ♖b4 can make ... ♜c4 seem like the only alternative to ... ♜c7.

Incidentally the game continued 24 ♕xc6 ♖xd3 25 ♖a7 ♜b8 26 ♜xd3 ♕c5 27 ♜dd1 ♕e6 (27... ♜xa7? 28 b4) 28 ♖d5 ♖d4 29 ♜xd4 exd4 30 ♖xd4 f5 31 c3 ♜d8 0-1

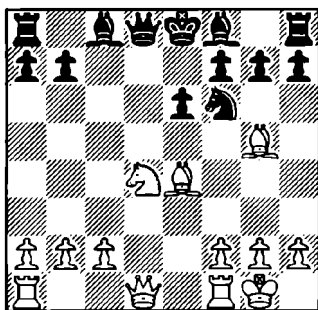
Opening theory – thinking is allowed

We can't expect to survive long at the board – at any level of competition – without learning at least a modest amount of opening theory. As we accumulate more and more information, build a repertoire and gain in experience there is a danger that we occasionally log on to 'auto' mode during the opening

phase. If we get into the habit of relying too much on memory rather than taking a little time to actually consider the position in front of us we are sure to come unstuck eventually. And it happens to the world's top players.

Svidler-Bareev
 Wijk aan Zee 2004
French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Qc3 dx e4 4 Qxe4
 Qd7 5 Qf3 Qg6 6 Qd3 c5 7 0-0 Qxe4
 8 Qxe4 Qf6 9 Qg5 cxd4 10 Qxd4



Svidler has been in this position before, Svidler-Izoria, Bled 2002 continuing 10... Qc5 11 c3 h6 12 Qxf6 Wxf6 13 Wa4+ Qd7 14 Wc4 Qxd4 15 cxd4 Qc8 16 Wb4 Qc6 17 Qxc6+ bxc6 18 Wb7 0-0 19 Wxa7 Qf8 20 Qfd1 c5 21 dxc5 Wxb2 22 h3 with a draw. Since the average club player is keen on preparing for opponents these days, we can safely assume that Bareev was well aware of this game.

10...h6?

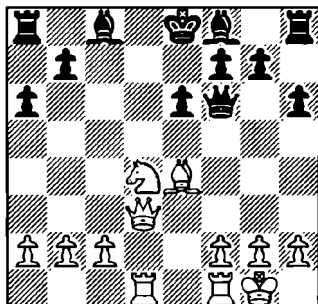
It appears that Black simply forgot to preface the text with ... Qc5 .

11 Qxf6 Wxf6 12 Wd3 !

The difference between this and 10... Qc5 11 c3 is that in the earlier game Black gained an important tempo on the knight, whereas here he must lose a tempo due to the blunt but genuine threat of Wb5+ . Already trailing by a good three developing moves, this is

seriously bad news for Black.

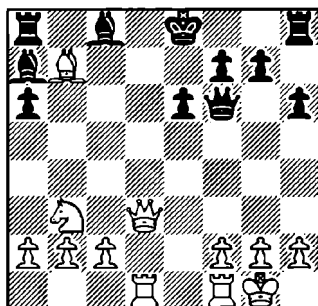
12...a6 13 Qad1



Black is on the ropes.

13... Qe7

I read somewhere that now 13... Qc5 14 Qb3 Qa7 runs into 15 Qa5 , but I guess the point behind Qad1 is to set up nasty surprises such as the decisive 15 Qxb7 !

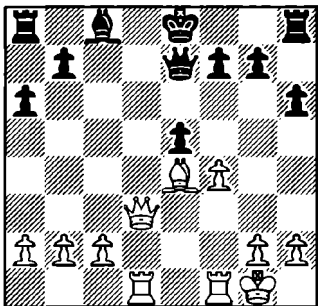


There's no doubt Bareev will have seen this line, but what compounds his predicament is that the damage has been done and there is nothing he can do to rectify the problem. The text is safer but still fails to hold back the tide thanks to White's total command of the situation.

14 Qc6 ! e5

Desperate times call for desperate measures, although Black's plan is doomed to fail. Black would like to send his king to safety with 14...0-0 but then 15 Qxe7+ Wxe7 16

♖d6 ♗xd6 17 ♜xd6 sees White maintain both the development lead and the bind.
15 ♔xg7 ♗xg7 16 f4!



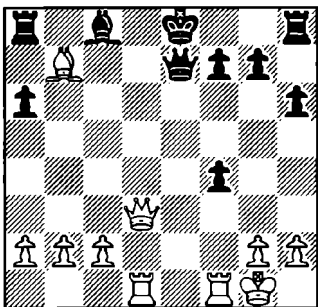
Black is teetering on the brink, so White refuses to slow down. Black's best is 16...0-0, when 17 ♗e3! is strong, the point being that 17...exf4?? drops the queen to 18 ♖h7+, leaving 17...♔g4 18 ♜d2, e.g. 18...♜ad8 19 ♜xd8 ♜xd8 20 fxe5 (20...♗xe5?? 21 ♖h7+), or 18...f6 19 ♖d5+ ♗h8 20 fxe5 fxe5 21 ♜df2 etc.

But by now Black must have been rather demoralised, which might explain his next.

16...exf4??

