GAMBIT

101 Chess Questions Answered

Steve Giddins

Sound advice on all aspects of playing chess

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Introduction

This book covers a wide variety of aspects of chess, including tactics, strategy, openings, middlegame and endgame, chess history, computer chess and chess organization. It is aimed primarily at relative newcomers to the game, especially those who are familiar with the rules of chess, but have little or no experience of competitive play. Although the format of the book means that each topic can only be covered relatively briefly, I have done my best to select the most useful and instructive material I can find. I hope, as a result, that readers will find a great deal of valuable chess instruction in the book, and I believe that a player who studies this material thoroughly should obtain a good grounding in all the basics of chess.

Chess is one of the greatest of all games, and has survived and prospered for over 1500 years. At various times it has been embraced by states, and promoted and financed by them, whilst at other times, it has been outlawed and its practitioners persecuted. It has survived all those experiences, and remains an important part of Western culture. The development of chess-playing computers, and the Internet, has made the game much more accessible all round the world, and it is now possible to play chess online, against opponents from all corners of the world, at any time of day or night.

I have been playing chess for over 35 years, and remain as fond of the game as ever. One of the great things about chess is that the game can be enjoyed in many different ways. As my competitive drive has waned in recent years, so I have become more and more interested in chess composition and chess history. During 2007, I had a moving experience that brought home to me what chess can mean to people. At the Staunton Memorial tournament in London, I had occasion to see a chess set that had belonged to a remarkable man called Moses Sobkowski. During World War Two, Sobkowski had survived incarceration in no fewer than five Nazi concentration camps, including Auschwitz and Belsen. A passionate chess fan, his chess set never left his side throughout this appalling ordeal, and he remained a lifelong lover and supporter of the game. Looking at the set itself, an unremarkable wooden set, one could hardly begin to imagine the horrors that the little men had witnessed, but at the same time, one could not but feel proud to be involved with a game that had played a significant part in helping a man to survive the worst that his fellow man could inflict on him.

To those who read and enjoy this book, I hope that chess will become a source of pleasure and comfort to you too, in whatever trials life may hold for you.

Steve Giddins
Rochester, July 2008

Symbols

+	check	?	bad move
++	double check	??	blunder
#	checkmate	Ch	championship
!!	brilliant move	1-0	the game ends in a win for White
!	good move	½-½	the game ends in a draw
!?	interesting move	0-1	the game ends in a win for Black
?!	dubious move	*(D)*	see next diagram

QUESTION 1

Currently, I only play against friends and my computer. Should I join a club?

There are an enormous number of people who play chess, often quite regularly, but have never been to a chess club. Their chess is limited to playing at home and/or work, against family members and colleagues. Some of these players become quite competent at the game, and certainly many of them gain great pleasure from this form of chess, and do not feel any need to join a club.

However, there are a number of reasons why such players should at least consider giving club chess a try.

- By playing solely against a small group of acquaintances, it is very difficult to measure your true playing strength. If none of you have ever played against a more regular, trained competitive player, then you have no objective standard against which to measure yourselves.
- By the same token, it is also difficult to improve your game significantly if you always play against the same limited circle of acquaintances. This can be true even within a small club, of course, but by taking part in organized chess, you have the chance to meet a much wider range of players, and hence to develop your play.
- Playing organized chess in a club gives you the chance to progress beyond casual games, and to play 'serious' chess, i.e. games played with a clock, lasting several hours, and with something more than pride at stake.
- Finally, of course, there is the social aspect. Joining a chess club enables you to meet other people with a keen interest in chess, and to spend time in each other's company, and learn from each other. Many close, lifelong friendships have been formed as a result of two casual players meeting at the local chess club.

I have many times been approached by people who play only amongst their friends and then ask me to play against them. Quite often, they are optimistic about their chances, since, as they often put it, "I can beat my friend at work, and he can beat three of his friends, so I think I must be quite good" Usually, such players experience a sharp reawakening when they encounter a reasonable club player from outside their circle.

Much the same considerations apply to playing at home with a computer. Here too, your ability to develop as a player is likely to be limited by only playing the same opponent. Furthermore, there is the added fact that computers tend to play in a very unusual style, and playing only against computers is often not a good preparation when one comes to face human opponents. This matter will be discussed further in Part 8, but for now, I would just say that the player who only plays chess against his computer is missing out on a lot.

QUESTION 2

How should I go about finding and choosing a club?

Here, there are essentially two questions: how to find a local chess club, and how to decide which club to join.

Finding a Club

The growth of Internet chess and computers in general has led to some decline in club chess in recent years, but unless you happen to live in a fairly remote part of your country, you should be able to find a chess club reasonably nearby. There are a number of ways to find your local club. Sometimes personal contacts are enough, but if you do not know where to start, the local public library is usually a good standby. Most libraries maintain lists of local clubs and societies, and the details of the chess club can usually be found there. Another obvious resource nowadays is the Internet. A quick search should enable you to find the website of your national chess federation, which will often contain a listing of chess clubs in the country. If it does not, it should at least provide a contact address for further information, and you should not have too much trouble identifying the chess clubs in your area.

Choosing a Club

If you are lucky enough to have a choice of clubs in your vicinity, you will then need to decide which one to join. Obviously, this will depend in considerable measure on mundane factors, such as which one has the nicest club-room, which charges the lowest subscription, and perhaps even which one has the best selection of beers in the bar! In purely chess terms, however, you should try to find a club that has a reasonable number of members, and members of varying strengths. Tempting though it can be to bask in the glory of being a big fish in a small pond, your chess will not develop much if you are far and away the strongest player in the club. The same is true if you are far and away the weakest – it is much better to find a club where there are players of varying strengths, including some of approximately your strength, or a little better. These are the players from whom you can learn the most in a short time.

You should also look for a club that enters teams in the local competitive leagues, as this will give you the chance to play serious games. Of course, there is nothing to stop you joining more than one club, especially if they meet on different nights of the week. If you have the time to play chess several evenings per week, this can only help you to develop as a player. The only thing you need to beware of is that most leagues are likely to have restrictions on whether one player can represent more than one club, so you may have to use one club for your serious league chess, and another club for friendly games and/or internal club competitions.

Online Information about Chess Clubs

USA: http://main.uschess.org
UK: http://www.gtryfon.demon.co.uk/bcc/Uk_clubs/associationsandclubs/associations.htm

QUESTION 3 Where can I play chess on the Internet?

In many ways, chess is made for the Internet, and nowadays there are numerous sites where one can play chess, and well as following live broadcasts of the games of major tournaments. The two best, and best-known, sites are the Internet Chess Club, or ICC (http://www.chessclub.com), and Playchess (http://www.playchess.com). The latter is the playing server of the German chess software company ChessBase, which sells the world's most popular chess database program (ChessBase), and also one of the best-known and most popular playing engines (Fritz). Both sites charge a small annual subscription of about US$25 for full membership, although one advantage of Playchess is that you often get a free subscription to their site if you purchase a ChessBase product, such as Fritz.

On both sites, once you have joined, you can play chess over the Internet against other members. In practice, thousands of people from around the world are likely to be logged on at any given time of day or night, so it is usually possible to find an opponent 24/7. It is also possible to play many different time-limits, and although blitz games (in which each player has a maximum of five minutes for the whole game) are far the most common, it is often possible to play slower games as well.

Both the ICC and Playchess number many top grandmasters amongst their members, and as well as playing, you can also watch ('kibitz') the grandmaster games. Furthermore, when major international tournaments are taking place, both sites usually broadcast the games live, sometimes with grandmaster commentary, thus allowing you to follow the games and take an active part in discussing the moves played. This can be a very effective way of improving your game, as well as providing great entertainment.

There are also some websites which allow one to play much slower games, the equivalent of postal chess, where the time-limit may be 5, 10 or even 20 days per move. Traditionally, such 'correspondence chess' was often recommended as a good way to improve, since with such a time-limit, you can analyse the position at your leisure, consult opening books, etc. Unfortunately, the growth in strength of chess engines has largely killed off the point of correspondence chess, since whatever the rules of the event or website may say, you can in practice be certain that 99% of your opponents are using an engine. However, if this does not bother you, I can recommend a site such as www.letsplaychess.com, which seems to be one of the better correspondence chess sites.

Best Chess Sites for Playing Online

Internet Chess Club (ICC) – www.chessclub.com
Playchess (run by ChessBase) – www.playchess.com

QUESTION 4

What is the best place to get chess news and information?

Traditionally, the main source for news and information within the chess world was the printed magazine, but nowadays the Internet is a major rival. Even so, there are some great printed magazines still being published, and almost every country will have its own chess magazine, often more than one. Within the UK, there are two main magazines, *British Chess Magazine* and *Chess Monthly*. Both appear twelve times per year, and contain reports and games from major British and international chess events. *BCM* is the oldest surviving chess magazine in the world, having published continuously since 1881, and continues to be the main journal of record for British chess. *Chess Monthly* is slightly more entertaining in its approach, and generally tends to appeal more to the less experienced player, although that is not to say that it has nothing for the stronger player also. In the USA, the dominant magazine is *Chess Life*, published by the USCF.

Internationally, the best English-language chess magazine (indeed, the best chess magazine in any language) is *New in Chess*, published eight times per year in the Netherlands. This is the serious player's magazine, being read by almost every top grandmaster, from Garry Kasparov downwards. Here, you will find the best games of the top international tournaments, with annotations by the players themselves, and it is simply unparalleled.

In recent years, though, the traditional chess magazines have come under great pressure from the Internet, and there are now many fine chess sites, carrying news from around the world, free of charge. There are two main market leaders, at least as far as English-language news is concerned. One is *The Week in Chess* (http://www.chesscenter.com/twic), universally known by its acronym TWIC. As well as daily news updates from all major tournaments, each Monday evening the site publishes a file containing results and games from almost every significant national and international tournament in the world. In a full year, one can get something in the region of 200,000 games, all free of charge. Another indispensable news site is http://www.chessbase.com. Here, I should confess a degree of partiality since I am a regular contributor to the site, but even so, I sincerely believe it is the best site for English-language news reports from around the chess world, being especially strong on photographic reports. Chess Café (http://www.chesscafe.com) is updated weekly with articles on a wide range of aspects of chess.

Finally there is one other Internet site that should be mentioned, which is Chess Vibes (http://www.chessvibes.com). This Dutch-based site, which has an English page, specializes in video reports, and has been revolutionizing the way chess is presented on the Internet.

Best Chess Websites for News

www.chessbase.com
www.chesscenter.com/twic/twic.html
www.chesscafe.com
www.bcmchess.co.uk
www.chessvibes.com
www.fide.com

QUESTION 5

How is national and international chess organized?

I have to start by saying that anybody who has observed what has happened in the chess world in recent years might be forgiven for thinking that the phrase 'organized chess' is something of an oxymoron! However, passing on from such heretical thoughts, the principal international chess body is the International Chess Federation, known as FIDE, from its French initials ('Fédération International des Échecs'). FIDE is nowadays responsible for all international chess matters, including the organization of the world championship, various international team events, the maintenance of the international rating system, the awarding of master and grandmaster titles, etc. FIDE is made up of some 161 national federations, each of which has a vote in electing the President. The current President is a controversial, even bizarre figure, called Kirsan Iliumzhinov, who in his spare time is also the president of the semi-autonomous Russian republic of Kalmykia.

Ratings

International players are rated according to a formula developed in the 1960s by a physicist called Professor Arpad Elo. Depending on his results against other rated players, each player has a four-digit rating, which is recalculated every three months. The world's top players are rated over 2700, the average grandmaster around 2500-2600, whilst a reasonably strong club player would be about 2000.

Titles

The titles of International Master and Grandmaster are awarded on the basis of tournament performances. Depending on the average rating of its participants, each international tournament will have an 'IM norm' and 'GM norm', i.e. a set score, the achievement of which will represent an IM or GM qualification. The score needed will be less, the stronger the tournament. Thus, in a very strong tournament, a score of 5/9 might be enough for a GM norm, whilst in a weaker event, a player may need to score 7/9 even for an IM norm. Once a player has scored enough norms (normally three) and has achieved a minimum rating (2400 for an IM, 2500 for a GM), he will be awarded the IM or GM title, which he then keeps for life. There are separate titles, with lower qualification standards, for women players, although women are also able to achieve the full titles, if they meet the required standards.

National Federations

Each individual country has its own federation, and usually has its own rating system as well, based on results in domestic competitions. In England, the governing body is the English Chess Federation, or ECF. Most countries follow the Elo rating model – including the USCF, which pioneered Elo ratings. Some, like England, have an entirely different rating system. The ECF uses a three-digit grading system. Thus, Britain's top player, Michael Adams, has at the time of writing an international rating of 2726, but his ECF grading is 272.

QUESTION 6

Who is the current world champion and who were his predecessors?

In recent years, the world chess championship has become a rather confused affair, with multiple claimants to the title, rather as in boxing. However, at the time of writing, some clarity has recently been restored, and I can write with reasonable confidence that the current undisputed world champion is Viswanathan Anand, of India. He won the title in October 2007, by triumphing in a double-round tournament in Mexico, ahead of a field of eight players, who included the previous world champion, Vladimir Kramnik of Russia.

The full list of world champions is:

1886-1894	Wilhelm Steinitz
1894-1921	Emanuel Lasker
1921-1927	Jose Raul Capablanca
1927-1935	Alexander Alekhine
1935-1937	Max Euwe
1937-1946	Alexander Alekhine
1946-1948	title vacant
1948-1957	Mikhail Botvinnik
1957-1958	Vasily Smyslov
1958-1960	Mikhail Botvinnik
1960-1961	Mikhail Tal
1961-1963	Mikhail Botvinnik
1963-1969	Tigran Petrosian
1969-1972	Boris Spassky
1972-1975	Bobby Fischer
1975-1985	Anatoly Karpov
1985-2000	Garry Kasparov
2000-2007	Vladimir Kramnik
2007-present	Viswanathan Anand

Anand's victory represented a major break with tradition, since in the past, the world championship has almost always been decided by a set match between champion and challenger. The 'official' title is generally regarded as having started in 1886, when Steinitz defeated his strongest challenger, Zukertort, in a match. After several successful defences, he lost the title in 1894 to the young German, Emanuel Lasker, who went on to hold the championship for a record 27 years. His conqueror, the Cuban genius Capablanca, was widely considered unbeatable, but was surprisingly defeated in 1927, by the Russian émigré Alekhine. The latter was in turn upset in 1935 by the Dutch master Euwe, but unlike Capablanca, Alekhine had been wise enough to include a return-match clause in the contract with Euwe, and two years later, he regained the title decisively.

The first exception to the match tradition occurred when Alekhine died in 1946, taking the title to the grave with him. Up until then, the world championship had been the personal property of the champion, who could pick and choose his challenger as he wished. With Alekhine's death, however, FIDE stepped in and took control of the title. They organized a tournament in 1948 between the five strongest players in the world, to decide the new champion. This was

won convincingly by the Soviet star, Mikhail Botvinnik. FIDE also initiated a three-year cycle of qualifying tournaments to determine the challenger, who would then play a match against the defending champion. After two successful defences, Botvinnik was deposed by Smyslov in 1957, but the FIDE rules gave him the right to a return match, which he won the following year. The pattern was repeated against Tal in 1960-1, but by the time Botvinnik lost to Petrosian in 1963, the return-match clause had been abolished.

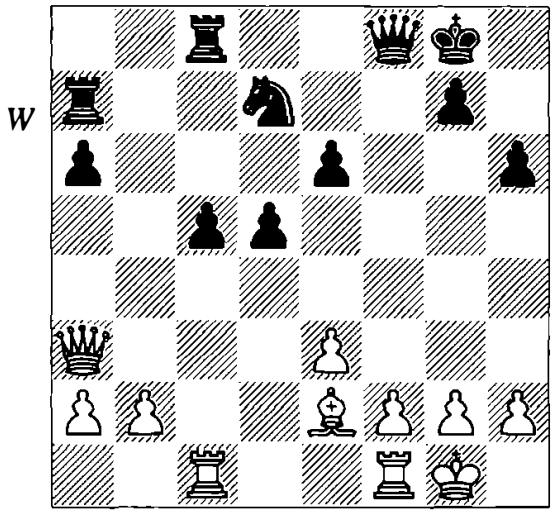
The next hiatus in the match tradition came in 1975, when Fischer refused to defend his title against the duly qualified challenger, Anatoly Karpov, who thus inherited the title by default. From 1993 onwards, a split in the chess world meant that FIDE tried to run an alternative world championship, on several different formats, and various other players laid claim to the FIDE title during the period 1993-2007. However, most players continued to recognize Kasparov and then Kramnik as the real champions in this period, and I have followed this route by ignoring the alternative claimants, and sticking with the recognized 'apostolic succession'. In late 2008, Anand is due to defend his title in a 12-game match against Kramnik, after which the world championship will again be won and lost in a set match.

And what is the best game ever played in a world championship match? Impossible to say, of course, but the following takes some beating:

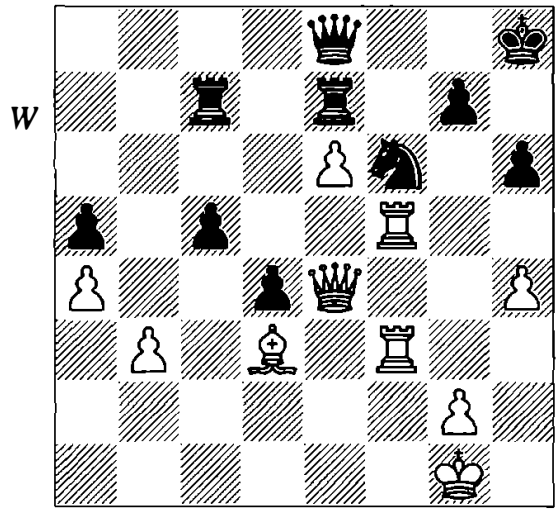
Fischer – Spassky

World Ch match (game 6), Reykjavik 1972

1 c4 e6 2 ♘f3 d5 3 d4 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 ♗e7 5 ♗g5 0-0 6 e3 h6 7 ♗h4 b6 8 cxd5 ♘xd5 9 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 10 ♘xd5 exd5 11 ♖c1 ♗e6 12 ♕a4 c5 13 ♕a3 ♖c8 14 ♗b5 a6?! 15 dxc5 bxc5 16 0-0 ♖a7?! 17 ♗e2 ♘d7 18 ♘d4! ♕f8 19 ♘xe6 fxe6 *(D)*



20 e4! d4?! 21 f4 ♕e7 22 e5 ♖b8 23 ♗c4 ♔h8 24 ♕h3 ♘f8 25 b3 a5 26 f5 exf5 27 ♖xf5 ♘h7 28 ♖cf1 ♕d8 29 ♕g3 ♖e7 30 h4 ♖bb7 31 e6 ♖bc7 32 ♕e5 ♕e8 33 a4 ♕d8 34 ♖1f2 ♕e8 35 ♖2f3 ♕d8 36 ♗d3 ♕e8 37 ♕e4 ♘f6 *(D)*

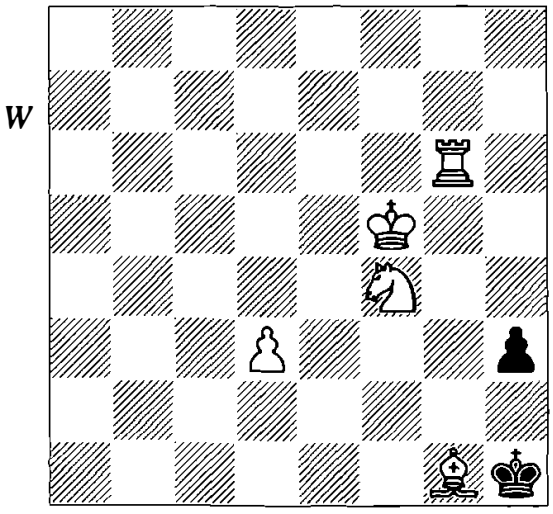


38 ♖xf6! gxf6 39 ♖xf6 ♔g8 40 ♗c4 ♔h8 41 ♕f4 1-0

QUESTION 7 What is chess composition?

As well as being played as a competitive game, chess also has another world: chess composition. This involves the composing of problem positions, designed to illustrate beautiful or unusual ideas on the chessboard. There are two distinct areas of chess composition, namely problems and endgame studies.

In a **chess problem**, the solver is required to find a mate within a specified number of moves. By convention, the solution must be unique and forced; if there are other, unintended solutions, the problem is said to be 'cooked', which is a fatal flaw. The solution will almost always involve surprising and unusual moves, and the positions will not necessarily resemble the sort of natural position one might expect to see in a game.

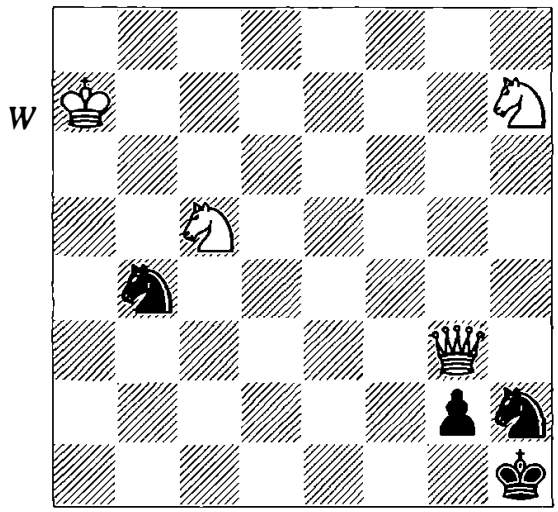


O. Wurzburg
St John's Globe, 1892
White to play and mate in 3

From the ordinary player's viewpoint, White's overwhelming material superiority means that winning is elementary, but that is irrelevant to a problem. Here, White must give mate, against any defence, by his third move. There is only one way to do so: **1 ♗a7 h2 2 ♖b6 ♔g1 3 ♖b1#**. This mating pattern, with the rook first blocking the bishop's diagonal, to let the black king out, and then mating by discovered check, is a classic problem theme. It was first shown in a 19th century problem published in an Indian newspaper, and is hence known as the Indian Theme. Here, there is also a second defence for Black: **1...♔h2 2 ♖h6 ♔g3** (or 2...♔h1) **3 ♖xh3#**.

As well as mate problems, there are other stipulations possible, generally of a more exotic nature, such as forcing the *opponent* to give mate, and there are problems in which the rules of the game are altered, or pieces with different powers introduced.

The other branch of chess composition is **'endgame studies'** Although they are also composed positions, these are much closer to a real game, in that the stipulation is not to give mate in a set number of moves, but simply 'White to play and win' or 'White to play and draw'. Many endgame studies are closely connected with the game, and some are even of theoretical significance for the endgame. In the main, however, they too are intended to show artistic ideas on the chessboard, and are often extremely beautiful. The following is one of my all-time favourites:



A. Gurvich
Bakinsky Rabochy, 1927
White to play and win

White is a queen up, but seems unable to prevent the far-advanced black g-pawn from promoting. However, he wins in exquisite style:

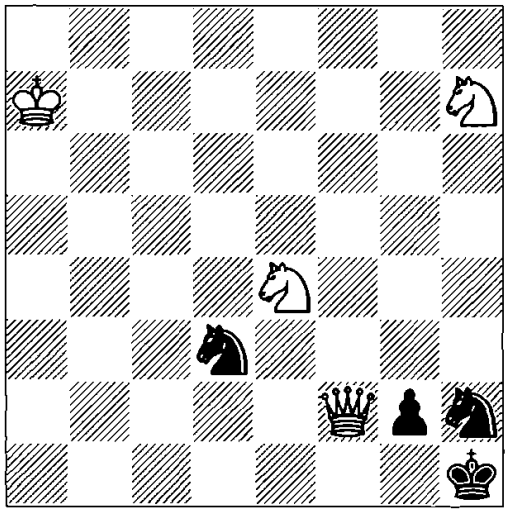
1 ♘e4

Threatening to meet 1...g1♕+ by 2 ♘f2+, when Black would have to give up his newly-acquired queen.

1...♘d3

Black takes control of f2, stopping White's knight check.

2 ♕f2!! *(D)*



Threatening a knight mate on g3, but also putting the white queen *en prise*!

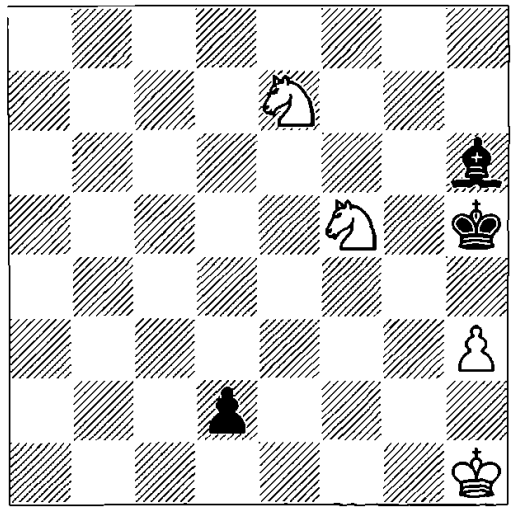
2...♘xf2

There is no choice.

3 ♘g3+ ♔g1 4 ♘g5!!

and White wins! Black cannot move his king or pawn. If he moves the h2-knight, he allows 5 ♘f3#, whilst if he moves the knight from f2, White plays 5 ♘h3# instead. The final dilemma facing Black is an example of a situation known as 'zugzwang', which often occurs in normal endgames – see Question 73 for more on this.

Here is another study:



M. Platov
Nauka i Teknika, 1925
White to play and draw

Here, White's task is to draw. It seems impossible, since he cannot prevent the black pawn from promoting, but like all good studies, the position conceals subtle hidden resources:

1 ♘g3+ ♔h4 (1..♔g5 2 ♘e4+ eliminates the pawn) **2 ♘ef5+ ♔xh3 3 ♘e3 ♗xe3 4 ♘f1 d1♕ stalemate**

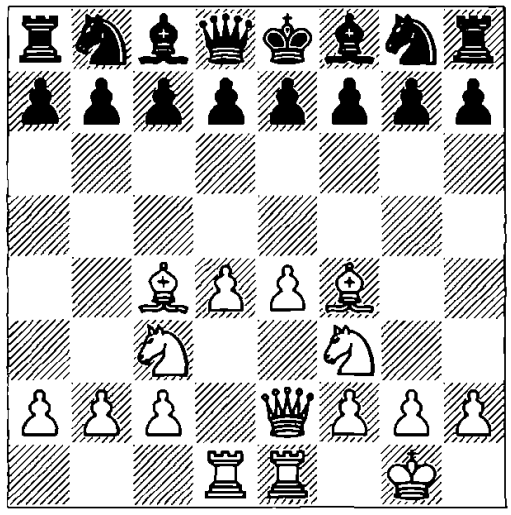
Most over-the-board players take very little notice of chess composition, which is a great shame. In terms of helping you improve your play, chess problems are of very little use. Studies are rather more useful in this respect, and as we shall see later (see Question 87), studies can be used very effectively for training purposes. However, the real reason to spend time on both problems and studies is simply for pleasure, since the ideas expressed can be incredibly beautiful. In the age-old debate about whether chess is game, art or science, there is no doubt that chess composition is the area that comes closest to art.

QUESTION 8 What should I be aiming to do in the opening?

Many players worry a great deal about the opening phase of the game, and almost all serious players spend a great deal of time learning openings. In reality, as great masters from Lasker to Portisch have pointed out, *the player's only requirement in the opening should be to reach a playable middlegame.* By 'playable', we mean simply a reasonable position – a little better, a little worse, perhaps, but that is all. It is wrong to expect to reach an overwhelming position in the first few moves. Naturally, if the opponent, by playing badly, gives you a chance to do so, then you should take advantage, but the basic aim of the opening is just to secure a reasonable middlegame position.

The main task in the opening is to develop your pieces. In the initial position, the pieces are all at home, like an army still in its barracks. Just as an army commander would not dream of launching a violent attack on his enemy without first mobilizing his troops and weaponry, so the same is true of chess. Before seeking to assault the opponent's position, the player must bring his pieces into active positions, where they exert their full power.

Naturally, there are many possible ways to develop, but a classical scheme of development, ignoring for the moment any possible interference from the opponent, is shown in the following diagram:



The white pieces have all been brought into action, his king castled into safety and his rooks connected. Note, too, how the pieces concentrate their attention on the four central squares, e4, d4, e5 and d5. These are generally the most crucial squares to try to control in the early stages of the game. The other thing to note is that White has only moved his two central pawns. In general, moving pawns does not contribute to piece development, and so it is best to minimize pawn moves in the opening. The e- and d-pawns need to move, to allow the bishops out, but other pawn moves are often superfluous in the opening.

The basic principles of development will be examined in more detail over the following pages.

QUESTION 9

Why is it bad to neglect the centre in the opening?

The easiest way to understand the importance of the centre is to think of the chessboard as a battlefield. Any military commander understands that if he controls the centre of the battlefield, and the high ground, he will be able to control the battle much more easily. He will also be able to deploy his troops to different parts of the field much more efficiently if he controls the central lines of communication and can switch his forces from side to side as the battle develops in different areas. The same is true in chess.

The following game shows Black suffering rapidly after neglecting the centre early on:

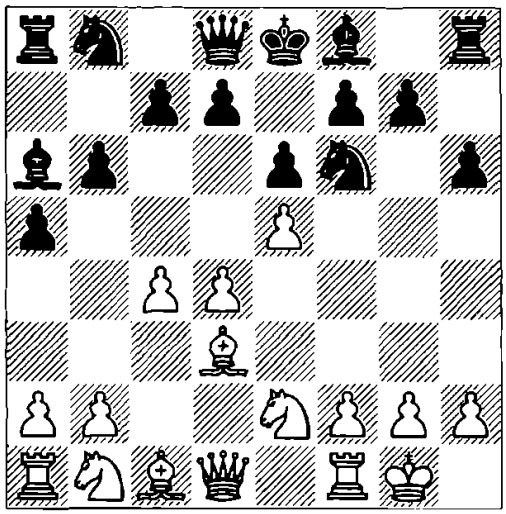
Morphy – J. Carr

Simultaneous display, Birmingham 1858

1 e4 h6? 2 d4 a5?

Black's first two moves exert no influence on the centre and do nothing to help his pieces develop. Morphy, meanwhile, continues to bring out his pieces and direct them towards the centre.

3 ♗d3 b6 4 ♘e2 e6 5 0-0 ♗a6 6 c4 ♘f6 7 e5 *(D)*



Black's knight must retreat, since the central squares d5 and e4 are under White's control.

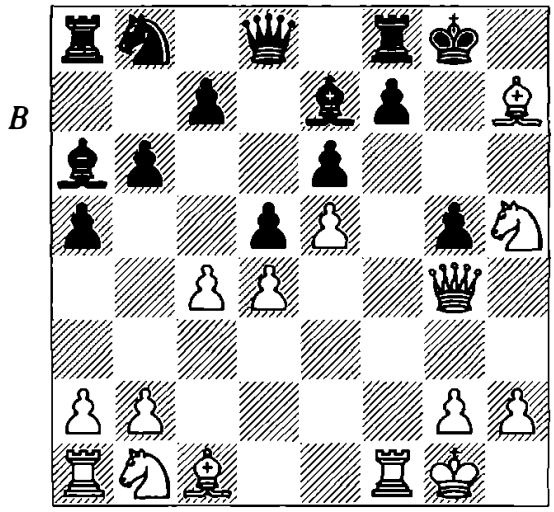
7...♘h7 8 f4 ♗e7 9 ♘g3 d5 10 ♕g4 0-0 11 ♘h5

White already has a decisive attack on the black king. Notice how easily White is able to bring his pieces over to the kingside, thanks to his control of the centre and rapid development.

11...g5

After 11...g6, 12 ♗xg6! is devastating.

12 fxg5 hxg5 13 ♗xh7+ *(D)*



13...♔h8

Black gives up a whole piece, but after 13...♔xh7 14 ♘f6+ White forces mate in a few moves; e.g., 14...♗xf6 15 ♖xf6 and there is no defence.

14 ♘f6 dxc4 15 ♗c2 ♕xd4+

Giving up another piece just to force off the queens. Black could instead have resigned.

16 ♕xd4 ♗c5 17 ♕xc5 bxc5 18 ♗xg5 ♘c6 19 ♖f3 ♔g7 20 ♗h6+ ♔xh6 21 ♖h3+ ♔g5 22 ♖h5+ ♔f4 23 ♔f2 ♖g8 24 g3+ ♖xg3 25 hxg3# (1-0)

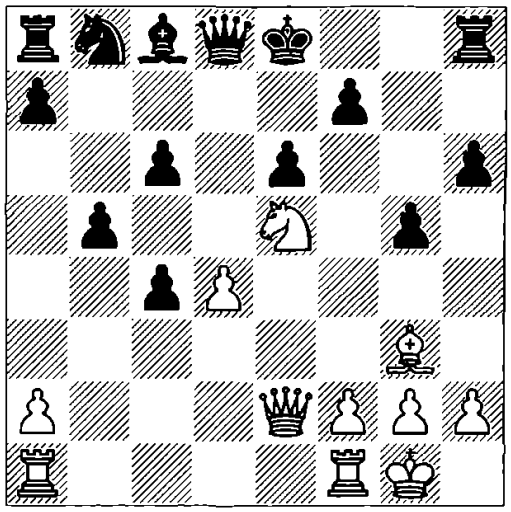
QUESTION 10

Why is it bad to make too many pawn moves in the opening?

We saw in the last example how Black's early pawn moves did not contribute to his piece development. If a player spends too much time moving pawns in the opening, his opponent can often outstrip him in piece development, and then launch a decisive attack, whilst most of the defender's forces are still at home and unable to contribute to the fight.

