

STUDY CHESS WITH MATTHEW SADLER



EVERYMAN CHESS

STUDY CHESS
WITH
MATTHEW SADLER

EVERYMAN CHESS
Gloucester Publishing plc www.everymarchess.com

First published in 2012 by Gloucester Publishers Limited, Northburgh House,
10 Northburgh Street, London EC1V 0AT

Copyright © 2012 Matthew Sadler

The right of Matthew Sadler to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyrights, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, electrostatic, magnetic tape, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission of the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

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

ISBN: 978 1 85744 940 2

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@everymchess.com; website: www.everymchess.com

Everyman is the registered trade mark of Random House Inc. and is used in this work under licence from Random House Inc.

Everyman Chess Series

Chief advisor: Byron Jacobs
Commissioning editor: John Emms
Assistant editor: Richard Palliser

Typeset and edited by First Rank Publishing, Brighton.
Cover design by Horatio Monteverde.

Contents

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Introduction](#)

[1 Discovering New Ideas in the Opening](#)

[2 Introducing New Ideas Easily into your Opening Repertory](#)

[3 Playing Unorthodox Openings](#)

[4 Types of Thinking in the Middlegame](#)

[5 That Didn't Quite Work Out ...](#)

[6 Thinking in Endgames](#)

[Index of Games](#)

Acknowledgments

A huge thank you to Natasha Regan for all her suggestions, corrections and her unstinting enthusiasm during the writing of this book. I really don't know where she found the time, but I'm so grateful she did – it wouldn't have been quite the same book without her help.

And as always, my heartfelt thanks to my parents for all their love and support over the years. I didn't quite manage to accomplish everything I wanted to in chess, but I had a wonderful time trying ... and years later, chess is still one of the most rewarding things in my life. Nothing of that would have happened without them.

Matthew Sadler,
Netherlands,
July 2012

Introduction

Despite my best efforts, I haven't been able to escape chess. I decided to stop as a professional chess player just after the Tilburg Category 18 event of 1998, and after some months of job searching, I joined the ranks of the respectable working population on 1st October 1999 when I started work at the Hewlett-Packard helpdesk for mobile computers in Amsterdam. In the years that followed, I still played some chess for my Bundesliga club until 2003, but after that, apart from a yearly outing in the Dutch Team Championship for companies, I was chess-free!

But things change in your life, and at some stage I got the urge to play chess again. More importantly for me, I got the urge to play *well* again. That was easier said than done. Even though I was still capable of playing decently, I was extremely inconsistent. I decided at some stage that I needed to relearn a few skills and think again about all the hard-earned knowledge I had won as a professional. It took me quite a while, but in the end I felt I had managed to get the most important things in my game working again. The thought that these skills and lessons might be useful and interesting to other amateurs as well was the inspiration for this book.

In this book I try to explain the most important skills for success as a practical chess player, and how you can train and develop these skills. In a nutshell, these skills are:

- a) How to find new ideas in openings.
- b) How to adopt new openings confidently and quickly.
- c) The various ways of solving practical middlegame problems.
- d) How to think in the endgame.

I suppose you could call this book a collection of my personal 'Eureka!' experiences, those wonderful moments when something complicated suddenly feels as natural and as easy as breathing. Some of those insights needed a lot of hard work, and some only came after the sorrowful analysis of heart-rending defeats. Hopefully this book can spare you both the midnight oil and the traumas, and set you off on the right path from the very beginning!

Chapter One

Discovering New Ideas in the Opening

The first thing I was confronted with when I started playing again was the state of my opening repertory. I still had plenty of unused analysis from my time as a professional, not of all of which was obsolete, so it seemed quite obvious to just play that again. At some stage I understood though that it wasn't enough. The openings themselves were fine, but playing these openings game after game felt like going through the motions: 'I played these 10 years ago, so I'll play them now ... and in 50 years' time.' On the other hand, just playing a random opening without having any original thought about it is also a bit of a waste. I feel much more motivated and interested in a game if I have the feeling that I'm coming to the board with *something* new of my own. So what I needed was – as the Dutch saying goes – a sheep with five legs. I needed new openings I'd never seen/played before, I needed to have fresh new ideas in them (if not actual novelties, then something that felt new and exciting for me!) ... and I didn't have much time to study either.

Well I worked out how to put aside a few hours a week for opening study, so full of expectation I sat down in front of the board the first evening ... and felt completely blank. I switched on the computer, fired up *ChessBase*, downloaded the most recent TWIC games, picked a game at random, played it through, discovered the opening summary feature, started *Rybka*, gazed blankly while it evaluated the position as +0.03 ... and soon my two hours were gone. Lovely ... and this was supposed to be creative and fun?

After a couple more evenings like that, I couldn't take it anymore. My biggest problem seemed to be that I couldn't generate any ideas. If I didn't start up *Rybka*, I might stare at a position for hours without finding anything interesting. But ... I used to be really good at this. So what was I missing now?

After pondering things for a while, I decided that I'd forgotten the difference between playing and analysing. When you play a game you invoke all sorts of filters/prejudices (consciously or unconsciously) to reduce the amount of information you have to process. Think of things like 'I never play positions like that', 'Someone told me that you shouldn't do that', 'I'll never be able to calculate all that', etc. This is useful in a practical situation as it speeds up your decision-making process, but these filters can get in the way of the creativity you need in analysis. The goal in (opening) analysis is not to limit the game and make it manageable. The goal is to discover new truths, and those truths may well lie outside the boundaries of your prejudices.

My solution had three components:

a) To remind myself explicitly before I started that I was analysing, not playing. I was going for creativity and quality, not expediency.

b) I drew up a list of six 'mind-enlarging' approaches that I hoped would stimulate me to leave my comfort zone when analysing and trigger my creativity.

c) I set the rule that I would only use *Rybka* to check analysis, not to generate ideas. In practice this meant that I followed this routine:

- 1) I set an alarm clock for 15 minutes.
- 2) Analysed for 2 x 15-minute stretches.

3) Typed my analysis into *ChessBase* (with *Rybka* switched off). Somehow writing things down always activates the checking part of my brain (I wish I was allowed to do that during games).

4) Then I switched on *Rybka* and checked through my analysis. I awarded myself points for the number of ideas I had analysed correctly. And what do points mean ... ? Pints! So you can see that a good analysis session tended to last shorter than a bad session.

Well that's enough explanation: let's take a look at the themes:

- 1) Disturbing the material balance.
- 2) You can't do that! Not in this opening! Well, actually ...

- 3) My goodness, you can play this for a win!
- 4) Crossover plans.
- 5) Acts of wanton aggression.
- 6) The spoilsport gambit (exchanging queens).

Theme 1:

Disturbing the material balance

This theme speaks for itself. Don't automatically shy away from lines where you might have to give something up. Be constantly aware that you can unbalance the material equilibrium in order to generate activity or create compensating weaknesses in the opponent's position. The following example is a wonderfully subtle exposition of this theme.

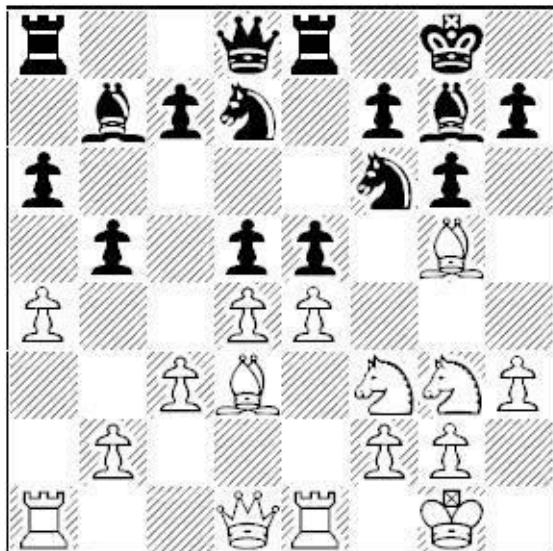
Game 1

A.Shirov-S.Mamedyarov

Tal Memorial, Moscow 2010

Ruy Lopez

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 Nb8 10 d4 Nbd7 11 Nbd2 Bb7 12 Bc2 Re8 13 Nf1 Bf8 14 Ng3 g6 15 a4 Bg7 16 Bd3 d5 17 Bg5

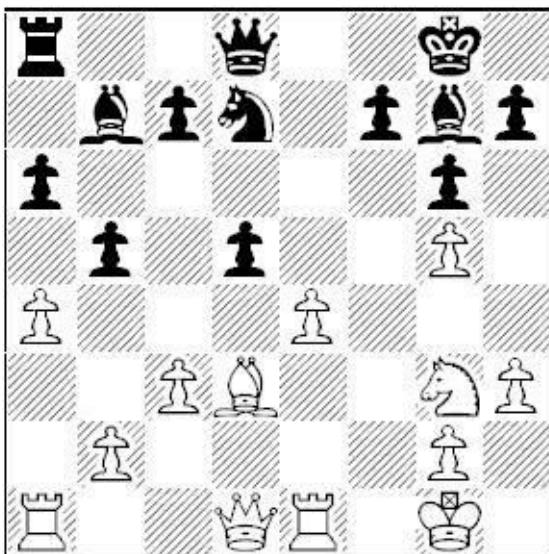


17 ... b4!?

An amazing move. 17 Bg5 is an aggressive developing move, so you would not expect that Black can afford to ignore the central threats it creates. To understand the move, let's take a step back and pretend that Black is allowed to pass after 17 Bg5. Very cheeky! How would White punish this impudence?

There's nothing completely devastating, but 18 Nxe5 Nxe5 19 dxe5 Rxe5 20 f4 seems to win. Black either has to lose a piece or give up the exchange: 20 ... Rxg5 21 fxg5 Nd7 22 axb5 with a very large advantage for White.

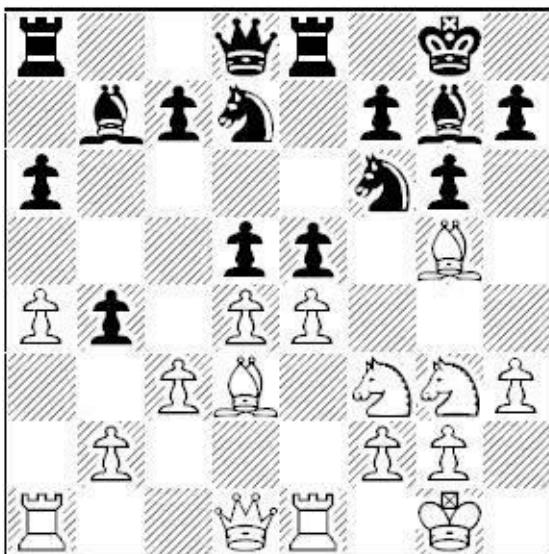
Just take a look at that last position though.



Imagine that White didn't have 22 axb5, winning another pawn. How would Black's position look then? Maybe still better for White, but not totally disastrous. Black has the two bishops, he's got the loose pawn on g5 to aim at and White's position is riddled with weak dark squares. Hmm ... Well, we skipped a move for Black on move 17, so Black may actually play two 21st moves! Can you think of a handy extra move that was also legal on move 17?

How about 21 ... b4? Black is threatening to win a pawn back for the exchange in two ways (... bxc3 and ... Qxg5) and it's not clear how White can cover these pressure points satisfactorily. And so we come to the point of that stunning move 17 ... b4!?. Black is willing to offer material to counteract White's main threat after 17 Bg5 and with 17 ... b4 he ensures that he will achieve the most favourable version of the resulting position!

Brilliant! How do you discover such an idea? By being willing to envisage sacrificing material. Once you've hurdled that mental barrier, it's not such a big step to 17 ... b4!?.



18 cxb4

Obvious, but Black now gains the two bishops and pleasant activity in return for the pawn. We'll just take a brief look at some other possibilities:

a) 18 dxe5 Nxe5 19 Nxe5 Rxe5 20 f4 (if 20 Bf4 Re6 21 e5 Nd7 and the e5-pawn can't be held) 20 ... Rxg5! (the justification of Black's idea, and not 20 ... Re6 21 e5) 21 fxg5 Nd7 with good compensation.

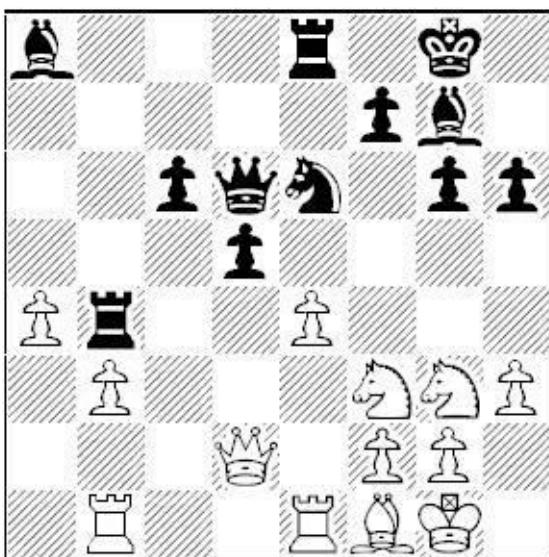
b) 18 Bh4!? increases the power of dxe5 by placing the bishop out of the range of the black

rook on e5: 18 ... dxe4 (better than 18 ... bxc3 19 dxe5 cxb2 20 Rb1 Nxe5 – 20 ... dxe4 21 Bxe4 Bxe4 22 Nxe4 wins – 21 Nxe5 Rxe5 22 f4 Rxe4 23 Bxe4 dxe4 24 Qxd8+ Rxd8 25 Rxb2 with an advantage for White) 19 Bxe4 Bxe4 20 Rxe4 bxc3! (20 ... exd4 21 Rxd4 bxc3 22 Bxf6 Qxf6 23 Rxd7 cxb2 24 Rb1 should be a bit better for White) 21 bxc3 (21 dxe5 cxb2 22 Rb1 Nxe4 23 Bxd8 Nc3 could be tricky for White) 21 ... exd4 22 Rxd4 Qe7 with equality.

c) 18 exd5 exd4 (18 ... bxc3!? 19 dxe5 Nxe5 20 Nxe5 cxb2 21 Rb1 Qxd5 is very murky) 19 c4 Nc5 is quite unclear.

d) 18 c4!? was played successfully in a game of Kosteniuk's, but it doesn't look that dangerous: 18 ... dxe4 19 Bxe4 Bxe4 20 Nxe4 (if 20 Rxe4 Qc8) 20 ... exd4 21 Nxd4 Qc8.

18 ... h6 19 Bxf6 Qxf6 20 Rc1 Qd6 21 b5 axb5 22 Bxb5 c6 23 Bf1 exd4 24 Nxd4 Rab8 25 b3 Ba8 26 Nf3 Ne5 27 Rb1 Ne6 28 Qd2 Rb4 and Black won after many adventures:



29 exd5 cxd5 30 Bb5 Rd8 31 Red1 Rf4 32 Ne1 Bd4 33 Nh1 Ba7 34 Nd3 Rh4 35 Re1 Ng5 36 Qe2 Ne4 37 Rbc1 Bb8 38 f4 g5 39 g3 Rxh3 40 Qg4 Qe6 41 Qxe6 fxe6 42 Bd7 Kf7 43 Kg2 Rh5 44 f5 exf5 45 Bxf5 Nf6 46 Nh2 d4+ 47 Kg1 Bxg3 48 Ne5+ Bxe5 49 Rxe5 g4 50 Be6+ Kg6 51 Rcc5 g3 52 Nh3 Rxe5 53 Rxe5 Ne4 54 Bg4 Rf8 55 Re6+ Kg7 56 Re7+ Kh8 57 Be2 Nd2 58 Nf4 Rxf4 59 Re8+ Kg7 60 Rxa8 Rf2 61 Bh5 Rh2 62 Bd1 Ne4 63 Bf3 Ng5 64 Bg2 h5 65 Rd8 Ne6 66 Rd7+ Kf6 67 a5 Nf4 68 Bf1 d3 69 Rd6+ Ke5 70 Rd8 g2 71 Re8+ Kd6 0-1

Theme 2: You can't do that! Not in this opening! Well, actually ...

The previous example was also a good demonstration of an unprejudiced approach to an opening. Who would expect that you could play such a sharp exchange sacrifice in the solid Ruy Lopez? Once you start entertaining the thought, however, you suddenly start to see all sorts of possibilities ...

Theme 3: My goodness ... you can also play this for a win!

During my professional career, I scored very heavily on the black side of the Queen's Gambit Accepted (QGA). Strangely enough, my most important discovery in the opening came about due to a serious failing of mine: my extremely rigid opening repertoire. I played the same openings against weak and strong players alike which meant that I needed to be able to play all my openings for a win. That requirement pushed me to investigate the winning chances from a number of unpromising situations, among which the typical QGA symmetrical pawn structures where both sides have two pawns on the queenside and four pawns on the kingside. To my delight, I discovered that these positions weren't as dead as everyone thought: there were real winning chances with the right approach.

A word of warning while reading through this game: I'm switching quite regularly to other topics within this game (for example, a related concept in another opening), which can make it a little hard to follow. I'd really recommend using a board and pieces for this game.

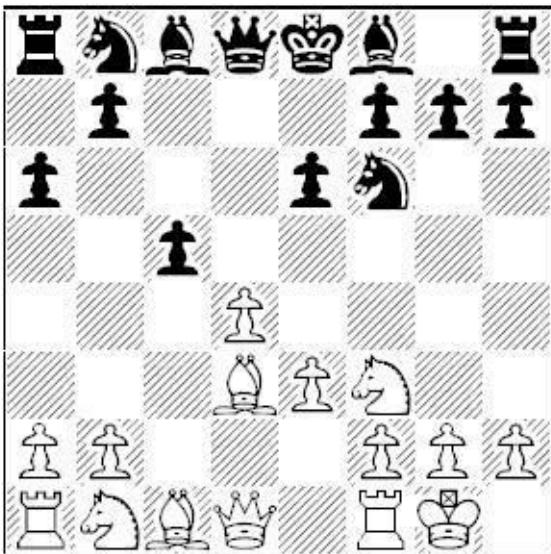
Game 2

P.San Segundo Carrillo-M.Sadler

Euro Team Ch, Pula 1997

Queen's Gambit Accepted

1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 e3 e6 5 Bxc4 c5 6 0-0 a6 7 Bd3



7 ... b6!?

A little wrinkle that I used in all sorts of QGA positions. I got triggered to look at the move while studying Hedgehog structures from a completely different opening (an example of applying our fourth theme to find new ideas in the opening). With 7 Bd3, White delays the development of his knight on b1 and anticipates 7 ... b5 which he plans to meet with 8 a4. After 8 ... b4 White can transfer his knight on b1 directly to the comfortable c4-square.

7 ... b6 achieves the same development goals as ... b5 – activating the bishop on the a8-h1 diagonal – but avoids providing White with an early target. The only drawback to ... b6 is that Black's position remains slightly cramped: for example, the black queen's natural square b6 is not available. However, that doesn't have to be a permanent state. The remedy to this problem occurred to me after examining a completely different opening (another example of applying the fourth theme in this chapter!). Just bear with me as we wander off into a Modern Benoni for a few seconds ...

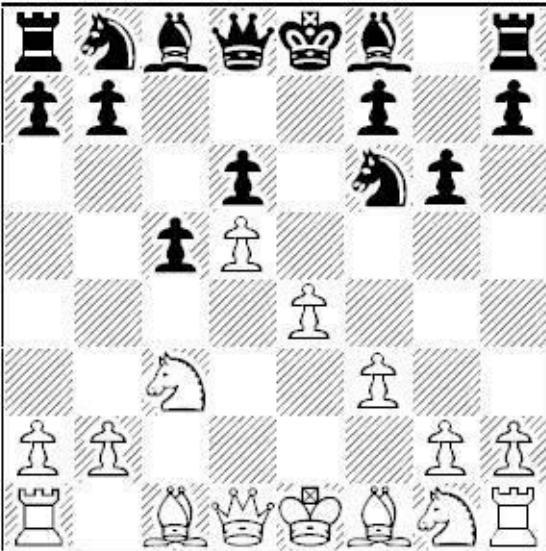
Game 2a

M.Sadler-E.Hummel

Amersfoort 2011

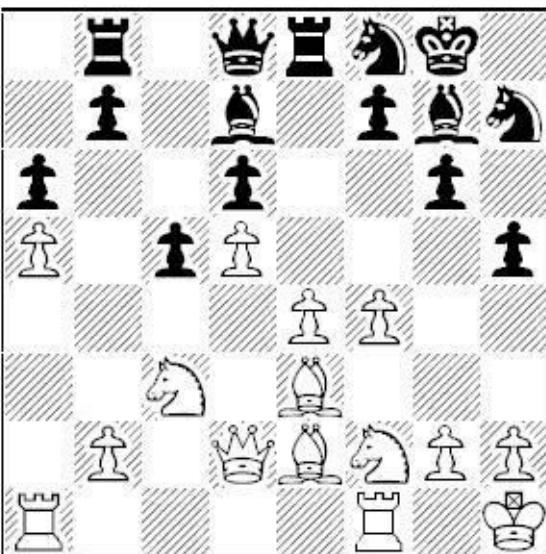
Modern Benoni

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 f3



A favourite scheme of mine against Benoni structures. The pawn's placement on f3 is temporary. By shoring up the e4-pawn, White takes the edge off Black's typical Benoni counterplay which is normally based on a combination of ... b5 and tricks against e4. It does give White a bit of development malaise (try and get the knight on g1 to somewhere decent ...), but once he's got himself sorted, White can get going with what he really wants: playing f4 and e5.

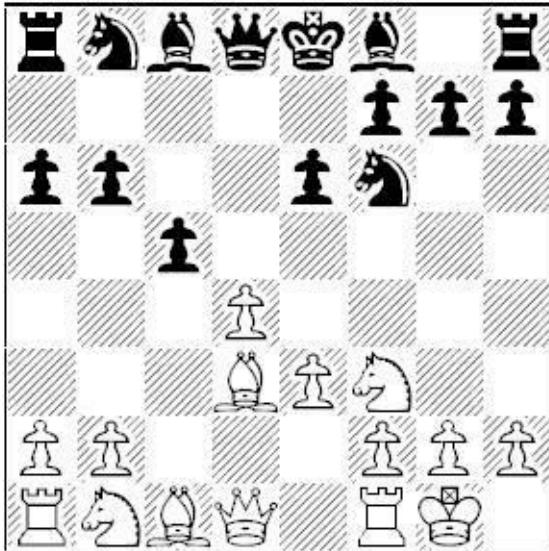
7 ... Bg7 8 Bg5 0-0 9 Qd2 h6 10 Be3 a6 11 a4 Nbd7 12 Nh3 Re8 13 Nf2 h5 14 Be2 Rb8 15 0-0 Nf8 16 Kh1 Bd7 17 a5 N6h7 18 f4!



18 ... f5 19 e5 dx5 20 Nd3

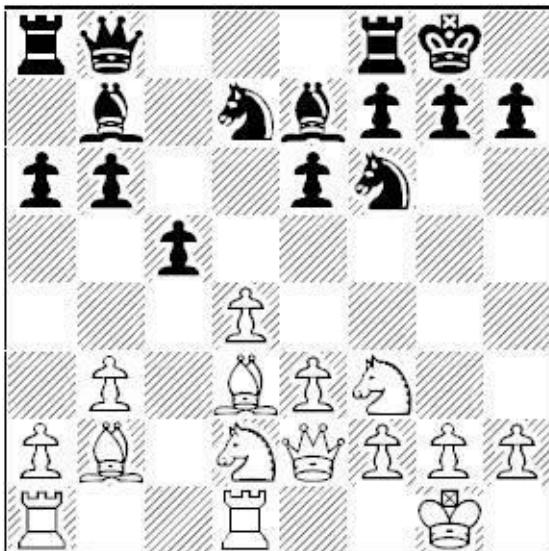
... and White enjoys a strong initiative.

In that line of the Modern Benoni, White plays his desired plan f4 in two steps. The first step is inserted in order to stifle any early Black counterplay attempts. So, returning to San Segundo-Sadler, why can't I do the same in the Queen's Gambit Accepted?



I play my desired plan ... b5 in two steps, and so avoid presenting White with a target for attack at an early stage.

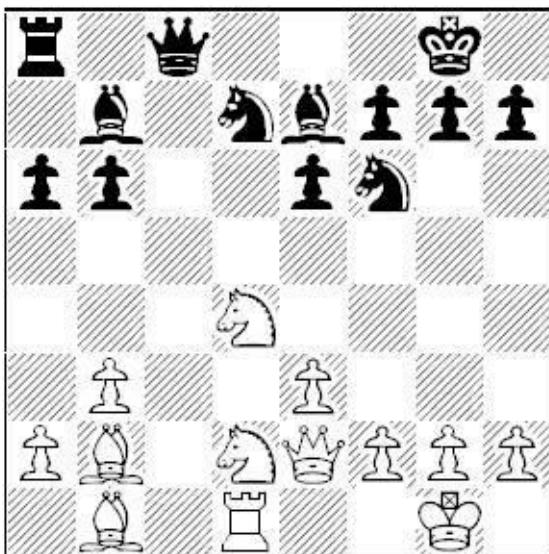
8 Qe2 Bb7 9 Rd1 Nbd7 10 Nbd2 Be7 11 b3 0-0 12 Bb2 Qb8



I felt the time still wasn't right for ... b5, so I carried on developing behind the lines. The text prepares to bring a rook to the c-file so that I can ease my cramped position with an exchange of rooks.

13 Rac1 Rc8 14 Bb1 cxd4 15 Rxc8+ Qxc8 16 Nxd4

So here we have it: the standard QGA symmetrical pawn structure. Dull, but not dead! I played these positions for a win based on two premises:



1) Nerves play a part. The white player can fall prey to all sorts of nervous thoughts:

a) Disappointment and the urge to get away from that disappointment. ‘Curses!, I’ve got absolutely nothing from the opening. I just need to force the draw and get out of here. I can’t seem to find a way to liquidate to a clear draw ... ’

b) Indecision about the best course of action. ‘Shall I offer a draw, or do I play on? I don’t want to be a coward, but I’m not sure what I’m doing as White. Is he playing for a win? Or am I still a bit better? I am White after all ... ’

c) Carelessness. ‘I can do anything. Nothing is ever going to happen to me.’

d) A misplaced desire to ‘show’ Black that White knew precisely what he was doing. ‘So you think you’ve equalized? Well, I’m going to show YOU who’s the better player ... ’ This last frame of mind leads inexorably to the second premise:

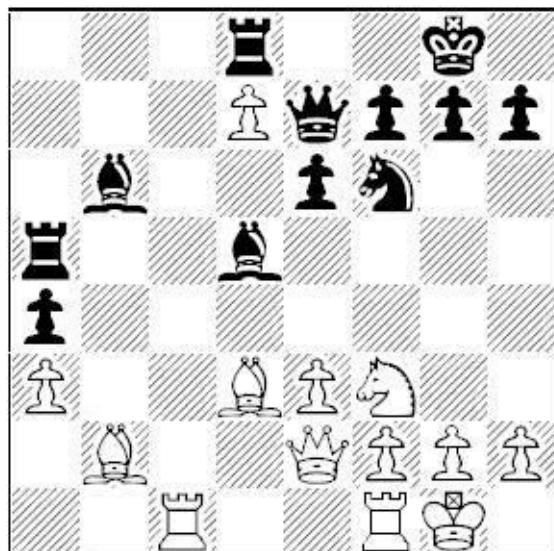
2) White plays e3-e4.

First things first: this isn’t necessarily a bad move. White blocks the diagonal of Black’s light-squared bishop on b7. If he can hold that blockade, then he’s on the way to a really big advantage. Just switching again to a few examples from my games:

Game 2b

M.Sadler-J.Lautier

Elista Olympiad 1998



After a long tactical sequence, I got the chance to shut out the light-squared bishop and

remove every last drop of activity from Black's position:

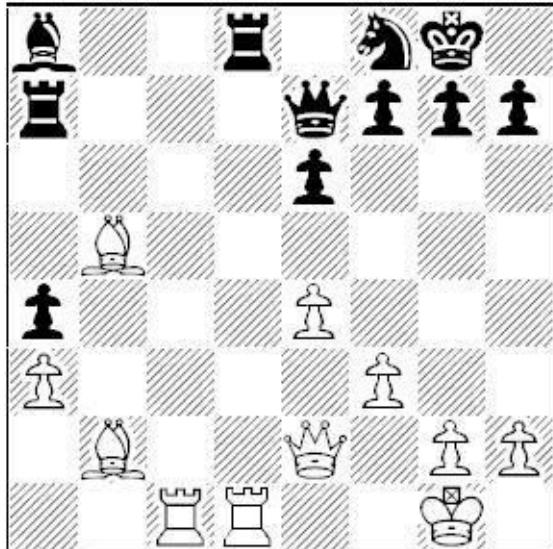
21 e4! Ba8 22 Ne5 Nxd7 23 Ne4!

The dark-squared bishop is the one I want.

23 ... Ra7 24 Nxb6 Nxb6 25 Bb5

This stops Black regrouping with ... Rad7.

25 ... Nd7 26 Rfd1 Nf8 27 f3!

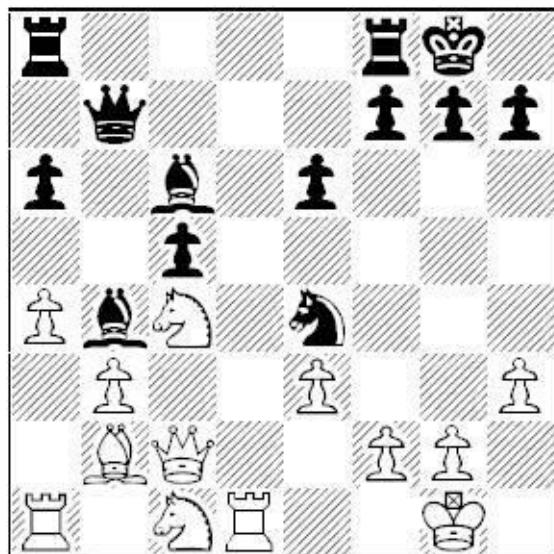


All I want now is to swap off all the major pieces and the a-pawn is mine.

Game 2c

M.Sadler-N.Pedersen

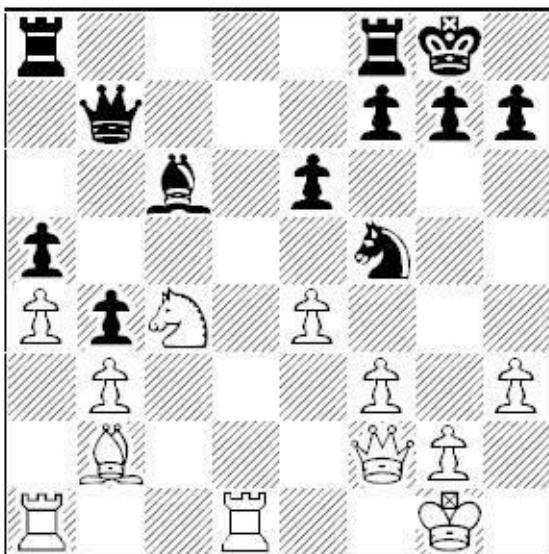
Dutch League 2002



21 Nd3 a5?

21 ... Bd5 was Black's last chance to stay in the game. Now it gets very painful.

22 f3! Ng3 23 Nxb4 cxb4 24 Qf2 Nf5 25 e4!



25 ... Ne7 26 Qc5

The queenside weaknesses render Black's position hopeless.

However, white players often don't quite appreciate how fundamentally e3-e4 changes the position. In one fell swoop, Black gets central dark squares to play with: the a7-g1 diagonal is no longer blocked, while e5 becomes a lovely step-on/step-off square for the queen or a knight. A nice example of this is my game against Mark Hebden:

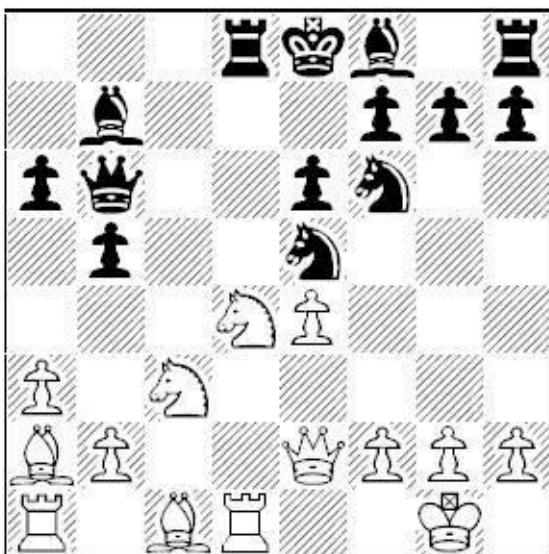
Game 2d

M.Hebden-M.Sadler

Hastings Challengers 1991/92

Queen's Gambit Accepted

1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 Nf3 a6 4 e3 Nf6 5 Bxc4 e6 6 0-0 c5 7 a3 b5 8 Ba2 Bb7 9 Nc3 Nbd7 10 Qe2 Qb6 11 Rd1 Rd8 12 e4?! cxd4 13 Nxd4 Ne5



It starts! Note that Black's pieces are already ideally placed: the queen is on b6 and the knight is already making use of the e5-square. Note also that White's light-squared bishop on the a2-g8 diagonal does not combine well with the plan of advancing e3-e4 in the centre.

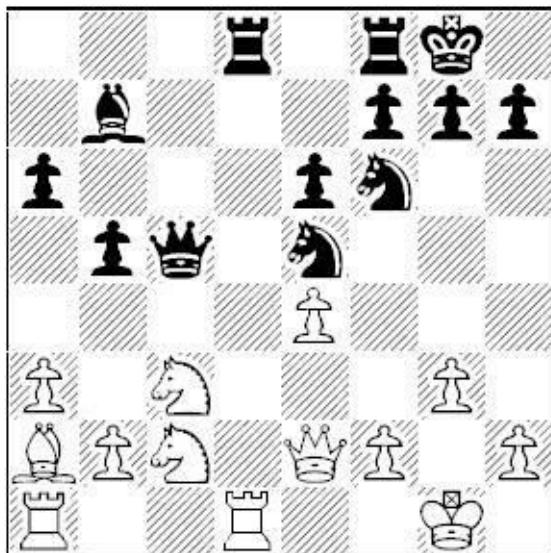
14 Bf4 Ng6 15 Be3 Bc5 16 Nc2 0-0 17 Bxc5 Qxc5

In principle, White really does want to exchange off the dark-squared bishops and leave

Black with a light-squared bishop biting on granite. In the current position, however, White is finding it hard to cope with Black's pressure against e4 and his entry possibilities on the dark squares. The knight on g6 is particularly annoying – remember that knight!

18 g3 Ne5

Got my weakness, back to the transit square. The knight is now looking at both f3 and c4.



19 Rac1 a5

Looking for ... b4 to step up the pressure on e4.

20 Ne3 Rxd1+ 21 Qxd1 Qb6 22 Bb1 Rc8

22 ... Rd8 was awesomely strong as 23 Qe2 Rd2 is curtains. However, I do like what I did: there's no rush, so let White collapse all by himself!

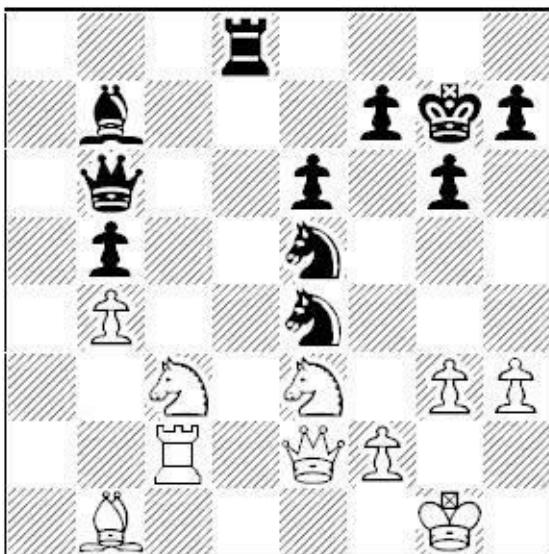
23 b4 axb4 24 axb4 g6?!

Again, 24 ... Rd8!.

25 h3 Kg7?!

And, again, 25 ... Rd8! was indicated.

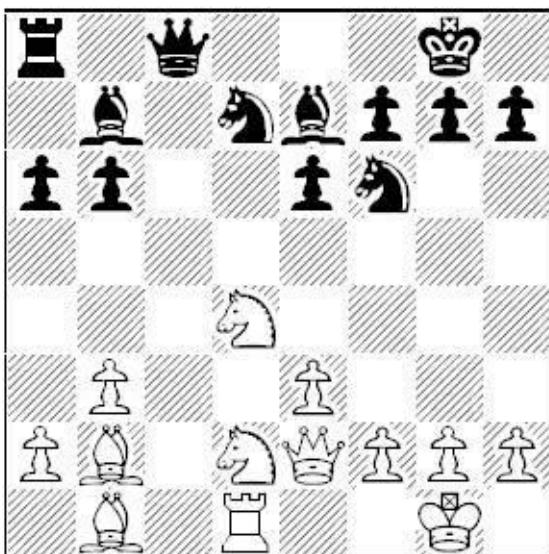
26 Rc2 Rd8 27 Qe2 Nxe4



and Black won shortly:

28 Ng4 Nxe4 29 Nxe4 Bxe4 30 Qxe4 Rd1+ 31 Kg2 Nf6 32 Qe5 Qb7+ 33 f3 Rxb1 34 Rd2 Qa7 0-1

We have seen both extremes in the examples above. In my games against Lautier and Pedersen, Black lost all control over the central dark squares and so couldn't make any use of the drawbacks of e4. In my game against Hebden, Black had everything he could ever dream of. After 16 Nd4 in San Segundo-Sadler White's pieces are better placed and Black's pieces are more passive than in the previous Hebden-Sadler game.



Black won't be able to stop White going e4-e5. But ... that's not bad either! Once White plays e4-e5, the a8-h1 diagonal is reopened for the b7-bishop which gives Black hope again for fun and games on the kingside.

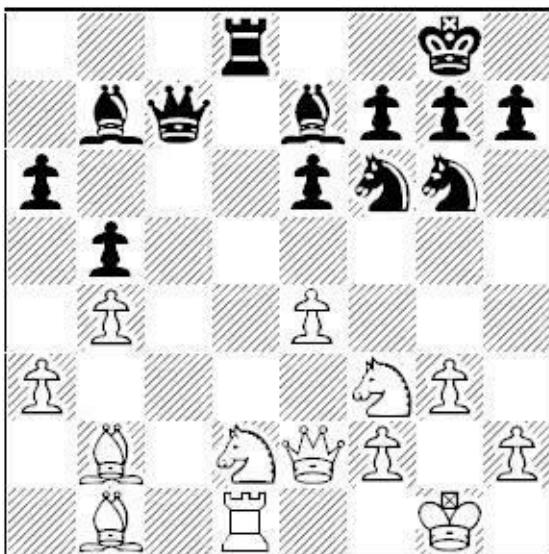
16 ... b5!

This takes c4 away from the white knight. Moreover, a2-a4 isn't dangerous any more.

17 e4 Nf8!

Heading for g6, tickling the f4-square.

18 N4f3 Qc7 19 a3 Rd8 20 b4 Ng6! 21 g3



Now the next step is to somehow give White the urge to play e4-e5.

21 ... Ba8 22 Rc1 Qb7

Eyeing the e4-pawn.

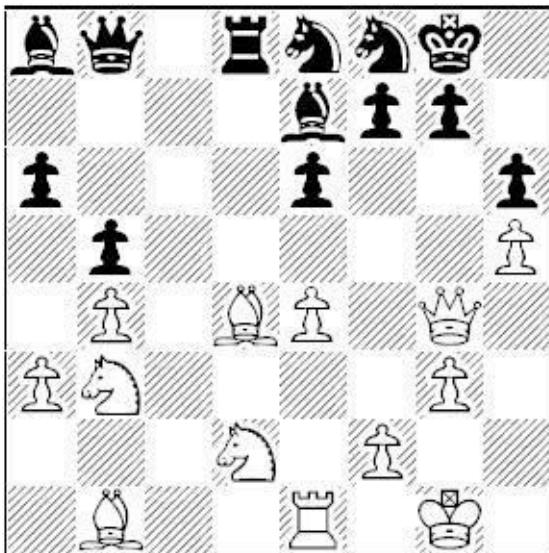
23 Re1 Ne8!

Another typical manoeuvre, bringing the knight to d6 to eye the outpost on c4.

24 Nb3 Nd6 25 Nfd2 Qb6 26 h4

Yum! White's coming forward. My knight doesn't have all that much to do on g6 so I don't mind it being chased away.

26 ... h6 27 Bd4 Qb8 28 h5 Nf8 29 Qg4 Ne8



Classic. I've got a number of teasing little ideas now: ... Bg5, ... Bf6, ... Nf6 and ... e5.

30 e5

There it is!

30 ... Nh7!

Heading for g5.

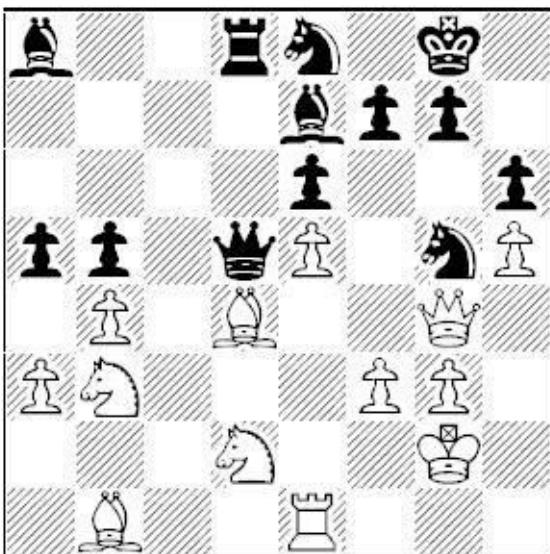
31 Ne4?! Qb7!

That's annoying. The knight is pinned now.

32 f3

Another little weakness appears.

32 ... Qd5 33 Ned2 Ng5 34 Kg2 a5!



The beginning of the end. White's position is collapsing.

35 bxa5 Bxa3 36 Re3 Bb4 37 Rd3 Qc6 38 Bb6 Rxd3 39 Bxd3 Bxd2 0-1

Black wins a piece after 40 Nxd2 Qc3.

This game just goes to show that something new doesn't always mean new moves. Just deciding that you can play a certain type of position for a win instead of for a draw can also unlock a range of hidden possibilities.

Theme 4: Crossover themes

The most rewarding technique for unearthing new ideas in a particular opening is to borrow ideas from other openings. It's both an effective way of discovering new paths during home analysis and an efficient way of finding new opening ideas at the board. We have already seen two examples of this theme in the 7th move notes to my game against San Segundo. However, I first made use of this technique when I discovered some unexpected similarities between my two favourite openings: the Najdorf and the Queen's Gambit Accepted.

I started playing the Najdorf when I was about 10 or 11. I was very heavily influenced by Polugaevsky's games, probably due to his sublime book *Grandmaster Preparation*. I took away four lessons from studying Polugaevsky's Najdorf games:

- a) You castle as late as possible (preferably not at all).
- b) You can survive anything if you calculate precisely enough.
- c) You should delay development in order to achieve positional goals (for example, getting rid of White's remaining central pawn – the e-pawn).
- d) Sacrifice for the initiative!

Looking back, it's quite scary how much a single book can shape your conception of a certain subject. For me, these rules had the immutability of God. Still do, come to think of it. I get this terrible feeling of blasphemy when I see black players castling early in the Najdorf!

Thank goodness for my chess career that Polugaevsky knew what he was doing! You could do worse than follow his example:

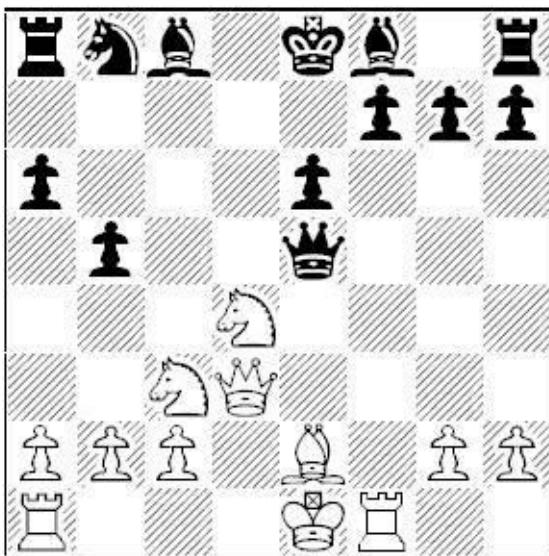
Game 3

M.Tal-L.Polugaevsky

1st matchgame, Alma-Ata Candidates 1980

Sicilian Defence

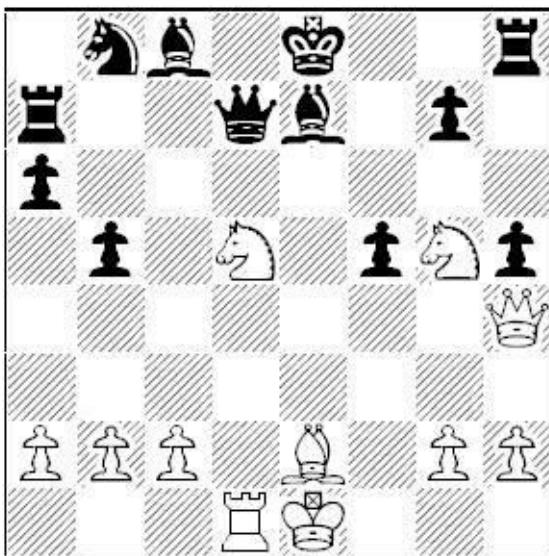
1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 a6 6 Bg5 e6 7 f4 b5 8 e5 dxе5 9 fxе5 Qc7 10 exf6 Qe5+ 11 Be2 Qxg5 12 Qd3 Qxf6 13 Rf1 Qe5



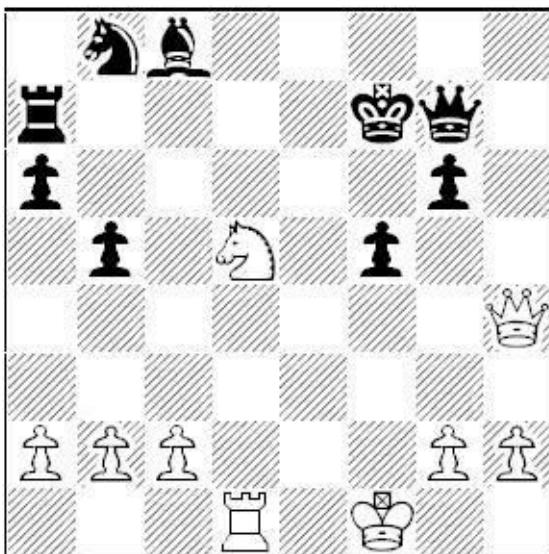
Black removes the e-pawn, trusting in his powers of calculation to help him beat off the resulting attack.

14 Rd1 Ra7 15 Nf3 Qc7 16 Ng5 f5 17 Qd4 h5 18 Rxf5 exf5 19 Nd5 Qd7 20 Qh4 Be7

This may look scary, especially when facing Mikhail Tal, but Black is a rook ahead and Polugaevsky defends with a cool head.



21 Kf1 Bxg5 22 Bxh5+ Kf8 23 Qxg5 Rxh5 24 Qxh5 Qf7 25 Qh8+ Qg8 26 Qh4 Kf7 27 Qh5+ g6 28 Qh4 Qg7



29 Qd8 Be6 30 Qxb8 Rd7 31 c4 bxc4 32 Nc3 Rxd1+ 33 Nxd1 Qd4 34 Nc3 Qd3+ 35 Kf2 Qd4+ 36 Kf1 Qd3+ ½-½

Another Najdorf theme that grabbed my attention was the fight for the e5-square, and I developed a number of home-brewed variations based around this theme. For example, take this very old game of mine:

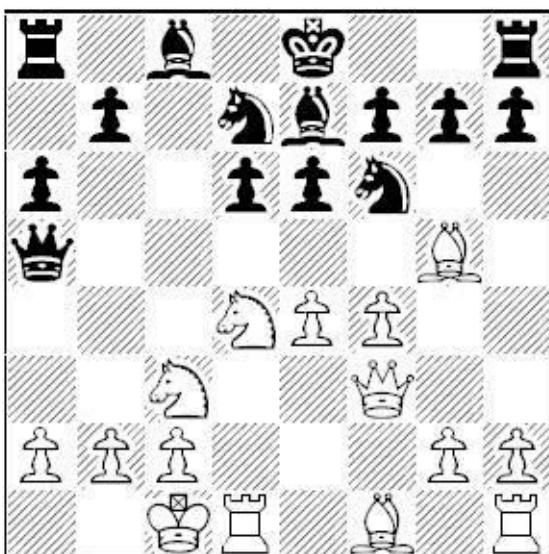
Game 4

S.Cullip-M.Sadler

Hastings Open 1988

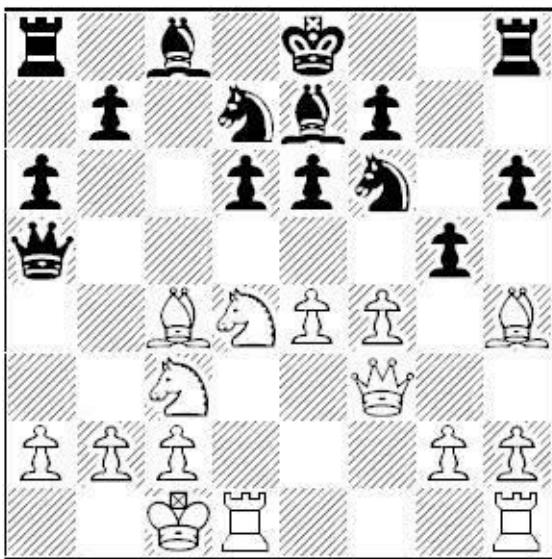
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 a6 6 Bg5 e6 7 f4 Be7 8 Qf3 Nbd7 9 0-0-0 Qa5



Strange, but I have a cunning plan!

10 Bc4 h6 11 Bh4 g5



That's it: the queen aids Black's fight to secure the e5-square for his pieces by supporting ... g5.

12 Be1 gxf4 13 Bb3 Qg5 14 Nde2 e5

and Black won a few moves later:

15 Bf2 Nc5 16 Bxc5 Bg4 17 Qd3 dxc5 18 Nd5 f3+ 19 Rd2 Nxd5 20 Qxd5 Be6 0-1

This may remind you of my emphasis on the e5-square in the QGA positions that we saw earlier, and that's no coincidence. I don't think that I would have cottoned on so quickly to this idea in the QGA if I hadn't been a Najdorf player. The Najdorf was also a huge inspiration for one of the most creative bits of analysis I did in the QGA. Unfortunately, I never got to play it myself! Joel Lautier (whom I seconded for many years) did, but even that wasn't an unqualified success: his opponent, Jan Timman, found the most critical and dangerous idea at the board and even improved significantly on my analysis. Still, it was a great concept!

Game 5

J.Timman-J.Lautier

Ubeda 1997

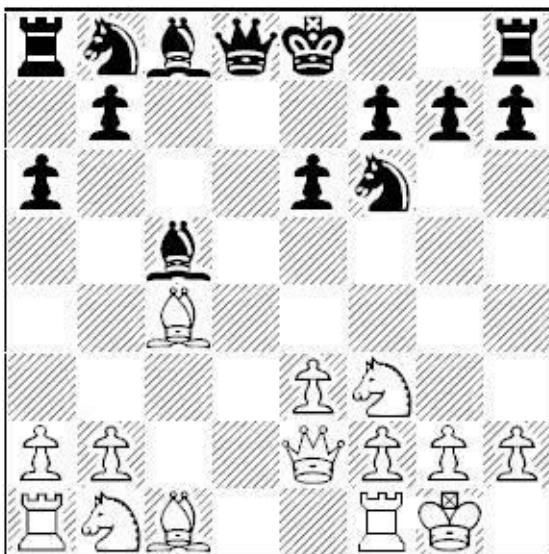
Queen's Gambit Accepted

1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 Nf3 a6 4 e3 Nf6 5 Bxc4 e6 6 Oe2

A very popular continuation at the time which caused Black considerable problems.

6 ... c5 7 dxc5 Bxc5 8 0-0

White's set-up is extremely flexible. He can either go for a slight pull through quiet development with b3, Bb2, Nbd2 etc, or try for a very quick e4-e5 before Black has had time to get himself properly organized.

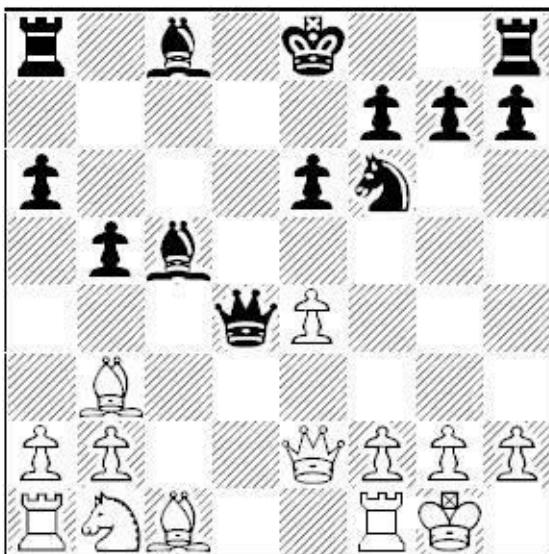


There's also a very cunning trap which has claimed countless victims: 8 ... b5 9 Bd3 Bb7? 10 Bxb5+ nabs a pawn. I came up with a very sharp Najdorf-style idea based on:

- a) No castling!
- b) Fighting for the e5-square.
- c) Pressuring the pawn on e4.

It entailed moving a piece twice in the opening before completing my development in order to achieve positional goals.

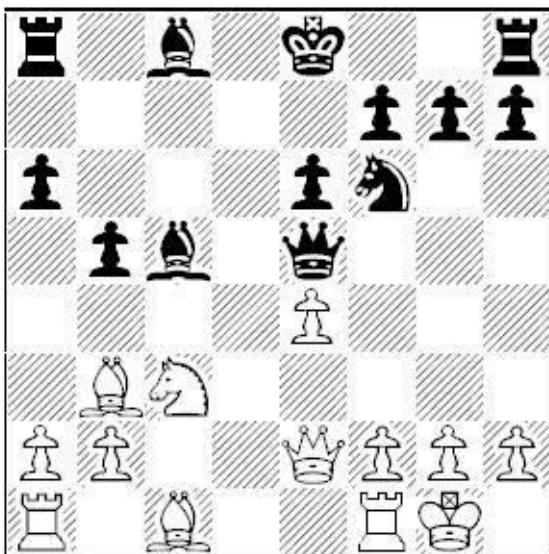
8 ... Nc6 9 e4 b5 10 Bb3 Nd4!? 11 Nxd4 Qxd4



12 Be3!

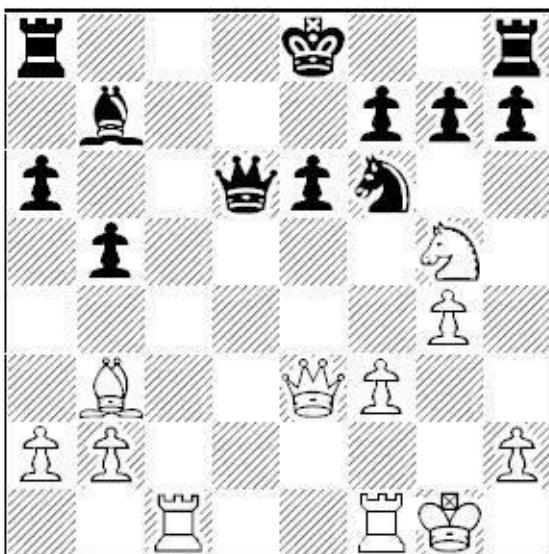
Critical! Instead:

- a) 12 e5 Nd7 13 Re1 Bb7 is very pleasant for Black.
- b) 12 Nc3 Qe5! was the main idea,



when 13 Kh1 Bb7 14 f4 Qd4 15 Nxb5 (15 Rd1 Qf2!) 15 ... Qxe4 16 Nc7+ Ke7 17 Qxe4 Nxe4 18 Nxa8 Rxa8 is fine for Black.

12 ... Qxe4 13 Nd2 Qf5 14 g4 Qe5 15 Nf3 Qe4 16 Ng5 Qc6 17 Rac1 Bb7 18 f3 Bxe3+ 19 Qxe3 Qd6



This was still all analysis. I think, though, that I had underestimated how dangerous the sacrifice on e6 was, or at least the sacrifice of the knight on e6. I seem to remember only looking at 20 Bxe6 0-0 and thinking Black was fine.

20 Nxe6!! fxe6 21 Bxe6 Kf8 22 Rfd1 Qe7 23 g5!

Joel does really well now to hold the draw.

23 ... Re8 24 gxf6 gxf6 25 Qh6+ Qg7+ 26 Qxg7+ Kxg7 27 Rc7+ Kh6 28 Rd6 Bc8 29 Bxc8 Rxc8 30 Rxf6+ Kg5 31 Rxc8 Rxc8 32 Rxa6 Rc2 33 b4 Kf4 34 Rf6+ Ke3 35 a3 Ra2 36 Rf5 Rxa3 37 Kg2 Rb3 38 Re5+ Kf4 39 Re4+ Kf5 40 Kg3 Rb2 41 Rh4 Kf6 42 h3 Rb3 43 Rf4+ Kg6 44 Rd4 Rb1 45 Kh4 Kf6 46 Kg4 Ke5 47 Re4+ Kf6 48 Rd4 Ke5 49 Re4+ Kf6 50 Rf4+ Kg6 51 Rd4 h5+ 52 Kg3 Kf7 53 Kf4 Kf6 54 Ke3 Ke5 55 f4+ Ke6 56 Kd3 Rd1+ 57 Kc3 Rc1+ 58 Kd2 Rb1 59 Ke3 Re1+ 60 Kd2 Rf1 ½-½

This dancing on the dark squares around a central pawn on e4 has become one of my favourite motifs, and I've applied it since to a variety of other openings. Take a look at these two recent games; both examples of using this theme to find ideas at the board.

Game 6

C.Van Oosterom-M.Sadler

Haarlem 2010

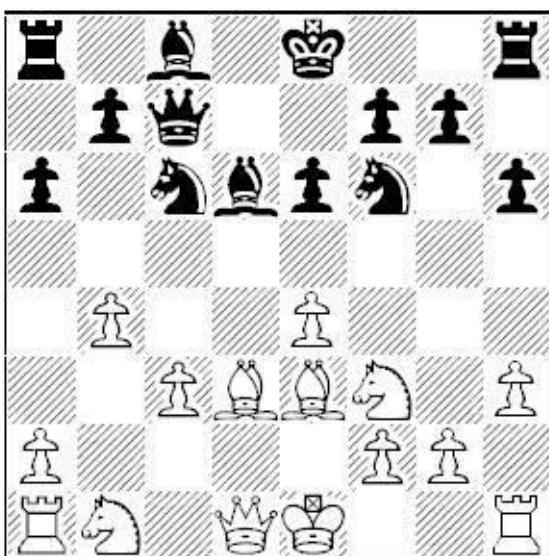
Basman Opening

1 e4 a6!? **2 d4 h6!?** **3 Bd3 c5 4 dxc5 e6 5 Be3 Qc7 6 b4 Nc6 7 c3**

Pretty much as expected. I continued in standard Basman style, trying to pretend that I hadn't just lost a central pawn for nothing.

7 ... d6 8 cxd6 Bxd6 9 Nf3 Nf6 10 h3

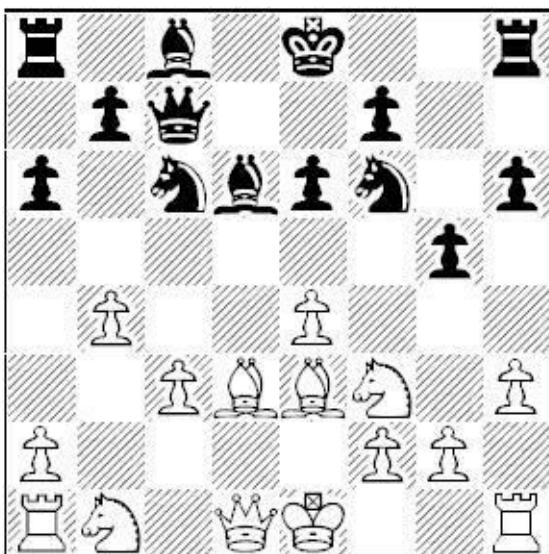
One of those life-defining moments. To be absolutely honest, I was wondering what had possessed me to play this opening in the morning round of this strong weekend tournament. I wasn't feeling that sharp-witted, I was already starting to fall behind on the clock, I was really missing my central pawn ... and in a stunning moment of clarity, I realized that I really did not fancy losing like a complete idiot.



Then all of a sudden, it struck me that I was just looking at a Queen's Gambit Accepted. Granted, one where White has an extra pawn on the c-file, but well ... you can see the positive side to that too: the black queen is nice and safe on c7 now.

Forget all those nice classical ideas you've been looking at so far like castling and developing. Think Polugaevsky! What I really needed to do was to fight with all my might for the use of the e5-square. By any means possible. And then I understood that I had one good positional move in this position. This one move changed everything for me!

10 ... g5!