Now after the natural 17 ♜xf4 ♖e6 Black would have hopes of wriggling out with 18 ♗d6 ♜c8 or 18 ♗f3 0-0 but, with his guard low, Bareev overlooked a cruncher.

17 ♖xb7! 1-0



The punishment for Black's 'finger-slip' is

over as 17...♗xb7 allows mate on d8, 17...♖xb7 permits the pin on the e-file and 17...♜b8 18 ♖c6+ ♗f8 19 ♗d8+ is final. Black could have put up stiffer resistance after his blunder but the defensive task was extremely difficult. Additionally, the psychological effect of his automatically churning out the moves getting him into the mess in the first place can be quite debilitating. Time controls might be quickening up nowadays, but don't forget to play your moves in the correct order.

It should go without saying, but remember to always consider your opponent's most obvious reply before making a move! For example, before sending a piece into enemy territory it is imperative to see how that piece might be attacked, something that Black failed to do in the following game.

Vaulin-Pasztor

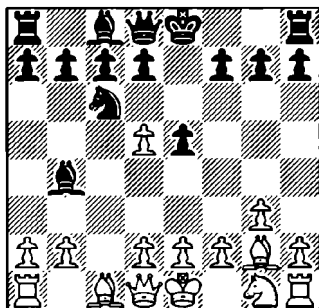
Tenkes Kupa Harkany 1994

English Opening

1 c4 e5 2 g3 ♔c6 3 ♖g2 ♖f6 4 ♔c3 ♖b4 5 ♔d5 ♔xd5

By no means forced, so we can assume that Black had a plan in mind.

6 cxd5



Okay, so your knight is attacked – where should it go? There is little point sitting down to play chess if this question isn't given suffi-

cient time and effort.

6...♖d4?

The active choice. We'll never know what Black had in mind because White now played the first move that springs to mind to anyone aware of the relative values of the pieces.

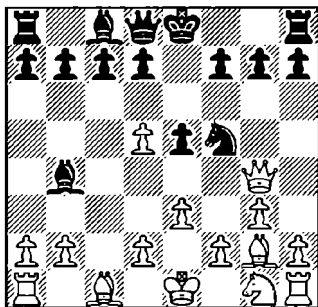
7 e3

I won't bother adding an exclamation mark either here or on White's next move.

7...♗f5

7...♖b5 8 ♖a4 comes to a similar end.

8 ♖g4 1-0



This blunder is difficult to explain away. The players can't have been sitting down for very long so time shortage is not to blame, nor is the situation complex. Whether Black's analysis of ...♖d4 ended so abruptly that he didn't see White's reply, or whether he stopped looking after the awkward looking 7...♗f5 is not clear, but there is no excuse for failing to check (investigate seems too strong a word in this case) how the piece in question might come under further attack.

Another early bath...

Petrosian-Ree

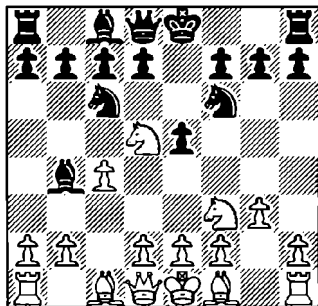
Wijk aan Zee 1971

English Opening

1 c4 e5 2 ♖c3 ♗f6 3 ♗f3 ♖c6 4 g3
♗b4 5 ♖d5

Compared with the previous game White

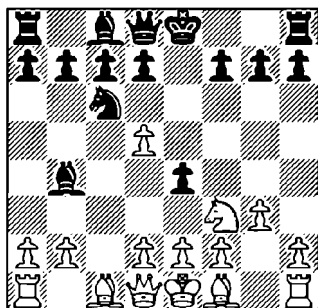
has replaced ♗g2 with ♗f3, a feature that Black now seeks to exploit.



5...♖xd5

5...♗c5, 5...a5 and 5...e4 are three respectable alternatives. There is nothing wrong with the text, either, except with the way Black plays it here. Having said that, given what soon befalls Black, it is intriguing to know what was going through his mind when taking on d5, forcing the issue with the black pieces as early as the fifth move against a former world champion.

6 cxd5 e4?



Correct is 6...♖d4, giving White a chance to go wrong with 7 ♗xe5? ♖e7 when 8 ♖d3?? walks into a smothered mate on f3. Therefore White must play 8 f4 with an awful position after 8...f6 9 e3 (9 ♖d3 ♖e4) 9...fxe5 10 exd4 exf4+ etc. White should play 7 ♖xd4 exd4 8 ♖c2 ♖e7 9 ♗g2 ♗a5 10 0-0

0-0 11 e3 and now 11...c5! secures a level game.

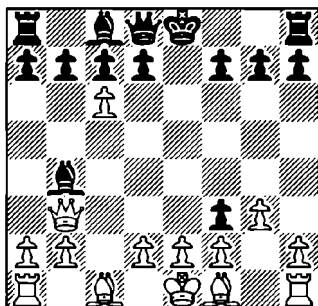
As far as 6...e4 is concerned, not going first in a game of 'follow the leader' can be a risky business, the opponent's extra tempo requiring extra attention just in case. Before moving on with the game – can you see what Black missed?