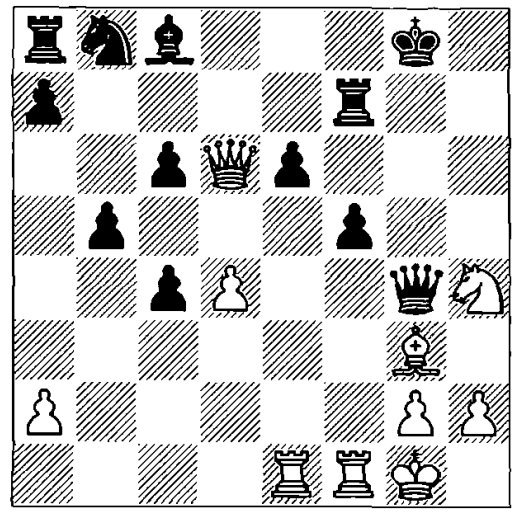
Cheparinov – Nepomniashchy
Wijk aan Zee 2008

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘f3 e6 4 ♘c3 ♘f6 5 ♗g5 h6 6 ♗h4 dxc4 7 e4 g5 8 ♗g3 b5 9 ♘e5 ♗b4 10 ♗e2 ♘xe4 11 0-0 ♗xc3 12 bxc3 ♘xc3 13 ♕c2 ♘xe2+ 14 ♕xe2 *(D)*



Black has won no fewer than three pawns, but he has no pieces developed at all, and his king is hopelessly exposed in the centre. Incredibly, Black, a strong young grandmaster, continues to ignore his development, and to play pawn moves instead. Not surprisingly, he is slaughtered in his bed.

14...h5 15 f4 f5 16 fxg5 ♕xg5 17 ♖ae1 h4 18 ♘f3 ♕g4 19 ♕e5 0-0 20 ♘xh4 ♖f7 21 ♕d6 *(D)*



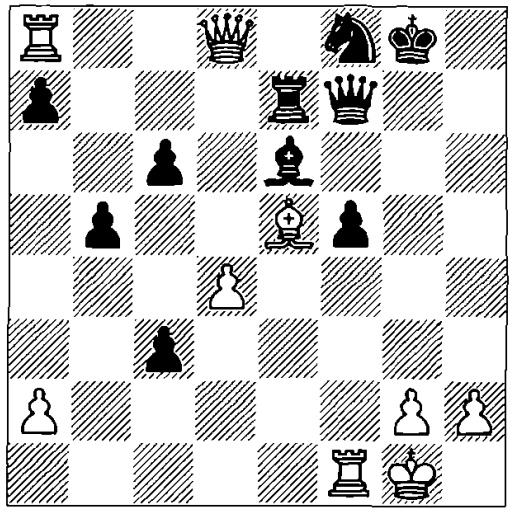
21...♘d7

This allows White's rook in, but Black cannot hope to hold the position anyway. He is fighting with two pieces against White's entire army.

22 ♖xe6 ♘f8 23 ♖e8 c3

23...♗b7 loses to 24 ♘xf5! ♖xf5 25 ♕e6+ and Black is mated quickly.

24 ♘g6 ♗e6 25 ♘e7+ ♖xe7 26 ♖xa8 ♕g5 27 ♕d8 ♕g7 28 ♗e5 ♕f7 *(D)*



29 ♗d6 1-0

A drastic example of too many pawn moves in the opening leading to disaster.

QUESTION 11

Why shouldn't the queen be developed early on?

Since the queen is the most powerful piece on the board, many beginners naturally assume that it must be good to bring her out as soon as possible, and one often sees such players open 1 e4 e5 2 ♕h5. In reality, though, such an approach is not usually good, since the queen can easily become a target. Precisely because of its great value, the queen usually has to move if attacked by a lesser piece, which leads to wasted time and a lack of development. The following game is a typical example.

Tolush – Alatortsev
USSR Ch, Moscow 1948

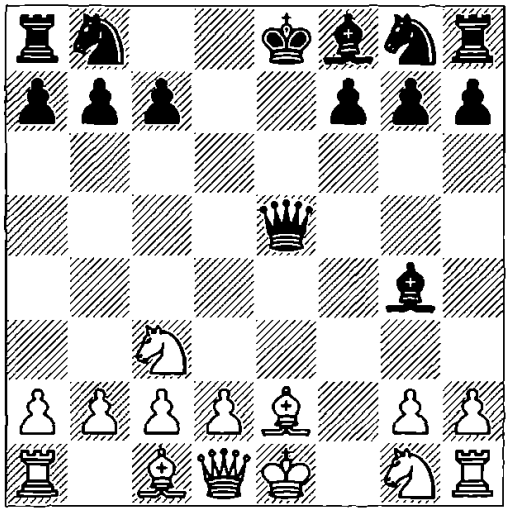
1 e4 e5 2 f4 d5 3 exd5 ♕xd5?

Already a bad move, exposing the queen to attack.

4 ♘c3

Developing a piece and at the same time attacking the queen.

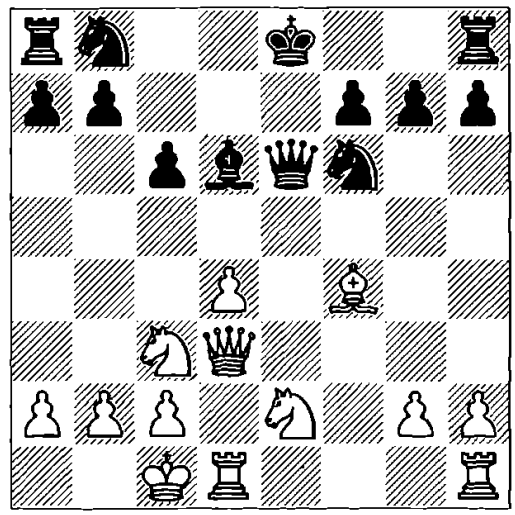
4...♕e6 5 fxe5 ♕xe5+ 6 ♗e2 ♗g4 *(D)*



7 d4

Another developing move that attacks the queen. Black is unable to develop himself, because of the need to keep moving his queen out of the attacks.

7...♕e6 8 ♕d3 c6 9 ♗f4 ♘f6 10 0-0-0 ♗xe2 11 ♘gxe2 ♗d6 *(D)*



White has almost every piece developed, whilst Black has only three pieces out, and his king remains uncastled. Now White strikes to exploit his development advantage.

12 d5! ♘xd5 13 ♘xd5 cxd5 14 ♕g3 ♗xf4+ 15 ♘xf4

Yet again the black queen is attacked, so he still cannot castle his king into safety.

15...♕h6 16 ♖he1+ ♔f8 17 ♕a3+ 1-0

From this game, it is clear that one must be very careful about bringing out the queen early on. Naturally, if some major material gain is possible, then it is probably worth doing so, but merely bringing out the queen, in the vague hope that it will prove useful, is generally not a good idea. It is far better to develop the minor pieces and castle before looking for a way to activate the queen.

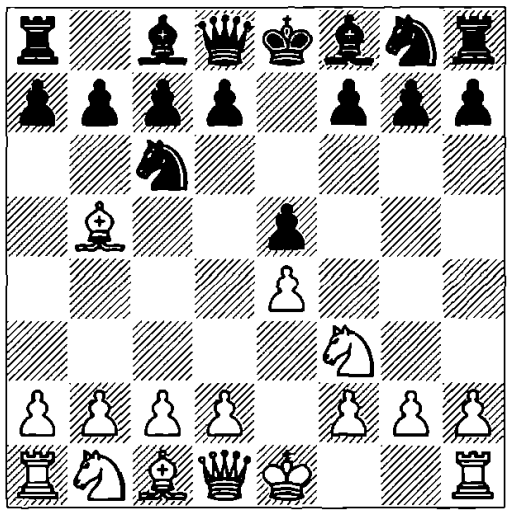
QUESTION 12 What are the main king's pawn openings?

The two most common opening moves are 1 e4 and 1 d4. After 1 e4, Black can choose the symmetrical reply 1...e5, leading to the 'Open Games', or go for an asymmetrical 'Semi-Open Game'

Open Games

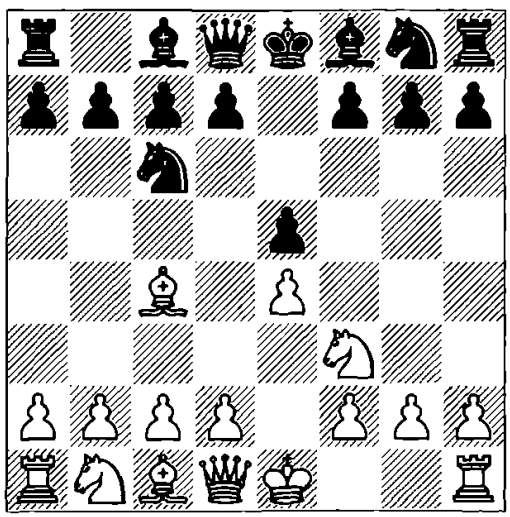
The main Open Games are as follows:

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 *(D)*



The *Ruy Lopez*, or *Spanish Game*. This is the most highly-regarded of all, and is the usual choice at grandmaster level. Note that **2...♘f6** (the *Petroff Defence*) is also possible.

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗c4 *(D)*

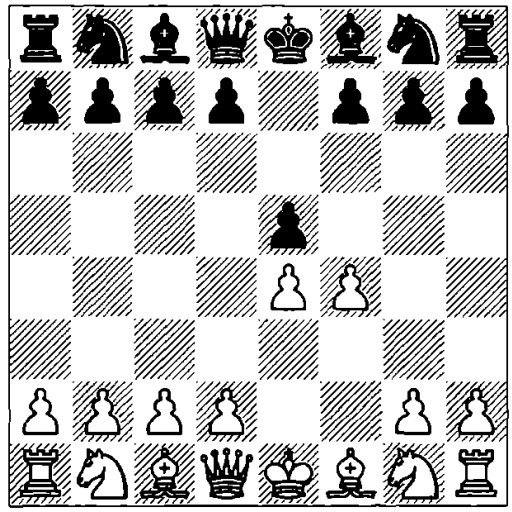


The *Italian Game*. Very popular in the 19th century, but less so today, although it is still used at grandmaster level occasionally. Now 3...♗c5 is the *Giuoco Piano*, while 3...♘f6 is the *Two Knights*.

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4

The *Scotch Opening*, so called because it was first played in a postal match between the cities of Edinburgh and London in 1824-8. After a long period in the doldrums, it was re-introduced into top-level play by Kasparov in 1990, and is now the main alternative to the Ruy Lopez at grandmaster level.

1 e4 e5 2 f4 *(D)*



The *King's Gambit*, the great 19th century weapon and still beloved of chess romantics. White sacrifices a pawn for attacking chances. Nowadays, it is distrusted at grandmaster level, but is still hugely popular at lower levels, as it leads to some of the most exciting attacking chess of any opening.

1 e4 e5 2 d4

The *Centre Game*, often leading to the *Danish Gambit* (2...exd4 3 c3), another attacking gambit opening. Nowadays it is hardly ever seen at grandmaster level, but can still be effective at club level.

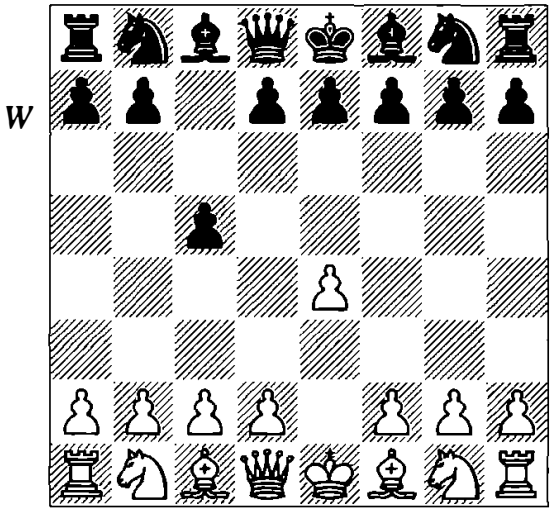
1 e4 e5 2 ♘c3

The *Vienna Game*. White generally prepares a sort of delayed King's Gambit, with a later f4. Although perfectly sound, it is nowadays very rare at master level.

Semi-Open Games

In these lines, Black avoids 1...e5 in favour of an asymmetrical development.

1 e4 c5 *(D)*



The *Sicilian Defence*, the most popular reply to 1 e4. Black uses his c-pawn to control the centre, planning to meet a later d4 with the exchange ...cxd4. There are many subvariations within the Sicilian Defence. One particular line, the *Najdorf Variation* (2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6) is an especial modern favourite, having been the regular choice of both Fischer and Kasparov.

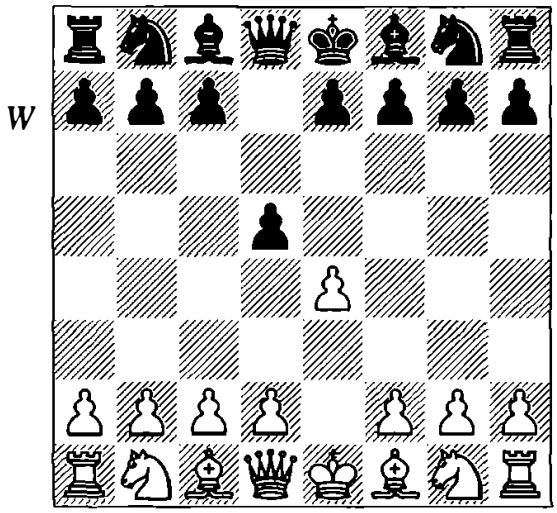
1 e4 e6

The *French Defence*. Black prepares to challenge the centre with ...d5 next move. This is a good, solid defence, but has the drawback of shutting in Black's bishop on c8.

1 e4 c6

The *Caro-Kann Defence*. Like the French, Black prepares ...d5, but here, he tries to keep open the diagonal of his c8-bishop. The Caro is another solid, reputable defence, although perhaps a little passive for many club players' tastes.

1 e4 d5 *(D)*



The *Centre-Counter*, or *Scandinavian Defence*. Black immediately strikes at White's centre pawn, and opens lines for his pieces. However, after 2 exd5 ♕xd5, his queen is exposed early, which as we have seen, can be risky.

1 e4 d6

The *Pirc Defence* (the closely-related *Modern Defence* is **1 e4 g6**). This is a direct challenge to the theory that Black should seek to occupy the centre. Here, Black allows his opponent to create a big pawn-centre, in the hope of being able to use it as a target. Although such a strategy is feasible at master level, I do not recommend it to less experienced players, as it requires considerable judgement to implement successfully.

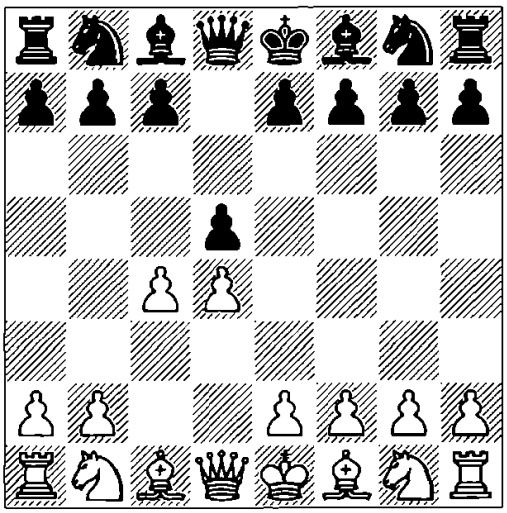
1 e4 ♘f6

The *Alekhine Defence*. This is another risky, provocative defence, in which Black tries to lure the white centre pawns forward and then counterattack. Again, I do not recommend it to the beginner.

QUESTION 13 What are the main queen's pawn openings?

It is probably fair to say that 1 d4 usually leads to a quieter, more positional game than 1 e4. The main openings after 1 d4 are as follows:

1 d4 d5 2 c4 *(D)*

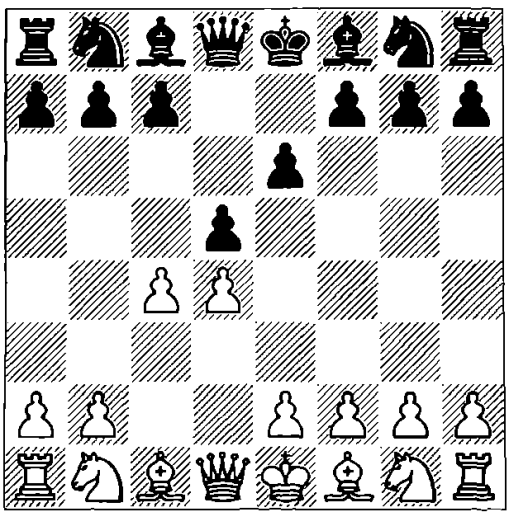


The *Queen's Gambit*. White offers a pawn (which Black can take but not easily hold) in order to create pressure on the queenside and centre. Black now has three main options:

1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4

The *Queen's Gambit Accepted*. Black concedes his opponent a slight pawn superiority in the centre, but is able to develop his pieces freely.

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 *(D)*



The *Queen's Gambit Declined*. Black maintains his pawn on d5, where it exerts control of the centre. However, this is at the cost of blocking in his bishop on c8, which is often a rather passive piece in this opening.

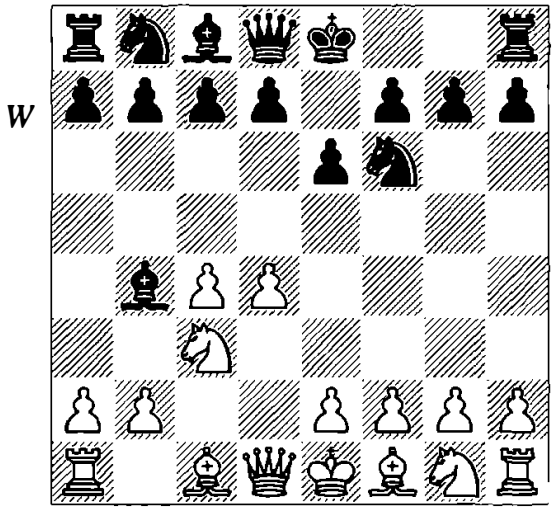
1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6

The *Slav Defence*. Black again maintains his d5-pawn, but here he tries to do so without blocking his c8-bishop. On the other hand, the pawn on c6 prevents Black's b8-knight from coming to its natural square. The Slav is one of Black's most solid replies to 1 d4, and at the time of writing, it is extremely popular at top level.

1 d4 ♘f6

This normally leads to what are called the Indian Defences. White will usually follow up with 2 c4, controlling the centre and seizing space on the queenside, and the play then depends on how Black replies:

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 *(D)*

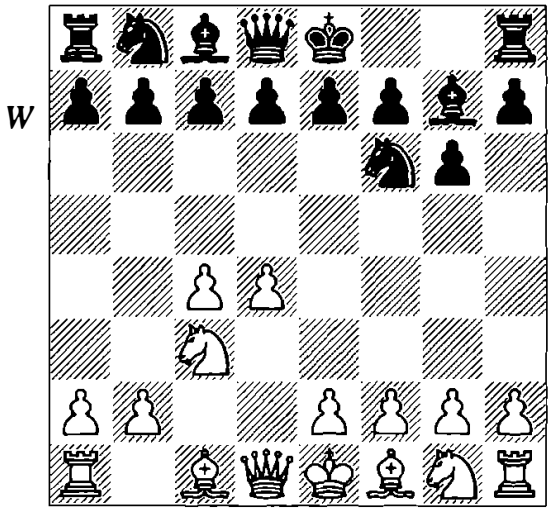


The *Nimzo-Indian Defence*. Black controls the e4- and d5-squares by pinning White's knight (note that 4 e4? is now answered by 4...♘xe4). This is one of the most reputable of all Black's defences, although it often entails exchanging bishop for knight on c3.

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 b6

The *Queen's Indian Defence.* This is the counterpart to the Nimzo-Indian Defence, and is employed when White avoids the Nimzo by playing 3 ♘f3 instead of 3 ♘c3. Black will 'fianchetto' his bishop on b7, using it to control d5 and e4.

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 *(D)*

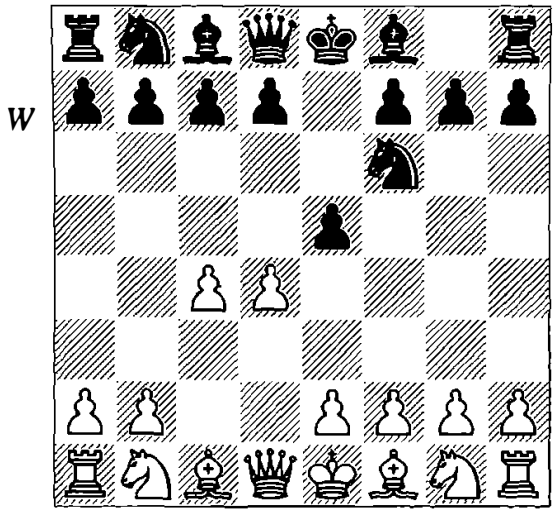


The *King's Indian Defence.* Another classic black defence to 1 d4. Black fianchettoes the dark-squared bishop, and will follow up with ...d6, ...0-0, and a strike at the central dark squares, by either ...c5 or, more commonly, ...e5. His bishop on g7 is a key piece and can often develop great activity. This was another favourite of both Fischer and Kasparov, in their day.

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 d5

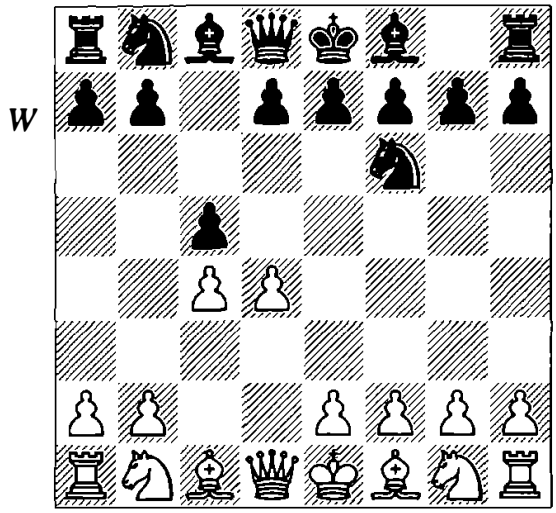
The *Grünfeld Defence.* Unlike the King's Indian, which often leads to blocked positions, the Grünfeld leads to a more open game. White frequently gets a big pawn-centre (after cxd5 and e4), but Black aims to counterattack from the sides. Again, Fischer and Kasparov both used the opening successfully, but the strategy is rather sophisticated, and not really to be recommended to the less experienced player.

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e5 *(D)*



The *Budapest Defence.* Rare at grandmaster level, but more popular with club players. Black sacrifices a pawn to create tactical chances. This is rather risky, but will appeal to those who like to seize the initiative early on.

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 *(D)*



The *Benoni.* This allows White to seize space after 3 d5, but Black then hopes to counterattack, usually by 3...e6 and 4...exd5 (the *Modern Benoni*), or by the gambit 3...b5 (the *Benko Gambit*). These lines are nowadays somewhat rare at grandmaster level, but still fully playable. The Benko Gambit, in particular, is a simple, easy-to-play line, which is justifiably popular at club level.

QUESTION 14

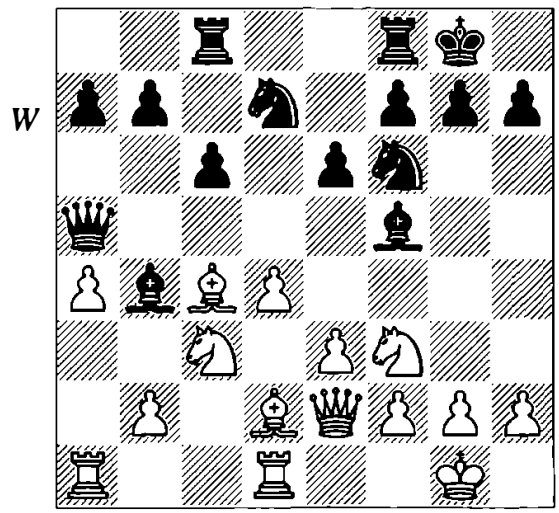
How much do I need to know about the openings I play?

As noted earlier, most chess-players fret about the supposed inadequacy of their opening knowledge. If one looks through specialized opening books, there is often a truly frightening level of detail, and some players imagine that they have to learn all this by heart. In reality, this is not the case. In order to get by at anything below master level, you need to know little more than the basic underlying ideas of the opening, and the typical plans associated with it. For example, how the pieces are usually developed, which part of the board you play in, etc. In most openings the concrete variations are less important, and only the basics need be learned in detail.

Take the example of the Slav Defence, 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6. Typically, the next moves will be 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 dxc4. Already, one can play the black position without knowing much more in the way of detailed lines. For example, if White does not play 5 a4 now, then Black can try to keep his extra pawn by 5...b5. Assuming White plays 5 a4, Black can develop thus:

1) Firstly, he develops his c8-bishop, usually to f5 or g4.
2) Then he plays ...e6, to let the other bishop out.
3) The king's bishop generally occupies the hole on b4, although d6 or e7 may also be possible locations.
4) Then Black castles kingside.
5) The queen's knight will usually go to d7, and later perhaps to b6 and d5.
6) The queen can go to a5 or e7, maybe even c7.
7) The rooks will usually go to some combination of c8, d8 and e8.

This might lead to a position such as the following, after 11 moves:



Already, we have mapped out Black's development scheme, and all he has to do in practice is attend to the details.

Once he is also familiar with some of the typical middlegame plans (e.g. preparing the pawn-break ...e5, or ...c5, playing on the queenside, containing White's central pawn advance e4, etc.), Black can play the Slav with confidence, even if his knowledge of specific sequences is very limited. Of course, memorizing some key variations is also useful, but it is no substitute for understanding the basic ideas and plans. Merely memorizing variations makes a player vulnerable once he is out of his 'book' knowledge, but if he understands what he should be doing, he can still find sensible moves for himself.

QUESTION 15 Should I specialize in one or two openings, or develop a broad repertoire?

Benefits of a Narrow Repertoire

If you stick to a very narrow, predictable range of openings, always choosing the same defence against a certain opening move, you are able to build up a very good knowledge of your chosen lines. Not only is there less to memorize, but by continually playing and studying a limited range of typical positions, you will get to know their ins and outs, the typical plans and tactical ideas they contain, the typical do's and don'ts in such positions, etc. All of this will enable you to play the positions better and should lead to improved results.

Benefits of a Broad Repertoire

There are some positive reasons for developing a broad repertoire. It increases your experience of a wide range of positions, and this will undoubtedly improve your game in the long term. It also avoids your chess becoming stale, and means that you have a back-up choice if your normal opening hits a problem of some sort.

A common motivation for playing a variety of openings is to reduce the danger that your opponents will know in advance what to expect from you, and will be able to prepare something to play against you. This is a genuine concern, but not such a major problem below master level. If you are playing international events, your games will appear in computer databases, and your opponents are likely to spend several hours before the game studying your openings and working out how to play against you.

My Advice

Overall, I would advise most players to stick to a fairly limited range of openings, and not to worry about learning too much by heart.

Even at grandmaster level, most games are decided not by opening knowledge, but by tactical mistakes in the middlegame, and this is even more true at club level. Providing you are playing a reputable opening, there is no reason to think that your opponent will be able to win the game by preparation alone, even if he has a good idea of what you will play. He is unlikely to secure more than a small advantage, and your general understanding and experience of the opening should enable you to hold your own.

So, my advice is to avoid spending a great deal of time on openings. Just learn enough to get by, and spend more of your chess study time improving your tactical ability. This will win you more games than extensive study of opening lines.

QUESTION 16

How should I go about choosing which openings to play?

This is another topic to which many players devote a great deal of soul-searching. It is important to understand that all of the mainstream openings, such as those listed in Questions 12 and 13, are good and playable, especially at amateur level. Consequently, there is no point in spending huge amounts of time searching for the very 'best', or the 'perfect' opening. It probably does not exist anyway, and even if it does, the benefit you will derive from playing that opening, rather than another reputable system, is so marginal as to be irrelevant.

As noted in Question 14 above, the average player only needs to know a limited amount about the openings he plays. Providing he understands the main aims of the opening, a few typical plans and a handful of basic variations, that is enough. It follows from this that relatively little depends on which openings he uses. Many players worry a lot about style considerations, agonizing about whether they are a 'tactical' or a 'positional' player, and then trying to choose openings which they think correspond to that style of play. In reality, though, unless a player is of at least international master strength, he is unlikely to have any pronounced style, and it will not matter whether he plays a 'sharp' opening or a 'quiet' system. Most of the mainstream openings are flexible enough to be handled in different ways.

Choosing a 'Hero'

A typical way of choosing an opening repertoire is to copy the openings used by a player one admires. Many players do this with the top grandmasters, and the popularity of certain openings, such as the Najdorf Sicilian, can be traced directly to the influence of Fischer and Kasparov. However, what is good at world-championship level is not always the best choice at lower levels of play, and it is often a good idea to choose a 'model' who is nearer your own playing strength. A relative newcomer to competitive chess would often be better advised to copy the openings of one of the stronger players in his club, rather than copying the repertoire of Anand or Kramnik.

Opening Compatibility

Another factor which should influence your choice of openings is compatibility and move-orders. As an example, if you like the Caro-Kann Defence against 1 e4, it makes a lot of sense to choose the Slav against 1 d4. This allows you to meet the English Opening, 1 c4, with 1...c6, when 2 d4 d5 transposes into the Slav, whilst 2 e4 d5 is a variation of the Caro-Kann.

Finally, one can also choose an opening repertoire by using one of the various dedicated books on the subject. There are many books which provide a complete repertoire, based on 1 e4 or 1 d4, with the author recommending specific lines against each black response.

QUESTION 17

What is the best way to introduce a new opening into my repertoire?

If you decide to take up a new opening, the most important thing to do is to develop an understanding of the basic ideas and plans. As we have noted above, it is this understanding which is the key to playing an opening successfully, rather than memorizing concrete variations. The best way to learn about the main ideas and plans of an opening is to study games by grandmasters who specialize in the opening, preferably with their annotations. Well-written commentaries will explain the ideas that underlie the moves, and will point out the important strategic and tactical features of the position.

As a typical example, we shall consider a Botvinnik game from the 1940s with the French Defence, Winawer Variation.

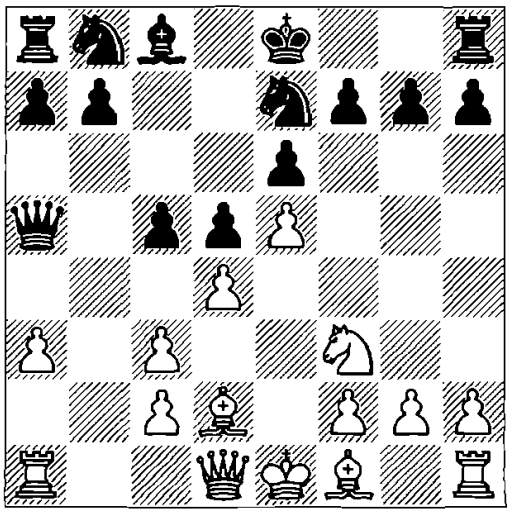
Tolush – Botvinnik
USSR Ch, Moscow 1945

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♗b4

The characteristic move of the Winawer Variation. Black induces White to release the central tension and prepares to spoil White's pawn-formation, at the cost of giving White the two bishops.

4 e5 c5 5 a3 ♗xc3+ 6 bxc3 ♘e7 7 ♘f3 ♕a5 8 ♗d2 *(D)*

B



8...c4

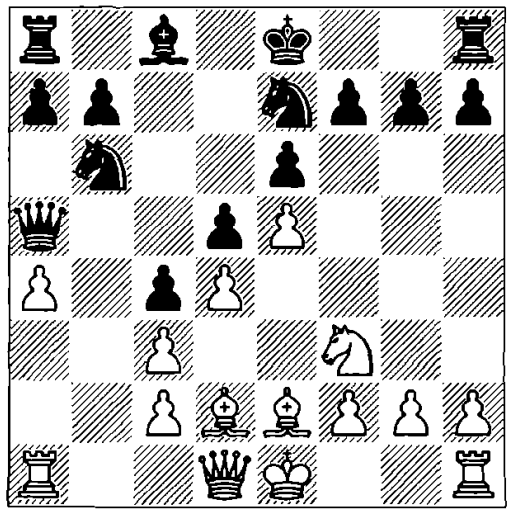
A typical plan in such positions. Black closes the position, in order to deprive White's bishop-pair of scope.

9 a4

In turn, a typical plan for White. He wishes to activate his bishop on a3. However, the drawback is that his a4-pawn is now hard to defend.

9...♘d7 10 ♗e2 ♘b6 *(D)*

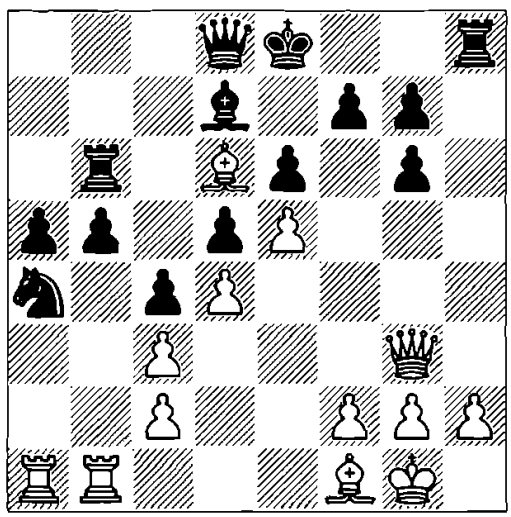
W



Black goes after the a4-pawn.