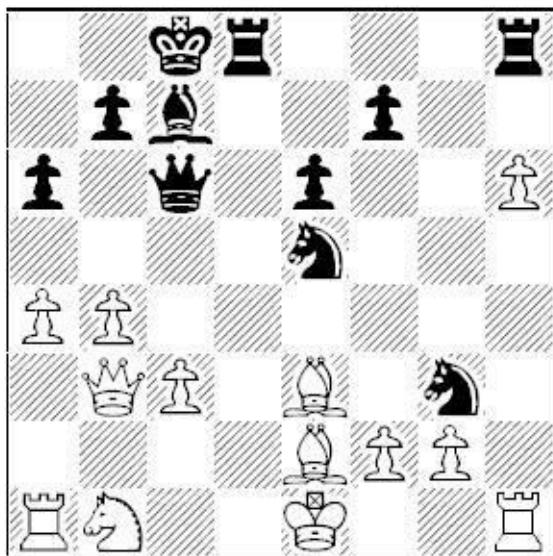
11 a3 g4!

Fighting for the e5-square and disrupting White's position. White begins to panic and it ends in flames.

12 Nd4 Ne5

Got it!

13 Be2 Nxe4 14 hxg4 Bd7 15 g5 0-0-0 16 gxh6 Bc6 17 Nxc6 Qxc6 18 Qb3 Bc7 19 a4? Ng3!



20 fxg3 Qxg2 21 Rf1 Nd3+ 22 Bxd3 Rxd3 0-1

Without that game, with its positional theme of fighting for the central dark squares with an advance of the g-pawn, I might never have played this game:

Game 7

F.Elburg-M.Sadler

Dutch League 2011

Sicilian Defence

1 c4 b6 2 Nc3 Bb7 3 e4 e6 4 d3 c5 5 g3 Nf6 6 Bg2 Be7 7 Nge2 d6 8 0-0 Nc6

9 h3



I wasn't thrilled with the way I had developed. White has two obvious plans to gain space:
 a) Expanding on the kingside with f4, g4.

b) Expanding in the centre with d4 leading to a Hedgehog type position after ... cxd4; Nxd4.

The first plan is the most annoying. White avoids central conflict and asks Black to think up something active himself. Black's natural plan is to gain space on the queenside with ... b5, but I haven't made a good start on that by playing ... b6 and ... Bb7 at such an early stage. If I castle kingside, then I castle into the area where White is expanding. Castling queenside ... hmm. Well, it's an acquired taste.

None of the normal stuff looks that great. So I started looking around for different development schemes. The normal random moves like ... h5 pop into your mind of course, but I couldn't really wrap a plan around that. I started thinking about why castling queenside seemed such a bad idea. It looked much easier for White to open lines on the queenside than for Black to open lines on the kingside. I don't have any convincing targets to get started there. It would be easier if White had played f4 for example: I could look for something like ... g5 opening up the g-file, even at the cost of a pawn. If I had that, then I could consider castling queenside. I would still give White a big target, but at least I would have something in return ...

Lightbulb! How about playing ... h6 and ... g5? If White just lets me do it, then I can meet f4 with ... gxf4 which gives White a dilemma: gxf4 opens up the g-file which gives me an avenue of attack against the white king, but if White takes back with a piece, then I have the e5-square! White does have the f-file, of course, so f7 might get a bit sensitive, but hey ho, you can't have everything.

The big question is: what does Black do if White avoids f4, and just switches back to gaining space in the centre with d4. Doesn't ... h6 and ... g5 just look silly then? Well, then you need to know your classics! Take a look at these two games:

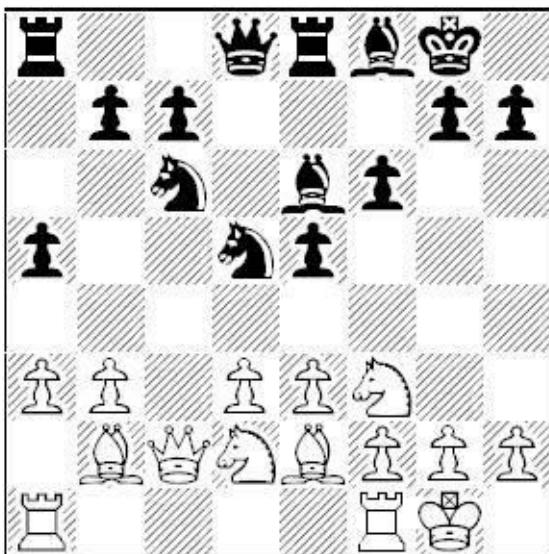
Game 7a

R.Fischer-U.Andersson

Siegen 1970

Nimzowitsch-Larsen Attack

1 b3 e5 2 Bb2 Nc6 3 c4 Nf6 4 e3 Be7 5 a3 0-0 6 Qc2 Re8 7 d3 Bf8 8 Nf3 a5 9 Be2 d5 10 cxd5 Nxd5 11 Nbd2 f6 12 0-0 Be6

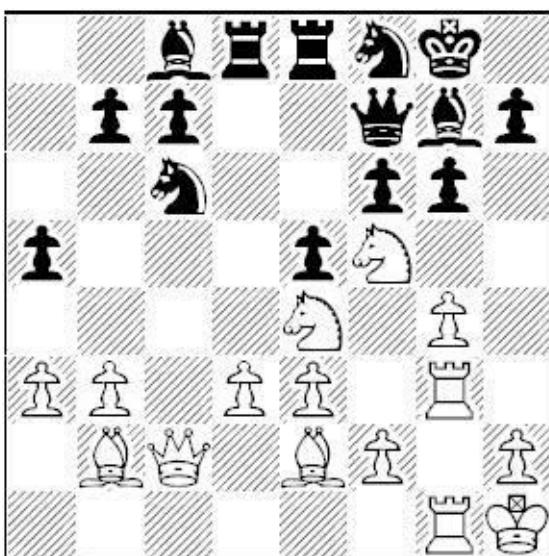


13 Kh1 Qd7 14 Rg1! Rad8 15 Ne4 Qf7 16 g4

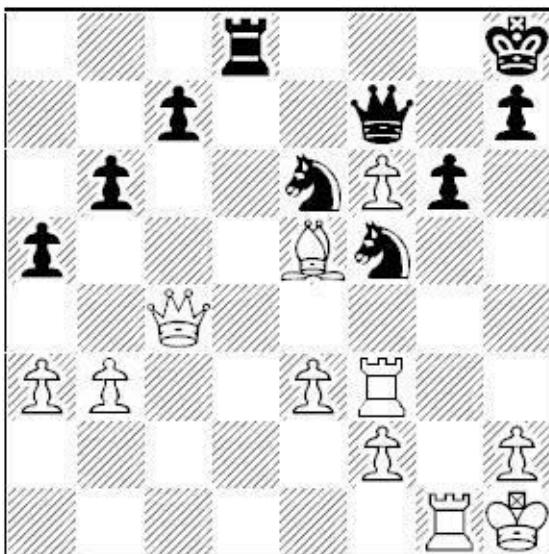
Beginning the attack, but just what is Black up to?

16 ... g6 17 Rg3 Bg7 18 Rag1 Nb6 19 Nc5 Bc8 20 Nh4 Nd7 21 Ne4 Nf8 22 Nf5!

Fischer went on to win a beautiful game:



**22 ... Be6 23 Nc5 Ne7 24 Nxg7 Kxg7 25 g5 Nf5 26 Rf3 b6 27 gxf6+ Kh8 28 Nxe6 Rxe6
29 d4 exd4 30 Bc4 d3 31 Bxd3 Rxd3 32 Qxd3 Rd6 33 Qc4 Ne6 34 Be5 Rd8**



35 h4 Nd6 36 Qg4 Nf8 37 h5 Ne8 38 e4 Rd2 39 Rh3 Kg8 40 hxg6 Nxg6 41 f4 Kf8 42 Qg5 Nd6 43 Bxd6+ 1-0

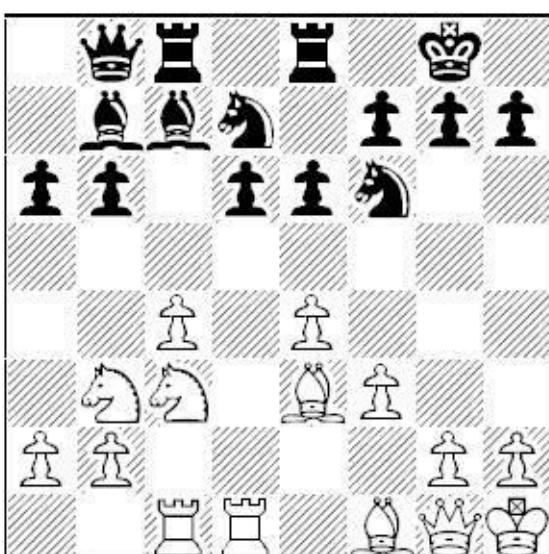
Game 7b

M.Taimanov-A.Yusupov

USSR 1982

English Opening

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 Nf3 cxd4 4 Nxd4 b6 5 Nc3 Bb7 6 f3 e6 7 e4 d6 8 Be2 a6 9 Be3 Nbd7 10 0-0 Be7 11 Qd2 0-0 12 Rfd1 Rc8 13 Rac1 Qc7 14 Bf1 Rfe8 15 Kh1 Qb8 16 Qf2 Bd8 17 Nb3 Bc7 18 Qg1



18 ... Kh8!

In this typical Hedgehog position Yusupov borrows Fischer's plan.

19 Rc2 Rg8! 20 Rcd2 g5! 21 Bd4 Rg6 22 Nc1 Rcg8 23 Nd3 Qf8 24 Re1 g4!

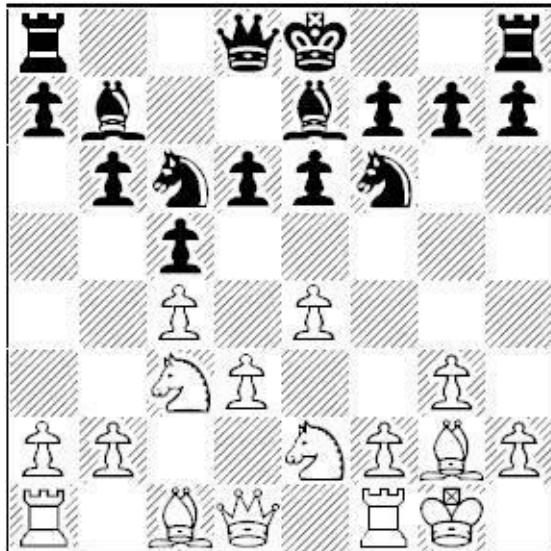
Black has a big initiative and Yusupov won after:

25 fxg4 e5 26 Be3 Nxg4 27 Nd5 Bd8 28 Nf2 Bh4 29 Ree2 Nxe3 30 Nxe3 Bxf2 31 Qxf2 Bxe4 32 Nf5 Ne5 33 Ng3 Ba8 34 Rd1 Ne6 35 Qxb6 Nf4 36 Rf2 Qh6 37 Kg1 Qh4 38 Qb3 Rh6 39 Rxf4 exf4 40 Qc3+ f6 41 Nf5 Rxg2+ 42 Bxg2 Qxh2+ 0-1

Summarizing the position after the 9 h3 in Elburg-Sadler:

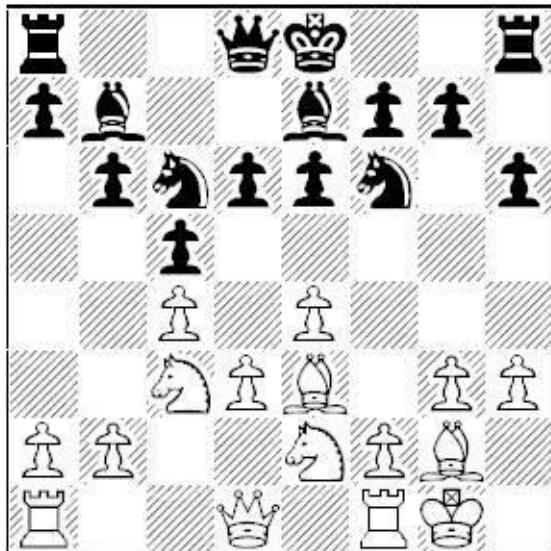
White has two clear plans: gaining space on the kingside (f4, g4) and gaining space in the

centre (d4). I'm most worried about the plan of f4 and g4 because then I need to come up with something to do myself. None of the standard stuff looks convincing: for example, castling kingside puts me in the line of fire of White's kingside expansion.



I want to fight White's kingside expansion by trying to gain space there myself. If lines get opened there, then I can castle queenside. That's risky, but at least I've already made a start attacking White's kingside. And if White switches back to a standard plan of d4, I can claim to be following the example of Fischer and Yusupov!

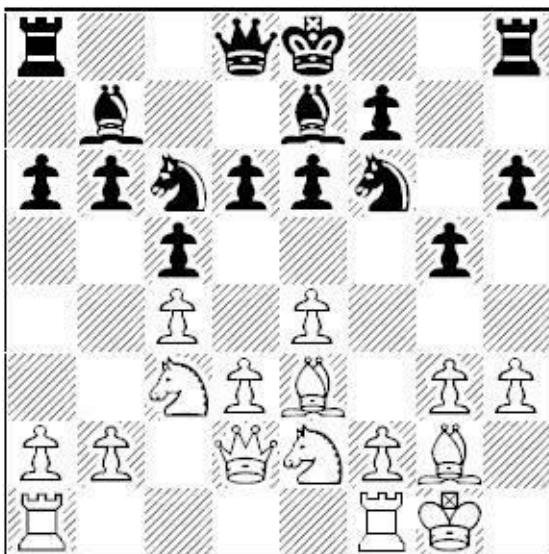
9 ... h6!? **10 Be3**



10 ... a6!?

Camouflaging my idea. I wanted to be able to answer d4 with ... cxd4; Nxd4 Ne5, but I wasn't 100% happy about doing it immediately. I don't think that was necessary, though. Indeed, 10 ... g5 11 d4 cxd4 12 Nxd4 Ne5 13 f4 gxf4 (13 ... Nxc4 14 Qa4+ was my worry of course) 14 gxf4 Ned7 is pretty much what I was looking for!

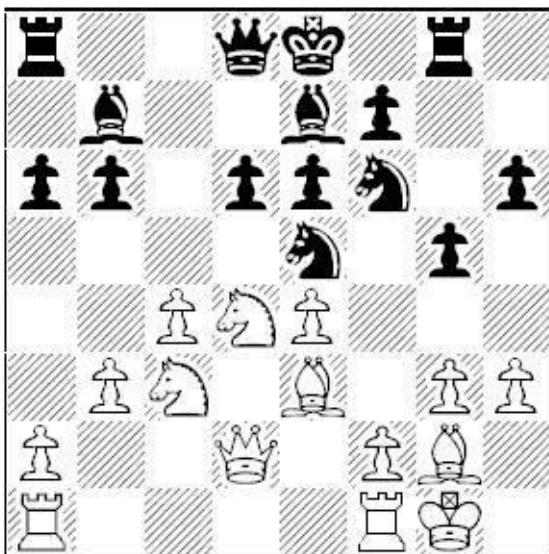
11 Qd2 g5



12 f4?!

Better was 12 d4, although actually it's not clear that Black even needs to take on d4 immediately. After 13 d5 Ne5 14 b3, Black can try 14 ... g4 when the threat of ... Nf3+ is quite annoying. So we have:

- a) 12 ... Qc7!? 13 b3 e5 14 dxc5 dxc5 15 Nd5 Nxd5 16 cxd5 Nd4, although White is probably better after, say, 17 b4!?.
- b) 12 ... e5!? 13 dxc5 dxc5 14 Nd5 Nd4 (14 ... Nxd5 15 exd5 Nd4? 16 Bxd4 exd4 17 d6 wins) 15 Nec3 should be a bit nicer for White.
- c) 12 ... cxd4 13 Nxd4 Ne5 14 b3 and then:
 - c1) After 14 ... g4 15 h4 h5 I'm not quite sure how Black will follow up, but if instead 15 ... b5 16 cxb5 axb5 17 Ndxb5 Nf3+ 18 Bxf3 gxf3 19 Rfd1 Ra6 20 e5 or 15 ... Nfd7 16 Bxh6 Bxh4 17 gxh4 Qxh4 18 Bf4 Nf3+ 19 Nxf3 gxf3 20 Bxf3 Ne5 21 Bg2, and White wins in both cases.
 - c2) 14 ... Rg8! and I'll follow in the footsteps of Fischer/Yusupov and put the king on h7!



White has two entry points into Black's position:

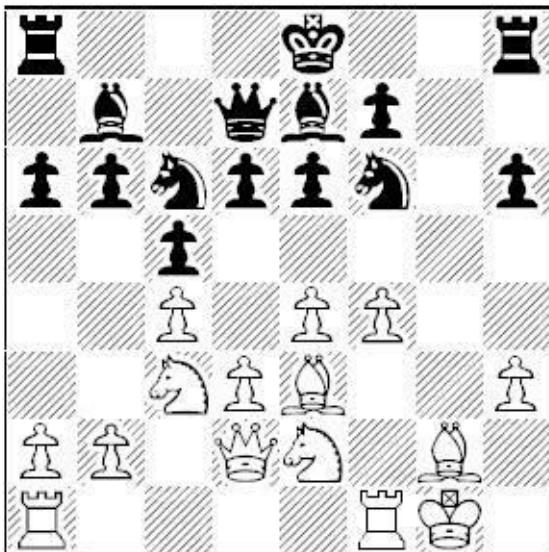
- 1) The f4 break pushing back the black knight on e5 and aiming to follow up with f5 or (rather unlikely) e5. This is, however, very risky for White due to the open g-file. If it works, it's going to be due to a one-off specific thing.
- 2) An attack against the weak b6-pawn. However, the obvious Na4 will fail due to the weakness of e4. Therefore a more modest attack with a4-a5 seems quite logical, holding White's position while introducing an extra threat.

The quiet Kh1 is another useful move that will be played very soon, hinting at a future f4. Play might continue 15 ... Rc8!? 16 a5 bxa5 17 Qa2 Rc5!? with ... Qa8 to follow, and if 18 Nc2 g4!?.

12 ... gxf4 13 gxf4?!

If 13 Rxf4 Nd7.

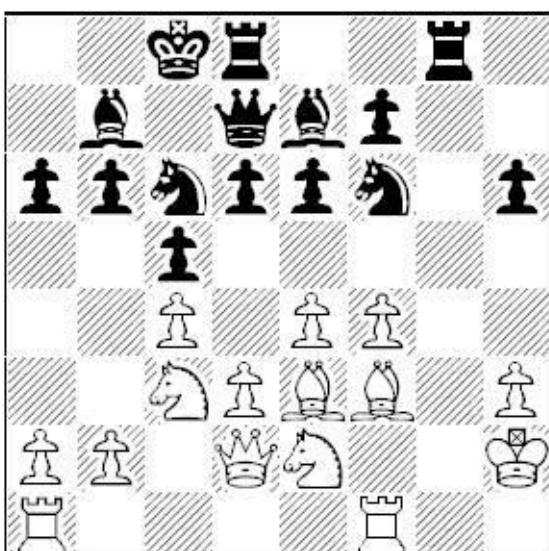
13 ... Qd7



14 Kh2

14 Na4 Bd8 holds the b-pawn.

14 ... Rg8 15 Bf3 0-0-0



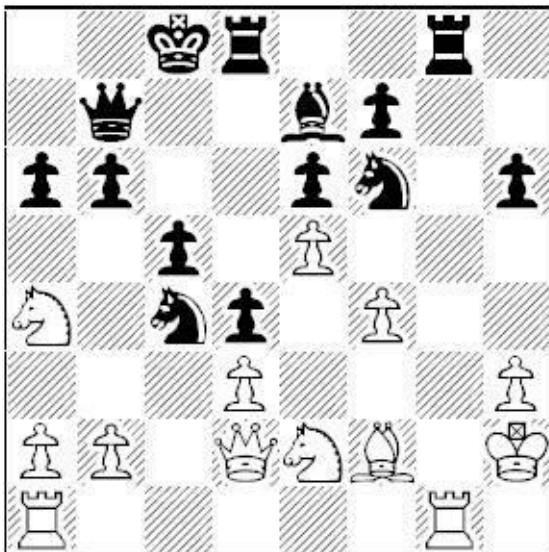
16 Rg1

The direct 16 Na4 Qc7 17 b4 Nxb4 18 Rab1 sort of worried me a bit ...

16 ... Na5! 17 Bf2 d5! 18 cxd5

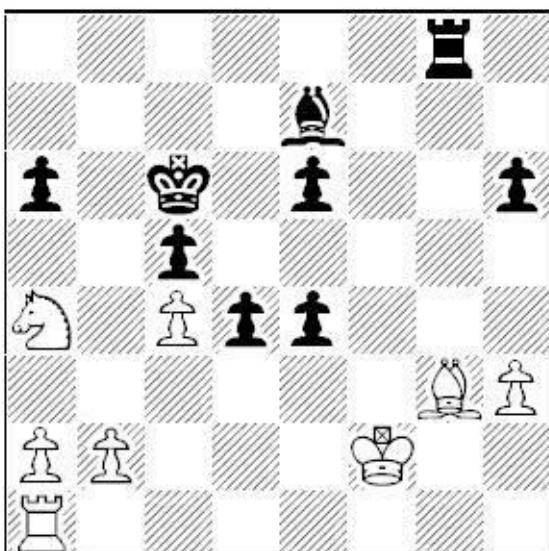
18 e5 was much sharper. I've done lots of analysis of this position, but I'll just show you a couple of variations here to give a flavour of things. Note especially how the weakness I've created on the white kingside by opening the g-file comes back in all the tactics. If I hadn't done that before castling queenside, then nothing would have worked. After 18 ... d4 19 Bxb7+

$Qxb7$ 20 $Na4$ $Nxc4!$ (the cunning idea behind 16 ... $Na5$; 20 ... $Nd7$ gives White some respite) we have:



a) 21 $dxc4$ $Ne4$ 22 $Qe1$ $Rxg1$ 23 $Qxg1$ $b5$ (if 23 ... $Nd2$ 24 $Qg2!$ $Nf3+$ 25 $Kh1$) 24 $cxb5$ $Qxb5!$ 25 $Nac3$ $dxc3$ 26 $Nxc3$ $Nxc3$ 27 $bxcc3$ $Qc4$ is good for Black.

b) After 21 $Qc2$ $Qf3$ 22 $Ng3$ I was sure during the game that something would be winning here, but it's not as clear as I thought: 22 ... $Qxf4$ (22 ... $Ng4+$ 23 $hxg4$ $Rxg4$ 24 $Rg2$ $Ne3$ 25 $Bxe3$ $Qxe3$ – threatening ... $Rh4+$ – 26 $Qf2$ is dangerous for White, but is not conclusive after, say, 26 ... $b5$ 27 $Nxc5$ $Bxc5$ 28 $Qxe3$ $dxe3$ 29 $Rc1$) 23 $dxc4$ $Nd7$ 24 $Qe4!$ $Qxe4$ (otherwise, 24 ... $Qxf2+$ 25 $Rg2$ $Qe3$ 26 $Qc6+$ $Kb8$ 27 $Nxb6$ $Nxe5$ 28 $Qa8+$ $Kc7$ 29 $Qa7+$ $Kc6$ 30 $Qxa6$ leads to a draw, and White is better after 24 ... $Qxe5$ 25 $Nxb6+$ $Kc7$ 26 $Nxd7$) 25 $Nxe4$ $Nxe5$ 26 $Nxb6+$ $Kb7$ 27 $Rxg8$ $Rxg8$ 28 $Na4$ $Kc6$ 29 $Bg3!$ $Nf3+$ (29 ... $Nxc4$ 30 $Rc1$ $Ne3$ 31 $Nexc5$ isn't so clear) 30 $Kg2$ $f5$ 31 $Kxf3$ $fxe4+$ 32 $Kf2$ and I like Black.



White's key difficulty is that the bishop on g3 cannot leave its post: ... $Bh4+$ is very awkward for White. Then Black forces entry to the seventh rank and takes control of the queening square of the passed e-pawn.

18 ... exd5 19 e5 d4 20 Bxb7+ Qxb7 21 exf6 dxc3 22 bxc3

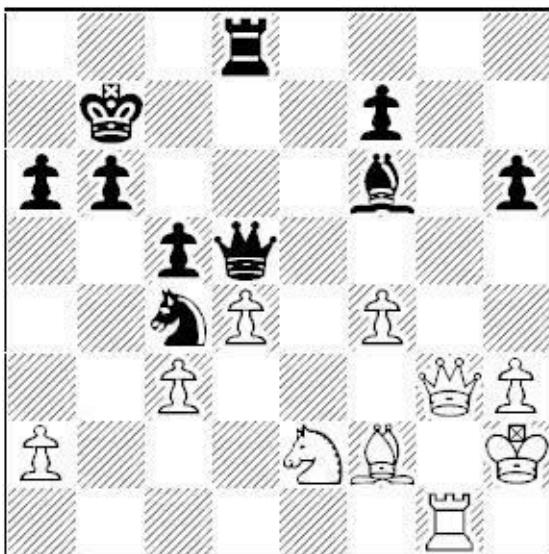
Otherwise:

a) 22 $Qxc3$ $Qf3!$ 23 $Bg3$ $Rxd3$ 24 $Qe5$ $Rd2$ wins.

b) 22 $Nxc3$ $Rxg1$ 23 $Rxg1$ $Bxf6$ 24 $Qe2$ $Nc6$ is very pleasant for Black.

22 ... Rxg1 23 Rxg1 Bxf6 24 Qe3 Qd5 25 d4 Ne4 26 Qd3 Kb7 27 Qg3?

A slip, but 27 $Rb1$ $Kc6$ is very nice for Black.



27 ... Nd2! 28 Rd1 Nf3+ 29 Kg2

Black wins too after 29 Kh1 Nxd4+ 30 Kh2 (30 Kg1 Nxe2) 30 ... Nf3+.

29 ... Nxd4+ 30 Kf1 Nxe2 0-1

31 Rxd5 Nxg3+ wins.

Theme 5: Acts of wanton aggression

In this section, we consider a number of standard ways of upping the tension in a position.

An unreasonable 0-0-0

My all-time favourite method for sharpening up a position. I was enormously influenced by this opening idea in the 5 Bf4 variation of the Queen's Gambit Declined:

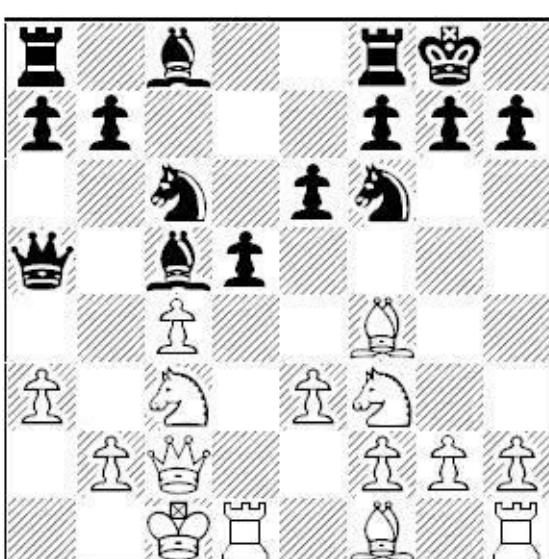
Game 8

M.Gurevich-A.Sokolov

USSR Championship, Moscow 1988

Queen's Gambit Declined

1 Nf3 d5 2 d4 Nf6 3 c4 e6 4 Bf4 Be7 5 e3 0-0 6 Ne3 c5 7 dxc5 Bxc5 8 Qc2 Nc6 9 a3 Qa5 10 0-0-0



10 ... dxc4 11 Bxc4 Be7 12 g4 b5 13 Bxb5 Bb7 14 Nd2 Nb4 15 axb4 Bxb4 16 Nc4 Qa1+ 17 Kd2 Bxc3+ 18 Ke2 Qa2 19 Ra1 1-0

I was impressed by the idea of course, but I was even more impressed by the unsettling effect the idea, combined with the sharp follow-up 12 g4, had on Gurevich's very strong opponent. 12 ... b5 (a pawn sacrifice played on general grounds, but not properly calculated) and the panic reaction 14 ... Nb4 (facing White's sneaky idea of Nc4 winning the queen) show how confused and vulnerable the black player felt.

So I had to try that too! One of the games that have stuck in my memory is my game against Keith Arkell, played towards the end of the British Championship of 1995. I was playing really appallingly, as I tended to around that time (I was so distressed by the way I was playing, I was one game away – one time-trouble second away in fact – from stopping chess in 1995), but this game started me off on a 3/3 finish and my first British title.

10 0-0-0 wasn't a great chess move in this particular game, but it had the right psychological effect. I really felt that I'd forced Keith into an unfamiliar type of position and that his play in the middlegame suffered as a result.

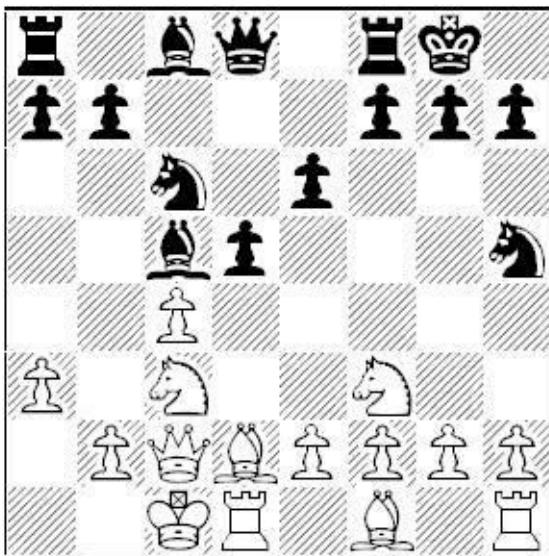
Game 9

M.Sadler-K.Arkell

British Championship, Swansea 1995

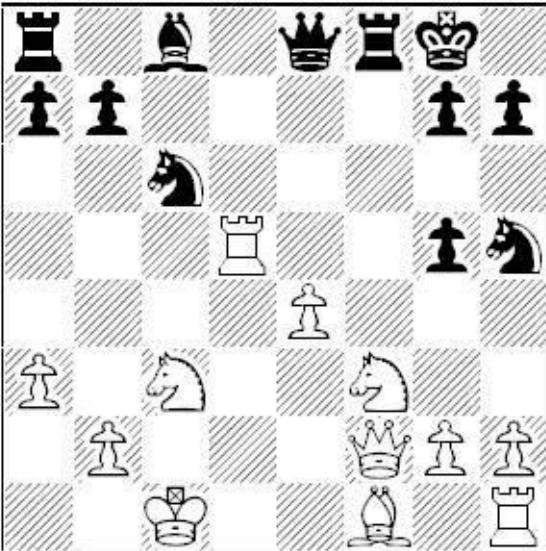
Nimzo-Indian Defence

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Ne3 Bb4 4 Qc2 c5 5 dxc5 0-0 6 a3 Bxc5 7 Nf3 Nc6 8 Bf4 Nh5 9 Bd2 d5
10 0-0-0**



Not a particularly good move in fact, but quite a good choice against Keith who prefers positions in which he can make decisions on general grounds.

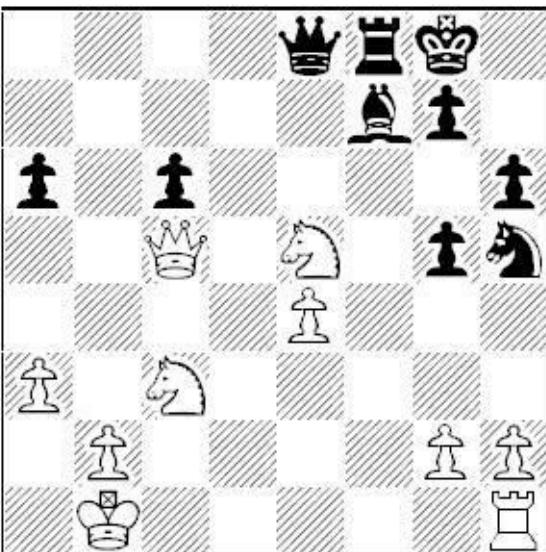
10 ... Bxf2 11 cxd5 exd5 12 Bg5 f6 13 Rxd5 Qe8 14 e4 fxg5 15 Qxf2



15 ... h6

15 ... g4 16 Qh4 Nf6 would have been extremely painful. I had seen some attacking lines here when calculating 10 0-0-0, but obviously hadn't bothered to look properly at the defences ... After Keith's choice, I get my pieces coordinated quite effectively.

16 Qc5 Be6 17 Rd6 Bf7 18 Bb5 Rc8 19 Kb1 a6 20 Bxc6 Rxc6 21 Rxc6 bxc6 22 Ne5



With a pleasant advantage for White which I eventually converted:

22 ... Nf6 23 Nxc6 Kh7 24 Ka1 Nxe4? 25 Nxe4 Qxe4 26 Qxf8 Qc4 27 Nb4 a5 28 Qa8! axb4 axb4 Bd5 30 Qa5 Bxg2 31 Qf5+ Kh8 32 Rd1 Qc7 33 Qf8+ Kh7 34 Qf5+ Kh8 35 b5 Qa5+ 36 Kb1 Qa8 37 Rd4 Qa5 38 Qd3 Qe1+ 39 Ka2 Qe6+ 40 b3 1-0

Early kingside thrusts

Thanks to the efforts of Alexei Shirov, the early kingside pawn thrust g4-g5 has become a standard weapon in many different openings. g4-g5 is effective because it disrupts the black knight on f6 which is normally a stable factor in Black's position: the knight both supports the central squares e4 and d5 and helps defend the kingside. Take a look at this somewhat famous example:

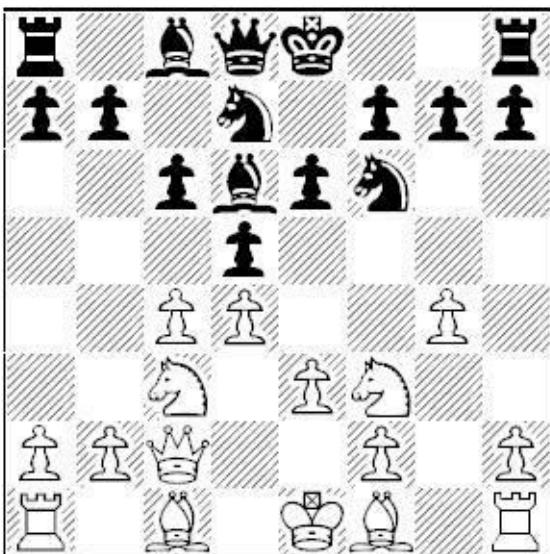
Game 10

A.Shirov-T.Thorhallsson

Reykjavik 1992

Semi-Slav Defence

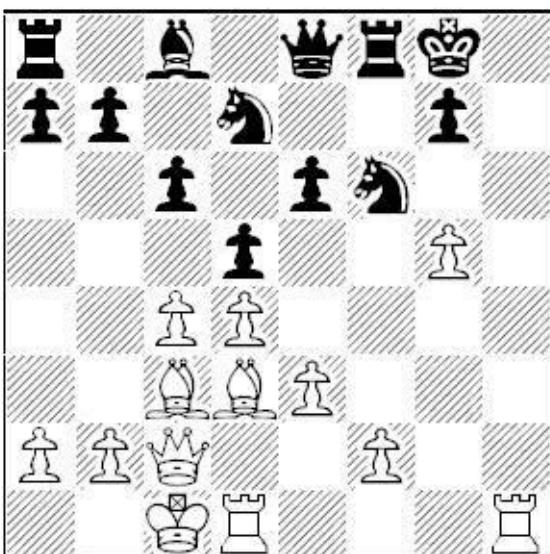
1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Nf3 e6 5 e3 Nbd7 6 Qc2 Bd6 7 g4



7 ... 0-0 8 g5 Nh5 9 Bd2 f5 10 gxf6 Nhxf6

Black has got his knight back into play but only at the cost of weakening his kingside and allowing the opening the g-file.

11 Ng5 Qe8 12 0-0-0 h6 13 h4 Bb4 14 Bd3 Bxc3 15 Bxc3 hxg5 16 hxg5



A pawn on g5 again! The knight has to move.

16 ... Ne4 17 Bxe4 dxe4 18 Qxe4 Rf5 19 Qh4 Qg6 20 Qh8+ Kf7 21 f4

With a massive position for White, who won after:

21 ... Nf8 22 Qh4 Ke8 23 e4 Rf7 24 Rhe1 Kd8 25 d5 cxd5 26 cxd5 Bd7 27 f5 exf5 28 e5 f4 29 e6 Ba4 30 Rd2 Rf5 31 Qf2 f3 32 Re4 Rxg5 33 Rxa4 Rg1+ 34 Rd1 Rg2 35 Qh4+ Ke8 36 Re4 Rc8 37 d6 Rd8 38 Qe7 mate (1-0)

Recently Aronian came up with a slight twist to this idea: an early kingside pawn storm aimed at a pawn on h6 even when the Black knight has already left f6! As we can see from the following game, this idea is working a treat:

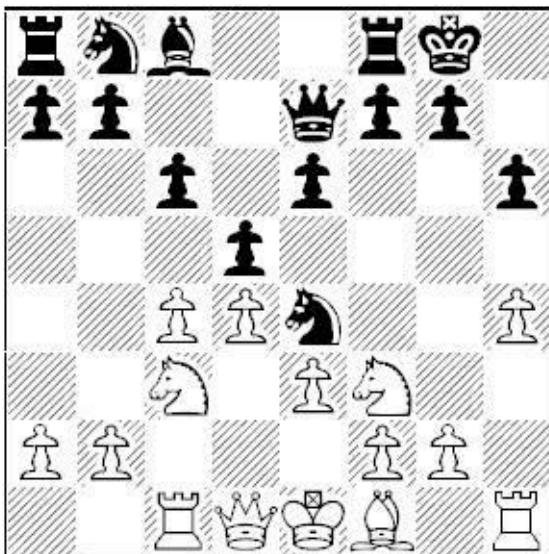
Game 11

S.Ernst-P.Harikrishna

Wijk aan Zee 2012

Queen's Gambit Declined

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 d5 4 Nc3 Be7 5 Bg5 h6 6 Bh4 0-0 7 e3 Ne4 8 Bxe7 Qxe7 9 Rc1 c6 10 h4

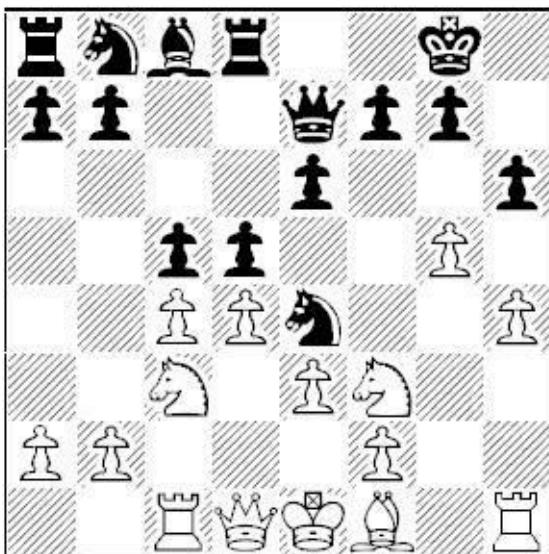


Here comes the first pawn!

10 ... Rd8 11 g4

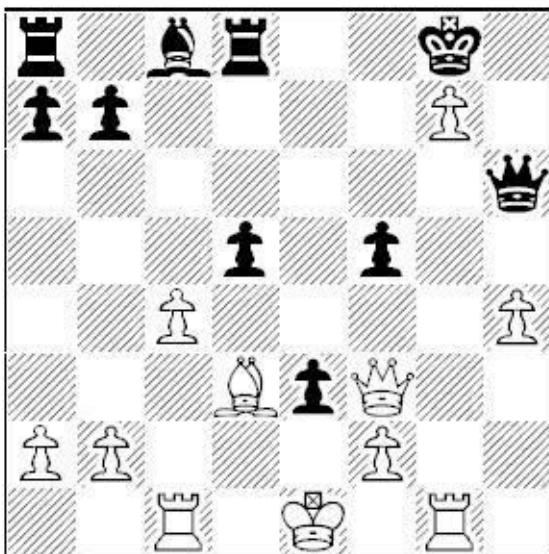
And now the second!

11 ... c5 12 g5



White's kingside play is already extremely dangerous.

12 ... Nc6 13 gxh6 Qf6 14 hxg7 cxd4 15 Nxe4 dxe4 16 Nxd4 Qh6 17 Rg1 Nxd4 18 exd4 e3 19 Bd3 f5 20 d5 exd5 21 Qf3



This is a great attacking position for White and Ernst converted:

21 ... Be6 22 Qxe3 f4 23 Qe5 Re8 24 Kd2 Bf7 25 Qg5 Qb6 26 Qf5 Qxb2+ 27 Kd1 Re4 28 cxd5 Rae8 29 Bxe4 Qd4+ 30 Bd3 Bh5+ 31 Kc2 Qa4+ 32 Kb2 Qb4+ 33 Kc2 Qa4+ 34 Kd2 Qa5+ 35 Rc3 Qxa2+ 36 Rc2 Qa5+ 37 Rc3 Qa2+ 38 Bc2 Re2+ 39 Kd3 Qa6+ 40 Rc4 Qa3+ 41 Rc3 Qa6+ 42 Kd4 Rd2+ 43 Ke5 Qe2+ 44 Kf6 1-0

Theme 6: The spoilsport gambit (exchanging queens)

It's very easy to get carried away during analysis, only considering the complicated, attacking stuff and forgetting all the options that simplify the position. After all, are you going to be impressed with yourself if you spend four hours on a position and all you come up with is an exchange of queens?

I like to think back to an experience I had while analysing an interesting position with some strong players. Kramnik was looking over our shoulders. Every weird, 'creative' idea we had got beaten down by him with comments like: 'No, but you don't *need* this. Qd4, offering the exchange of queens is an easy advantage. Simple play.' Simple can be best!

One of the best guys for these sorts of opening ideas is Yasser Seirawan. You see it happening time and time again in his flank openings. For example:

Game 12

Y.Seirawan-P.Nikolic

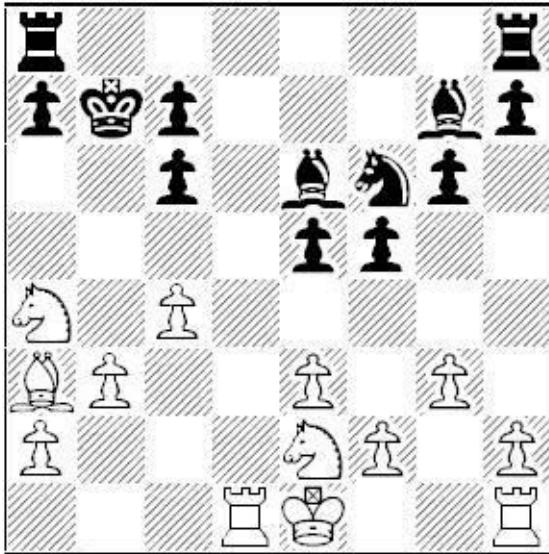
Wijk aan Zee 1992

English Opening

1 c4 e5 2 g3 Nc6 3 Bg2 g6 4 Nc3 Bg7 5 e3 f5 6 Nge2 Nf6 7 d4 d6 8 dxe5 dxe5 9 Bxc6+

White gives up his favourite English bishop in the pursuit of a structural plus.

9 ... bxc6 10 Qxd8+ Kxd8 11 b3 Be6 12 Ba3 Kc8 13 Rd1 Kb7 14 Na4



White enjoys a slight, pleasant plus, although Nikolic managed to hold:

14 ... Rae8 15 Nc5+ Kc8 16 Nxe6 Rxe6 17 Nc3 Bf8 18 Bxf8 Rxf8 19 Ke2 Rd6 20 f3 Rfd8 21 Rhg1 h5 22 h3 g5 23 e4 fxe4 24 Nxe4 Nxe4 25 fxe4 Rxd1 26 Rxd1 Rxd1 27 Kxd1 c5 ½-½

Last thoughts

Opening analysis can be a difficult skill to master, especially when you're working on your own. It's really important to get past all the instincts that are quite healthy in practice – 'I don't want to waste time on this; it might well turn out to be nothing', 'No one ever plays like this in this opening; don't waste time on that' – and open your mind up to non-standard possibilities. Remember, at home you've got all the time in the world to waste on bad ideas, and no effort is ever wasted.

If you do have the opportunity to work with another player, then the following method of working is a very effective way of investigating openings:

- Agree before a training session on a number of openings you want to practice. The more specific you are, the more valuable the training session.
- Analyse the variations you have selected independently, looking seriously for ideas with both colours.
- Play a series of games with the openings (for example, 30-minute games). Each player should try playing both colours.
- After the games have concluded, analyse them together.

I've done this a number of times in the past couple of years and it's always worked extremely well.

So this was all about generating new ideas. In the following chapter we look at the next step: feeling comfortable when playing your new ideas/openings in a tournament game for the first time.

Chapter Two

Introducing New Ideas Easily into your Opening Repertory

As we discussed in the previous chapter, my rigid opening repertoire was a big weakness during the early part of my professional career. I played the same openings all the time, no matter the strength of the opponent. Granted, that isn't all bad news. That sort of persistence teaches you a number of things:

- a) You learn to play an opening both for a win and for a draw.
- b) Because you play the opening against all strengths of opponents and under all tournament situations, you're forced to delve deeper into the opening (and also the resulting middlegames and endgames) to discover ideas appropriate to the requirements of the practical situation. For example, a line that allows a repetition might be appropriate against a GM in round 2, but not in a must-win situation against a weaker player in round 9.
- c) You develop a deep personal attachment to the opening.
- d) Because you stick with your opening through thick and thin, and you trust in your handling of the opening to get you through every type of situation, you identify yourself totally with the opening. That gives you an extra edge. You're less willing to settle for an easy draw ('Nobody's going to draw easily with me in *my* opening'), and it also helps you fight harder when you encounter the inevitable difficult situations ('Nobody beats me in *my* opening').

However, decisions should be taken from a position of strength. It's fine restricting yourself to a limited set of openings if you know that you can easily play something different if the need arises. But that wasn't the case with me. I played the same thing all the time, because attempts to play new openings tended to work out very badly.

At some stage, I understood that the narrowness of my repertoire (and thus the limited types of positions I played) was becoming a real barrier to improvement, and I decided to take some time to think why I was having these problems.

One important insight was the realization that I had played a new opening with minimal preparation with conviction in the past. At the age of 14, I had a big chance to get my final IM norm in the strong Lloyds Bank Masters Open. Just before, I had suffered a really traumatic experience in the World U-16 Championship. After being in the top three for all of tournament, I had blown my medal chance by losing the last round with White against an unknown Chinese player. The reason for the loss was primarily nerves of course, but there was also a technical reason: my white repertoire was far too sharp for me. In critical situations, I just couldn't keep track of the mess I'd created. I'm a good attacking player, but I don't have the irrational genius of a Shirov, so trying to play like that in tense situations was just courting disaster.

Do you want to see the game? It's not in the official databases, but ... Fatherbase to the rescue! My father wrote up all my games into scorebooks from the moment I started playing until my last game as a professional player. No mean feat considering my handwriting was designed for obscurity.

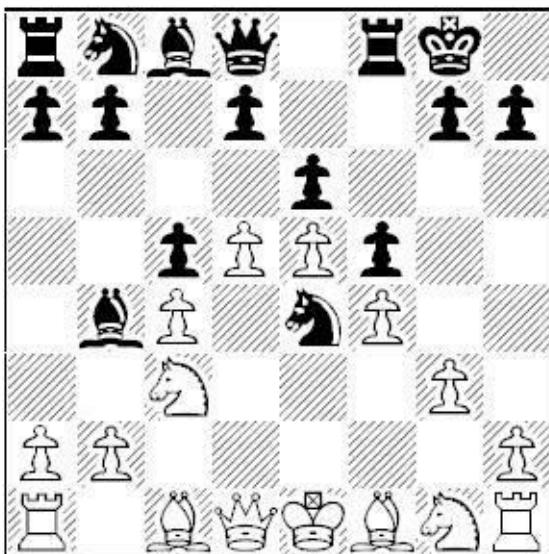
Game 13

M.Sadler-Y.Tong

World U-16 Championship, Timisoara 1988

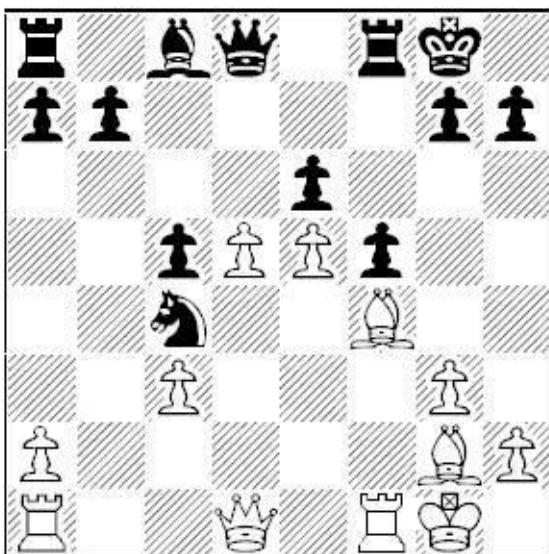
Nimzo-Indian Defence

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 f3 c5 5 d5 Nh5 6 g3 f5 7 e4 0-0 8 f4 Nf6 9 e5 Ne4



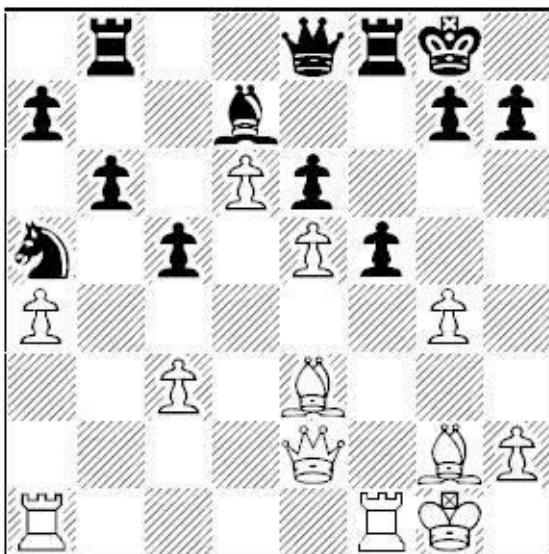
The position is already rather unusual and far from easy to handle.

10 Nge2 d6 11 Bg2 dxe5 12 fxe5 Nd7 13 Bf4 Nb6 14 0-0 Bxc3 15 Nxc3 Nxc3 16 bxc3 Nxc4



White's bishops and d-pawn compensate for the sacrificed pawn.

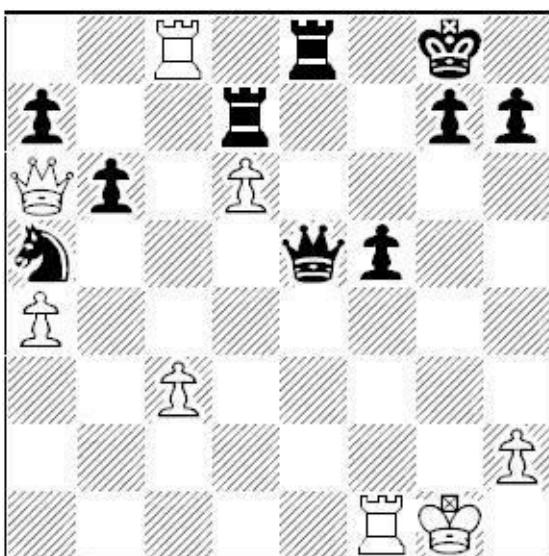
17 d6 Rb8 18 a4 Bd7 19 Qe2 Na5 20 Be3 b6 21 g4 Qe8



22 gxf5 exf5 23 Bg5 Be6 24 Rad1 Rf7 25 Bd5

I'm not that satisfied with my last few moves, but this is where it really starts to go wrong.

25 ... Bxd5 26 Rxd5 Qe6 27 Qd3 Rbb7 28 Be7 Rd7 29 Qa6 Rfxe7 30 Rxc5 Re8 31 Rc8 Qxe5



I honestly could not believe what had happened but couldn't bring myself to resign.

32 Rxf5 Qe1+ 33 Rf1 Qe3+ 34 Rf2 Rxd6 35 Rxe8+ Qxe8 36 h3 Qe1+ 37 Kg2 Rg6+ 0-1

There were some quite specific pressures on a teenager playing high-level chess: every tournament was important and exciting, and there was a lot of external interest in every game I played. This led to me receiving plenty of well-meaning advice at that time, not all of which was delivered particularly sympathetically.

For the Lloyds Bank Masters, I wanted to put aside my 1 d4 repertoire temporarily and just play something random and quiet. I was sure I wasn't playing badly, but I didn't feel I had the mental energy to cope with the positional concessions my normal repertoire insisted on.

In the run-up to this tournament I was advised by quite an experienced player that only beginners changed their openings after one setback, and that I should stick to what I understood best. After I tried to explain why I needed to recover before playing the opening again, his manner and language became a bit dismissive: 'Why is this kid challenging me? Don't be so stupid, I know best!' It was unfair and left me feeling frustrated and upset. Unfortunately I fear there's still some resentment there even after all those years.

After starting the tournament with a decent win with Black, the choice of opening was brought to a head when I faced international master James Howell with the white pieces in the

second round.

Game 14

M.Sadler-J.Howell

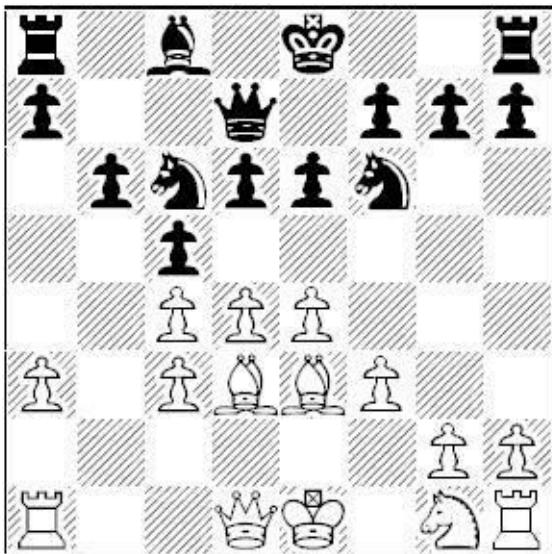
Lloyds Bank Masters, London 1988

Nimzo-Indian Defence

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 f3 c5 5 a3 Bxc3+ 6 bxc3 Nc6 7 e4 d6

A clever move order from Black. 6 ... Nc6 puts pressure on d4 and forces White to play Be3 if he wants to develop in standard fashion with Bd3, and then 7 ... d6 stops White from playing e4-e5.

8 Be3 b6 9 Bd3 Qd7



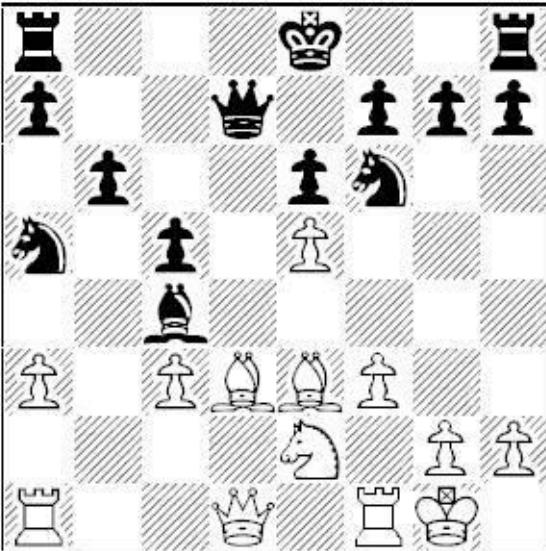
There were no other games in my database with this, but it's extremely sensible. James said after the game that this was an idea of Andrew Martin's. Black's play against the c4-pawn is coming very quickly.

10 Ne2 Ba6 11 0-0 Na5

The c4-pawn is just dropping off and White has no real compensation.

12 e5 dxe5 13 dxe5 Bxc4

Black is just winning.



14 Bxc4 Nxc4 15 Bxc5 Qxd1 16 Rfxd1 Nxe5 17 Bd4 Nc4 18 Bxf6 gxf6 19 Nd4 0-0-0 20 Rab1 Kb7 21 Rb4 Nxa3 22 Ra1 a5 23 Ra4 e5 24 R1xa3 exd4 25 cxd4 Rd5 26 Kf2 Rc8 27 Re3 Rc2+ 28 Kg3 Kc6 29 Re7 Kb5 30 Ra1 Rxd4 31 Rxf7 Rdd2 32 Rb1+ Rb2 33 Rxb2+ Rxb2 34 Rxh7 Rb1 35 h4 Rh1 36 Ra7 a4 37 Kg4 Kb4 38 g3 a3 39 Kf5 b5 0-1

Awful, wasn't it? It was a good choice of opening scheme by Black and cleanly finished off. I still remember looking at my position after move 9. I did not want these weaknesses; I didn't want to have to fight already to build up an initiative to compensate for my doubled pawns. In short, I was destroying myself. And what was worse, I had known this was going to happen, and I had let myself be bullied into it.

The trip back home on the train was a bit grim. My normally so peaceable father got into a big argument in the train about whether a window should be shut or open. And I was contemplating another disaster. It was all made worse by the fact that a children's television program was following my quest to become the youngest IM in the world ... Sometimes it's tough being 14 .

My friend Steve Giddins – my very first coach when I was 8 – was travelling with us, and I said to him that I would have liked to play 1 b3 with White. And he spoke those revelatory words: 'Well, why don't you then?'

I was still a bit shaky in the next few rounds, but I got a new lease of life in my white games. And that led to this crucial encounter:

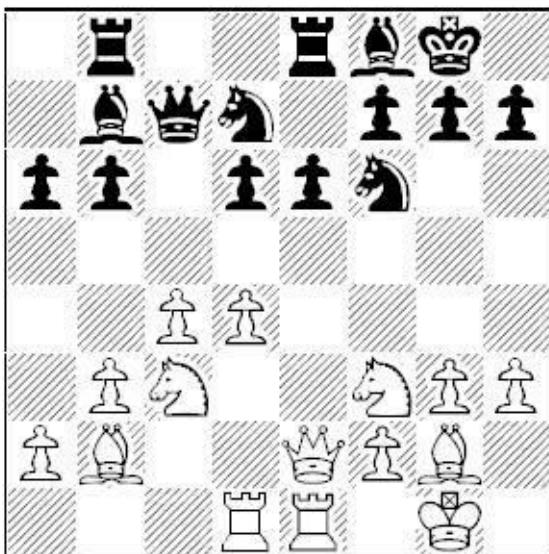
Game 15

M.Sadler-S.Kudrin

Lloyds Bank Masters, London 1988

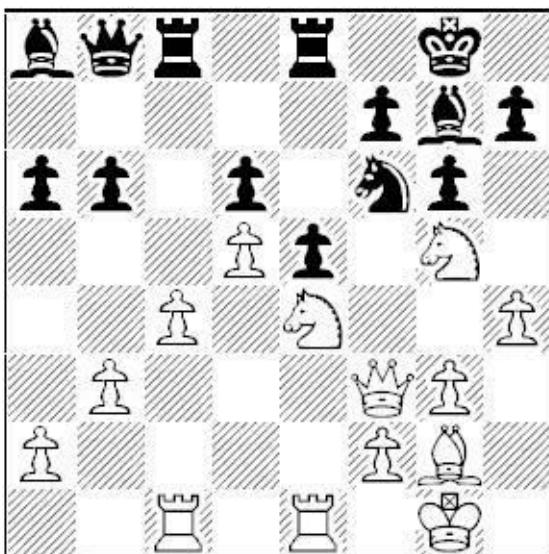
Réti Opening

1 b3 b6 2 Bb2 Bb7 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 g3 e6 5 Bg2 Be7 6 0-0 c5 7 d3 d6 8 c4 0-0 9 Nc3 a6 10 e3 Nbd7 11 Qe2 Rb8 12 d4 cxd4 13 exd4 Re8 14 Rad1 Bf8 15 Rfe1 Qc7 16 h3



White enjoys a harmonious position without having had to do anything special or stressful.

16 ... Rbc8 17 Qd3 Qb8 18 d5 e5 19 Ng5 Ba8 20 Rc1 g6 21 h4 Bg7 22 Ba3 Nc5 23 Bxc5 Rxc5 24 Nce4 Rcc8? 25 Qf3



Extremely painful. Black missed this simple tactic which nets a vital pawn with a huge kingside initiative to boot.

25 ... Nxe4 26 Qxf7+ Kh8 27 Bxe4 Rf8 28 Qd7 Rcd8 29 Qg4 Bh6 30 Nxh7 Bxc1 31 Nxf8 Rxf8 32 Qxg6 Qc7 33 Rxc1 Bb7 34 Bf5 Be8 35 Bxc8 Rxc8 36 Re1 1-0

Black played badly of course, but I guess you can imagine how happy I was on move 16. I just had a normal position, nothing special, but without any idiotic weaknesses. Heaven!

Looking back a few years later, I found that quite intriguing. I had barely prepared 1 b3 at all apart from looking through a few famous games. I'm not even sure why I chose to play it; maybe something to do with the fact that I've always been very fond of both Nimzowitsch and Larsen. But how did I manage to play this opening well? And what was stopping me now from playing other new openings reasonably?

To this day, I can clearly recall the sheer joy I felt playing 1 b3! For some reason, it really felt like me. It wasn't just something I'd seen, or a variation someone else had told me about. It felt, rightly or wrongly, like my own creation and that gave me masses of energy and the desire to play the opening and, most importantly, the resulting middlegame and endgame positions.

So was that the key? When you play a new opening, even if you've studied it a lot, you

normally feel a bit ‘cold’. You haven’t won or lost any dramatic games with it, you haven’t experienced frustrations or sudden Eureka moments. It just feels a bit ... dead. That doesn’t matter if the opponent follows your 50-move analysis precisely to his doom, but that never happens of course. The opponent always deviates into a line you’ve barely looked at. Maybe you have a nice advantage, but then you have to play a typical middlegame for the opening which can easily go wrong if you don’t have any feeling about the opening. You’re not really tuned-in to the subtleties of the position, you start getting doubts about the evaluation of certain positions, and you start regretting all the work you did on the sharp lines that you haven’t been able to use ...