7 dxc6 exf3 8 ♖b3! 1-0

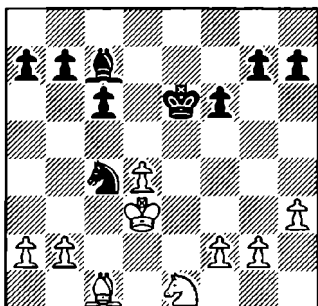
It is possible that Black was too happy with 8 cxb7? ♙xb7 9 exf3 ♜e7+, when 10 ♜e2 ♙xf3 11 ♜xe7+ ♚xe7 12 ♖g1 ♗he8 is very nice for Black, and sufficiently content with 8 e3 dxc6 9 a3 ♙d6 10 ♜xf3 and so on to notice Petrosian's witty rejoinder.

Once again the bishop has quickly become accident prone on b4, in this case being pinned to the b7-pawn as (for example)

8...a5 9 a3 forces the bishop to move and runs into 10 cxb7 with a decisive win of material.



Euwe, has a slight edge due to the IQP. His knight is attacked, so he countered:

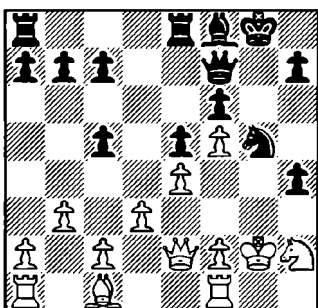


1...♗a5?? 2 b4! ♗xb4 3 ♖c2 1-0

... and the 'invincible'

Capablanca-Jaffe

New York National 1913



White, who has already invested a pawn in his endeavour to generate something on the kingside, has just played g4xf5, announcing that the g-file is to be under the spotlight for the next phase of the game.

23...♖h8 24 ♖g4 ♖g7 25 ♖h1 ♖h6 26 ♖g1 ♗e7 27 f4

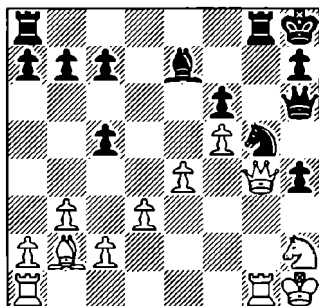
White keeps chipping away.

27...exf4 28 ♗b2

Capa is impressed with the combination of the g-file and the long diagonal. The threat is 29 ♖xg5, exploiting the pin. 28 ♗xf4 gives

White a big advantage, e.g. 28...c6 29 e5 ♖g8 30 ♖f3 or 28...♗d6 29 ♗xg5 (29 ♗e3 ♗g3) 29...fxg5 30 ♖xg5 ♖xg5 31 ♖xg5 and the respective strengths and weaknesses of the pawn structures are practically decisive.

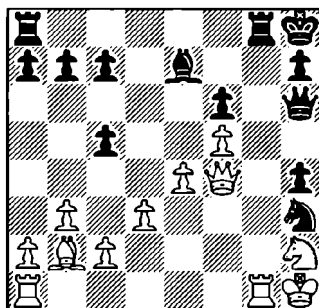
28...♖g8



29 ♖xf4??

Black appears to be under pressure, a sample line being 29...♗d6 30 ♖e3 ♗xh2 31 ♖xh2 ♖ae8 32 ♖g4 etc.

29...♖h3!



White's hitherto comfortable king is suddenly in trouble now that Black has 'defended' the g-file. Consequently 30 ♖xh6 allows immediate mate on f2.

30 ♖xg8+ ♖xg8 31 ♖f1 ♖e3 0-1

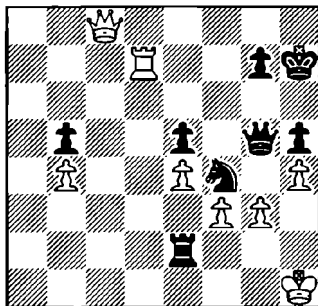
The knight will not be denied entry to f2. This was another case of the aggressor assigning his opponent the role of defender, resulting in his no longer contemplating the

possibility of a winning move coming back at him.

Good Evans!

In the next position Black is a piece up and can easily side-step the double attack with 48...♖f6 because gxf4 allows mate after ...♖xh4+ etc. Instead he chose the direct route to victory.

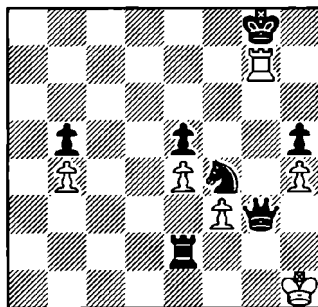
Evans-Reshevsky
New York 1964



48...♖xg3??

The story goes that Evans now held out his hand and, when Reshevsky went to accept the resignation, looked on as Evans was actually reaching out to play...

49 ♖g8+!! ♔xg8 50 ♖g7+ ♚- ♚



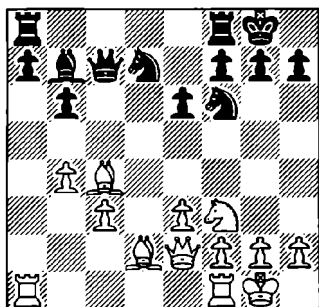
A draw was agreed because either recapture results in immediate stalemate, while

there is no profitable escape for the king as 50...♔f8 51 ♖f7+ ♔e8 simply sees the rook tag along, e.g. 52 ♖e7+ ♔d8 53 ♖d7+ etc.