11 0-0 ♘xa4 12 ♘h4 ♘g6 13 ♘xg6 hxg6 14 ♖e1 ♗d7 15 ♗f1 b5 16 ♕f3 ♖b8 17 ♖eb1 ♕c7 18 ♗c1 a5 19 ♗a3 ♖b6 20 ♕g3 ♕d8 21 ♗d6 *(D)*

B

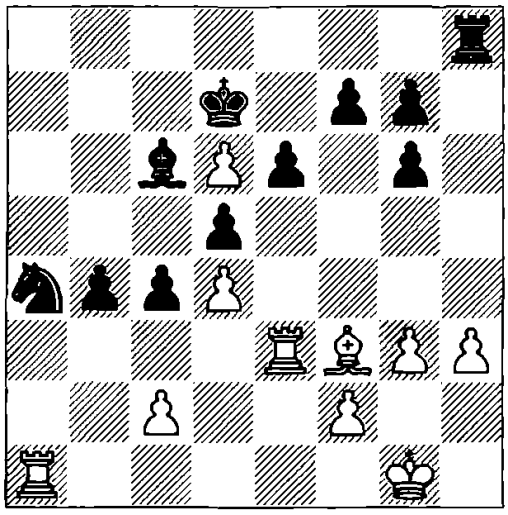


21...♖xd6!

A positional exchange sacrifice, another typical idea in such Winawer positions. The

blocked position means that the white rooks have no open files along which to operate. Meanwhile, Black's queenside pawns will roll forward.

22 exd6 ♗c6 23 h3 ♔d7 24 ♖e1 ♕h4 25 ♕e5 ♕f6 26 ♕g3 ♖h4 27 ♖e3 ♖f4 28 ♗e2 ♕h4 29 ♗f3 b4 30 ♕xh4 ♖xh4 31 g3 ♖h8 32 cxb4 axb4 *(D)*



The black knight is more powerful than either of White's rooks. The remainder is easy for Black.

33 ♖b1 ♖b8 34 h4 ♖b7 35 ♔h2 ♔xd6 36 g4 ♘c3 37 ♖a1 ♘b5 38 ♖d1 ♖a7 39 h5 g5 40 ♔g2 ♖a2 41 ♗e2 0-1

This game illustrates many typical Winawer ideas – blocking the position with ...c4, going after the a4-pawn, the positional exchange sacrifice, etc. Now consider the following Botvinnik game, which was played a year earlier:

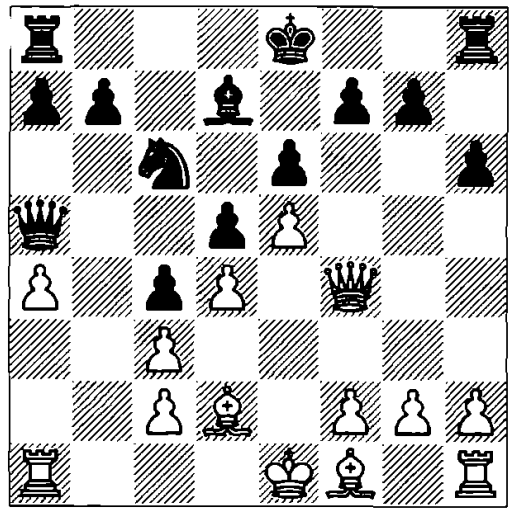
Smyslov – Botvinnik

USSR Ch, Moscow 1944

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 ♗xc3+ 6 bxc3 ♘e7 7 a4 ♘bc6 8 ♘f3 ♕a5 9 ♗d2 c4

Again the same plan of closing the position.

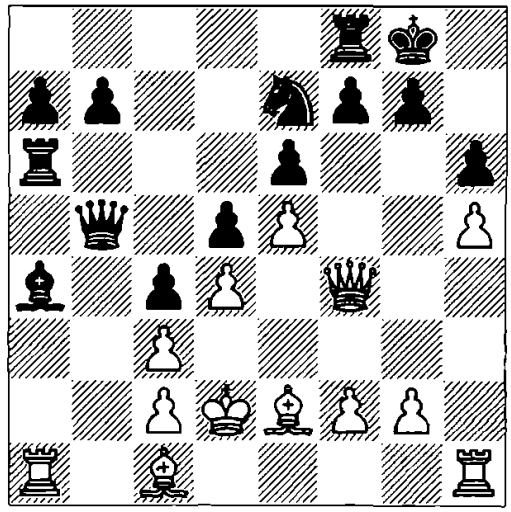
10 ♘g5 h6 11 ♘h3 ♘g6 12 ♕f3 ♗d7 13 ♘f4 ♘xf4 14 ♕xf4 *(D)*



14...♘e7 15 h4 ♗xa4

This time it is the bishop which annexes the a4-pawn.

16 h5 ♕b5 17 ♔d1 ♖c8 18 ♗c1 ♖c6 19 ♗e2 ♖a6 20 ♔d2 0-0 *(D)*



Black is basically just a pawn up, and eventually won after some complications.

By studying such games, with Botvinnik's annotations, you can gradually build up your understanding of the opening, which is the key to being able to play it successfully yourself. The same type of work can be done with any opening, by using annotated games by grandmasters who specialize in that opening.

QUESTION 18

How can I keep my opening knowledge up to date?

At grandmaster level, opening theory changes almost daily, but for the average player, such detailed niceties are of little relevance. However, it still pays to keep an eye on what is going on in the world of opening theory, and there are many ways to do so.

Traditionally, the main source of fresh information was printed chess magazines. These will usually contain the best games from major international tournaments, and from these, you can see what developments have taken place in your favourite opening. Since the late 1960s, the other main printed source was a Yugoslav publication called *Informator*. This appears four times a year, and contains the best games from international events, with annotations. The *Informator* series is languageless, using a system of graphical symbols to annotate the games.

Until quite recently, *Informator* was an indispensable tool for every grandmaster or serious player. In recent years, however, its pre-eminent position has been taken by computer-based information systems, by far the best-known of which is *ChessBase*. This database program allows you to store literally millions of games on your computer, many of them annotated. The program also has a sophisticated opening classification system, which allows you to look up a specific variation, and within a few seconds locate many hundreds, if not thousands, of master games with the same line. By purchasing the bi-monthly DVD-based *ChessBase Magazine*, you can update your database with all the games of major events, many with grandmaster annotations. In addition, each issue of *ChessBase Magazine* includes specialized opening articles by grandmaster authors.

Going back to the world of printed sources, I should also mention the publication *New in Chess Yearbook*. Despite its name, this appears quarterly, and consists of numerous articles on the latest trends in opening theory. Most of the articles are written by grandmasters, and contain a huge wealth of detailed opening information.

In summary, therefore, one does not have any problem in accessing fresh information on developments in opening theory. In fact, the real problem for the average player is to cope with the potential information overload. Unless you are a very strong player (at least 2100 rated, or 180 ECF), I would advise you to steer clear of such specialized publications as *New in Chess* or *ChessBase Magazine*, and to spend your chess study time improving your middlegame and endgame play. Such work will be far more productive over time.

QUESTION 19

Will playing offbeat lines and gambits give me more chances of winning quickly?

The short answer to the question is: yes, to a certain extent. But...

The advantage of using offbeat lines, and little-known gambits, is that your opponents are far more likely to be taken by surprise. Furthermore, in sharp gambit positions, the consequences of an inaccuracy can often be much greater than in quiet positions. A drastic example is the following miniature, won many years ago by a strong English amateur, David Mabbs:

1 d4 f5 2 g4?!

Rather than the positional main line 2 g3, Mabbs prefers a very sharp approach.

2...fxg4 3 e4 d5 4 ♗f4 dxe4 5 ♗c4

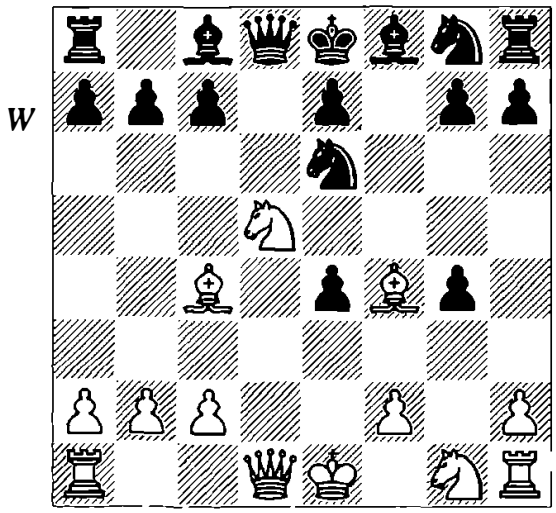
White continues to throw pawns onto the fire with reckless abandon.

5...♘c6 6 ♘c3 ♘xd4?!

Thrown on his own resources, Black misses a tactical point. After a developing move like 6...♗f5, Black would objectively have the advantage.

7 ♘d5 ♘e6?? *(D)*

The only move here was 7...e5, when Black still has a good game. Instead, he continues with the plan envisaged on the previous move, but a rude awakening is ahead.



8 ♘xc7+! 1-0

Black loses his queen after both 8...♘xc7 9 ♗f7+, and 8...♔f7 9 ♕xd8.

This is a drastic example of how quickly things can go wrong for the defender in sharp gambit lines. However, the gambiteer is taking a significant risk in playing the way White did here. If the defender plays correctly, he can usually secure at least a decent game, often by returning the material to complete his development. In such cases, the would-be attacker is often left with a position where he stands slightly worse, and has no attacking chances.

A classic example is the famous Lasker Defence to the Evans Gambit:

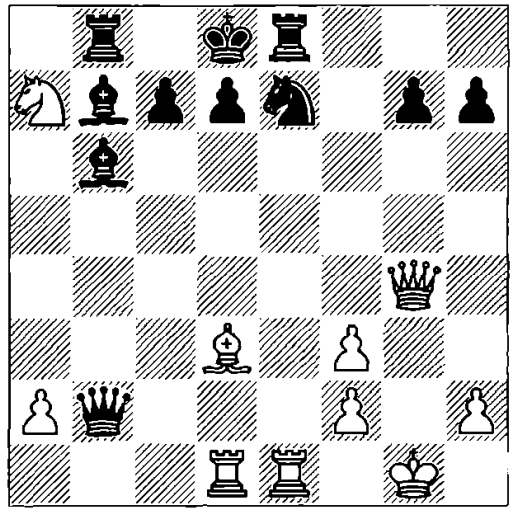
1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗c4 ♗c5 4 b4 ♗xb4 5 c3 ♗a5 6 d4

For decades in the second half of the 19th century, great attacking players such as Morphy and Anderssen had won spectacular games against opponents who captured the pawns on d4 and then c3. One typical example is the simultaneous game Blackburne-Martin, England 1876:

6...exd4 7 0-0 dxc3 8 ♕b3 ♕f6 9 e5 ♕g6 10 ♘xc3 ♘ge7 11 ♗a3 b5 12 ♘xb5 ♖b8 13 ♕a4 ♗b7 14 ♖ad1 ♗b6 15 ♗d3 f5 16 exf6 ♕xf6 17 ♖fe1 ♔d8 18 ♘xa7! ♖e8 19 ♕g4 ♘d4 20 ♗b2??

This gives Black a chance to turn the tables with 20...♗xf3! or even 20...♕xf3!. Instead, 20 ♗b5 would have won cleanly.

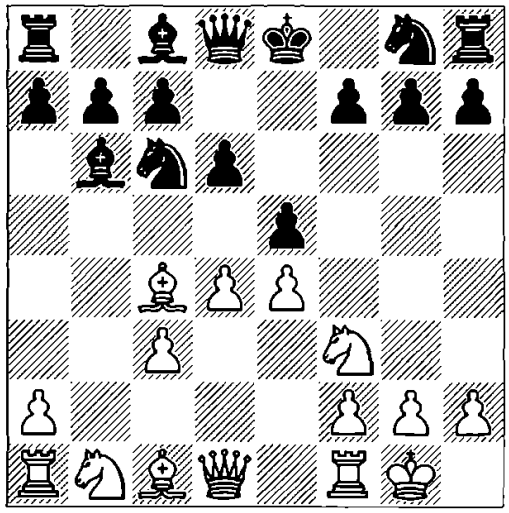
20...♘xf3+?? 21 gxf3 ♕xb2 *(D)*



22 ♕xd7+! ♔xd7 23 ♗b5# (1-0)

Such a game would inspire anyone to play the Evans. However, in the 1890s, Emanuel Lasker poured a large bucket of cold water on White's attacking ambitions, with the suggestion...

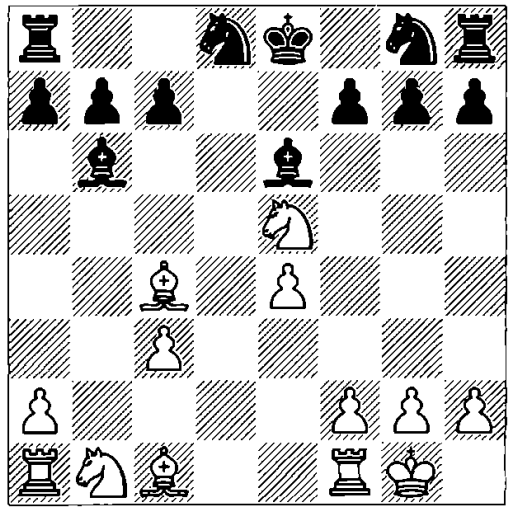
6...d6 7 0-0 ♗b6! *(D)*



With this cold-blooded move, Black refuses to take up the challenge by grabbing material, and instead offers the pawn back. White probably has nothing better than to regain his sacrificed pawn.

8 dxe5 dxe5 9 ♕xd8+ ♘xd8 10 ♘xe5 ♗e6 *(D)*

Now we have reached an endgame position in which White's broken queenside pawns mean that Black has at least equal chances, if not more. And from the viewpoint



of a romantic attacker playing White, this is hardly the position he was after – instead of his glorious sacrificial attacking chances, he has to defend a slightly worse endgame. This defence took much of the fun out of the Evans Gambit, although a few years later, the white players did manage to mount a small comeback with the move 7 ♕b3, instead of 7 0-0.

The problem with playing gambits nowadays is that all strong players are now aware of this technique of giving back the material to defuse the threats. Consequently, it is much more difficult to secure the type of open attacking play that the gambiteer likes, although, as the Mabbs game shows, it is not impossible. At the level of the average club player, gambits are much more likely to be successful, although one must be ready for the occasional disappointment.

QUESTION 20

Aren't there some masters who play crazy, offbeat openings?

There are indeed, and the fact that they can be successful with such lines, even against grandmasters, is a great advert for the merits of such an approach. There are many such players around. In England, the best-known is Michael Basman, an international master and former British championship runner-up. Always an original player, he gradually developed more and more outlandish systems, including such lines as 1 g4, 1 e4 g5 as Black, and even what he named the 'Creepy-Crawly Opening', which involves playing a3 and h3 (or ...a6 and ...h6 as Black) on the first two moves! Basman himself beat some very strong players with these lines, but probably the greatest-ever success for one of his openings came in 1980, when English grandmaster Tony Miles used the line 1 e4 a6 2 d4 b5 to defeat the reigning world champion, Anatoly Karpov, at the European Team Championships in Skara, Sweden.

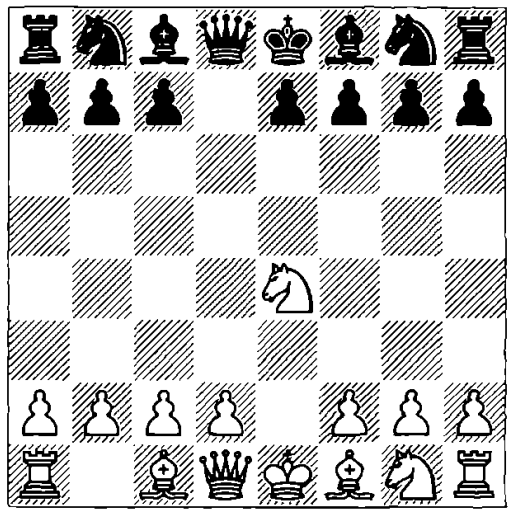
Basman's ideas are certainly fascinating, but they are very provocative, and only a really strong player can hope to be able to use them successfully. But there are other unusual and offbeat lines, which are much sounder and less risky positionally. One such is the move 1 ♘c3, usually called the Van Geet Opening, after a highly talented Dutch player, who has played and analysed it extensively. There is no real reason why 1 ♘c3 should not be perfectly playable, since it develops a piece and does not create any weaknesses in White's position. It also contains a distinct drop of poison, as Van Geet has demonstrated in many games:

Van Geet – Van Santen
The Hague 1966

1 ♘c3 d5 2 e4 dxe4

2...d4 leads to a quieter type of game. One example is 3 ♘ce2 e5 4 ♘g3 c5 5 ♗c4 ♘c6 6 ♘f3 g6 7 d3 f6 8 c3 ♘ge7 9 ♕b3 and White was better in Van Geet-Bobotsov, Beverwijk 1968.

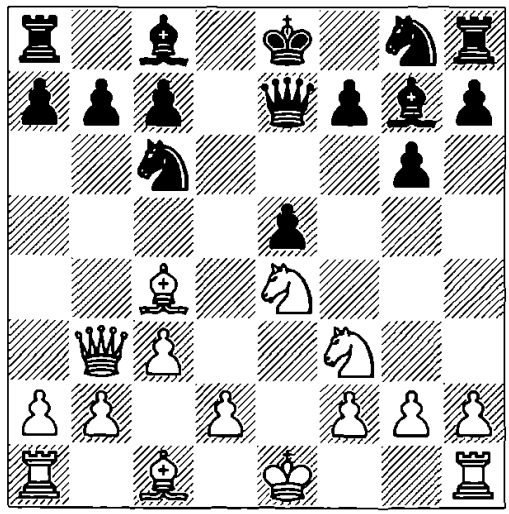
3 ♘xe4 *(D)*



3...g6

The trap 3...e5 4 ♗c4 ♗e7?? 5 ♕h5, winning at once, has claimed many victims.

4 ♗c4 ♗g7 5 ♘f3 ♘c6 6 c3 e5? 7 ♕b3 ♕e7 *(D)*



8 d4! exd4 9 0-0

Suddenly White has a winning attack on the open e-file.

9...♗d7 10 ♗g5 ♘f6 11 ♘xf6+ ♗xf6 12 ♖fe1 ♗xg5 13 ♘xg5 ♘e5 14 ♘xf7! 1-0

Of course, there are almost as many such offbeat systems as there are players, and it is

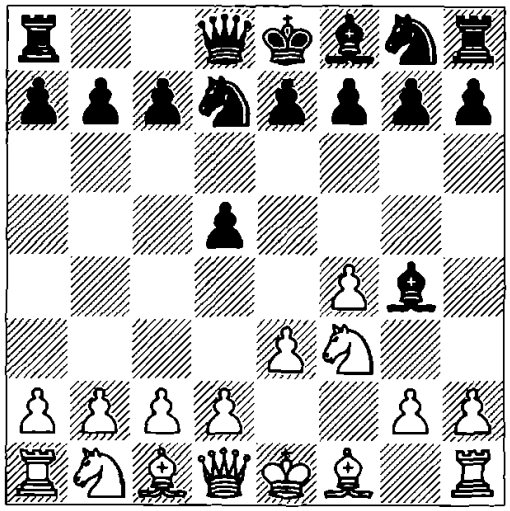
impossible to give examples of very many here. But one final illustration of how effective such home-brewed systems can be is the following game, by a Danish grandmaster:

Danielsen – Luther
Schwerin 1999

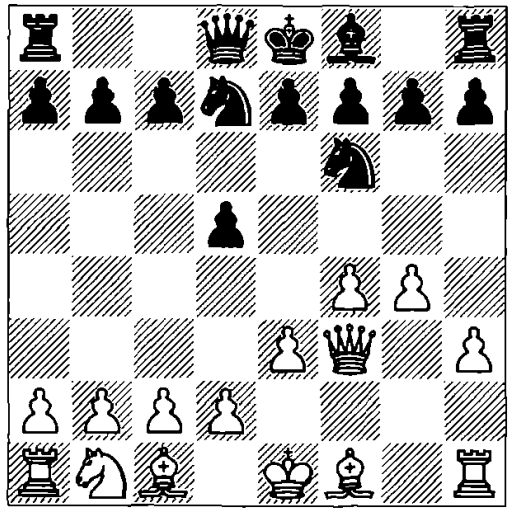
1 f4

Bird's Opening, a very rare guest in modern master play. However, Danielsen *is a* specialist in the line, having developed his own system, often based on the follow-up g3. This leads to a type of reversed Leningrad Dutch, although in view of his Nordic origins, Danielsen calls the whole line the Polar Bear System!

1...d5 2 ♘f3 ♗g4 3 e3 ♘d7 *(D)*

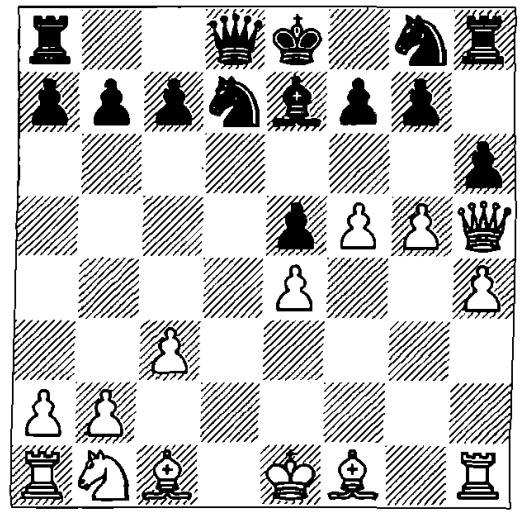


4 h3 ♗xf3 5 ♕xf3 ♘gf6 6 g4! *(D)*



A very striking, and also very strong, continuation.

6...e6 7 d3 ♗b4+ 8 c3 ♗d6 9 e4 dxe4 10 dxe4 e5 11 g5 ♘g8 12 f5 h6 13 h4 ♗e7 14 ♕h5 *(D)*



An incredible position. White's only developed piece is his queen, yet Black – a strong grandmaster, by the way – can hardly move.

14...♘b6 15 ♗e3 ♕d6 16 ♘a3 c6 17 ♘c4 ♘xc4 18 ♗xc4 0-0-0 19 ♖h2 ♕c7 20 ♗xf7 hxg5 21 ♕xh8 ♘h6 22 ♕xg7 ♘g4 23 f6 1-0

The possibility of a check on e6 wins in all variations.

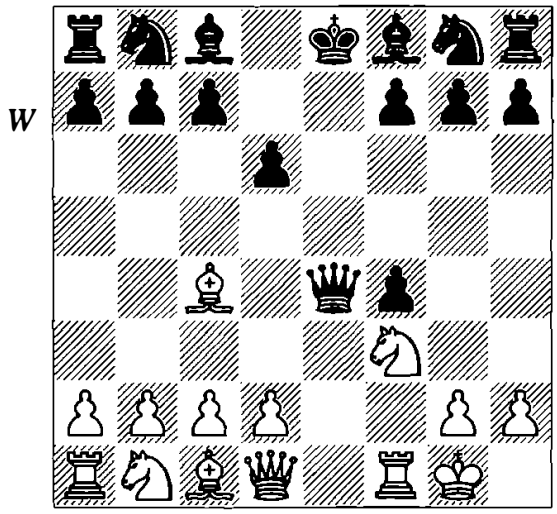
We have seen the advantages of playing such unusual lines – surprise value, and the possibility of developing detailed personal experience. Furthermore, the fact that such systems are barely covered in most openings books makes it difficult for one's opponents to prepare. So what is the downside? Well, the main point is that offbeat openings are offbeat for a reason – objectively, such systems do not promise any advantage against accurate defence, and most offbeat black openings will not equalize. However, in practical, over-the-board play, especially below master level, such systems can be very effective, as well as being great fun to play, and I would therefore encourage readers at least to give them some consideration.

QUESTION 21 What are the most important tactical themes?

In cricket, there is an old adage that 'catches win matches' The chess equivalent, although it neither rhymes nor scans, is that 'tactics win games'. Even at grandmaster level, most games are decided by tactical errors deep in the middlegame or endgame, and this is even more true at lower levels. So it is important to become familiar with the main tactical tricks in chess. The three most common devices are pins, forks and skewers. There are other types of tactical devices, but they are often closely related to these three, or are essentially a combination of them.

The Pin

The 'pin' is a situation where a piece is attacked but cannot move, because it would expose a piece of even greater value to attack. Take this position:

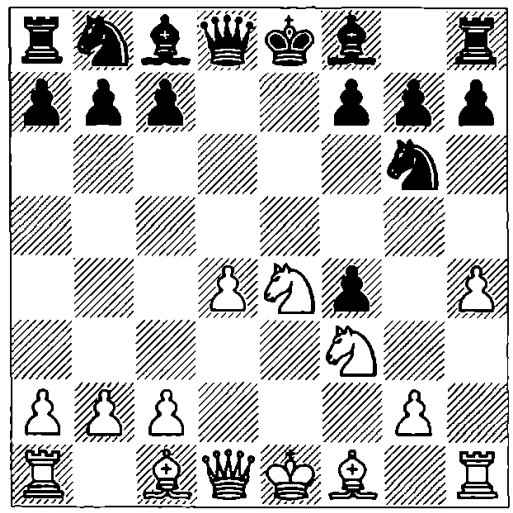


Black has just made the fatal mistake of taking a pawn on e4. Now by **1 ♖e1**, White attacks the black queen. The queen would of course like to move off the e-file, but it cannot do so, because that would leave the black king in check. Consequently, Black loses his queen.

A more sophisticated example occurred in the following high-level game:

Spassky – Seirawan
Montpellier Candidates 1985

1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 ♘f3 ♘e7 4 d4 d5 5 ♘c3 dxe4 6 ♘xe4 ♘g6 7 h4 *(D)*

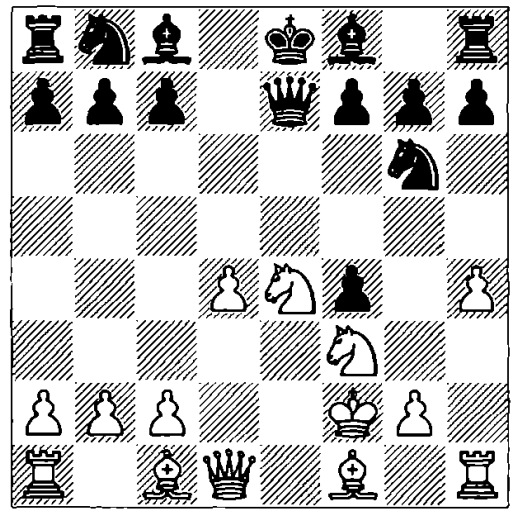


Here Seirawan played:

7...♕e7?

This attacks the white knight, which cannot move because it is pinned against his king. However, Spassky replied with a surprising move:

8 ♔f2! *(D)*

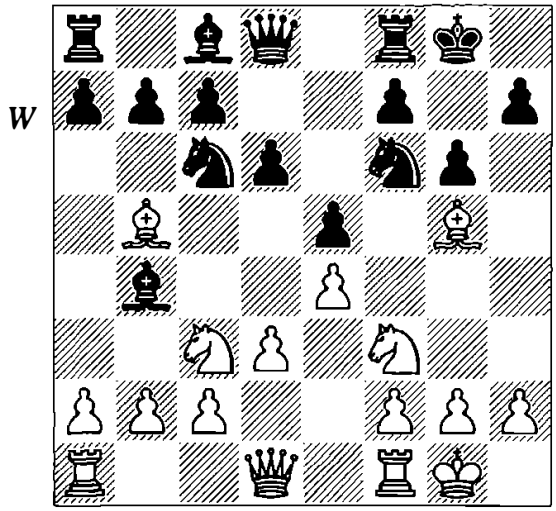


Seirawan now realized that if he takes the knight by 8...♕xe4 White replies 9 ♗b5+!. Now after a move such as 9...c6, it is the black queen which is pinned after 10 ♖e1. The only way to avoid the pin is to answer the

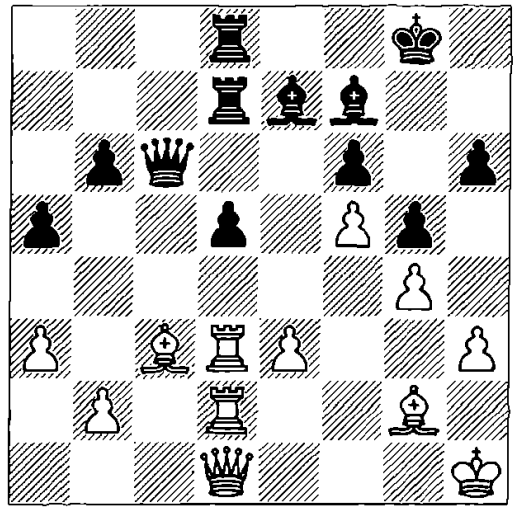
bishop check with 9...♔d8, but on closer inspection, this does not help either; after 10 ♖e1, the queen still cannot move away, because of 11 ♖e8#.

In the game, Seirawan saw this, of course, and did not take the knight on e4, but in that case, his 7...♕e7 move loses all its point, and the queen just stands badly. White went on to win in 32 moves.

It does not have to be the king against which is a piece is pinned. Any piece of greater value than the piece in front of it can serve for a pin.



In this position, the black knight on f6 is pinned against its queen; if the knight moves, the queen is lost. White can now increase the pressure on the pinned knight by 1 ♘d5, after which Black cannot defend the knight against the double attack from White's knight and bishop.



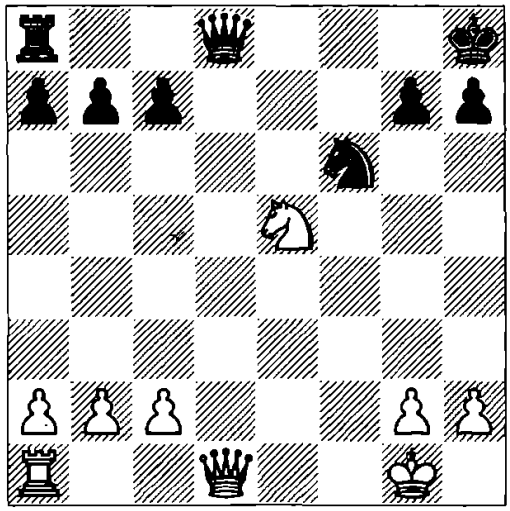
Karpov – Spassky
Montreal 1979

Here, a pin proves decisive late in the middlegame. After a long manoeuvring struggle, White has managed to get four pieces attacking Black's isolated pawn (see Question 64) on d5. For the moment, Black is defending with four pieces, but now White breaks the defence with the modest pawn advance **36 e4**. This attacks the d5-pawn for a fifth time, and it cannot be defended. Black cannot reply 36...dxe4 because the pawn is pinned against the rook on d7; White would simply reply 37 ♖xd7, winning a whole rook. Spassky instead surrendered the pawn, but lost a few moves later.

So we have now seen the value of a pin. The pinned piece is immobilized, and cannot move out of the attack, with the result that it is often lost.

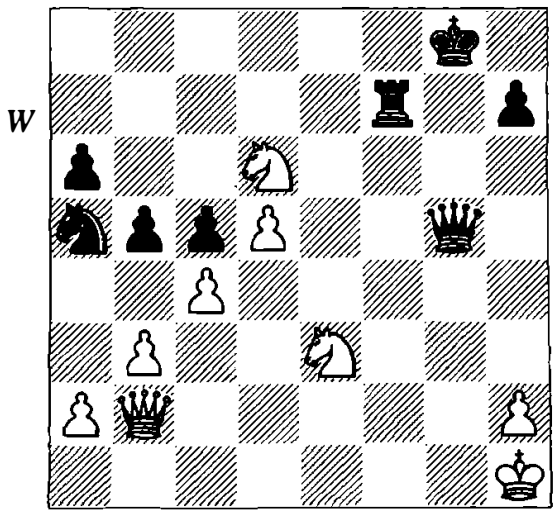
QUESTION 22 — OK, that is a pin. So what is a fork?

A fork is simply a multiple attack. One piece attacks two or more enemy pieces at once. Since the rules of chess only allow one piece to move at a time, it follows that one of the attacked units must be lost.



Here we see a simple knight fork. White plays **1 ♘f7+**, simultaneously attacking the black king and queen. Black must move the king out of check, and therefore has no time to save his queen.

This same knight-fork theme was beautifully exploited in the following world championship game:

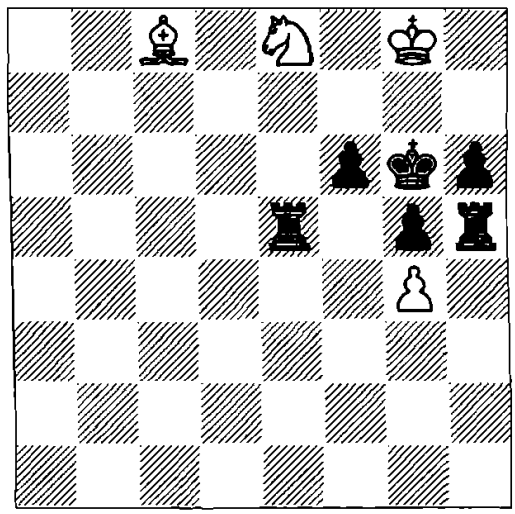


Petrosian – Spassky
World Ch match (game 10), Moscow 1966

White could regain the exchange by 30 ♘xf7, but instead, Petrosian found a way to win a whole rook by **30 ♕h8+!**. Black resigned immediately, since after the forced reply 30...♔xh8, White plays 31 ♘xf7+, forking king and queen, and emerging a whole knight ahead.