So I decided that an important part of my preparation time for a new opening should be dedicated to building up warm feelings about the opening.

I thought of two ways of doing this.

Emotional

I took time to consciously reflect on the moves I was playing in the opening. What did I feel when I played a move? Was I happy or apprehensive? Did I associate a certain colour or sound with a position? Did it remind me (however far-fetched) of a situation in a previous game?

When proofreading this book, Natasha Regan made the point that you often select openings because you know/respect/like someone who plays it. That feeling of ‘I’m playing like x does’ is also a good way of making the opening feel more alive. It all sounds a bit vague, but the essence of the approach was to find something that would make me identify personally with the opening.

Technical

Preparation focuses most of the time on positions around move 10-15. You spot a nice idea somewhere in this phase and that idea becomes your starting position. When you analyse, you set up the board straightaway at that position. When you get the opening on the board, you rattle out your moves instantly to get to that position as quickly as possible. Every time I did this, I had the insecure feeling that I was playing a position without having the faintest idea how I had got there. I couldn’t feel the logic of my previous play at all: all I had was a position that felt as if it had been formed by shaking the pieces out of the box.

I decided to remedy this by applying the following techniques.

Jack-and-Jill thinking

I used this technique both during preparation and when executing my moves on the board. I described the moves I played in simple Jack-and-Jill language. The aim was to understand properly what the balance of the position was. What are you giving up when you play the opening and what are you achieving? It sounds a bit abstract, so let’s take a simple example:

1 d4

Occupying d4, attacking e5 and opening the c1-h6 diagonal for White’s dark-squared bishop.

1 ... d5

Occupying d5, attacking e4 and opening the c8-h3 diagonal for the Black’s light-squared bishop.

2 c4

Attacking d5, threatening to remove Black’s central pawn outpost on d5.

2 ... e6

Reinforcing Black’s central presence on d5 and opening the f8-a3 diagonal to develop Black’s dark-squared bishop. Black is thus a move closer to castling. On the minus side, this move reduces the perspectives for active development for the light-squared bishop on c8.

If we make up the balance of the first two opening moves, we see that White has managed

to ensure more active development of his queenside pieces (by keeping the c1-h6 diagonal), but that Black has already made a start getting his kingside pieces developed and getting his king to safety. Both sides have gained certain advantages, and relinquished others.

You can continue doing this to fairly advanced stages of the opening. Once again, the aim is to understand what you are giving up and what you are gaining when you follow your opening schemes. Just thinking about something complicated in these beginner's terms can often lead to useful insights.

Building up a positional compilation of the opening

Finally, real chess! And to demonstrate this, we're going to take a look at how I added the Stonewall Dutch to my repertory just before I went to play my two comeback international tournaments in Barcelona and Oslo.

Why play the Stonewall?

Well, quite. To be honest, I'd never really liked the opening at all. All those static weaknesses! But then I played this game in the crucial final round of Dutch League 2C. My team Amersfoort only needed a draw for the championship against a team that was a good bet for relegation.

Game 16

W.Van de Gracht-M.Sadler

Dutch League 2011

Dutch Defence

1 d4 e6 2 Nf3 b6 3 e3 Bb7 4 Bd3 f5 5 0-0 Nf6 6 c4 Be7

This commits the bishop very early to e7, when it might be interesting to meet Nc3 with ... Bb4xc3. However, no other alternatives are without drawbacks:

a) 6 ... Na6 7 Nc3 Bb4 and it is a moot point whether the position of the knight on a6 can be considered development when White has not yet played d4-d5.

b) 6 ... g6!? 7 Nc3 Bb4 is a very interesting idea. The pawn on g6 does cut off the path of the black queen to the kingside via e8-h5 and does weaken the kingside dark squares substantially. However, by protecting the f5-pawn, ... g6 supports the idea of a quick ... d6 and ... e5.

7 Nc3

Now if 7 d5 Na6.

7 ... 0-0

7 ... Ne4 8 Bxe4 fxe4 9 Nd2 d5 10 Qg4 Kf7 11 f3 is painful, but 7 ... Bb4!? might be considered.

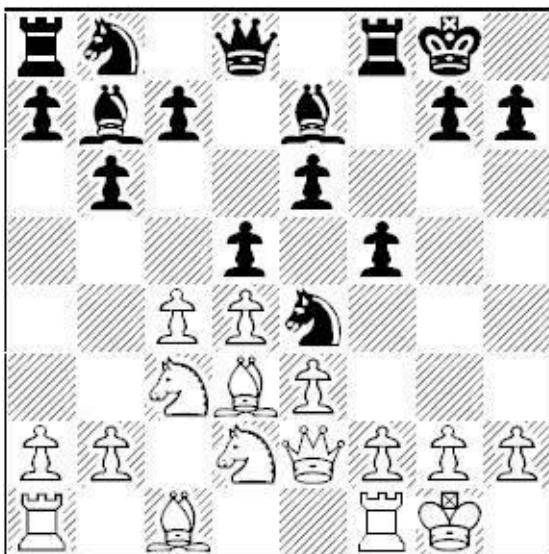
8 Qe2 Ne4

Again, perhaps 8 ... Bb4.

9 Nd2!

A good move which rather surprised me from my opponent, especially as it was played very fast.

9 ... d5!?



The most ambitious. Hey, that's a Stonewall structure.

Instead 9 ... Nxc3 10 bxc3 with e4 and f4 to follow is very nice for White. Black has a hard time creating anything against White's centre. The doubled pawns in this case have a very strong strengthening effect.

10 f3

Necessary to be able to develop White's queenside.

10 ... Nd6 11 b3 Nd7 12 Bb2 Nf6!? 13 e4!?

13 Rad1 was a calm option.

13 ... dxe4 14 fxe4 Ng4! 15 exf5?

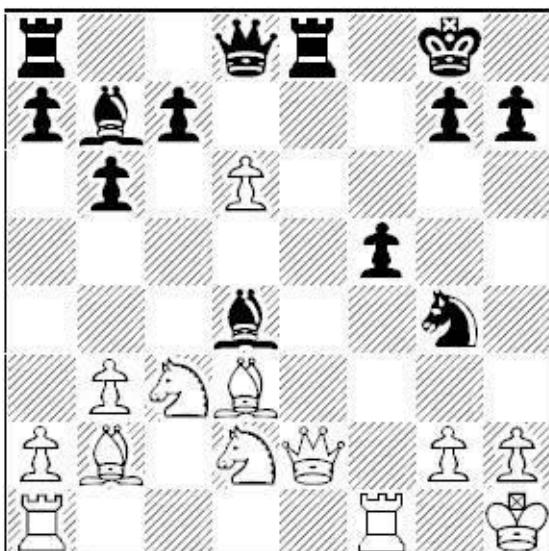
A slip. Instead:

a) 15 Nf3 Bg5! 16 Nxg5 (16 Bc1 Bxc1 17 Raxc1 f4 18 Nd1 Nf7 is unclear) 16 ... Qxg5 17 e5 Nf7 is murky.

b) 15 h3 is best, forcing the knight back to h6.

15 ... exf5 16 Nf3

16 c5!? was the only consistent follow-up to 15 exf5. Otherwise, White has just activated Black's pieces: in particular, he has opened the e-file on which White's queen is vulnerable to attack from Black's rook. Here Black goes 16 ... Bf6! 17 cxd6 Bxd4+ 18 Kh1 Re8.



Black's key lever in this position is the weakness of the h2-square. At the moment, White can cover this tactically with Nf3 Bxf3; gxf3. This only works due to the position of the queen

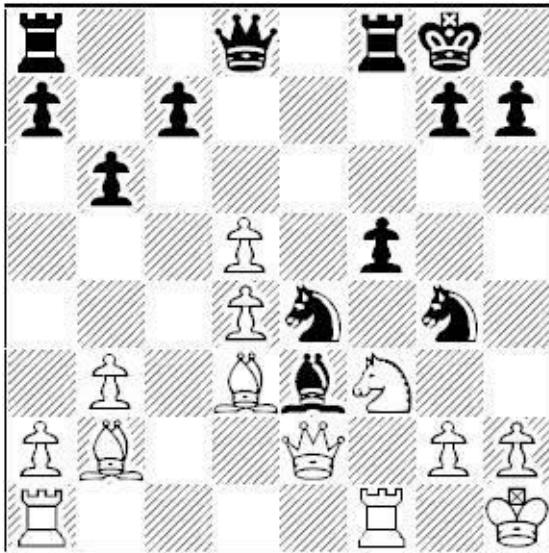
on e2. By driving the queen away from e2, Black hopes to intensify the venom in ... Qd6 or ... Qh4. The position is extremely sharp, but I like Black's (practical) chances of course.

Similarly, if 16 h3 Bf6!.

16 ... Bg5 17 Nd5?

The attack is too strong after 17 Ne5? Be3+! 18 Kh1 Bxd4 19 Nxg4 Qh4! 20 Rf4 (Black wins after all of 20 Nf2 Rae8 21 Qd1 Be5, 20 Ne5 Rae8, 20 Ne3 Be5 and 20 Bxf5 Nxf5 21 Qe6+ Kh8 22 Rxf5 Bxg2+!) 20 ... Rae8 21 Qd2 fxe4 22 Rxd4 Rf2, and by now 17 Bc1 may have been best.

17 ... Bxd5 18 cxd5 Be3+ 19 Kh1 Ne4!



20 Bxe4

If 20 g3 Nef2+ 21 Kg2 Nxd3 22 Qxd3 Qxd5.

20 ... fxe4 21 Ne5 Nf2+ 22 Rxf2 Bxf2

Not 22 ... Rxf2? 23 Qxe3 Rxb2 24 Nc4 Rc2 25 Na3 when White is okay.

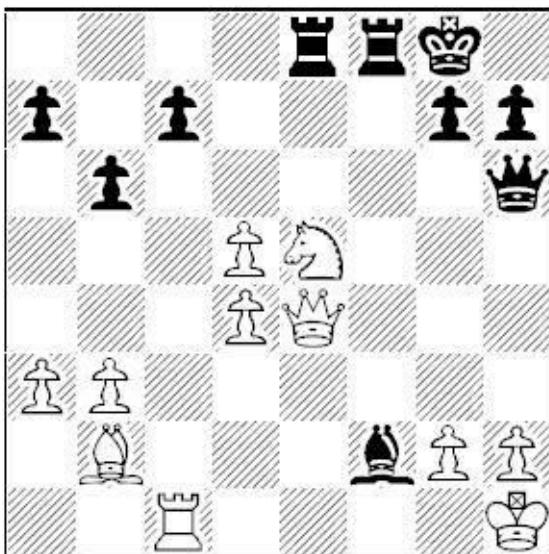
23 Qxe4 Qd6!

This stops Ba3 and prepares ... Qh6.

24 Rc1 Rae8 25 a3

If 25 Rc6 Bxd4.

25 ... Qh6!



Threatening ... Bg3, ... Bxd4 and ... Qd2.

26 Qd3 Bxd4! 27 Qxd4 Qxc1+ 28 Bxc1 Rf1+ 29 Qg1 Rxg1+ 30 Kxg1 Rxe5 31 Bf4 Rxd5 32 Bxc7 Rd3 0-1

I enjoyed that game, and something of that enjoyment seemed to rub off on the idea of playing Stonewall structures more often. Even a catastrophic team performance (we lost 5-3 ... DAAAAAAMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMIT ... on my birthday!) which cost us the championship didn't completely manage to spoil that feeling.

So I started building up a positional compilation of instructive Dutch Stonewall games. There was not much time to do a careful selection so I concentrated on a mix of famous names and good players I knew: Botvinnik, Bronstein, Spraggett and Yusupov. I got something like 150 games together, sifted out a number of less interesting games and ended up with about 80 games which I merged into notes within one game in *ChessBase*.

Then I just played through the games and every time I saw a theme I liked, I flagged it up in the notes like this '{!!}' and often put a brief comment explaining the theme. Since that first moment, I've played through this compilation maybe 10 or 15 times before games, adding a small comment here and there. It never fails to put me in a good mood for playing the Stonewall. Just to give you an idea, I'll show you a few examples of the types of themes I picked out.

This was the first game I looked at and it got me really excited. It's Botvinnik at his very best: a quite beautiful exposition of how to play the opening. He achieves a better position with Black against a very strong grandmaster with seemingly effortless means.

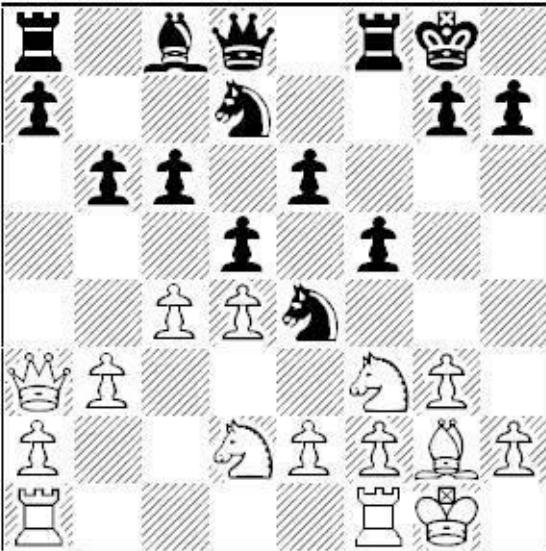
Game 17

L.Szabo-M.Botvinnik

Budapest 1952

Dutch Defence

1 d4 f5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 g3 e6 4 Bg2 Be7 5 0-0 0-0 6 c4 d5 7 b3 c6 8 Ba3 Nbd7 9 Qc1 Ne4 10 Nbd2 Bxa3 11 Qxa3 b6



Sensibly completing his development. Botvinnik isn't overly fixated on the kingside.

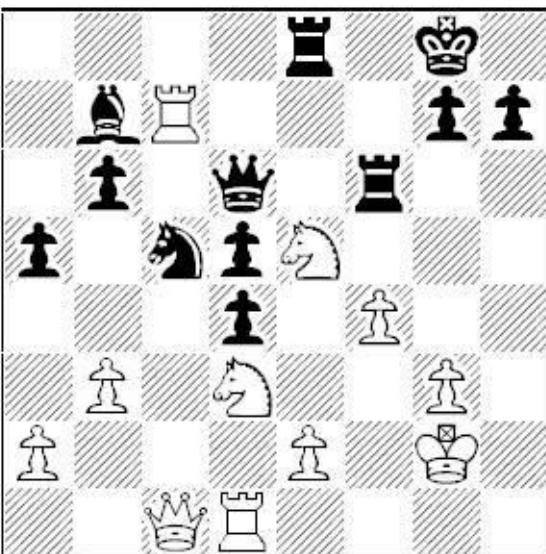
12 Rac1 Bb7 13 Rfd1 Qf6 14 cxd5 exd5 15 Ne1 a5

Preventing White from obtaining a bind with b4.

16 Ndf3 f4 17 Nd3 fxe3 18 hxg3 Rae8 19 Rc2 Qh6 20 Qc1 Qd6 21 Bh3 Rf6 22 Kg2 c5

23 Bxd7 Qxd7 24 Nfe5 Qd6 25 f4 cxd4 26 Re7 Ne5

By this point Black had a clear advantage, although eventually Botvinnik was a little fortunate to hold:



27 Rxc5 bxc5 28 Qxc5 Qxc5 29 Nxc5 Ba8 30 Rxd4 Rc8 31 Ncd3 Rc2 32 Ra4 Rxe2+ 33 Kf3 Rc2 34 Rxa5 Rf8 35 Ke3 d4+ 36 Kxd4 Rd8+ 37 Ke3 Rg2 38 g4 Rc2 39 b4 Bd5 40 a4 Bh1 41 Ra7 Ra2 42 b5 Ra3 43 a5 g5 44 f5 Rd5 45 Re7 Rxb5 46 f6 Rxe5+ 47 Rxe5 Kf7 48 Rf5 Bb7 49 Kd2 Bc8 50 Ne5+ Kf8 51 Rxg5 Rxa5 52 Nd7+ Bxd7 53 Rxa5 Bxg4 54 Ke3 Be6 55 Kf4 Bc4 56 Ra7 h5 57 Kg5 h4 58 Kxh4 Bb3 59 Kg5 Bc4 60 Rc7 Ba2 61 Rc1 Bd5 62 Kf5 Kf7 63 Ke5 Bb3 64 Rc7+ Kf8 65 Rb7 Bc4 66 Rb4 Ba2 67 Kf5 Bd5 68 Kg6 Bf7+ 69 Kg5 Bd5 70 Rh4 Bb3 71 Rh8+ Kf7 72 Rh7+ Kf8 73 f7 Ke7 74 Kg6 Bc4 75 Rg7 Bb3 76 f8Q+ Kxf8 77 Kf6 Ke8 78 Re7+ Kd8 ½-½

Which themes did I pick out from Szabo-Botvinnik? Five things occurred to me:

- Black didn't mind exchanging off his dark-squared bishop.
- Black developed his queenside with ... b6, ... Bb7 and ... a5.
- Black didn't rush ... c5. He only played it once he was completely ready.
- Black expanded on the kingside, this time with ... f4.

e) White couldn't find a way to get at Black's position.

This game turned out to be an excellent template: we're going to see all of these themes turning up in other examples.

Game 18

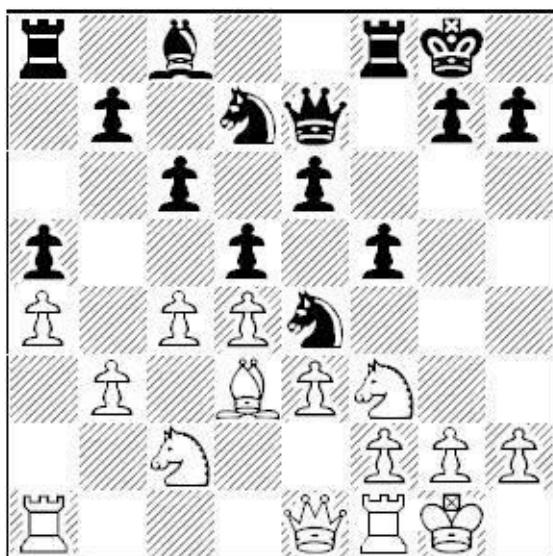
V.Korchnoi-A.Yusupov

Montpellier Cand 1985

Dutch Defence

1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 c6 3 e3 e6 4 d4 f5 5 Bd3 Nf6 6 0-0 Bd6 7 b3 Qe7 8 a4 0-0 9 Ba3 Bxa3 10 Nxa3 Ne4 11 Nc2 Nd7 12 Qe1 a5

{!!}



13 Nd2 b6

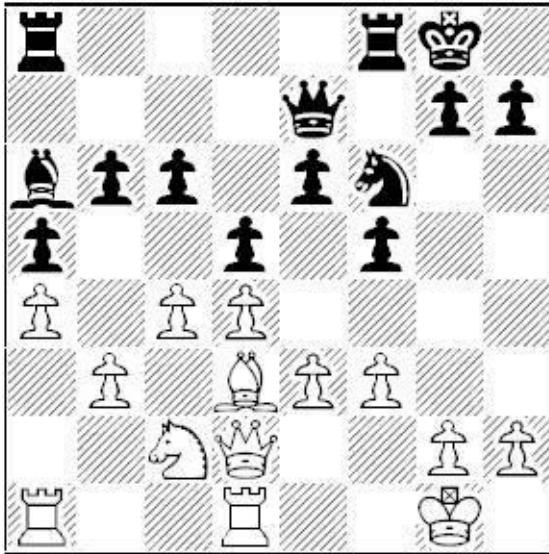
{!!}

A typical idea. Allow the exchange of the dark-squared bishops, but achieve:

- a) A knight on e4.
- b) Pawns on a5 and b6.
- c) The break ... c5.

All these moves attack the dark squares that Black's exchanged dark-squared bishop no longer can attack, and that White's exchanged dark-squared bishop no longer can defend.

14 f3 Nxd2 15 Qxd2 Nf6 16 Rfd1 Ba6



{!!}

Typical square for the light-squared bishop.

17 Ne1 Rfc8 18 Rac1 Qb7 19 Qf2 c5 20 Qg3 cxd4 21 exd4 dxc4 22 bxc4 Qc7
It's a Nimzo now!

23 Bf1 Qxg3 24 hxg3 Ra7

Black is fine and the game was eventually drawn:

25 Nc2 Rac7 26 Na3 Nd5 27 Re1 Kf7 28 Re5 Nb4 29 Rce1 Rc6 30 Nb5 Bxb5 31 axb5 Rd6 32 c5 Rxd4 33 cxb6 Rd6 34 b7 Rb8 35 Bc4 Kf8 36 Bxe6 Rxb7 37 Rxf5+ Ke8 38 Bd7+ Kd8 39 Rf8+ Kc7 40 Bc8 Rb8 41 Rf7+ Kb6 42 Bf5 Rf6 43 Rxf6+ gxf6 44 Bxh7 a4 45 Ra1 Ra8 46 Be4 Ra7 47 Ra3 Kxb5 48 Kf2 Na6 49 g4 Nc5 50 Bd5 Rd7 51 Bg8 Kb4 52 Re3 Rd8 ½-½

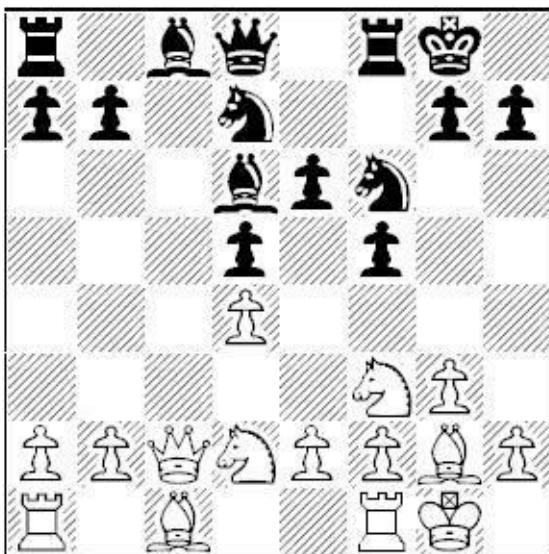
Game 19

F.Gheorghiu-A.Yusupov

World Team Championship, Lucerne 1985

Dutch Defence

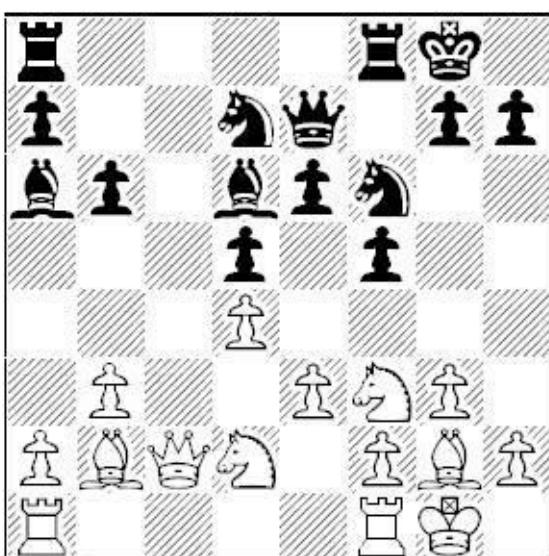
1 d4 e6 2 c4 f5 3 g3 Nf6 4 Bg2 d5 5 Nf3 c6 6 0-0 Bd6 7 Nbd2 Nbd7 8 Qc2 0-0 9 cxd5 cxd5



{!!}

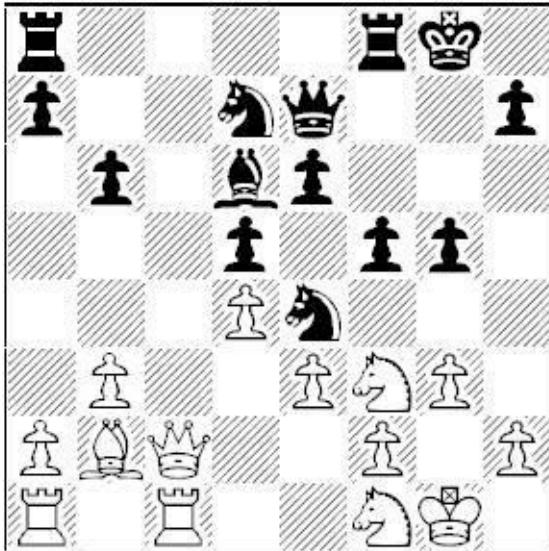
Black is not afraid of this symmetrical structure.

10 b3 Qe7 11 Bb2 b6 12 e3 Ba6



{!!}

13 Rfc1 Ne4 14 Bf1 Bxf1 15 Nxf1 g5



{!!}

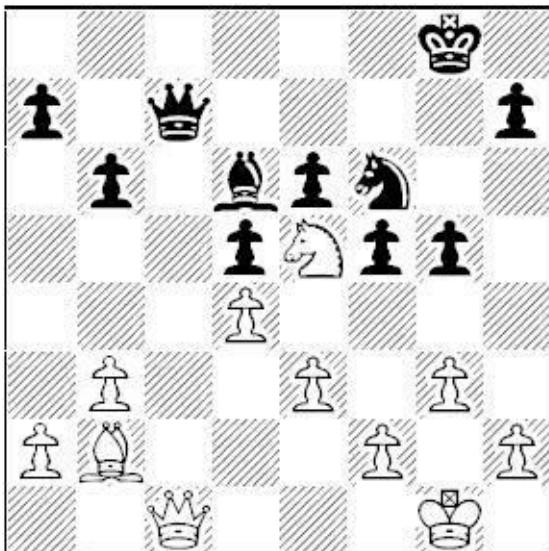
Gaining space on the kingside. It's very noticeable that Black does not immediately fight for control of the c-file. That will come later.

16 N1d2 Ndf6 17 Ne5 Nxd2 18 Qxd2 Rac8

{!!}

Starts here!

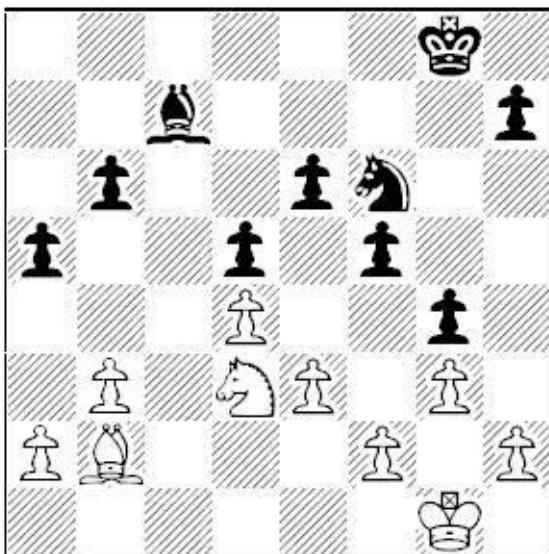
19 Rxc8 Rxc8 20 Rc1 Rxc1+ 21 Qxc1 Qc7



{!!}

Very noticeable: Yusupov is always looking to exchange queens in Dutch endings. Maybe the reasoning is that Black's weaknesses are more apparent with queens on, while his strengths (extra space) are more apparent with the queens off?

22 Qxc7 Bxc7 23 Nc6 a6 24 Nb4 a5 25 Nd3 g4



{!!}

Very typical theme for Yusupov: fixing the kingside with ... g4. He does this very often in the middlegame as well.

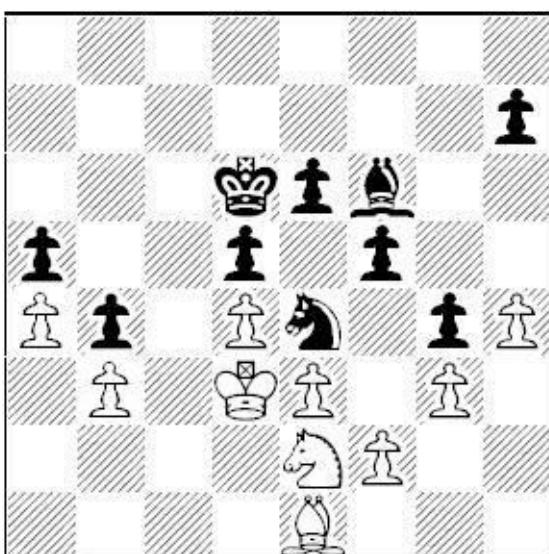
26 h3 Kf7 27 Be3 Ne4 28 Be1 b5

Grabbing extra space on the queenside.

29 a3 Ke7 30 h4 Kd7 31 Kf1 Kc6 32 a4 b4 33 Ke2 Kd7

This isn't a forced win for Black of course, but White does have to be a little careful. In particular, you might have expected that White would transfer his bishop to b2 to help prevent Black's only pawn break ... e5. Later on, 43 Nd4 also seems to be a panicky reaction. However, that doesn't take anything away from the skill with which Yusupov eventually wins this endgame.

34 Nf4 Kd6 35 Nd3 Ke7 36 Nf4 Kf6 37 Kd3 Bd8 38 Ke2 Ke7 39 Kd3 Kd6 40 Ne2 Bf6



That turned out well! Black has been aiming all along for ... e5. He tried it first one way with the king on f6 supported by a bishop on c7, and then the other way with the king on d6 and the bishop on f6. White hasn't done anything to try to prevent the second plan so Black makes a small step forward.

41 Kc2 e5 42 dxe5+ Bxe5 43 Nd4

A really bad move. 43 Kd3 looks completely holdable.

43 ... Bxd4 44 exd4 Ke6 45 Kd3 f4 46 Ke2 Nd6 47 Kd3 Nf5 48 h5 fxg3 49 fxg3 Kf6 50

h6 Kg6 51 Bd2 Nxg3 52 Bxb4 axb4 53 a5 Nh5 54 Ke3 Nf6 55 Kf4 Kxh6 56 a6 Nd7 57 a7 Nb6 58 Kxg4 Kg6 59 Kf4 Kf6 60 Kg4 Na8 0-1

Game 20

P.Scheeren-A.Yusupov

Eindhoven 1986

Dutch Defence

1 d4 e6 2 c4 f5 3 g3 Nf6 4 Bg2 d5 5 Nf3 c6 6 0-0 Bd6 7 b3 Qe7 8 a4 0-0 9 Ba3 Bxa3 10 Nxa3 Nbd7 11 Qc1 Ne4

{!!}

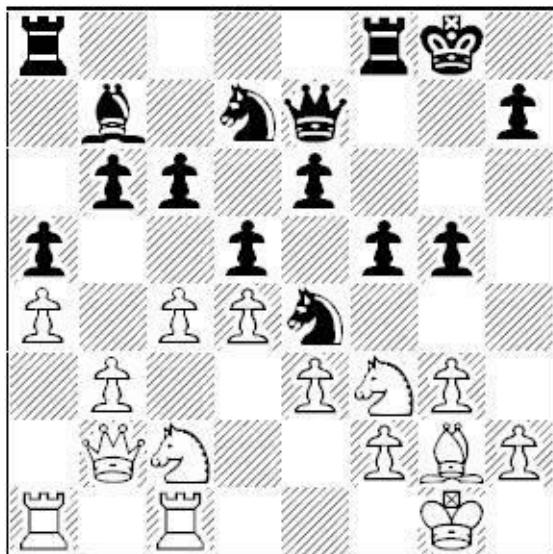
12 e3 a5

{!!}

13 Qb2 b6

{!!}

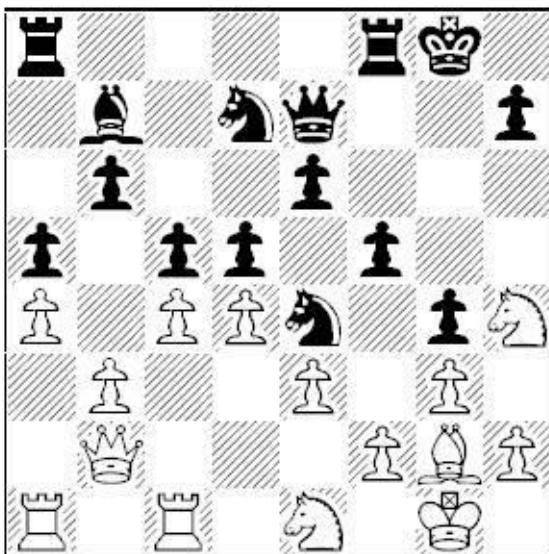
14 Rfc1 Bb7 15 Nc2 g5



{!!}

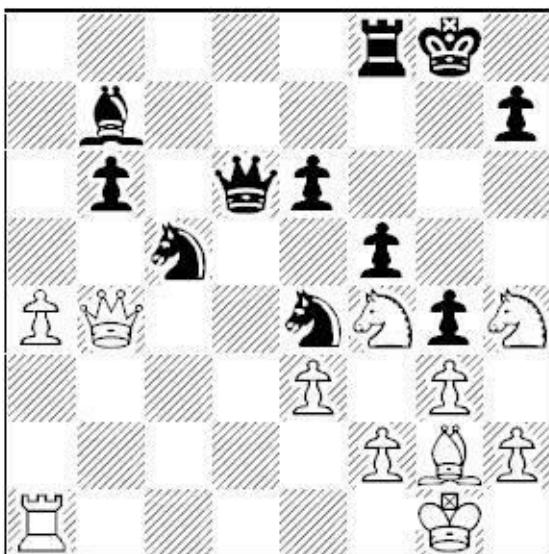
16 Nce1 g4 17 Nh4 c5

{!!}



18 cxd5 Bxd5 19 Nd3 Rac8 20 Nf4 Bb7 21 dxc5 Rxc5 22 Rxc5 Ndxc5 23 b4 axb4 24 Qxb4 Qd6

A very interesting position. You might feel that Black's position is too loose, but he has an enormous central presence and the white knight on h4 is rather lame.



25 Qc4 Ba6 26 Qd4 Kf7 27 Qxd6 Nxd6 28 h3 Rd8 29 hxg4 fxg4 30 Rc1 Bc4 31 e4 e5 32 Nd5 Bxd5 33 exd5 Ra8 34 f4 exf4 35 gxf4 Rxa4 36 Rb1 b5 37 Kh2 b4 38 Kg3 h5 39 f5 b3 0-1

A number of the same themes come back in different games. Let's make a summary of the ideas we've seen:

- a) You don't need to care too much about the exchange of dark-squared bishops: this weakens White's grip on the queenside dark squares as much as it does Black's. Make sure, though, that you put some queenside pawns on dark squares (typically with ... a5 and ... b6).
- b) ... g5-g4 gaining kingside space is a big play, both in the middlegame and in the endgame. Don't worry too much about weakening f4.
- c) The queen's bishop looks pretty good on a6.
- d) Remember how Yusupov played that ending. Gaining space on both wings, and then organizing his break and letting the pressure of the situation on the white player do the rest. Classic stuff! Use it as a model for your own games!
- e) ... c5; cxd5 Bxd5 is a very active way to play. Don't rush ... c5 though: White can't get at the black position that easily, so there's no need to weaken yourself too early.

So how does all this good stuff come back in your own games? Well take a look at this game played in the Dutch Cup competition in 2011. Amersfoort's tried and trusted plan in the Cup Competition is to make 2-2 and try to win the blitz play-off. That worked wonders in 2010-2011 as we managed to reach the semi-finals (not bad for a 100% amateur club!). However, this tactic does depend on one thing: me winning!

Game 21

E.De Haan-M.Sadler

Dutch Cup 2011

Dutch Defence

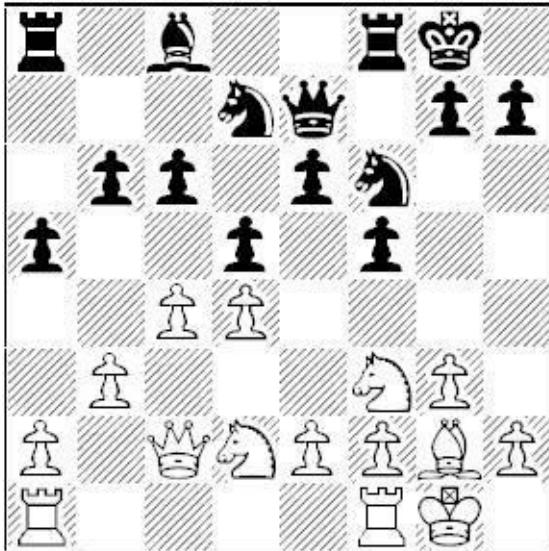
1 d4

I had no idea what my opponent played, so I just mentally tossed a coin ... and out came the Stonewall!

1 ... e6 2 c4 f5 3 g3 Nf6 4 Bg2 Be7 5 Nf3 0-0 6 0-0 c6 7 b3 d5 8 Ba3

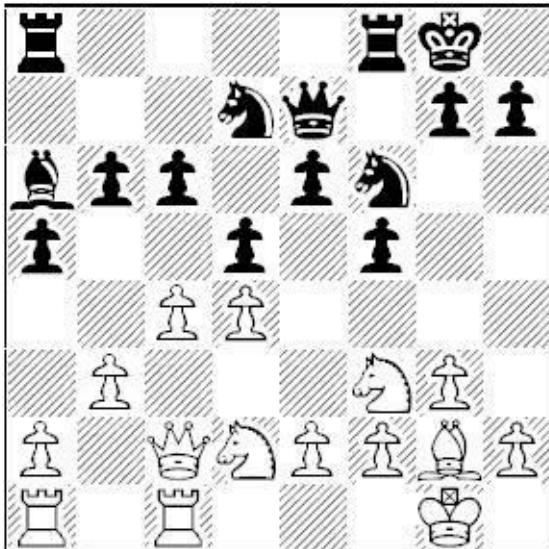
White exchanges Black's 'good' dark-squared bishop, but that doesn't worry me after playing through Botvinnik's and Yusupov's games!

8 ... Nbd7 9 Bxe7 Qxe7 10 Nbd2 b6! 11 Qc2 a5!



Thematic, taking control of the queenside dark squares. This wasn't difficult, of course, when you've seen a few Yusupov games.

12 Rfc1 Ba6!

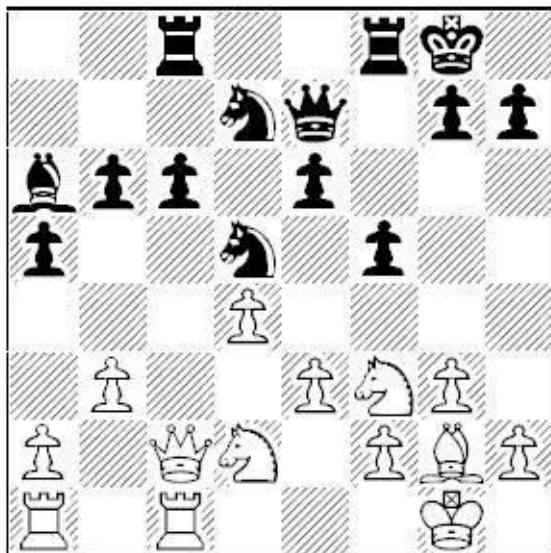


Again thematic: the bishop is much more active on a6 than on b7 and, of course, Yusupov has done this pretty often.

13 e3 Rac8

Just like Botvinnik, not rushing with ... c5, but holding it back until I'm 100% ready.

14 cxd5 Nxd5!?



A very nice idea, which pushes the possibilities of the black position to its limits. The enablers are:

- The position of the white queen opposite the black rook on c8 which will inevitably lead to a loss of tempo for White.
- The vulnerability of White's central light squares, especially d3, to the black knights (via ... Nb4 and dxc5 Nxc5), which makes the natural b2 outpost for the queen unattractive.
- The position of the white rooks which are difficult to organize together with a good outpost for the white queen (see the game).

Yusupov's game against Scheeren also went through my mind. It gave me confidence to consider taking on d5 with a piece instead of a pawn.

15 Nc4 c5

Quite risky, but quite promising as well. Black's queenside dark squares, in particular his pawn on b6, are quite vulnerable, but White has difficulties finding a good spot for his queen. Moreover, the move he wants to play (d4xc5 to free d4 for the knight on f3) allows ... Nxc5, activating the black knight. His rooks are also not well placed on a1 and c1.

16 Qd2

Alternatively:

- 16 Qb2 b5!? 17 Nxa5 c4!? was an idea that really appealed to me. However, 18 a3 keeps things tight for White.
- 16 dxc5 Nxc5 17 Nd4 Qf6! deals with the threat of Bxd5 and Nxb6 by an X-ray to defend the b6-pawn.

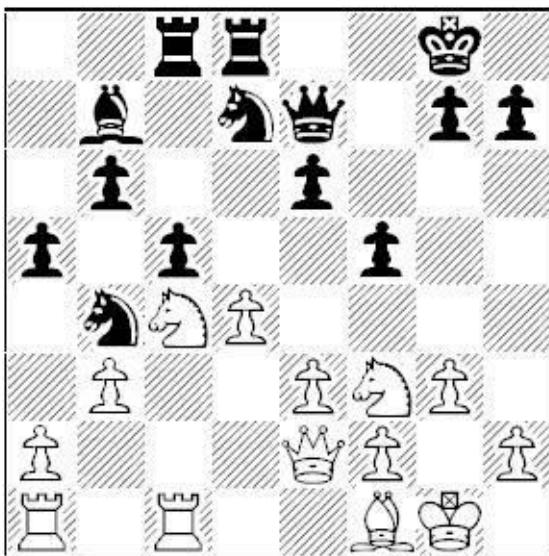
16 ... Rfd8 17 Qe1 Nb4!

Black won't mind this knight being chased away with a3: this gives Black the extra idea of ... a4!, knocking away the support of the white knight on c4.

18 Bf1

If 18 Rd1 Nc2.

18 ... Bb7 19 Qe2



19 ... Be4!

I spent a very long time on this move, but it was worth it. I got a bit carried away with ideas of the thematic ... g5 and it was hard to put them aside. I think that ... g5 is a thematic idea when the centre is fairly rigid. The current centre is not, however, a typical Stonewall! Again, thanks to studying Yusupov's games, I was aware of the typical idea of ... g5. It probably wasn't good in this position, but that knowledge gave me an idea for a plan that I wouldn't normally have considered: 19 ... g5!? 20 h3 was what worried me most; I don't think that ... g5 has helped. Also, 19 ... Bd5 20 Nfe5 Nxe5 21 dxe5 was less good than I wanted.

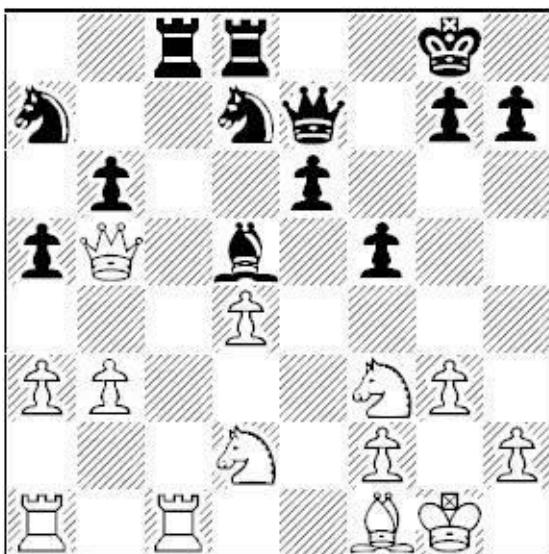
20 a3

If 20 dxc5 Rxc5.

20 ... Nc6! 21 Ncd2 Bd5

Black stands very pleasantly now.

22 Qb5 cxd4 23 exd4 Na7!



24 Qa6

Rybka suggests 24 Qe2 when 24 ... Rxc1 25 Rxc1 Qxa3 26 Rc7 Nc8 27 Nc4 gives White decent compensation.

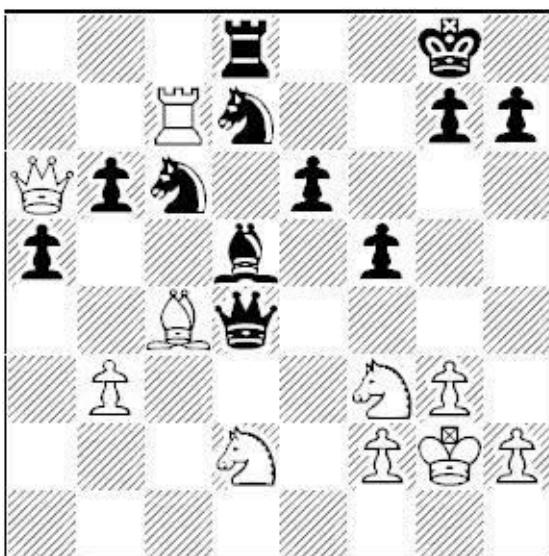
24 ... Rxc1 25 Rxc1 Qxa3 26 Rc7 Nc6 27 Bc4 Qa1+

27 ... Qd6 28 Bxd5 Qxc7 29 Bxe6+ Kf8 (if 29 ... Kh8 30 Ng5) 30 Qc4 made me nervous.

28 Kg2

After 28 Nf1 Bxf3 29 Bxe6+ Kf8 30 Rxd7 Rxd7 31 Bxd7 Nxd4 32 Qc8+ (32 Bb5 Nxb5 33 Qxb5 Qf6 leaves Black a pawn ahead) 32 ... Ke7 33 Qe8+ Kd6 (I thought 33 ... Kf6 might be possible, but ... 34 Qd8+ Kg6 35 Be8+ Kh6 36 Qh4+ Bh5 37 Qxh5 is mate) 34 Bb5 I couldn't find a win, but Rybka points out 34 ... Qd1!.

28 ... Qxd4



Despite a slightly fraught realization phase, I managed to bring the point home.

29 Qb7 Qxd2 30 Bxd5 Qxd5 31 Qxc6 Nc5 32 Qxb6 Nd7 33 Qa7 Kf7 34 Qb7 Qxb7 35 Rxb7 Kf6 36 Ra7 Nc5 37 Rxa5 Nxb3 38 Ra7 Nc5 39 h4 h6 40 Rc7 Ne4 41 Rc2 g5 42 hxg5+ hxg5 43 Ng1 Rd2 44 Rxd2 Nxd2 45 f3 Ke5 46 Kf2 Kd4 47 Nh3 Nxf3 48 Kg2 g4 49 Ng5 Nxg5 0-1

Analyse Your Games!

Another very good source of positional themes is ... your own games. Once you've played one game with an opening, it's a really good idea to make a big effort to analyse this game properly. Your first experience with an opening is an incredibly rich moment. It's the first time that you played the opening live without the 'safety net' of your computer analysis and database next to you. What happens when you do that?

Variations about which you said 'Oh, that's no problem' suddenly start looking a bit annoying when it looks as if you might have to play them. Maybe you doubt your chances to win, or maybe when push comes to shove, you're not actually that thrilled with your compensation for your ruined pawn structure.

You start to discover gaps in your memory during an actual game. You might not be able to remember how to reach the position you're aiming for. Is it Nd4 first or 0-0-0 first? You might not be able to piece together a complicated variation in your head or you might just have a complete blank where a cunning plan should be.

Moreover, some of your main analysis and conclusions start to look a bit less snazzy when you actually get them on the board.

Don't just suppress these thoughts after the game. Make a quick note of them as soon as

you've finished – otherwise they fade quickly, especially if you've won – and then try to work out what caused them when you analyse the game.

The following example made a very big impression on me. I was still just getting back into chess at this stage – I think this was only my seventh long game – and it was the first time in about 10 years that I'd played a main line 1 d4 opening. It felt as new anyway! It was played on a Friday evening after work so please have mercy on the quality of the play.

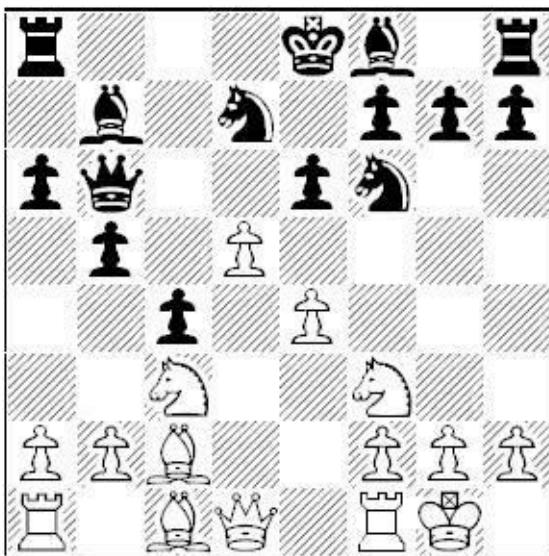
Game 22

M.Sadler-E.Goudriaan

Veenendaal 2010

Semi-Slav Defence

1 d4 d5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 c4 c6 4 Nc3 e6 5 e3 Nbd7 6 Bd3 dxc4 7 Bxc4 b5 8 Bd3 a6 9 e4 c5 10 d5 Bb7 11 0-0 c4 12 Bc2 Qb6?!



Well that can't be right. White's major threat in these types of position is to take on e6 and play e4-e5. This combination of opening the e8-h5 diagonal, weakening the pawn structure in front of the black king and chasing away the knight from f6 makes the black kingside very vulnerable to attacks starting with Ng5. Thus Black normally plays something like 12 ... Qc7 covering the e5-square.

13 dxе6 fxе6 14 e5

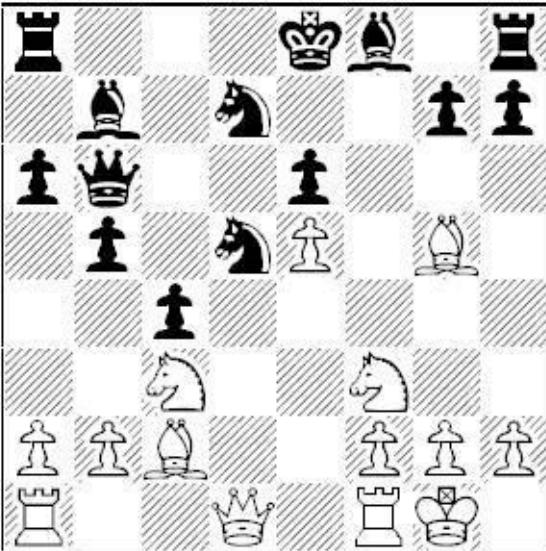
Well, let's be seeing you then!

14 ... Nd5

After 14 ... Ng4 15 Qe2 0-0-0 (if 15 ... Bc5 16 Ne4) 16 a4! b4 17 Qxc4+ the knight on g4 hangs.

15 Bg5?!

15 Ng5 was much more thematic and fairly strong, but I got extremely attracted to the idea of forcing the black king to go kingside.



15 ... Qc7?!

Another fairly outrageous move. I always wonder how Black can seem to get away (sort of) with so much in the Semi-Slav. Such a sharp opening and he can just play two queen moves and not lose immediately. It has something to do with his queenside pawn majority I think. This long-term factor adds considerable richness to Black's defensive possibilities. As White you constantly have to be on the lookout for exchange sacrifices or pawn sacrifices from Black which have the aim of breaking White's initiative and transposing into an endgame/unbalanced middlegame where the queenside majority compensates for the material investment.

After 15 ... Bc5 16 Nh4 Nxe5 *Rybka* thinks that Black is covered. 17 Qh5+ Nf7 18 Rae1 g6 19 Bxg6 hxg6 20 Qxg6 is pretty scary though.

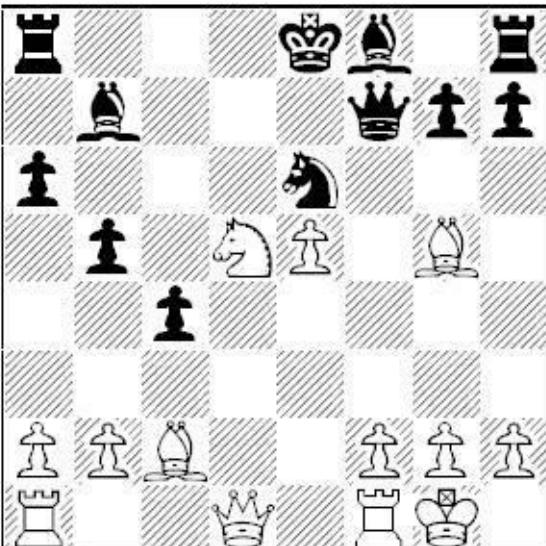
16 Nd4!

With a very big threat of Qh5+.

16 ... Nc5 17 Nxe6 Nxe6 18 Nxd5 Qf7

White wins after both:

- a) 18 ... Qxe5 19 Nb6! Bd6 (or 19 ... Bc6 20 Qh5+ g6 21 Qxg6+ hxg6 22 Bxg6 mate) 20 Qh5+ Kf8 21 Nd7+.
- b) 18 ... Qd7 19 Be4 Nxg5 20 Qh5+ Qf7 (20 ... Nf7 21 e6) 21 Qxg5 Bxd5 22 e6.

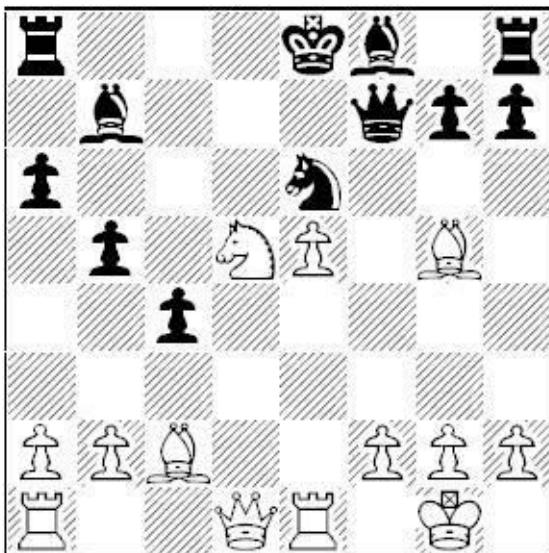


So far so good. I'd played very quickly up to here, so it was time to roll up my sleeves and get that fine calculating brain of mine going. Hmm ... Friday evening, where's my brain? I came up with three candidate moves: 19 Re1, 19 Bf6 and 19 Bh4.

19 Bh4

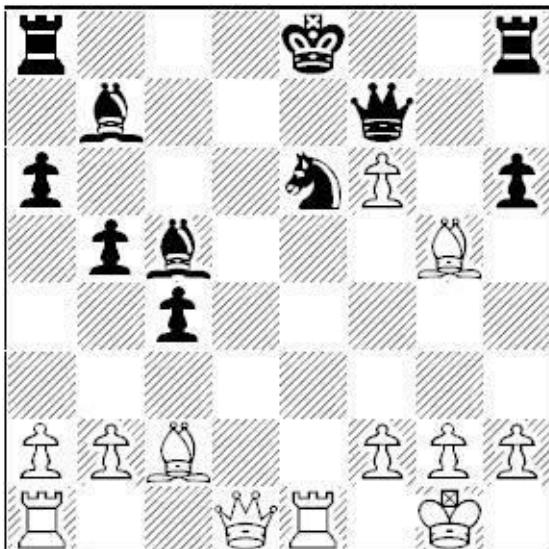
I didn't take too long on this decision funnily enough. I applied reactive thinking here (see Chapter Four for more about this): working out what I couldn't do and then playing what was left. I saw that 19 Bf6 was not going to work, I rejected 19 Re1 on positional grounds, so that left 19 Bh4 ... Not bad, but not the best.

19 Re1! is really very logical.

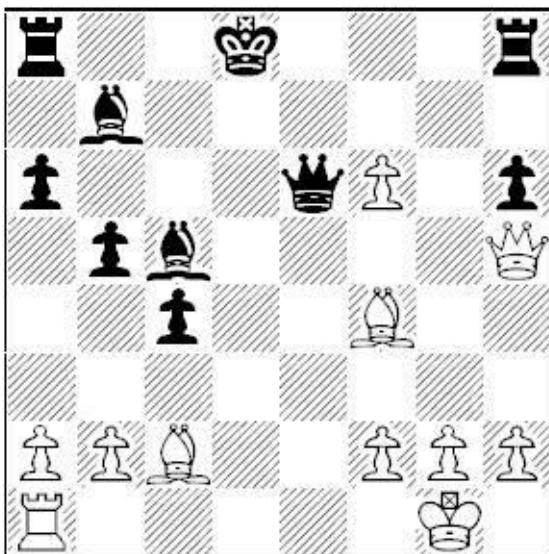


White's biggest problem in subsequent lines is getting the major pieces involved in the action. With 19 Re1, the king's rook and queen are both involved in the attack immediately: 19 ... Bc5 (if 19 ... Nxg5 20 e6) 20 Nf6+ gxf6 21 exf6.

Yep. *Rybka* likes it! I saw this idea, and considered it seriously, but in the end I rejected it due to one specific move and on positional grounds. I was afraid of the play that Black would develop on the g-file after 21 ... h6. This move stops a bishop coming to h6 so that the Black king has a hiding place on f8. That positional feeling blocked me from looking any further. If I had believed in my chances, I would have seen the not-too-difficult follow-up:



- a) 22 Bf5 hxg5 23 Bxe6 Qxf6 24 Qd7+ Kf8 25 Qxb7 Bxf2+ 26 Kh1 Re8 and Black wins.
- b) If 22 Qg4 hxg5 23 Rxe6+ Kf8.
- c) 22 Bh4 Kf8.
- d) 22 Rxe6+! Qxe6 23 Qh5+ (not 23 Bg6+ Kf8 24 Qh5 Kg8) 23 ... Kd8 (*Rybka* gives 23 ... Kd7 24 Be3, and if 23 ... Qf7 there's the reply 24 Bg6) 24 Bf4!.

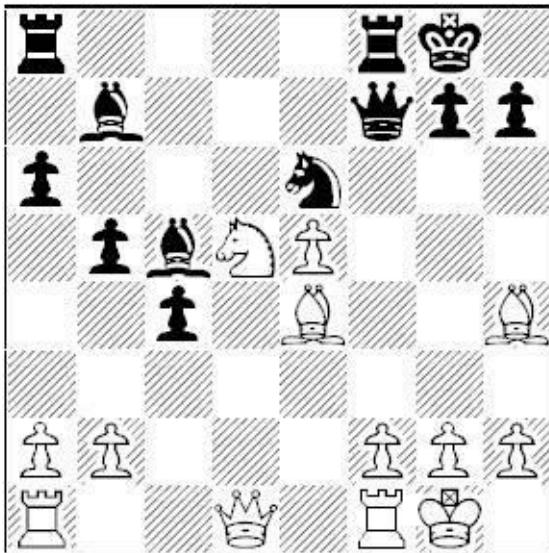


This, with the threat of Rd1 and Bf5, is extremely strong: for example, 24 ... Bd5 25 Rd1 Bd4 26 Kf1 wins.

However, 19 Bf6? Bc5 (not 19 ... gxf6 20 Nxf6+ Ke7 21 Qd6 mate) 20 Bf5 (if 20 b4 Bd4 or 20 Be4 0-0 21 Qg4 Kh8) 20 ... 0-0 21 Qg4 (or 21 Bxe6 Qxe6 22 Nc7 Qc6 23 Qg4 Qxc7 and Black wins, while 21 b4 is met by 21 ... Ba7) 21 ... Bxd5 is not so good.

Returning to 19 Bh4:

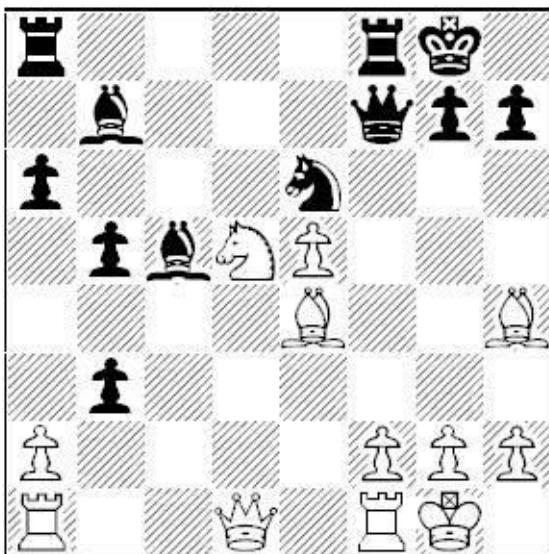
19 ... Bc5 20 Be4 0-0



21 Qg4?

I spent huge amounts of time here, but didn't get anywhere. I knew this wasn't good, but I lacked the tactical imagination to get anything to work effectively:

- a) 21 Nf6+ gxf6 22 Qg4+ Ng5 (if 22 ... Ng7 23 Bxb7 Qxb7 24 exf6 or 22 ... Kh8 23 Bxb7) 23 Bxb7 Qxb7 24 exf6 Rxf6 25 Bxg5 Rg6 is given by *Rybka*. Oh, am I not getting out of this?
- b) 21 b4! is White's best attempt to involve his major pieces. After 21 ... cxb3 (if 21 ... Bd4 22 Ne7+ or 21 ... Bxb4 22 Qb1 Bxd5 23 Bxd5 Bc3 24 Bxa8 Bxa1 25 Bd5) White has:



b1) 22 axb3 Nf4. I just couldn't make anything of this during the game ... and that's not surprising! Here Black also has 22 ... Kh8 23 Rc1 Bd4 and it's tough to hold e5.

b2) If 22 Qxb3!! is possible, of course it's the best, activating the queen: 22 ... Nd4 (22 ... Kh8 23 Rac1 Rab8 24 Qf3 Qxf3 25 gxf3 is given by *Rybka*) 23 Nf6+ gxf6 24 Qg3+ Kh8. Curtains I thought during the game, but ... 25 Rae1!! (*Rybka*'s move; not 25 Bxf6+ Qxf6) 25 ... Rg8 26 Bxf6+ Qxf6 27 exf6 Rxg3 28 Bxb7 Rgg8 29 f7 wins.

21 ... Kh8

Instead 21 ... h5 22 Nf6+ Kh8 (I missed this, only seeing 22 ... Qxf6 23 Qxh5, or rather that ... Bxe4 is a subsequent in-between move) 23 Qf5 Bxe4 24 Qxe4 gxf6 25 Bxf6+ Kg8 is nothing for White.