Remember how the pieces move!

Bishops move diagonally. Yes – you knew that already, but GM Rogozenko is about to forget:

Rogozenko-Ki.Georgiev
Skopje 2002

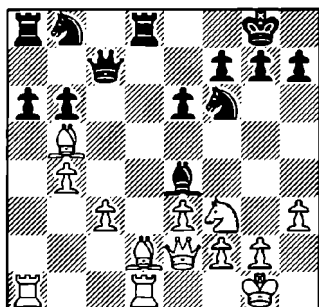


We have a completely normal position here. And the course of the game was quite normal, too. For a few moves.

14 ♖a6 ♖e4 15 h3 ♖fd8 16 ♖fd1 ♔b8

This looks rather negative.

17 ♖b5 a6



18 ♖e1??

Rogozenko: 'The long diagonal proved to be 'too long' for me, as I didn't observe that

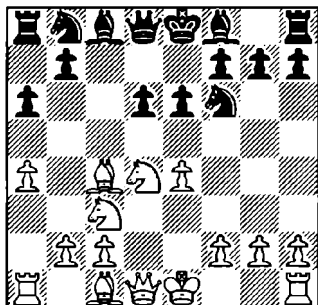
the rook on a8 is protected...! 18 ♖g5 is level.
18...axb5 0-1

Remember the rules!

Here's a funny one:

T.Ruck-Dely

Hungarian Team Championship 1998



In the diagram position Black saw a way to steer the game to a queenless middlegame.

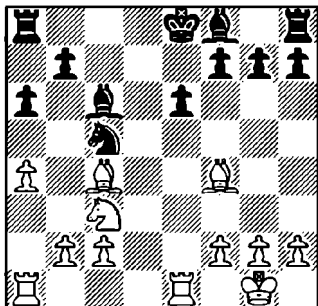
7...♖xe4 8 ♖xe4 d5 9 ♖f3

9 ♖g5 looks better.

9...dxe4 10 ♗xd8+ ♗xd8 11 ♖g5 ♖e8
12 ♖xe4 ♖d7

White has a development lead but is unable to generate anything special. We could be in for a quick draw or a long ending, depending on the mood of the players.

13 0-0 ♖c6 14 ♖e1 ♖d7 15 ♖f4 ♖c5 16 ♖c3 1-0



Unfortunately for Black (IM, 2410) he now played 16...0-0-0, having somehow managed to forget over the course of only five moves that he had already moved his king (twice). Occasionally, players get away with breaking the rules like this (or nobody notices until after the game) – even at the highest level – but this time the reality was that Black, having touched his king, was forced to move it. Ironically, White's last move had carried with it a threat to earn a decisive advantage with 17 b4, and none of Black's king moves does anything to properly address this problem – hence the resignation.

What makes this embarrassing 'blunder' even worse is that it was Black who initiated the sequence of exchanges, which must mean he had factored in the surrender of castling rights when deciding to play 7...♖xe4.

Self-destruction

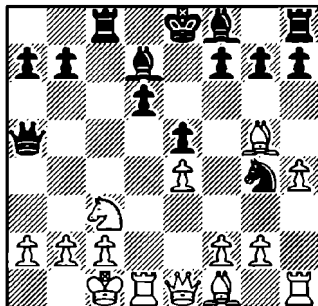
As an overall plan of self-destruction the following 'brilliancy' takes some beating (so to speak).

Ganguly-Venkatesh

Indian Championship 2003

Sicilian Defence

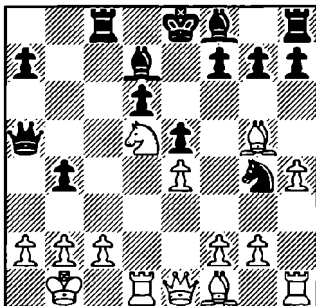
1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 ♖c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4
♖f6 5 ♖c3 d6 6 ♖g5 ♖d7 7 ♗d2 ♖c8 8
0-0-0 ♖xd4 9 ♗xd4 ♗a5 10 h4 e5 11
♗e3 ♖g4 12 ♗e1



Over the years I have played just about every defence to 1 e4, and the Sicilian proved the most frustrating. One move can make all the difference whatever the opening, but in the Sicilian even strong players can blunder and still not be aware of the unfortunate consequences until much later, when the game is over. The nature of most of the main lines in the Sicilian is such that both sides are given plenty of opportunity to generate activity or create confusion, yet it can take time for the validity of these ideas to be defined. Consequently we can set off merrily on our way, engaging in this or that skirmish or counter-attack, only to realise some way down the line that we have actually been heading for oblivion...

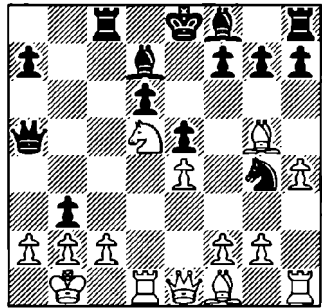
An important positional feature of this Sicilian position is the hole on d5, a square that Black, to move, has abandoned in his quest to drum up the traditional pressure against White's king. In fact there is a means of making his opening play pay off here, namely with the quite conventional, indeed trademark exchange sacrifice on c3, when the forced recapture with the pawn (13 ♖xc3? ♗xc3 14 bxc3 ♕xf2) leaves White's protection severely compromised and offers Black sufficient compensation. Instead Black latched on to another resource using the trusty b-pawn.