Obviously, any other piece can also fork enemy units. Many a beginner has fallen for the hoary old trap 1 e4 e5 2 ♕h5 g6?? 3 ♕xe5+, when the white queen forks king and rook.

Even the humble pawn can get in on the act, as the following example shows:



G. Kasparian (end of a study)
4th Prize, *Shakhmaty v SSSR*, 1935
White to play and win

This is the conclusion of an endgame study, and has been called 'The Mother of All Forks' White wins in exquisite style:

1 ♗f5+

Playing 1 ♘g7? immediately doesn't work, because Black can reply 1...f5, giving his king some air.

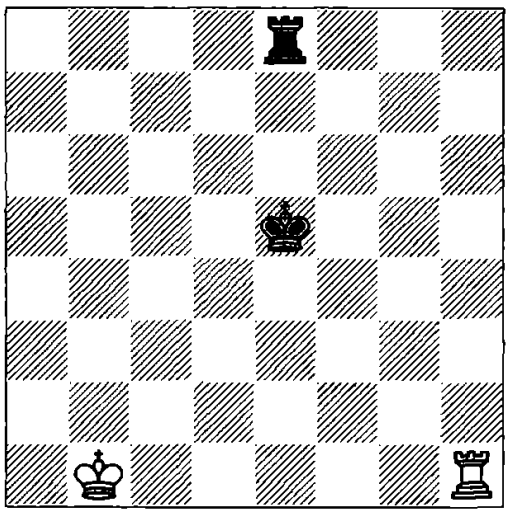
1...♖xf5 2 ♘g7!!

He threatens both 3 gxh5# and 3 gxf5#, and Black cannot prevent both of these mating threats.

QUESTION 23

So what is the third device you mentioned, a skewer?

The skewer is effectively an attack through a piece. One attacks the more valuable front piece, which must move away, thus exposing another piece to attack on the same line.

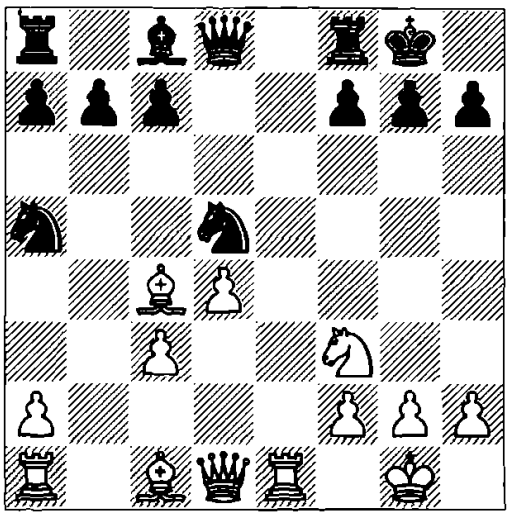


White wins by **1 ♖e1+**, and when the black king steps out of check, there follows 2 ♖xe8.

In the following game, Black loses a piece due to missing a skewer:

Euwe – Duffield
Weston-super-Mare 1924

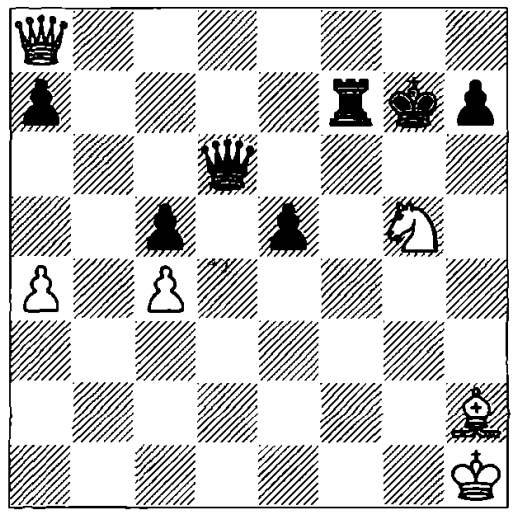
1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗c4 ♗c5 4 c3 ♘f6 5 d4 exd4 6 cxd4 ♗b4+ 7 ♘c3 d5 8 exd5 ♘xd5 9 0-0 ♗xc3 10 bxc3 0-0 11 ♖e1 ♘a5?? *(D)*



12 ♗xd5 1-0

Black resigned in view of 12...♕xd5 13 ♖e5, skewering the knight on a5.

In the following diagram, we see a beautiful combination involving both a fork and a skewer. Once again, this involves Petrosian, and is very similar to the combination we saw from him in Question 22.



Petrosian – Simagin
Moscow Ch match (game 5) 1956

White decided matters as follows:

45 ♗xe5+!

Forking king and queen, hence forcing Black to capture.

45...♕xe5 46 ♕h8+!!

Now a skewer. If the black king moves away, White plays 47 ♕xe5, so again Black must take.

46...♔xh8 47 ♘xf7+

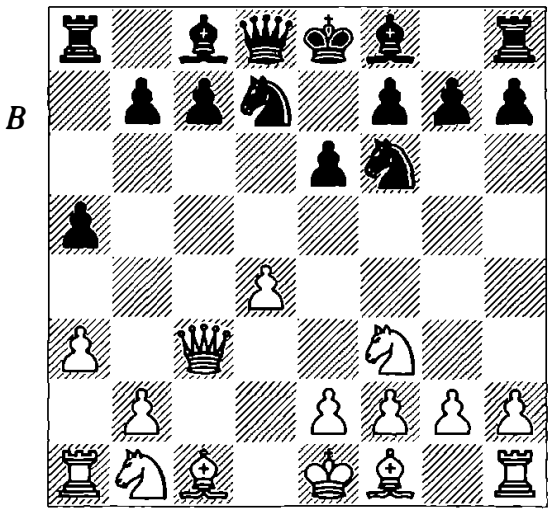
Now we see the point of the two previous sacrifices – Black's king and queen have been lured onto squares where they can be forked by the white knight. White will capture the queen on e5, remaining a whole piece up.

47...♔g7 48 ♘xe5 1-0

QUESTION 24

Are there other tactical devices, besides pins, forks and skewers?

There are indeed many other tactical devices, although a lot of them have connections with the basic ones we have examined. Here are a few examples:

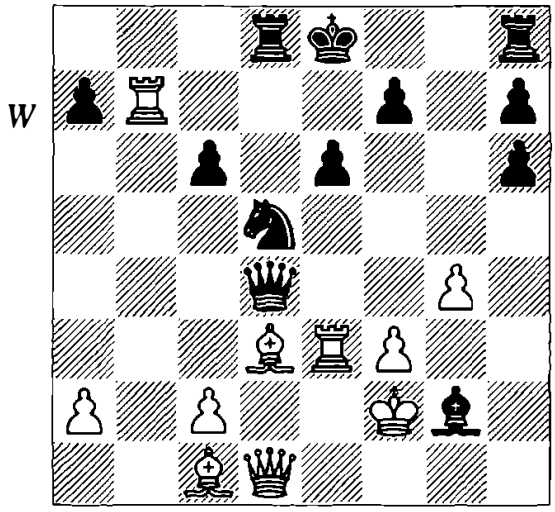


This is an example of a double attack which is not actually a fork. Black plays **1...♗b4!**. In order to save his queen, White must capture by 2 axb4, but after 2...axb4, his queen is attacked by the pawn, and the rook on a1 is also attacked. White emerges an exchange down.

Another very common tactical device is the discovered attack. A piece moves, unmasking an attack from another piece standing behind it. A very common example occurs after the moves 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3 ♘c6 5 ♘f3 ♕b6 6 ♗d3 cxd4 7 cxd4 ♘xd4? 8 ♘xd4 ♕xd4. Now Black's pawn-grab is punished by the move 9 ♗b5+, a discovered attack that wins the black queen.

The next example, from top grandmaster practice, is more complex (*see following diagram*).

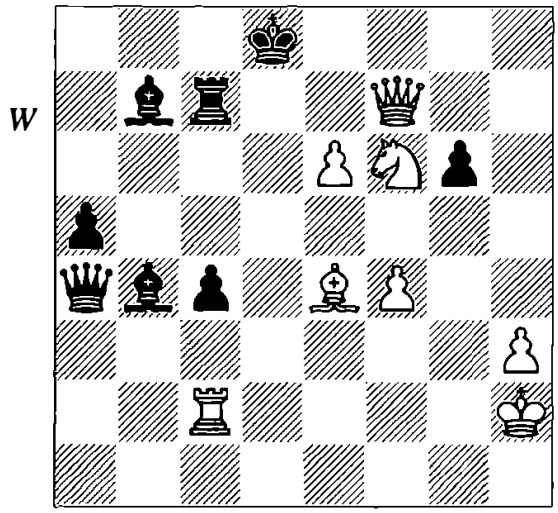
In this wild position, White decided the game with the spectacular **21 ♗g6!!**. The bishop threatens the f7-pawn, and at the same time uncovers an attack from White's queen on its opposite number. Now taking the queen



Anand – Lautier
Biel 1997

with 21...♕xd1 would allow a forced mate after 22 ♖xe6+ (exploiting the pin on the f7-pawn) 22...♔f8 23 ♗xh6+ ♔g8 24 ♗xf7#.

Another typical tactical idea is the deflection, where a defensive piece is lured away from a key defensive task.

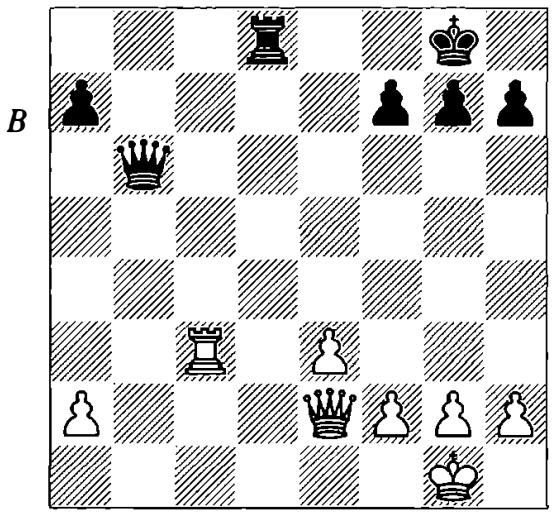


Cardoso – Fischer
Match (game 3), New York 1957

In this simple example, White decided the game by **39 ♖d2+**. Black cannot take the rook, because the bishop on b4 has to guard the f8-square; 39....♗xd2 40 ♕f8+ would force

mate next move. On the other hand, 39...♔c8 leads to mate after 40 ♕g8+. Fischer played **39...♗d5** and resigned after **40 ♖xd5+**.

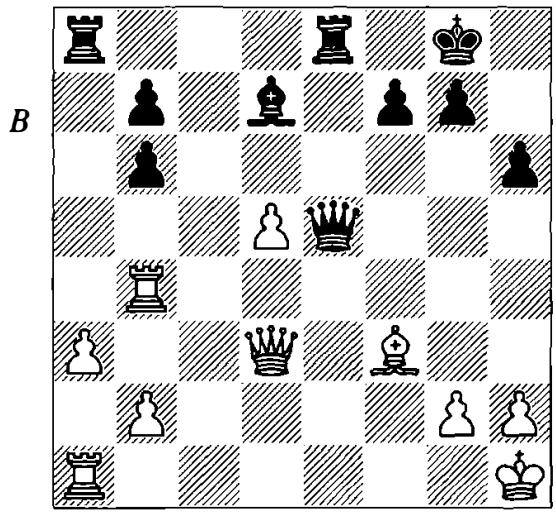
Many tactical operations are based on the weakness of the back rank. The following is a particularly famous example:



O. Bernstein – Capablanca
Moscow 1914

Capablanca ended the game with the beautiful move **29...♕b2!!**. White is defenceless, because of his back-rank weakness. 30 ♕xb2 ♖d1# is mate, 30 ♖c2 loses to 30...♕b1+, whilst after 30 ♕e1, Black again exploits the back rank with 30...♕xc3! (31 ♕xc3 ♖d1+ mates).

In the next example, a weak back rank results in the game being decided by a thunderbolt, seemingly from a clear sky:



Mikenas – Bronstein
USSR Ch, Tallinn 1965

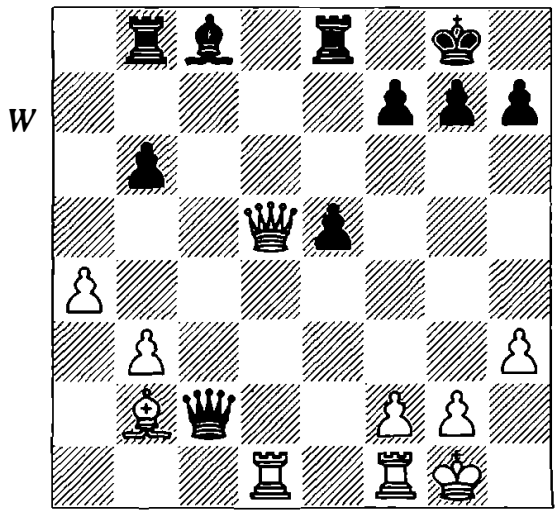
The spectacular **24...♖xa3!!** forced White's resignation. 25 bxa3 ♕xa1+, 25 ♖xa3 ♕e1+, 25 ♕xa3 ♕e1+ and 25 ♕d1 ♖xa1 26 ♕xa1 ♕e1+ all result in a back-rank mate.

QUESTION 25

What is the best way to improve my tactical skill?

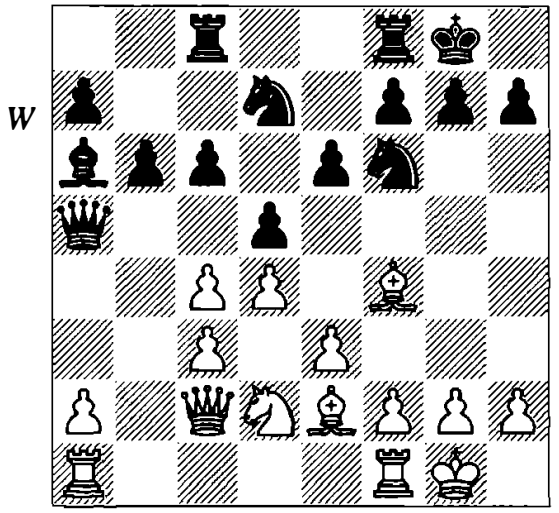
Practice makes perfect! The best way to improve your tactical ability is to solve tactical problems regularly. Tactical alertness is a bit like physical fitness. If you are totally unfit, you will need to train for hours every day, for several weeks or months, in order to reach a peak level of fitness. Having attained that peak level, you can maintain it by only a limited amount of training each day, but it is essential to do a little work pretty much every day; if you skip a week, your fitness level will start to decline.

Tactical sharpness is very similar. Most chess magazines have a column of 'Find the winning move' puzzles, and a few minutes every day spent solving these will keep your tactical eye sharp. Wherever possible, you should try to solve such positions without moving the pieces, as this comes closest to replicating the conditions you face in an actual game. By way of some training, here are six positions, in which world champions missed tactical ideas. See if you can do better.



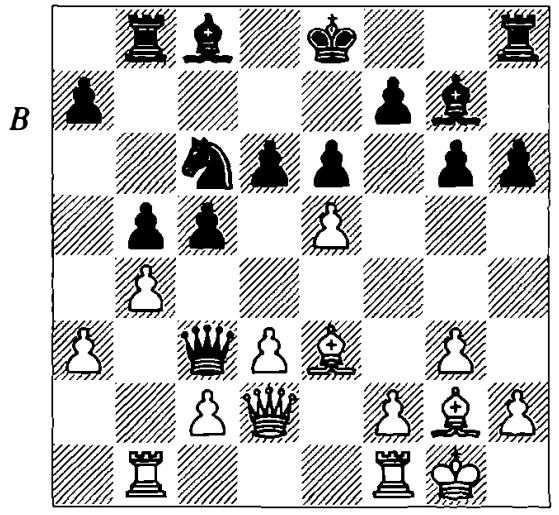
Solokovsky – Em. Lasker
Simultaneous, Moscow 1899

Material is equal, but White has a decisive tactical blow available. How did the Russian amateur force the world champion to resign at once?



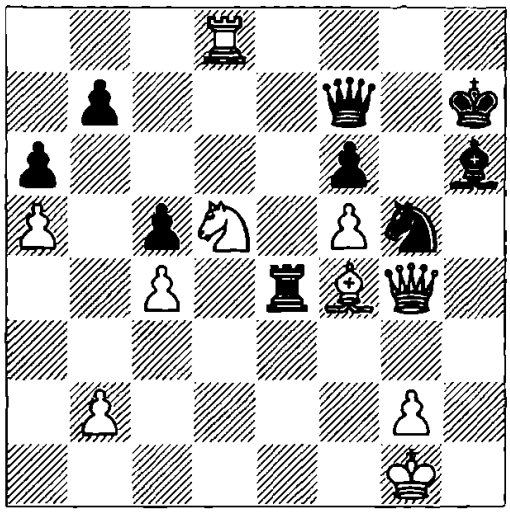
Izmailov – Botvinnik
Odessa 1929

Black has just played 12...♖ac8??. Why was this bad?



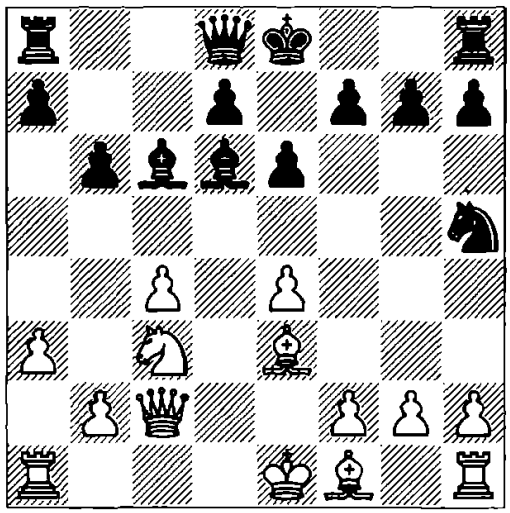
Smyslov – Hjartarson
Reykjavik 1995

Smyslov has just played the tricky 16 e5, thinking that he will regain his piece after 16...♕xd2 17 ♗xc6+. What had he missed?



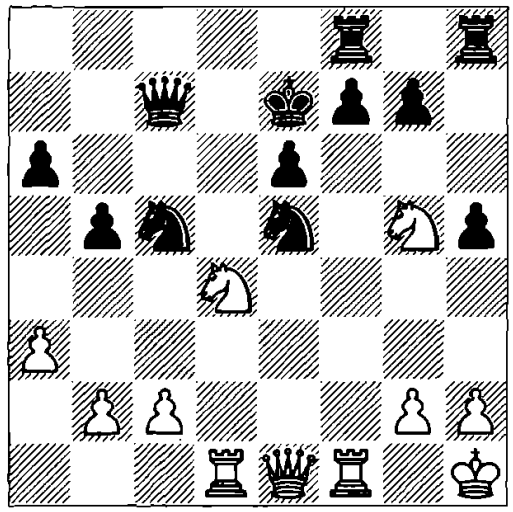
Benko – Fischer
Portorož Interzonal 1958

Fischer has just played 37...♗g7-h6. How did White finish him off?



Christiansen – Karpov
Wijk aan Zee 1993

Karpov has just played 11...♗f8-d6??, but he had to resign at once, after White's reply. What had Karpov missed?



Velibekov – Kasparov
Moscow 1976

The 13-year-old future world champion has just played 22...♘d7-c5??. This was a blunder, and he had to resign after White's next move. What was it?

Solutions

Solokovsky-Lasker: White played 20 ♕xe5!. This is a fork, threatening mate on g7, and attacking the two undefended rooks on b8 and e8. Black's only response would be to take the queen by 20...♖xe5, but this allows mate on the back rank after 21 ♖d8+.

Izmailov-Botvinnik: 13 ♗d6 is a double attack – the rook on f8 is hanging, and the black queen is threatened with being trapped after 14 ♗b4. Botvinnik had to surrender the exchange, after which his position was hopeless and he resigned some moves later.

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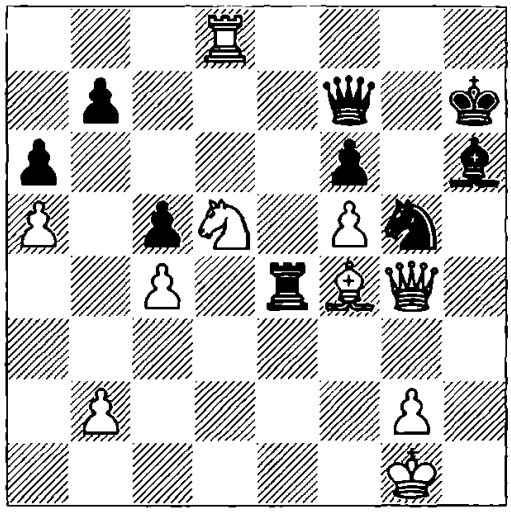

Benko – Fischer
Portorož Interzonal 1958

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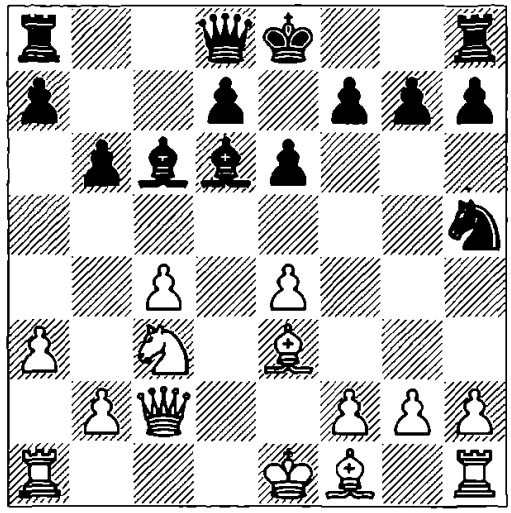

Christiansen – Karpov
Wijk aan Zee 1993

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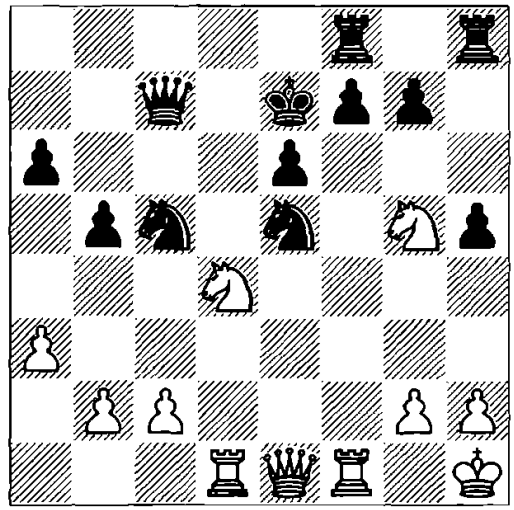

Velibekov – Kasparov
Moscow 1976

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QUESTION 26

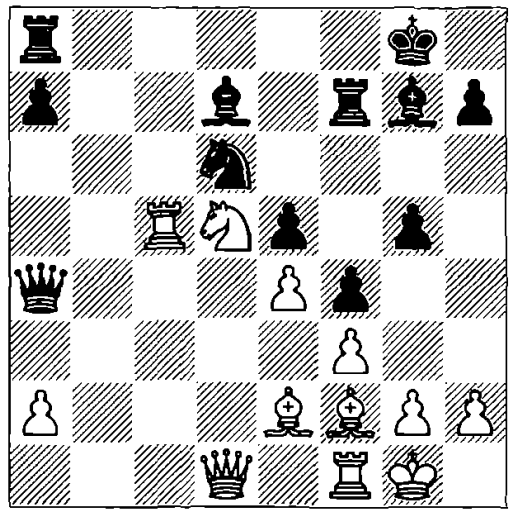
How do you know if there is a tactical possibility available in the position?

Finding tactical ideas in 'spot the winning move' puzzles is all very well, but these exercises have one big disadvantage – you know in advance that there is a spectacular winning move. Knowing this usually makes it much easier to spot the idea. In a normal game, however, you do not have somebody standing next to you, tipping you off when there is a tactical trick available. So how do you learn to detect such opportunities?

In the main, it is a function of experience. Once you are familiar with typical tactical operations, you develop an intuition for such possibilities. In addition, the tactical themes themselves often provide a hint. If the enemy king is blocked in behind a row of unmoved pawns, this suggests that a back-rank tactic might be available. Similarly, if an enemy piece is fulfilling two important functions – for example, stopping a mate threat and also defending a piece elsewhere on the board – the possibility of exploiting this overload naturally comes to mind.

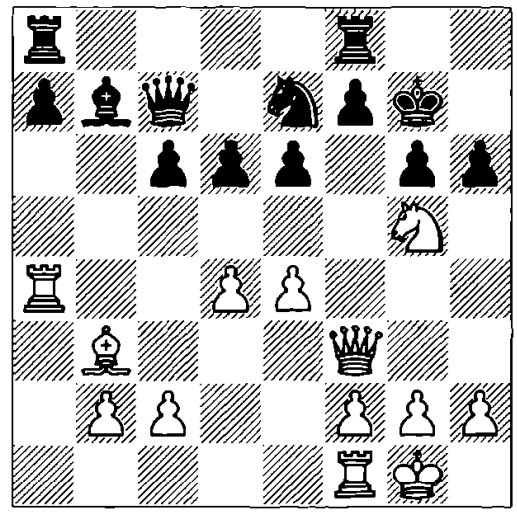
One of the best rules of thumb for such tactics is John Nunn's rule 'Loose Pieces Drop Off' (LPDO). Undefended enemy pieces often give rise to tactical possibilities. In the top diagram of the next column we see a simple example.

Here, Black has two undefended pieces – the d6-knight and the a8-rook. Moving the d5-knight away would attack d6, but Black could answer by taking on d1. However, the move **26 ♘e7+**, as played, prevents this defence, and wins immediately after 26...♖xe7 (or 26...♔f8 27 ♕xd6 ♖xe7 28 ♖c7, etc.) 27 ♕d5+, picking up the loose rook on a8 (LPDO).



Giddins – Botley
Thanet 1990

And here we see the rule's creator demonstrating the idea:



Nunn – Swanson
European Junior Ch, Groningen 1974/5

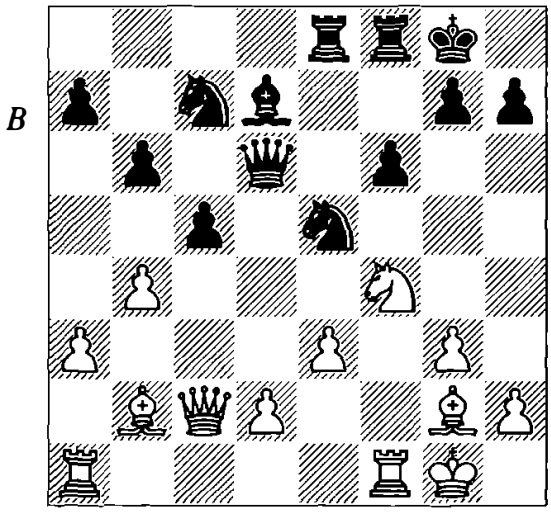
Note that Black's queen is undefended. White exploited this by **18 ♕xf7+!** and Black resigned, since after 18...♖xf7 19 ♘xe6+ and 20 ♘xc7 (LPDO), White wins two pawns and an exchange.

QUESTION 27

How can I make my position less vulnerable to tactical strikes?

The answer to this question is derived largely from the previous one. Since it is the presence of loose pieces that often creates tactical opportunities for the opponent, so the key to safeguarding yourself against unpleasant tactical surprises is to avoid having undefended units in your position.

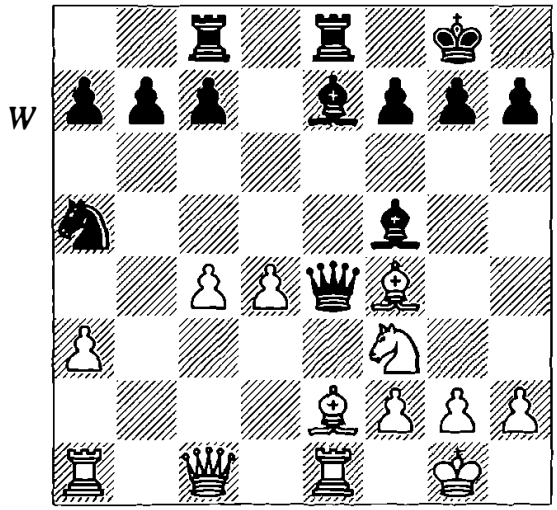
The next diagram is a typical example of a player losing through failing to do so.



Giddins – Wooley
English Counties Ch 2006

In this position, White has some pressure and more active pieces, but after a move such as 19...♘e6, his advantage would not be so great. Instead, Black played **19...♗c6?** which places the bishop on a vulnerable square. Surprisingly, Black is now lost, thanks to the principle of LPDO. Play continued **20 bxc5** (the immediate 20 d4 may be stronger still) **20...bxc5** (20...♕d7 was a better chance) **21 d4!** and Black faced decisive material loss. Now 21...cxd4 22 exd4 ♗xg2 is met with 23 dxe5! followed by 24 ♘xg2, winning a piece. Black instead tried **21...♘d7**, but after **22 dxc5 ♘xc5 23 ♖fd1**, he resigned, since he loses the loose bishop on c6 (LPDO). It is hard to believe that Black could lose the diagram position quite so quickly, but that he did so is directly attributable to his failure to keep his pieces securely guarded.

The next example sees a world champion lose a game through ignoring the same principle.



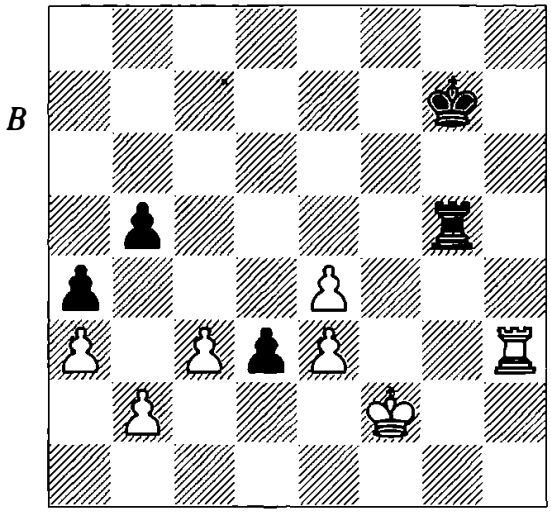
Anand – Kramnik
Sofia 2005

Black has just blundered by playing his queen to e4. Looking at the diagram, we can see that he has an undefended knight on a5, and his queen is vulnerable to a discovered attack from the rook on e1. Kramnik had of course realized this, but thought White had no way to exploit these factors. However, he had missed something. Anand played **18 ♗d1 ♕d3 19 ♖e3!**. This was what Kramnik had overlooked. The reply **19...♕xc4** is forced, but now the black queen no longer defends the bishop on f5. After **20 ♖e5**, the knight on a5 and the bishop on f5 are forked, so a piece is lost (LPDO). Black resigned at once.

QUESTION 28 Are tactics important in the endgame?

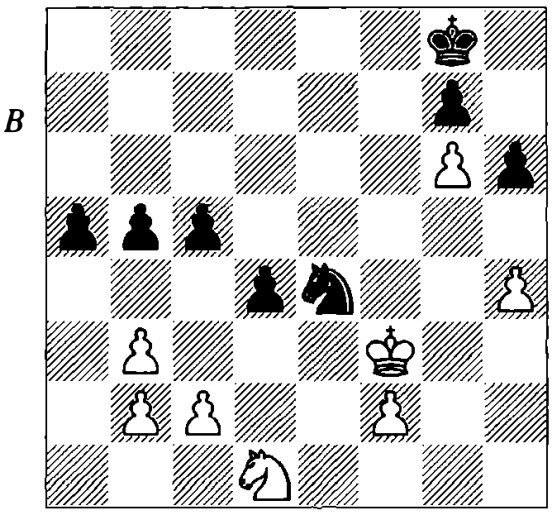
In principle, one would expect tactics to be less important in the endgame, because the simplified positions should reduce the scope for sharp tactics. Nonetheless, there are many tactical ideas in endgames.

One major theme in endgames is the passed pawn, and many endgame tactics revolve around this.



Ferguson – Adams
British Ch, Hove 1997

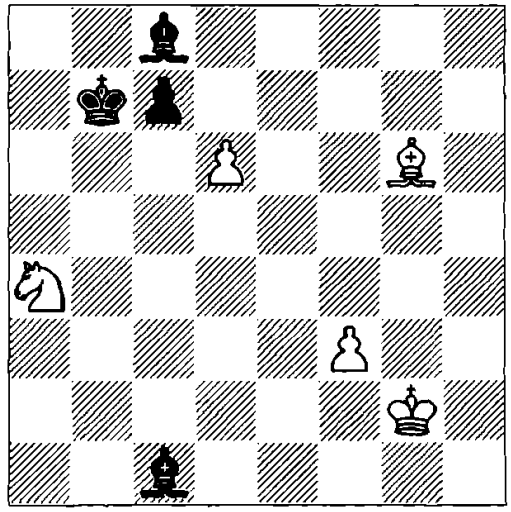
Here, Michael Adams struck with a neat tactical idea based on his passed d-pawn: **73...♖g1! 74 ♔xg1 d2** and the pawn queens.



Bonner – Medina
Haifa Olympiad 1976

Black decided the game with the very nice sacrifice **41...♘c3!! 42 bxc3 a4** and the a-pawn cannot be stopped. After the further moves **43 cxd4 cxd4 44 c3 a3**, White resigned.

Endgame studies are an excellent way to learn about tactics in the endgame. The example below illustrates the use of forks in the ending.