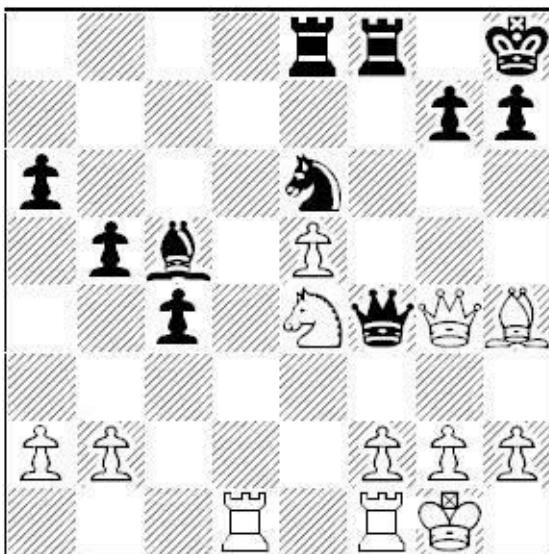
22 Rad1 Rae8

I was worried about 22 ... h5 during the game, especially if I had played 22 Rae1; I thought that Black might even have a chance of being better. At least with 22 Rad1, I can meet 22 ... h5 with 23 Qg6!. Instead 23 Qh3 g5!? (23 ... Rae8) 24 Bg3 g4 25 Qh4 Bxd5 26 Bxd5 Be7 27 Bxe6 Qh7 was my fear, but ... *Rybka* points out 28 Rd7 and that Black should thus prefer 24 ... Bc8!.

23 Nf6

After 23 Kh1 Nf4 24 Nxf4 Bxe4 25 Bg3 I wasn't sure I would keep the e-pawn. *Rybka* isn't either.

23 ... Bxe4 24 Nxe4 Qf4



By now Black was clearly fine with lots of extra time. I managed to grind Goudriaan in the endgame, but it was clear that I'd mishandled the position.

25 Qxf4 Rxf4 26 Nxc5 Nxc5 27 Bg3 Re4 28 Rd6 Re2 29 Rb1 Kg8 30 f4 g6 31 Rc6 Ne4 32 Rxa6 Rd8 33 Be1 Rf8 34 e6 Nc5 35 Ra7 Nxe6 36 Bc3 Rxf4 37 Rf1 b4 38 Bxb4 Rxb2 39 a3 Rxf1+ 40 Kxf1 Rc2 41 Rd7 Nf4 42 Rd2 Rc1+ 43 Kf2 Nd3+ 44 Ke3 Rb1 45 Bc3 Rb8 46 Kd4 Rc8 47 a4 Nf4 48 a5 Ne6+ 49 Kd5 Nf4+ 50 Kd6 Ra8 51 Ra2 g5 52 a6 Nxg2 53 Kc6 Ne3 54 Kb7 Rf8 55 a7 Nd5 56 Be5 Rf7+ 57 Kc6 Nb4+ 58 Kd6 Nxa2 59 a8Q+ Rf8 60 Qxa2 Rd8+ 61 Ke6 Rc8 62 Qa7 1-0

Quite apart from the fun I had analysing the game, I also took away one clear positional lesson for the opening from the game: don't automatically assume that Black's g-file counterplay is awesomely dangerous. I was able to use this lesson in the following game. I do have to offer my apologies in advance to Rustam for using a 5-minute game in this way, but it fits my theme too perfectly. Honesty also compels me to admit that he normally crushes me in pretty much any sort of chess.

Game 23

M.Sadler-R.Kasimdzhanov

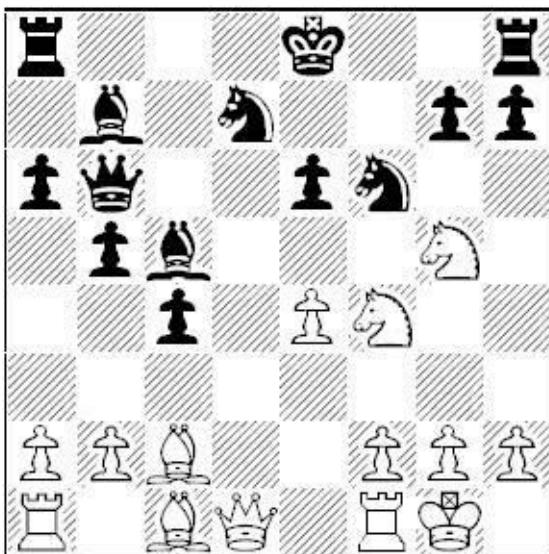
Dordrecht (blitz) 2011

Semi-Slav Defence

1 d4 d5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 c4 c6 4 Nc3 e6 5 e3 Nbd7 6 Bd3 dxc4 7 Bxc4 b5 8 Bd3 a6 9 e4 c5 10 d5 Qc7 11 0-0 c4 12 Bc2 Bc5 13 dxe6 fxe6 14 Ne2!?

A typical 5-minute move that walks into White's main idea.

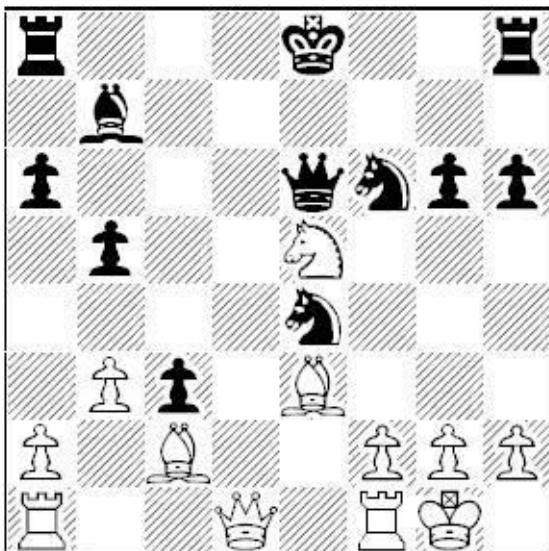
15 Nf4 Qb6 16 Ng5



16 ... e5 17 Nfe6! g6 18 b3! h6 19 Nxc5 Nxc5 20 Nf3 c3

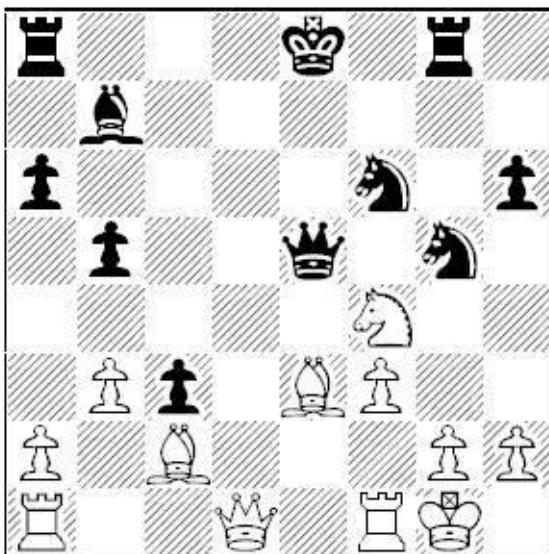
20 ... Rd8 21 Qe2 Nd3 Rybka 22 bxc4 bxc4 23 Rb1 Qc7 24 Be3 is tricky. I had the feeling that with all Black's kingside loose (the h6-pawn is especially annoying to defend), I was always going to pick up a pawn somewhere.

21 Nxe5 Ncxe4 22 Be3 Qe6

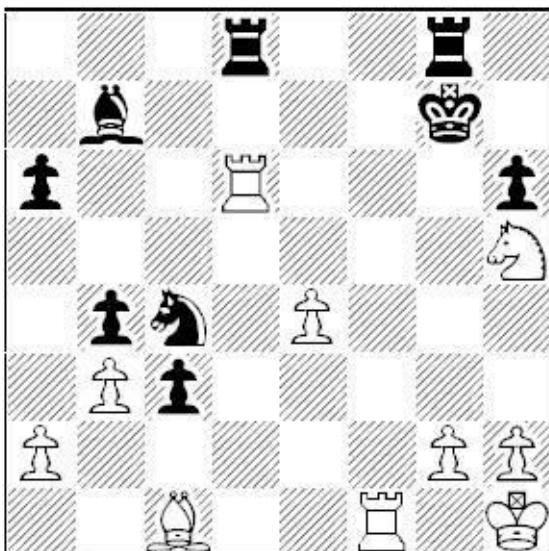


At this point, the thought popped into my head: 'I can take that pawn on g6, no worries. I've analysed much, much worse against Goudriaan and even that worked out fine. Take it!'. So I lopped off the pawn with confidence:

23 Nxg6! Rg8 24 Nf4 Qe5 25 f3 Ng5



26 Kh1! Rd8 27 Qe2 Kf7 28 Rae1 b4? 29 Qc4+ Nd5 30 Bc1 Qd6 31 Be4 Kg7 32 Rd1 Nxe4 33 fxe4 Nb6 34 Rxd6 Nxc4 35 Nh5+ 1-0



It's mate after 35 ... Kh8 36 Rxh6.

Final thoughts

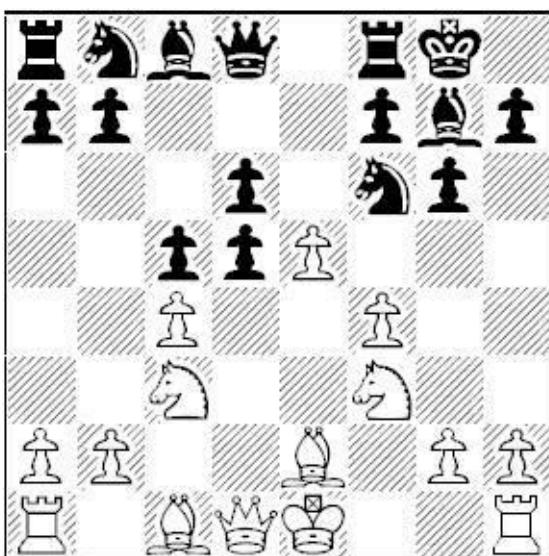
How you feel about the opening you play is likely to have a big influence on how well you play it. My experience was that the more time I spent trying to develop 'warmth' for an opening, the better I played it. That's especially important when you're preparing something on your own. If you have the opportunity to work with another player, then training games as described in the previous chapter are an excellent way to build up experience in an opening. You even can play a training match over the Internet!

Chapter Three

Playing Unorthodox Openings

Until the age of 12, I paid little attention to openings. With White I played mainly the London System (1 d4 d5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 Bf4), and didn't show much interest in main lines. Somewhere around March 1987, I went crazy. At the beginning of the month, I was happily playing my boring stuff; end of the month, I'd revamped completely with hyper-sharp openings like the Four Pawns Attack against the King's Indian. In particular I became obsessed with this variation:

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 f4 0-0 6 Nf3 c5 7 d5 e6 8 Be2 exd5 9 e5



One of my big discoveries was that 9 ... Ne4 10 cxd5 Nxc3 11 bxc3 Nd7 could be refuted by 12 0-0 dxe5 13 f5. Umm ... glad I was never given too much opportunity to share that knowledge with the world! Almost overnight, you start seeing an enormous increase in the aggression of my play and an explosion in playing strength. This is a typical example from that time:

Game 24

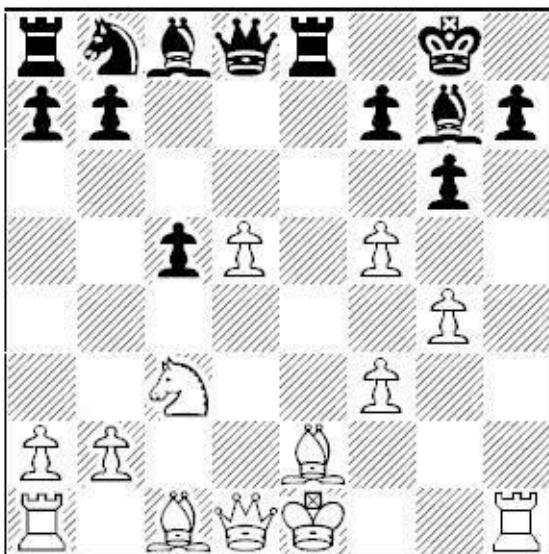
M.Sadler-D.Sands

Kent U-18 vs. Essex U-18 1987

King's Indian Defence

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 f4 0-0 6 Nf3 c5 7 d5 e6 8 Be2 exd5 9 e5 Ng4 10 cxd5 dxe5 11 h3 e4 12 hxg4 exf3 13 gxf3 Re8 14 f5

There haven't been games in this line for ages, but this position was well-known at the time due to the stem game A.Vaisser-G.Kasparov, Moscow 1981.

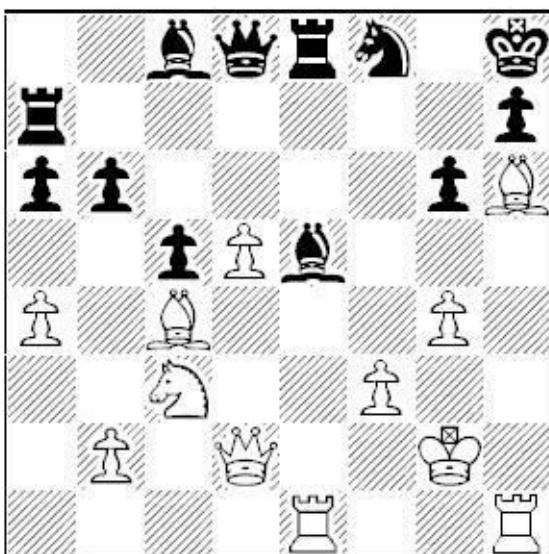


Kasparov continued 14 ... Qb6 and won (of course), but it all looked very risky for Black. It's certainly much easier for White to play than for Black.

14 ... b6 15 fxg6 fxg6 16 Kf1 Nd7 17 Bh6 Be5

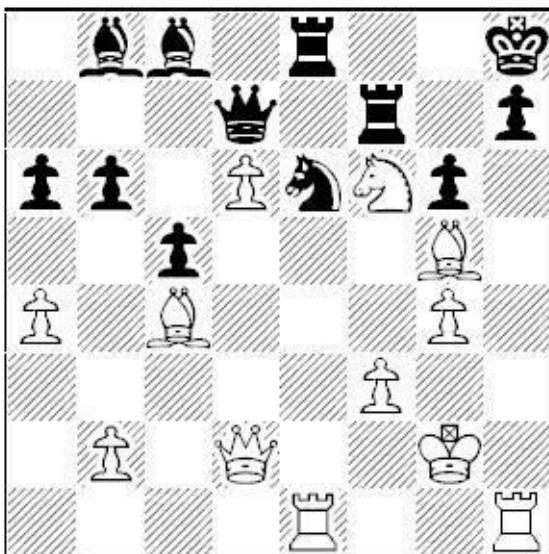
Not a good move. The white bishop on h6 is extremely threatening, while the bishop on e5 blocks an excellent square for the black knight.

18 Bc4 Nf8 19 Qd2 a6 20 a4 Ra7 21 Kg2 Kh8 22 Rae1



White is wonderfully developed. A great position for my first try-out of an opening!

22 ... Bb8 23 Ne4 Rf7 24 Bg5 Qd7 25 d6 Ne6 26 Nf6



Crashing through.

26 ... Rxf6 27 Bxf6+ Kg8 28 Qh6 Qb7 29 Re2 Qf7 30 Be7 b5 31 Bxe6 1-0

I'd clearly found a way of playing and a way of approaching chess that suited me. Although I toned down my openings slightly over the years, I developed into a well-prepared player whose opening knowledge was an intrinsic part of his playing strength.

In 1996 one of my chess dreams came true when I was selected to play for the English team in the Yerevan Olympiad. I'd come agonizingly close to making it in 1994, but a terrible tournament just before the selection meeting (I had a sort of nervous collapse) cost me my chance for a place. I did fairly well at Yerevan, but that isn't the thing I remember the most about it. The most amazing thing was ... Spess! It was the first time I'd seen Jon in action close-up and I found it really inspiring.

My approach to chess was based on eliminating the factor of chance. All the preparation and work I did at home and before the game was focused on hammering the opponent into channels of play that favoured my style. It wasn't super-subtle, but when I had a good energy level, it wasn't easy to escape. Of course Jon was also looking for positions he liked, but there was a mesmerizing chaotic messiness about the whole proceedings. It felt to me like the board had just got bigger. Wow! You could also play like this! Just one example to give you a flavour of his play:

Game 25

D.Garcia Ilundain-J.Speelman

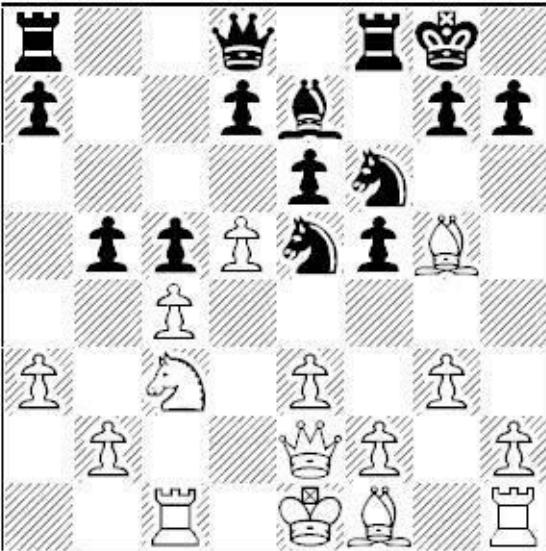
Yerevan Olympiad 1996

English Defence

1 d4 e6 2 c4 b6 3 a3 Bb7 4 Nc3 f5 5 Nf3 Nf6 6 Bg5 Be7 7 Rc1 0-0 8 g3 c5 9 e3 Bxf3!?

No, I would never have thought of doing this either!

10 Qxf3 Nc6 11 d5 Ne5 12 Qe2 b5

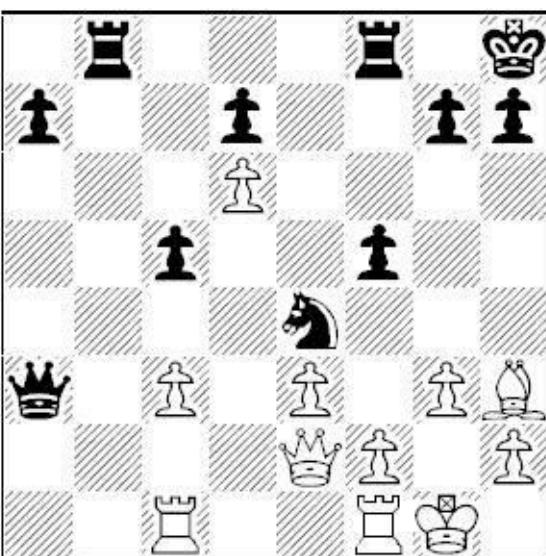


Don't ask me how, but we have ended up in a sort of Benko!

13 Nxb5 exd5 14 cxd5 Qa5+ 15 Nc3 Rab8 16 Bf4

If 16 Bg2 Rxb2!.

16 ... Bd6 17 Bxe5 Bxe5 18 Bh3 Bxc3+ 19 bxc3 Ne4 20 d6 Kh8 21 0-0 Qxa3



Black has emerged with a good position from the opening. Spess had also built up a good time advantage so White does really well to hold the draw.

22 Ra1 Qxc3 23 Rxa7 Rf7 24 Qa2 Qf6 25 Qd5 g6 26 Bg2 Rb2 27 f3 Rd2 28 Qa8+ Rf8 29 Qb7 Nxd6 30 Qxd7 Rf7 31 Ra8+ Kg7 32 Qd8 Qe7 33 Qh8+ Kh6 34 Qc3 Re2 35 Qxc5 Rxe3 36 Ra6 Rd3 37 Qc1+ f4 38 Re1 Qf6 39 Ra4 Rd4 40 Rxd4 Qxd4+ 41 Kh1 Kg7 42 Rd1 ½-½

I knew I couldn't repeat Jon's thinking process – I've never really understood how Jon ends up choosing a move – but I really wanted to use the inspiration he'd given me to add something of that spirit to my own play. Just after Yerevan I got press-ganged into jury service which gave me a couple of stress-free weeks in which I could analyse Jon's Yerevan games. And that was one of the best things I ever did. Things certainly didn't always go to plan. However, playing these openings expanded my chess horizons in a number of important ways:

Mental: Capacity for improvisation

One of the uncertainties of my extremely forcing approach was how I would react when the game position varied significantly from my expectations. I sometimes had the feeling that I had

pre-programmed myself so thoroughly for a certain type of game that I would need therapy to make the adjustment to a different sort of position. Playing unorthodox openings means nothing is fixed and nothing is certain. The only way to thrive is to improvise.

Technical: Playing a wide variety of (unexpected) positions with conviction

This follows on from the previous point. Playing unorthodox openings exposes you to a wide range of new positions. To play these systems with any conviction, you need to be able to see the positive side to all sorts of situations. In fact, I found that my endgame play improved significantly once I took up these openings. I felt so happy if I survived the opening and got out into an equal endgame that I was filled with enthusiasm to play it. An equal endgame always felt like a bit of a failure from a theoretical opening. All that effort and work just for equality with reduced material ... what a waste of effort!

Having played unorthodox openings on and off over the years, I decided that the most important thing to get right was your mindset. Before you start playing an opening like this, you need to understand a few things that are different – or maybe more extreme – than in normal chess.

It could all go horribly wrong

You have to understand that you are taking risks, and that risk-taking sometimes goes awry. The fact that you're taking risks by playing an unorthodox opening does not automatically give you the moral right to a good position. If you give up space in the centre, you can get squashed! Let me just relive the horror of one of my games to prove the point:

Game 26

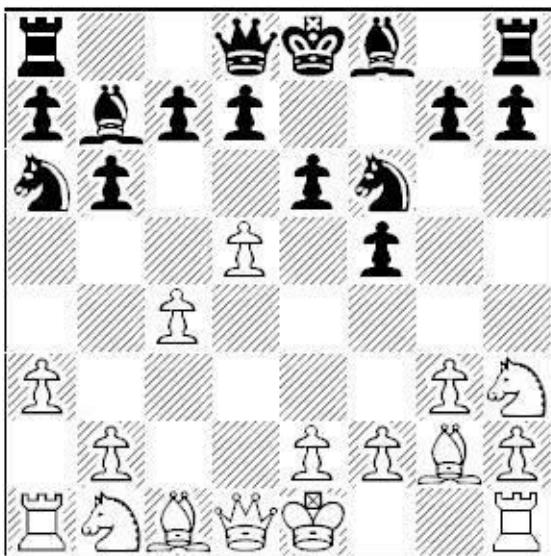
V.Anand-M.Sadler

Melody Amber, Monaco (rapid) 1998

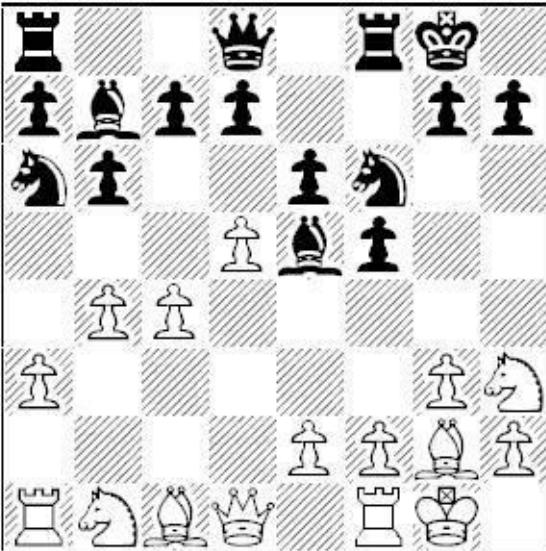
English Defence

1 c4 b6 2 d4 e6 3 a3 Bb7 4 d5 f5 5 g3 Nf6 6 Bg2 Na6 7 Nh3

A very sneaky move that picks up nicely on my very early ... Na6. Whenever Black plays ... Nc5, then b4 Nce4; f3 can be unpleasant.



7 ... Bd6 8 0-0 0-0 9 b4 Be5



I started losing track of things around here. In fact, I didn't grasp the fact that my knight on a6 could turn into a *really* big problem if I didn't take measures straightaway. Something like 9 ... c6 would have been pretty okay for Black. Instead I got all creative.

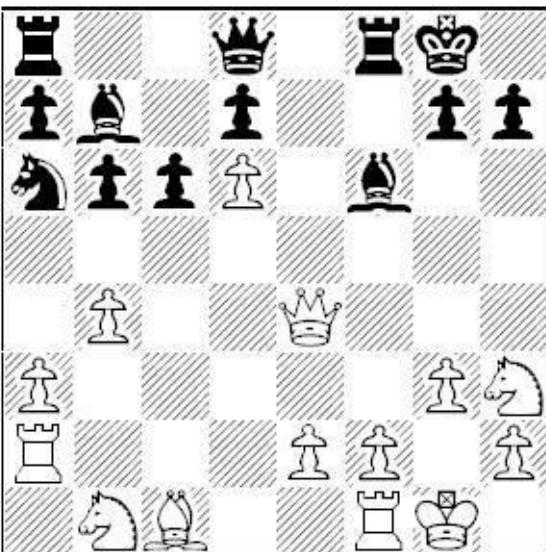
10 Ra2 exd5 11 cxd5 Ne4 12 Qd3 c6 13 Bxe4 fxe4 14 Qxe4

This was more awkward than I had realized. I couldn't find a good way to defend my bishop.

14 ... Bf6

14 ... Qf6 15 Ng5 g6 16 Nf3 is very unpleasant: without the bishop-pair, Black doesn't have the slightest bit of compensation for the pawn.

15 d6!



It struck me all of a sudden how awful my position was. That knight on a6 is not going to escape. The rest is humiliation.

15 ... Qe8 16 Qxe8 Raxe8 17 Rd1 c5 18 b5 Nb8 19 Bg5 Bxg5 20 Nxg5 Rf5 21 Nh3 Re4 22 Nc3 Rc4 23 Rd3 g5 24 f3 g4 25 Nf4 gxf3 26 exf3 Rd4 27 Rad2 Bxf3 28 Rxd4 cxd4 29 Rxd4 a6 30 a4 Rc5 31 Rd3 Bg4 32 Re3 Kf8 33 Nfd5 axb5 34 axb5 Be6 35 Nxb6 Kf7 36 Kf2 h5 37 Nba4 Rc4 38 Rf3+ Kg7 39 Rf4 Rc8 40 Ke3 Kg6 41 Kd2 Kg7 42 Kd3 Kg6 43 Kf2 h4 44 Kd4 Bf7 45 Ne4 Be6 46 Nd5 Kg7 47 Ne7 1-0

Unbridled Elation and Manic Despair

Playing unorthodox openings sounds ... wild and carefree. Easy Rider. A person who plays unorthodox openings must be a sort of happy-go-lucky genius, blessed with a mystical touch

that turns ridiculous-looking moves into mysteriously good ones. Don't you want to be person too?

Don't believe a word of it! You're a nervous wreck when you play like this! Almost every time I play an unorthodox opening, I have a moment of utter despair where I bemoan the fatal inspiration that led to me to play this opening. 'Why couldn't I just play something sensible? What's so wrong about putting your pawns in the centre and just developing normally?' With a bit of luck, that's soon followed by a feeling of supreme elation when you emerge unscathed from the opening, coupled to an almost unstoppable urge to thumb your nose at your opponent and shout 'Got away with it again!' It's quite an emotional experience doing this stuff.

I've already described these feelings a little bit in my notes to the game against van Oosterom (Chapter Two). Here is another example from the last round of the Tata Steel C tournament.

Game 27

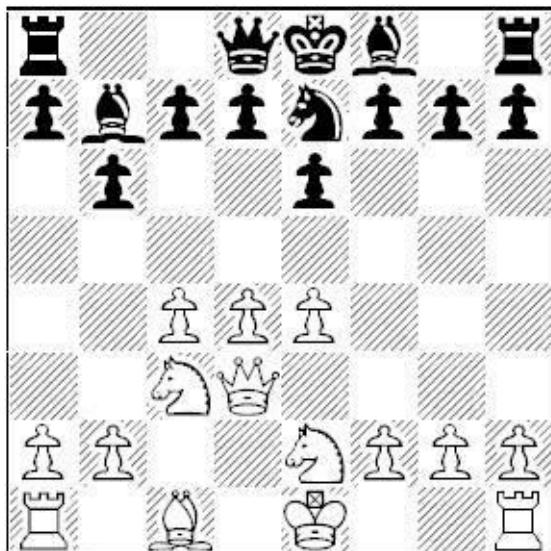
S.Grover-M.Sadler

Wijk aan Zee 2012

English Defence

I had some difficulty choosing my opening for this game. Tata had already been a horribly disappointing experience before I lost my penultimate game. I really just wanted to run away and go back to work, but you have your pride. So ... do I play solidly and try to get a decent position, or do I go creative to try to get myself going for one last effort? I always like the sound of the second option before the game, but I also know I need to be feeling tough to cope with the emotional ups and downs that come with these openings, and I wasn't in good shape. Having taken a look at my opponent's games though, I was fairly sure he would not be terribly comfortable facing this sort of rubbish. So with the battle-cry 'Confuse the Indians' on my lips, I went in to fight ...

1 d4 e6 2 c4 b6 3 e4 Bb7 4 Bd3 Nc6 5 Ne2 Nb4 6 Nbc3 Nxd3+ 7 Qxd3 Ne7

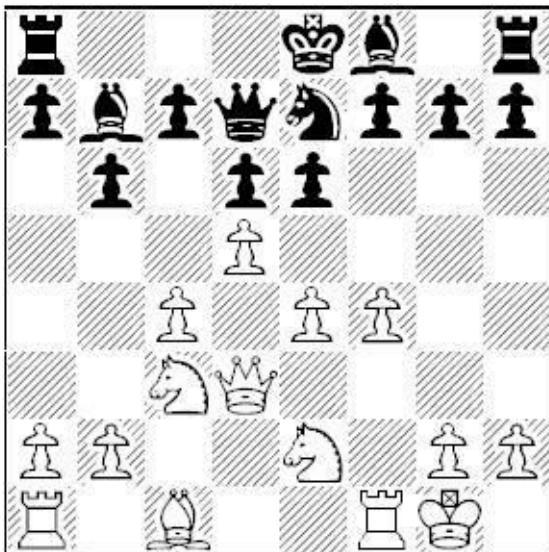


The second time I have played this opening. Having secured the bishop-pair, Black is just trying to develop his pieces out of the range of White's central pawns. 7 ... Ne7 is extremely flexible. Black can put his knight on g6, or he can fianchetto his bishop with ... g6 and ... Bg7. There is also the possibility of breaking with ... f5 (or maybe even ... d5) to gain a bit of central space. It gives White plenty to think about at least.

8 d5

New at this early stage

8 ... d6 9 f4 Qd7 10 0-0



I had one of my sudden bouts of depression around here. I really felt very cramped and all of my plans suddenly seemed quite useless. Castle queenside and he'll blast me off the board with a4, but 10 ... g6 allows 11 Qd4 and ... Ng6 is going to walk into f5 at some point. Aaagh! Why did I do this?

Deep breath, you know this always happens, stay calm, Easy Rider. All of a sudden the idea of gaining space on the kingside with ... h5-h4 came into my mind. That's all you need to put a smile back on your face: a plan. No need to look too deeply to check whether it's any good: that would spoil things. Just accept the gift and try to make it work somehow.

10 ... Ng6

10 ... h5 11 f5!? seemed a little tricky, so I decided to anticipate f5 by bringing my knight to g6 first.

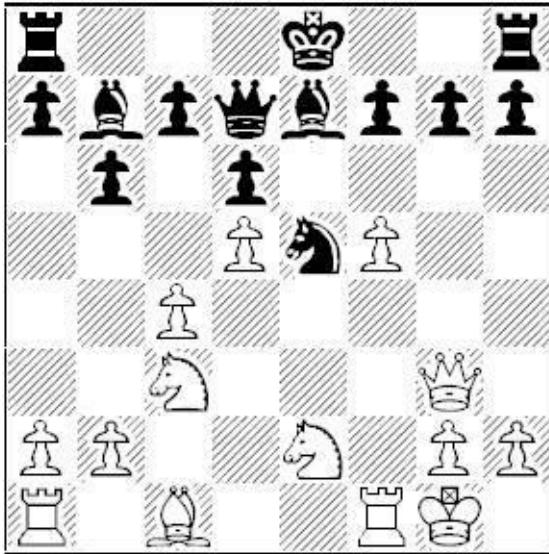
11 Qg3

Actually an unpleasant move as my idea of ... h5(-h4) gaining space on the kingside is now impossible due to dx6. That means that I will need to take on d5 if I want to play ... h5-h4. On the bright side, however, it will come with tempo now. I thought though that I could probably take a little extra time for development first. I wasn't worried about sacrificing a pawn: that always seems to happen in these types of systems.

11 ... Be7 12 f5

If 12 b3 Bf6 (12 ... Bh4!?) 13 Bb2 exd5 (13 ... b5!? 14 e5 dx5 15 Ne4 gives White the initiative) 14 cxd5 h5!? 15 h3 (15 e5 dx5) 15 ... h4 and maybe castle on the kingside!? Not sure what I would do after castling queenside ... but could look for ... Bxc3 and ... f5.

12 ... exf5 13 exf5 Ne5



14 b4?!

A quite astounding move played after a huge think. Those sorts of things just seem to happen when you play confusing systems like this. I guess that White's idea was to play c5 very quickly, but there's no way that idea is going to work.

Alternatives were:

a) 14 b3 h5 15 Bb2 h4 16 Qh3 0-0-0 17 Nd4 Rde8 followed by ... Bd8. I thought I would survive.

b) 14 Qxg7 0-0-0 15 b3 h5! (after 15 ... Rdg8 16 Qh6 the queen gets an annoying safe place on h5) 16 Qg3 Rdg8 17 Qh3 Rg4, stopping ... Ne4 and preparing ... Bf6 was my idea with fairly good compensation for the pawn.

14 ... 0-0-0

14 ... Nxc4 15 Qxg7 0-0-0 16 f6 Rdg8 17 Qxf7 Qg4 18 Rf2 Bd8 19 Qe6+ is excellent for White.

15 Be3?!

15 c5 dxc5 16 Qxe5 cxb4 is good for Black.

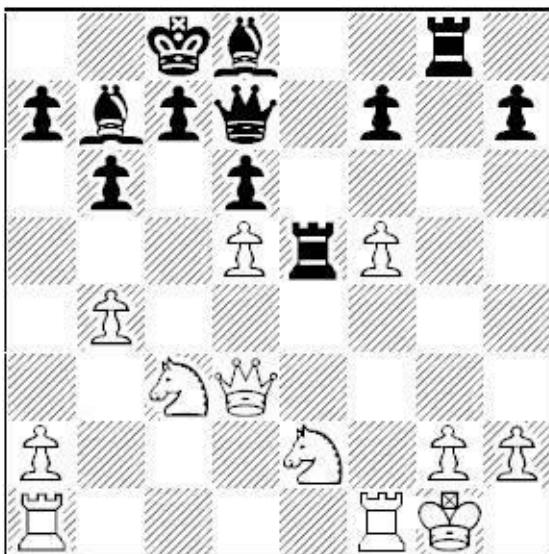
15 ... Nxc4 16 Bd4 Rde8

I wasn't so sure about 16 ... Bf6 17 Bxf6 gxf6 18 Qf4 Ne5 19 b5.

17 Qxg7 Bd8

Threatening ... Rhg8 and ... c5.

18 Qg3 Rhg8 19 Qd3 Ne5 20 Bxe5 Rxe5



Black enjoys an excellent position, but he managed to escape and we eventually drew after many adventures:

21 Nd4 Bg5 22 Kh1 Be3 23 Nf3 Ree8 24 a4 a6 25 Rae1 Bh6 26 b5 a5 27 Ne4 Qd8 28 h3 Kb8 29 Re2 Ka7 30 Qc4 Bg7 31 Rc1 Kb8 32 f6 Bh6 33 Rcc2 Qd7 34 Nd4 Bf4 35 Nc6+ Bxc6 36 bxc6 Qc8 37 Rb2 Rxg2 38 Rxg2 Qxh3+ 39 Kg1 Be3+ 40 Nf2 Bxf2+ 41 Rbxf2 Re1+ 42 Rf1 Qe3+ 43 Kh2 Qh6+ 44 Kg3 Qg5+ 45 Kh3 Qh5+ 46 Qh4 Qxh4+ 47 Kxh4 Rxf1 48 Rg8+ Ka7 49 Rc8 Rxf6 50 Kg5 Rg6+ 51 Kf5 h5 52 Rxc7+ Kb8 53 Rxf7 Rh6 54 Kg5 Rh8 55 Kh4 Re8 56 Rd7 Re4+ 57 Kh3 Rxa4 58 Rxd6 Rc4 59 Rd7 Kc8 60 Rb7 Rc5 61 Rxb6 Rxd5 62 Ra6 Kc7 63 Kh4 Rc5 64 Kh3 Kd6 65 Kh4 Re5 66 Kh3 Rf5 67 Kh4 Kc7 68 Kh3 Rf3+ 69 Kh4 Rf5 70 Kh3 Re5 71 Kh4 Rd5 72 Kh3 Rd3+ 73 Kh4 Ra3 74 Kxh5 a4 75 Kg4 Kd6 76 Kf4 Ra1 77 Ke3 a3 78 Kd2 a2 79 Kc2 Rh1 80 Rxa2 Rh2+ 81 Kb3 Rxa2 82 Kxa2 Kxc6 ½-½

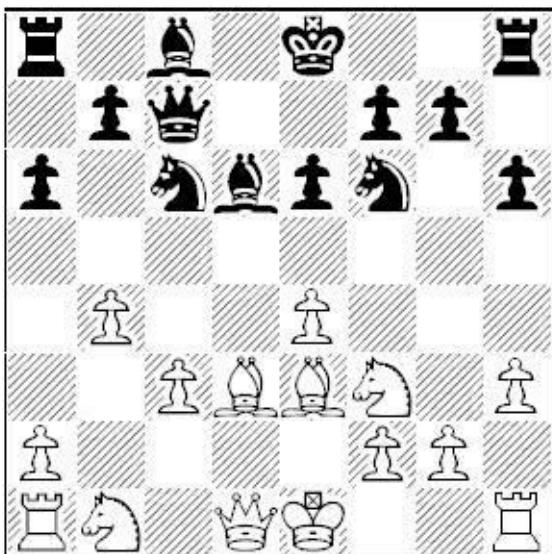
Play positionally

People often assume that because you're playing silly systems, you also have to play them in a silly way. Nothing could be further from the truth. The normal rules of chess still apply, even if you're playing a weird system! You just try to stretch them a bit that's all. A good example of this is my game against van Oosterom:

Game 28

C.Van Oosterom-M.Sadler

Haarlem 2010



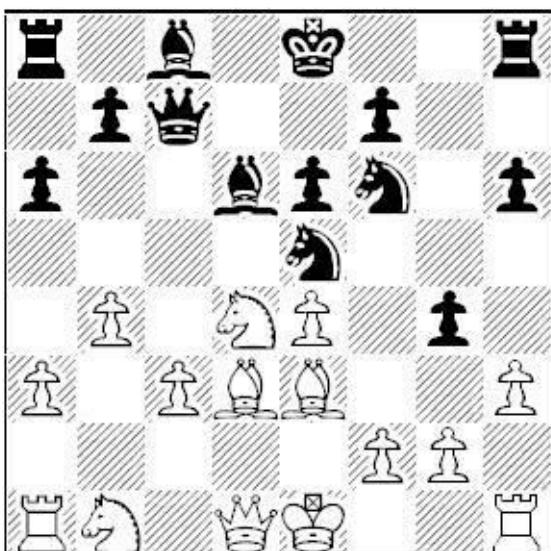
10 ... g5!

This move was successful because it wasn't just a wild lunge: there were some serious positional ideas behind it. Just as in a Queen's Gambit Accepted structure, Black wants to gain control of e5 so that he can place a knight there. From e5 the knight attacks the bishop on d3 and stops a white knight from coming to c4 (which would be curtains for Black). Moreover, once the knight moves from c6, the black queen is attacking the backward pawn on c3.

Black can achieve this goal either by chasing away the white knight from f3 or by attacking e5 with more than one knight. I did spend a little time considering 10 ... Nd7 with ... Nde5 to follow, but that felt much too slow. It would be much more active to play ... Ng4 of course as White would then need to do something about his bishop on e3 ... but there's the little matter of that pawn on h3. It was then that it struck me that ... g5-g4 might be an extremely effective idea. Once Black gets in ... g4, either the knight has to move from f3, or after hxg4 Nxg4, the bishop on e3 has to take cover while the knight on g4 comes into contact with the e5-square.

I'm making this sound like Black is in complete control here, and of course that's not the case. Objectively, Black only has some vague, temporary activity for the central pawn he has sacrificed and White should have many good possibilities. But that's no reason for Black not to play good active positional chess!

11 a3 g4! 12 Nd4 Ne5



Got it! Black won 10 moves later (see Chapter One for the remainder).

Sacrificing a pawn

It can't just be coincidence: I always seem to end up sacrificing a pawn for counterplay when I play unorthodox systems. We saw examples of this already against Grover and against van Oosterom. The point is: you don't play these types of systems and take those sorts of risks just to end up in a dull and slightly worse position! That feeling really motivates you to delve deeper into the position and find ways of generating activity. In the games above, you couldn't really say that Black had 100% compensation for the pawn, but you could also imagine the practical difficulties that White faces. I have another example here:

Game 29

A.Arribas Lopez-M.Sadler

Barcelona 2011

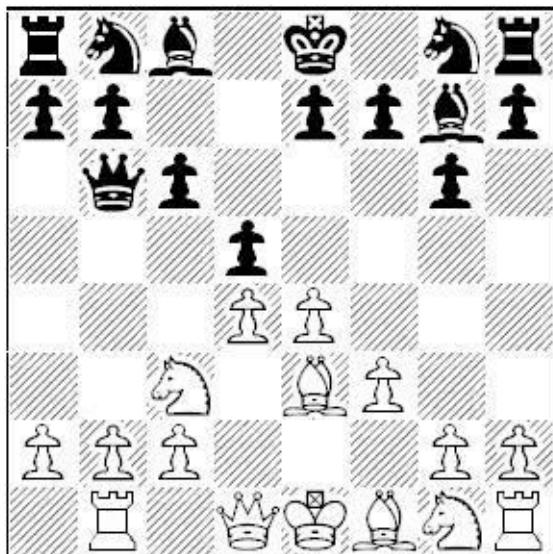
Modern Defence

This was an important game for me in the fight for first place. I was in joint first place with 5½/6 and had received a rather fortunate pairing: Black against an FM rated 2443. He was playing rather well to reach his score – he'd beaten Smeets with Black and should also have beaten Iturriaga – but of course it was still an excellent opportunity for a point.

1 e4 g6 2 d4 Bg7 3 Nc3 c6

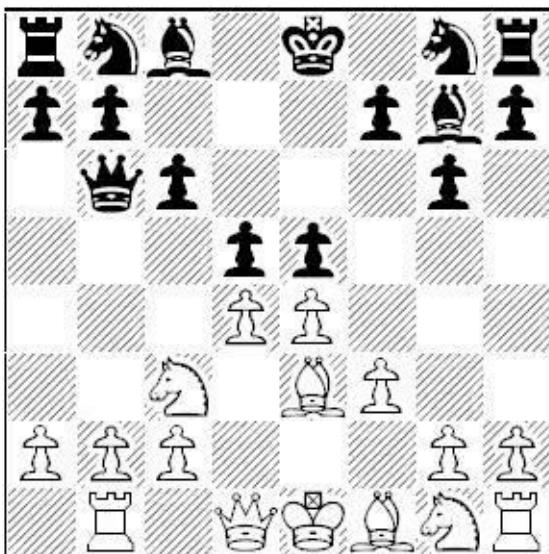
I remembered Dave Norwood and Julian Hodgson playing this sort of stuff in the good old days, so playing it gave me a nice nostalgic feeling. It does show the depths to which my opening knowledge has sunk when I start relying on Dave's openings in crucial games!

4 Be3 d5 5 f3 Qb6 6 Rb1



I had thought my opening might be a surprise for my opponent (I'd never remotely come close to playing this before), but he whacked out his moves extremely quickly. And here I went into a deep think. So much for gaining time on the clock with the element of surprise!

6 ... e5



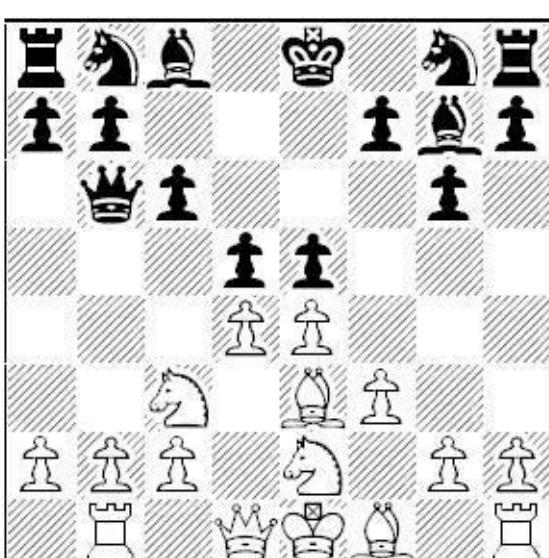
I spent a lot of time on this position: 6 Rb1 was really tempting me! It's a completely normal move of course, but it has a significant drawback: White cannot castle queenside any more. This changes the dynamics of the position in two ways:

- a) Reduced attacking possibilities for White. If the centre is opened quickly, White doesn't have the option of castling queenside and sacrificing lots of pawns to get at the uncastled black king.
- b) White's king as a possible weakness. To get his king out of the centre, White will need to go kingside which isn't as easy as it looks: structures with a pawn on f3 often combine better with queenside castling than with kingside castling (where are you going to develop your g1-knight?).

These general considerations led me to look for ways of clearing the centre at the cost of a pawn or two. I don't think I found the best way of doing it unfortunately – as you will see, I could have got into some trouble – but I do think that the basic idea was correct.

7 Nge2

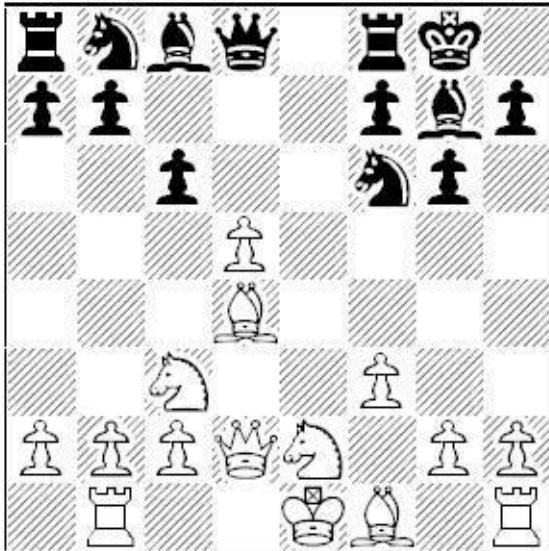
All played a tempo.



7 ... Nf6

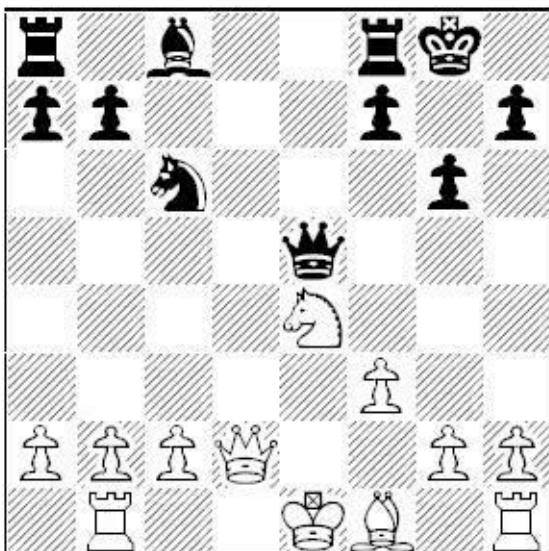
7 ... exd4 8 Bxd4 Bxd4 9 Qxd4 Qxd4 10 Nxd4 dxe4 11 Nxe4 is a good example of what you don't want to get from one of these systems!

8 Qd2 exd4 9 Bxd4 Qd8 10 exd5 0-0



This is it! Get that centre open!

11 Nf4 cxd5 12 Nfxd5 Nc6 13 Bxf6 Bxf6 14 Nxf6+ Qxf6 15 Ne4 Qe5



I'd assessed these types of position quite optimistically from afar – I thought I was bound to be able to get a pawn back somehow, especially considering the fact that a2 is undefended (... Be6xa2 wins a tempo against the rook on b1!) – but now I got a little tactical shock.

16 Qd6?!

A bad move after which Black is doing very nicely. While my opponent was thinking, I suddenly spotted 16 Qc3 Nd4 17 Rd1 Rd8 18 Bd3! f5 19 f4! which wins for White after 19 ... Qxf4 20 Bc4+ Kf8 21 Rxd4. I was starting to look at ways of having a tiny bit of play for my pawn after 16 ... Qxc3+ 17 Nxc3 Bf5 and mentally girding myself for a long struggle. I was so happy to see 16 Qd6! However, it's an example once again of how even strong white players can go astray when faced with non-standard situations.

16 ... Qa5+ 17 Kf2 Bf5 18 Qa3?! Qxa3 19 bxa3 Bxe4 20 fxe4 b6 21 Bc4

If 21 Ba6 Rae8.

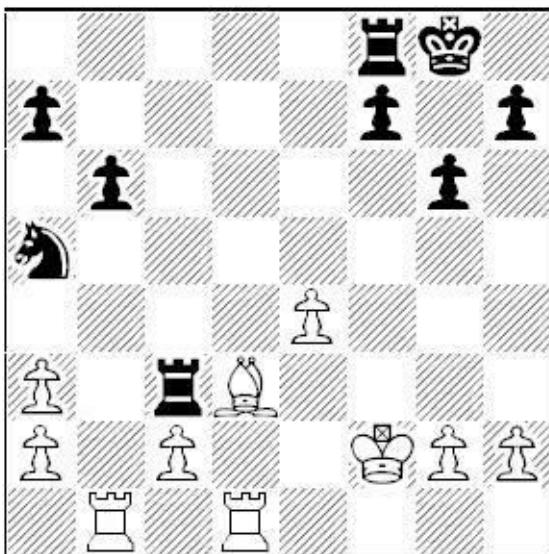
21 ... Rac8 22 Rhd1 Na5!

To stop White from playing Bb3.

23 Bd3

23 Bb3 Nxb3 24 cxb3 Rc2+ 25 Kf3 Rfc8 is very good for Black.

23 ... Rc3



This is a very pleasant position for Black which I converted many moves later:

24 Rb3 Nxb3 25 axb3 Rd8 26 a4 Kf8 27 Ke3 Ke7 28 Ra1 a5 29 Rb1 Rc5 30 Rf1 Rh5 31 h3 Rg5 32 Rf2 Rd6 33 Bc4 Rf6 34 Rd2 h5 35 c3 h4 36 Rf2 Rc6 37 Kd4 Rcc5 38 Re2 Rg3 39 Rf2 f6 40 Rb2 Rcg5 41 Bf1 Rc5 42 Bc4 Rcg5 43 Bf1 f5 44 e5 f4 45 Rf2 Rf5 46 Be2 Re3 47 Bd3 Rfxe5 48 Rxf4 g5 49 Re4 R3xe4+ 50 Bxe4 Kd6 51 Bf3 Re1 52 Kc4 Rc1 53 Kd4 Rc2 54 Ba8 Rf2 55 Bf3 g4 56 Bxg4 Rxg2 57 Bc8 Rg8 58 Bf5 Rg5 59 Bc8 Rd5+ 0-1

Make use of unexpected structural options

Unorthodox systems usually seem to involve the early development of bishops, often on long diagonals. This introduces a number of early opportunities for damaging the opponent's structure. This technique can be particularly effective when White tries to stick to a standard development scheme and tries to ignore the weird things that Black is doing. An example here from Jon Speelman who has had a lot of success with these types of positions.

Game 30

P.Toloza Soto-J.Speelman

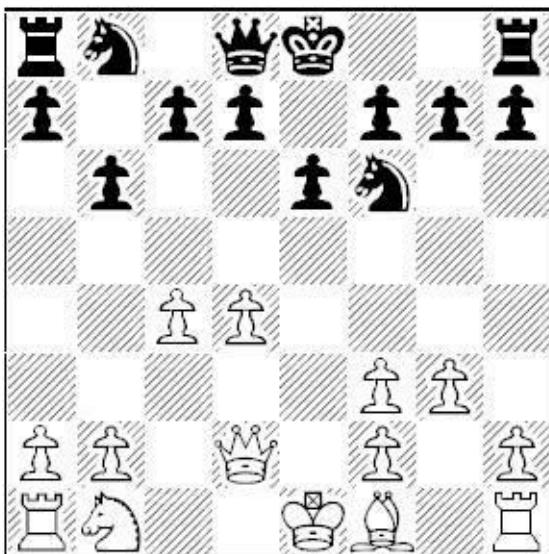
Bled Olympiad 2002

English Defence

1 d4 e6 2 c4 b6 3 Nf3 Bb7 4 g3

White tries to play a solid g3 Queen's Indian structure as if Black was just playing normally. The early fianchetto of the bishop on b7 gives Black an extra idea however.

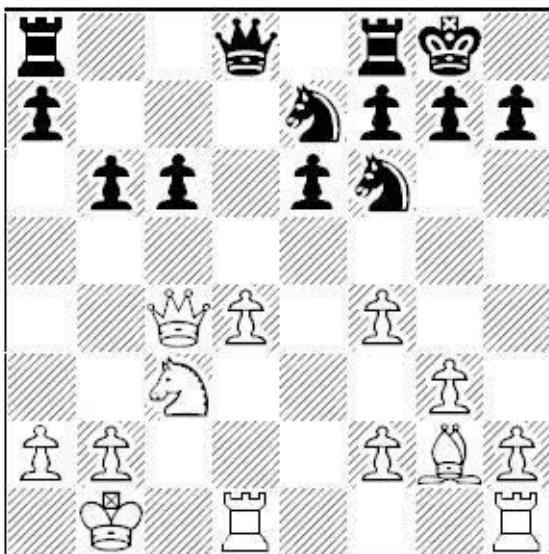
4 ... Bb4+ 5 Bd2 Bxf3! 6 exf3 Bxd2+ 7 Qxd2 Nf6



Black has managed both to inflict a structural weakness in White's position and to eliminate White's bishop-pair. Jon now follows his tried and trusted method of handling these positions:

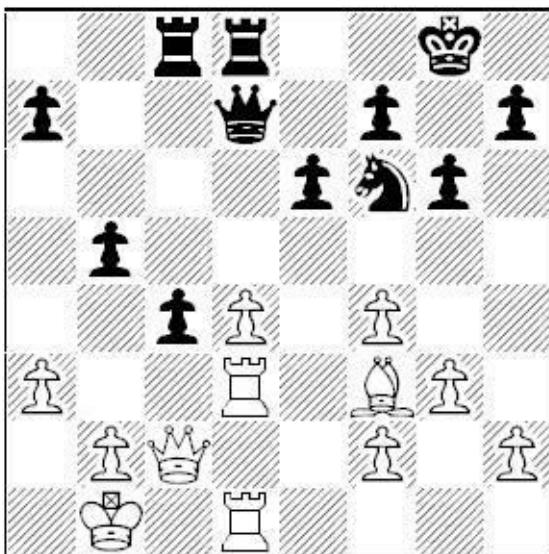
- a) Play ... d5xc4 to isolate the d-pawn.
- b) Play with the knights on the central light squares d5 and f5.
- c) Wait for your chance for queenside expansion.

8 Nc3 0-0 9 0-0-0 d5 10 Kb1 Nc6 11 f4 Ne7 12 Bg2 c6 13 Qd3 dxc4 14 Qxc4



Part 1 accomplished; now it's time for parts 2 and 3 of the grand plan.

14 ... Rc8 15 Rhei Qd7 16 Bf3 Ned5 17 Ne4 Nxe4 18 Bxe4 Rfd8 19 a3 g6 20 Rd3 Nf6 21 Bf3 c5! 22 Red1 b5! 23 Qc2 e4



Black stands very well and soon won.

24 Re3 Qc7 25 Re5 Qb6 26 d5 exd5 27 Bxd5 a5 28 f5 Nxd5 29 Rxd5 Rxd5 b4 31 fxg6 hxg6 32 axb4 axb4 33 Qd2 c3 34 Qd4 Qc7 35 Qxb4 cxb2 36 Qxb2 Qc4 37 Ra5 Qe4+ 0-1

Tony Miles was another great player of unorthodox openings who, especially towards the end of his career, really enjoyed just taking a structural advantage and sitting out the opponent's activity until the structural advantage became the defining factor.

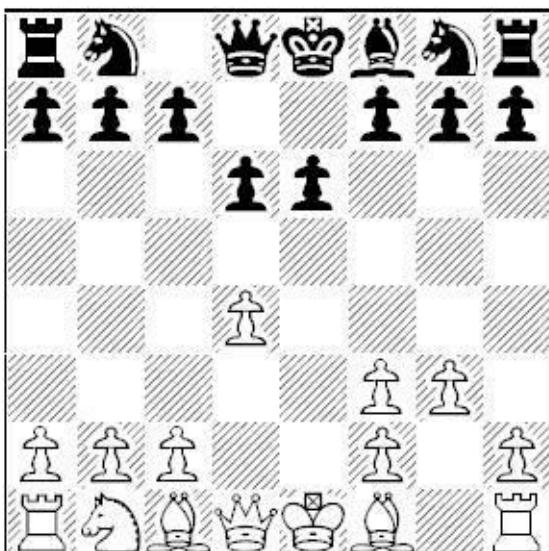
Game 31

L.Polugaevsky-A.Miles

Biel 1990

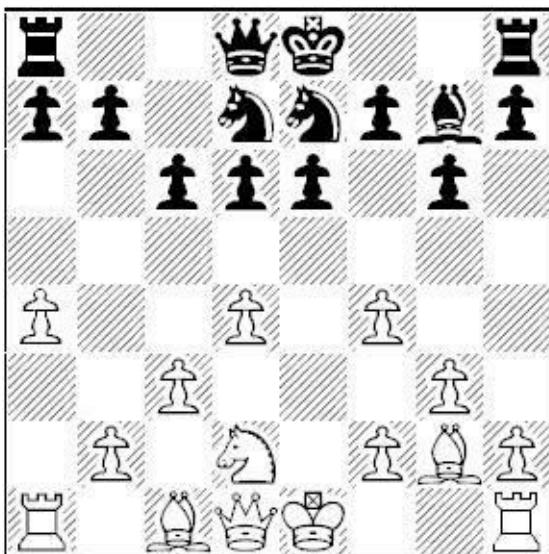
Wade Defence

1 d4 d6 2 Nf3 Bg4 3 g3 Bxf3 4 exf3 e6



Will White's bishops compensate for the long-term disadvantage of the doubled pawns?

5 f4 c6 6 Bg2 g6 7 Nd2 Bg7 8 c3 Nd7 9 a4 Ne7

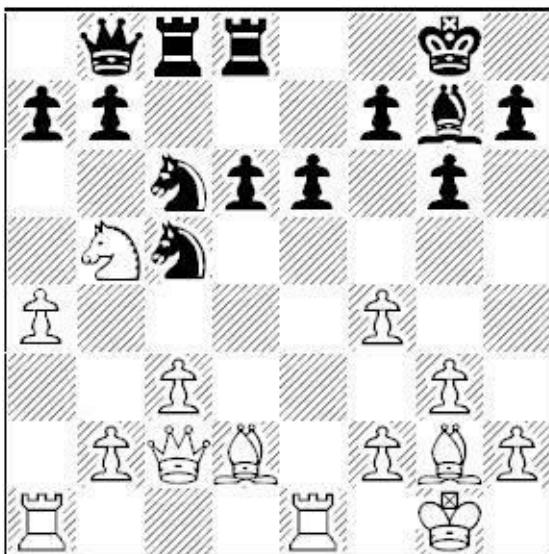


You'll also notice some similarities with Jon Speelman's play in the previous game. The key point is the development of the knight to e7. f5 is a very good outpost for the knight just in front of the doubled f-pawn. It's not easy for White to drive the knight away as g4 would seriously weaken White's kingside dark squares.

10 0-0 0-0 11 Re1 Qc7 12 Nf3 Rac8 13 Bd2 Rfd8

Black's position is under no danger so Tony prepares the ... c5 break unhurriedly.