12...b5? 13 ♖b1 b4 14 ♕d5

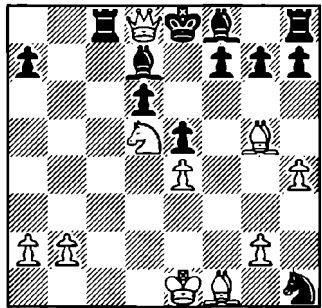


14...b3??

The point – unfortunately for Black – is to radically alter the course of the game creating a material imbalance.



15 ♗xa5 bxc2+ 16 ♚c1 cxd1♗+ 17 ♚xd1 ♕xf2+ 18 ♚e1 ♕xh1 19 ♗d8+! 1-0



Did you see this after 14...b3, or perhaps even before? It doesn't really matter because even without the comical smothered mate that follows 19...♗xd8 20 ♕c7 White would still stand clearly better because his queen contributes much more than Black's two rooks – one being buried in the corner, the other having no support. In other words Black's plan was awful anyway, but elevated to disastrous thanks to it being an over the board self-mate. Furthermore, with ...b4-b3 Black forces what follows, and blunders that don't even give the opposition a chance to go wrong have no chance of being overlooked.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

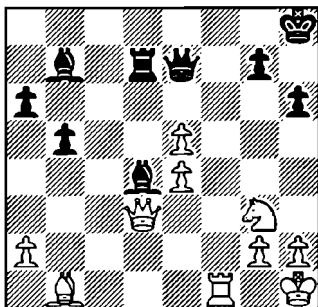
The Twilight Zone

To finish the book we have some games in which the blunders are the results themselves. I once resigned a game against a strong GM after the position had been repeated two and a half times and my next move would in fact leave my opponent with no better choice than to allow a further repetition! I was defending, and rather short of time (no sympathy, then) and for some reason I didn't like the look of his latest, very aggressive move. So I resigned. I can't properly explain why. However, I know now that in many cases it is logical to let the game take its natural course, which is what a few of the players below should have done.

We kick off this chapter with a golden oldie.

Von Popiel-Marco
Monte Carlo 1902

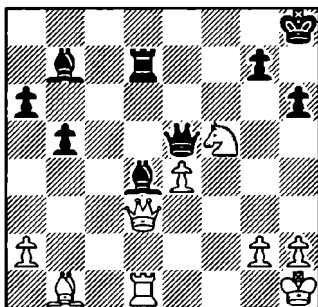
White is sitting comfortably in the driving seat, and the immediate advance 35 e6 is an effective way to exploit Black's dodgy king, e.g. 35.. ♖xe6 (if instead 35.. ♖d8 then the reply 36 e5 is strong) 36 ♖f8+ ♔h7 37 e5+ g6 38 ♖f6 ♖e8 39 ♖xg6 ♔h8 40 e6 etc. Instead White finds what seems to be an equally clinical **winning** method.



35 ♔f5? ♖xe5

Now White can still press on with 36 ♔h4
♖e8 37 e5.

36 ♖d1?? 1-0



The pinned bishop prompts Black's resignation. He was losing just a moment earlier anyway... But Black is winning here thanks to 36...♙g1!

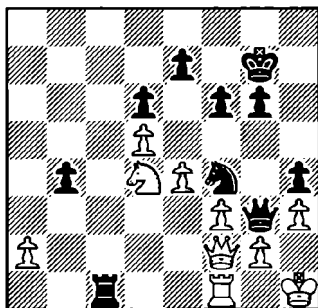
If the bishop is attacked then at least Black should have looked at putting it somewhere dangerous before resigning, especially when all that is required to make White's plan backfire is a free move with which to turn the tables on the d-file. A remarkable oversight

Look for your 'Get out of Jail Free' card

Before resigning, at least have a look around for any spoiling resources that you might have.

M.Mitkov-V.Georgiev

Albania 2001



White resigned in this position because taking the queen loses simply enough to ..♙xf1+ and ..hxg3+ while taking the rook drops the queen, and the queen and rook are effectively immobile.

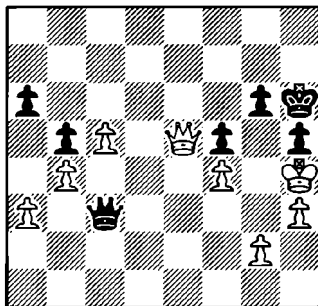
It doesn't look terribly promising for White but in fact there is a simple win with 43 ♖f5+! gxf5 44 ♜xg3+ hxg3 45 ♜xc1 when the rook dominates.

Resign or deliver mate?

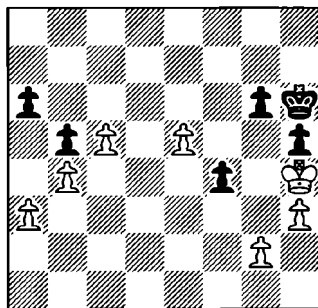
This should be an obvious one, but it is surprising how many choose the former option.

Pedersen-Bergstrom

European Club Championship,
Halkidiki 2002



White has just played his queen to e5. Black's king is the more exposed of the two and he resigns the ending because a trade of queens leaves the c-pawn free and moving away allows mate on h8. The alternative to resigning is finding the line 54...♜xe5 55 fxе5 f4!