S. Kaminer
3rd Prize, *Shakhmaty*, 1925
White to play and win

White wins with a combination based on a succession of knight forks.

1 ♘c5+

White must play his moves in the correct order. 1 d7? ♗xd7 2 ♘c5+ fails because now Black can play 2...♔c8.

1...♔c6 2 d7! ♗xd7 3 ♘d3 ♗g5

3...♗a3 4 ♘e5+ ♔d6 5 ♘c4+ wins for White. 3...♗d2 and 3...♗e3 are met by the same response, while after 3...♗h6 White continues as in the main line.

4 ♘e5+ ♔d6 5 ♘f7+ ♔e6 6 ♘xg5+ ♔f6

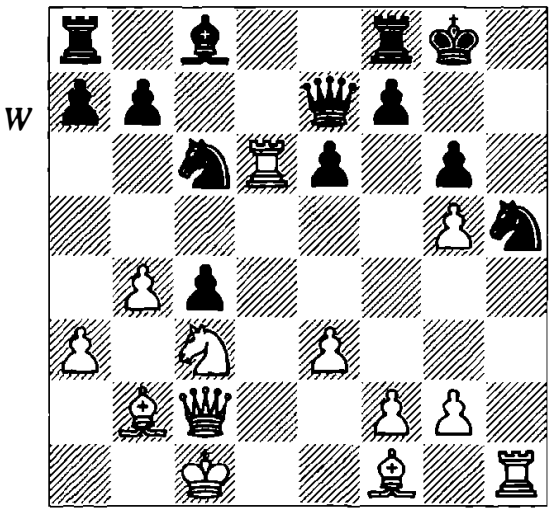
White has won a piece, but he seems to be losing it back. However...

7 ♘h7+! ♔xg6 8 ♘f8+

White wins a piece with another fork.

QUESTION 29 What is a combination?

Various attempts have been made to define the term 'combination' One of the best-known is Botvinnik's formulation: *a combination is a forced variation, with a sacrifice.* In a combination, a player typically sacrifices some material to achieve a specific, pre-calculated advantage, usually either mate or the overall gain of material. The essential difference between a combination and a mere sacrifice is that a sacrifice can sometimes be speculative, whereas a combination is usually calculated out to a forced conclusion. We shall examine a few examples.



Hartlaub – Benary
Munich 1911

This first example is by a wonderfully talented minor German master, who was famous for his spectacular combinations. Hartlaub finished the game in spectacular style:

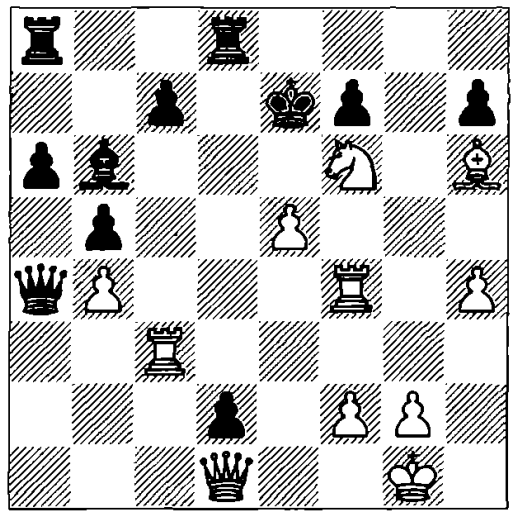
16 ♖xh5! gxh5 17 ♘d5! exd5

17...♕xd6 allows mate in two by 18 ♘f6+ and 19 ♕h7#.

18 ♕h7+!! ♔xh7 19 ♖h6+ ♔g8 20 ♖h8# (1-0)

Three sacrifices led to a forced mate.

In the next example, a brilliant mating combination decided the outcome of an entire league season:



Sutovsky – I. Sokolov
British League (4NCL) 2004/5

This game was the decisive one in the 2004/5 season of the British national league. It seems that White cannot do better than a draw by perpetual check, after 34 ♘g8+ ♔e8 (34...♖xg8 35 ♕xd2 would be very good for White) 35 ♘f6+ ♔e7, etc. This result would have given overall league victory to the team represented by the black player. However, with his flag hanging, and the board surrounded by spectators, Sutovsky found a beautifully-calculated winning line.

34 ♘d5+! ♖xd5

Forced, since 34...♔e8 allows simply 35 ♕xd2, eliminating the dangerous passed pawn, when White is winning.

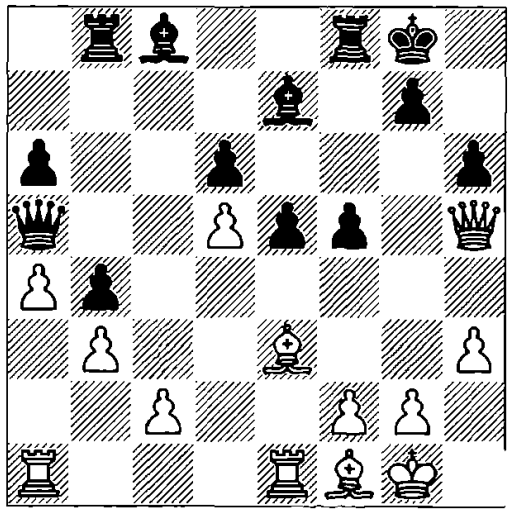
35 ♖xf7+!! ♔d8

This loses, but so does taking the rook: 35...♔xf7 36 ♕f3+ ♔e8 (36...♔e6 37 ♕f6+ ♔d7 38 ♕f5+ transposes to the main line) 37 ♕f8+ ♔d7 38 ♕f5+ ♔e7 39 ♗g5+ ♔e8 40 ♕e6+ ♔f8 41 ♗h6#.

36 ♖f8+ ♔e7 37 ♗g5+! 1-0

Now Black is forced to take the rook and mate follows after 37...♔xf8 38 ♕f3+ ♔e8 39 ♕h5+ ♔d7 40 ♕g4+ ♔e8 41 ♕e6+ ♔f8 42 ♗h6#. Certainly a worthy way to win any league title!

The next example shows that 'quiet' moves can sometimes occur within a combination:



Kariakin – Van Wely
Foros 2007

White played a carefully-calculated combination:

26 ♗xh6! gxh6?

Black should decline, but Van Wely had not seen White's 30th move.

27 ♕g6+ ♔h8 28 ♕xh6+ ♔g8 29 ♕g6+ ♔h8

It seems as though White only has perpetual check, but Kariakin had seen further.

30 ♖e3!

This, and the next, are the key to White's combination.

30...f4

Forced, as the threat was 31 ♖g3 and mate.

31 ♖xe5!

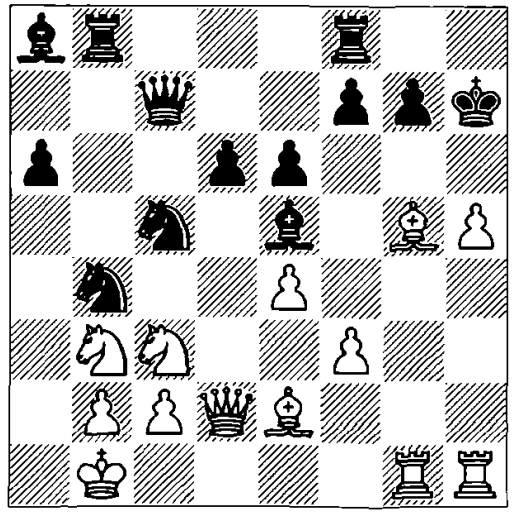
This sacrifice would not have worked last move, because Black could have declined it with 30...♕d8. Now, however, with Black's pawn lured to f4, there is a threat of 32 ♖h5#, so Black must capture.

31...dxe5 32 ♕h6+ ♔g8 33 d6!

The final point, opening the a2-g8 diagonal for White's bishop.

33...♖f7 34 ♗c4 ♗f5 35 dxe7 1-0

Finally, a combination by Garry Kasparov. It was in fact the last game he ever won in an international tournament, prior to announcing his retirement from the game.



Adams – Kasparov
Linares 2005

Black has a menacing array of pieces pointing at the white king, and Kasparov converted this into decisive threats as follows:

22...♘xc2! 23 ♘xc5

The first point is that capturing on c2 allows Black to take on b3, with an extra pawn.

23...♘a3+ 24 ♔a2 ♕xc5

Now the second point is that if White captures on a3, his knight on c3 is hanging. He therefore moves it away with tempo, attacking the black queen, but Kasparov had seen another very nice tactical point.

25 ♘a4 ♘c2!

A neat trick. White cannot take the queen, as there follows 26...♖xb2#.

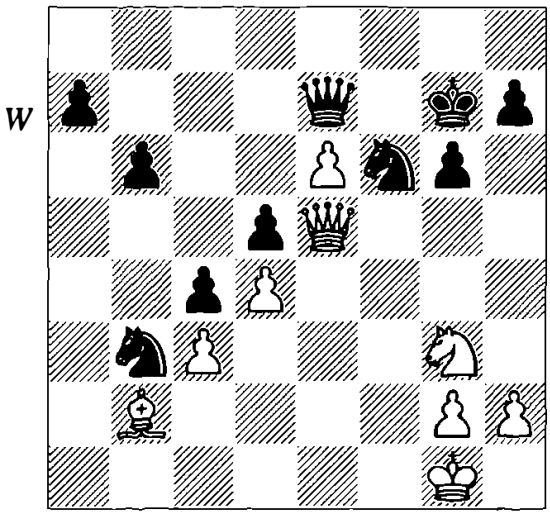
26 ♔b1 ♕a3 0-1

White resigned, since after 27 ♕xc2 ♖fc8 28 ♕d2 ♕xa4, Black has won a pawn and the b2-pawn is defenceless.

QUESTION 30 Are all combinations fully calculated?

In practice, it is not always possible to calculate a combination out completely, and players sometimes rely on a degree of intuition. After calculating some lines, one often feels that, although not every line is clear, there are simply so many pieces in the attack, and so few defenders, that the combination must work. In such circumstances, a player will often play the combination, and rely on working out the remaining lines if and when he has to.

One particularly common example occurs when a sacrifice offers the attacker at least a draw by perpetual check. In such cases, it is often possible to play the combination without being certain whether it wins. Since the player knows that he can force a draw if he needs to, he is able to play the combination, reach the critical position, and only then calculate further, to establish whether he has more than a draw. If it turns out that he does not, he can just settle for the draw. A famous example of this 'safety-net' approach is the following:



Botvinnik – Capablanca
Rotterdam (AVRO) 1938

Botvinnik finished the game with a double piece sacrifice:

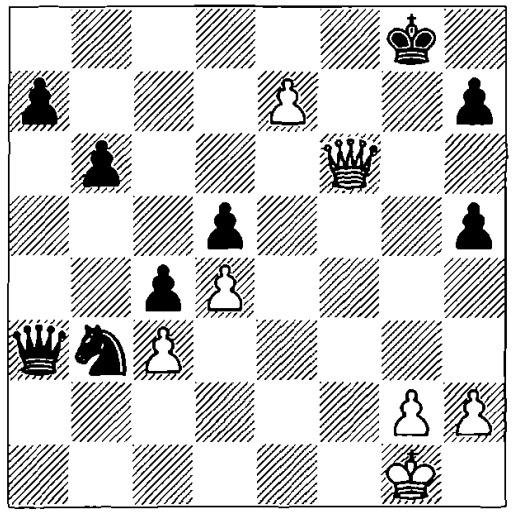
30 ♗a3!!

Deflecting the black queen away from the kingside.

30...♕xa3 31 ♘h5+!

And this follow-up forces the next few moves.

31...gxh5 32 ♕g5+ ♔f8 33 ♕xf6+ ♔g8 34 e7 *(D)*



Now it is clear that White's e-pawn will decide the game, providing Black cannot give perpetual check. It turns out that he cannot:

34...♕c1+ 35 ♔f2 ♕c2+ 36 ♔g3 ♕d3+ 37 ♔h4 ♕e4+ 38 ♔xh5 ♕e2+ 39 ♔h4 ♕e4+ 40 g4 ♕e1+ 41 ♔h5 1-0

Very impressive stuff, but Botvinnik later admitted that he had not seen all of the combination when he played 30 ♗a3!!. He had calculated as far as 34 e7, but was not certain whether he could avoid perpetual check. However, since it was clear that the very worst that could happen to him was a draw, he decided to play the combination, and then work out the consequences of Black's checks once the position was reached on the board.

The combination in Kariakin-Van Wely, examined in the previous Question, is another example. Even if Kariakin had not seen the subtlety 30 ♖e3! in advance, he could still play the sacrifice 26 ♗xh6, since he knew that he had at least a perpetual check in hand.

QUESTION 31

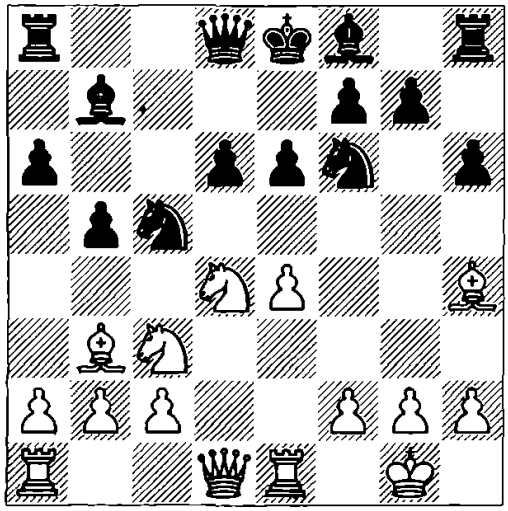
Why would a player sacrifice material without being able to calculate a definite win?

Such sacrifices are often made on the basis of intuition, for long-term compensation. The key factor with any sacrifice is being able to get more pieces to the relevant sector of the board than the defender can.

Fischer – Rubinetti

Palma de Mallorca Interzonal 1970

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 e6 6 ♗c4 a6 7 ♗b3 b5 8 0-0 ♗b7 9 ♖e1 ♘bd7 10 ♗g5 h6 11 ♗h4 ♘c5 *(D)*



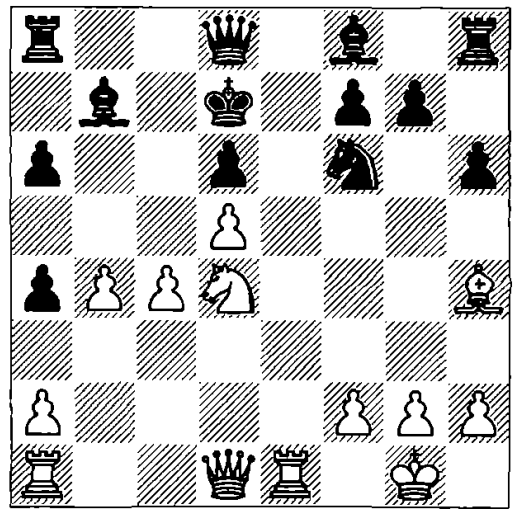
If we count up, we see that White has five pieces developed, plus his king castled. Black, by contrast, has developed only three pieces, and his king is still in the centre. Fischer decides he can sacrifice a piece, just to open the e-file and attack the black king.

12 ♗d5! exd5 13 exd5+ ♔d7

13...♗e7 14 ♘f5 is no improvement for Black.

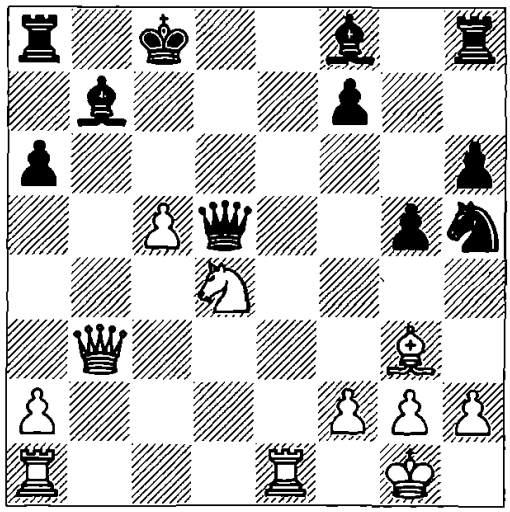
14 b4 ♘a4 15 ♘xa4 bxa4 16 c4 *(D)*

Although Black has an extra piece, it is useless, as most of his pieces (both rooks, for



example) are not taking part in the game. White's pieces, by contrast, are all in active play, and he has a decisive attack. This is the point of many sacrifices – what is important is not how many pieces are on the board, but how many are playing an active role in the area of the board that matters.

16...♔c8 17 ♕xa4 ♕d7 18 ♕b3 g5 19 ♗g3 ♘h5 20 c5 dxc5 21 bxc5 ♕xd5?! *(D)*



22 ♖e8+ ♔d7 23 ♕a4+ ♗c6 24 ♘xc6 1-0

QUESTION 32 Some players, such as Tal, were famous for making very speculative sacrifices. Why did they do this?

It is true that, in many of his games, Tal would make sacrifices that he could not fully calculate, but which his instinct told him should create enough problems to cause the defender to go wrong. There was often an element of bluff, in that perfect defence might have refuted his play, but Tal knew that it is very hard for even a world-class grandmaster to defend perfectly over the board, with the clock ticking.

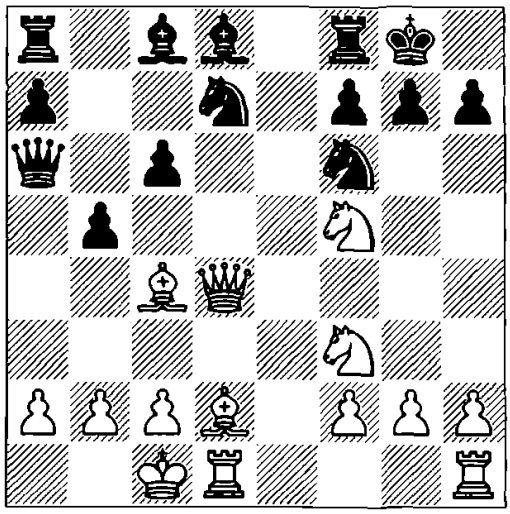
This is a typical example of Tal's brinkmanship:

Tal – Smyslov

Candidates, Bled/Zagreb/Belgrade 1959

1 e4 c6 2 d3 d5 3 ♘d2 e5 4 ♘gf3 ♘d7 5 d4 dxe4 6 ♘xe4 exd4 7 ♕xd4 ♘gf6 8 ♗g5 ♗e7 9 0-0-0 0-0 10 ♘d6 ♕a5 11 ♗c4 b5 12 ♗d2 ♕a6 13 ♘f5 ♗d8 *(D)*

W



14 ♕h4!?

A very aggressive sacrifice, which should give no advantage against best defence.

14...bxc4 15 ♕g5 ♘h5

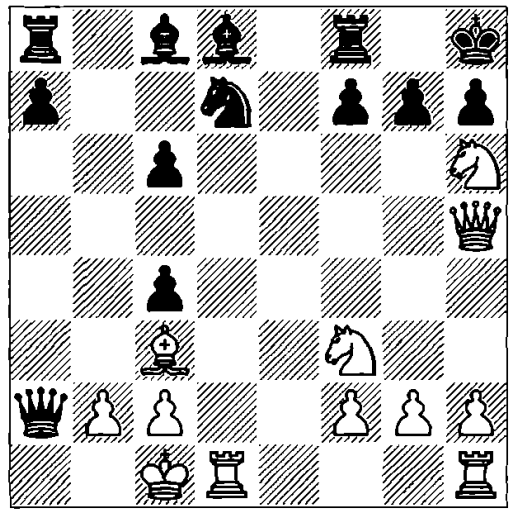
A good defence. 15...g6 16 ♘h6+ ♔g7 gives White a choice between Tal's speculative 17 ♗c3, or an immediate draw by 17 ♘f5+. Smyslov's move is more challenging.

16 ♘h6+ ♔h8 17 ♕xh5 ♕xa2!?

Smyslov had a reputation as one of the best defenders in the world, and for much of this game we can see why. 17...♗f6 is also possible, and roughly equal.

18 ♗c3 *(D)*

B



18...♘f6??

At last, the pressure takes it toll, and Smyslov commits a losing blunder. 18...♗f6 keeps the game in the balance (e.g. 19 ♘xf7+ ♔g8 20 ♘3g5 ♕a1+ 21 ♔d2 ♗xc3+ 22 bxc3 ♘f6), while 18...♗c7 (Kasparov; threatening mate by 19...♗f4+ and 20...♕a1#) forces White to take a draw by 19 ♘xf7+ ♔g8 20 ♘h6+.

19 ♕xf7! ♕a1+

The immediate 19...♖xf7 leads to a smothered mate after 20 ♖xd8+ ♘g8 21 ♘xf7#.

20 ♔d2 ♖xf7

Forcing off the queens, but at decisive material cost. There is no better defence.

21 ♘xf7+ ♔g8 22 ♖xa1 ♔xf7 23 ♘e5+ ♔e6 24 ♘xc6 ♘e4+ 25 ♔e3 ♗b6+ 26 ♗d4 1-0

A classic example of Tal's speculative sacrifices triumphing. Even as great a defender as Smyslov was eventually beaten by the extent of the defensive problems.

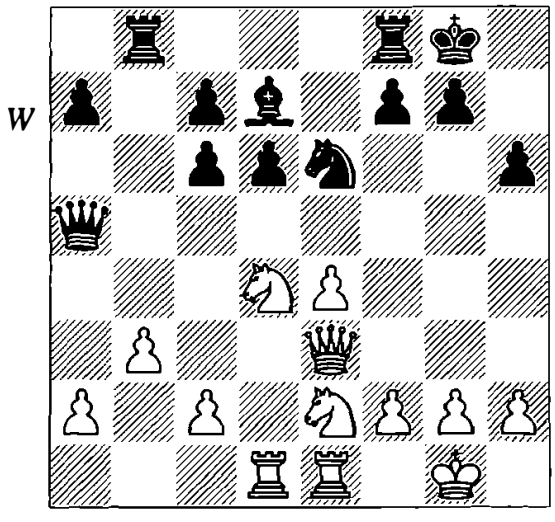
QUESTION 33 What sort of plans should I be trying to make?

Plans can be both long- and short-term. A typical long-term plan might be to attack on the kingside, whilst various short-term plans might contribute to that. Thus, we might bring a rook from f1 to g3, to take part in the attack. Or we might create a target, by inducing a weakening pawn move in front of the king. Similar short-term plans build up to the point where we can launch a decisive attack on the enemy king, thus fulfilling our long-term goal.

The following game is an example of this.

Capablanca – O. Bernstein
San Sebastian 1911

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 ♘f6 4 0-0 ♗e7 5 ♘c3 d6 6 ♗xc6+ bxc6 7 d4 exd4 8 ♘xd4 ♗d7 9 ♗g5 0-0 10 ♖e1 h6 11 ♗h4 ♘h7 12 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 13 ♕d3 ♖ab8 14 b3 ♘g5 15 ♖ad1 ♕e5 16 ♕e3 ♘e6 17 ♘ce2 ♕a5 *(D)*



With his last move, Black declares his plan, which is to attack the white queenside. Capablanca could defend the a-pawn, but instead, he commits himself to a plan of developing an attack on the black king. That is the long-term plan. In the short term, he first brings his knights towards the enemy king. In fact, this plan turns out to be mistaken from an objective viewpoint, but the main thing to note is how purposeful his play is, and that once Black has missed a fleeting chance, White's attack becomes overwhelming.

18 ♘f5?! ♘c5 19 ♘ed4 ♔h7 20 g4

The next short-term plan is to try storming the enemy king position.

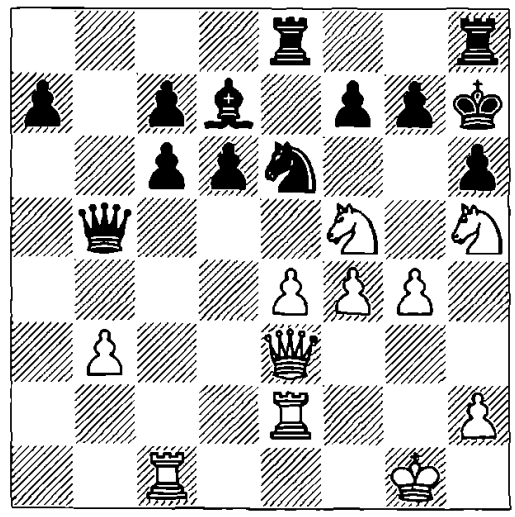
20...♖be8 21 f3 ♘e6 22 ♘e2

Black has stopped the g5 advance, so now Capablanca forms another sub-plan. He intends to bring his other knight to h5, so both knights will be attacking g7.

22... ♕xa2 23 ♘eg3 ♕xc2 24 ♖c1 ♕b2 25 ♘h5 ♖h8?

25...g5! is best (e.g. 26 e5 ♘f4 or 26 ♖c3 f6), and leaves White in some trouble.

26 ♖e2 ♕e5 27 f4 ♕b5 *(D)*



28 ♘fxg7! ♘c5?

28...♘xg7 is met by 29 ♘f6+ ♔g6 30 ♘xd7, when White has the advantage because of the bad black king position. However, this is better than the text-move, which simply gives up material without a fight.

29 ♘xe8 ♗xe8 30 ♕c3 f6 31 ♘xf6+ ♔g6 32 ♘h5 ♖g8 33 f5+ ♔g5 34 ♕e3+ 1-0

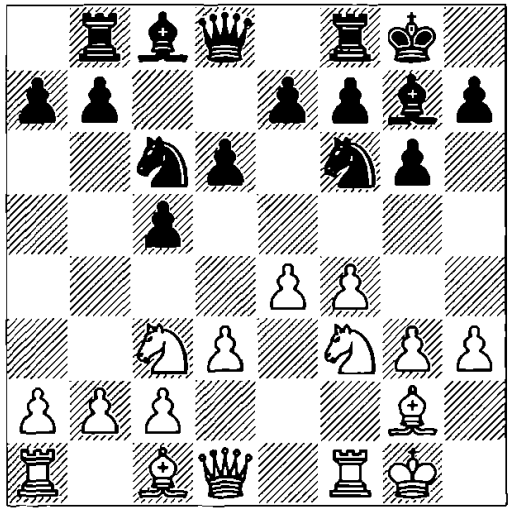
QUESTION 34 How does one form a plan?

The appropriate plan depends on the characteristics of the position, and many plans flow naturally from the opening. The pawn-structure is often a very good indicator of what plan one should pursue. A good rule of thumb is to attack on the sector of the board where you have some advantage, often in space. The next game is a typical example.

Spassky – Geller

Candidates match (game 6), Sukhumi 1968

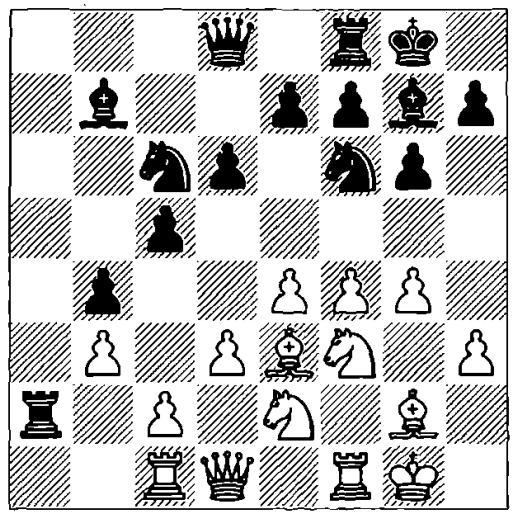
1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 d6 3 g3 ♘c6 4 ♗g2 g6 5 d3 ♗g7 6 f4 ♘f6 7 ♘f3 0-0 8 0-0 ♖b8 9 h3 *(D)*



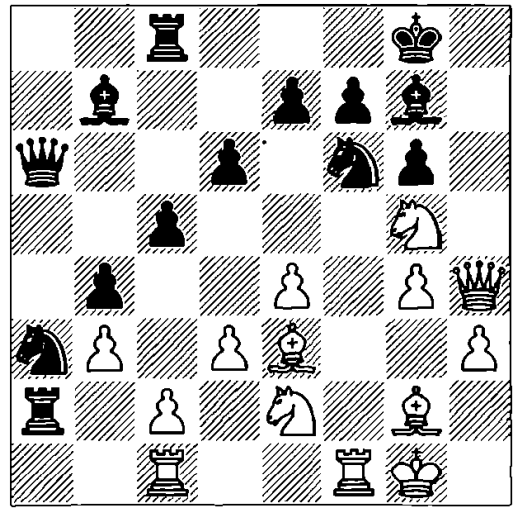
Already, the pawn-structure gives us a tip as to what will happen. White has more space on the kingside, and Black on the queenside.

9...b5 10 a3 a5 11 ♗e3 b4 12 axb4 axb4 13 ♘e2 ♗b7 14 b3 ♖a8 15 ♖c1 ♖a2 16 g4 *(D)*

Each side pursues its strategy consistently. White tries to give mate on the kingside, Black to win material on the other wing.



16...♕a8 17 ♕e1 ♕a6 18 ♕f2 ♘a7 19 f5 ♘b5 20 fxg6 hxg6 21 ♘g5 ♘a3 22 ♕h4 ♖c8 *(D)*



Now White breaks through decisively.

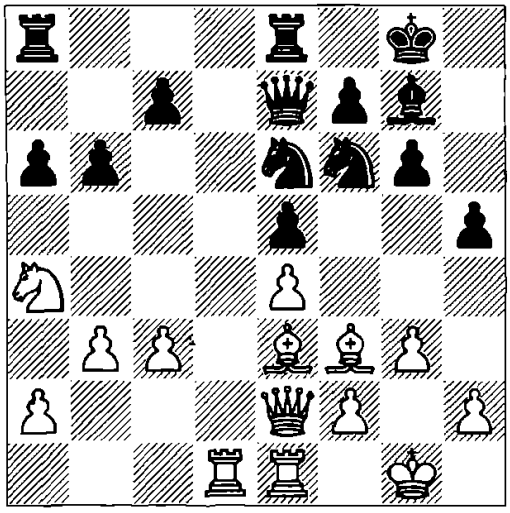
23 ♖xf6! exf6 24 ♕h7+ ♔f8 25 ♘xf7! ♖xc2

25...♔xf7 26 ♗h6 ♖g8 27 ♘f4 gives White a winning attack, but the text-move also loses.

26 ♗h6 ♖xc1+ 27 ♘xc1 ♔xf7 28 ♕xg7+ ♔e8 29 g5 f5 30 ♕xg6+ ♔d7 31 ♕f7+ ♔c6 32 exf5+ 1-0

QUESTION 35 What if I can't see any plan?

If you are unsure how to proceed, and cannot see any clear plan, there is a very good rule of thumb: identify your worst-placed piece, and improve its position. This simple rule can be extremely effective in practice.



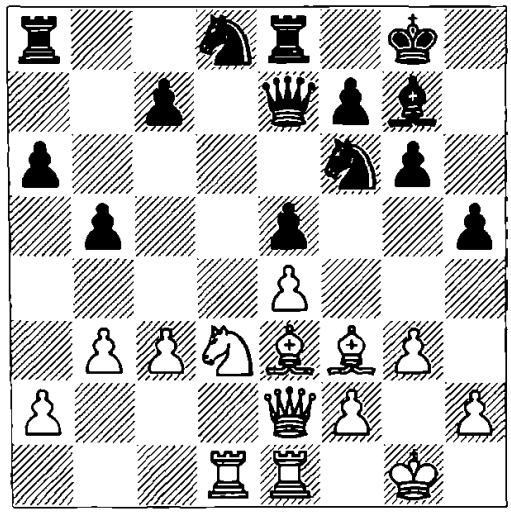
Karpov – Spassky
TV tournament, Hamburg 1982

What is White's worst piece here? Yes, the knight on a4. So...

18 ♘b2 b5 19 ♘d3

Now the knight occupies a good central post, attacking the e5-pawn.

19...♘d8 *(D)*



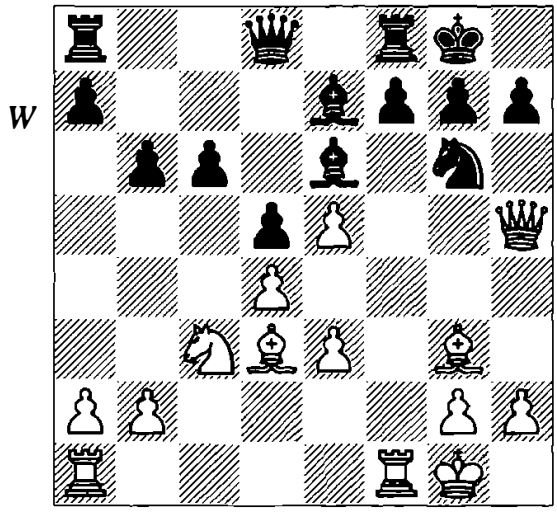
Again, we ask the question: which white piece is worst placed? The answer now is the inactive bishop on f3.

20 ♗g2! c6 21 f3 ♘b7 22 ♗h3

Now the bishop occupies a splendid diagonal. Such quiet manoeuvres may not look so impressive, but after just 8 more moves, Karpov had a winning advantage.

22...a5 23 a4 bxa4 24 bxa4 ♘h7 25 ♕f2 ♖ed8 26 ♗b6 ♖d6 27 ♘c5 ♘g5 28 ♗g2 ♗f8 29 ♖b1 ♘d8 30 f4

Comparing this position with the first diagram, we can see how much progress White has made. Karpov went on to win in 56 moves.



Rubinstein – B. Nikolaev
Russian Ch, Kiev 1903

One of the few white pieces not contributing to the attack is the knight on c3. Rubinstein therefore played...

17 ♘e2!