14 Qc2 c5 15 dxc5 Nxc5 16 Nd4 Ne6 17 Nb5 Qb8



Black has obtained an excellent position which Tony won very nicely:

18 Be3 a6 19 Bxc5 dxc5 20 Na3 Na5 21 Rad1 c4 22 Qe2 Qc7 23 Rxd8+ Rxd8 24 Bf1 Rc8 25 Rd1 Qc6 26 Qc2 Bf8 27 Nb1 Nb3 28 Bg2 Qxa4 29 Bxb7 Rb8 30 Bf3 Nc5 31 Qxa4 Nxa4 32 Nd2 Nxb2 33 Ra1 Bg7 34 Rxa6 Bxc3 35 Ne4 Bd4 36 Rc6 Nd3 37 Be2 Rb1+ 38 Kg2 Ne1+ 39 Kh3 c3 40 Nxc3 Rb2 41 Ba6 Rxf2 42 Ne4 Rb2 43 g4 Kg7 44 Bc4 Bg1 45 f5 Rxh2+ 46 Kg3 Rg2+ 47 Kh3 exf5 48 gxf5 g5 49 Rc7 g4+ 50 Kh4 Nf3+ 51 Kh5 Rh2+ 52 Kxg4 Ne5+ 53 Kg3 Rc2 54 f6+ Kh6 55 Nd6 Bh2+ 56 Kh3 Bf4 0-1

Tony also did pretty much the same flexible development scheme when playing the Trompowsky with White, as did Julian Hodgson. Here's an example:

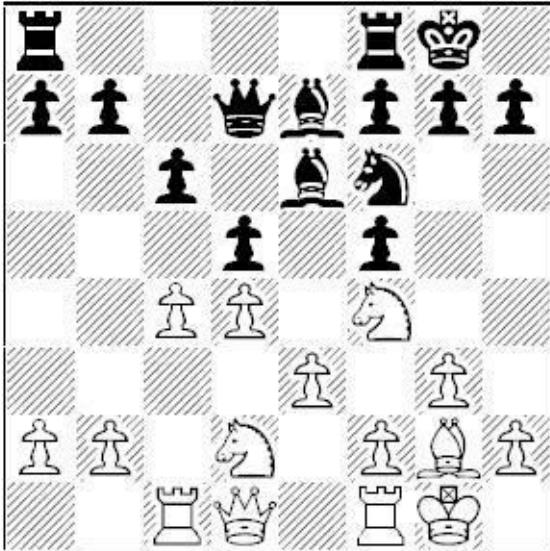
Game 32

J.Hodgson-T.Upton

Moscow Olympiad 1994

Trompowsky Attack

1 d4 d5 2 Bg5 Nf6 3 Bxf6 exf6 4 e3 Be7 5 g3 0-0 6 Bg2 c6 7 Nd2 Be6 8 Ne2 Nd7 9 0-0 f5 10 c4 Nf6 11 Nf4 Qd7 12 Rc1



The knight has taken up its favourite post. This is a very pleasant position for White, and Julian won after:

12 ... g5 13 Nd3 Ne4 14 Ne5 Qd6 15 f3 Nxd2 16 Qxd2 Bf6 17 f4 g4 18 cxd5 Bxd5 19 Bxd5 Qxd5 20 Rc5 Qe6 21 h3 Be7 22 Rc2 f6 23 Nd3 h5 24 Ne1 Rfe8 25 Ng2 Bf8 26 hxg4 hxg4 27 Qd3 Rad8 28 Qb3 Qxb3 29 axb3 Rd5 30 Kf2 Red8 31 Rd1 Rb5 32 Rc3 Rdd5 33 Ke2 a5 34 Kd3 Rb6 35 Kc2 Rdb5 36 Ra1 Bb4 37 Rd3 Rd5 38 Rh1 Bf8 39 Rh5 Rdb5 40 Nh4 a4 41 Nxf5 axb3+ 42 Kb1 Ra6 43 e4 b6 44 e5 c5 45 e6 Ra7 46 dxc5 bxc5 47 Rd8 Rba5 48 Rxf8+ Kxf8 49 Rh8 mate (1-0)

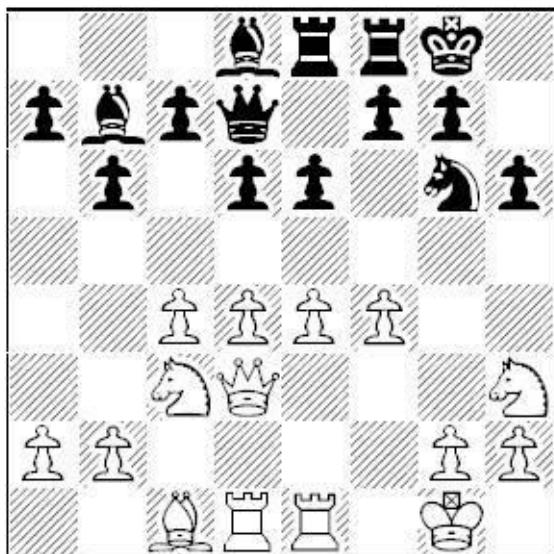
Where did that come from?

When you play unorthodox positions, you often end up developing your pieces to slightly strange places. This increases the likelihood enormously of agonizing tactical accidents. My tactical checking is quite good so I blunder very infrequently, but I always come closest to it when playing these type of openings! An (unpunished) example from one of my games is a case in point:

Game 33

NN-M.Sadler

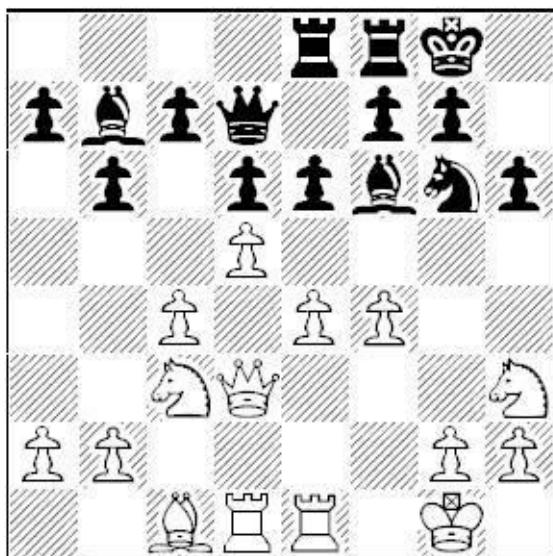
Bedrijvenschaak (rapid) 2009



16 d5

I'm sure you can guess which opening this was! I wasn't massively impressed with the way White had played so far, so with a carefree heart, I decided to bring one of my inactive pieces into play.

16 ... Bf6??



17 Nf2??

Lucky for me! Instead 17 dxe6 fxe6 18 e5 would have won on the spot.

Don't mind the smell

When you play unorthodox openings, you're going to end up sometimes with positions at which you'd normally turn your nose up. 'I can't play that', you think to yourself, 'Darlings, the *smell*'. Time to drop that snooty attitude and join the plebs down in the mud and the mire! For me the true breakthrough only came when I started to study the Leningrad Dutch.

Game 34

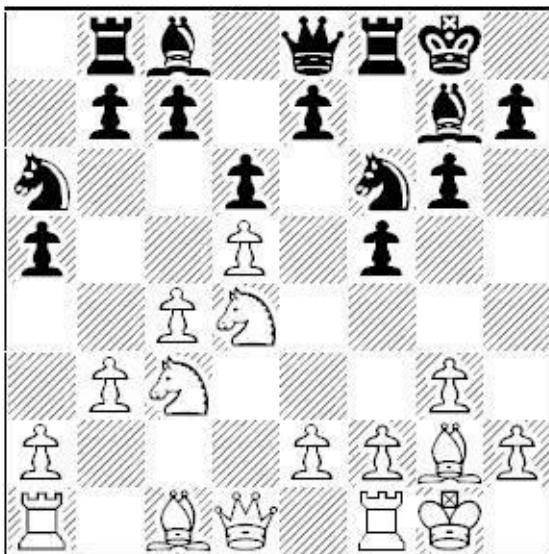
O.Rubingh-M.Sadler

Dutch League 2002

Dutch Defence

1 d4 f5 2 g3 Nf6 3 Bg2 g6 4 Nf3 Bg7 5 0-0 0-0 6 c4 d6 7 Nc3 Qe8 8 d5 a5 9 Nd4 Na6 10 b3 Rb8

After a few weeks of staring at that repulsive weakness on e6, I got completely desensitized! Now nothing scares me anymore!



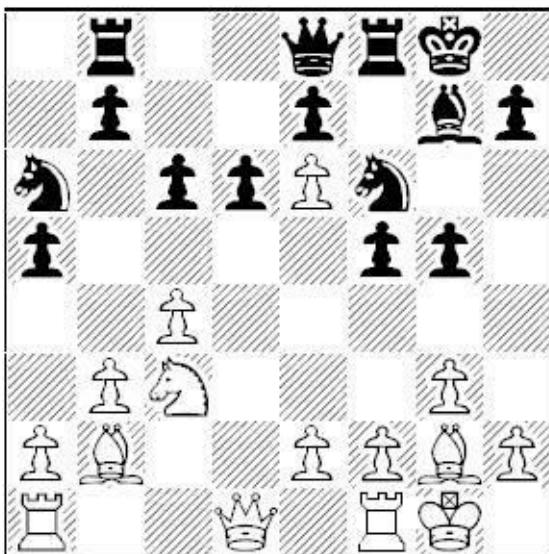
11 Bb2 g5

Taking advantage of the chance to gain space on the kingside now that White's knight and dark-squared bishop are no longer covering the g5-square.

12 Ne6??

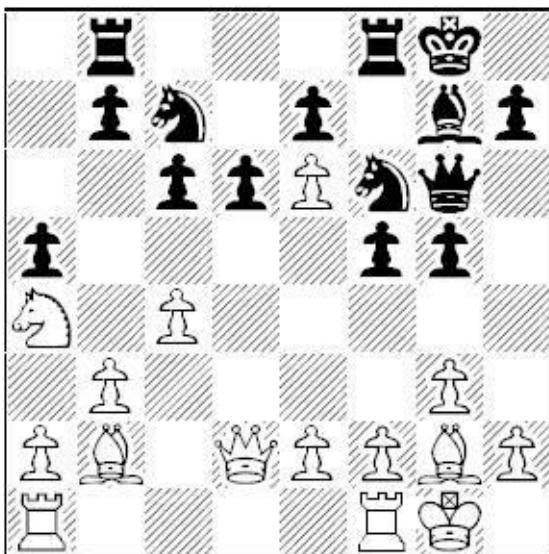
This looks very tempting, but actually relieves Black of a worry. Once a white pawn has moved to e6, this square can no longer be used as an advanced outpost by a piece.

12 ... Bxe6 13 dxe6 c6!



A typical move, restricting the bishop on g2 and preparing to bring the knight on a6 into play.

14 Qd2 Qg6 15 Na4 Nc7



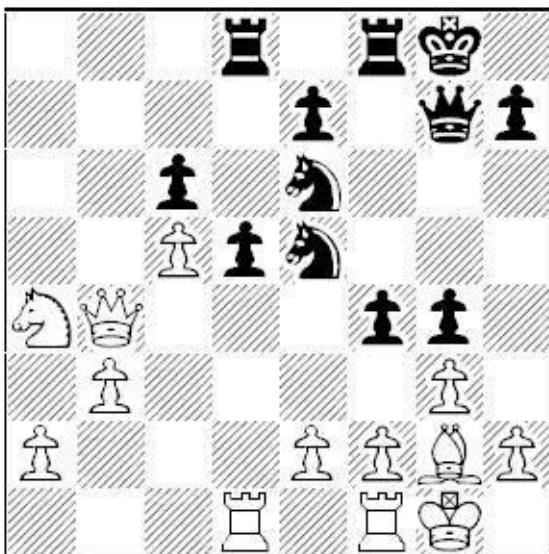
16 c5?!

16 Qxa5 Nxe6 17 Nb6 f4 gave good Black chances, but was still better than the text which gives Black an unshakeable grip on the centre.

16 ... d5 17 Qxa5 Nxe6 18 Be5 Rbd8 19 Qb4 Ng4 20 Bxg7 Qxg7 21 Rad1

If 21 Qxb7 Nd4 22 Rae1 (22 e3 Ne2+ 23 Kh1 Nxf2+ wins) 22 ... f4 with a big initiative for Black.

21 ... Ne5 22 Qxb7 f4 23 Qb4 g4



24 Qc3

Black wins too after 24 Rfe1 Ng5 25 Kh1 f3 26 exf3 gxf3 27 Bf1 Ne4 28 Qd4 Ng4 29 Rxе4 dxе4 30 Bc4+ Kh8 31 Qxd8 Nxf2+ 32 Kg1 e3.

24 ... f3

Curtains.

25 exf3 gxf3 26 Rfe1 d4 27 Qc2 fxg2 28 Kxg2 d3 29 Qb2 Nf4+ 30 Kh1 Qg4 31 gxf4 Qf3+ 32 Kg1 Rxf4 33 Qxe5 Qxf2+ 0-1

Help! Someone shrunk my position!

Being squashed is one of the inevitable hazards of playing unorthodox openings. You can sometimes forget this as many white players are very cautious about throwing their pawns forward (you don't want to get into an anthology of great wins with unorthodox openings, do

you?). But then someone does it to you and you suddenly realize how dangerous it can be. My game against Anand was a refined high-class example of getting killed by space-gaining pawns. He did it so tastefully and delicately, you couldn't really feel all that cross. Here's a cave(wo)man example:

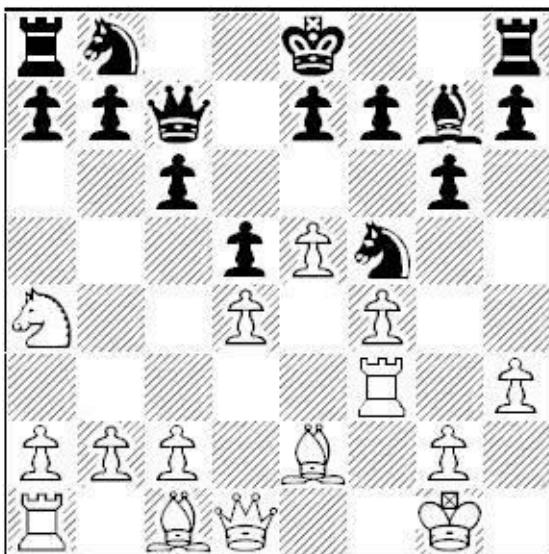
Game 35

E.Paehtz-M.Sadler

Wijk aan Zee 2012

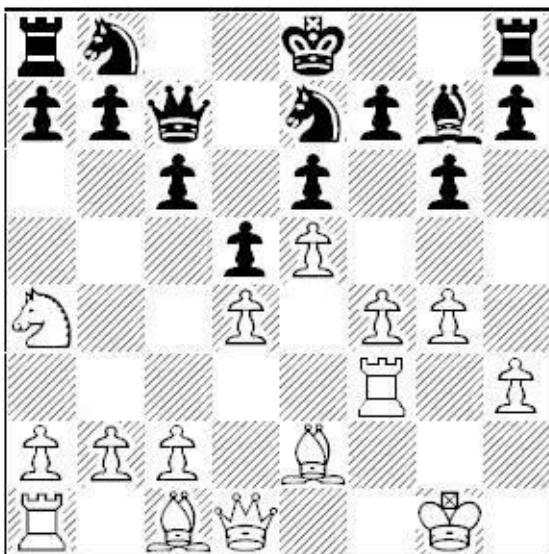
Modern Defence

1 e4 g6 2 d4 Bg7 3 Nc3 c6 4 f4 Qb6 5 Nf3 d5 6 e5 Bg4 7 Be2 Nh6 8 0-0 Nf5 9 Na4 Qc7 10 h3 Bxf3 11 Rxf3



11 ... h5

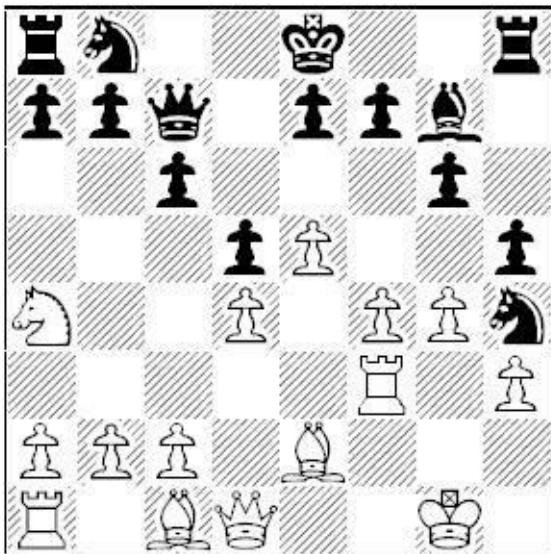
I had the choice here between 11 ... h5 and 11 ... e6. If I can play it, then 11 ... h5 is obviously the nicest. I'm threatening ... h4 so White has to take concrete action. And that's the point. 12 g4 is quite tricky. I'm going to need to put my knight on h4 and then hope I can blast through those central pawns with moves like ... g5 and sacrifices on e5. Did I fancy that? It could be horribly embarrassing if it goes wrong. Or did I want to play 11 ... e6 when I can meet 12 g4 with the safe 12 ... Ne7?



It's one of those agonizing decisions. On the one hand, White is creating lots of room behind her pawns in front of her king which active black pieces could exploit. On the other

hand, a knight on h4 is not the ideal tool to exploit these weaknesses. If I don't manage it, then I just look like an idiot! I wasn't really very clear in my head that day. In fact you just need to start calculating some sample lines, letting your imagination run free, to get a feel for the possibilities in the position. At some stage, you just understand whether there are sufficient chances or not. I stayed in the indecisive 'will I, won't I?' guessing mode for much too long before I took the plunge and really started looking at concrete variations. In the end I decided to go for it, but the time I wasted here helped kill me later.

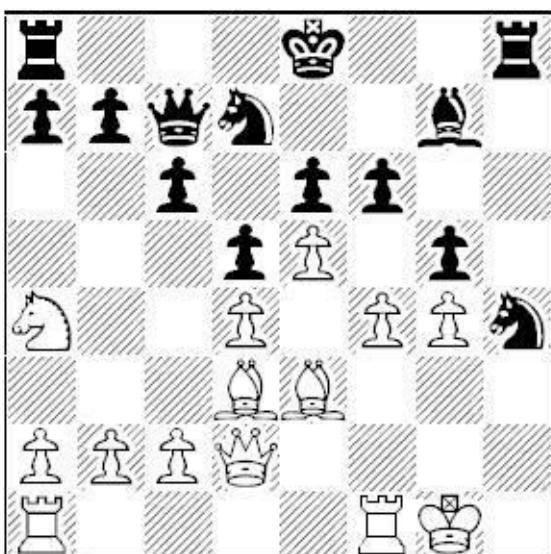
12 g4 Nh4



13 Rf1?

Curses! Why didn't I play much quicker? I had spent lots of time looking at 13 Rb3. The rook covers g3 and is ready to move to h3 if Black ever takes on g4. And that might have to happen fairly quickly as White's next move is Qe1 attacking the knight on h4. The text is completely wrong.

13 ... Nd7 14 Be3 hxg4 15 hxg4 g5 16 Bd3 e6 17 Qd2 f6



White's position was collapsing, but it later all went wrong:

18 exf6 Bxf6 19 Kf2 0-0-0 20 Ke1 Rdf8 21 Kd1 Bg7 22 f5 exf5 23 gxf5 Nxf5 24 Bxf5 Rxf5 25 Rxf5 Rh1+ 26 Ke2 Rxal 27 Rxg5 Qh2+ 28 Kd3 Qh7+ 29 Kc3 Bf6 30 Kb3 Bxg5 31 Bxg5 Qf7 32 Qa5 Qf3+ 33 c3 Qf8 34 Qxa7 Qd6 35 Nc5 Qb8 36 Qa5 Qc7 37 Qa8+ Qb8 38 Qa5 Qc7 39 Qa8+ Qb8 40 Qa5 ½-½

More on these closing moves in Chapter Five.

Make use of your structural flexibility

We already saw in Polugaevsky-Miles and Grover-Sadler how flexible the pawn structures of unorthodox systems can be. This is something you need to exploit as much as possible. Keep the opponent guessing, keep them uncertain until the very last moment. Jon Speelman is a master at this sort of play. Let's see another great example from him!

Game 36

A.Yermolinsky-J.Speelman

Hastings 1995/96

English Defence

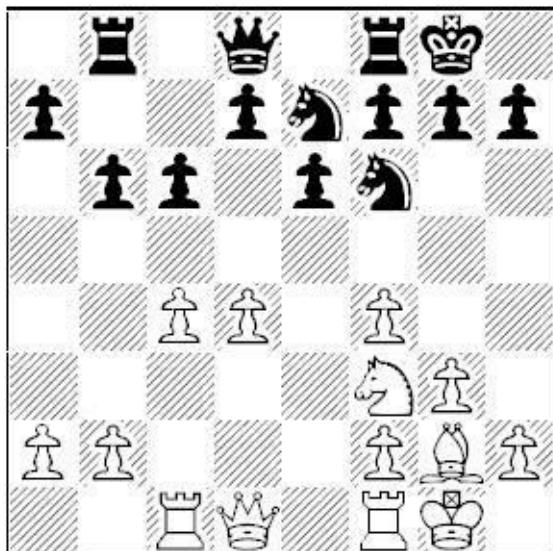
1 d4 e6 2 c4 b6 3 g3 Bb7 4 Nf3 Bb4+ 5 Bd2 Bxf3

This familiar theme again.

6 exf3 Bxd2+ 7 Nxd2 Nf6 8 f4 Ne6 9 Nf3 Ne7 10 Bg2 0-0 11 0-0 c6

Preparing the typical idea of ... d5.

12 Rc1 Rb8



A very subtle move! The move has a number of good general points without having any specific purpose:

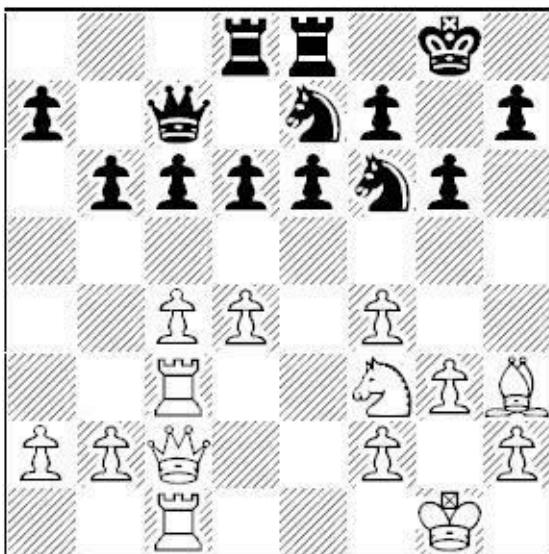
- The rook moves off the long diagonal and away from a potential attack by the bishop on g2.
- The rook eyes the unprotected b2-pawn which can be handy after ... c5; dxc5 bxc5, or ... d5; c5 bxc5.

I really like the move. Black is holding back committing himself, making use of the fact that White is not threatening anything at the moment.

13 Ne5 Rc8

Just adjusting a little bit! Protecting the c6-pawn so that Black can chase away the knight with ... d6.

14 Qe2 d6 15 Nf3 Qc7 16 Bh3 Rfe8 17 Rc3 Rcd8 18 Rfc1 g6 19 Qc2

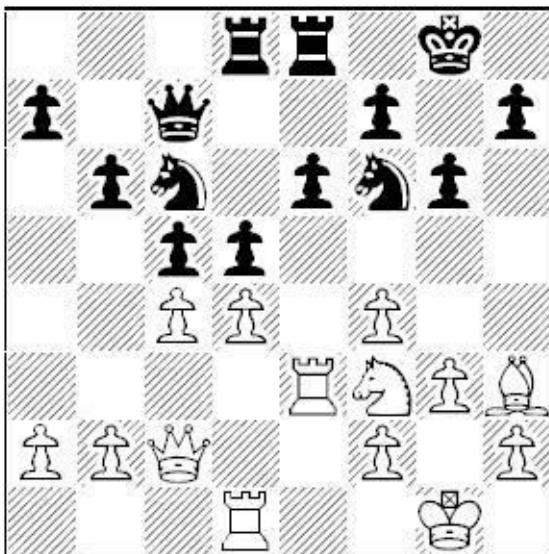


White has lined up completely on the c-file to make the advance ... d5 unattractive so ...

19 ... c5

Black goes for another break!

20 Rd1 Nc6 21 Re3 d5



22 dxc5 bxc5 23 cxd5 Nxd5

Another pawn structure! The rest is a wonderful bit of Spess knight wizardry. Somehow White never gets the chance to catch his breath until the end. Yermolinsky actually keeps the balance pretty well, but the pressure tells in the end and he blunders on his 39th move.

24 Ree1 Ncb4 25 Qc4 Nb6 26 Qb3 a5 27 Ne5 a4 28 Qf3 Nc2 29 Rxd8 Rxd8 30 Rc1 Nd4 31 Qe4 Nd5 32 Bg2 Qb6 33 Ne4 Qa6 34 h3 Nb6 35 Bf1 Nxc4 36 Rxe4 Qa7 37 Bg2 Qb6 38 Rxa4 Qxb2 39 h4 Ne2+ 0-1

Last thoughts

I just wanted to finish off with the game that really made me feel that all the effort to develop this way of playing had been worthwhile! It was played in the 1998 Elista Olympiad and it won the sponsor's prize for the best game played by an English player. That's not quite as impressive as it sounds when you see how we were playing, but it's still one of the nicest

games I've played in my career.

Game 37

D.ZagorskisM.Sadler

Elista Olympiad 1998

English Defence

1 c4 b6 2 d4 Bb7

This is less flexible than 2 ... e6, but it does avoid 3 e4 Bb7 4 Bd3.

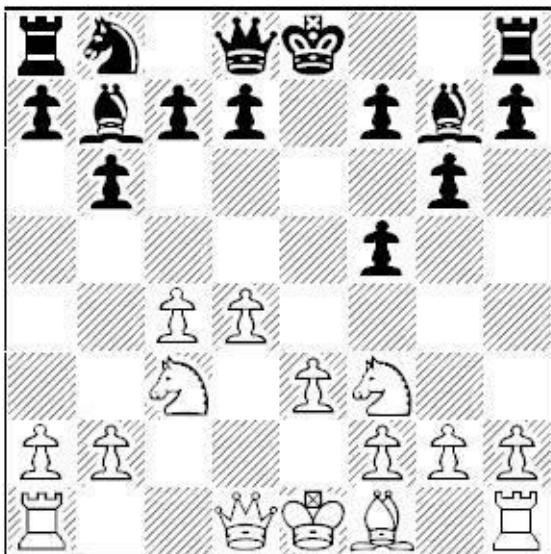
3 Bg5!? Nf6

3 ... f6 was Tony Miles' suggestion. Still some way to go before I'm that unorthodox!

4 Bxf6 exf6!? 5 e3 f5

Since White will want to play d4-d5 to block out the light-squared bishop, it is advisable to put the dark-squared bishop on the h8-a1 diagonal.

6 Nf3 g6 7 Nc3 Bg7



8 Be2

8 g3 is very sensible as typical ideas for White are to exchange off the light-squared bishops and to transfer the knight from c3 to f4 via e2. Mickey Adams and Jon Speelman both thought that it was crucial for White to exchange off the light-squared bishops.

8 ... d6

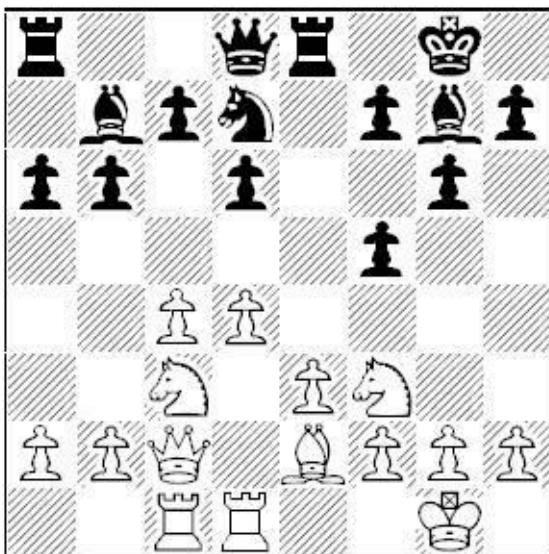
It is essential for Black to find a good post for his queen's knight (remember Anand-Sadler!).

9 0-0! Nd7 10 Qc2 0-0! 11 Rfd1 Re8

11 ... Nf6 12 c5!? dxc5 13 dxc5 Qe7 was also possible.

12 Rac1 a6

After 12 ... Nf6 13 c5 dxc5 14 dxc5 Qe7 15 Nb5 gives White a pleasant initiative.

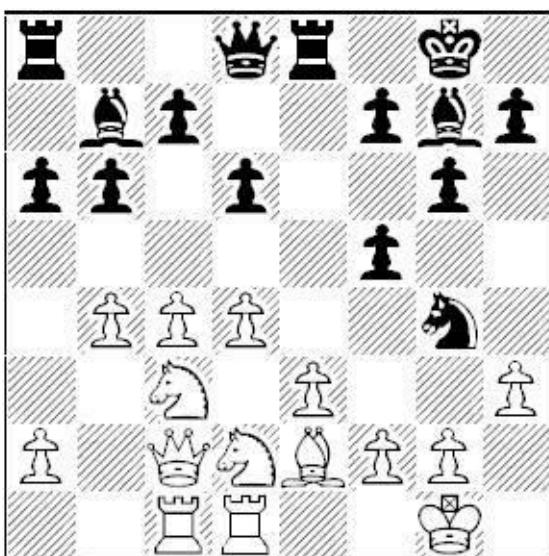


13 b4 Nf6 14 Nd2??!

Intending Bf3. I had a bit of a think now and decided the time was ripe to go all in.

14 ... Ng4! 15 h3?

15 Nf3 had to be played and not 15 Bf3? Qh4!.



15 ... Nxf2! 16 Kxf2 Qh4+!

16 ... Qg5 17 Nf3 Qxe3+ 18 Kf1 intending Qd2 is just good for White.

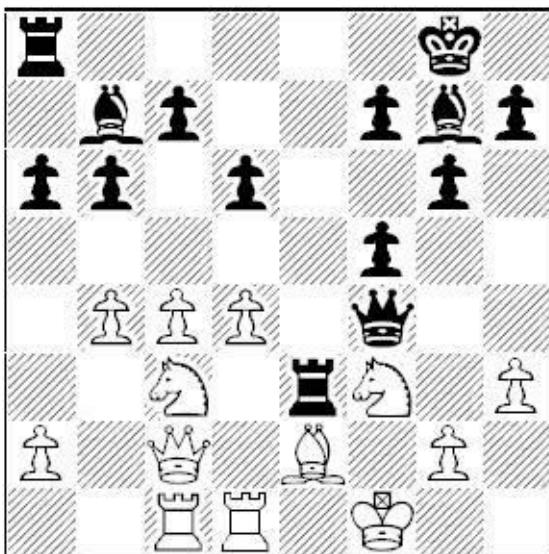
17 Kf1

Alternatively:

a) 17 g3 Qxh3.

b) 17 Kg1 Rxe3 (threatening ... Rxc3) 18 Nf1 (18 Nf3 Bxf3 19 Bxf3 Bxd4 20 Rxd4 Qxd4 wins) 18 ... Rxh3!! 19 gxh3 Bxd4+ 20 Rxd4 Qxd4+ wins.

17 ... Rxe3 18 Nf3 Qf4!



Aiming to follow up with ... g5-g4.

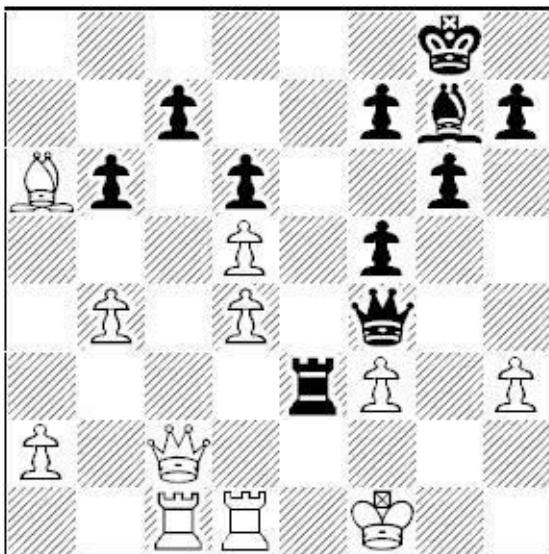
19 Nd5

If 19 Rd3 Rxd3 (19 ... Be4!? 20 Rxe3 Bxc2 21 Nd5 Qh6 22 Rxc2 c6 is very painful for White) 20 Bxd3 Bxf3 with a winning attack.

19 ... Bxd5 20 cxd5 Rae8!

Much better than both 20 ... Bh6 21 Kg1 and 20 ... g5 21 Rd3 g4 (or 21 ... Rae8 22 Rxe3 Rxe3 23 Qxc7 g4 24 Qd8+ Bf8 25 Qg5+!) 22 Rxe3 Qxe3 23 Qd2 Bh6 24 Qxe3 Bxe3 25 Rxc7 gxf3 26 Bxf3 Bxd4, with a likely draw.

21 Bxa6 Rxf3+! 22 gxf3 Re3!!

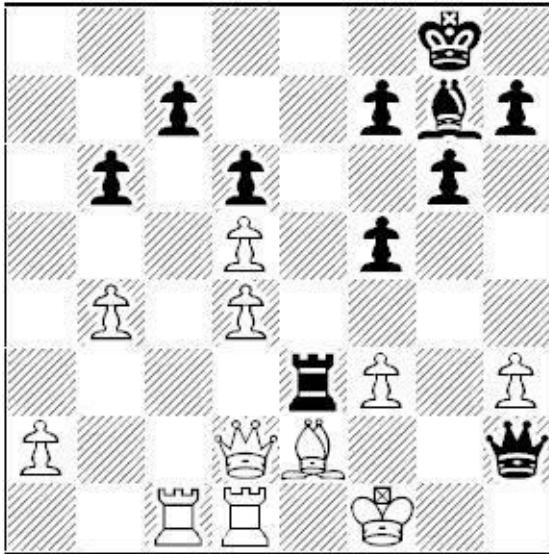


23 Be2

23 Rd3 Qxf3+ 24 Kg1 (or 24 Qf2 Qxh3+ 25 Kg1 Rxd3) 24 ... Qg3+ 25 Kh1 Qxh3+ 26 Kg1 Rg3+ 27 Rxg3 Bxd4+ wins.

23 ... Qh2! 24 Qd2

Black wins after 24 Rd3 Bf6!! 25 Ke1 (or 25 Rxe3 Qh1+ 26 Kf2 Bh4 mate) 25 ... Qg1+ 26 Kd2 Rxd3+ 27 Bxd3 (if 27 Kxd3 Qxd4 mate) 27 ... Bg5+.



24 ... Bh6?!

A mistake that should have cost me victory, which seems a bit unfair! During the game I had spent quite a bit of time on 24 ... Bxd4 25 Qxd4 Qxe2+ 26 Kg1 Rxf3 27 Qh4 Qe3+ 28 Kg2 Qe2+ (28 ... g5 29 Qe1) 29 Kg1, but couldn't find any more than a draw. However, 29 ... f4 introduces the threat of ... Rg3+ and wins on the spot: 30 Re1 Qxa2 31 Ra1 Qb2 32 Rab1 Qd4+ 33 Kg2 Qxd5.

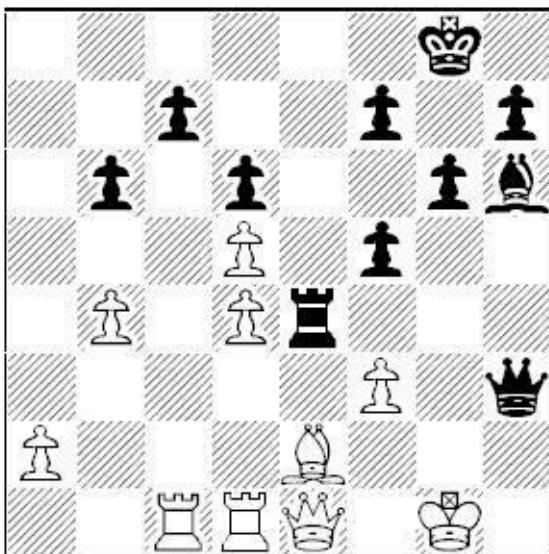
25 Qe1?

25 Rc3 would have held the draw. Black doesn't have anything better than perpetual check.

25 ... Qh1+ 26 Kf2 Qh2+ 27 Kf1 Qxh3+ 28 Kg1

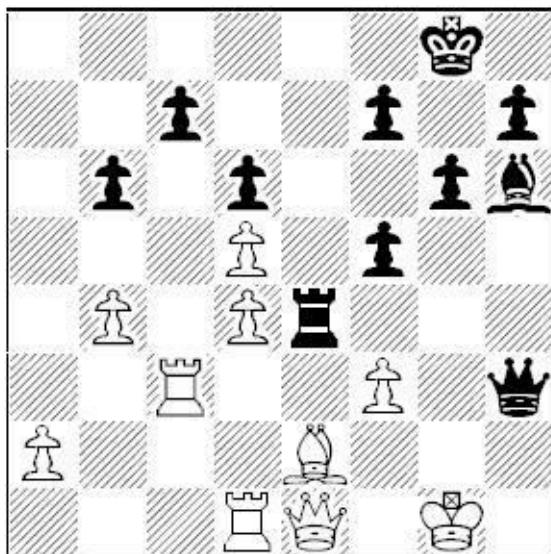
Or if instead 28 Kf2 Black continues Ra3 29 Rc3 Qh2+ 30 Kf1 Qh1+ 31 Kf2 Qxe1+.

28 ... Re4!!



29 Rc3

It's all over too after 29 fxe4 Be3+ 30 Qf2 Qg3+.



29 ... Rh4! 30 f4 Qh1+ 31 Kf2 Rh2+ 32 Ke3 Qe4+ 0-1

I'm really proud of that one!

Chapter Four

Types of Thinking in the Middlegame

In 2011 I decided to take part in a couple of international opens. I hadn't played any strong events in more than 10 years, but things turned out really well and I took clear first in both. I was talking with a friend from my local chess club about the games I'd played. He said something like 'Nice games! Except for that dull draw of course ... and that other game with White wasn't that exciting either'. I couldn't think which games he meant. Turned out to be two of the games I liked the most.

That was weird! Why was I so pleased about those games? In the end I decided that I was happy about the way that I had taken decisions during those games, especially about the breadth of techniques I'd applied when considering my moves. But that obviously needed some explaining. And that led me to develop a lecture, based on my most boring games, which formed the basis for this chapter. Enjoy!

Types of thinking

There are three general ways of thinking in chess: active thinking, reactive thinking and prophylactic thinking. Nothing too deep about that: we'll just examine each of them briefly as a recap.

Active thinking

This is the standard way of thinking. You just say 'I want this' and then you work out how to do it. When you get this right, your play can look very powerful.

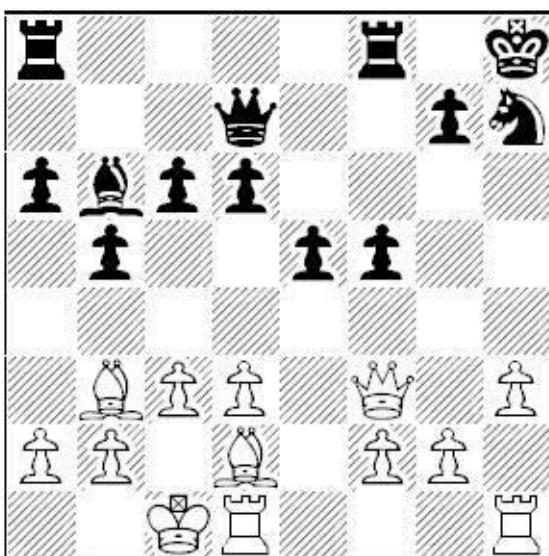
Game 38

M.Sadler-D.Kovachev

Oslo 2011

Ruy Lopez

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 Qe2 b5 6 Bb3 Bc5 7 c3 d6 8 d3 h6 9 Nbd2 Be6 10 h3 Qd7 11 Nf1 Bb6 12 Ng3 0-0 13 Nh4 Ne7 14 Qf3 Nh7 15 Nhf5 Nxf5 16 Nxf5 Bxf5 17 exf5 c6 18 f6 Nxf6 19 Bxh6 Kh8 20 0-0-0 Nh7 21 Bd2 f5??



Exercise 1

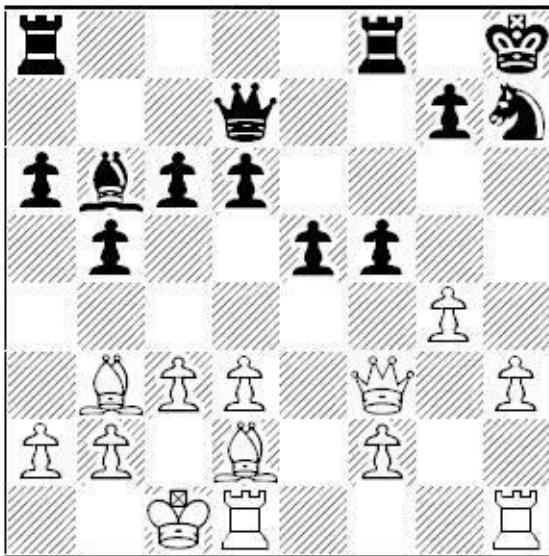
Two questions:

- What do you *want*?

b) How do you achieve it?

What do we want? We want to rip open that kingside and get at the black king!

22 g4!



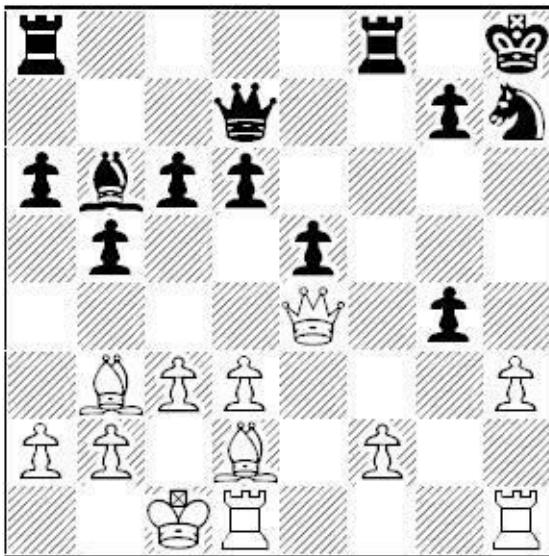
22 ... fxg4

Otherwise:

a) 22 ... d5 23 g5! gives Black an unpleasant dilemma: either allow g6 or play ... g6 himself and have to deal with h4-h5.

b) 22 ... f4 23 d4! opening the b1-h7 diagonal now that Black cannot block it with ... e5-e4.

23 Qe4!!



I want the h-file open! 23 Qxg4 Qf5 is not that bad for Black.

23 ... gxh3

23 ... g3 was more circumspect, but 24 fxg3 Rae8 25 Rdf1 d5 26 Qg6 is pleasant for White.

24 d4!

I want the b1-h7 diagonal open as well!

24 ... d5

24 ... g5 was my thought during the game. Then *Rybka* likes 25 Rdg1, rather than 25 dxe5 d5.

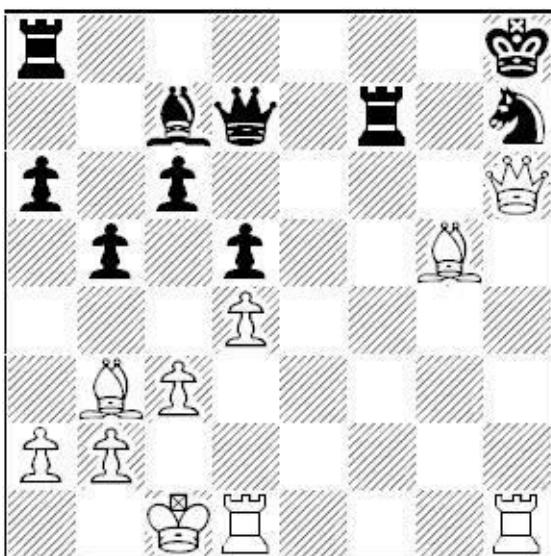
25 Qxe5 Bc7

If 25 ... Rxf2 26 Bc2! (not 26 Qh5 Qf5), and 25 ... Rf3 26 Qh5 (26 Bc2 Qf7!) 26 ... Qf7 27 Qxf7 Rxf7 28 Rxh3 Kg8 29 Rdh1 g6 30 Bc2 wins.

26 Qh5 h2 27 f4 Rxf4 28 Qxh2! g5 29 Qh6! Rf7

29 ... Rh4 30 Rxh4 gxh4 31 Qxh4 looked like a very simple win.

30 Bxg5



Carnage.

30 ... Qd6 31 Qh5 Qd7 32 Bc2 Raf8 33 Bf6+ Rxf6 34 Qxh7+ 1-0

Reactive thinking

I'd never really thought of this as a type of thinking until I had the privilege of training with Mark Dvoretsky. You turn your normal thinking on its head: instead of thinking what you want, you work out what can't be done/what you don't want and then just play/analyse what remains.

Exercise 2

Two general questions:

- a) Why would you want to take decisions in this way?
- b) What's the risk?

This is a practical approach designed to save time taking decisions on which you have very little influence in order to reserve time for more difficult moments later on in the game. This can be very effective (and is sometimes the only way to approach a position), but needs to be applied with caution. Laziness can creep in very easily and before you know it, you start rejecting anything that looks vaguely risky.

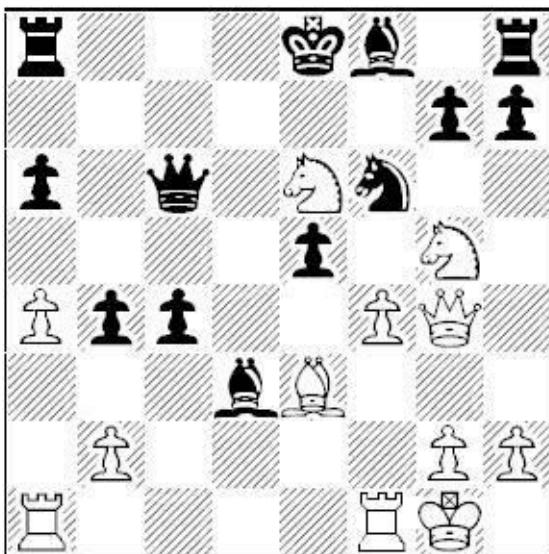
Game 39

M.Sadler-J.Smeets

Barcelona 2011

Semi-Slav Defence

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e3 e6 5 Nf3 Nbd7 6 Bd3 dxc4 7 Bxc4 b5 8 Bd3 Bb7 9 0-0 a6 10 e4 c5 11 d5 Qc7 12 dxe6 fxe6 13 Bc2 c4 14 Ne2 Nxe4 15 Ned4 e5 16 Ne6 Qb6 17 Bxe4 Bxe4 18 Nfg5 Bg6 19 a4 b4 20 Qg4 Qc6 21 f4 Bd3 22 Be3 Nf6

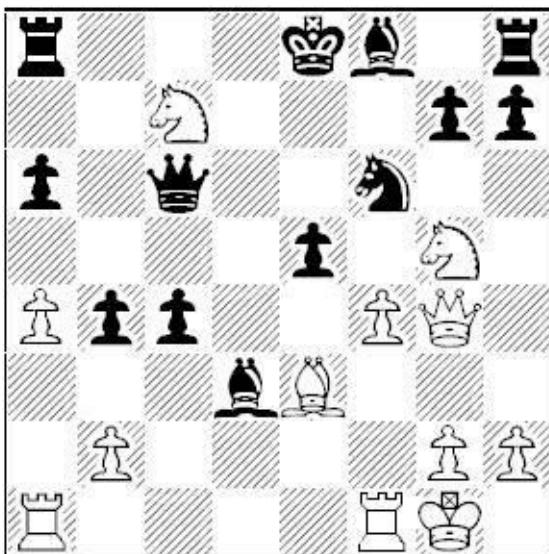


This is the nicest attacking game I've played since I started again. In this position, with Black very short of time, I took a very good practical decision.

23 Nc7+!?

A big shock for Jan, and the crucial moment in the game.

Instead if 23 Qh3 e4 24 Qf5 (or 24 Nc7+ Qxc7 25 Qe6+ Be7) 24 ... Rg8. This sort of thing did not look too clear to me. Black is just preparing ... Be7, ... g6 and ... h6. If the white queen moves from the h3-c8 diagonal, then the black king can move to d7-c8.



23 ... Ke7??

The decisive blunder. It was very tough to get this right with so little time, but it was possible with reactive thinking.

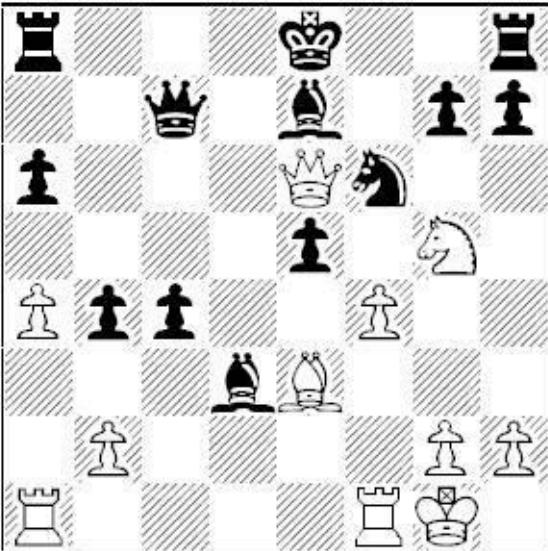
Black has just three legal moves. With so many white pieces around the king, it doesn't seem likely that more than one possibility will be okay:

- a) 23 ... Kd8 24 Nge6+ is terrible.
- b) 23 ... Qxc7 24 Qe6+ Be7 and is that winning for White?

c) 23 ... Ke7 and lots of white are pieces hanging. The queen is the most important. If that goes away, let's say to h3, can I take the other hanging piece on c7? No, doesn't look like it. And fxe5 or Nxa8 is coming otherwise. That's trivial for White.

Check 23 ... Qxc7 24 Qe6+ Be7 again. Both 25 Qf7+ and 25 fxe5 look horrible, but everything else loses. Go!

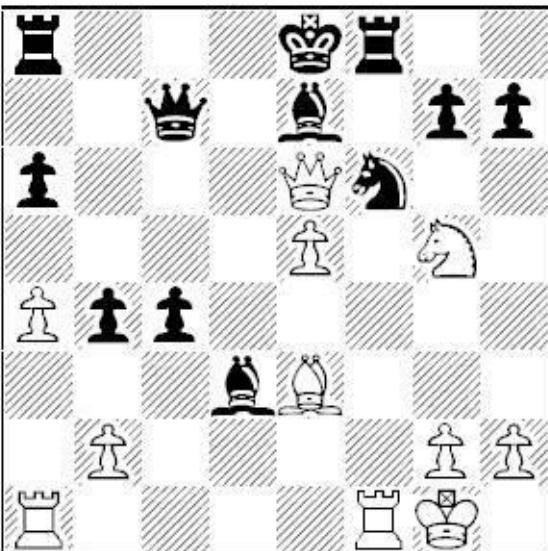
So we explore 23 ... Qxc7 24 Qe6+ Be7 (not 24 ... Qe7 25 Qc6+ or 24 ... Kd8 25 Nf7+), when White has:



b1) 25 Bb6 Qd6 wins for Black.

b2) 25 Qf7+ Kd7 26 Qe6+ Ke8 can be inserted to stop Black from castling queenside or kingside (if 26 ... Kd8 27 Nf7+ Ke8 28 fxe5 wins), and only then 27 fxe5.

b3) 25 fxe5 Rf8!



26 exf6 gxf6 27 Qd5 (or 27 Ne4 Bxf1 28 Bc5!? Bd3! 29 Nd6+ Kd8 30 Qd5; I had high hopes while analysing this on the plane home, but ... 30 ... Qxc5+!! 31 Qxc5 Kd7 wins for Black) 27 ... Rc8 28 Ne6. I'd got this far during the game and quite fancied my chances especially with Black so short of time, but it's not over by any means: 28 ... Qd6 (Black is still alive!) 29 Qh5+ (29 Qxd6 Bxd6 30 Nxf8 Bxf1 wins) 29 ... Bg6 30 Qh3 Rg8 31 Rae1 and White has some initiative, but it's certainly not a clear advantage yet.

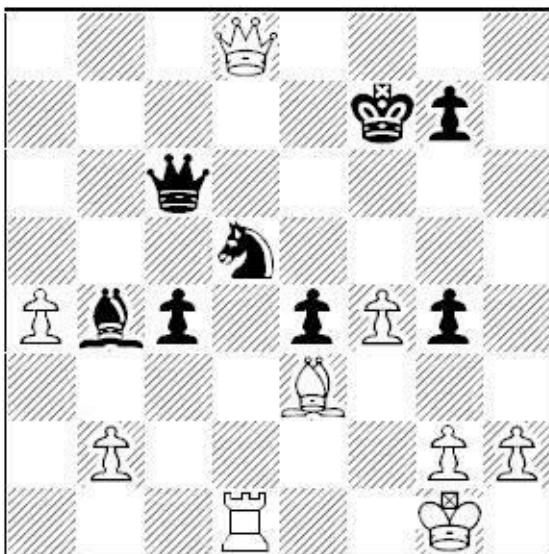
24 Qh3! e4 25 Nxa8 h6 26 Ne7 Bxf1 27 Rxfl hxg5 28 Qxh8 g4 29 Nxa6??

29 Ne6! was more clinical.

29 ... Kf7 30 Nxb4 Bxb4 31 Qd8 Nd5

White wins too after 31 ... Bc5 32 Bd4.

32 Rd1!



32 ... Bd6 33 a5 Qa4 34 Rxd5 1-0

Prophylactic thinking

Prophylactic thinking focuses on anticipating what the opponent wants to do. Once you've worked that out, you can already prepare your response to the opponent's idea(s). This response can range from preventing it completely to letting it happen but nullifying (some of) the positive effects. Mark Dvoretsky is the person responsible for bringing this concept to common practice, so I would like to use one of his examples to demonstrate the theme.

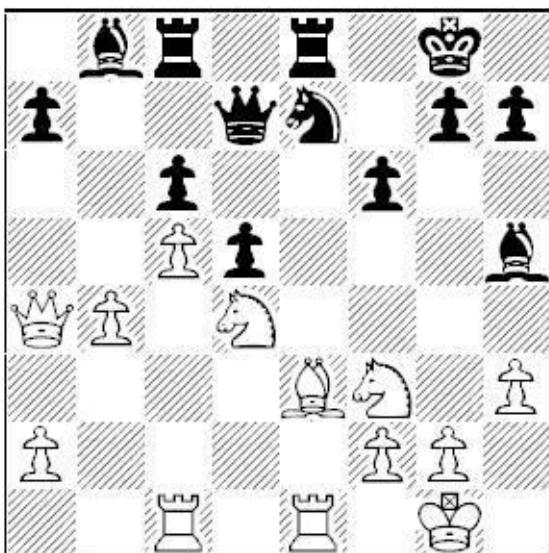
Game 40

V.Tseshkovsky-M.Dvoretsky

Riga 1975

French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 c5 4 Ngf3 Nc6 5 exd5 exd5 6 Bb5 Bd6 7 dxc5 Bxc5 8 Nb3 Bd6 9 0-0 Nge7 10 Re1 0-0 11 Bg5 Bg4 12 h3 Bh5 13 Bxc6 bxc6 14 Nbd4 Rc8 15 c4 Re8 16 Rc1 f6 17 Be3 Qd7 18 Qa4 Bf7 19 c5 Bb8 20 b4 Bh5



As Dvoretsky explained, he was planning 21 ... Nf5 on his next move.

Exercise 3.1

How does White dissuade Black from carrying out his plan, while improving his own

position?

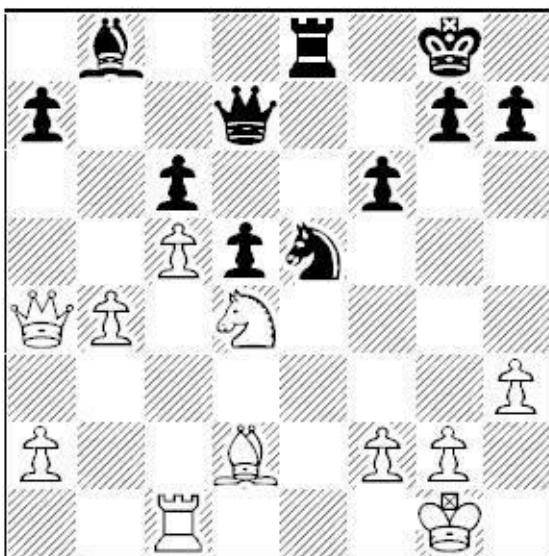
21 Bd2!

A lovely move which both stops ... Nf5 and also increases White's activity a little by unmasking the e-file, activating White's rook on e1.

21 ... Bxf3

Black switches his plan. White wins after 21 ... Nf5 22 Rxe8+ Rxe8 (or 22 ... Qxe8 23 Nxf5) 23 Qxc6.

22 Nxf3 Ng6 23 Rxe8+ Rxe8 24 Nd4 Ne5



Dvoretsky is aiming for 25 ... Nc4, with ... Qc7 as a possible follow-up, to force White to retreat his strong knight from d4 to defend his kingside.

Exercise 3.2

How does White prevent Black from activating his knight with 25 ... Nc4?

25 Rd1!!

Anticipating ... Nc4 by protecting the bishop on d2.

25 ... Rc8

25 ... Nc4 26 Qxc6 Qxc6 27 Nxc6 Nxd2 28 Nxb8 wins.

26 Bf4!

Again stopping ... Nc4. The bishop also takes control of the h2-b8 diagonal. Black can no longer develop an attack against h2 with a queen and bishop battery.

26 ... Qb7 27 Qb3 a6 28 Re1 g6 29 Bg3 Kf7 30 Qe3 Qd7 31 f4 Nc4 32 Qe6+ Qxe6 33 Rxe6 Nb2 34 Rxc6 Rxc6 35 Nxc6 Bc7 36 Kf2 a5 37 bxa5 Nd3+ 38 Ke3 Nxc5 39 Kd4 Ne4 40 Kxd5 Nxg3 41 a6 Bb6 42 a4 Ke8 43 a5 Bf2 44 Nd4 1-0

A stunning example! What really appealed to me was that neither 21 Bd2 nor 25 Rd1 was a really dangerous move for Black. You can't say that either of those moves brought Black's position to the verge of collapse. However, as Dvoretsky explains, the psychological effect of both moves was enormous. Just one small move and Black has to start from scratch again to find a new plan. From a practical point of view, you only have the energy to do that a limited number of times in one game. Prophylaxis is a wonderful way of giving the opponent the opportunity to mess up his own position.

Types of thinking in practice

During a game, you should ideally be switching between all these types of thinking, sometimes even within the analysis of a single variation. Sometimes you'll need to go forward like crazy, at other times you'll need to check carefully what the opponent wants to do. If you can do this, your play becomes flexible and multi-faceted. So this is what we're going to practice! We are going to examine two of my games: one from Barcelona, and one from Oslo. Every time we stop, we are going to try and answer the same questions:

- a) Which type of thinking needs to be applied? (and why?)
- b) What do you want to play?

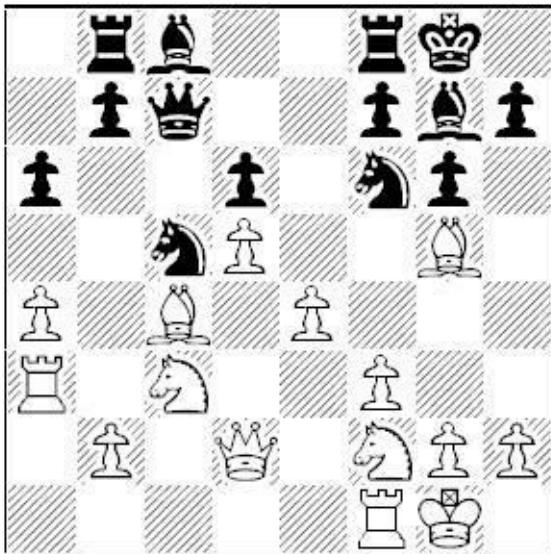
Game 41

M.Sadler-M.Munoz Pantoja

Barcelona 2011

Modern Benoni

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 g6 4 Nc3 Bg7 5 e4 0-0 6 f3 d6 7 Bg5 e6 8 Qd2 exd5 9 cxd5 a6 10 a4 Qa5 11 Ra3 Nbd7 12 Nh3 Rb8 13 Nf2 Qc7 14 Be2 c4 15 0-0 Nc5? 16 Bxc4

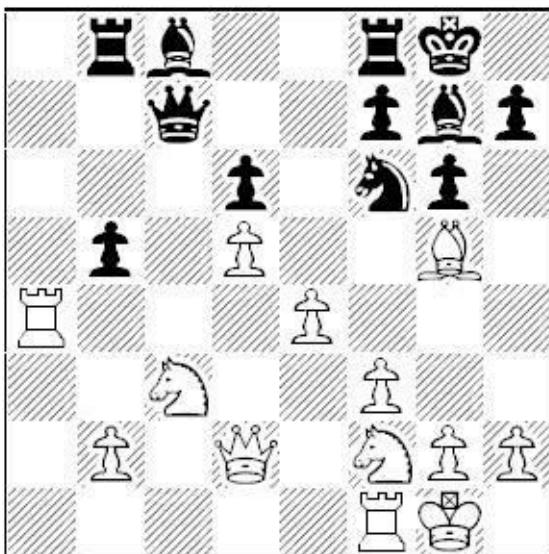


Exercise 4.1

Just a little tactical test to sharpen us up. Is anything the matter with 16 ... Ncxe4?

16 ... Ncxe4? fails to 17 Ncxe4 Nxe4 18 Nxe4 Qxc4 19 Nf6+ Kh8 20 Rc1! trapping the queen. So Black has blundered a pawn here with 15 ... Nc5. Now it's a question of reeling in the win.