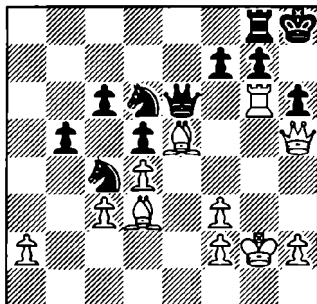
White cannot escape mate.

Play the board...

I doubt very much Black would have resigned the following game against a low-rated player. As it was, sitting opposite the formidable, imposing chess legend Korchnoi, the Belgian IM threw in the towel in a winning position.

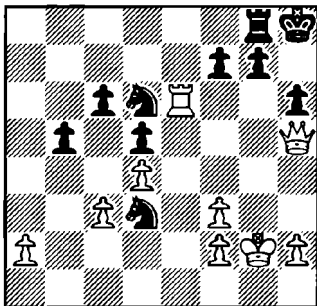
Korchnoi-van der Stricht

European Team Championships,
Plovdiv 2003



1-0

Having seen the great Korchnoi place his rook so menacingly on g6 (from g4) Black resigned because he did not want to either part with his queen or 'go through the formalities' of allowing mate with ♖xh6 (exploiting the pinned g7-pawn). However, rather than finish off a nice attack in style, Korchnoi's bullish move should have led to a helpless position for White after 36...♗xe5! 37 ♖xe6 ♕xd3

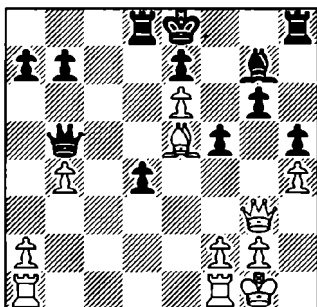


Now there is the deadly threat of ...♕f4+, and the crucial point is that 38 ♖xh6+ doesn't lead to mate on h6 because 38...gxh6+ is check(!), after which 39 ♔f1 ♖g6 gives Black too much for the queen.

Play the board...

Remember the rules II**Sznapik-Van Gils**

Liege 1986



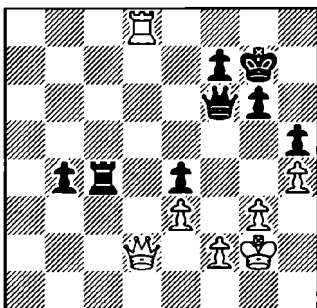
Black, to move, cannot take the bishop in view of ♖xg6+ and mate on f7 and, without a defence against both the final check on g6 and ♗xg7, he resigned. But he could have simply castled, when the extra pawn will tell.

Every day could be your birthday...

In the next (GM versus GM) example White is so surprised at his good luck that he fails to realise he should have been luckier.

Kurajica-Kozul

Split 2001



Black, to move, is a clear pawn up with the slightly superior king position in view of his control of f3.

64...♖c3??

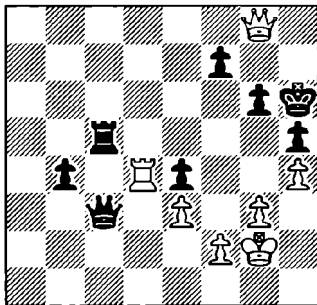
Black's queen is well posted already. The obvious 64...b3, with threat of ...♖c2, is easily winning. Now White sees a gap for his queen.

65 ♖d6! ♖c5??

I would guess that Black has missed his opponent's 68th move, although this is anyway a terrible blunder, albeit consistent with his previous mistake. After 65...♖c7 66 ♖f8+ ♔h7 67 ♖g8+ ♔h6 68 ♖d4 f5 69 ♖h8+ ♖h7 70 ♖f8+ ♖g7 71 ♖xb4 ♖a3 the game is level.

66 ♖f8+ ♔h7 67 ♖g8+

67 ♖xf7+ is probably what Black had seen, when 67...♖g7 68 ♖e6 ♖e5 is not clear (but what is clear is that Black won't win).

67...♔h6 68 ♖d4!

Black pays the price for venturing to c3. Compared with the initial diagram we have a completely different story, the b-pawn irrelevant and only the health or otherwise of the kings being of any importance. The threat of mate in one on h8 needs immediate attention.

68...g5

68...♖c8 69 ♖xf7 ♖c7 (69...♖c7 70 ♖d7) 70 ♖f8+ ♔h7 and White can choose between either capture on b4.

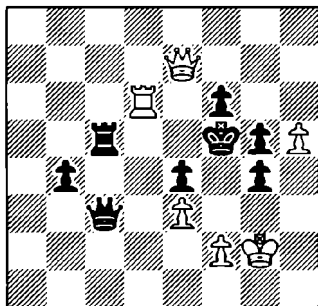
69 ♖h8+

69 ♖d6+ f6 70 ♖d7 is more precise and would have also pointed White in the right direction. But remember that only five moves ago White was on the verge of defeat

and has since bounced back to exploit the enemy king with a couple of checks. To retrieve a half-point in such a short time is very satisfying.