The knight is coming to f4, to exchange off the important defender on e6.

17...♕d7 18 h3 ♗d8 19 ♘f4 ♗e7 20 ♖ac1 c5 21 ♖f3 c4 22 ♗b1 ♖ae8 23 ♖cf1 ♗d8 24 ♘xe6 ♕xe6 25 ♗f5 ♕e7 26 h4 a5 27 e4

This central breakthrough gives White's bishops extra scope.

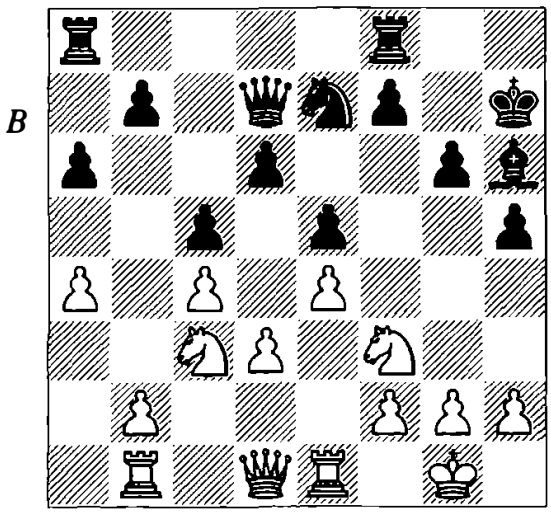
27...♕b7 28 ♕g4 dxe4 29 ♗xe4 ♕e7 30 ♗d5 ♘h8 31 ♗xc4

and White went on to win.

QUESTION 36

How should I meet the opponent's plans?

To some extent, this depends on how strong his plan is. Sometimes, it may be best just to let him carry out his plan, if you believe that it is unfavourable for him anyway. In most cases, though, it pays to prevent the opponent from fulfilling his plan.



Aronin – Kholmov
USSR Ch, Erevan 1962

White has just played 19 ♖a1-b1, and clearly intends to advance with b4, opening lines on the queenside. Kholmov stopped this once and for all:

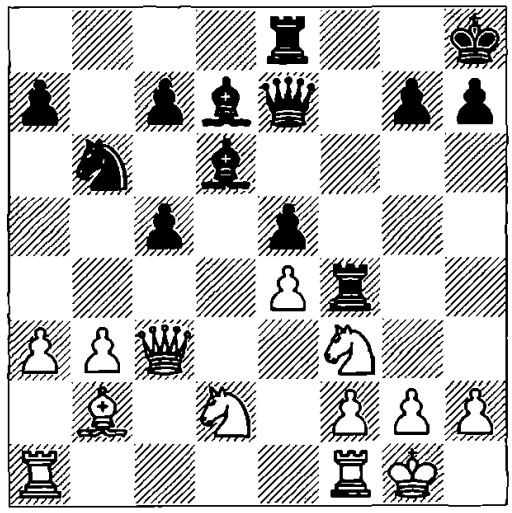
19...a5!

Now White has no way to create effective counterplay to offset Black's kingside attack. Black went on to win:

20 ♕b3 f5 21 ♕b5 ♘c6 22 ♘d5 ♕g7 23 ♕b6 ♖f7 24 ♖a1 ♖af8 25 ♖a3 g5 26 ♘e3 g4 27 ♘h4 ♗xe3 28 fxe3 f4 29 ♘f5 ♕g5 30 exf4 exf4 31 ♖f1 f3 32 g3 ♖xf5 33 exf5 ♕d2 0-1

Taking action to prevent the opponent's plans is usually referred to as 'prophylaxis', a term coined by Nimzowitsch. In the following diagram we see Petrosian, one of its greatest masters, demonstrating the technique.

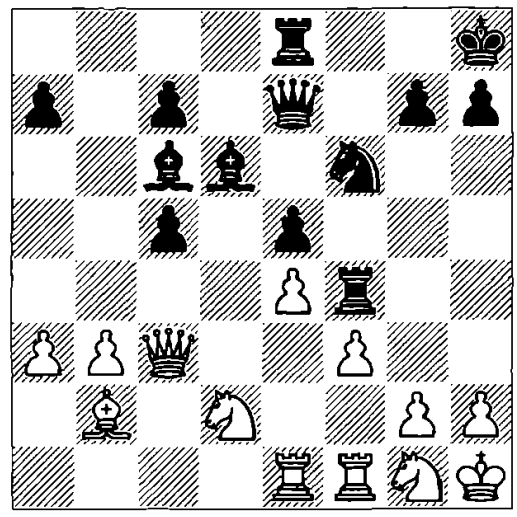
The weak black queenside pawns mean that White will have a clear advantage if he can contain the enemy counterplay. Petrosian



Petrosian – Balashov
Moscow Clubs Ch 1978

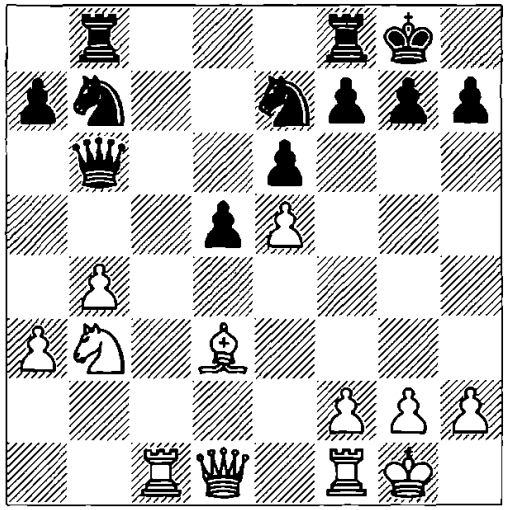
asked himself what Black wants to do here. The answer is to attack down the f-file and put pressure on the e4-pawn. He therefore played:

18 ♔h1! ♗c6 19 ♖ae1 ♘d7 20 ♘g1! ♘f6 21 f3 *(D)*



As a result of White's manoeuvre, the e4-pawn is rock-solid and Black has no effective kingside counterplay. White is clearly better, and won quickly after a blunder by Black.

The best form of prophylaxis is when you can combine stopping the opponent's plans with furthering your own.



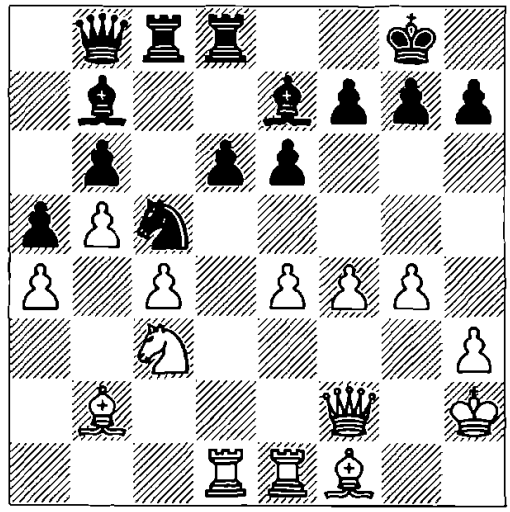
Karpov – Bagirov
USSR Ch, Riga 1970

White's basic plan is to attack Black's poorly-defended king. But what does Black want? He has a badly-placed knight on b7, and his plan is to play 27...a5 and meet 28 b5 with 28...a4!, so as to secure the c5-square for his knight. Understanding this, Karpov combined the furtherance of his own plans with the hindering of Black's by **27 ♕g4!**. As well as taking up a threatening position in front of the enemy king, the queen also patrols along the fourth rank, so that after 27...a5 28 b5, Black no longer has 28...a4. Bagirov played **27...f5**, to secure his king, but then Karpov continued **28 ♕d4!**, again stopping the move 28...a5, and at the same time looking to switch into an endgame where his queenside pawn-majority will give him the advantage. He went on to win in 46 moves, without Black's misplaced knight on b7 ever finding a decent square.

One of the best prophylactic manoeuvres I have ever witnessed was the following (*see next diagram*):

White has just played 25 g4, announcing a kingside attack. Andersson responded with a wonderfully creative prophylactic idea:

25...h6! 26 h4 ♔h7!! 27 ♗h3 ♖c7 28 ♖e3 ♖h8!



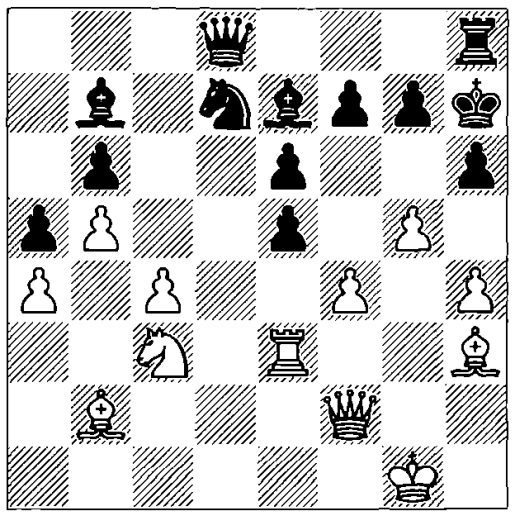
Christiansen – Andersson
Hastings 1979/80

Completing a remarkable manoeuvre. Now ...g5 will fatally expose the white king down the h-file.

29 ♔g1 ♕d8

White now has no good way to defend his exposed pawn on h4, and his attempts to create tactical complications lead to rapid collapse:

30 e5 ♖d7 31 g5 dxe5 32 ♖xd7 ♘xd7! *(D)*



Suddenly ...♗c5 is a horrible threat.

33 ♕c2+ g6 34 ♖d3 ♕c7 35 h5 ♘c5 36 hxg6+ fxg6 37 ♗xe6

Desperation, but White's position is a wreck anyway.

37...♘xe6 38 ♖h3 ♕c5+ 39 ♔h2 ♘xf4 40 ♖xh6+ ♔g8 0-1

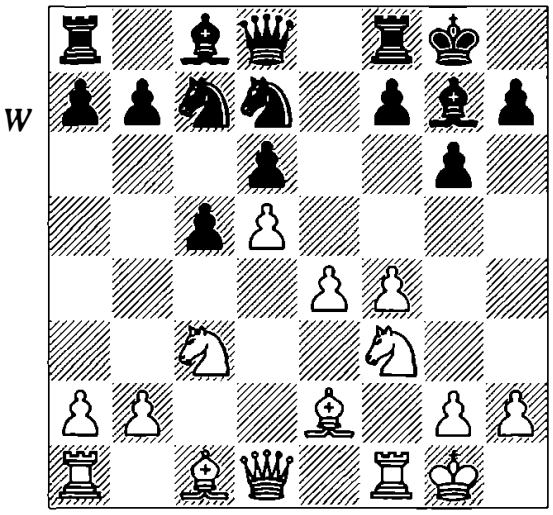
QUESTION 37

How does the central pawn-structure affect the plan?

The central pawn-structure frequently plays a big role in determining the right plan.

Moskalenko – Alonso Moyano
Barbera 1999

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 f4 ♗g7 8 ♗b5+ ♘fd7 9 ♗e2 ♘a6 10 ♘f3 ♘c7 11 0-0 0-0 *(D)*



The opening has left White with a central pawn-majority, and the natural plan of pushing e5. Over the rest of the game, this is what he strives for. Black needs to prevent the central breakthrough, whilst trying to utilize his own queenside majority.

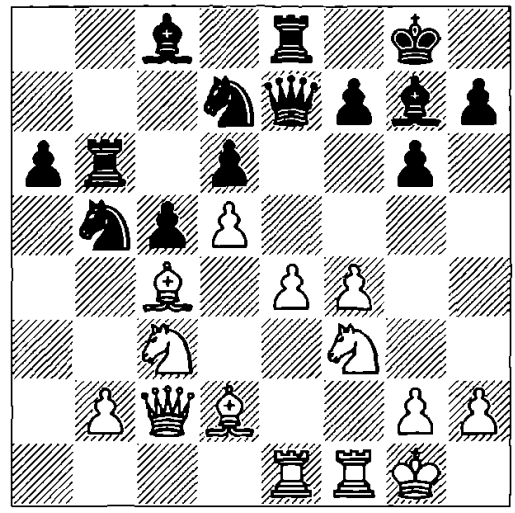
12 a4 a6 13 ♗d2 ♖b8 14 a5 ♖e8 15 ♕c2 ♕e7 16 ♖ae1 b5 17 axb6 ♖xb6 18 ♗c4 ♘b5 *(D)*

19 e5!

With the aid of tactics, White achieves his planned break. Now he breaks through to the black king.

19...dxe5 20 fxe5 ♘xe5 21 ♘xe5 ♗xe5 22 ♘xb5 axb5 23 d6!

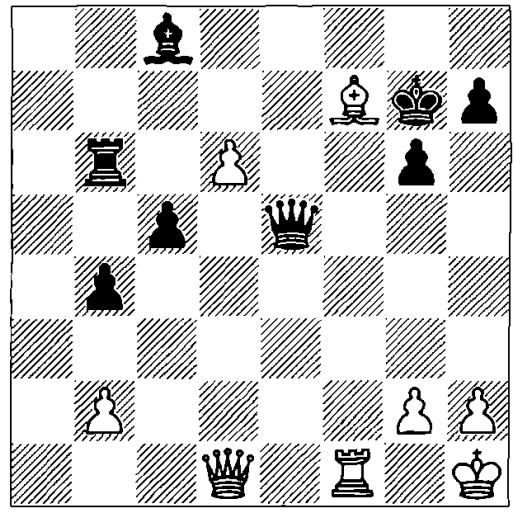
This is the point of White's play: he wins the f7-pawn.



23...♕h4?!

23...♗d4+ 24 ♔h1 ♕d7, aiming to give up the queen for rook and bishop, is a tougher defence, but should still lose.

24 ♗xf7+ ♔g7 25 ♖xe5 ♕d4+ 26 ♔h1 ♖xe5 27 ♗c3 ♕e3 28 ♕d1 b4 29 ♗xe5+ ♕xe5 *(D)*



30 d7

Fittingly, White's d-pawn strikes the decisive blow.

30...♗xd7 31 ♕xd7 ♖f6 32 ♗c4+ ♔h6 33 ♕d2+ ♔g7 34 ♖e1 ♖d6 35 ♕c1 ♕d4 36 b3 ♖d7 37 h3 1-0

QUESTION 38

What happens if the central pawn-structure is blocked?

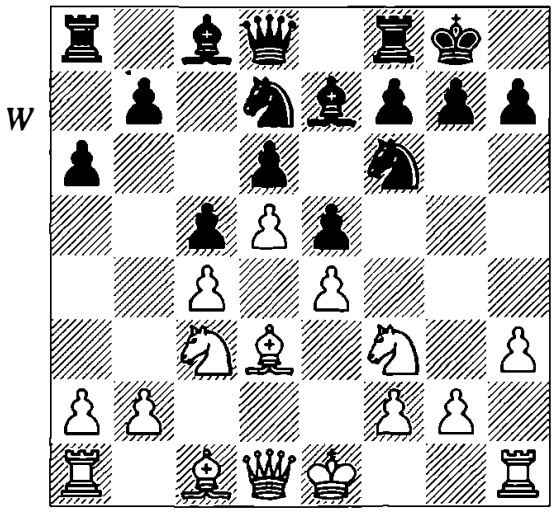
When the central pawn-structure is blocked, play tends to take place on the flanks, as in the following example.

Van den Broeck – Hartston
Reykjavik Zonal 1975

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5

This opening is known as the Czech Benoni. Black sets up a blocked pawn-centre immediately.

4 ♘c3 d6 5 e4 ♗e7 6 ♗d3 0-0 7 h3 ♘bd7 8 ♘f3 a6 *(D)*



With the centre blocked, both sides must play on the wings, which White now proceeds to do.

9 g4 ♘e8 10 a4 g6 11 ♗h6 ♘g7 12 ♕c2 ♘f6 13 ♘e2 ♗d7 14 0-0?

This is hardly consistent with White's play so far. He would do better to leave his king in the centre, although there is the longer-term risk of the centre opening up after Black plays an eventual ...f5.

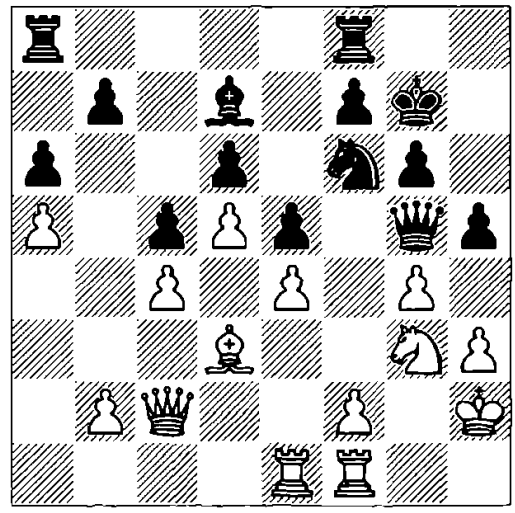
14...♔h8 15 ♘g3 ♘g8

Note that Black's knights have already made six moves between them. In an open position, such an expenditure of time would frequently spell disaster, but in blocked positions, time is often less important, and slower manoeuvres are the order of the day.

16 ♗xg7+?

A bad exchange, which leaves his kingside dark squares very weak. He should have preferred 16 ♗d2.

16...♔xg7 17 ♔h2 ♗g5 18 ♘xg5 ♕xg5 19 a5 ♘f6 20 ♖ae1 h5! *(D)*



Now Black has seized the initiative completely, and White's kingside soon collapses.

21 f3 hxg4 22 hxg4 ♖h8+ 23 ♔g1 ♖h3 24 ♕g2 ♕h4 0-1

There is no defence to 25...♖h8.

This is a typical example of how play can develop in blocked positions, although it was poorly handled by White. Both sides play on the flanks, and the game frequently involves a great deal of slow positional manoeuvring. Black's convoluted knight manoeuvres in this game are typical of such positions.

QUESTION 39 What is 'Hypermodern' strategy?

The Hypermodern school of chess flourished in the years after the First World War, its two leading practitioners being Réti and Nimzowitsch. Their main contribution was their attitude to pawn-centres. The classical view was that one should always try to occupy the centre with pawns. The Hypermoderns took the view that it was control of the centre that mattered, rather than mere occupation, and that an inadequately-supported pawn-centre could be a liability. They developed many openings that relied on control of the centre by pieces from a distance, often by fianchettoing bishops. Openings such as the Réti (1 ♘f3, 2 g3, etc.), the Modern Defence (1 e4 g6) and the Alekhine Defence (1 e4 ♘f6) are typical Hypermodern openings. The main strategy is to lure the opponent's central pawns forward, hoping they will prove weak, as in the following game:

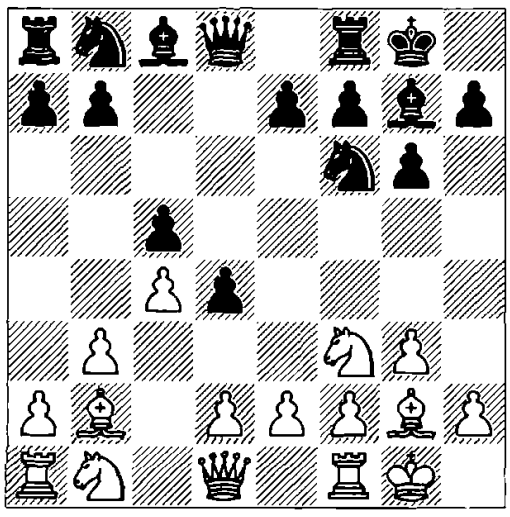
Keene – Thorbergsson
Reykjavik 1972

1 ♘f3 ♘f6 2 g3 g6 3 b3

The double fianchetto is typical Hypermodern strategy.

3...♗g7 4 ♗b2 0-0 5 ♗g2 d5 6 0-0 c5 7 c4 d4 *(D)*

W



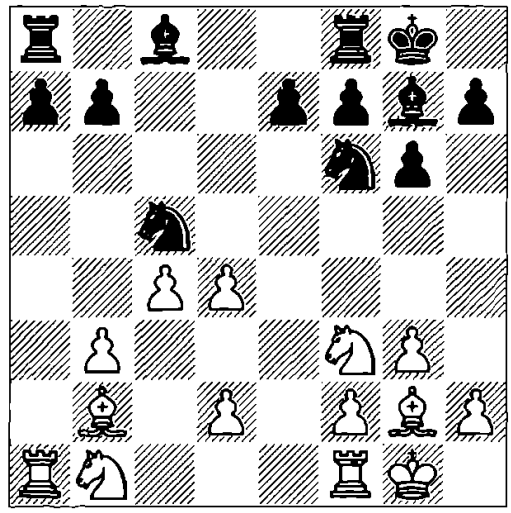
Black has seized the centre with his pawns, but they soon disappear under the weight of White's flank blows.

8 b4! ♕b6 9 ♕b3 d3?

Not good, but he is already unable to defend his pawn-centre.

10 bxc5 ♕xb3 11 axb3 ♘a6 12 exd3 ♘xc5 13 d4 *(D)*

B



Compare the previous diagram – what has happened to Black's pawn-centre? He is already completely lost.

13...♘d3

Black cannot play 13...♘xb3 due to 14 ♖a3, trapping the knight. Therefore Black must remain a pawn down.

14 ♗a3 ♘e4

Black's knights occupy central squares, but they lack support from pieces or pawns and cannot stay where they are for long.

15 ♘c3 ♘exf2 16 ♖xf2 ♘xf2 17 ♔xf2 ♗g4 18 ♘e5 ♖fd8 19 ♘d5 ♗xe5 20 dxe5 e6 21 ♘f6+ ♔g7 22 ♘xg4 ♖xd2+ 23 ♔g1 h5 24 ♘f2 1-0

Hypermodern strategy is very interesting, but requires a lot of experience and positional judgement. For this reason, I would not recommend it to inexperienced players, who should stick to a classical approach.

QUESTION 40 What is the value of a pawn-majority?

The value of a pawn-majority derives principally from the fact that it can produce a passed pawn, which may eventually promote. Question 37 featured an example of a central pawn-majority which crashed through the centre and eventually forced Black to give up a piece. A queenside majority is frequently strong in the middlegame also, as its distance from the kings makes any potential passed pawn more dangerous.

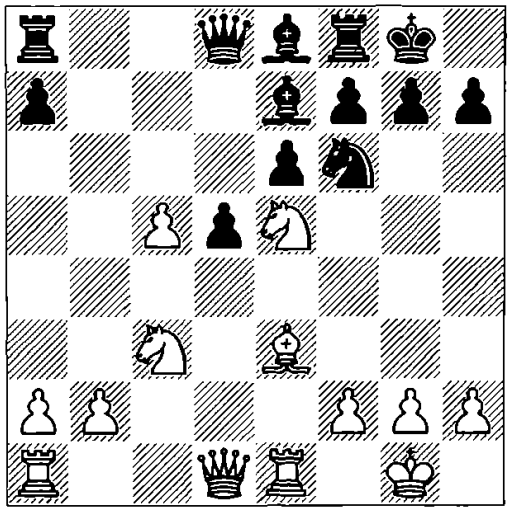
Acs – Khruschov
World U-16 Ch, Erevan 1997

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 c4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 ♘c6 6 ♘f3 e6 7 c5

White establishes his queenside majority. Now his task is gradually to advance it.

7...♗e7 8 ♗b5 0-0 9 0-0 ♗d7 10 ♖e1 b6 11 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 12 ♘e5 ♗e8 13 ♗e3 bxc5 14 dxc5 *(D)*

B



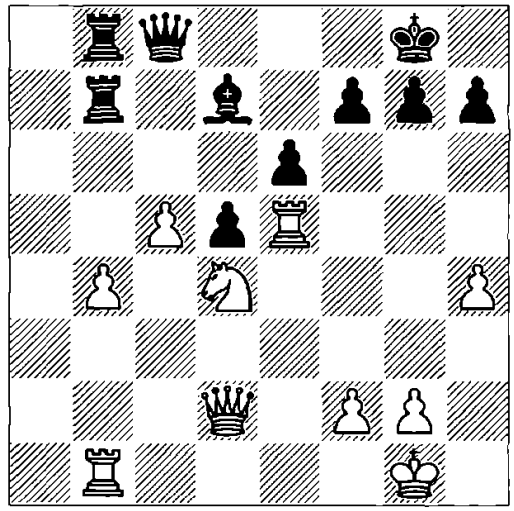
This latest exchange has given White two connected passed pawns on the queenside. Black also has passed pawns on the d- and e-files, but White succeeds in blockading them, while gradually preparing the advance of his own majority.

14...a5 15 ♖c1 ♖c8 16 a3 ♘d7 17 ♘xd7 ♗xd7 18 b4 axb4 19 axb4 ♖b8 20 ♖b1 ♕e8 21 ♗f4 ♖b7 22 ♖e3 ♗c6 23 ♘e2!

From d4, the knight will support the pawn advances to b5 and c6.

23...♕d7 24 ♘d4 ♗f6 25 ♗e5 ♗xe5 26 ♖xe5 ♖fb8 27 ♕d2 ♕c8 28 h4 ♗d7 *(D)*

W



This allows a decisive breakthrough, during which White gives us a small revision exercise in some of our basic tactics.

29 c6! ♗xc6 30 ♖c1 ♖c7 31 ♕c3

The pin costs Black material.

31...♕e8 32 b5 ♗d7 33 ♕xc7 ♖c8 34 ♕xc8 ♗xc8 35 ♖e3

The two rooks are stronger than the queen, and White soon breaks down the last resistance.

35...♗b7 36 ♖c7 ♕b8 37 ♖ec3 e5 38 ♘f5 d4 39 ♖xb7!

And to finish, a small combination, based on the fork motif.

39...♕xb7 40 ♖c8+ ♕xc8 41 ♘e7+ ♔f8 42 ♘xc8 1-0

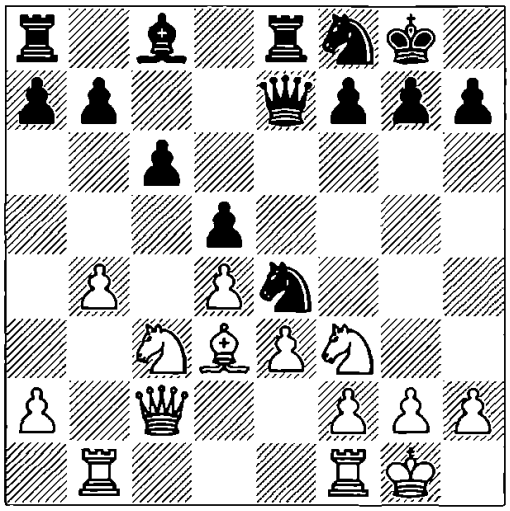
QUESTION 41 What is a 'minority attack'?

The usual rule of thumb in chess is to attack where you have a pawn-majority, but there are structures where the opposite happens, and the player attacks in the sector where his pawns are in a minority.

Averbakh – Konstantinopolsky
USSR Team Ch, Moscow 1966

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 ♗g5 ♗e7 5 e3 0-0 6 ♘f3 ♘bd7 7 ♕c2 c6 8 cxd5 exd5 9 ♗d3 ♖e8 10 0-0 ♘f8 11 ♖ab1 ♘e4 12 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 13 b4 *(D)*

B



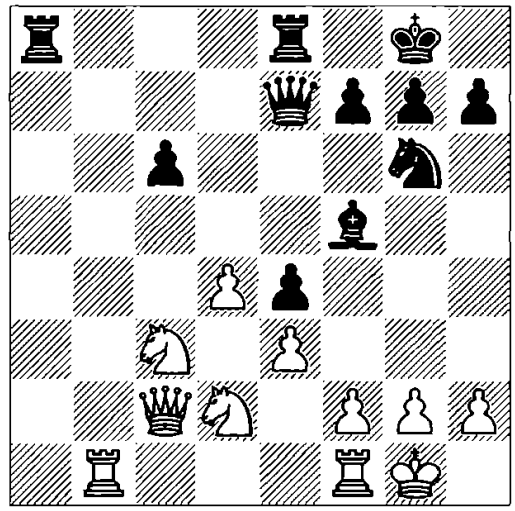
This is one of the standard structures in which a minority attack is appropriate. White attacks by advancing his pawn to b5. The idea is to capture on c6, and leave Black with a weak pawn on this square. If Black avoids this by taking on b5 himself, his d5-pawn will be weak.

13...a6 14 a4 ♘g6 15 b5 axb5 16 axb5 ♗g4 17 ♗xe4!

An important move. The trap 17 ♘d2? ♘xd2 18 ♕xd2 ♘h4 has claimed quite a few victims, with White having no good defence to the threats of ...♗f3, ...♗h3 and ...♘f3+.

17...dxe4 18 ♘d2 ♗f5 19 bxc6 bxc6 *(D)*

W



White has achieved his aim. Black's c6-pawn is permanently weak, and will be the subject of attack from White's pieces. The remainder of the game sees White trying to exploit this advantage, while defending against Black's counterattack on the kingside.

20 ♘e2 ♘h4 21 ♘g3 ♗g6 22 ♕xc6 ♖ac8 23 ♕b5 f5 24 ♖bc1 ♖xc1 25 ♖xc1 f4 26 exf4 e3 27 ♕b3+ ♗f7 28 ♕xe3 ♕b7 29 ♘de4 ♗g6 30 f5 ♘xf5 31 ♘xf5 ♖xe4

31...♗xf5 loses to 32 ♘f6+.

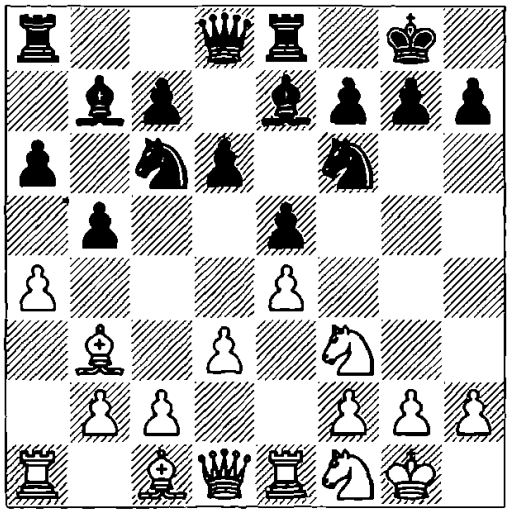
32 ♘d6 ♖xe3 33 fxe3 ♕d7 34 ♖c8+ ♕xc8 35 ♘xc8 ♔f7 36 e4 ♔e6 37 e5 ♔d7 38 ♘d6 ♔e6 39 ♔f2 ♔d5 40 ♔e3 h6 41 h4 ♔e6 42 ♔f4 ♗d3 43 ♘e8 ♔f7 44 ♘c7 ♔e7 45 d5 ♔d7 46 ♘e6 ♗f1 47 ♘xg7 ♗xg2 48 e6+ 1-0

QUESTION 42 How does castling affect the choice of plan?

The main effect of castling is in determining the method of attack. If both sides have castled on the same side, then any kingside attack will usually be based on piece-play.

King – D. Howell
London (Simpson's) 2003

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 a6 4 ♗a4 ♘f6 5 0-0 ♗e7 6 ♖e1 b5 7 ♗b3 0-0 8 a4 ♗b7 9 d3 d6 10 ♘bd2 ♖e8 11 ♘f1 *(D)*



White's principal strategy in such Lopez positions is to attack Black's king. With both sides having castled kingside, it is difficult to attack by advancing White's kingside pawns, because that would expose his own king as much as Black's. Consequently, White must attack with pieces, rather than pawns.

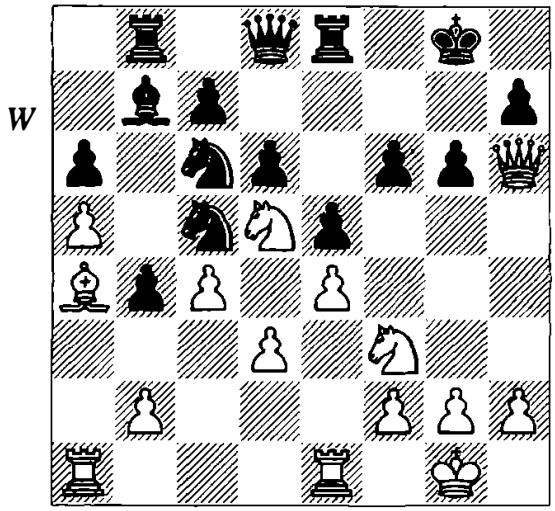
11...♗f8 12 ♗d2 g6 13 c4 b4 14 a5 ♖b8 15 ♗a4 ♘d7 16 ♘e3 ♗h6?

The plan of exchanging this bishop backfires badly. 16...♘c5 is better.

17 ♘d5 ♗xd2 18 ♕xd2 ♘c5?

Allowing White to launch a decisive sacrificial attack. 18...♔g7 is superior, although after 19 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 20 ♘xb4 or 19 d4 White retains a large advantage.

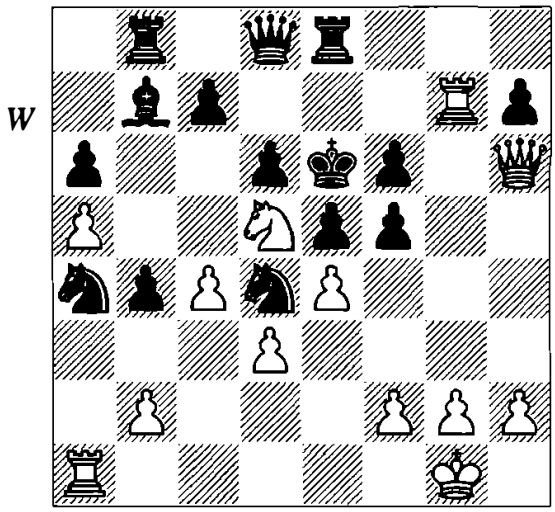
19 ♕h6 f6 *(D)*



20 ♘h4! ♘xa4 21 ♘f5! gxf5 22 ♖e3 ♘d4

22...f4 loses to 23 ♖h3.