16 ... Nxa4 17 Rxa4 b5 18 Bxb5 axb5



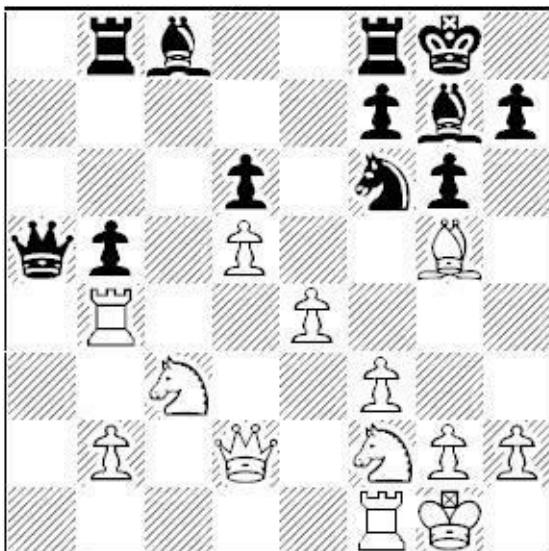
Exercise 4.2

Required type of thinking:

No one ever has any trouble finding the right move here – 19 Rb4 is obvious and good – but there's always a fair amount of debate during lectures as to whether you're thinking actively or prophylactically. But do you really play 19 Rb4 only because you want to attack the b5-pawn? The pawn can be successfully defended in many ways after all. In my view, the most important point to 19 Rb4 is a prophylactic one: it stops Black's b-pawn from advancing to b4. ... b4 is desirable for Black for two reasons:

- a) It frees up some light squares for Black's bishop on c8 (the a6-f1 diagonal) which is otherwise extremely short of active squares.
- b) It stops White from playing b4 and thus secures c5 as an outpost, for example for the black knight on f6.

19 Rb4 Qa5



Exercise 4.3

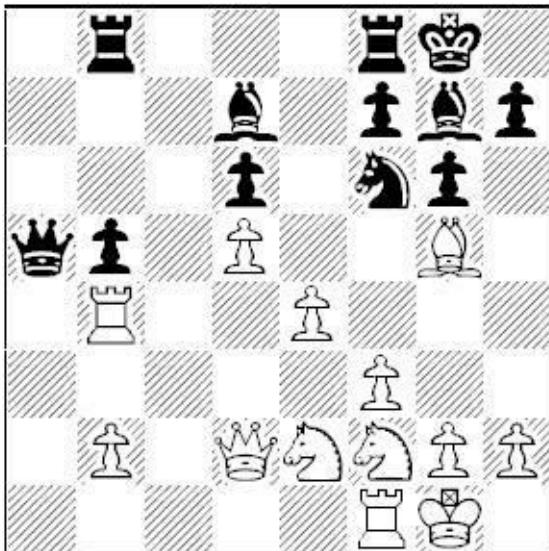
Required type of thinking:

Again, there is always an awful lot of debate here about the type of thinking required. During the game, I approached the problem prophylactically. I want to maintain my rook on b4, so I either have to defend it with 20 Nd3 or 20 Ne2. Building on my prophylactic thoughts about 19 Rb4 – that allowing ... b4 would give Black an excellent outpost for his knight on c5 – I decided that Black's best chance for counterplay would come from transferring his knight to the queenside via d7 (-b6-c4, or to c5). In that case, 20 Nd3 is really not clever as 20 ... Nd7 suddenly becomes possible: 21 Be7 Re8 22 Bxd6?? Qb6+ is rather embarrassing. 20 Ne2 avoids that by keeping the a7-g1 diagonal sealed. Once I noticed that point I moved on to the positive side of 20 Ne2.

However, you could just think actively and take the decision to play 20 Ne2 based only on its positive points, namely that the knight is moving to d4 from where it:

- a) Attacks c6 (this also has a prophylactic function as it probably forces the bishop to d7, thus preventing ... Nd7-b6/c5).
- b) Attacks e6 which discourages/anticipates counterplay with ... f5.
- c) Attacks b5.
- d) Prepares Nb3 which gives White the possibility of controlling the a-file.

20 Ne2 Bd7



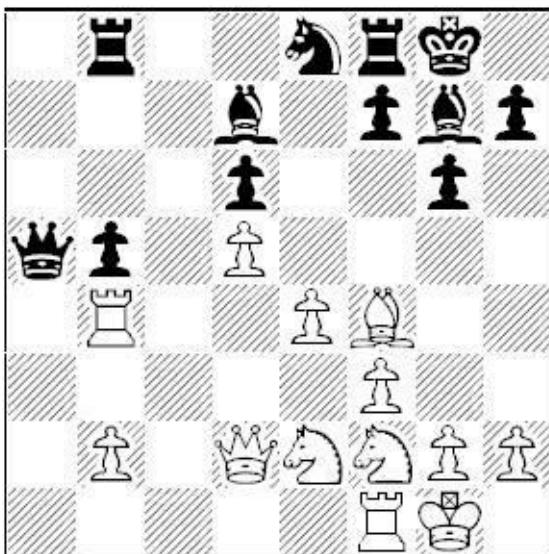
Exercise 4.4

Required type of thinking:

Here I won't accept any arguments! You really need to think prophylactically. What is Black going to do? I still think that Black is looking primarily to activate his pieces via the queenside. Something like ... Rfc8 followed by ... Ne8-c7-a6-c5. It's all a little slower than Black would like, but still annoying for White if implemented.

I came up with the idea of disrupting Black's plan by attacking d6 immediately with 21 Bf4. This prevents 21 ... Rfc8 and forces the knight to e8 immediately. White only needs to exercise a modicum of care (keeping the a7-g1 diagonal sealed) to prevent the knight from leaving e8 in the short term. The coordination of Black's pieces is then far from optimal. The only variation I needed to take care of was 21 Bf4 Rfc8 22 Bxd6 Rb6 23 Be7! keeping control of the a3-f8 diagonal. Black can't get at the bishop!

21 Bf4 Ne8



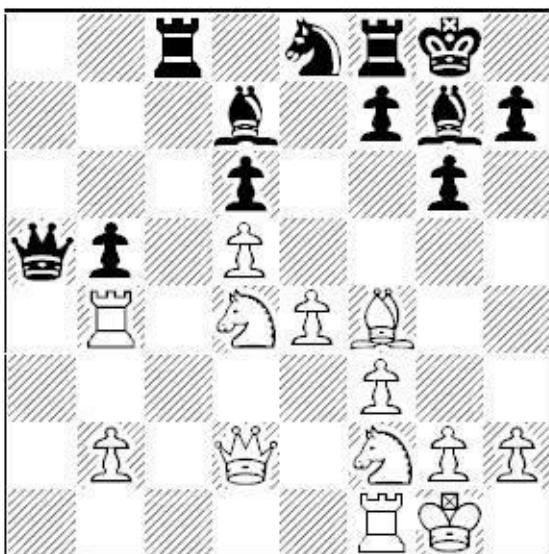
Exercise 4.5

Required type of thinking:

If we compare the position now with three or four moves ago, we can see how well White has prevented Black from developing counterplay on the queenside. It's now time to move to active thinking and grab a few extra positional plusses. Swapping off the dark-squared bishops is a typical idea in such positions and it's a very attractive idea here too. In order to be able to achieve that, however, I need to push away the queen from a5.

So 22 Nd4 is natural, with the simple plan of Nb3 followed by Bh6. My goodness, I might even get the chance for a kingside attack at some stage if I can play e5 and then swing my rook over to h4!

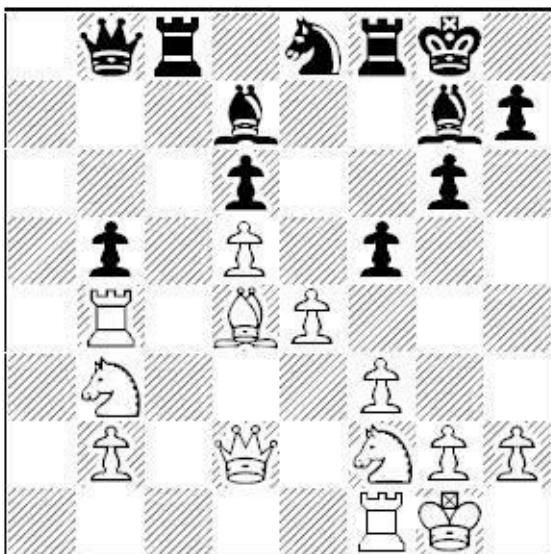
22 Nd4 Rc8



23 Nb3 Qb6 24 Be3

Even cleaner than 24 Bh6.

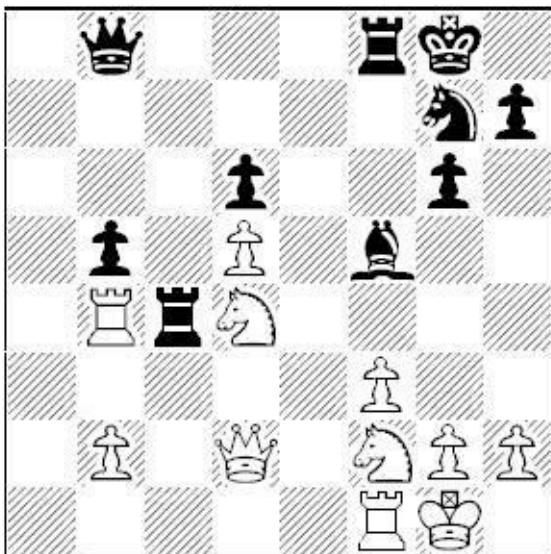
24 ... Qb8 25 Bd4 f5



26 exf5

Seems a little strange, but this activates two white pieces: the rook along the fourth rank and the knight on f2 which can come to e4. I'm careful to take on f5 before taking on g7 to stop Black eventually from taking back on f5 with his knight.

26 ... Bxf5 27 Bxg7 Nxg7 28 Nd4 Rc4



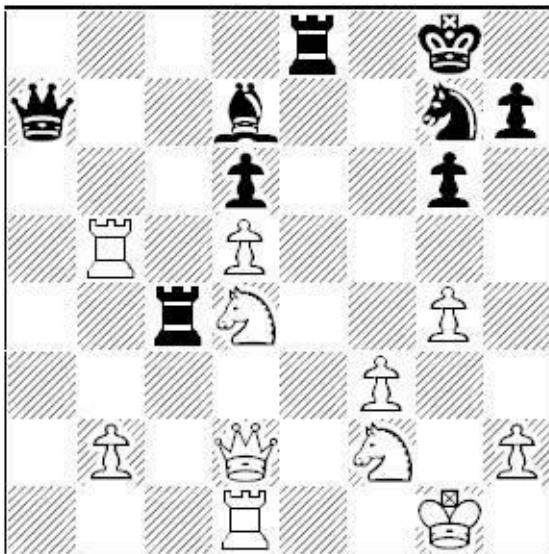
Exercise 4.6

There are many ways of winning here. I went back to prophylactic thinking here though. Or at least I approached the position from the viewpoint of avoiding danger. While considering the obvious 29 Rc1 Rxc1+ 30 Qxc1, it suddenly struck me that I would rather Black exchanged off my rook on b4 (which is still a little awkward), rather than my other rook (which protects my king against back rank checks). So I decided to try to force Black to play ... Rxb4 by consolidating my position. I was quite pleased with the text move. It was the first time I'd ever felt like Petrosian (just a little!).

29 Rd1! Re8 30 Rxb5 Qa7 31 g4!

Deals with the threat of ... Rxd4 and ... Re1+ and at the same time, I take away f5 from the black bishop and knight.

31 ... Bd7



Exercise 4.7

A last test. What is the most depressing move for Black?

32 Qa5!

Forcing the exchange of queens.

32 ... Ra8 33 Qxa7 1-0

Obviously Black blundered a pawn in the opening so I got a flying start to the game. However, this game made a very big impression on me. I have never felt so relaxed during a game in my life! Using prophylactic thinking, I had the feeling that I was pushing all the problems for finding moves on to Black. Think of this when you look at the next chapter. There I explain how poor my (prophylactic) thinking was during the Tata Steel tournament a few months later. In those games, I always looked under pressure no matter how well I stood, mainly because I was so focused (obsessed even) on forcing things my way instead of letting the opponent take the strain.

This example was reasonably easy because you could approach it move by move. This is not always the case. Very often you get a position and you know that the course you take is going to be crucial for the game, maybe even for your whole tournament. In that case, you need to apply all these thinking techniques within the analysis of one position. I always compare it to trying on new clothes. You try ideas out in your head (individual pieces of clothing), you visualize the results and you ask yourself ‘Does it suit me?’ Slowly you just build up a complete outfit in your mind. To be honest, whenever I do this, I do normally think of a beautiful woman trying clothes on. If I get nowhere with the analysis, at least I’ve had some fun along the way.

The following game was such a critical moment for me. It was played in the fourth round of the Oslo Open. I had started with 2.5/3, but I was playing poorly. I had been paired with Black against a 2440 IM – a good player, but slightly weaker than you’d expect when you’re in second place – so this was an excellent practical chance. The opening was rather tame, and it was clear that White was going to be happy with a draw. I needed to puzzle out a way to maintain life in the position. It took me about 45 minutes, but I was very happy with the results of my efforts. This was the catalyst for my whole tournament: after that, I knew I was unstoppable.

Game 42

G.Ostmoe-M.Sadler

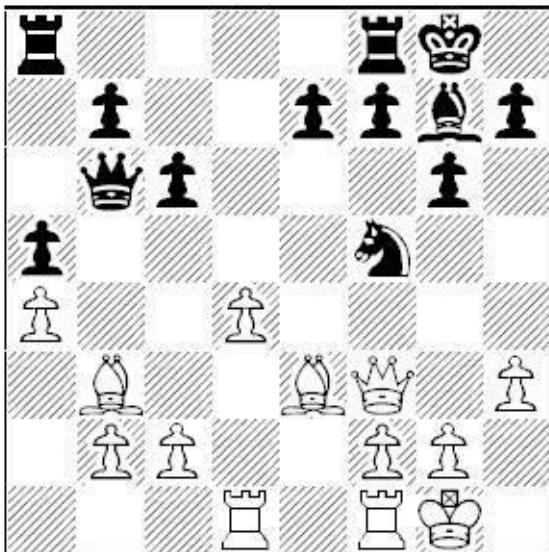
Oslo 2011

Modern Defence

1 d4 g6 2 e4 Bg7 3 Nc3 c6 4 Be3 d5 5 Qd2 dxe4 6 Nxe4 Nd7 7 Nf3 Ngf6 8 Nxf6+ Nxf6 9 Bc4 0-0

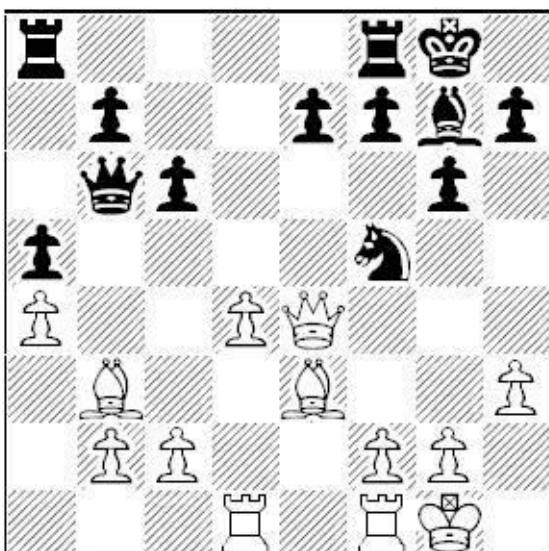
I wanted to tempt White to castle queenside, so I held off on the ... Ne4 manoeuvre in order not to frighten him. However, White stayed calm.

10 0-0 Ne4 11 Qe2 Nd6 12 Bb3 a5! 13 a4 Bg4 14 Rad1 Nf5 15 h3 Bxf3 16 Qxf3 Qb6



17 Qe4

I wondered during play whether White should take the plunge with 17 d5. However, the more I look at 17 ... c5, the more I like it for Black. After 17 d5 c5!? (17 ... Nxe3 18 fxe3 cxd5 – 18 ... Kh8 19 dxc6 bxc6 20 Bxf7 Bxb2 21 Qe4 is level, as is 18 ... Rad8 19 dxc6 Rxd1 20 Bxf7+ Kh8 21 Rxd1 bxc6 – 19 Rxd5 with Rb5 to follow) 18 Bc1. Black has lots of ideas: ... Nd4, ... Nd6, and ... Rac8.



Exercise 5.1

How do you assess this position?

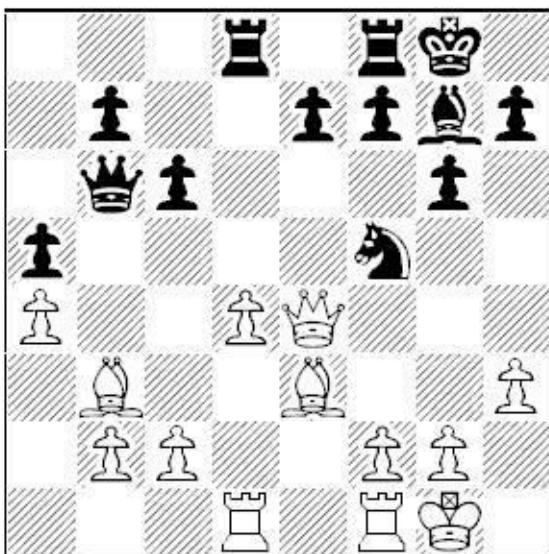
White's position is a tiny bit awkward. Black has developed annoying pressure on d4 which White cannot neutralize with c3 due to the loose bishop on b3. The inclusion of 12 ... a5 13 a4

was a crucial part in Black's plan, enhancing the irritation factor of the outpost on b6 for the queen.

Exercise 5.2

How do you start analysing the position? Required type of thinking:

Reactive thinking! The normal discipline is to draw up a complete list of candidate moves/plans at the beginning of your analysis, and only start analysing variations concretely once you have a good overview of the position. Sometimes, however, one continuation is so obvious that it's better to turn your thinking around. First of all work out why this continuation is good/bad and use that information as input to puzzle out the rest of the position. It's a bit like the technique for multi-choice exams: the way one question is formulated can give you clues to the answer to another question. In this case 17 ... Rad8 is the no-brainer. If it works, then White cannot defend his d-pawn. So we think reactively to start with, eliminating other possibilities from our analysis.



Exercise 5.3

How should White react?

White has two ideas: 18 d5 and 18 g4. I was fairly confident I would work out some edge after 18 d5 due to White's broken pawns after 18 ... Nxe3. I was much more dubious about 18 g4. Critical is 18 ... Nxd4 19 Qxe7 c5 20 Bxd4 Bxd4 21 Qe4. I really wanted to believe this, and during my long think on the 17th move I came back several times to the 'changing room' to try it on again, but I couldn't bring myself to do it. I thought that I would win a pawn somewhere, but only end up in a drawn opposite-coloured bishop endgame where White has compensating pressure along the a2-g8 diagonal.

Exercise 5.4

So what should Black do?

So, either I go for 17 ... Rad8 18 g4 Nxd4 19 Qxe7 c5 20 Bxd4 Bxd4 or I search for something else.

Required type of thinking:

I started off with reactive thinking. I drew up some general guidelines for my quest to help me narrow down the possibilities.

- a) I always have 17 ... Rad8 in reserve.

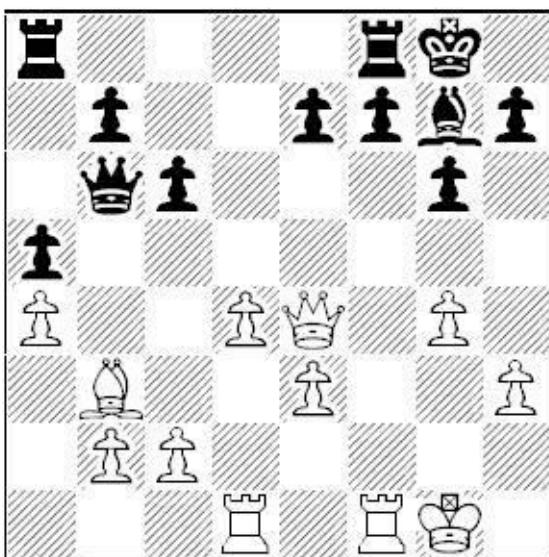
b) I'm looking for complexity – I want to give White more chances to go wrong than in the forcing variation after 17 ... Rad8.

c) If I can find something complex but unclear, that's preferable to being slightly better after 17 ... Rad8.

I then tried to determine the contours of the scenarios I was facing. Actually, it turned out that there was really only one scenario: in order to deal with the pressure that Black can exert on d4, White will need to play g4 quite early to drive away the knight from f5. What did I want to then? I could move the knight away (to d6 for example) and claim a weakness. I wasn't sure: I really lose a lot of activity when I do that. My queen would also have to move away from b6 (due to the threat of d5) which would allow White to make sense of his position again by defending d4 with c3. I agonized for a few minutes, but then I decided to add another general guideline to my list:

I would not consider scenarios in which I retreat my knight after g4. If that was all I had, then I would just play 17 ... Rad8.

So ... what's left? Well, only the idea of playing ... Nxe3 when White goes g4. How did I feel about this sort of structure? Note, I haven't yet decided on a 17th move for Black here so Black has 2 moves to play in the diagram below.

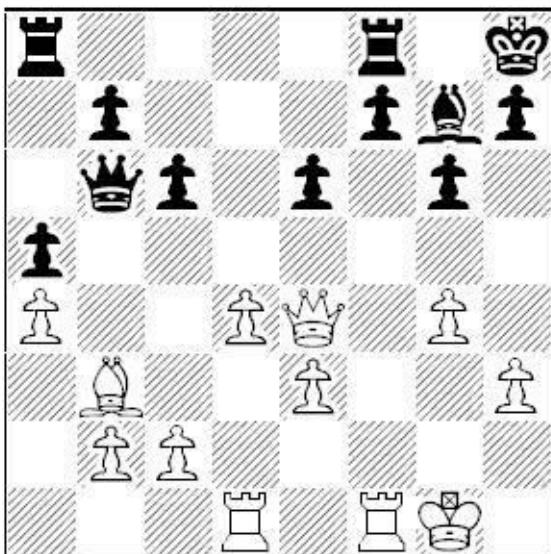


Let's switch over to Matthew's brain now and see what he's thinking:

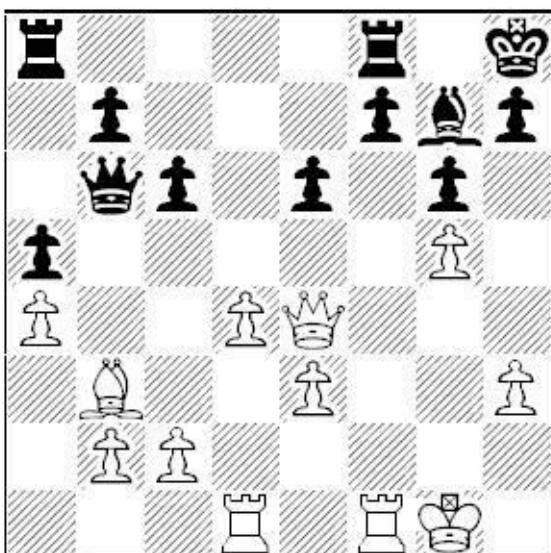
"Hmm ... let's add everything up:

- a) Lots of weak dark squares around the white king (tactical chances!).
- b) My queen is still annoying on b6.
- c) I would need to get in one of my breaks (... c5 or ... e5) to get some counterplay.
- d) ... c5-c4 might also be a possible idea, embarrassing that bishop on b3.
- e) The only problem is the pressure along the a2-g8 diagonal. Once I take on e3, I open the f-file which means that f7 is under pressure.

"Time to dive back into the 'changing room'. Try on the possibilities! Need some active thinking! How do I deal with that pressure on f7? ... Bf6 looks ... well, just wrong. If I play ... e6, then I'm going to get hit by Rxf7 at some stage. Wait a mo ... If I play ... e6 and ... Kh8, I suddenly introduce the idea of ... f5!. Let's see that sequence: 17 ... e6 18 g4 Nxe3 19 fxe3 Kh8.

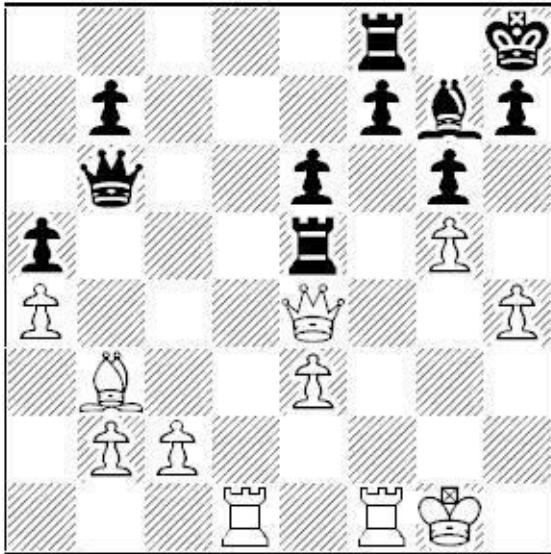


“That’s annoying for White! How does he deal with that? 20 g5 looks very tempting, nailing down my f-pawn.

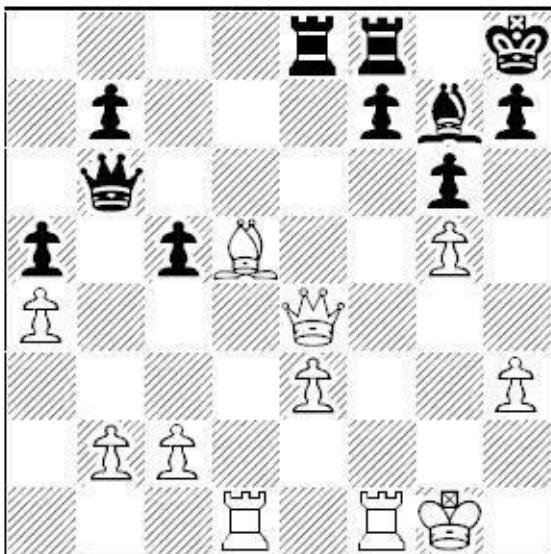


“Back into the ‘changing room’. Is this me? Does my bum look big in this? Well funnily enough I think I’m really happy to see 20 g5. Doesn’t that show that I have White in my thrall? I have bewitched him! I play a timid little move like 19 ... Kh8 and White has to extend himself further to keep his position together. Look at that pawn on g5: it’s on a dark square in front of the white king – a perfect target for my pieces. If I get something heavy on the fifth rank, I’m going to be hitting it with tempo. I do need to get a move on with my breaks though. White’s gaining masses of space – I don’t want to let him double up on the f-file for free, for example.

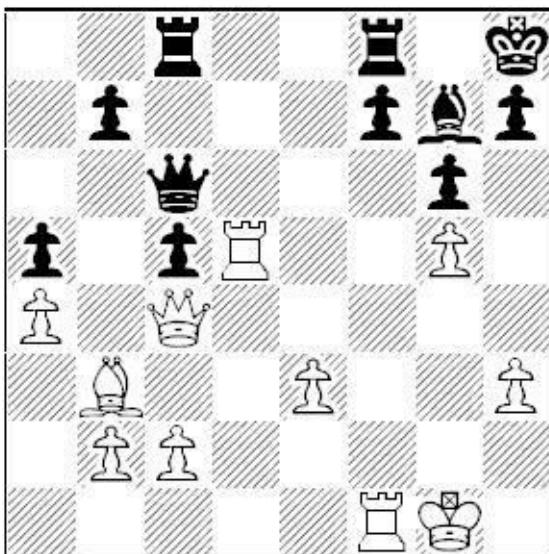
“More active thinking required! Well then it’s time for that idea I saw before: something with ... c5-c4. I’m not too keen on a super-rapid 20 ... c5. White might play 21 dxc5 Qxc5 22 h4 or something. Don’t want him to put a rook on d7 ... Well, then we switch move orders: 20 ... Rac8 preparing ... c5. If he takes on c5, I take back with the rook, hitting g5. Oh! Oh! I’m threatening ... Re5 as well.



“Cooooooooool. Hmm ... I’ve lost all my time advantage and now I’m 30 minutes behind on the clock. Let’s just finish this off. After 21 ... c5, he’s going to go 22 d5 isn’t he? The queen on e4 stops ... c5-c4. Curses and damnations. Well, not over yet. That’s going to open the e-file and I know a good square for my rook now! 22 d5 exd5 23 Bxd5 Rce8! followed by ... Re5 or perhaps even ... f6.



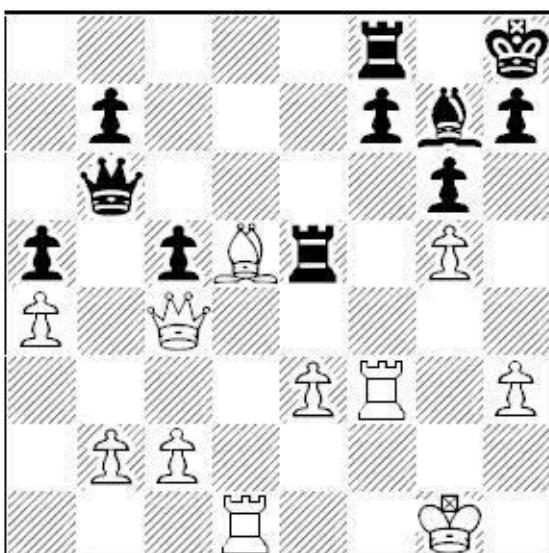
“So thinking prophylactically, he should play 23 Rxd5 to keep control of e5. Don’t I have something with ... c4? C’mon, c’mon. Yes! 23 ... Qc6. If 24 Bc4 Qxa4. So 24 Qc4.



“Back into the ‘changing room’. Are my legs good enough for this mini-skirt? Starting to get quite far from the starting position. Can I think of any sample variations? Doesn’t have to be correct, just to give me a good feeling. 24 ... f6 25 gxf6 Rxf6 26 Rxf6 Qxf6 27 Rxc5 Rf8! 28 Rc8 (threatening Qg8+!). Is that a draw? Oh no, I can win! 28 ... Qf2+ 29 Kh1 Qf3+ 30 Kg1 Qg3+ 31 Kh1 Qxh3+!. Well, whatever! Anyway, feels good. Not sure it’s better, but lots of chances for White to go wrong here. And I’ve spent so much time on this, I have to do it!”

And do you know what? It turned out to be 45 minutes well spent!

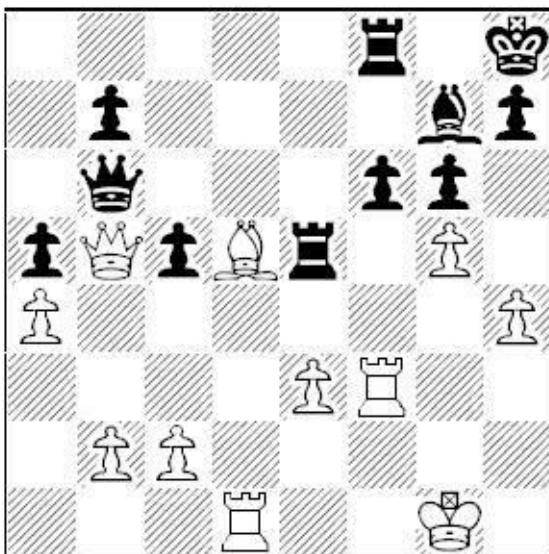
17 ... e6 18 g4 Nxe3 19 fxe3 Kh8 20 g5 Rac8 21 Rf3 c5 22 d5 exd5 23 Bxd5 Rce8 24 Qc4 Re5!



Luring another white kingside pawn to a dark square. Opposing pieces are much easier to attack if they are close-by!

Instead 24 ... f6 25 gxf6 Rxf6 26 Qb5 would be okay for White.

25 h4 f6 26 Qb5



26 ... Qd6!?

Risky, but I hadn't come all this way to play the endgame after 26 ... Qxb5. I felt that was too easy for White to play decently. I'm not sure about that decision objectively, but with White using up a lot of time, it was an unpleasant practical decision for him.

26 ... Qxb5 27 axb5 Rd8 28 c4 fxg5 29 hxg5 Rxg5+ 30 Kf1 is better for Black of course.

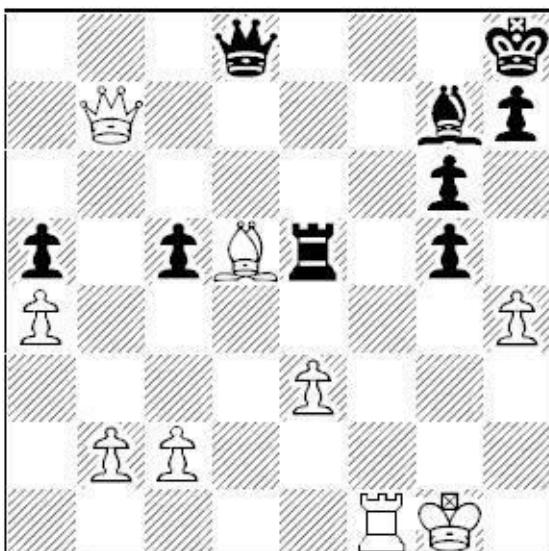
27 Qxb7?

27 gxf6 Rxf6 28 Qxb7 Re8 is unclear.

27 ... fxg5 28 Rxf8+

If 28 Rf7 Rxe3 29 Rxg7 Rg3+.

28 ... Qxf8 29 Rf1 Qd8!



Missed by White. Suddenly Black is completely winning.

30 Bg2

30 e4 gxh4 31 Rf7 Qg5+ 32 Kf1 Re8!.

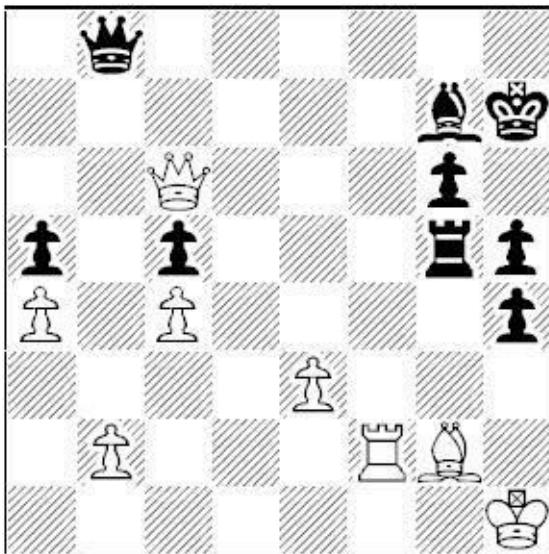
30 ... gxh4 31 Qc6

Or 31 Rf7 Rxe3 32 Rxg7 Re1+ 33 Kh2 Qd6+.

31 ... Rg5!

31 ... h5!? was my first thought to put my king safe. However, I got cold feet about this variation: 32 Qxg6 h3 33 Rf5 Rxf5 34 Qxf5 hxg2 35 Qxh5+ Kg8 36 Qxc5 when I don't have many pawns left.

32 Kh1 h5! 33 c4 Qb8 34 Rf2 Kh7!



No worries about my king any more.

35 Rf4 Qxb2 36 Qf3 Qc1+ 37 Qf1 Qxe3 38 Rxh4 Rf5 39 Qd1 Kh6

39 ... Bd4 40 Be4 Rg5 41 Rxh5+ Kg7 is given by *Rybka*. I saw it, but didn't dare to do it

...

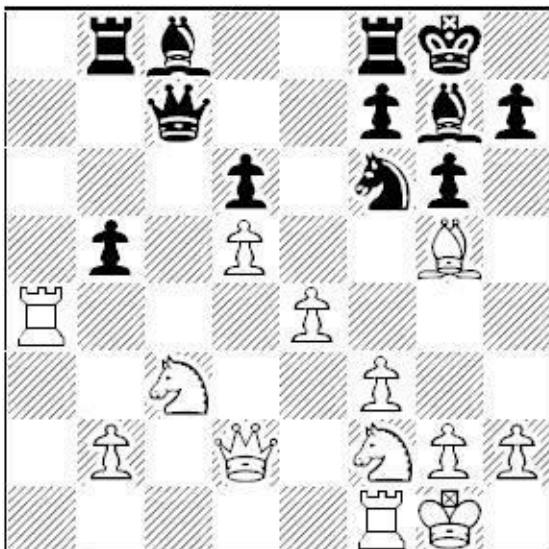
40 Re4 Qg3 41 Qe1 Rf2 42 Qe3+ Qxe3 43 Rxe3 Bd4 44 Re6 Rf6 45 Re8 Rb6 46 Be4 Kg5 47 Kg2 Kf4 48 Bc2 Rb2 49 Re4+ Kg5 50 Re2 Kf6 51 Bd1 Rb4 52 Re8 Rxc4 53 Ra8 Bc3 54 Ra6+ Kg5 0-1

Last thoughts

When I showed this chapter to WIM Natasha Regan, she came up with a number of unexpected questions which really appealed to me. So here they are, with my answers.

Question: I'm not sure yet if I completely understand how to incorporate all this into my thinking. Do I stop each move and consciously decide whether I should be thinking actively or prophylactically? Or is it more something to have in the back of your mind?

Answer: It's not easy to give a really concrete answer to that question. Sometimes positions lead you into a certain type of thinking at first. For example, take the position against Munoz Pantoja after move 18:



It's very obvious that Black wants to play ... b5-b4 so White's thinking is very much guided towards the prophylactic approach: play 19 Rb4 in order to prevent Black's idea of ... b5-b4. Probably the most natural approach in general though is to start with active thinking and

to only make the switch back to prophylactic thinking once you understand that you don't quite have enough to push your own plan through ('Right, can't break through yet, so let's strengthen my position a little bit and take one of his threats out of the equation'). The key thing though is that ability to be flexible and make the switch when required. You'll see in the next chapter how I failed to do this many times during the Tata Steel tournament.

Question: I'm imagining active thinking a bit more in open positions and prophylactic thinking in closed positions ...

Answer: Not really. Anticipating the opponent's plans and planning accordingly is just as big a skill in open positions as in closed positions. All these techniques are applicable in all sorts of positions.

Question: When you are using active thinking, should your opponent tend towards prophylactic thinking and vice versa?

Answer: Interesting! I've never really thought of that, but I don't think it's any sort of rule. You often see both players engaging in prolonged prophylactic passages, or trading blows both trying to implement their plans at all costs.

Question: Are these essential skills, or just 'nice-to-haves'? What happens when you're not capable of using these skills? What does your play look like then?

Answer: Read on for my own personal horror story ...

Chapter Five

That Didn't Quite Work Out ...

'What do we learn, Palmer?'

'I don't know sir.'

'I don't know either. I guess we learn not to do it again.'

'Yes sir.'

'I'm f7%\$#d if I know what we did.'

'Yes sir, it's ... hard to say.'

From the closing scene of *Burn after Reading* (Joel & Ethan Coen)

In the previous chapter, we defined three ways of thinking about chess positions and we examined how to apply them in practice. It may have occurred to you that the examples were rather one-sided: pretty much everything I touched turned to gold. While demonstrating these games just after Barcelona and Oslo, it struck me that it would also be interesting to study passages of play where matters proceed less smoothly: for example, a player chooses the wrong type of thinking. I may have jinxed myself because my very next tournament provided a wealth of material demonstrating this!

The Tata Steel C tournament in January 2012 was a disaster for me. Top seed and favourite for the first prize in a relatively weak tournament, I trailed in equal fifth and lost 29 Elo points. I made +1 with 10 draws! I fought hard during the tournament (my games lasted an average of 50 moves), and I played quite entertainingly at times so I was a bit confused as to why things had turned out so badly. After the tournament, I spent a couple of weeks (in the evening after work of course) analysing my games trying to understand what had happened. It proved to be an interesting learning experience.

Coping with bad results

When I was a professional chessplayer, I spent most of my effort after a bad result analysing my preparation for the tournament. I reasoned that as a full-time professional, I had every opportunity to ensure that I arrived for a tournament in tip-top condition. If I played like a drain, then I had obviously made some mistakes in the run-up to the tournament.

As an amateur, your preparation is always going to be appalling. The week at work before a tournament will mostly be spent rushing around trying to round things off so that you can take a couple of weeks off without causing too many problems. There's no point getting upset about that (unless you fancy a good whinge). It's much more important to understand how that's going to affect your chess, and how you can best compensate for low energy or lack of focus (especially at the beginning of tournaments).

Wijk aan Zee 2012

A quick word about getting the most out of the examples in this chapter. In the previous chapter, I took a move-by-move approach to the examples. That's fine when everything goes according to plan and each move follows on logically from the previous one ... but there's not much of that in this chapter. I've therefore gone for a different approach here. At some point in a game I give a sequence of 7 or 8 moves without any commentary. Play through the sequence of moves a few times and try to answer these questions:

a) Did Matthew's position improve after this sequence of moves?

b) Were there any critical moments during the sequence of moves? For example, a dodgy tactical moment or a questionable positional decision.

Once you've answered these questions, you can move on to the analysis section. I recommend using a board when reading through the analysis section. I'll be explaining how I gradually came to understand the true evaluation of the position and that involves quite a bit of

hopping around within the sequence of moves. That can get extremely confusing if you're just following in your head.

Game 43

M.Sadler-T.Sachdev

Wijk aan Zee 2012

Scotch Game

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 exd4 4 Nxd4

The first time I'd ever played this opening. An expert on the Scotch had been generous enough to share some insights with me on the opening so I had a few ideas. I'd also seen that Sachdev had lost the ending that arose once before, so it didn't seem a bad idea to remind her of that game.

4 ... Bc5 5 Nxc6 Qf6 6 Qf3 bxc6 7 Nd2 d6 8 Nb3 Bb6 9 Bd2 Qxf3 10 gxf3 Ne7 11 a4 a5 12 Rg1 Ng6

An unusual move (12 ... 0-0 is most common), though quite reasonable.

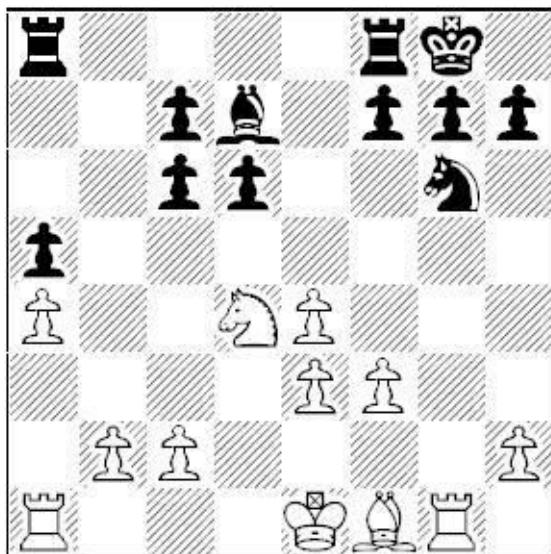
13 Be3 Bxe3

Allowing Bxb6 gives Black a backward pawn on d6 so most black players prefer to capture on e3.

14 fxe3 0-0

An important decision. Black normally plays ... c5 to keep the white knight away from d4. Shifting the knight once it gets to d4 is quite tricky as Black must deal with Nb5 after ... c5.

15 Nd4 Bd7



16 Rg3!?

A non-standard decision. I anticipated the game continuation, evaluating it as sufficiently complicated to offer good chances. My goal is to get the knight to b5 by removing the bishop on d7, which defends the pawn on c6, via Bh3. I also want to meet ... c5; Nb5 Bxb5 with axb5. In that case, the queen's rook is excellently placed on a1, attacking the pawn on a5. The king's rook is quite useful on g3 in a number of lines as it prophylactically defends the pawn on f3 (and thus anticipates ... Ne5 or ... Nh4). I took this decision fairly quickly and I built up a big time advantage over the next few moves. I was quite happy with the way I was thinking so

far.

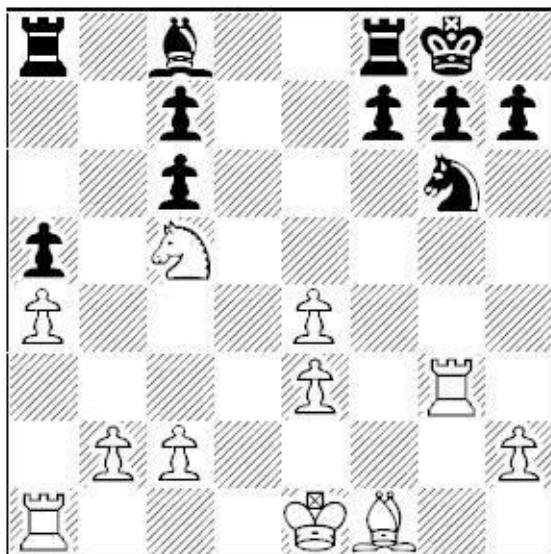
16 ... d5

I was expecting this reaction.

17 Nb3!

Played immediately.

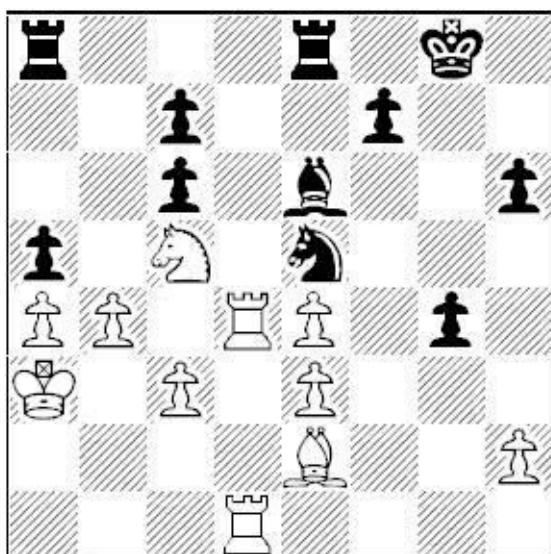
17 ... dxe4 18 Nc5 Bf5 19 fxe4 Bc8



Exercise 1

Examine moves 20-28 carefully.

20 0-0-0 Ne5 21 Rd4 Be6 22 Be2 Rfe8 23 c3 Re7 24 b4 h6 25 Rg1 g5 26 Kb2 Ree8 27 Ka3 g4 28 Rgd1

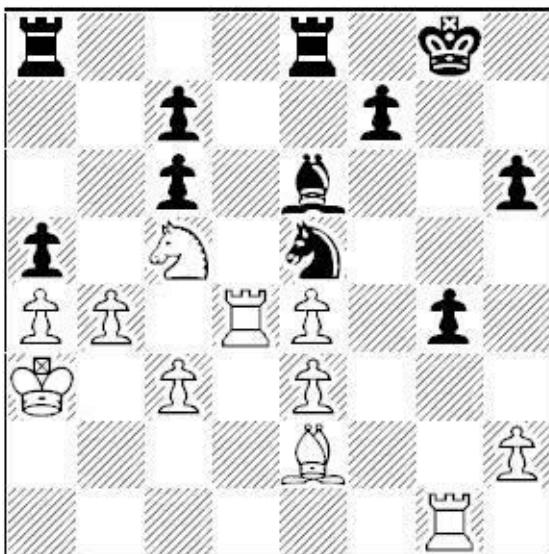


Analysis section

When I demonstrated this example during a lecture at the Max Euwe Centre in Amsterdam, the general consensus was that I had significantly improved my position in the course of these 8 moves. At first sight White's play does seem logical, but I've actually made a total hash of things. We'll see why later, but let's take a look first at one obvious moment of importance.

Exercise 1.1: 1st Critical Moment

27 ... g4?



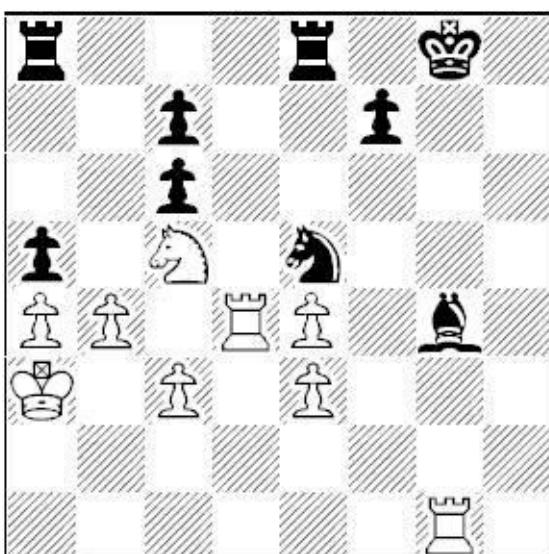
28 Rgd1?

My opponent was very short of time at this stage. She had maybe a couple of minutes (+ 30-second increments) to reach move 40, whereas I still had around 45 minutes. My thought process went something like this:

'27 ... g4. That can't be right. Can she really do this? Just move a pinned pawn forwards to where it can be easily attacked? 28 Nxe6 Rxe6 29 Bxg4 Rg6 30 h3 h5 wins a piece. 28 h3 h5 29 Nxe6 Rxe6 30 hxg4 hxg4 31 Bxg4 Rg6 doesn't help either. Bizarre. Right, well okay, that's life. Let's just carry on with my plan.'

As you can see, I did notice that 27 ... g4 was a very risky move tactically, but somehow that didn't spur me on to make any big effort to prove Black wrong. I just made a cursory examination of the most obvious tactical possibility and then just shrugged my shoulders and carried on with my plan.

That's wrong for a number of reasons. Let's start with the most obvious reason: I could have just won a pawn. While I was entering the game into *ChessBase* that evening, *Rybka* showed me the following nice tactic: 28 h3 h5 29 hxg4 hxg4 30 Bxg4 (a preliminary 30 bxa5 Rxa5 also works) 30 ... Bxg4

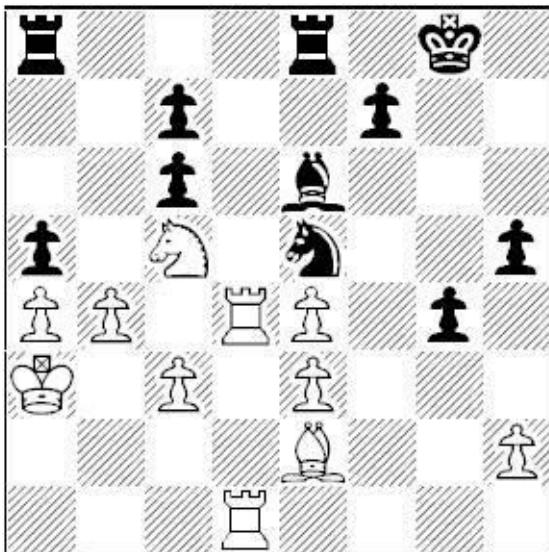


31 Nd7!! would have won a pawn, and probably the game. Bother! So I was simply outplaying my opponent, better all along and then just missed a winning tactic to finish it off immediately, right?

Umm ... let's just take a step back and think calmly about this. How good was my position after 28 Rgd1? After all, I may have missed a tactical win but I should still have my substantial

positional advantage, shouldn't I?

28 ... h5



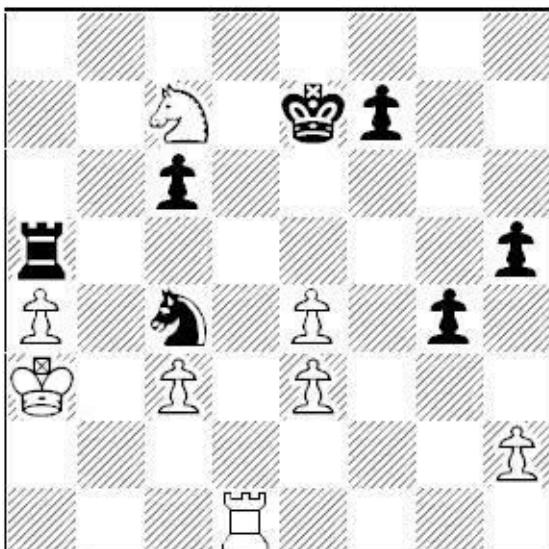
During the game I suddenly felt very uneasy here. I had the unpleasant feeling that I had missed my chances. Why am I still better actually? In the past 8 moves I've focused on activating my queenside majority, but I haven't yet created a passed pawn, and there's no obvious way to make any progress. Take a look at Black, on the other hand, and you see massive kingside counterplay brewing: king somewhere, ... h4 and ... g3, maybe even ... Nf3.

How can this be? Isn't it true that I've just been oblivious to Black's main (only) plan of activating her kingside majority? I've gallantly allowed Black to play her pawns to ... g4 and ... h5, and now it's too late: Black has a very powerful counterweight to my queenside pressure. Ah, but I should have just won the game on my previous move. True, but wasn't 27 ... g4 just a blunder on her part? What if Black had first prepared ... g4 first with 27 ... Kh7, for example? I can't possibly claim I'm better there either. The next few moves of the game show that the tactics weren't on my side either (usually a good sign that your position is not as good as you thought).

29 bxa5 Rxa5 30 Rd8 Kf8 31 Rxe8+ Kxe8 32 Na6

A nice concept ... with an enormous tactical hole which I spotted ... NOW!

32 ... Bc4 33 Nxc7+ Ke7 34 Bxc4 Nxc4+



And 35 Kb4 fails to 35 ... Rxa4+!. OUCH! OUCH! OUCH!

After **35 Kb3 Nxe3** I was completely lost but managed to grovel out to a comfortable draw! The remaining moves were:

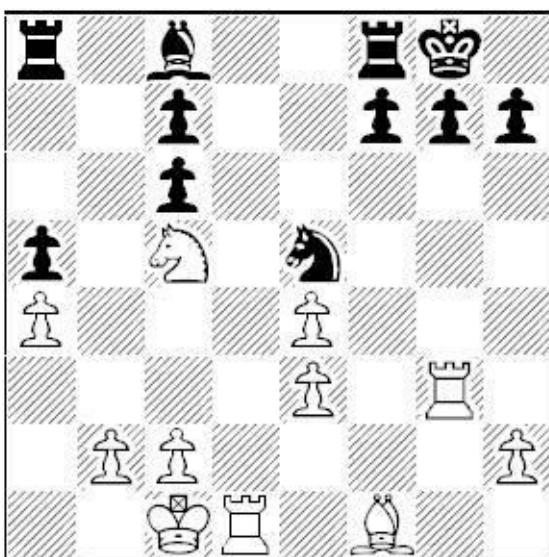
36 Re1 Ng2 37 Rg1 Nh4 38 h3 Nf3 39 Rg3 Nd2+ 40 Kb4 Ra7 41 hxg4 hxg4 42 Nb5 cxb5 43 axb5 Nxe4 44 Rxg4 Nd6 45 c4 Ra1 46 Kc5 Rc1 47 Rd4 Rxc4+ 48 Rxc4 Nxc4 49 Kxc4 Kd6 50 Kd4 f5 51 b6 Kc6 52 Ke5 Kxb6 53 Kxf5 ½-½

So wait a minute, what am I saying here?

- a) I just let Black develop her kingside counterplay (activating her kingside pawns) for free.
- b) Black stood fine until move 27 when she blundered.
- c) I missed a win and the position went back to being very pleasant for Black.
- d) I tried to justify my play with tactics ... and failed miserably.

In other words, I focused exclusively on my own plan (active thinking) when I should have been paying much more attention to my opponent's plans (prophylactic thinking).

So I should probably be looking for improvements much earlier in the sequence of moves. How about after 20 0-0-0 Ne5?



Exercise 1.2: 2nd Critical Moment

It never occurred to me (until it was a bit too late – see the 25th move of the game) that Black was going to push her g-and h-pawns to generate counterplay on the kingside (I was not thinking prophylactically). The only plan for Black I really considered was to challenge the knight on c5 by organizing ... Be6, ... Re7, and then ... Nd7. To be honest, my solution to this problem wasn't watertight either. With the benefit of hindsight, we know that stopping Black's kingside expansion should be the top priority and the most obvious way to do that is to play h4 at some stage. Keep hold of that idea and let's take a look at my 21st move.

21 Rd4

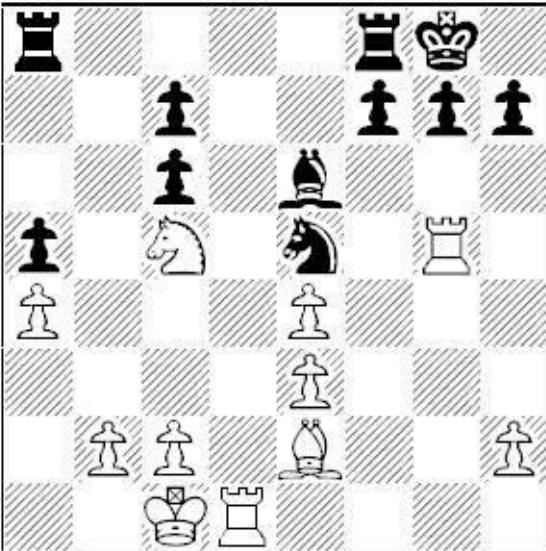
What's our feeling about this move? Looks sort of reasonable doesn't it? The rook is defended (now if Black exchanges rooks on the d-file, then White will undouble his pawns), and supports White's queenside expansion with c3 and b4. It also covers c4 which looks like quite a nice square for Black's pieces once White plays b4. True ... but it's really a bit of a stinker. As we shall see in the rest of the chapter, I had some difficulties placing my pieces harmoniously during the tournament and this was the first example. On d4, the rook is tactically vulnerable in two ways:

a) ... Nf3. For example, I often want to play Rg5 or Rg1 (to redeploy my rook on g3), but that fails to a knight fork now.

b) Rg5 f6; Rxe5 tricks fail to ... fxe5 when the rook on d4 is attacked. Moreover, I lose the chance to activate the rook via another channel (for example, by doubling on the g-file).

Does that all seem a bit abstract? Let's just try 21 Be2 instead of 21 Rd4 and see what the difference is.

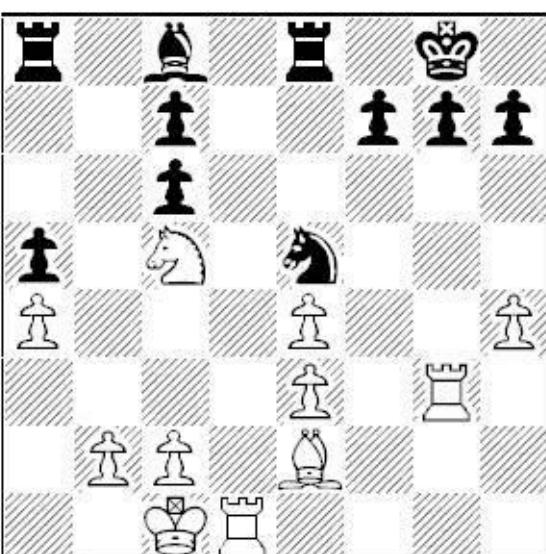
21 Be2 Be6 22 Rg5!.



So Mrs Black Player, what are you going to do now? 22 ... Ng6 (otherwise, 22 ... f6 allows 23 Rxe5 and 22 ... Bc4 23 Rxe5 Bxe2 24 Rd7 is catastrophic for Black) 23 Nxe6 fxe6 24 Bc4 wins. Nice trap isn't it? How do you spot this sort of trick? Well it's easy if you're thinking prophylactically ... but I wasn't at all. I had a plan in my head (c3, b4 and creating a passed pawn on the queenside), and all I wanted was to *force* that plan on to the black player. However, in so doing I made it impossible for Black to go wrong herself.

With the move 21 Rd4, I turned 21 ... Be6 into a reasonable possibility instead of a blunder. This is one of the key mistakes that you make when you are nervous or out of form. You are so anxious to achieve your own plan that you forget that it's much easier to win games by letting the opponent find his/her own mistakes. And apart from this incidental trick, the alternative 21 Be2 fits in very much better with the prophylactic requirements of the position.

21 Be2 Re8 is better therefore, preparing ... Be6. Then 22 h4!.



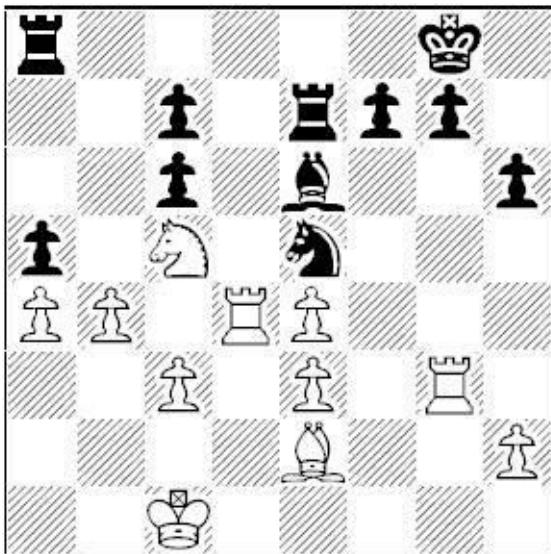
Prophylaxis, holding back any future Black attempt at kingside expansion. Funnily enough, however, this idea also contains some attacking venom: 22 ... Be6 23 h5!? (with a possible idea of h6, giving the black king some problems on the back rank; if instead 23 Rg5 Bc4) 23 ... h6? 24 Rdg1 g5 25 hxg6 fxg6 26 Rxg6+ Nxg6 27 Rxg6+ Kf7 28 Rxe6 (28 Bh5 is even stronger according to Rybka) 28 ... Rxe6 29 Bc4 and wins. Do you see what I mean? Play a harmonious move like 21 Be2 instead of 21 Rd4 and all of a sudden tactics start working for you. It's also nice to see how a prophylactic idea (22 h4) can contain the seeds of an attacking attempt (h5-h6).

The next interesting moment in the game arose on the 24th and 25th moves:

21 Rd4 Be6 22 Be2

If instead 22 Rg5 then 22 ... Nf3 is the reply.