69...♔g6 70 ♖d6+ f6 ½-½

White has been let off the hook and takes a draw that seemed virtually impossible only moments earlier. Indeed after 71 ♖g8+ ♔f5 (71...♔h6 72 ♖d7) 72 ♖h7+ ♔e5 73 ♖e7+ ♔f5 White can be forgiven (perhaps) for believing there to be nothing more than a perpetual, but a closer look – and a little more ambition – reveals a forced mate: 74 g4+! hxg4 (74...♔xg4 75 ♖xe4 mate; 74...♔g6 75 ♖d7) 75 h5



Mate (in one) is unavoidable. Had White's memory of previous events in the game been wiped clean on the 70th move there is no doubt the experienced GM would have found the win, but his judgement was clouded by the bonus of the draw.

The poorly timed draw offer

In order to try to appreciate what is behind Korchnoi's uncharacteristically negative thinking at the end of the next game it is worth starting from the beginning.

Korchnoi-Luther

Essen 2002

Catalan Opening

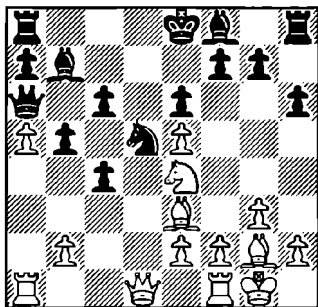
1 d4 e6 2 c4 d5 3 ♖c3 c6 4 ♗f3 ♗f6 5

g3 dxc4 6 ♖g2 ♖bd7 7 0-0 b5 8 ♖g5!? ♗b7 9 a4 ♜b6 10 ♜e5 ♜xe5 11 a5?

Korchnoi gives 11 dxe5 ♜d5 (11...♜d7 12 ♜e4) 12 axb5, e.g. 12...♜xc3 13 bxc3 cxb5 14 ♗xb7 ♜xb7 15 ♜d4, or 12...cxb5 13 ♗xd5 exd5 14 ♜xd5 ♜c6 15 e4 ♗c5 16 b4!;

from his annotations he is clearly not comfortable with the way the opening has gone.

11...♜a6 12 dxe5 ♜d5 13 ♜e4 h6 14 ♗e3

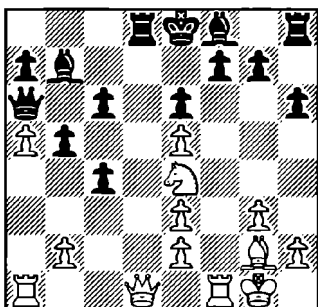


For the pawn White has a development advantage and a grip on the dark squares, which the latest addresses.

14...♜e3

14...0-0 15 ♗c5! clamps down on the dark squares so Black parts with his good knight. White gets three e-pawns but by now Korchnoi is in need of some kind of breakthrough – or at least he thinks he is.

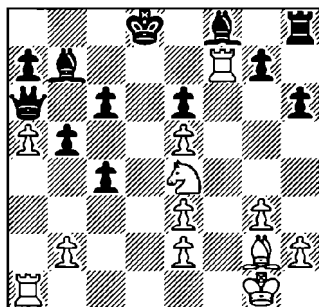
15 fxex3 ♜d8



16 ♜xd8+

Korchnoi: 'Despair. And one might say, not yet motivated.' Instead he recommends 16 ♜c2 ♗e7 17 ♜f4 0-0 18 ♜f6+ with an attack, while 16...♜d5 17 ♜f4 ♜xe5 18 ♜af1 f5 19 ♜c3 ♜d5 20 ♜f6+! looks like trouble.

16...♜xd8 17 ♜f7



With a crafty threat of 18 ♜xf8+! and 19 ♜c5, trapping the queen.

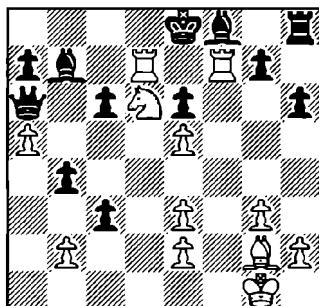
17...b4

17...c3 is Korchnoi's suggestion, and Black does seem to be on top. However, in complex positions it is quite possible for neither side to be satisfied with his lot, and in just three more moves the game is over.

18 ♜d1+ ♜e8??

18...♜c8 is crying out to be played, e.g. 19 ♜dd7 c3 20 bxc3 bxc3 21 ♜xc3 ♗c5 or 21 ♜c7+ ♜b8 22 ♜xb7+ ♜xb7 23 ♜xb7+ ♜xb7 24 ♜xc3 ♗c5.

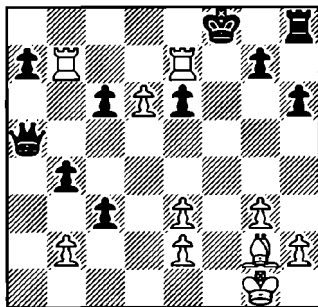
19 ♜dd7 c3 20 ♜d6+ ♗-♗



Korchnoi: 'At this moment I realised that White is not losing, and making the move I simultaneously offered a draw. Then, a few seconds later, I grasped that White has more than a perpetual check, that Black can't avoid mate!'

For a fighter such as Korchnoi to offer a draw in a winning position he must have been genuinely unsettled for much of the game, not happy with the way he played the opening. Meanwhile Black, a very useful GM, had managed to contrive a lost position with 18...♖e8?? when the alternative looked decisive. Is this because putting the king on e8 'forced' a draw against his illustrious opponent?