23 ♖g3+ ♔f7 24 ♖g7+ ♔e6 *(D)*



25 ♕xf6+!! 1-0

A beautiful finish. 25...♕xf6 26 ♘xc7# is mate. Notice how White's attack was conducted exclusively with pieces, while his kingside pawns remained at home. This is typical of positions with same-side castling.

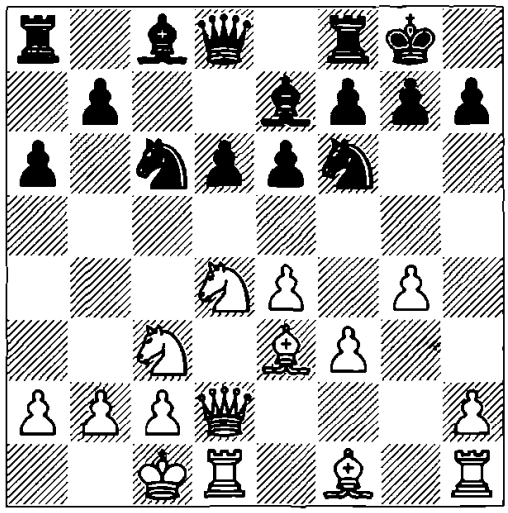
QUESTION 43

So what happens in positions where the players have castled on opposite sides?

In this case, the more usual method of attack is to rush your pawns down the board at the enemy king, since it is possible to do so without exposing your own king. Time is usually of the essence in such positions, and whoever gets his attack going first, often wins.

Morozevich – Rowson
British League (4NCL) 1999/00

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 d4 cxd4 5 ♘xd4 a6 6 ♗e3 e6 7 f3 ♗e7 8 ♕d2 0-0 9 0-0-0 ♘c6 10 g4 *(D)*

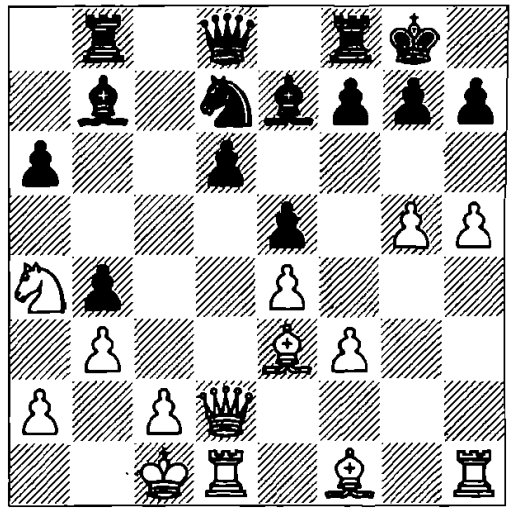


A typical advance in opposite-castling positions.

10...♘xd4 11 ♕xd4 b5 12 h4 e5 13 ♕d2 b4 14 ♘a4 ♖b8 15 g5 ♘d7 16 b3 ♗b7 17 h5 *(D)*

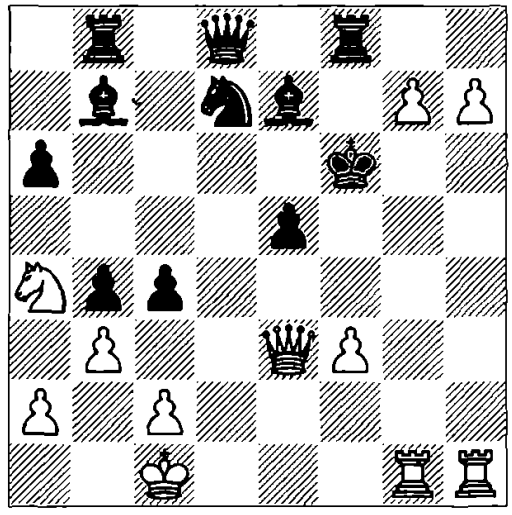
White's attack has developed much more quickly than Black's, and there is now a threat of 18 g6, tearing open lines in front of Black's king. It is probably already too late to defend the black king adequately.

17...f5 18 ♗c4+ ♔h8 19 g6 h6



The only way to try to keep lines closed, but now White breaks through with an obvious sacrifice.

20 ♗xh6 fxe4 21 ♖dg1 e3 22 ♕xe3 d5 23 ♗xg7+ ♔xg7 24 h6+ ♔f6 25 g7 dxc4 26 h7 *(D)*



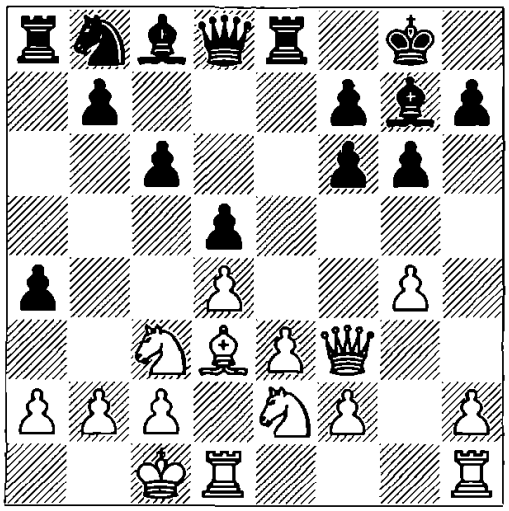
1-0

A picturesque finish. After getting his pawns all the way to g7 and h7, White deserves a diagram, but the position also shows with brutal clarity the sort of thing to aim for in positions with opposite-side castling.

QUESTION 44

Is there anything more to the strategy in opposite-castling positions?

Although most such positions involve a race between opposing attacks, other elements sometimes come into play.



Miles – L. Spasov
Surakarta/Denpasar 1982

Rather than rushing forward on the kingside, Miles employed prophylaxis on the other flank.

11 a3! b5 12 ♘a2! ♘d7 13 c3

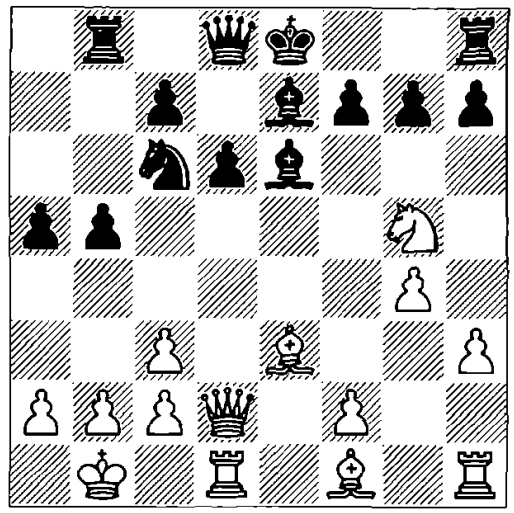
As a result of his last three moves, Miles has sealed up the queenside and made it very hard for Black to open lines there. White is now free to proceed with h4 and an attack on the other wing. Miles won in 41 moves.

The next example shows that the centre is still important in such positions.

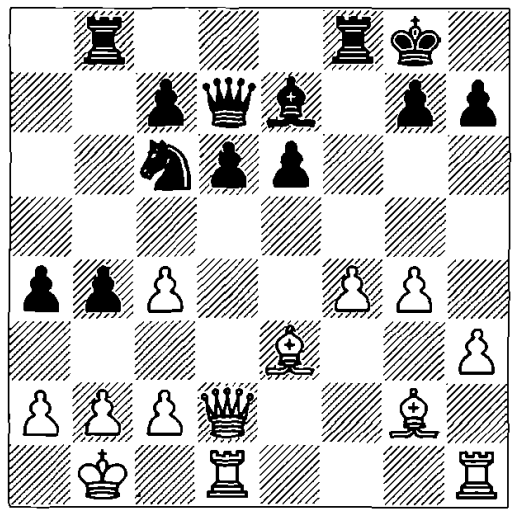
Atkins – Sherrard
British Ch, Southport 1905

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 ♘xe5 d6 4 ♘f3 ♘xe4 5 ♘c3 ♘xc3 6 dxc3 ♗e7 7 ♗e3 ♘c6 8 h3 a6 9 ♕d2 ♗e6 10 0-0-0 b5 11 ♔b1 ♖b8 12 g4 a5 13 ♘g5 *(D)*

Removing Black's light-squared bishop will weaken his central control and light squares.



13...♕d7 14 ♘xe6 fxe6 15 f4 0-0 16 ♗g2 b4 17 c4 a4 *(D)*



18 f5!

Striking at Black's real weakness, which is not his king, but his central light squares.

18...♘d8 19 ♗e4 exf5 20 ♗xf5 ♕e8 21 ♖de1 g6 22 ♗e4 c6 23 h4

Only now does Atkins turn to the usual kingside pawn-storm, which soon decides the game.

23...♘e6 24 h5 g5 25 ♗f5 ♘f4 26 ♗xf4 gxf4 27 ♕d3 h6 28 ♖e6

Exploiting another weak light square.

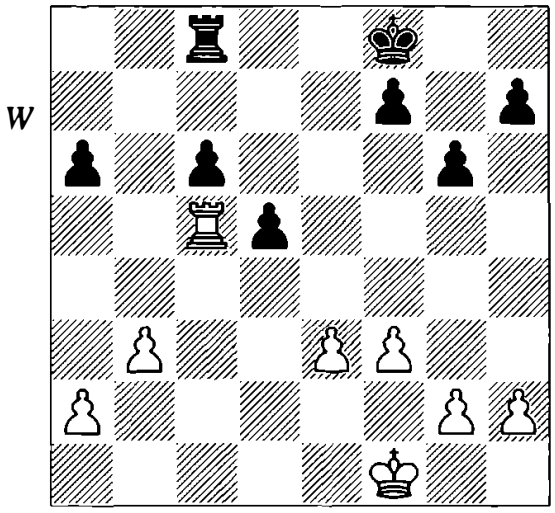
28...♖f6 29 ♖he1 ♖xe6 30 ♖xe6 ♕f8 31 ♖g6+ 1-0

QUESTION 45 What is a positional advantage?

In simple terms, a positional advantage is just a situation where a player has a superiority which does not consist of extra material. Positional advantages tend to boil down to one or more of the following:

- Better pawn position
- Better king position
- More active pieces
- Control of key squares or lines

The following three diagrams illustrate the first three of these situations.



Flohr – Vidmar
Nottingham 1936

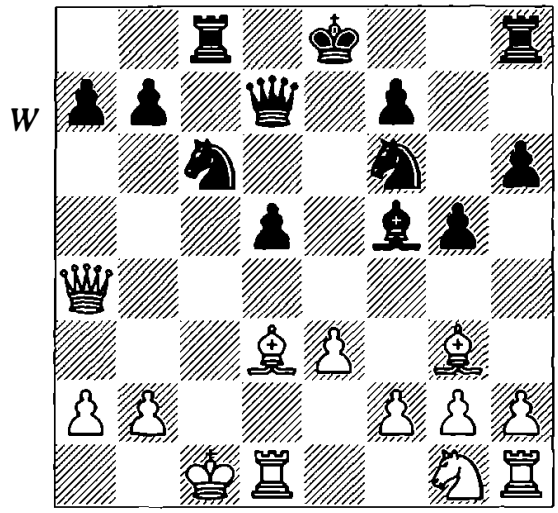
White's superior pawn-structure (especially the weak black pawns on a6 and c6) gives him a near-decisive advantage. In fact, Flohr won the ending without any discernible mistake from his opponent.

In the top diagram in the next column, the exposed position of his king leaves White without any defence. He lasted only eight more moves:

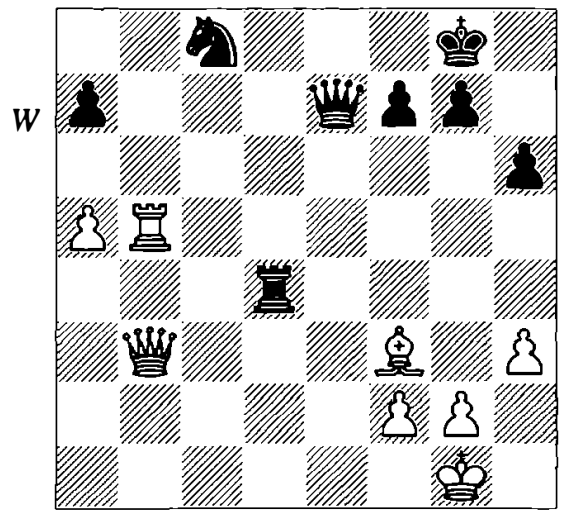
15 ♔b1

Fleeing from the dangerous c-file.

15...♗xd3+ 16 ♖xd3 ♕f5 17 e4 ♘xe4 18 ♔a1 0-0 19 ♖d1 b5 20 ♕xb5 ♘d4 21 ♕d3 ♘c2+ 22 ♔b1 ♘b4 0-1



Keres – Botvinnik
USSR Absolute Ch, Leningrad/Moscow 1941



Kasparov – Torre
Moscow 1981

Material is level, and the pawn-structure symmetrical, yet White has an overwhelming positional advantage. Why? Because his pieces are so much more active than their opposite numbers. Kasparov won quickly:

31 ♕c3 ♖d8 32 ♖b7 ♕d6 33 ♖c7 ♘e7 34 ♖xa7

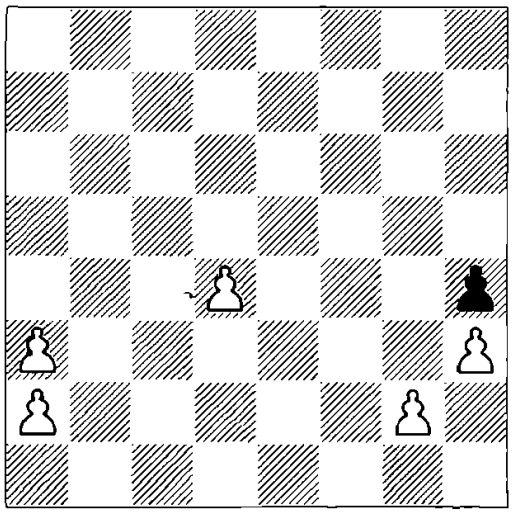
Already, White's positional advantage has yielded a material advantage as well.

34...♘g6 35 ♕c7 ♕f6 36 ♕xd8+ 1-0

QUESTION 46 Which pawn-structures are weak?

A weak pawn is any pawn that cannot be defended by another pawn. Since pawns are the least valuable unit, it is generally not good to have to use pieces to defend pawns, since this deprives the piece concerned of its mobility.

Three of the most common types of weak pawn are seen in the diagram below:

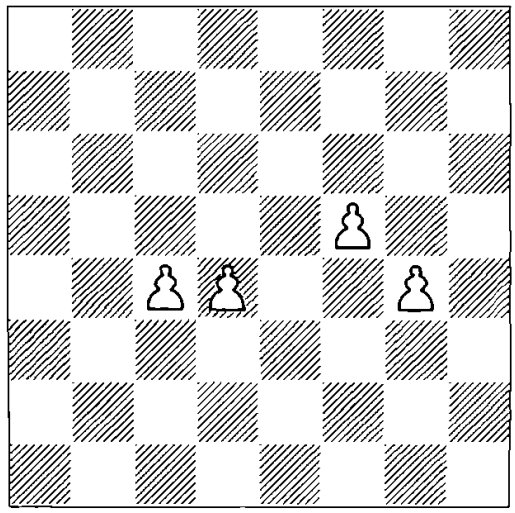


The two pawns on the a-file, standing one in front of the other, are called *doubled pawns*. They cannot defend each other, so if Black attacks the a3-pawn, for example with a rook on the a-file, White would have to use a piece to defend it.

The white pawn on d4 is an *isolated pawn*, i.e. a pawn which has no pawns on the same colour on either of the adjacent files. It too cannot be defended by one of its own pawns, so it is vulnerable to attack. In addition, an enemy piece can occupy the square immediately in front of it (in this case, d5), safe from attack by white pawns.

Finally, the pawn on g2 is a *backward pawn*. Although it has a white pawn on the neighbouring h-file, that pawn cannot support the g-pawn, which is held back by the enemy pawn on h4. Once again, if Black puts a rook on the open g-file, the g2-pawn would be under attack and would have to be defended by a white piece.

The other principal type of weak pawn-structure may be seen in the following diagram.



Here, the two pawns on c4 and d4, and the pair on f5 and g4, are known as *hanging pawns*. The problem with this formation is that when side by side, neither pawn defends the other. If one steps forward, as has happened with the f- and g-pawns, the front pawn is defended, but the rear pawn is not. Furthermore, the g5-square is now available as a potential outpost for a black piece, which cannot be driven away by a pawn.

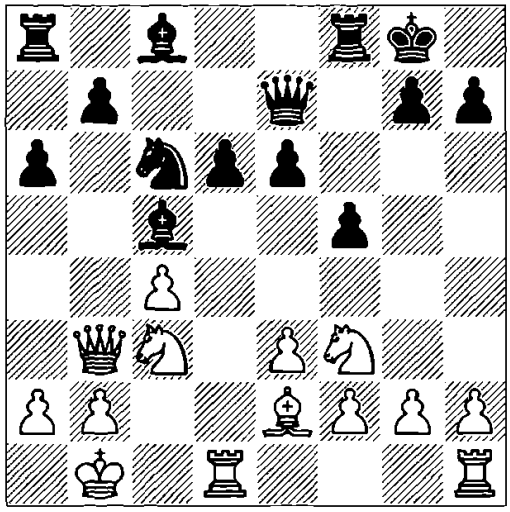
QUESTION 47

Why exactly are weak pawns a disadvantage?

There are two problems. Firstly, the pawns themselves may prove impossible to defend, and can simply be lost. Secondly, even if they can be defended, this ties up the defender's pieces, and may leave him exposed to a strike somewhere else on the board. The first scenario is illustrated in Karpov-Spassky (Question 21). The game below illustrates the second.

Fine – Michell
Hastings 1935/6

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 ♕b3 c5 5 dxc5 ♘c6 6 ♘f3 ♘e4 7 ♗d2 ♘xd2 8 ♘xd2 ♗xc5 9 e3 0-0 10 0-0-0 f5 11 ♗e2 ♕e7 12 ♘f3 a6 13 ♔b1 d6 *(D)*

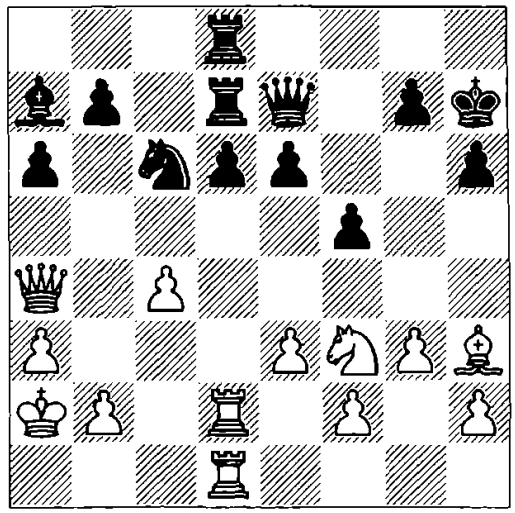


Black has a backward pawn on the open d-file. The first stage is to tie Black's pieces to its defence.

14 ♘a4 ♗a7 15 ♘b6 ♖b8 16 ♖d2 ♕c7 17 ♘xc8 ♖bxc8 18 ♖hd1 ♖fd8 19 a3 ♕e7 20 g3 ♖d7 21 ♗f1 ♖f8 22 ♔a2 h6 23 ♕a4 ♖fd8 24 ♗h3 ♔h7 *(D)*

White cannot win the d6-pawn by force, but now that the defender's pieces are tied to its defence, he opens up a second front on the kingside.

25 g4 g6 26 gxf5 gxf5 27 e4?!

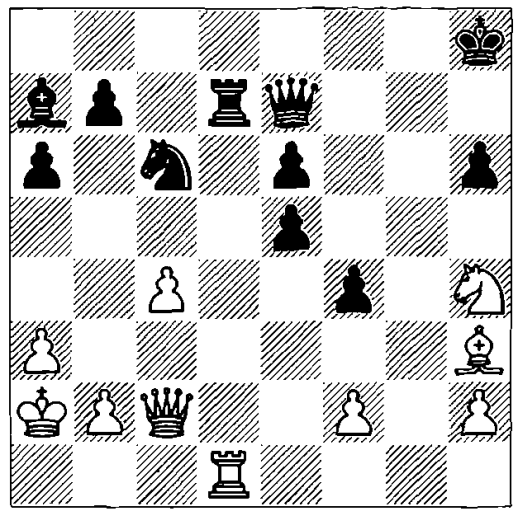


The right idea, but preparing the e4 advance with 27 ♕c2 (Nunn) is crushing.

27...f4?!

27...fxe4 28 ♕c2 d5 is a better defence, when 29 cxd5 exd5 30 ♗xd7 ♖xd7 gives Black some play for the exchange.

28 e5 dxe5 29 ♕c2+ ♔h8 30 ♖xd7 ♖xd7 31 ♘h4! *(D)*



Now the tactical threats on g6 prove decisive.

31...♕f7 32 ♘g6+ ♔g7 33 ♖g1 ♔f6 34 ♘h8 ♘d4 35 ♖g6+ ♔e7 36 ♕e4 ♕e8 37 ♕xe5 ♔d8 38 ♖xh6 ♗b8 39 ♕xb8+ 1-0

A typical example. Black never did lose his weak pawn on d6, but the effort of defending it led to disaster elsewhere on the board.

QUESTION 48

What is a space advantage, and why does it matter?

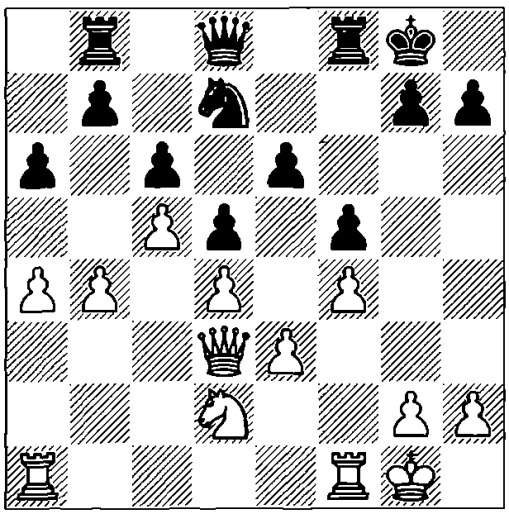
Controlling more space is usually the result of your pawns being further advanced. The advantage is that you have more room for manoeuvre, and can switch your pieces from one point of attack to another more easily than the defender can do.

Petrov – Grau
Buenos Aires Olympiad 1939

1 d4 d5 2 ♘f3 ♗f5 3 c4 e6 4 ♕b3 ♘c6 5 ♗d2 ♖b8 6 e3 a6 7 ♗d3 ♗xd3 8 ♕xd3 ♘b4 9 ♗xb4 ♗xb4+ 10 ♘bd2 ♘f6 11 0-0 0-0 12 c5

The first conquest of space.

12...♗xd2 13 ♘xd2 c6 14 f4 ♘d7 15 b4 f5 16 a4 *(D)*

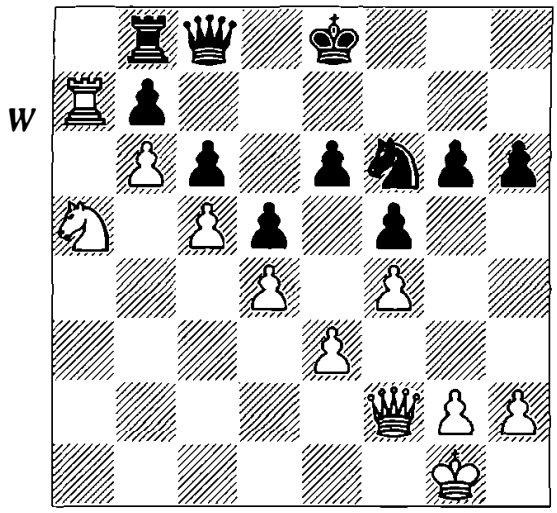


White now has substantially more space on the queenside, and proceeds to tie Black in knots.

16...♕c7 17 ♖fc1 ♖a8 18 b5 ♖fb8 19 ♘f3 axb5 20 axb5 ♕d8 21 b6

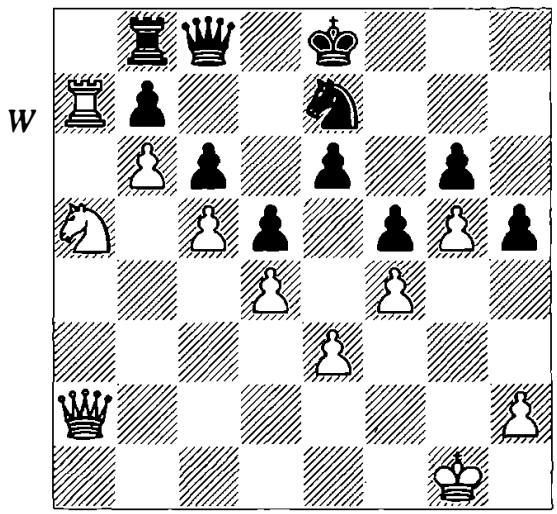
Fixing b7 as a target, and preparing to infiltrate with ♖a7.

21...♖xa1 22 ♖xa1 h6 23 ♖a7 ♔f7 24 ♕e2 g6 25 ♘d2 ♘f6 26 ♘b3 ♔e8 27 ♘a5 ♕c8 28 ♕a2 ♘d7 29 ♕f2 ♘f6 *(D)*



White's space-gains on the queenside have reached a maximum, and the black pieces are hopelessly tied up defending b7. Now White exploits his superior mobility by striking at Black's virtually undefended kingside.

30 ♕h4 ♘g8 31 g4! ♔f7 32 g5 h5 33 ♕f2 ♔e8 34 ♕a2 ♘e7 *(D)*



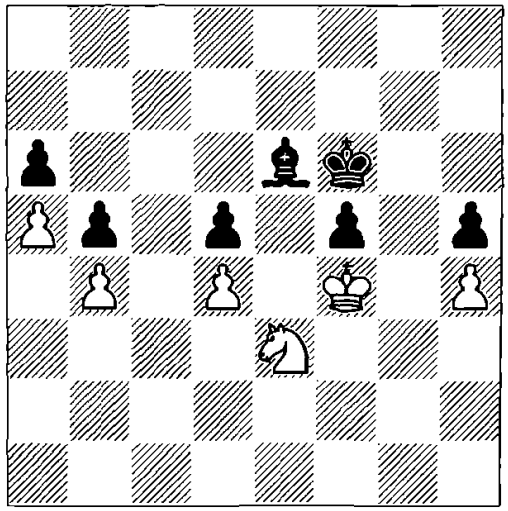
Black has managed to block the kingside, but his extreme lack of space means that he cannot defend against another switch of target, back to the queenside.

35 ♘xb7! ♖xb7 36 ♖xb7 ♕xb7 37 ♕a7 1-0

A drastic, but highly instructive example of the dangers of a space deficit.

QUESTION 49 Which is better, bishop or knight?

The usual rule is that bishops are better in open positions, knights in blocked positions. This is because knights are short-range pieces, but can jump over obstacles. Bishops, by contrast, have a long range, but only if their lines are not obstructed. In particular, bishops tend to be bad pieces when their own pawns are fixed on squares the same colour as those of the bishop.



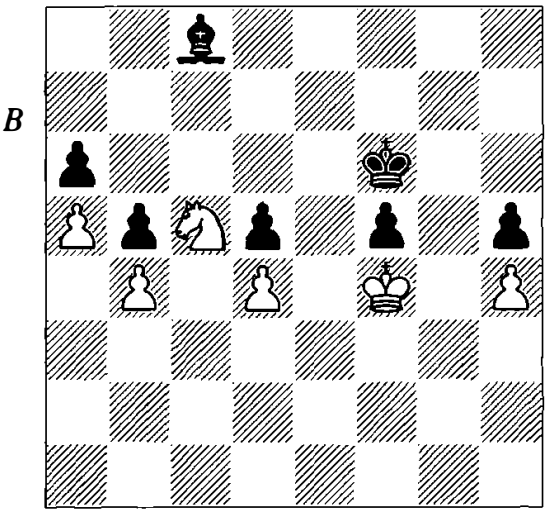
Khalifman – Barua
FIDE knockout, Las Vegas 1999

Black even has an extra pawn, but every one of his pawns is fixed on a light square, severely hampering his bishop's mobility. Khalifman won easily by tying the bishop to the defence of a6, and eventually breaking through on the dark squares after some manoeuvres with his king.

71 ♘c2 ♗d7 72 ♘e1 ♗c8 73 ♘d3 ♗e6 74 ♔f3 ♔e7

74...♔g7 75 ♔g3! ♔f6 76 ♘c5 ♗c8 77 ♔f4 is also zugzwang.

75 ♔g3 ♔f6 76 ♘c5 ♗c8 77 ♔f4 *(D)*

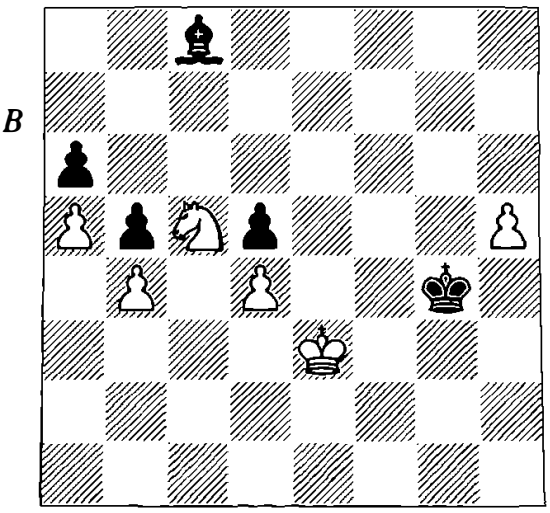


Zugzwang. Note how the bishop is totally immobilized. Black's king must give ground.

77...♔g6 78 ♔e5 f4 79 ♔xf4 ♔f6 80 ♔g3 ♔g7 81 ♔f3 ♔g6 82 ♘d3 ♗g4+ 83 ♔e3 ♗e6

The only way to defend the d5-pawn, but now h5 drops instead.

84 ♘f4+ ♔f5 85 ♘xh5 ♔g4 86 ♘f4 ♗f7 87 ♘d3 ♗e6 88 ♘c5 ♗c8 89 h5 *(D)*

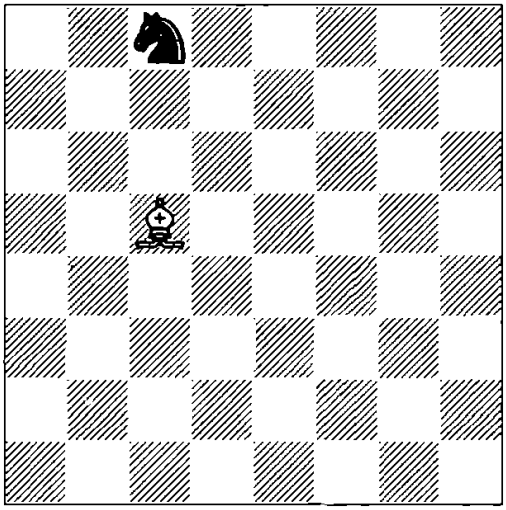


1-0

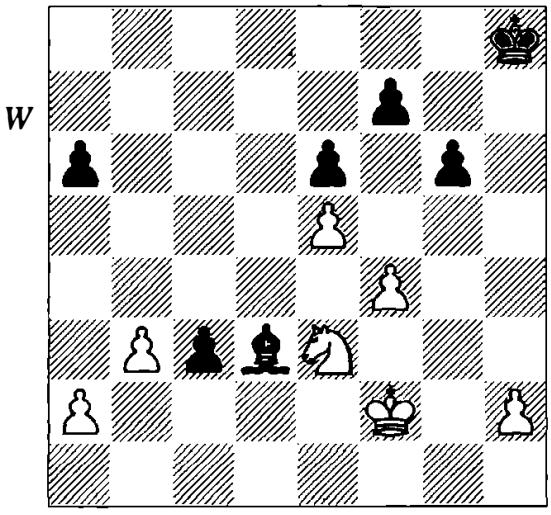
After 89...♔xh5 90 ♔f4, the white king gets to e5 and wins the d5-pawn.

QUESTION 50 So when are bishops better than knights?

Bishops are usually better than knights in open positions, where the bishop is not obstructed by blocked pawns. In addition, if there are pawns on both sides of the board, the bishop's superiority is usually enhanced, since it is a long-range piece, and can influence both sides of the board at once.



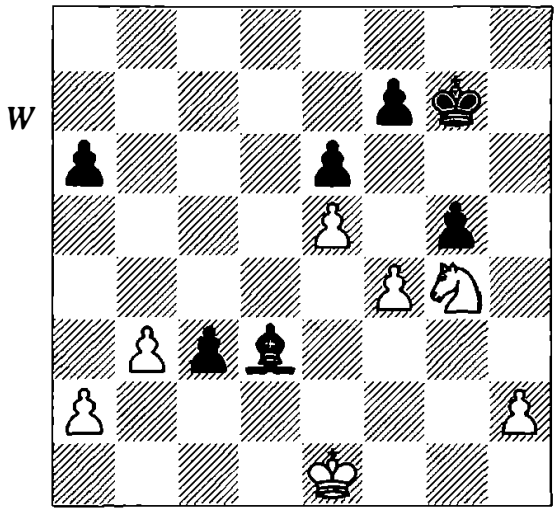
Here we see that on an open board, a bishop can even immobilize a knight without the help of other pieces.