22 ... Rfe8 23 c3 Re7 24 b4 h6



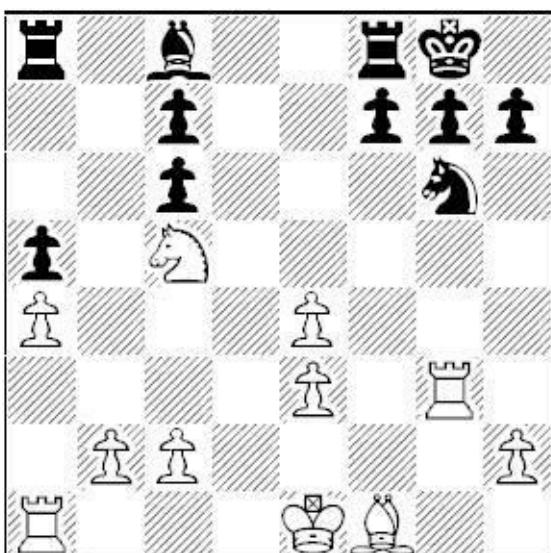
Exercise 1.3: 3rd Critical Moment

One of those wonderful dilemma moments. Once Black played 24 ... h6, I suddenly cottoned on to the plan of ... g5 activating the kingside pawns. This was the first time that 25 h4 occurred to me as a plan. However, in the meantime, I had also noticed that 24 ... Nd7 was also quite decent for Black: 24 ... Nd7 25 Na6 c5! (25 ... axb4 26 cxb4 c5 is also possible) was the idea I had missed when drawing up my plan. I do get an extra pawn, but I'm not convinced about the beauty of my pawn structure.

Of course this plan only gets stronger with the inclusion of ... h4 and h4, as there aren't even any back-rank mates any more. Decisions, decisions. Stop Black's play on the kingside and gamble she hasn't seen this plan, or allow ... g5 and prepare yourself a little better against ... Nd7? I think I chose wrong! With ... Nd7 and ... c5, Black has to decide to sacrifice a pawn which costs some courage; ... g5 is a much easier decision to make.

And finally, just one last thing that occurred to me while analysing the game at home.

19 ... Bc8



Exercise 1.4: 4th Critical Moment

20 Ra3!? looking for Rc3, Nb3 and Rc5 (for example) didn't even occur to me, but looks very interesting. By introducing power behind the knight on c5, White makes it harder for Black to

develop her bishop on c8 or to challenge the white knight on c5 (so this is combined activity and prophylaxis once again). The drawback is that White does not do anything with the d-file and that White does not get his queenside pawns moving. I'm not sure, but it should have been one of my candidate moves.

Summary

It maybe didn't look that interesting to start with, but there were a number of important points in this sequence of moves:

a) I chose the wrong type of thinking. I focused 100% on active thinking (activating my queenside with c3 and b4) and neglected a considerable number of strong prophylactic possibilities (21 Be2 and 22 h4, or 20 Ra3). Thus I didn't give my opponent any chance to go wrong.

b) I placed my pieces inharmoniously (21 Rd4).

c) I allowed Black to activate her kingside pawns for free (... h6, ... g5, ... g4, and ... h5), and thus develop a counterweight to my own positional advantage on the queenside.

d) I missed a fairly obvious tactical chance. Why did I miss it? Because I hadn't yet consciously appreciated that Black was just going to have a great position if she got her kingside pawns going. If I'd realized that, I would have tried harder to make the tactics work when the opportunity presented itself. You notice tactics when you properly appreciate positional danger.

So ... it didn't get better of course. The next game we're going to examine is my round 5 game with Black.

Game 44

B.Adhiban-M.Sadler

Wijk aan Zee 2012

French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 h6

A slightly unusual continuation that I had played once before with success against the talented young Dutch IM David Klein.

4 Ngf3 Nf6 5 e5 Nfd7 6 c4 dxc4 7 Nxc4 Nb6 8 Bd3 Nc6 9 0-0 Nb4 10 Nxb6 axb6 11 Be4

I wasn't particularly enamoured of my position here. Black has secured the d5-square for one of his pieces, but I wasn't too sure how I was going to activate my position. Moreover, I was slightly worried about my king: neither the kingside (when White can line up bishop and queen on the b1-h7 diagonal), nor the queenside (the a-file is open and the c-file is half-open) seemed a particularly attractive hiding place.

11 ... Be7?!

A nothing move. 11 ... Nd5 looks better preparing a rapid ... Bd7-c6.

12 Re1 Nd5 13 Qd3!



A sharp move, which introduces a number of nasty tactical motifs against Black's main plan of ... Bd7-c6.

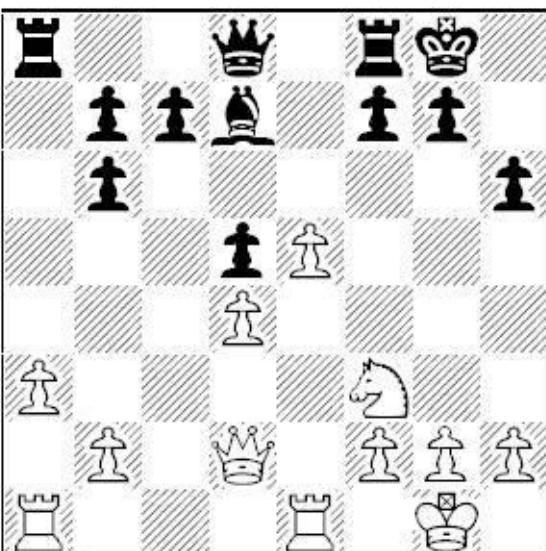
13 ... Bb4!?

13 ... Bd7 was what I wanted to play, but 14 Bxd5 exd5 15 e6 Bxe6 (if 15 ... fxe6 16 Qg6+ Kf8 17 Ne5 with an attack) 16 Rxe6 fxe6 17 Qg6+ Kd7 18 Ne5+ Kc8 19 Nf7!! (I spotted this idea during the game; 19 Qxe6+ Kb8 20 Nf7 Qc8! 21 Qxe7 Re8 22 Qb4 Ra4!! got me really excited for a while) 19 ... Qe8 20 Nxh8 Qxh8 21 Qxe6+ wins for White. Hence the disruptive text.

14 Bd2

I'd focused almost exclusively on 14 Re2 Bd7 15 Bxd5 exd5 16 e6!. I thought that this was the brilliant idea of 13 Qd3. After 16 ... fxe6 (16 ... Bxe6? 17 Qb5+ wins a piece) 17 Qg6+ (17 Ne5 0-0 18 Bxh6 Be8 looked okay to me) 17 ... Kf8 18 Ne5 Qe7! (intending ... Be8) 19 Nxd7+ Qxd7 20 Rxe6 Qf7 I felt Black would survive. I was fairly pleased with my play until now. I had calculated a number of scary-looking variations quite accurately and after 14 Bd2 I felt that I was past the trickiest part.

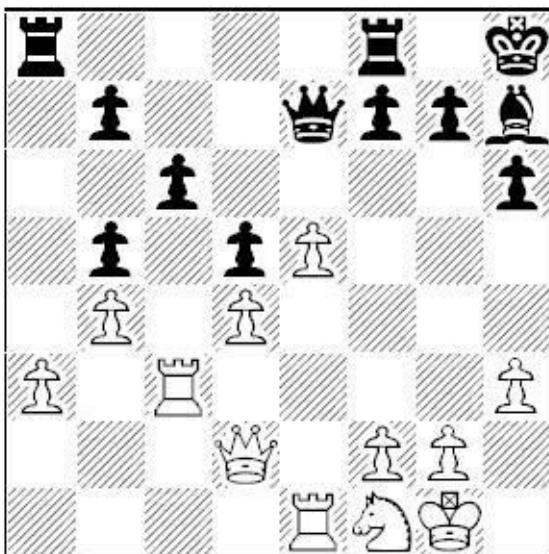
14 ... Bxd2 15 Qxd2 Bd7 16 Bxd5 exd5 17 a3 0-0



Exercise 2

Take a careful look at the following sequence of moves:

18 Rac1 c6 19 Rc3 Bf5 20 h3 b5 21 Nh2 Kh8 22 Nf1 Qe7 23 b4 Bh7

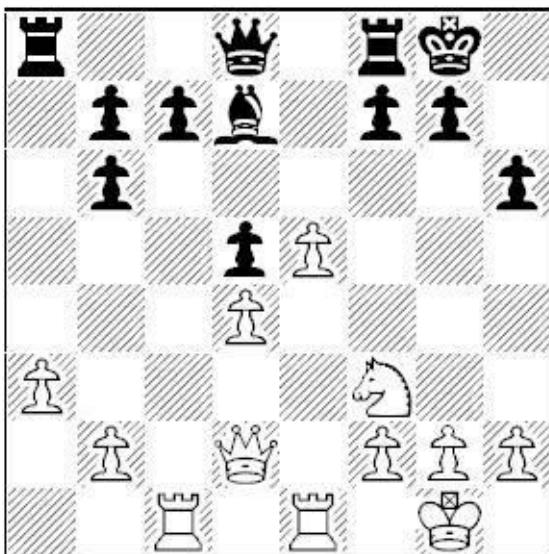


Analysis section

So what did you think about this passage of the game? Once again, I found the reactions quite interesting when I demonstrated this game to a group of players. The general consensus was that Black's position certainly hadn't got worse and probably had improved a bit. Quite funny because I'm thoroughly ashamed of the way I played. There's really only one critical moment to look at and that occurs right at the beginning of this sequence of moves:

Exercise 2.1: 1st Critical Moment

18 Rac1



18 ... c6?!

My choices on move 18 and 20 are a positional travesty. They are also quite revealing about my mindset during the tournament. My thought processes went something like this:

'Right I want to play ... c5, that's pretty obvious. Hmm ... don't think I'm going to achieve that in a million years. Look at all the pressure that White can get on c5. Never going to succeed. You'll see, if I delay ... c6, he might double up on the c-file, and then when I play ... c6, he might get an extra possibility like b5 which could be annoying. Know what, we'll just play safe and make sure none of that can happen by playing my pawns to c6 and b5 straightaway. Then I don't need to worry about that any more.'

I really deserve a smack in the face. That is a disgraceful piece of thinking. The only thing I can say for myself is that I understood during the game (pretty much immediately after I'd played 20 ... b5) what a mess I was making of things. There are obstacles to achieving ... c5.

I'm not necessarily going to be able to achieve that goal directly ... but that doesn't mean that you shouldn't try. By threatening ... c5, Black exerts influence on White's piece placement. By trying to achieve this goal, Black can force White to dedicate some of his pieces to prevention instead of attack. And this may in turn lead to an opportunity for play somewhere else.

Of course by maintaining the tension, you do take extra risks and run the risk of getting into a knot and allowing something nasty. But what I did (fossilizing my queenside structure with ... c6 and ... b5) completely removed any chance of queenside counterplay and gave up any leverage I had on White's position.

What's the root cause of the problem? I'm not completely sure, but a number of things do occur to me:

a) This does remind me a little of my reaction after Sachdev played 27 ... g4 against me. Something about accepting my fate far too easily – 'She can get away with this', 'I can't carry out my plan' – instead of pouring energy into finding a way to make things work.

b) Looking at the game against Sachdev, you see that I just wasn't capable of any sophistication in my plan-making. Against Sachdev, I missed all sorts of prophylactic points, whereas here I couldn't even handle the pressure of maintaining the tension.

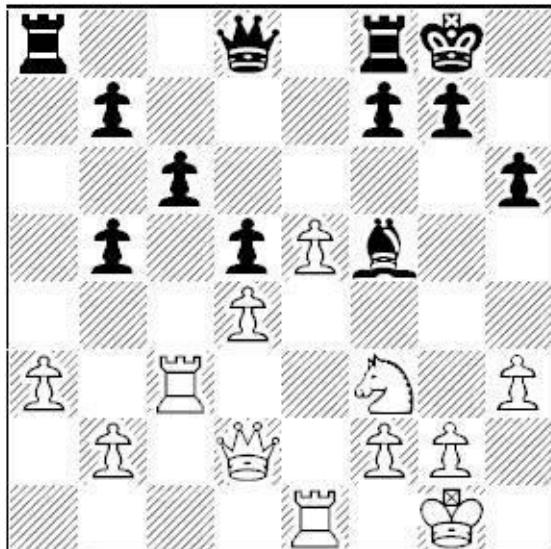
c) Finally, just as against Sachdev after 27 ... g4, I'm not hearing the positional alarm bells. I didn't consciously understand that Sachdev was developing really serious counterplay, and I didn't consciously understand that I was killing my own hopes of counterplay in this game. My sense of positional danger was completely dulled ... or absent.

So what ideas were possible?

18 ... Bg4 should also be considered, although it feels passive to exchange the light-squared bishop for the knight straight away. 19 Rc3!? is quite interesting when 19 ... Bxf3 20 Rxf3 c5 allows the startling 21 Rf6! gxf6 22 Qxh6 Qd7 23 Re3 Qg4 24 Rg3 Qxg3 25 hxg3 fxe5 26 Qg5+ Kh7 27 Qxe5 with a big advantage.

Instead 18 ... Rc8 19 b4 (19 Qb4!?) 19 ... Qe7 20 Qe3 Rfd8!? (20 ... Bb5!?, 20 ... Bg4!?) 21 Nd2 Bf5 22 Nf1 c5 is a very sensible sample continuation.

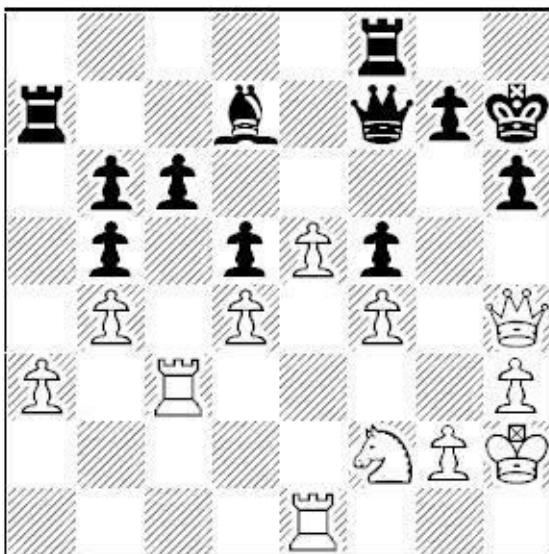
19 Rc3 Bf5 20 h3 b5?



Awful. Black will never get counterplay in the centre now with ... c5. White is free to concentrate on activating his kingside majority.

There wasn't much left to do, but buckle down and hang in tough, which I did quite well. My opponent wasn't very convincing in his manoeuvring and quite a bit of shuffling occurred:

21 Nh2 Kh8 22 Nf1 Qe7 23 b4 Bh7 24 Ng3 24 Ng3 Rae8 25 Rce3 Qh4 26 Qd1 Re6 27 Qg4 Qd8 28 f4 f5 29 Qe2 Bg8 30 Kh2 Ree8 31 Nh1 Be6 32 Nf2 Qh4 33 Nd3 b6 34 Qf2 Qe7 35 Rc1 Rc8 36 Rc3 Rc7 37 Re1 Kg8 38 Qf3 Kh8 39 Rec1 Bd7 40 Nf2 Qf7 41 Re3 Be6 42 Rec3 Bd7 43 Qg3 Kh7 44 Qh4 Ra7 45 Re1

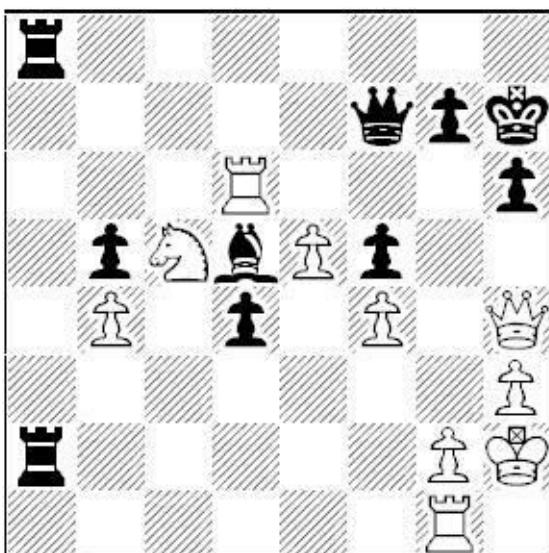


One of those wonderful practical dilemmas. I wasn't convinced that my opponent was really going to make progress if I stayed still, but I knew that I would regret it if I didn't take this opportunity to break out.

45 ... c5!? **46 dxc5 bxc5** **47 Nd3 d4** **48 Rxc5 Be6!?**

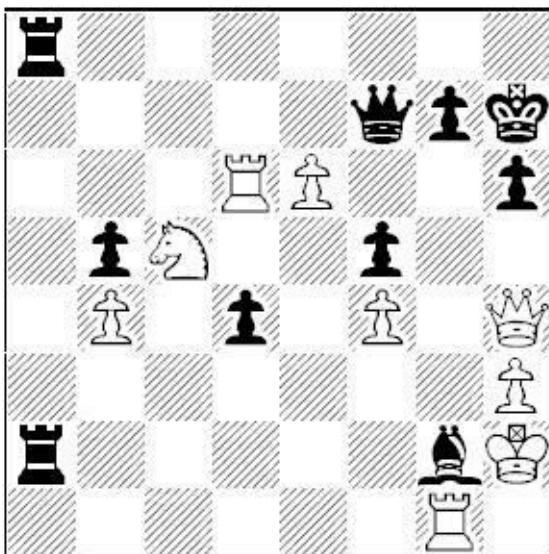
Not necessarily the best, but I had a concrete idea in my head. Around here the sacrifice on move 53 started to take shape in my head.

49 Rc6 Rxa3 **50 Nc5 Bd5** **51 Rd6 Ra2** **52 Rg1 Rfa8!!**



Seen quite a bit in advance and played instantly. I was filled suddenly with the most wonderful feeling that my – until now dismal – tournament was about to change for the better.

53 e6 Bxg2!



54 Qxh6+!!

A great way to get out of jail. White frees h4 as an escape square for his king. Otherwise:

- a) 54 exf7 Be4+ 55 Kg3 R8a3+ wins.
- b) 54 Rxg2 Rxg2+ 55 Kxg2 Qg6+ wins.

54 ... gxh6 55 exf7 Bd5+ 56 Kg3 Bxf7

The best I have.

57 Kh4 Rg8 58 Rxg8 Kxg8 59 Rxd4 ½-½

So just another draw after all.

Summary

A short fragment, but containing a number of important themes:

- a) I meekly stopped trying to carry out my plan as soon as I encountered resistance ('I'll never be able to achieve ... c5; no point in trying').
- b) I seemed to want to avoid uncertainty. The struggle involved in maintaining the tension and fighting for ... c5 didn't seem to interest me. I made my pawn structure completely static just to avoid the possibility that I might mishandle my position and not even be able to achieve the advances ... c6 and ... b5.
- c) I didn't appreciate the positional concessions I was making until it was much too late.
- d) I kept on drawing, no matter what I tried.

Round 9 was more or less my last chance to start a winning run and challenge for the top prizes.

Game 45

L.Schut-M.Sadler

Wijk aan Zee 2012

Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 g6!?

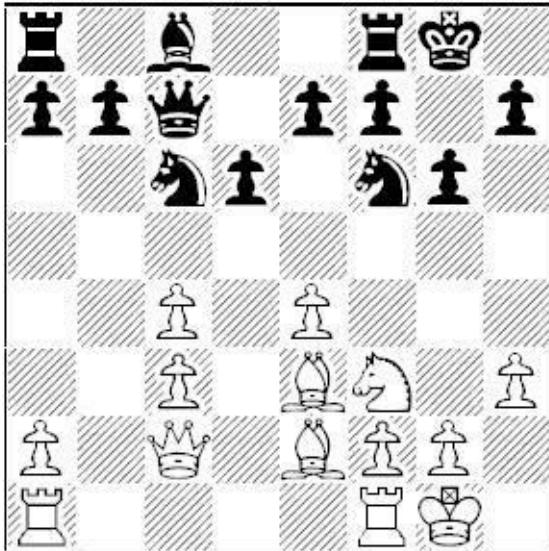
An unusual idea that I've played a few times in Dutch weekend tournaments.

3 d4 Bg7 4 c4 Qb6 5 dxc5 Qxc5 6 Be2 d6 7 0-0 Nc6 8 Nc3!?

A provocative move, but one I was quite happy to see. I was quite happy to play an unbalanced position when I was so desperate for a win.

8 ... Bxc3 9 bxc3 Nf6 10 Be3 Qa5 11 Qc2 0-0 12 h3 Qc7!

Not an obvious decision, but one I was quite proud about, especially as I made the choice fairly quickly. The aim is to play ... b6 and develop the light-squared bishop to b7 or a6 without leaving the queen cut off on a5.



It was counterintuitive to allow White to liquidate her doubled c-pawns with c4-c5, but I felt that the remaining c3-pawn would prove to be just as tempting a target, especially as White is wasting time with her dark-squared bishop.

13 c5 dxc5 14 Bxc5 b6 15 Be3

Solid, keeping the dark squares around the e4-pawn covered (and thus preventing ... Qf4).

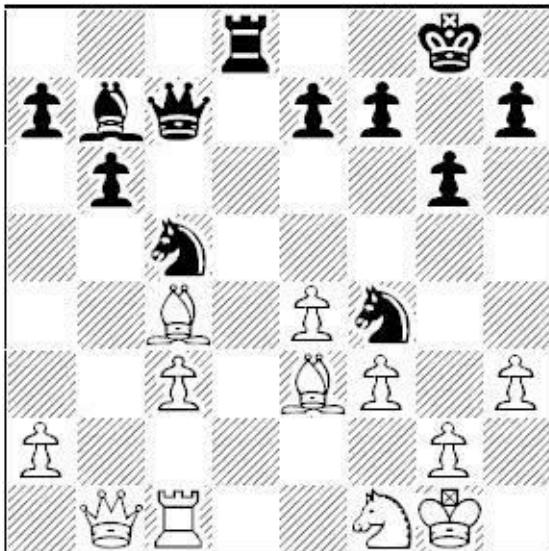
15 ... Bb7 16 Nd2 Rac8

I was trying to remain as flexible as possible. One idea that really attracted me was to play the c6-knight to e6 (via d8), from where it eyes f4 and d4 and can join in the attack on the e4-pawn from c5 if necessary.

17 Rac1 Rfd8 18 Qb2?! Ne5 19 Qb1?!

Instead 19 c4 Ned7 (19 ... Nxe4 20 Nxe4 Bxe4 21 c5 looked equal to me) 20 Bh6 Nc5 21 e5 Nfe4 22 Nxe4 Bxe4 seemed normal to me with balanced chances. Now Black starts teasing open White's position and creating little holes.

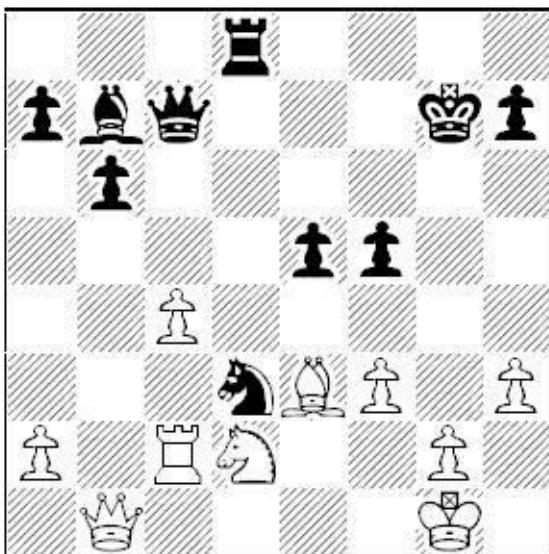
19 ... Ned7! 20 Rfd1 Nc5 21 f3 Nh5! 22 Nf1 Nf4 23 Rxd8+ Rxd8 24 Bc4



Exercise 3

The first sequence of moves from this game:

24 ... e5 25 Nd2 Ncd3 26 Bxd3 Nxd3 27 Rc2 Kg7 28 c4 f5 29 exf5 gxf5

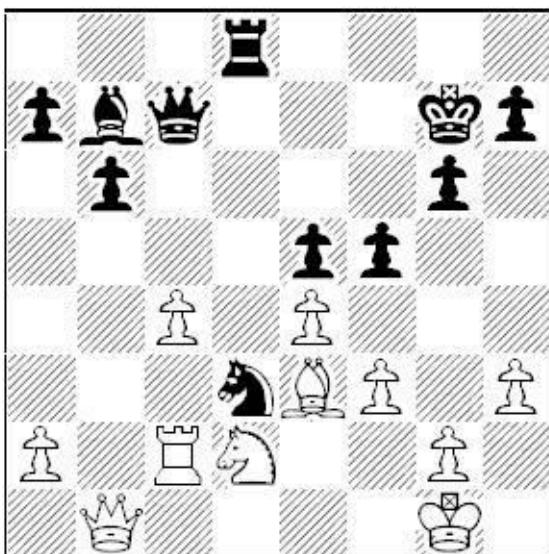


Analysis Section

This is probably a more difficult example to assess than the previous examples. Let's try to make the problem easier by splitting up the sequence of moves.

Exercise 3.1: 1st Critical Position

28 ... f5



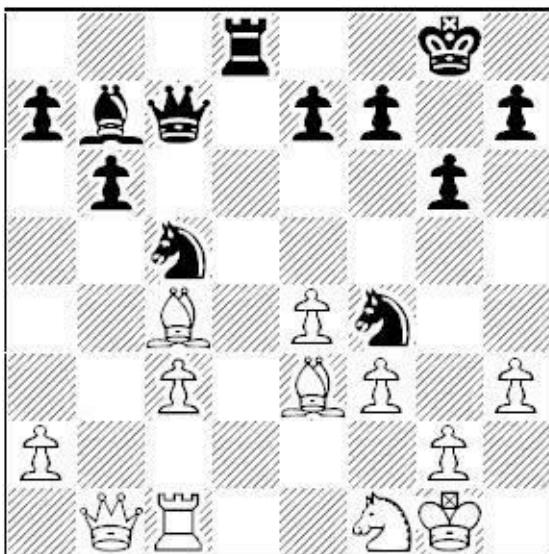
I invested most of my large time advantage in choosing my 24th move. I desperately needed/wanted to win this game, so I was looking for the most accurate and active continuation. In the end I plumped for something about which I wasn't 100% convinced. It did look very plausible and active, but I was very worried that 29 c5 (or 29 exf5 gxf5 30 c5) would lead to the liquidation of my advantage. White didn't play this in the game, but it does seem that my assessment was correct.

29 c5!. The whole strength of the plan with ... e5 and ... f5 is that White's dark-squared bishop is short of squares and vulnerable to ... f4. If White plays c5, then her bishop gains squares, and all I might have to show for my plan is a draughty king: 29 ... bxc5 30 Nb3 c4 31 Nc5! Nxc5 32 Rxc4 equalizes for White.

So we can conclude that Black's plan on move 24 was maybe a bit too ambitious and allows White a tactical stroke to liquidate her queenside weakness and activate her pieces. Time to go back to the 24th move and try to understand the position properly.

Exercise 3.2: 2nd Critical Position

24 Bc4



Black has a very pleasant position. White has the bishop-pair, but this is a very unstable advantage: the bishop on c4 is very loose and Black has many ideas based on exploiting the light squares around the weak c3-pawn. Black wants to stop White from playing Rd1 which neutralizes some of Black's light-squared pressure, and thus also the activity of his knights. I was still feeling quite frisky and I felt that I had a good chance of finding the right solution. I started playing around in my head with six motifs:

- a) The looseness of the bishop on c4.
- b) ... Ncd3 forcing the exchange of White's light-squared bishop (and thus eliminating White's only compensation for her weak c-pawn).
- c) ... Nxh3+ (especially when White abandons the defence of g3 by moving her knight to d2).
- d) ... f5 trying to force open the long diagonal after which White's kingside comes under additional pressure from the bishop on b7.
- e) ... Ba6 swapping off the light-squared bishops and weakening the light squares around the isolated c3-pawn.
- f) Prophylaxis against White's two ideas: (i) Rd1 and (ii) Nd2 followed by Bf1 and then Nb3.

I certainly felt that allowing Nd2 and Bf1 would lead to the evaporation of Black's advantage. I considered the following plans (not necessarily in this order):

First Thought

Just from a tactical point of view, it was very tempting to look for a way to threaten a discovered attack on the bishop on c4 and thus force Nd2 (removing some protection from White's kingside), after which Black can strike with ... Nxh3+. The most obvious way to threaten ... Nxe4 is to defend the knight on f4. ... e5 blocks the b8-h2 diagonal, so I was quite tempted by 24 ... g5. However, as we can see the tactics are not in White's favour.

Second Thought

The simple 24 ... Ncd3 25 Bxd3 Nxd3 26 Rc2 is fine, but I felt that I should be looking for a little more. I wasn't particularly keen on my light-squared bishop on b7 biting against granite.

Third Thought

I considered 24 ... Ba6 very seriously, removing White's advantage of the two bishops and leaving Black with a knight to exploit the weaknesses in White's position instead of the light-squared bishop on b7. With hindsight, this would have been a very good option.

However, somewhere in the course of my thought processes, I started to get all macho. The key driver for this was the prospect of the victory I so desperately longed for. I started to convince myself that I needed to do more than just exchange off light-squared bishops and I

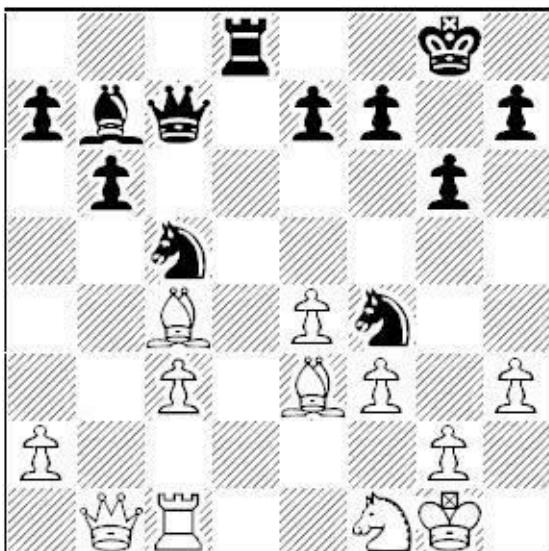
began to bestow more and more attention on ways of increasing my activity and opening lines against the white king.

Fourth Thought

After some analysis, I came up with a sequence in my head. These were approximately my thought processes:

- ‘a. 24 ... e5 prevents 25 Rd1 tactically so White is bound to play 25 Nd2.
- b. The knight was probably better on f1 than on d2, as from f1 the knight could come to e3 and then d5 or g4, attacking my weak kingside dark squares.
- c. Having lured the knight to d2, I stop White’s regrouping with Bf1 and kill his bishop-pair by playing ... Ncd3.
- d. I then blast open the centre and a8-h1 diagonal with a well-timed ... f5 (probably after a preliminary ... Kg7).’

I had real pangs of regret that I had to give up the idea of playing ... Nxh3+, but sometimes you have to be strong. I agonized about this decision in the end for a long time. The calm 24 ... Ba6 or this sharper idea? I was rather worried about the open spaces and weak dark squares I was leaving in my position after playing ... e5 and ... f5. Ideas like Qb3-e6 and Bg5 were regular guests in my thoughts. In the end, my over-anxious desire to win won through and I decided to go ‘all-in’.



24 ... e5

Some analysis of the alternatives:

a) 24 ... g5!? 25 Rd1 Rxd1 (25 ... Rc8 26 Nd2 Nxh3+ 27 gxh3 Qg3+ 28 Kf1 Nxe4 29 fxe4 Qxe3 30 Qd3 Qxd3+ 31 Bxd3 Rxc3 32 Ke2 is fine for White) 26 Qxd1 Nxe4? (consistent but bad) 27 fxe4 Qxc4 28 Qd8+ Kg7 29 Qxe7 wins for White.

b) 24 ... Ncd3 25 Bxd3 Nxd3 26 Rc2 and I felt the knight was better on f1 than on d2 if I was going to play for ... e5 and ... f5.

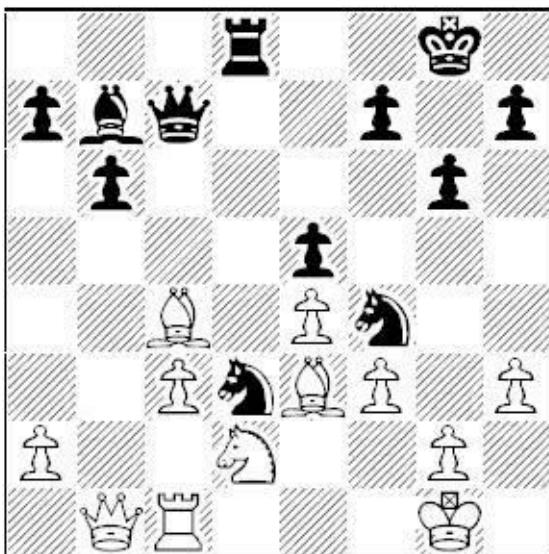
c) 24 ... Ba6 25 Bxa6 Nxa6 26 Qb5 (26 Qc2 Nc5 27 Rd1 Rc8 is a pleasant advantage for Black) 26 ... Nc5 (if 26 ... Nd3 27 Qxa6) 27 Bxc5 bxc5 was my reason for rejecting this continuation. It felt intuitively wrong to allow the c-file to be blocked with an isolated pawn. However, looking at things now, Black has substantial control over the position: the d-file is his while his queen is on its way to the kingside via g5.

25 Nd2

25 Rd1 Rxd1 26 Qxd1 Nxe4! is one of the points of ... e5.

25 ... Ncd3

25 ... Qe7 26 Bf1 Qg5 27 Kh2 looked fine.



26 Bxd3

I wondered about 26 Rf1 as I couldn't see anything clear against it. But it looked a bit too much like a computer move.

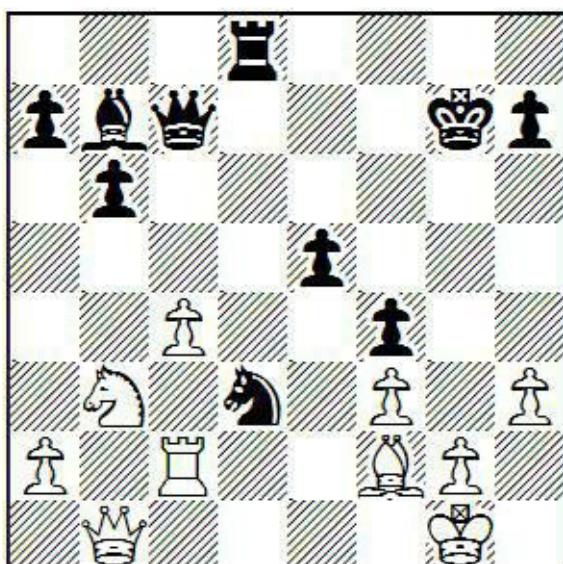
26 ... Nxd3 27 Rc2 Kg7

27 ... f5 28 Qb3+ Kg7 29 Bg5 looked rather awkward. I decided to wait with ... f5 until White played c4. However this does mean that White's idea of breaking open the queenside with c4-c5 comes much closer.

28 c4 f5 29 exf5

We're at the end of our sequence. White missed the chance to play c4-c5 quickly which meant that Black developed a fearsome initiative.

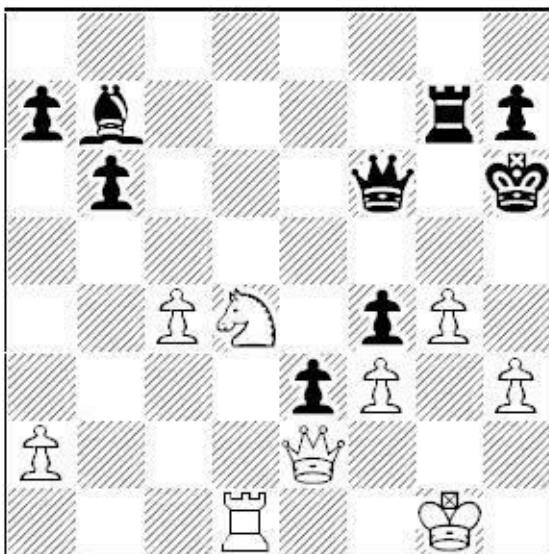
29 ... gxf5 30 Nb3 f4 31 Bf2



Exercise 4

Take a look at the following sequence:

31 ... Qf7 32 Qd1 Rd7 33 Qe2 Qg6 34 Rd2 Kh6 35 Rd1 Rg7 36 Be1 e4 37 Nd4 Nxel 38 Rxe1 Qf6 39 Rd1 e3 40 g4!?



Exercise 4.1: 1st Critical position

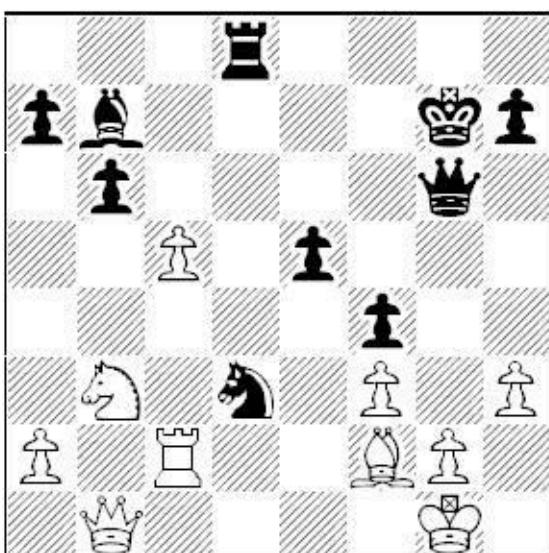
I found this sequence of moves interesting in a painful sort of way as it is a very nice example of inharmonious piece placement. During the game I had the strong feeling that I had lost the plot and that I was busy constructing a self-mate. That's actually a pretty good description of what I did. As we shall see, my poor choices of piece placement gave rise to a quite astonishing number of tactical opportunities for White.

31 ... Qf7

Eyeing c4 to try to stop Rd2. Not a bad start: the queen is coming to g6 from where she defends the knight on d3, puts pressure on g2, and supports ... e5-e4. Also possible was the alternative 31 ... e4!?:

32 Qd1

32 c5 Qg6 was the idea.



Then we have:

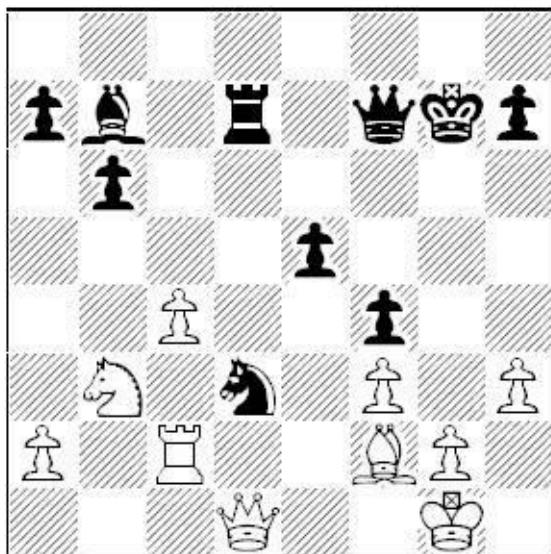
a) 33 Bh4 Rd7 34 Kh2 Kh6 was my idea (that *Rybka* likes). I just want to play ... Kh5 and embarrass the white bishop on h4 while freeing g7 for the black rook (as in the game). After 35 cxb6 axb6 (35 ... Kh5 is suggested by *Rybka*, intending 36 Bf2 Nxf2) 36 Rd2 Kh5 37 Bf2 (if 37 Be1 Bxf3! 38 gxf3 Rg7) 37 ... Rg7 38 Qf1 (38 Bg1 Bxf3) 38 ... e4 with an initiative (38 ... Ba6!?).

b) 33 cxb6 Bxf3 34 Bh4 Rd7 (a good square for the rook: it defends the second rank,

keeps the knight on d3 covered and also contains the idea of ... Kh6 and ... Rg7 attacking along the g-file; it is also better than all 34 ... Nf2 35 Rc7+, 34 ... Rc8 35 Rd2, and 34 ... Rg8 35 Rd2 Qxb6+ 36 Kh2 Be4 37 Rxd3 Kh6 38 g4) 35 Kh2 (otherwise, 35 bxa7 Nf2!! 36 Qf1 Rd1 37 Bxf2 Qxg2 mate, or 35 Rd2 Qxb6+ 36 Kh2 Be4) 35 ... Ba8 36 bxa7 Nf2 wins.

32 ... Rd7?

A first blunder. 32 ... Qg6 was correct.



33 Qe2

33 Bd4! Qg6 34 Rd2 was pointed out by *Rybka*. I had completely missed this idea of Bd4.

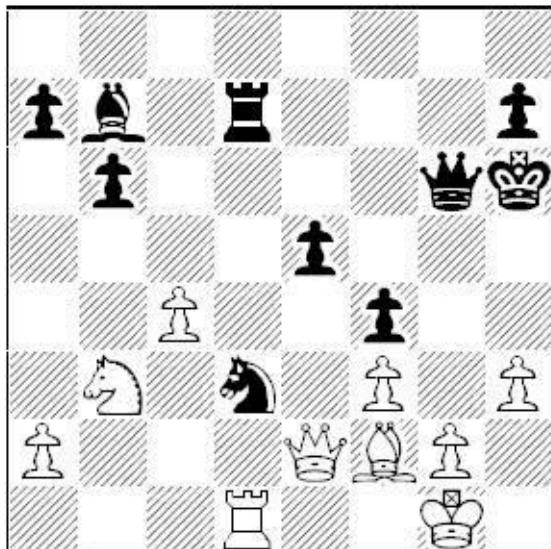
33 ... Qg6 34 Rd2

This carries the threat of Bd4 (missed this too during the game).

34 ... Kh6!?

Risky, but it neutralizes Bd4.

35 Rd1



35 ... Rg7?

A really poor move, and a good example of heading decisively to your doom. I had already spotted that White could try g4 against pressure on the g-file (with an idea like ... fxe3; Be3+),

so it's crazy for me to be boxing my king in like that. I've just turned g4 into a strong defensive resource. Moreover, I've put something valuable on the long diagonal again which gives White a second chance for a tactic.

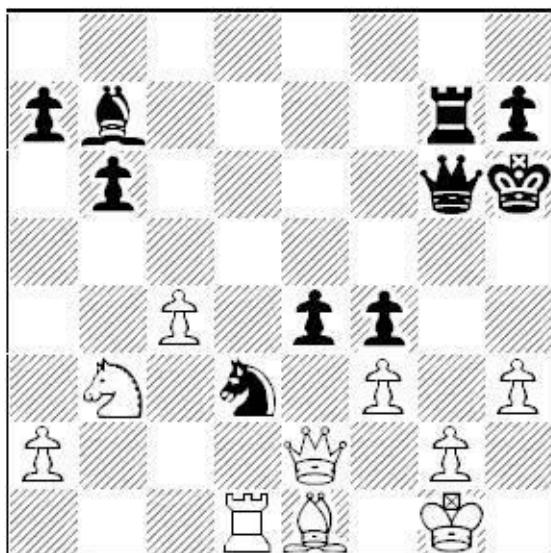
Correct was 35 ... e4!, but 36 fxe4 (36 Nd4 Ne5 is given by *Rybka*, threatening ... e3: 37 fxe4 Bxe4 38 g4 fxg3 39 Be3+ Kg7! and the king still has this square available) 36 ... Bxe4 37 Qg4 was what put me off during the game. Here 37 ... Qxg4 38 hxg4 Rg7 (if 38 ... Kg5 39 Nd2 Bc6 40 Nf3+ Kxg4 41 Rxd3!) 39 Nd2 Bb7 40 Nf3 Nxf2 41 Kxf2 (41 Rd6+ Rg6 42 Rxg6+ Kxg6 43 Kxf2 Kf6 looks very good for Black) 41 ... Rg4 42 Rd7 Rg7 43 Rd6+ Kh5 is better for Black, but not easy.

36 Be1??

Alternatively:

- a) 36 g4!? fxg3 37 Be3+ Nf4 38 Bxf4+ exf4 39 Qe5 offers a lot of counterplay.
- b) 36 Bd4!. That trick again spotted by *Rybka*, as the pawn on e5 is now pinned to the rook (this time instead of the king) on g7!

36 ... e4



37 Nd4?

Alternatives:

a) 37 Bc3!? gets the bishop away with tempo (thanks to the rook on g7!) and thus stops ... Nxe1. Then is 37 ... Rd7 probably best ... but this doesn't look that clever. Instead 37 ... exf3 38 Bxg7+ Kh5 39 Qf1 (39 g4+? fxg3 40 Qxd3 f2+ 41 Kf1 g2+ 42 Kxf2 g1Q+ 43 Rxg1 Qxd3 wins for Black) 39 ... f2+ 40 Kh1 Qg3? (40 ... Qxg7 41 Nd4 is level according to *Rybka*, though still very unclear) 41 Qe2+ (41 Rxd3 Qxg2+ 42 Qxg2 f1Q+ wins) 41 ... f3 42 Qe8+ wins for White.

b) 37 g4!? is possible once again due to the boxed-in position of the king on h6:

b1) 37 ... exf3 38 Qxd3 is the main point.

b2) 37 ... fxg3 38 Bd2+ Kh5 39 fxe4+ Kh4 40 Qxd3 Bxe4 41 Qe2 wins.

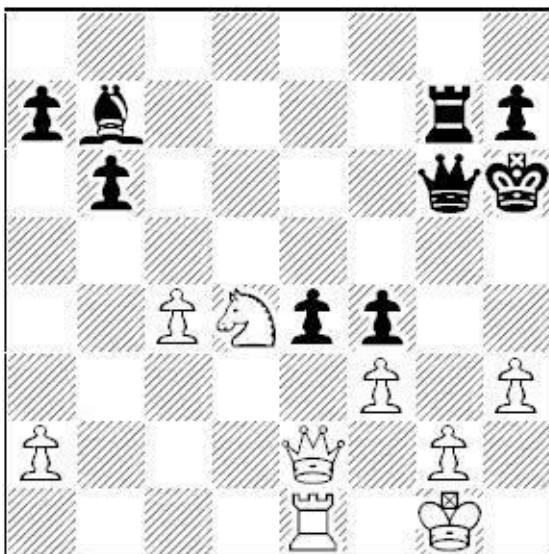
b3) 37 ... Nxe1 38 Rxe1 (38 Qxe1! is preferred by *Rybka*) 38 ... e3 (if 38 ... exf3 39 Qe5!).

b4) 37 ... Ne5 38 fxe4 Qxe4 39 Qxe4 Bxe4 40 Bc3 is equal.

37 ... Nxe1

Maybe 37 ... Ne5 38 g4 e3!?.

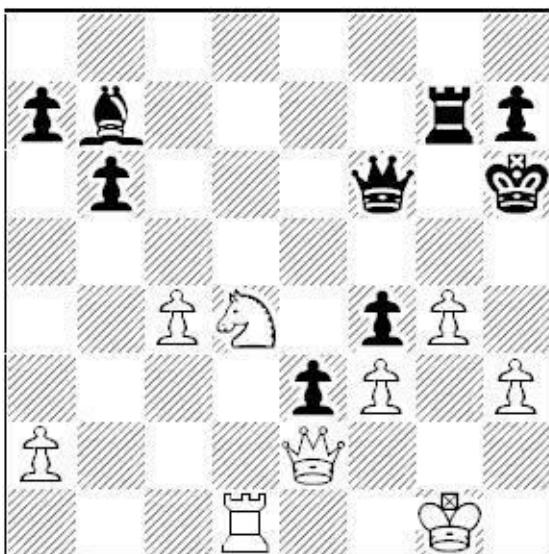
38 Rxe1



38 ... Qf6?!

38 ... exf3 39 Nxf3 (if 39 Qe6 Qxe6 40 Rxe6+ Kh5 41 Re5+ Kg6! 42 Nxf3 Bxf3 43 gxf3 Kf6) 39 ... Qg3. Didn't even occur to me during the game, but is a simple clear advantage. It should feel extremely natural to combine rook, queen and bishop against the f3-and g2-squares, but not to me that day: 40 Kf1 (if 40 Qe6+ Rg6 or 40 Qb2 Bxf3 41 Qf6+ Rg6 42 Qf8+ Kh5 43 Re5+ Rg5 44 Qf7+ Kh4 45 Qxh7+ Bh5 46 Rxg5 Qxg5 47 g4 fxg3 48 Qe4+ Kxh3 49 Qh1+ Kg4 50 Qe4+ Qf4 and wins) 40 ... Bxf3 (or 40 ... Be4!? 41 Qf2 Bd3+ 42 Kg1 Bxc4) 41 Qxf3 Qxf3+ 42 gxf3 Rg3 43 Re6+ Kh5 44 Kf2 Rxh3 45 Kg2 Rg3+ 46 Kf2 Rg5 47 Rf6 Ra5 with an advantage for Black.

39 Rd1 e3 40 g4?!



A resource made possible due to Black's piece placement choices for his king and rook.

Summary

During this sequence of moves, you could see how much I was struggling to get my pieces working together effectively:

a) I kept on stepping on to the same 'landmine': putting/leaving something valuable on the a1-h8 diagonal, thus allowing the interference trick Bd4.

b) I organized my king's position so that it had no flight squares ... and thus was in the maximum danger.

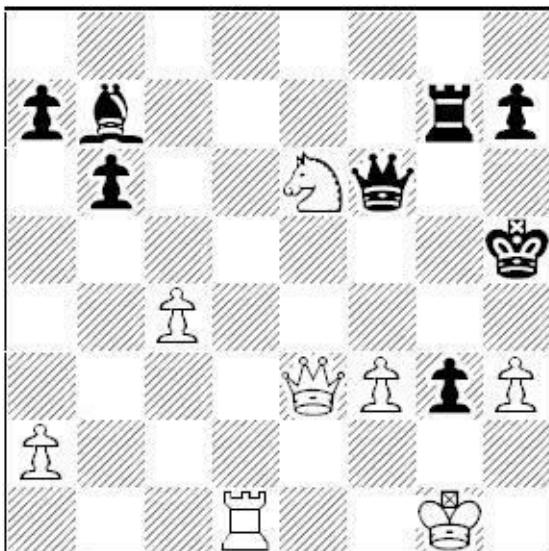
By so doing I gave White the additional defensive resource of g4. White made a lot of mistakes too of course which allowed me to get away with things, but I think that this whole

catalogue of piece placement disasters explains why I blundered so badly on my 40th move. I had clearly no idea any more what I was doing with my pieces. The end of the game was quite fun so I'll show it briefly:

40 ... fxg3??

After 40 ... Bc8 I was afraid I might be worse, but *Rybka* likes it once Black has reorganized his king. The point is that Black also has play against the white king with ... Qh4 which stops White going too crazy with queen and rook: 41 Qh2 Rd7 42 Qb2 (or 42 Nf5+ Qxf5 43 gxf5 Rxd1+ 44 Kg2 Rd2+) 42 ... e2.

41 Qxe3+ Kh5 42 Ne6



I had completely overlooked this.

42 ... Re7 43 Nf4+ Kh6 44 Ne6+ Kh5 45 Rd6 Kh4??

I had missed that 48 Qd2 Rf7 is met by 49 Rd6.

Instead 45 ... Rf7 46 Rd4 Bxf3 47 Nf4+ Kh6 48 Ne6+ Kh5 is *Houdini*'s and *Rybka*'s line.

46 Rd4+ Kh5 47 Nf4+ Kh6 48 Ne6+

48 Qd2! Re1+ 49 Kg2 Bxf3+ 50 Kxf3 Rf1+ 51 Ke4 and that's curtains.

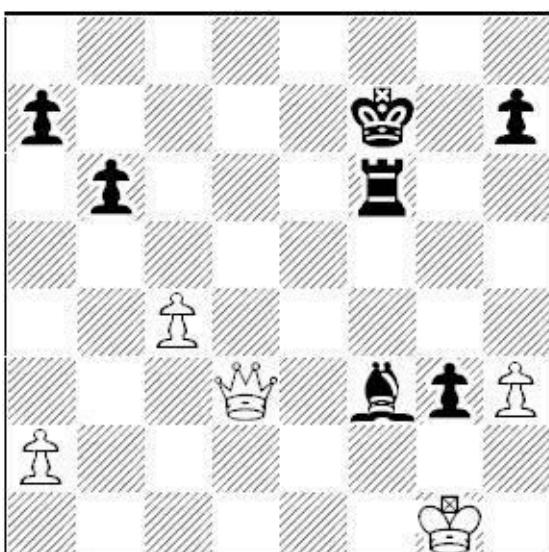
48 ... Kg6?!

The best try.

49 Rg4+?!

49 Qd3+! Kf7 (49 ... Kh6 50 Qd2+ Kg6 51 Rg4+ Kf7 52 Nd8+) 50 Rf4 Kxe6 51 Rxf6+ Kxf6 breaks my defensive structure. I also saw this during the game.

49 ... Kf7 50 Rf4 Rxe6 51 Rxf6+ Rxf6 52 Qd3 Bxf3!



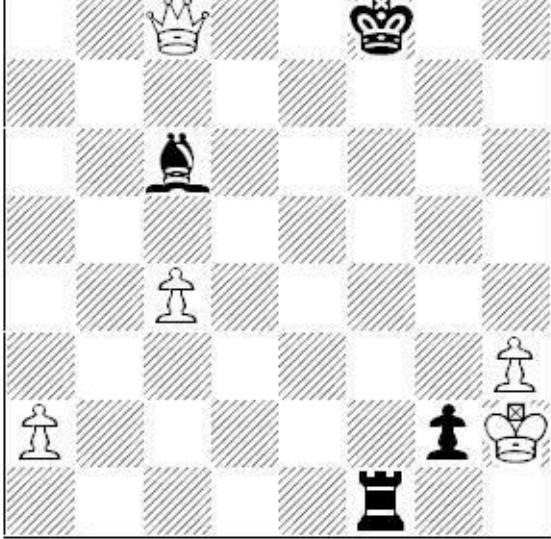
An excellent spot!

53 Qxh7+ Kf8 54 Qxa7 g2 55 Qb8+ Kf7 56 Qc7+ Kf8 57 Qd8+ Kf7 58 Qd7+ Kf8 59 Qd4 Kf7 60 Kh2

60 a4?? Bc6 6

60... Bc6 61 Qxb6 Rf1 62 Qc7± K

... Ecs 61 Qx56 Rff 62 Qc7+ Rff 63 Qd8+ Rff 64 Qe7+ Rff 65 Qf8+ /2 72



The last thing that really struck me while analysing my games was the fragility of my emotional state. I lost count of the number of times that I played a move before checking it completely (my hand just seemed to have a life of its own). I want to present a couple of these moments because at the end of the day, they were the most crucial factor in turning wins into draws.

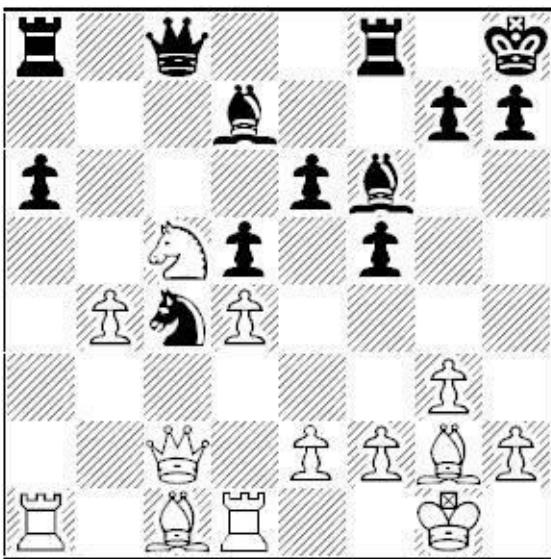
Game 46

E.Danielian-M.Sadler

Wijk aan Zee 2012

Dutch Defence

1 d4 e6 2 c4 f5 3 g3 Nf6 4 Bg2 Be7 5 Nf3 0-0 6 Nc3 d5 7 0-0 c6 8 Rb1 Ne4 9 Qc2 Nd7 10 b4 a6 11 a4 Bf6 12 Rd1 Nd6 13 cxd5 cxd5 14 a5 Kh8 15 Na4 Nc4 16 Nd2 b5 17 axb6 Nxb6 18 Nxc4 Nxc4 19 Nc5 Bd7 20 Ra1 Qc8



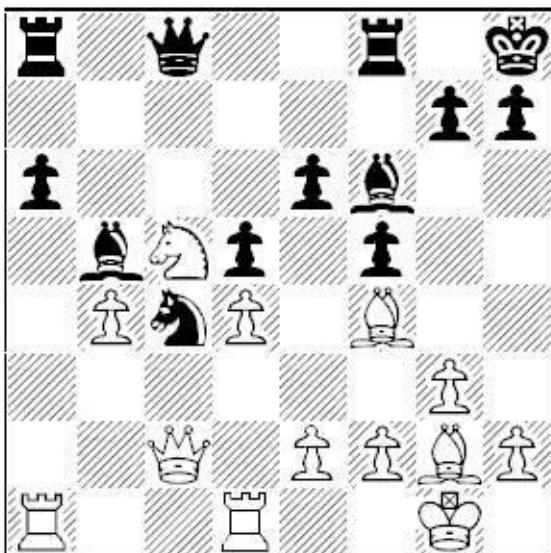
I was fairly optimistic after a well-played opening. I was just a little worried that White might try to liquidate as my original cunning intention didn't look that wonderful in retrospect.

21 Bf4

21 Nxd7 Qxd7 22 e3 worried me a little as I wasn't very sure how I was going to make something of this. 22 ... Rfb8 23 Bd2 Be7 24 Rdb1 a5! was the sneaky trick I'd been eyeing for quite a while, but ... 25 bxa5 Rxb1+ 26 Rxb1 (26 Qxb1 Nxd2) 26 ... Na3 27 Qa2 Nxb1 28 Qxb1 Bd8 29 Bf1 is not going to end up any better for Black. I was so pleased when White went 21 Bf4 that I played ...

21 ... Bb5?!

... instantly, and regretted it immediately.



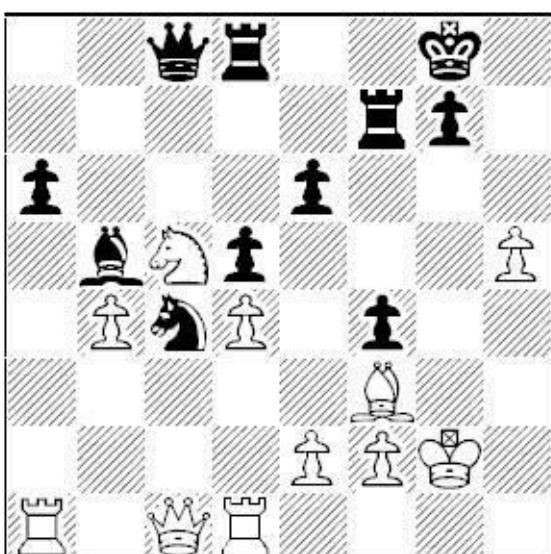
22 Qc1!

Aiming for Bg5, swapping off the dark-squared bishops. The point is that after ... Bb5, Black is holding wonderfully on the queenside, but this is not an area where he is going to be doing anything really active for now. He needs to expand on the kingside. After White's next move, that's much more difficult. If I'd just played 21 ... g5, then I would have stood very well indeed. I went into the tank again and actually played the next 9 or 10 moves extremely well and extremely quickly.

22 ... Bd8 23 h4 Kg8 24 h5 h6 25 Bf3 Ra7 26 g4 Raf7 27 g5 hxg5 28 Bxg5 f4 29 Bxd8 Rxd8

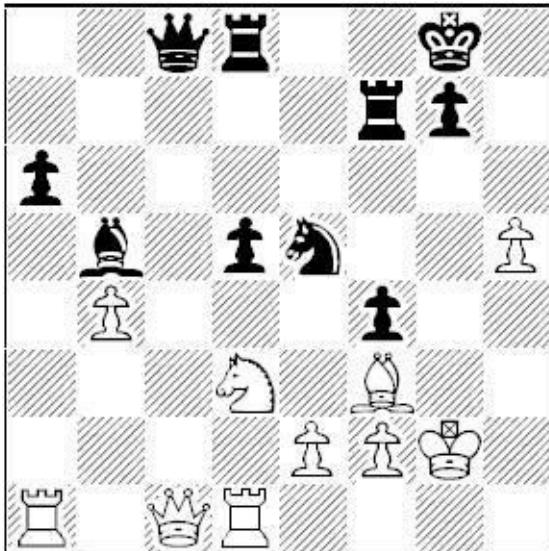
By now opponent was down to about 30 seconds (plus increments), whereas I still had half an hour.

30 Kg2?



I'd expected 30 Bg4 (a much better move), so when this was played, I whacked out 30 ... e5 in a sort of explosion of joy.

30 ... e5! 31 dxe5 Nxe5 32 Nd3

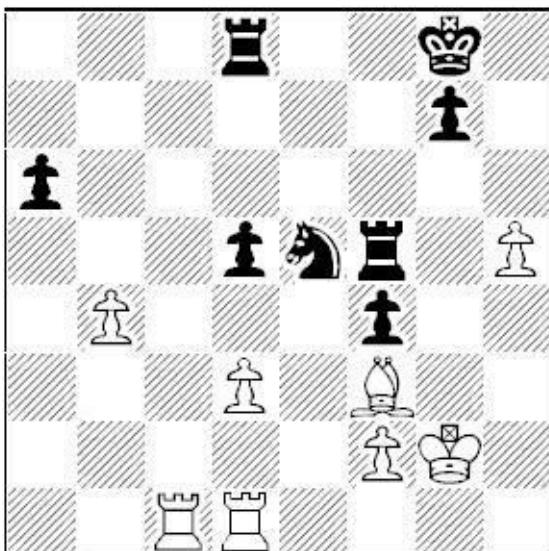


I'd missed that one (well, I played 30 ... e5 so quickly, I didn't really have time to spot very much). At this moment, I experienced a corresponding mood dip to the ecstasy I'd experienced while playing 30 ... e5. I'd missed this, maybe 30 ... e5 wasn't the best move, had I fallen into a trap, had I messed it up again? And in that mood, I didn't appreciate any of the tactical niceties of the position.

32 ... Nxf3?

Correct was 32 ... Qxc1! when:

- a) 33 Nxc1 Rf5 is extremely unpleasant for White: 34 Bxd5+ (or 34 Rxd5 Rg5+ 35 Kh1 Rxh5+ 36 Bxh5 Rxd5; b4 is very weak among other things and 37 Kg2 Rd6 threatens ... Bc6+) 34 ... Rxd5 35 Rxd5 Bc6 is very good for Black.
 - b) 33 Raxc1 Bxd3 34 exd3 Rf5!! is spotted by *Rybka*.