Anyway, after 20...♗xd6 21 exd6 Black is indeed completely lost, e.g. 21...♜xa5 22 ♖fe7+ ♖f8 23 ♖xb7

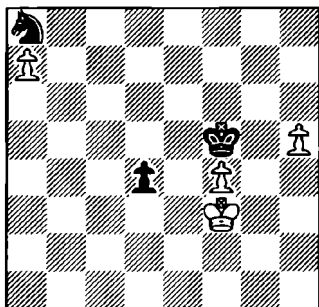


Now (other than 23...♜b6) the game might end 23...♜d8 24 ♖f7+ ♖g8 25 ♖xg7+ ♖f8 26 ♖b7+ ♖e8 27 ♖xc6+ etc.

Finish the game

Svidler-Anand
Dos Hermanas 1999

Let's start here. Remember that knights are poor defenders when faced with a passed pawn or two, especially when the pawns have a number of files between them. This leaves the king with an equally futile task.



65 ♖e2! ♖c7

65...♜xf4 66 h6.

66 ♖d3

Zugzwang is approaching.

66...♜f6

Black must surrender his hold on e4. 66...♗a8 67 ♜xd4 and Black's king has to stand by as White's travels to b7.

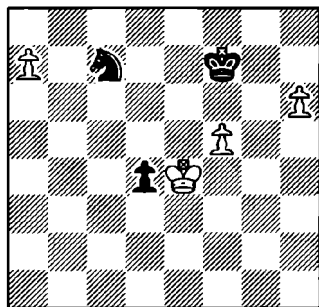
67 ♖e4

Not 67 ♜xd4?? ♖b5+ 68 ♖e4 ♖xa7 with a draw.

67...♜f7 68 f5 ♜f6

Or 68...♜g7 69 ♜d3 ♜f6 70 h6.

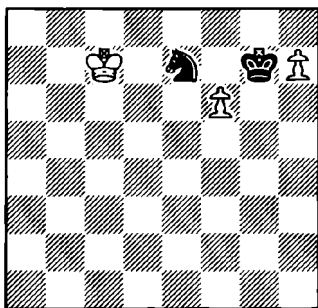
69 h6 ♜f7 ½-½



After making the necessary progress White acquiesces to a draw. And he fails to play the game out. I'm not sure Peter was yet a teenager when I first met him, and he was very nice, witty and good-humoured, as he continued to be over the years. He is cer-

tainly being rather kind here, because 70 cxd4 wins now that White's pawns are further advanced, e.g. 70... b5+ 71 c5 dxa7 72 b6! d8+ (72... g8 73 f6! [73 cxa7?? h7 74 b6 cxb6 75 c6 g5] 73... d8+ 74 c7 d7 75 d7) 73 c7 and it doesn't matter which way the knight goes. We can start with 73... d7 : 74 d7 b5 75 h7 g7 76 f6+ cxb7 77 f7 g7 78 e7 , or 74... f6 75 h7! g7 76 f6+ cxb7 77 f7 g7 78 e8! etc.

This leaves the more logical looking 73... d7 , when 74 h7 d5+ 75 d6 g7 76 cxd5 cxb7 77 c6 g7 78 e7 is simple, and 74... g7 walks into 75 f6+ !



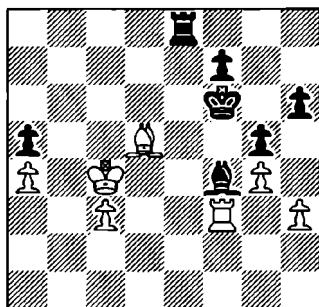
No doubt this fork is what Svidler missed, but we can forgive him that, of course. However, I'm sure he would have spotted it with ease by playing on, when the situation draws nearer. It pays to make sure that analysis is correct, safe in the knowledge that there is nothing to lose (and in this case it would be nice to be wrong).

Nearly four years later Svidler managed to make the same mistake, this time the recipient of the bonus half point being Kramnik:

Kramnik-Svidler
Wijk aan Zee 2004

The points situation is level but White has the passed pawn. The presence of rooks also

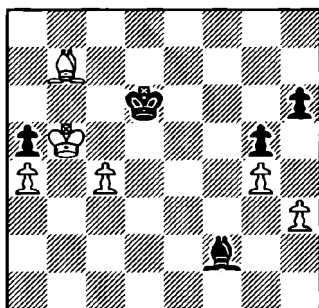
benefits the aggressor, so Black now steers the game toward the draw by forcing a trade.



42... e3 43 f3 44 b5 45

Abandoning the useless f-pawn in order to keep an eye on the more important c-pawn.

45 xf7 d6 46 c4 f2 47 e8 e7
48 c6 d6 49 b7 1-0 (??)



The super-GM resigned here because he thought that holding back the c-pawn, defending the a5-pawn and keeping White's king out of the kingside was an impossible task. Unfortunately for him, not all these are necessary, as Black can happily let his a-pawn go, after which there is no way through for White. Moreover the drawing plan is simple: keep the bishop on the g1-a7 diagonal and, when White's king tries to cross this barrier, close the door with the king, meeting c6 , for instance, with ... c7 , or d3 with ... e5 .