Suddenly, ... Rg5+ cannot be stopped.

33 Qxc8 Nh4+ 34 Kh3 Rxc8 35 Kxh4 Rc2 36 Ne5

36 Re1 f3 37 Ne5 fxe2 38 Nxf7 Kxf7, winning, was the idea.

36 ... Rf5 37 Rxd5 Rxe2

37 ... Kh7 38 Kg4 was what I had missed. Not that difficult ...

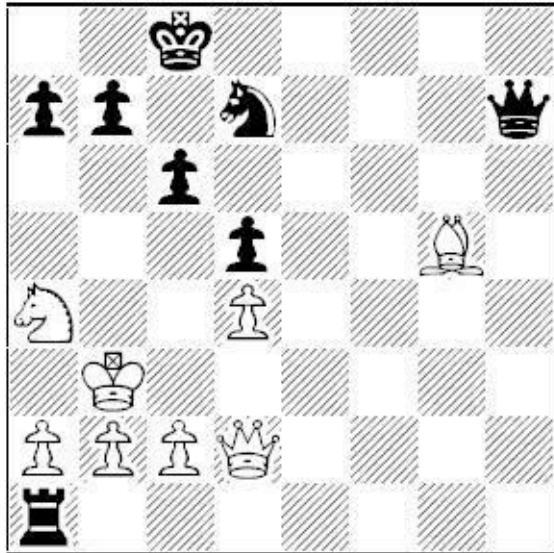
38 Rd8+ Rf8 39 Rxf8+ Kxf8 40 Ng6+ Kf7 41 f3 Rh2+ 42 Kg5 Rg2+ 43 Kxf4 Rh2 44 Kg5 Rg2+ 45 Kf4 Rh2 46 Kg5 ½-½

That was quite sad in round 7, but it doesn't come anywhere close to what I did against Paehtz in Round 3:

Game 47

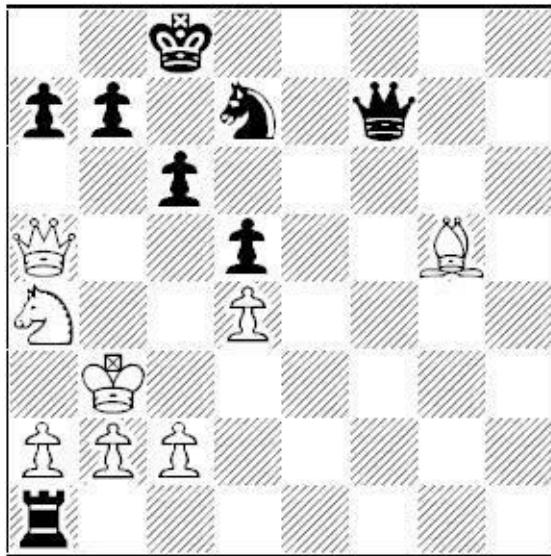
E.Paehtz-M.Sadler

Wijk aan Zee 2012



It's fair to say I'm winning and I haven't played badly until now either (we explored the start of this game in Chapter Three), although I might have handled my time better. Still with five minutes (+ 30-second increments) until move 40, this shouldn't be much of a problem. Just on general grounds, I decided to play my queen a little closer and stop White from getting the f-file.

31 ... Qf7 32 Qa5



And now something happened that I will have regular nightmares about for the rest of my life. If you'd asked me just after the game, I would have said that I made a horrific blunder (31 ... Qf7) in a completely winning position, but that I stayed reasonably calm and made sure that at least that I didn't lose. And indeed during the game, I felt as if I'd still got myself under control. But you just take a look at my moves and you see someone who has totally lost it. Every variation I calculated from now on was riddled with holes; some of them even contained illegal moves.

32 ... Qf3+

32 ... b6 shows that 31 ... Qf7 wasn't a blunder. I could have won easily with this move as 33 Qxa7 fails to 33 ... Nc5+.

33 c3

Now it's a bit tricky, especially with not that much time on the clock. I need to do something about mate on d8, but my a7-pawn is dropping off.

33 ... Qf8 34 Qxa7 Qd6?!

What's that doing? Something like 34 ... Rf1, getting my rook back into play, would have been very sensible.

35 Nc5

It's getting more and more difficult now. I didn't find anything better than a draw by repetition.

35 ... Qb8 36 Qa5 Qc7 37 Qa8+ Qb8 38 Qa5 Qc7 39 Qa8+ Qb8 40 Qa5 ½-½

Last thoughts

A rather painful chapter to write, but a very interesting learning experience. Seeing how and why things go wrong is often the trigger for really feeling and understanding why certain chess qualities or techniques are crucial to success. This tournament made me realize how one-sided and ponderous your play becomes when you're only thinking about what you want to do (active thinking), and how many easy chances you miss when you don't allow the opponent any opportunity to find his or her own mistakes (prophylactic thinking). I also learnt how important it is to pay attention to your inner calmness during the game, no matter the strength of the opponent. Get those two things rights, and you'll play well.

Chapter Six

Thinking in Endgames

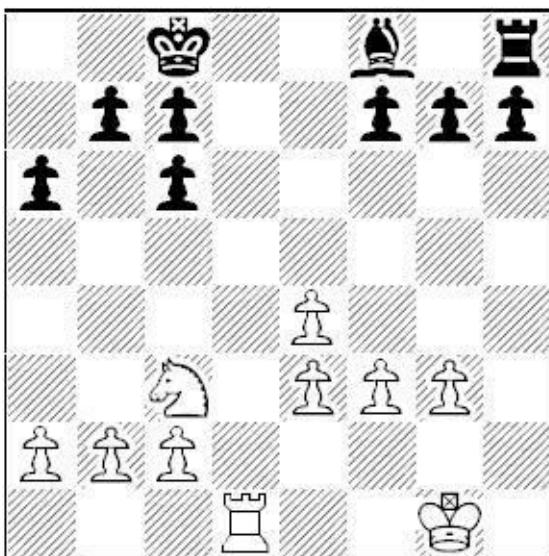
A couple of quiz questions to start.

Exercise 1

Who had the black pieces here?

Game 48

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Bxc6 dxc6 5 0-0 Qe7 6 d4 exd4 7 Qxd4 Bg4 8 Bf4 Bxf3 9 gxf3 Nf6 10 Nc3 Nh5 11 Bg3 Rd8 12 Qe3 Nxg3 13 hxg3 Qc5 14 Rad1 Qxe3 15 Rxd8+ Kxd8 16 Rd1+ Kc8 17 fxe3

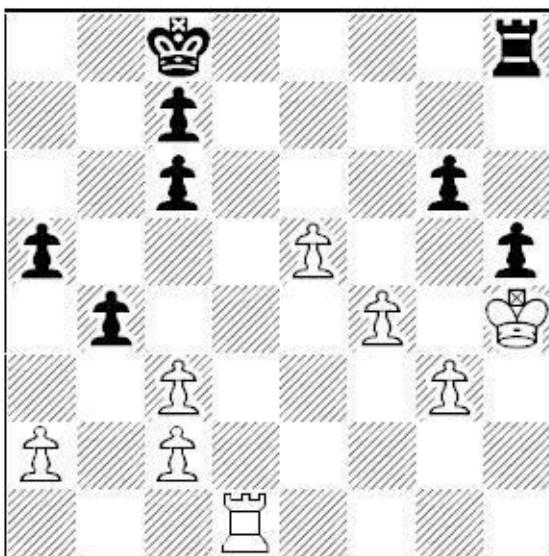


White will look to expand in the centre, ideally creating a passed pawn. Black, on the other hand, will do well to create a passed pawn on the queenside.

17 ... g6 18 e5 Bg7 19 f4 f6 20 exf6 Bxf6

Freeing the bishop, at the cost of allowing White a dangerous passed e-pawn.

21 e4 h5 22 Kg2 Bxc3 23 bxc3 b5 24 e5 a5 25 Kh3 b4 26 Kh4



The white king is coming to g5 and Black suffers a grisly defeat.

26 ... Re8 27 Kg5 Re6 28 Kh6 1-0

Exercise 2

What do these players have in common? Grandmasters Barbero (Elo 2580), Dautov (2616), Epishin (2667), Georgiev (2525), Kamsky (2705), Kramnik (2740), Laznicka (2617), and Tregubov (2649).

Answers

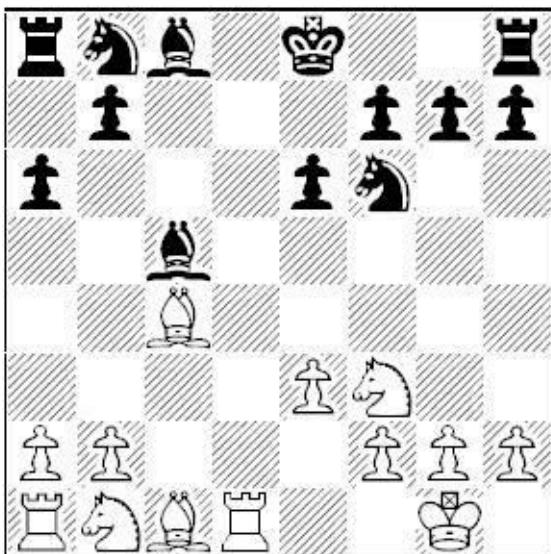
Exercise 1

The Black player in Game 48 was the creator of so many wonderful endgame masterpieces, Vassily Smyslov.

Exercise 2

All these white players have played the exchange variation of the Queen's Gambit Accepted with a view to painlessly torturing Black from a slightly better position ...

1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 e3 e6 5 Bxc4 c5 6 0-0 a6 7 dxc5 Qxd1 8 Rxd1 Bxc5



... and lost it. Take a look at this game for example. Epishin is a very strong grandmaster and a fine endgame player.

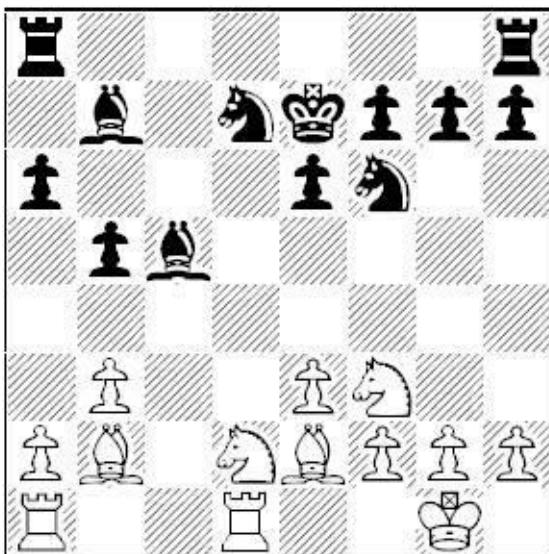
Game 49

V.Epishin-Z.Gyimesi

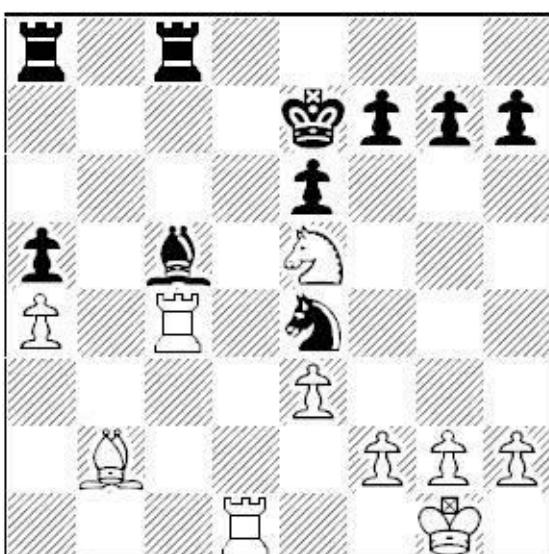
Bolzano 2000

Queen's Gambit Accepted

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 d5 4 e3 Be7 5 Bd3 dxc4 6 Bxc4 c5 7 0-0 a6 8 dxc5 Qxd1 9 Rxd1 Bxc5 10 b3 Nbd7 11 Bb2 b5 12 Be2 Bb7 13 Nbd2 Ke7

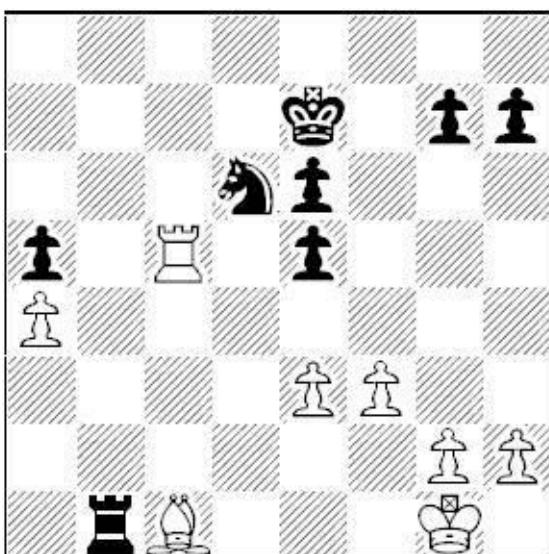


14 a4 bxa4 15 bxa4 a5 16 Nc4 Rhc8 17 Nce5 Nxe5 18 Nxe5 Bd5 19 Rac1 Ne4 20 Bc4 Bxc4 21 Rxc4



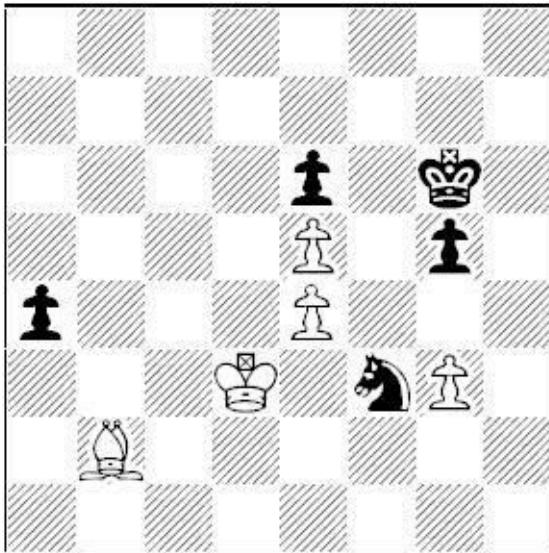
White relies on his knight to keep up the pressure, but it can be driven away.

21 ... Nd6 22 Rc2 f6 23 Rdc1 fxe5 24 Rxc5 Rxc5 25 Rxc5 Rb8 26 Bc1 Rb1 27 f3



Having defended well against White's slight initiative, it's now Black who invades.

27 ... Ra1 28 e4 Rxa4 29 Kf2 Kf6 30 h4 h6 31 Bd2 Re4 32 Rxc4 Nxc4 33 Bc3 g5 34 hxg5+ hxg5 35 Ke2 a4 36 Kd3 Nd6 37 g3 Nb5 38 Ba1 Nd4 39 f4 Kf7 40 Bb2 Nf3 41 fxe5 Kg6



42 Ke3 Nh2 43 Kf2 Kh5 44 Kg2 Ng4 45 Kf3 Nh6 46 Bc1 Nf7 47 Bb2 Nd8 48 Ba3 Nc6
49 Bb2 Na5 50 Bc3 Ne4 51 Ke2 Kg4 52 Kd3 Nb6 53 Bd2 a3 0-1

What's the conclusion? Endgames are **difficult!** Even the best endgame players have made a total hash of things at times in their career. We're going to look at the reasons endgames cause such problems, and then work through a number of techniques to improve your endgame play.

Why are endgames difficult?

A number of fundamental changes take place when material on the board is reduced. The tactical possibilities are much less extreme in a normal endgame than in a normal middlegame. You don't have the power to turn around a worsening position by setting the board on fire.

The limited power you have at your disposal can leave you weirdly helpless in a normal-looking endgame. It's like seeing an accident happening in slow motion without being able to do anything to stop it.

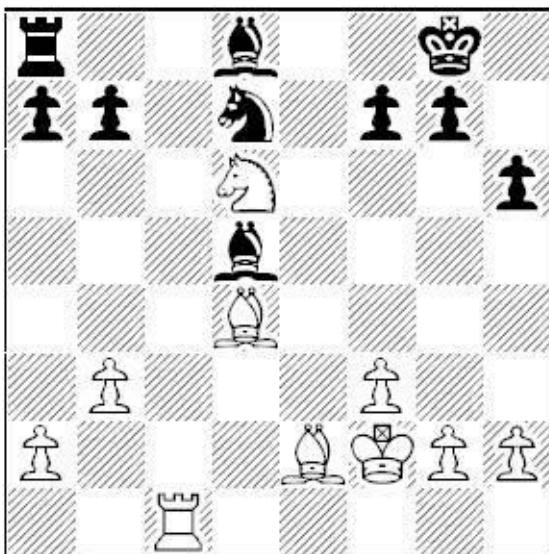
Game 50

M.Tal-W.Uhlmann

Moscow 1967

French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 c5 4 Ngf3 cxd4 5 exd5 Qxd5 6 Bc4 Qd6 7 0-0 Nf6 8 Nb3 Nc6 9 Nbxd4 Nxd4 10 Nxd4 Be7 11 b3 0-0 12 Bb2 e5 13 Nb5 Qxd1 14 Rfxd1 Bf5 15 Rac1 Rfd8 16 Bxe5 Rxd1+ 17 Rxd1 Bxc2 18 Rc1 Bg6 19 Be2 Be4 20 f3 Bd5 21 Kf2 h6 22 Nd6 Bd8 23 Bd4 Nd7



24 Bc4!

A very unpleasant idea which comprises six elements:

- Weakening Black's control of the queenside light squares, which:
- Forces ... b6, opening up the light squares on the queenside.
- The domination of the black knight (one of the remaining pieces that could try to cover the light squares) by White's dark-squared bishop on d4.
- The remoteness of the black king (the other piece that could theoretically oppose the coming march of the white king).
- White's control of the c-file and the passivity of the black rook.

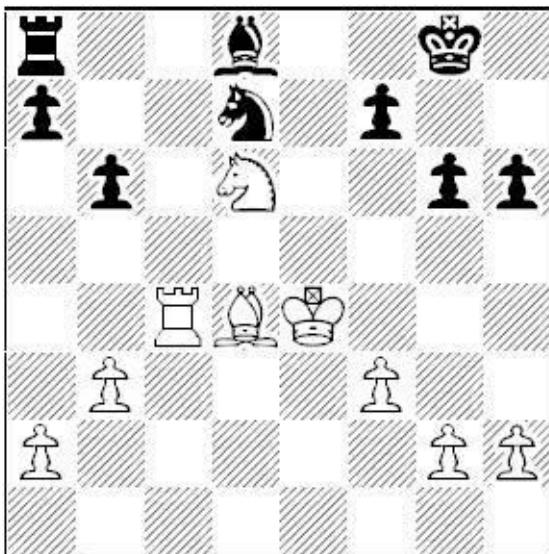
Which all facilitate:

- The march of the white king via the central and queenside light squares to Black's queenside pawns.

24 ... Bxc4 25 Rxc4 b6 26 Ke3 g6

26 ... Nf6 27 Bxf6 Bxf6 28 Rc8+ Rxc8 29 Nxc8 wins.

27 Ke4

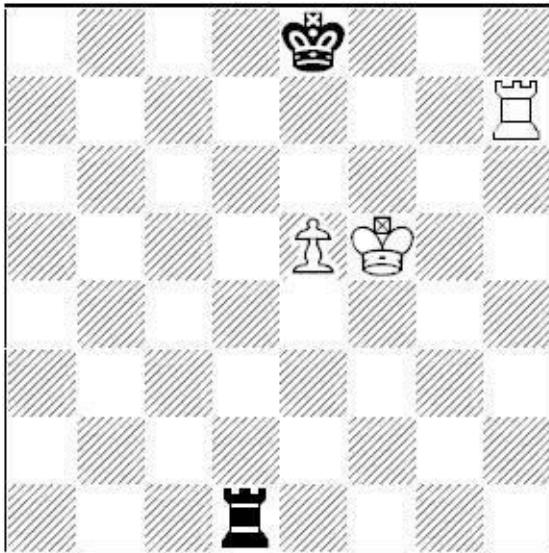


Black is completely helpless

27 ... Be7 28 Rc8+ Rxc8 29 Nxc8 f5+ 30 Kd5 Kf7 1-0

Pieces seem to move differently in the endgame. Take a look at the white king in this

theoretical endgame. If you play through it quickly, you'll soon feel dizzy: what the hell is he doing, where does he want to go!? Compare this to a middlegame where you get rewarded for getting your pieces to the most active squares as quickly and efficiently as possible.



1 Ke6

If 1 Kf6 Re1! 2 Rh8+ Kd7 and the combination of king and rook stops the advance of the e-pawn.

1 ... Kf8

In principle the ideal square for the king:

a) It covers the e7-square and thus prevents the white king from shepherding the e-pawn home.

b) It can escape to the short side, leaving the long side for the rook to give checks.

2 Rf7+

Chasing the black king away from its ideal square.

2 ... Kg8

White wins too after 2 ... Ke8 3 Ra7 Kf8 4 Ra8+ (the rook controls the queening square, whereas the black rook is badly placed and cannot react immediately with checks from the side) 4 ... Kg7 5 Ke7 (the key result of the rook being on d1 instead of e1) 5 ... Rb1 6 e6 Rb7+ 7 Kd6 Rb6+ 8 Kd7 Rb7+ 9 Kc6 Rb2 10 e7.

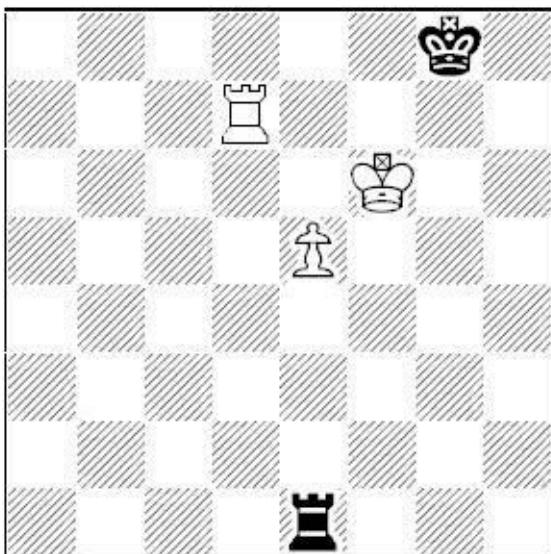
3 Rd7

Purely due to the poor position of the black rook on d1. White should avoid 3 Ra7 Re1 4 Kf6 Rf1+ 5 Ke7 Rf7+ and oops!

3 ... Re1

In principle the ideal square for the rook. It prevents Ke7 and e6 by targeting the e5-pawn. It *must*, however, be combined with a black king on f8. Without this, White can use a typical endgame zigzag manoeuvre to get his king to the desired square on e7.

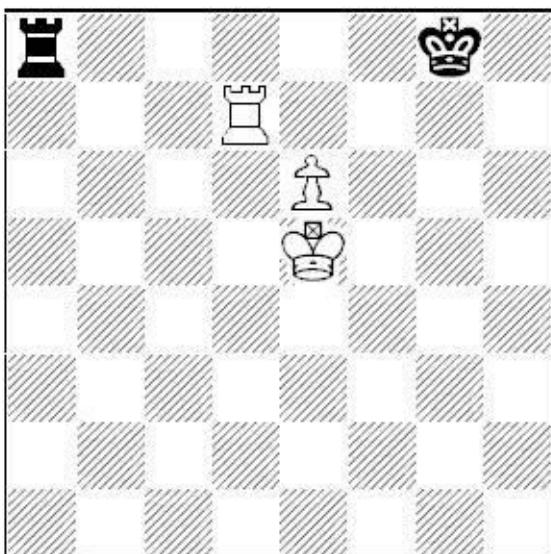
4 Kf6



Making use of the weakness of the Black king's position: on g8 it is far from the white pawn *and* cut off on the back rank.

4 ... Rf1+ 5 Ke7 Ra1

Black *can* chase away the white king from its ideal square, but only at the cost of completely misplacing his rook: 5 ... Rf7+ 6 Kd6 Rf8 7 e6 Ra8 8 Ke5!.

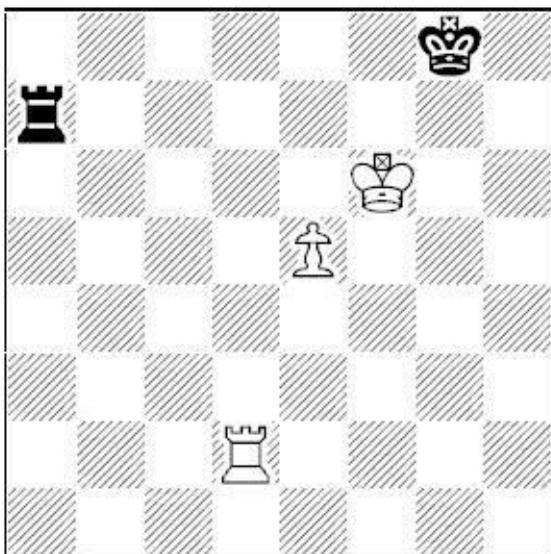


Just when you get access to your ideal square, you don't make use of it! Going to f6 this way keeps the black king bottled up on the back rank. Instead 8 Ke7 Kg7! is a theoretical draw. See how helpless the black king is on the back rank. White can always gain control of the queening square with gain of tempo if the black rook leaves the back rank: 8 ... Kf8 9 Kf6 Rb8 10 Rf7+ Ke8 11 Rg7 Kf8 12 e7+ wins.

6 Rd2!

White can consistently try to squeeze something extra out of the position by further cutting off the Black king. Instead 6 e6? Kg7! is a draw.

6 ... Ra7+ 7 Kf6

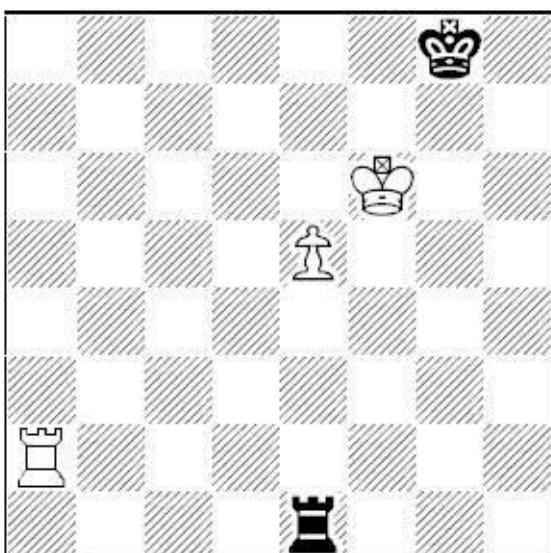


7 ... Rf7+ 8 Ke6 Rf1

Or 8 ... Ra7 9 Rd8+ Kg7 10 Rd7+.

9 Ra2! Kg7

If 9 ... Re1 10 Kf6.



The zigzag manoeuvre again, getting the king to e7 while misplacing the black rook, exploiting the fact that the black king is still on a bad square on g8: 10 ... Rf1+ 11 Ke7 Rf7+ 12 Kd6 wins.

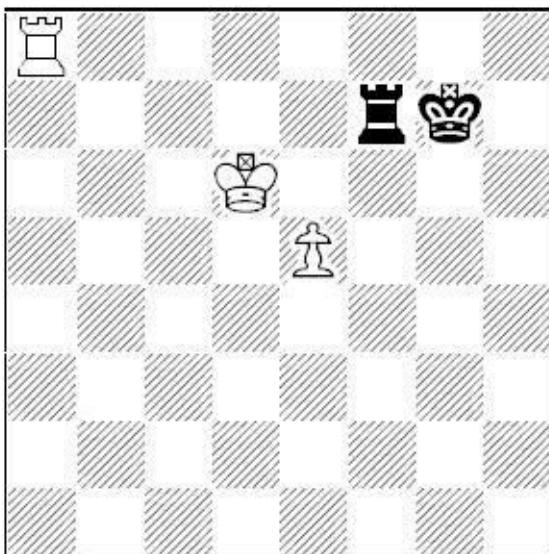
10 Ra7+ Kg6 11 Ra8 Kg7 12 Ke7

The black rook should have been on e1!

12 ... Rf7+

Or 12 ... Rb1 13 e6.

13 Kd6 1-0



There are also a few psychological factors which can cause a degree of uncertainty:

- a) You get closer and closer to theoretical positions which you should know but never really studied. That makes you nervous when:
 - a1) You have to play such a theoretical position.
 - a2) You're *thinking* about playing such a position.
- b) Often, transposing into an endgame is a (sometimes unwelcome) clarification of the situation. Goodbye dreams of a kingside attack, of swindling your opponent by winning a piece in a sneaky way.

But what's *really* difficult?

I studied the endgame a huge amount when I was 15 or 16. I drew up a list of 100 theoretical endgames that I wanted to memorize, and I went through them every day. But that didn't seem to be any guarantee for good endgame play. I got quite desperate about my endgame play: sometimes, I'd feel really in control and play well; at other times ... well, what was that monkey doing? Eventually I cottoned on to the problem. We have said that endgames require a different sort of thinking. I could obviously think like that from time to time, but it seems that I had real problems consistently switching to the right way of thinking in the heat of battle.

In the end I came up with quite a nice solution. I can best explain it by telling you the story of how I managed to get my driving license in 2004. I hate driving and didn't want to go anywhere near a car, but my company insisted so I went for it. The lessons went sort of okay, but the first test was a complete disaster. A small family of ducks were not the only casualties; additionally, my pride took a severe bashing.

Reflecting on the experience, I realized that I had had the feeling continually of having no time. Every time the driving instructor said 'Turn left', I felt there were 20,000 things I needed to do, and no time to do it. Then I thought of what I had done for endings. I had decided that since my biggest problem was making the mental switch from middlegame thinking to endgame thinking, I needed to be constantly prepared for the possibility that I would switch to an endgame. So every move, I would just ask myself the question: 'how would the position look with the queens off?' Asking that question all the time cost me just a few seconds every move, but ensured that when the time came to play an endgame, I was mentally prepared. I noticed that this technique also gave me a number of other advantages:

- a) I was much more conscious of plans and possibilities to swap off to a better endgame.
- b) I understood better when I started taking positional risks. At the moment that you start sacrificing your pawns or structure, you suddenly realize that you no longer have recourse to the endgame.

So to go back to my driving test, I realized that I should be continually preparing myself while driving for the possibility of turning left/right etc ... When the question came, it wouldn't come as a shock any more. And, yes, I passed!

Okay, but how do I find my way in an endgame?

So we've talked so far about being aware that endgame thinking is different to middlegame thinking, and about a technique to make sure that you can make the switch smoothly in a practical situation. But how should you think of plans in an endgame? In a middlegame, you can easily put a plan together just by calculation and a bit of alertness for unusual possibilities: you string together a few random tactics ... and suddenly, by jingo, you realize that you've put a plan together. Hmm, do I dare to illustrate this? Okay.

This is not meant as criticism of the white player whom I seconded for a number of years and whom I respect greatly as player. I have no idea whether the comments made were accurate, but it was just the insight as to how these things can go that struck me so deeply (and made me think of my own play).

I was seconding Joel Lautier at the Euwe Memorial in 1996. Joel had just won a very powerful game against Short in the first round, and I overheard a couple of players talking about the game.

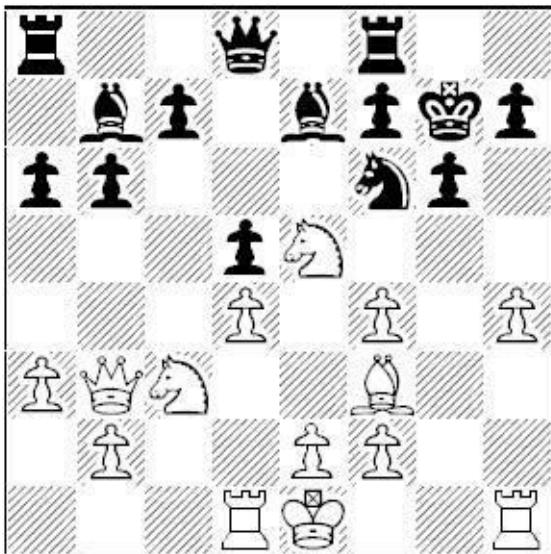
Game 51

J.Lautier-N.Short

Euwe Memorial, Amsterdam 1996

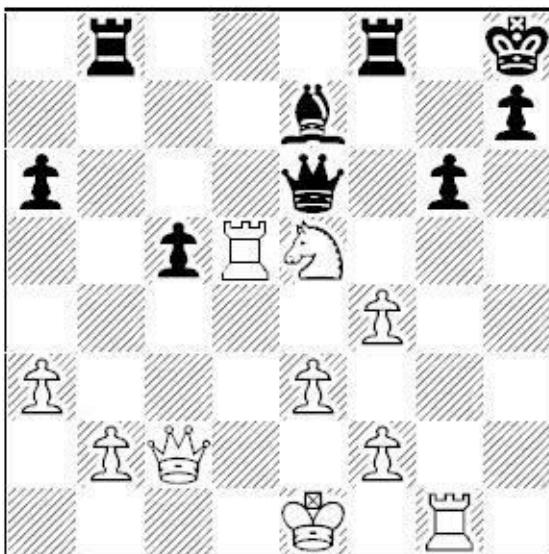
Queen's Indian Defence

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 b6 4 a3 Bb7 5 Nc3 d5 6 Qc2 a6 7 cxd5 exd5 8 g3 Nbd7 9 Bf4 Be7 10 Bg2 Nf8 11 Ne5 Ne6 12 Qa4+ Kf8 13 Rd1 Nxg4 14 gxf4 g6 15 Qb3 Kg7 16 Bf3 Rf8 17 h4



Here they come!

17 ... Rb8 18 h5 c5 19 e3 Qd6 20 Rg1 Qe6 21 hxg6 fxg6 22 Qc2 Kh8 23 Rh1 Kg7 24 Rg1 Kh8 25 dxc5 bxc5 26 Nxd5 Bxd5 27 Bxd5 Nxd5 28 Rxd5



28 ... Rf5 29 Rd2 g5 30 Nc6 Rbf8 31 Nxe7 Qxe7 32 Qc3+ Kg8 33 Qc4+ R8f7 34 Rd5 Kf8 35 Rxg5 Rxf4 36 Qxa6 Rxf2 37 Qc8+ Qe8 38 Rg8+ 1-0

Pretty impressive don't you agree? Joel was an amazingly powerful attacker. Take a look at his game against Leko from Ubeda 1997 for a magnificent example of this. It was one of Julian Hodgson's favourite attacking games: he called it a massive 60-move attack.

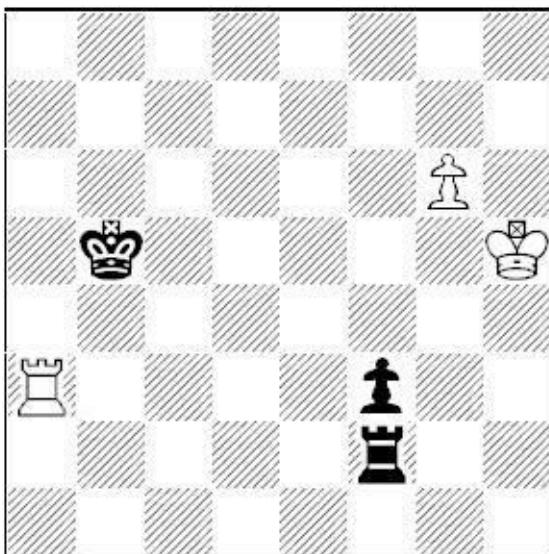
A couple of players were discussing the sequence of moves 15 Qb3, 16 Bf3 and 17 h4 which together form a real power plan. One of the players was quite dismissive, however: 'I don't believe he saw anything of it. After 15 Qb3, he wanted to play 16 e4, but then he suddenly noticed that 16 ... Nh5 was annoying, so then he played 16 Bf3. After 16 ... Rf8, he suddenly realized that the bishop on f3 supported h4-h5 so that's when he came up with it.'

Once again, it's not the truth behind this sarcastic comment that interested me, but the insight that planning often can go like that (unplanned!). It can work in middlegames because you have so much firepower at your disposal – there's always a piece you can fish up from somewhere to defend a key square! You don't have that in endgames: you have to go about things the proper way. Endgames reward players who can bring up the discipline to think in a 'classical' way: first formulating a plan, and then working out how to realize it.

As always, once you've got the mental side right, the best way to improve further is to analyse. I try to do a mix of three different types of analysis:

Analysing theoretical positions

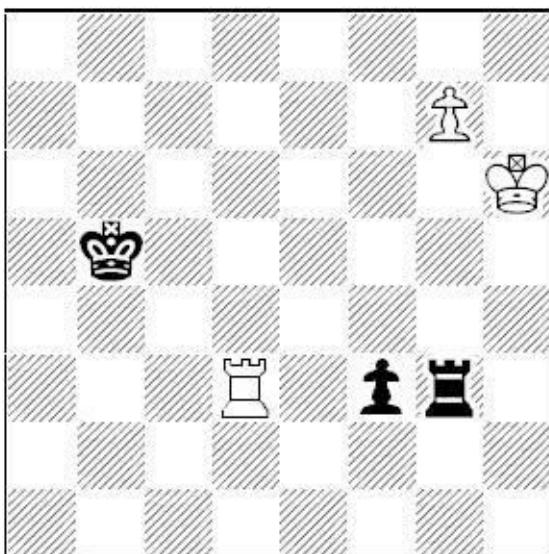
I take a book of theoretical endgames (for example, the classic Averbakh series), and try to examine the positions and the solutions critically. Perfect in the train on the way to work! The analysis of endgames with reduced material heightens your sensitivity to the nuances of endgame play: for example, the difference a single square or tempo can make to the outcome of the game. Take a look at the following study:



1 g7 Rg2 2 Kh6 Rg3!

2 ... f2 3 Rf3 wins.

3 Rd3!



Stopping the king from approaching the pawn and introducing the idea of Rd5-f5 getting behind the f-pawn.

Instead 3 Kh7 Rh3+ 4 Kg6 Rg3+ 5 Kf7 f2 6 Ra1 Rf3+ is only a draw.

3 ... Kc5

This stops Rd4 and Rd5.

If 3 ... Kc4 4 Rxf3 Rxf3 5 g8Q+.

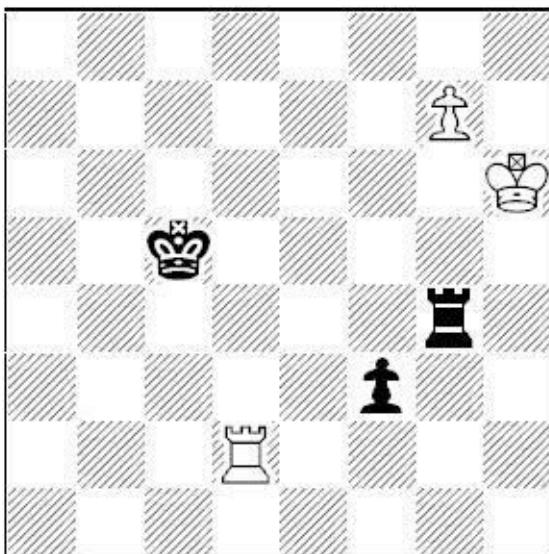
4 Rd2!

Neutralizing Black's tactical threat of ... f2 while still cutting off the black king. White now threatens Kh7 and g8Q if Black does nothing.

4 ... Rg4

Or instead 4 ... Kc4 White replies 5 Rd6 followed by bringing the rook behind the f-pawn.

5 Kh7 Rh4+ 6 Kg6 Rg4+ 7 Kh6!



Black's pieces are optimally placed. He doesn't want to move!

7 ... Kc6

This loses control over d4. Rd5 is still prevented, but ...

8 Rd4! Rg3 9 Kh7 Rh3+ 10 Kg6 Rg3+ 11 Kf7 f2 12 Rf4

White wins.

If we let our fantasy roam free, we can imagine that the black king and white rook are locked in hand-to-hand combat. The black king is desperately trying to prevent White's rook from reaching certain squares on the board. That the black king must give up control of d4 on move 7 – just one square! – is a cataclysmic event in the game: it seals the black king's fate, just as surely as a devastating attack in the middlegame. However, in a middlegame, it's not that difficult to anticipate an attack, to see the opponent's pieces moving towards your king, to feel the danger, and to understand that you need to gather together your forces and fight for your life. In an endgame, you have to be sensitive enough to have the same reactions ... about one tiny square!

Analysing endgames played by good modern players

The Tal Memorial of 2010 caught my eye due to the high number of interesting endings played. Endings involving strong modern players tend to be complex and tactical. Analysing such games develops your feeling for the tactical possibilities in an endgame: what sort of things work, and what sort of things don't.

I love the way Mamedyarov plays so I always take a look at his games first. Just flicking through this game quickly in *ChessBase* the first time, I assumed that it had been a smooth positional win. It was only when I stopped to look at the position properly that I realized Black is actually slightly better in the initial position.

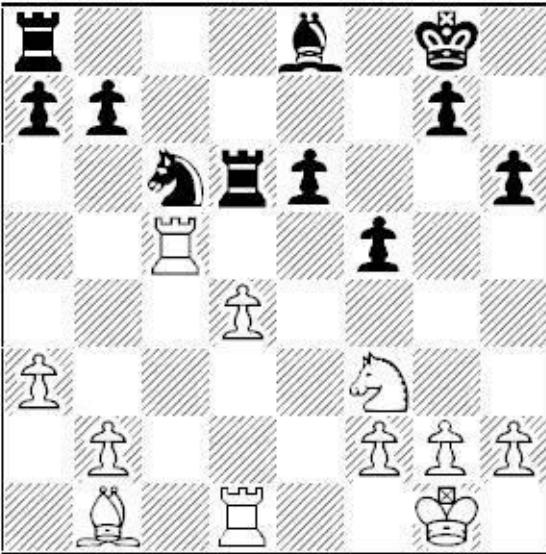
Game 52

S.Mamedyarov-Wang Hao

Tal Memorial, Moscow 2010

Queen's Gambit Declined

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 d5 4 Nc3 Bb4 5 Bg5 h6 6 Bxf6 Qxf6 7 e3 0-0 8 Rc1 dxc4 9 Bxc4 c5 10 0-0 cxd4 11 exd4 Nc6 12 Ne4 Qe7 13 Qe2 Rd8 14 Rfd1 Bd7 15 Bd3 Be8 16 Bb1 Ba5 17 Nc5 Bb6 18 a3 Bxc5 19 Qc2 f5 20 Qxc5 Qxc5 21 Rxc5 Rd6



Black has a very pleasant position. White's isolated d-pawn can provide powerful support for attacking play in the middlegame (outpost on e5, constant threat of d4-d5 blasting open the centre), but in the endgame it's a liability. Black's plan is simply to double his rooks on the d-file. He can further increase the pressure on the d-pawn by pinning the knight on f3 with ... Bh5. It's clear that White isn't going to be able to hold the pawn if it stays on d4. He has to try and liquidate into equality.

22 d5

Actually, White should be glad to emerge with a tiny disadvantage.

22 ... Bh5?

A very strange move to play. The only thing that occurs to me is that this was the original point of ... f5 so Black was maybe a little fixated on this idea. Black had a number of good alternatives:

- a) 22 ... b6 23 Rcc1 Rad8 24 Re1 exd5 25 Bxf5 is fairly even.
- b) 22 ... Rad8 23 Re1 (23 Ba2 b6 24 Rcc1 exd5) 23 ... Rxd5 24 Rxd5 Rxd5 25 Rxe6 (25 Ba2 Rb5 26 b4 Bf7 27 Bc4 Rb6 28 Bxe6 Bxe6 29 Rxe6 is pretty equal) 25 ... Bf7 26 Re1 g5 is maybe a slight pull for Black.
- c) 22 ... Ne7!? 23 Rc7 Nxd5 (or 23 ... Rxd5 24 Re1, but 24 Rxd5 Nxd5 25 Rxb7? Rc8 wins) 24 Rxb7 Bc6 25 Rb4! is a saving device pointed out by Rybka.
- d) 22 ... g6 protecting f5 so that a later ... exd5 doesn't drop the pawn on f5 is also worthy of consideration.

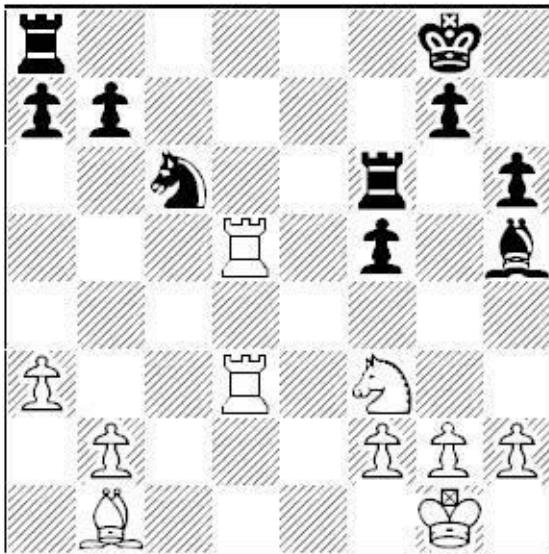
23 Rd3

Ambitious, but 23 Re1 Rxd5 (both 23 ... exd5 24 Bxf5 Bxf3 25 gxf3 Nd4 26 Bg4 Rf8 27 Re7 and 23 ... Bxf3 24 dxc6 Bxc6 25 Ba2 are about equal) 24 Rxd5 exd5 25 Bxf5 Bxf3 26 gxf3 Rd8 is pleasant for Black.

23 ... exd5?

A tame move. I get the feeling that Black was looking to just stabilize the position and secure a draw. Unfortunately, that's not quite what he's getting after the text. Black still had good tactical possibilities in his position: 23 ... Rad8 24 dxc6 (24 g4 Bxg4 25 dxc6 Rxd3 26 Bxd3 Bxf3 27 c7 Rc8 28 Bb5? – 28 Bc4 Bd5 29 Bxd5 exd5 30 Rxd5 Rxc7 31 Rxf5 Rc2 should end up equal – 28 ... Bc6 29 Bxc6 Rxc7 wins) 24 ... Rxd3 25 Bxd3 Rxd3 26 g4 bxc6 27 Ne1 Rd1 28 gxh5 Rxe1+ 29 Kg2 is a murky rook ending.

24 Rcx d5 Rf6



This looks inoffensive enough for Black, but it's actually got a bit tricky. White has all the trumps: active rooks, well-placed minor pieces, and a clear target on f5. Mamedyarov plays it really classily from here.

25 b4

A typical endgame idea: gain space and destabilize the opponent's pieces. Here b5 is a threat when Black loses control over a number of central squares.

Instead 25 Rd7? Bxf3 26 Rxf3 Ne5 wins.

25 ... Bf7?

Allowing the white rook to the seventh rank.

26 Rd7

This has gone wrong for Black. We are witnessing a very common ending scenario here: a player loses track of what he's doing (as Black did between moves 21-23), and then cannot seem to stop himself ruining his position further!

26 ... Bc4 27 Rd2 Re8

Maybe 27 ... b5 28 h4 a5!?.

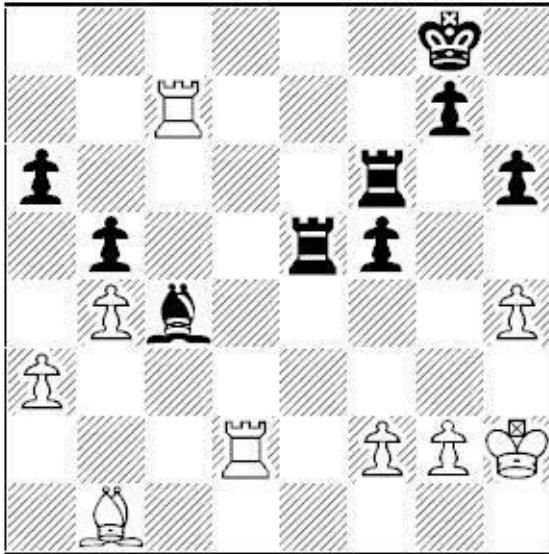
28 h4

Gaining more space, this time on the kingside.

28 ... b5 29 Rc7

Threatening Bxf5.

29 ... Ne5 30 Nxe5 Rxe5 31 Kh2 a6



32 g4!!

Stunning tactics ... and gaining space on the kingside as well of course!

32 ... Be6

32 ... g6 is a little better, but will shed a pawn on the sixth rank somewhere.

33 g5 hxg5 34 hxg5 Rf8

There's no defence:

- a) 34 ... Rg6 35 f4 wins.
- b) 34 ... Rf7 35 g6! Rf6 (if 35 ... Rf8 36 Re7 or 35 ... Rxc7 36 Rd8 mate) 36 Rd8+ Rf8 37 Rd6 Rf6 (37 ... Re8 38 Rxa6 wins) 38 Ba2!! Bxa2 (38 ... Kf8 39 Rd8 is mate, or if 38 ... Rxg6 39 Rxe6 Rgxe6 40 Re7) 39 Rd8+ Rf8 40 Rcc8 wins.

35 Re7 Re1

White wins too after both 35 ... Rd5 36 Re2 Bf7 37 Ba2 and 35 ... f4 36 Rd6.

36 Ba2 1-0

Analysing the classics

Here my approach is slightly different. Analogous to positional compilations in openings, I flag the key themes and annotate them lightly:

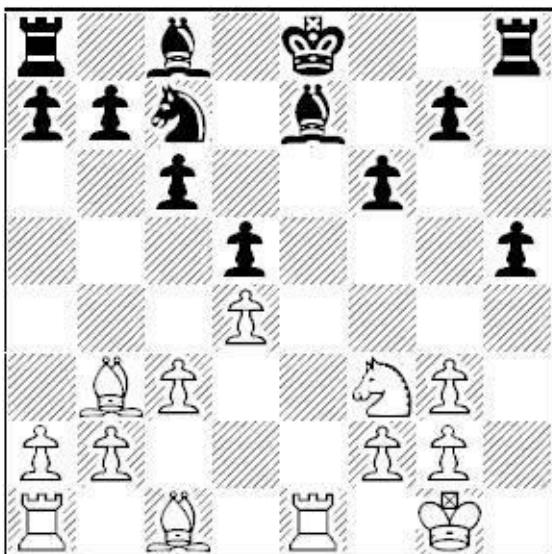
Game 53

S.Rosselli del Turco-A.Rubinstein

Baden-Baden 1925

Vienna Game

1 e4 e5 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 Bc4 Nxe4 4 Qh5 Nd6 5 Qxe5+ Qe7 6 Qxe7+ Bxe7 7 Bb3 Nf5 8 Nf3 c6 9 0-0 d5 10 Re1 Na6 11 d4 h5! 12 Ne2 Nc7 13 c3 f6 14 Ng3 Nxg3 15 hxg3



15 ... g5

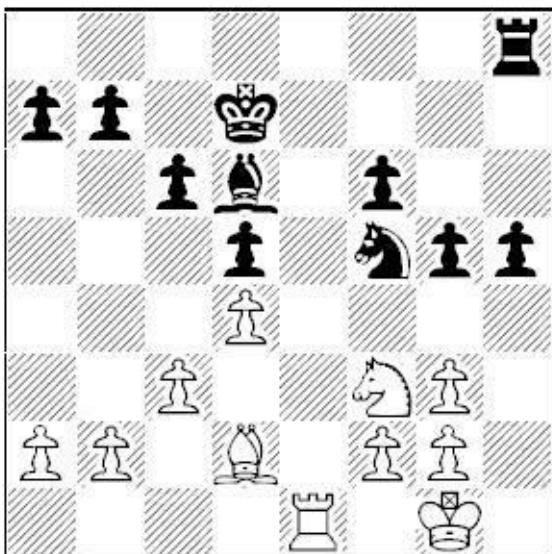
Black wanted to play two moves at once: ... g5 (to stop Bf4) and ... Bf5 (to stop White from activating his bishop on b3 with Bc2). He had to make a choice, so he chose ... g5.

16 Bd2

Better was 16 Bc2!.

16 ... Bf5 17 Re3 Kd7 18 Rc1 Bd6 19 Bc2 Bxc2 20 Rxc2 Rae8 21 Bc1 Rxe3 22 Bxe3 Ne8 23 Re2 Ng7 24 Bd2 Nf5 25 Re1

25 Ne1 looks more reasonable here.



25 ... c5!!

A very fine move. The key point is that White has little or no means of fighting Black's influence on the newly-opened a7-g1 diagonal. The combination Nf5 and Bc5 covers the d4- and e3-squares. White will require a number of moves before he can organize anything against this. Even if Black did not have the specific tactical sequence in the game, he would not be running any risk by creating a 'weakness' on d5: his activity is so great that he would always be able to play ... d5-d4 at some point if necessary.

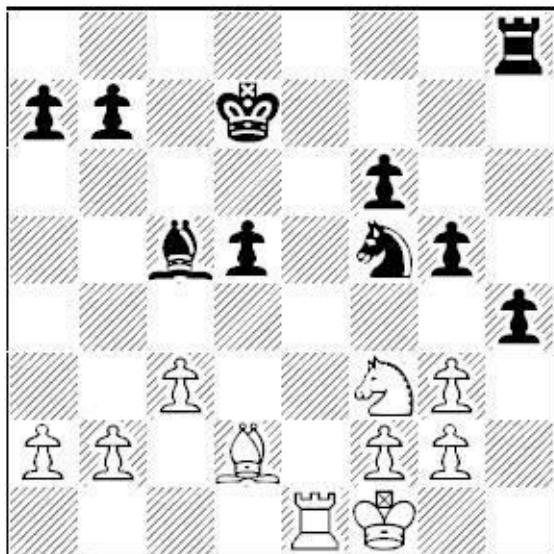
The pawn moves in the sequence between the 11th and 15th moves have actually been crucial in determining the contours of the current position:

- 11 ... h5, 13 ... f6 and 15 ... g5 has set up a kingside pawn structure that removes any active squares from the white knight and bishop.
- 13 c3 removes access to the a5-e1 diagonal for the white bishop.
- 15 hxg3 makes it harder for White to challenge on the a7-g1 diagonal: Be3 loses a pawn to

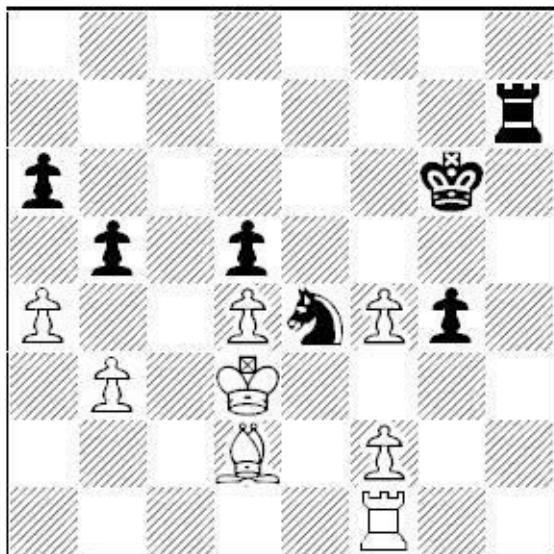
... Bxe3; fxe3 Nxg3!.

If White doesn't take on c5, then not only does he have to worry about the defence of his d-pawn, but he also gives Black the opportunity to gain more space on the queenside with ... c4 and to start a pawn storm with ... b5, ... a5 and ... b4.

26 dxc5 Bxc5 27 Kf1 h4



28 gxh4 g4 29 Nd4 Bxd4 30 cxd4 Rxh4 31 Bc3 Rh1+ 32 Ke2 Rh2 33 Rg1 Nh4 34 g3 Nf5 35 b3 Ke6 36 Bb2 a6 37 Bc3 Nd6 38 Ke3 Ne4 39 Be1 Kf5 40 Rf1 Rh8 41 Kd3 b5 42 a4 Rh7 43 Ba5 Rh8 44 Bb4 Rc8 45 Ba5 Ng5 46 Bd2 Ne4 47 Ba5 Kg6 48 Bb4 f5 49 Ba5 Rh8 50 Ke3 Re8 51 Kd3 Rc8 52 Bb4 Rc7 53 Ba5 Rh7 54 Ke3 Re7 55 Kd3 f4 56 gxf4 Rh7 57 Bd2



57 ... Nxd2

This is something I need to think about much more often. Why is it sometimes necessary to exchange a good piece for a bad piece? Very often a bad piece is bad because it has limited activity through being tied to the defence of a weakness. Or you can look at it another way: it is very good at one task (defending a weakness), but this prevents the piece from reaching its full potential. You exploit this in two ways:

- Exploit the activity of your own good piece to the fullest.
- Then exchange this piece for the opponent's bad piece at a moment of your choosing in order to pull apart the thread that was holding together the opponent's position.

58 Kxd2 Rh3 59 f3 gxf3 60 Rf2 Kf5 61 Ke3 Kg4 62 b4 Rh1 63 f5 Re1+ 64 Kd3 Re4 0-1

Final thoughts

The key to good endgame play lies at the end of the day – as with all things – in hard work and study. However, as I discovered early in my professional career, it's absolutely essential to make sure that your mental approach is right at the moment that you transpose into an endgame during a practical game. Constantly checking how the position would be without queens really helped me to make a better job of making that mental switch in the heat of battle.

Index of Games

[Adhiban.B-Sadler.M, Wijk aan Zee 2012](#)
[Anand.V-Sadler.M, Melody Amber, Monaco \(rapid\) 1998](#)
[Arribas Lopez.A-Sadler.M, Barcelona 2011](#)
[Cullip.S-Sadler.M, Hastings Open 1988](#)
[Danielian.E-Sadler.M, Wijk aan Zee 2012](#)
[De Haan.E-Sadler.M, Dutch Cup 2011](#)
[Elburg.F-Sadler.M, Dutch League 2011](#)
[Epishin.V-Gyimesi.Z, Bolzano 2000](#)
[Ernst.S-Harikrishna.P, Wijk aan Zee 2012](#)
[Fischer.R-Andersson.U, Siegen 1970](#)
[Garcia Ilundain.D-Speelman.J, Yerevan Olympiad 1996](#)
[Gheorghiu.F-Yusupov.A, World Team Championship, Lucerne 1985](#)
[Grover.S-Sadler.M, Wijk aan Zee 2012](#)
[Gurevich.M-Sokolov.A, USSR Championship, Moscow 1988](#)
[Hebden.M-Sadler.M, Hastings Chall 1991/92](#)
[Hodgson.J-Upton.T, Moscow Olympiad 1994](#)
[Korchnoi.V-Yusupov.A, Montpellier Cand 1985](#)
[Lautier.J-Short.N, Euwe Memorial, Amsterdam 1996](#)
[Mamedyarov.S-Wang Hao, Tal Memorial, Moscow 2010](#)
[NN-Sadler.M, Bedrijvenschaak \(rapid\) 2009](#)
[Ostmoe.G-Sadler.M, Oslo 2011](#)
[Paehtz.E-Sadler.M, Wijk aan Zee 2012](#)
[Paehtz.E-Sadler.M, Wijk aan Zee 2012](#)
[Polugaevsky.L-Miles.A, Biel 1990](#)
[Rosselli del Turco.S-Rubinstein.A, Baden-Baden 1925](#)
[Rubingh.O-Sadler.M, Dutch League 2002](#)
[Sadler.M-Arkell.K, British Championship, Swansea 1995](#)
[Sadler.M-Goudriaan.E, Veenendaal 2010](#)
[Sadler.M-Howell.J, Lloyds Bank Masters, London 1988](#)
[Sadler.M-Hummel.E, Amersfoort 2011](#)
[Sadler.M-Kasimdzhanov.R, Dordrecht \(blitz\) 2011](#)
[Sadler.M-Kovachev.D, Oslo 2011](#)
[Sadler.M-Kudrin.S, Lloyds Bank Masters, London 1988](#)
[Sadler.M-Lautier.J, Elista Olympiad 1998](#)
[Sadler.M-Munoz Pantoja.M, Barcelona 2011](#)
[Sadler.M-Pedersen.N, Dutch League 2002](#)
[Sadler.M-Sachdev.T, Wijk aan Zee 2012](#)
[Sadler.M-Sands.D, Kent U-18 vs. Es U-18 1987](#)
[Sadler.M-Smeets.J, Barcelona 2011](#)
[Sadler.M-Tong.Y, World U-16 Championship, Timisoara 1988](#)
[San Segundo Carrillo.P-Sadler.M, Euro Team Ch, Pula 1997](#)
[Scheeren.P-Yusupov.A, Eindhoven 1986](#)
[Schut.L-Sadler.M, Wijk aan Zee 2012](#)
[Seirawan.Y-Nikolic.P, Wijk aan Zee 1992](#)
[Shirov.A-Mamedyarov.S, Tal Memorial, Moscow 2010](#)
[Shirov.A-Thorhallsson.T, Reykjavik 1992](#)
[Szabo.L-Botvinnik.M, Budapest 1952](#)
[Taimanov.M-Yusupov.A, USSR 1982](#)
[Tal.M-Polugaevsky . 1st matchgame, Alma-Ata Candidates 1980](#)
[Tal.M-Uhlmann.W, Moscow 1967](#)

[Timman.J-Lautier.J, Ubeda 1997](#)
[Toloza Soto.P-Speelman.J, Bled Olympiad 2002](#)
[Tseshkovsky.V-Dvoretzky.M, Riga 1975](#)
[Van de Gracht.W-Sadler.M, Dutch League 2011](#)
[Van Oosterom.C-Sadler.M, Haarlem 2010](#)
[Van Oosterom.C-Sadler.M, Haarlem 2010](#)
[Yermolinsky.A-Speelman.J, Hastings 1995/96](#)
[Zagorskis.D-Sadler.M, Elista Olympiad 1998](#)