Sandipan – Shariyazdanov
Moscow 2002

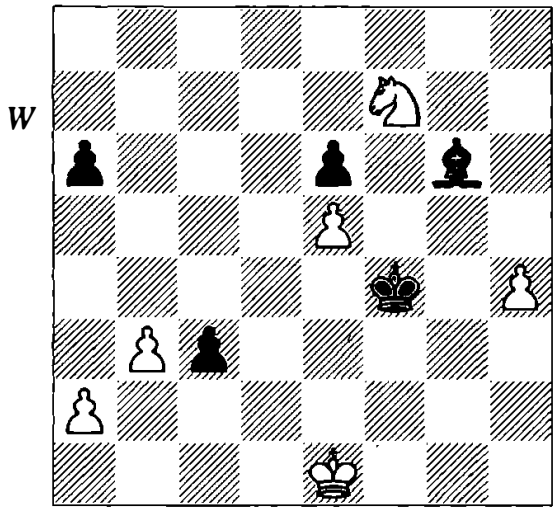
Black has a far-advanced passed pawn, but White is stopping it, and has his own potential passed pawn on the queenside. However, Black wins because his bishop is much stronger than the knight in such a position.

40 ♔e1 ♔g7 41 ♘g4 g5! *(D)*



Breaking up White's pawns and forcing an entry for the black king.

42 fxg5 ♔g6 43 ♘h6 ♔xg5 44 ♘xf7+ ♔f4 45 h4 ♗g6 *(D)*

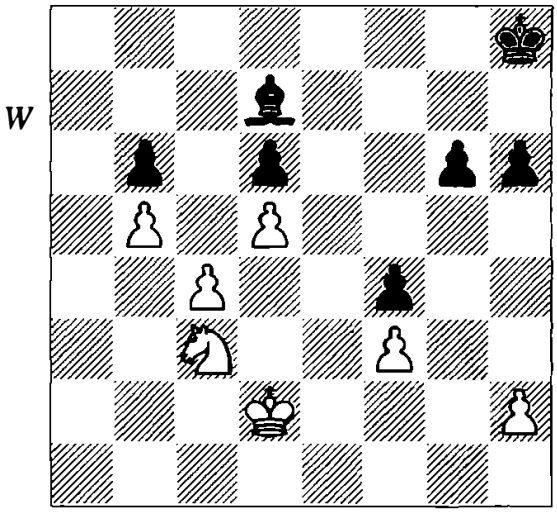


This position holds the key to the bishop's superiority over the knight in such positions. Note how the bishop is able both to stop the white passed pawn, and at the same time, support its own. The knight, by contrast, is effective only at short range, and cannot perform two widely-spaced functions.

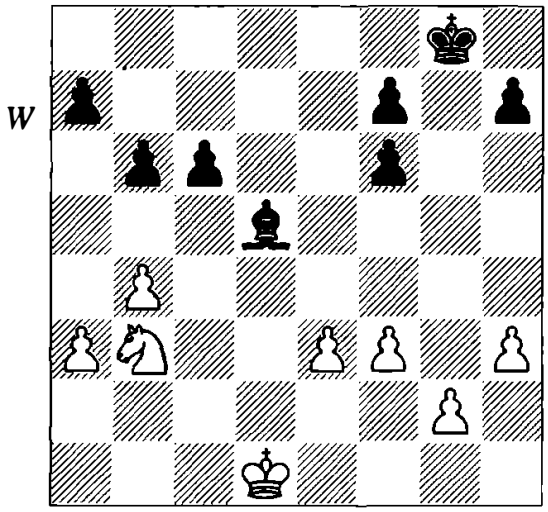
46 ♘d8 ♗h5 47 ♘xe6+ ♔e3 0-1

QUESTION 51 What other weakness does the bishop have?

There is one other important weakness of a single bishop, namely its 'colour-blindness' A bishop can only control squares of one colour, so even in an open position, it can sometimes be weaker than a knight if there are important weaknesses fixed on squares of the opposite colour from those which the bishop controls.



This hypothetical position is a simple example. Although Black's bishop is not 'bad' in the normal sense, it is unable to defend its own pawns on dark squares. White wins a pawn immediately by 1 ♘e4 or 1 ♘a4.



Botvinnik – Tal

World Ch match (game 1), Moscow 1961

This is a classic example. The knight exploits the enemy bishop's colour-blindness, to win material.

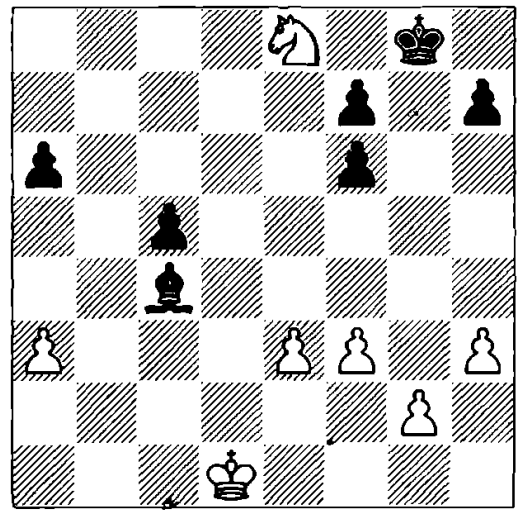
31 ♘d4

Threatening 32 e4, winning the c6-pawn, so the reply is forced.

31...c5 32 bxc5 bxc5 33 ♘b5 a6

Again forced.

34 ♘c7 ♗c4 35 ♘e8 *(D)*



Note how the bishop is quite impotent when it comes to defending pawns that stand on dark squares. The knight, by contrast, can attack squares of either colour. Black manages to stave off immediate loss of a pawn thanks to his threat of a counterattack by ...♗f1, but eventually material loss is inevitable.

35...f5 36 h4

This move safeguards White's kingside pawns, since if the bishop attacks them, they can simply advance to dark squares by g3 and f4. Black, on the other hand, can do nothing about his own weak pawns, and they will soon start to fall.

36...♔f8 37 ♘d6 ♗f1 38 g3 ♔e7

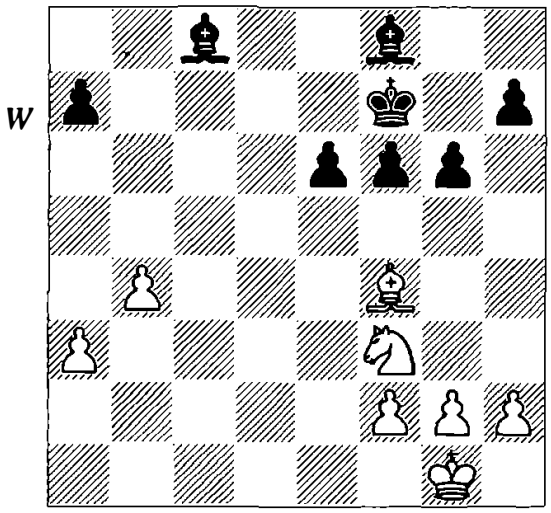
Or 38...♗d3 39 ♔d2 ♗b1 40 ♔c3 ♔e7 41 ♘b7, winning the c5-pawn.

39 ♘xf5+ ♔e6 40 e4 ♔e5 41 ♔d2 1-0

Intending ♔e3 followed by f4 and g4-g5, after which Black's position is hopeless.

QUESTION 52 — Why are two bishops so strong?

The main reason for the strength of the bishop-pair comes from the answer to the previous question. Between them, two bishops can control every square on the board, thereby eliminating the colour-blindness of a single bishop. As a result, two bishops against bishop or knight (or two knights) frequently represents a decisive positional advantage, even with balanced material. If the bishops coordinate properly, they can control whole swathes of the board, as well as attacking weaknesses on squares of either colour. The following is a painful example from my own experience:

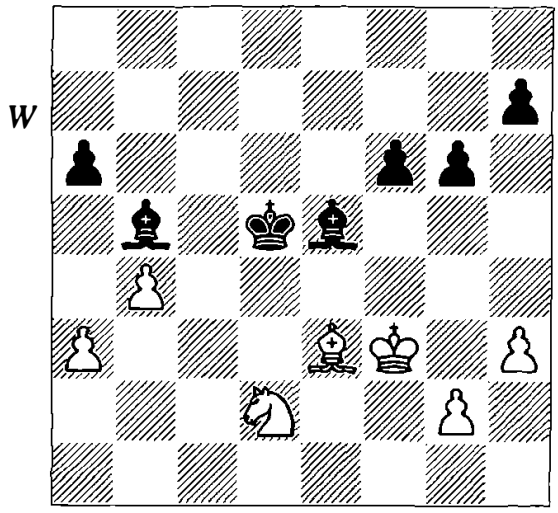


Giddins – Emms
Isle of Man 1999

Despite the material equality, White is virtually lost, because Black's bishop-pair is too strong. Black won easily:

28 ♘d2 e5 29 ♗e3 a6 30 ♔f1 ♔e6 31 f4 exf4 32 ♗xf4 ♔d5 33 ♗e3 ♗d7 34 ♔e2 ♗d6 35 h3 ♗b5+ 36 ♔f3 ♗e5 *(D)*

Note how the black bishops cooperate to dominate all the central squares. Only the

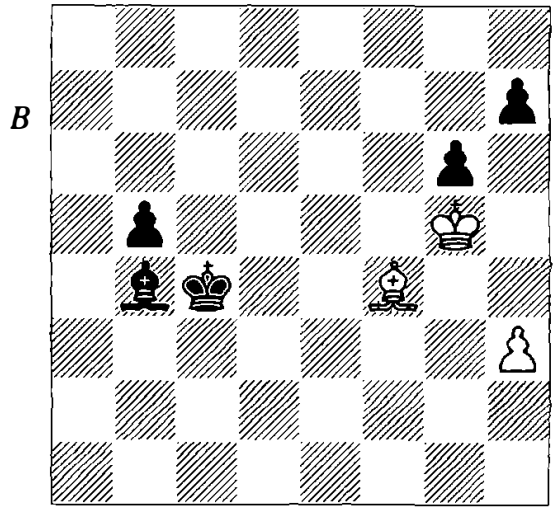


knight stops the black king from marching in via c4, and eventually, White will be unable to hold the blockade.

37 ♘e4 ♗b2 38 ♗d2 f5 39 ♘c3+ ♔c4

Now a pawn is lost.

40 ♘xb5 axb5 41 g4 fxg4+ 42 ♔xg4 ♗xa3 43 ♔g5 ♗xb4 44 ♗f4 *(D)*



44...♗f8

This stops White's last hopes of counterplay by 45 ♔h6. Now the b-pawn will cost White a piece.

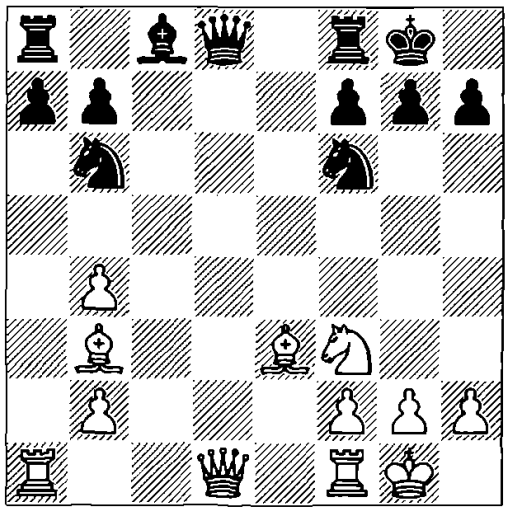
45 ♔f6 b4 46 ♔f7 b3 47 ♗e5 ♗b4 0-1

QUESTION 53 Are two bishops strong in the middlegame too?

In the right circumstances, they are indeed. Once again, it depends on their scope. In blocked positions, they are less effective, but if the position is open, they can be a dominant factor. In the following example, we see how strong the bishop-pair can be in attack.

Gligorić – Padevsky
Moscow Olympiad 1956

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 e3 c5 5 ♗d3 0-0 6 ♘f3 d5 7 0-0 ♘bd7 8 a3 cxd4 9 ♘xd5 exd5 10 axb4 dxc4 11 ♗xc4 ♘b6 12 ♗b3 dxe3 13 ♗xe3 *(D)*

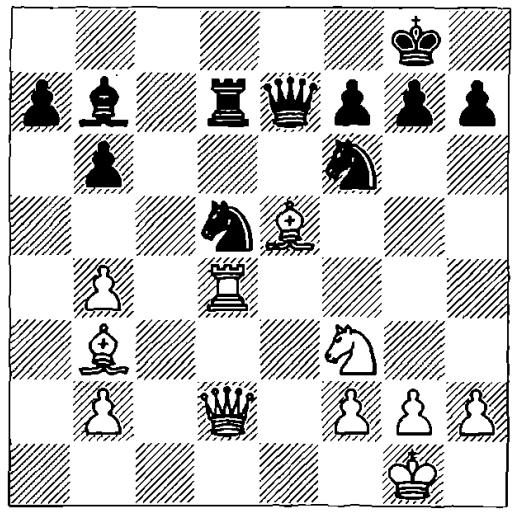


A position typical of the Nimzo-Indian. Black has surrendered the two bishops for the better pawn-structure, but in this position the bishops prove very powerful.

13...♘bd5 14 ♗c5 ♖e8 15 ♖e1 ♖xe1+ 16 ♕xe1 b6 17 ♗d4 ♗b7 18 ♖d1 ♕c7 19 ♗e5

Notice the particular strength of the dark-squared bishop, which is the one that has no opponent. When one has the bishop-pair, it is usually important to make the best possible use of the unopposed bishop, as Gligorić does here.

19...♕e7 20 ♖d4 ♖d8 21 ♕d2 ♖d7 *(D)*



22 g4!

A striking move. With Black's pieces pinned and badly tied up, White introduces the deadly threat of g5.

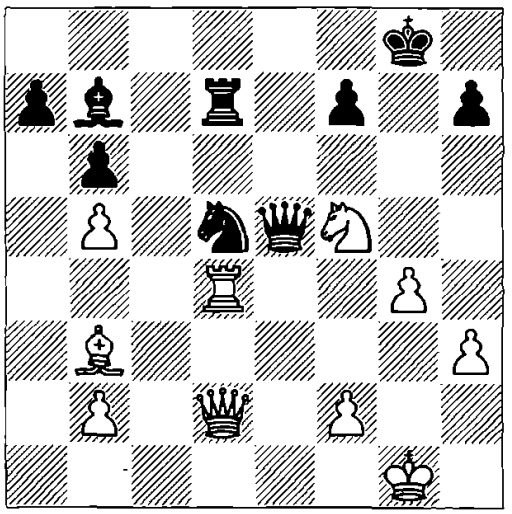
22...♕e6 23 h3 ♕c6 24 b5 ♕e6

After 24...♕xb5 25 ♗a4 White wins the exchange.

25 ♗xf6 gxf6

Forced, else the d5-knight is lost.

26 ♘h4 f5 27 ♘xf5 ♕e5 *(D)*



28 ♗xd5 1-0

After 28...♗xd5 29 ♖xd5 ♖xd5 30 ♕xd5! ♕xd5 31 ♘e7+ the fork wins a piece for White.

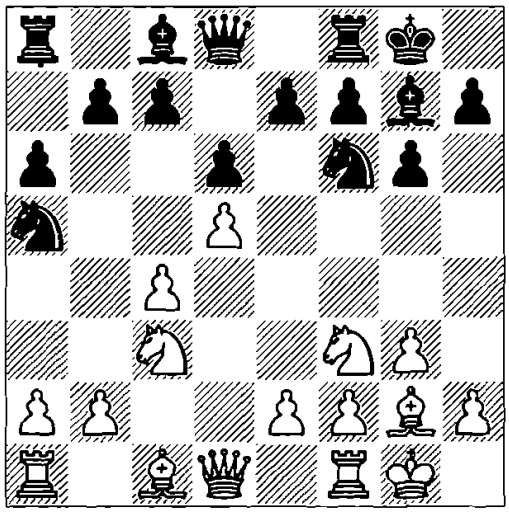
QUESTION 54

How does a misplaced piece affect the position?

Siegbert Tarrasch, a great German player in the late 19th century, famously declared that if one piece stands badly, then the whole position is bad. This is something of an exaggeration, but it is true that in many games the effect of one misplaced piece proves decisive. The following game is an example.

P.H. Nielsen – Nithander
Politiken Cup, Copenhagen 2007

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 g3 ♗g7 4 ♗g2 0-0 5 ♘c3 d6 6 ♘f3 ♘c6 7 0-0 a6 8 d5 ♘a5 *(D)*

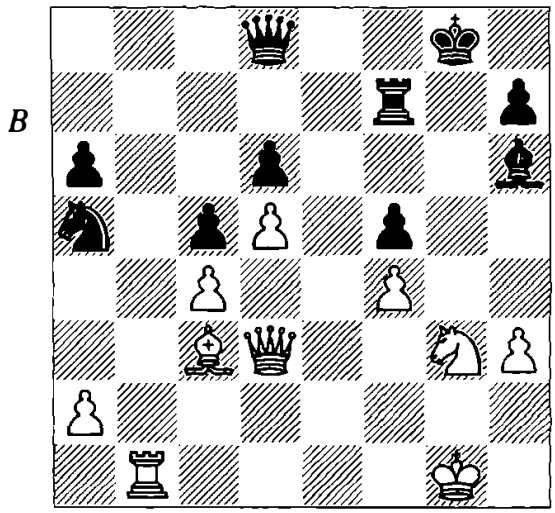


This move sets the pattern for the rest of the game. Black hopes the knight will prove useful in creating queenside counterplay with ...b5, whilst White hopes that the knight will prove sidelined.

9 ♘d2 c5 10 ♕c2 ♖b8 11 b3 b5 12 ♖b1 ♗f5 13 e4 ♗d7 14 ♗b2 bxc4 15 bxc4 ♗h6 16 f4

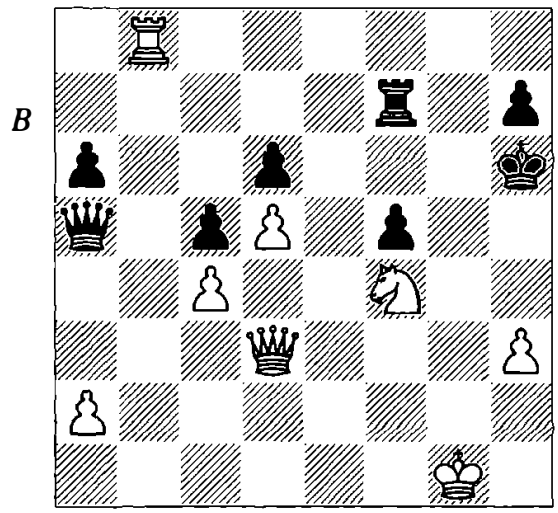
Black has achieved his queenside advance, but it has not brought much benefit. Play now switches to the centre and kingside, with the offside knight on a5 unable to contribute.

16...e5 17 ♘e2 exf4 18 gxf4 ♘g4 19 ♕d3 f5 20 ♗c3 ♖xb1 21 ♖xb1 fxe4 22 ♘xe4 ♗f5 23 h3 ♘f6 24 ♘xf6+ ♖xf6 25 ♗e4 ♖f7 26 ♗xf5 gxf5 27 ♘g3 *(D)*



It is easy to see that the knight on a5 is completely out of play. The action is all taking place in the centre and on the kingside, where White effectively has an extra piece. Black now blunders material, but his position is lost anyway, since he cannot defend the f5-pawn.

27...♗xf4? 28 ♗xa5 ♕xa5 29 ♖b8+ ♔g7 30 ♘h5+ ♔h6 31 ♘xf4 *(D)*



The game is over. Black plays on for a while, hoping for a swindle, but White just needs to consolidate his material advantage.

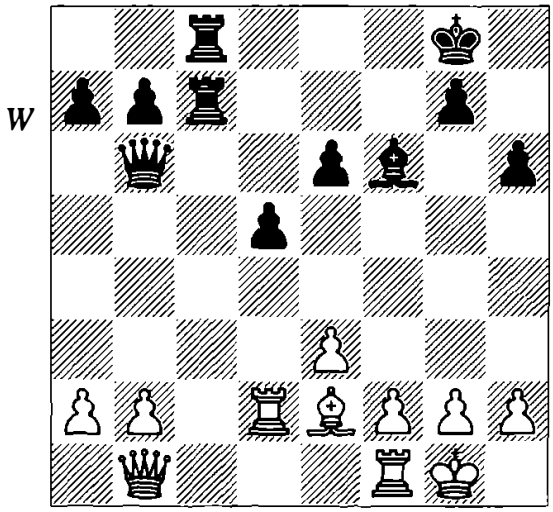
31...♕e1+ 32 ♕f1 ♖g7+ 33 ♘g2 ♕e4 34 ♖b3 f4 35 ♖f3 ♖g5 36 ♔h2 ♕c2 37 ♖xf4 ♕xa2 38 ♖f6+ ♖g6 39 ♕f4+ ♔g7 40 ♖xg6+ hxg6 41 ♕xd6 ♕a1 42 ♕e7+ 1-0

A typical case where one misplaced piece was enough to cost Black the game.

QUESTION 55

Are opposite-coloured bishops a drawish factor?

In the endgame, it is well-known that opposite-coloured bishops tend to make a draw more likely. We shall examine this more in Questions 74 and 75. In the middlegame, however, with plenty of other pieces on the board, the reverse tends to be the case. The player who is attacking can effectively enjoy an extra piece if he is able to direct the attack on the squares on which his bishop moves.



Karpov – Kasparov
World Ch match (game 4), Moscow 1985

22 ♗g4 ♖c4 23 h3 ♕c6 24 ♕d3 ♔h8 25 ♖fd1 a5 26 b3 ♖c3 27 ♕e2 ♖f8 28 ♗h5!

Planning ♗g6-d3, followed by ♕g4-g6, when the queen will create mating threats.

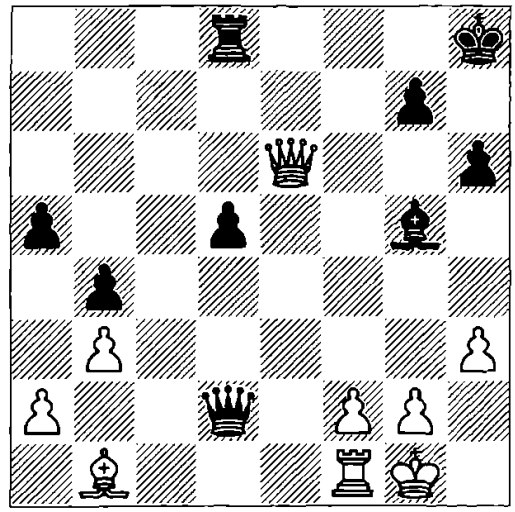
28...b5 29 ♗g6 ♗d8 30 ♗d3 b4 31 ♕g4 ♕e8 32 e4!

Breaking up Black's central formation.

32...♗g5

32...d4? is impossible due to 33 e5 followed by ♕e4.

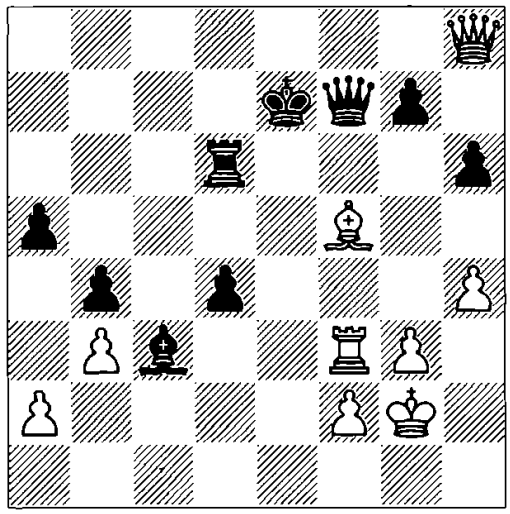
33 ♖c2 ♖xc2 34 ♗xc2 ♕c6 35 ♕e2 ♕c5 36 ♖f1 ♕c3 37 exd5 exd5 38 ♗b1 ♕d2 39 ♕e5 ♖d8 40 ♕f5 ♔g8 41 ♕e6+ ♔h8 42 ♕g6 ♔g8 43 ♕e6+ ♔h8 *(D)*



44 ♗f5!

The attack flows on the light squares and Black's bishop is unable to help the defence.

44...♕c3 45 ♕g6 ♔g8 46 ♗e6+ ♔h8 47 ♗f5 ♔g8 48 g3 ♔f8 49 ♔g2 ♕f6 50 ♕h7 ♕f7 51 h4 ♗d2 52 ♖d1 ♗c3 53 ♖d3 ♖d6 54 ♖f3 ♔e7 55 ♕h8 d4 *(D)*

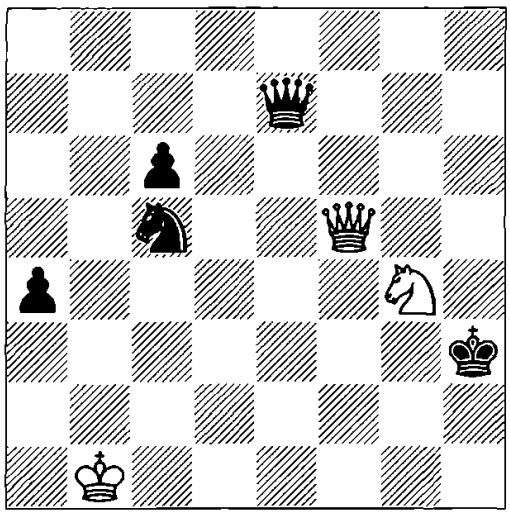


56 ♕c8 ♖f6 57 ♕c5+ ♔e8 58 ♖f4 ♕b7+ 59 ♖e4+ ♔f7 60 ♕c4+ ♔f8 61 ♗h7 ♖f7 62 ♕e6 ♕d7 63 ♕e5 1-0

QUESTION 56

Which combinations of major and minor pieces work best?

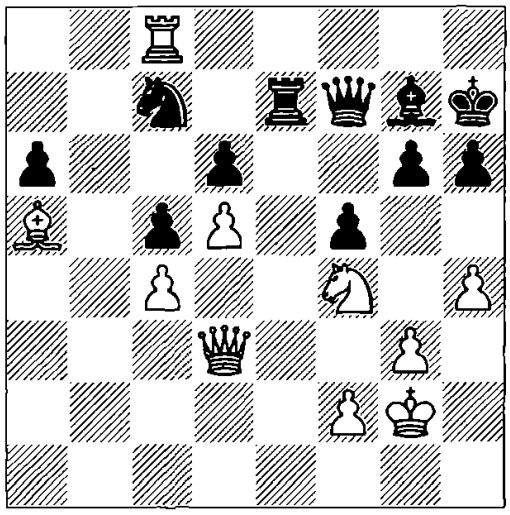
This is a complicated subject, and much depends on the specifics of the position. However, in general, a queen tends to combine well with a knight, especially in attack. The following endgame study is a classic illustration of the power of the ♕+♘ combination:



L. Kubbel
150 Endspielstudien, 1925
White to play and win

White wins by **1 ♘e3+ ♔g3 2 ♕g4+ ♔f2 3 ♕f4+ ♔e2 4 ♕f1+ ♔d2 5 ♕d1+ ♔c3 6 ♕c2+ ♔b4 7 ♕b2+ ♘b3 8 ♕a3+!! ♔xa3 9 ♘c2#.**

♕+♘ are often stronger than ♕+♗, as in this practical example:



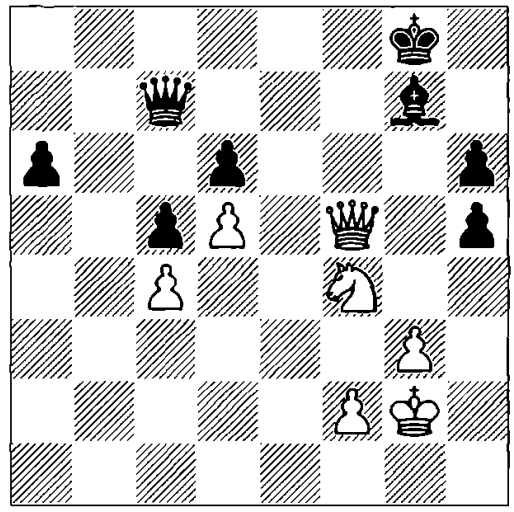
Keene – McKay
Student Olympiad, Dresden 1969

White clearly has strong pressure in return for his minus pawn, but the game still has to be won. The key is to break up Black's king-side pawn-structure, so as to penetrate with the queen. The knight will also gain access to some useful light squares and will cooperate well with the queen.

34 h5! gxh5

Now that the black king is weakened, White simplifies to a ♕+♘ vs ♕+♗ ending in which he will have a decisive attack.

35 ♖xc7 ♖xc7 36 ♗xc7 ♕xc7 37 ♕xf5+ ♔g8 *(D)*



Now the combination of queen and knight conduct a winning attack. It is noteworthy that all the action takes place on light squares, exploiting the 'colour-blindness' of Black's bishop.

38 ♕e6+ ♔h7 39 ♕g6+ ♔g8 40 ♕e8+ ♔h7

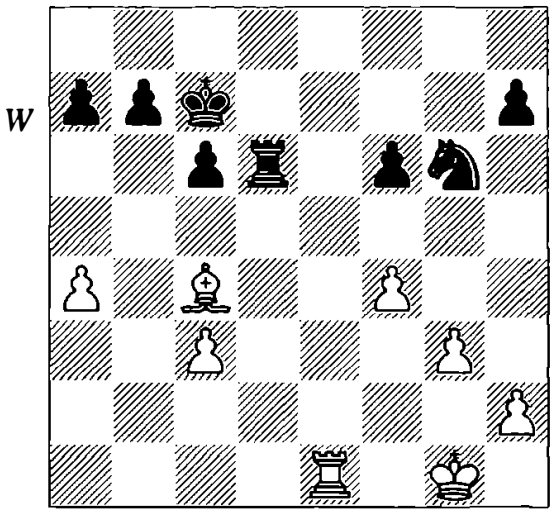
40...♗f8 is met by the typical tactic 41 ♕xf8+! ♔xf8 42 ♘e6+, winning a piece for nothing.

41 ♕g6+ 1-0

Here the game was adjourned, and Black resigned without resuming. After 41...♔g8 White repeats with 42 ♕e8+ ♔h7 and then plays 43 ♘g6!, when Black is curiously helpless to prevent the deadly 44 ♘e7 followed by 45 ♕g8#.

QUESTION 57 Which minor piece works best with a rook?

Again, much depends on the position. If the bishop is bad, in a blocked position, then ♖+♘ is likely to be better than ♖+♗, but if the position is open, more often than not, ♖+♗ is stronger than ♖+♘. The following ending is a classic example.



Alekhine – Euwe
World Ch match (game 2), Rotterdam 1937

The greater mobility of White's ♖+♗ combination enables him to exploit Black's weak kingside pawns more effectively than Black can counterattack against the weak white pawns on the queenside.

29 h4

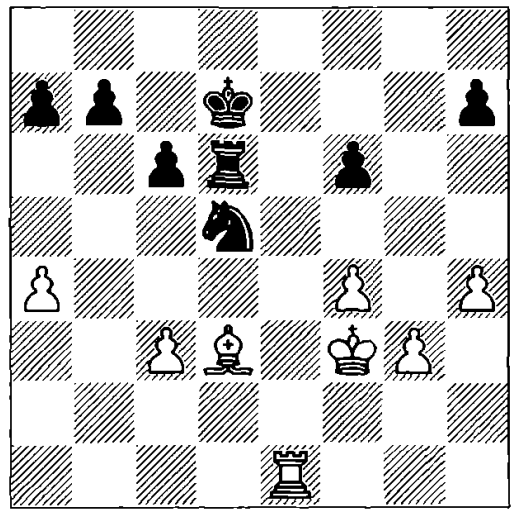
The h-pawn will be used to drive the knight from its post on g6, so the king can infiltrate.

29...♔d7 30 ♔f2 ♘e7 31 ♔f3 ♘d5

One thing that would change the assessment of the position would be a good secure central post for Black's knight, from which it could not be driven away. As it is, he lacks any such post. On d5, it can always be driven away by c4, if necessary.

32 ♗d3 *(D)*

32...h6

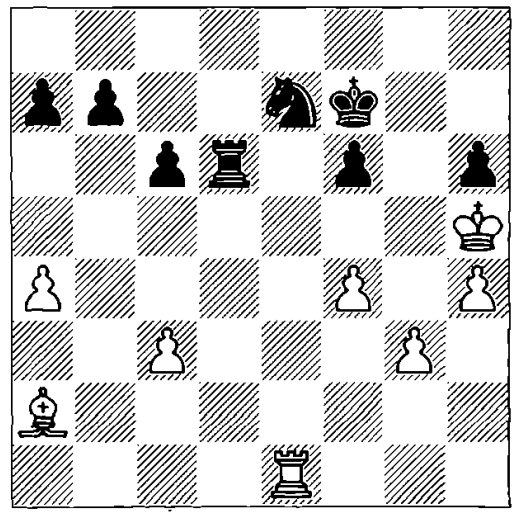


The exchange of pawns 32...♘xc3 33 ♗xh7 favours White, whose passed h-pawn is very dangerous.

33 ♗f5+ ♔d8 34 ♔g4 ♘e7

The same applies after 34...♘xc3 35 ♔h5.

35 ♗b1 ♔e8 36 ♔h5 ♔f7 37 ♗a2+ *(D)*



As usual, the bishop is highly effective at long range.

37...♔f8

He must give up the pawn, since 37...♘d5 is met by 38 c4 and 39 c5+, winning material.

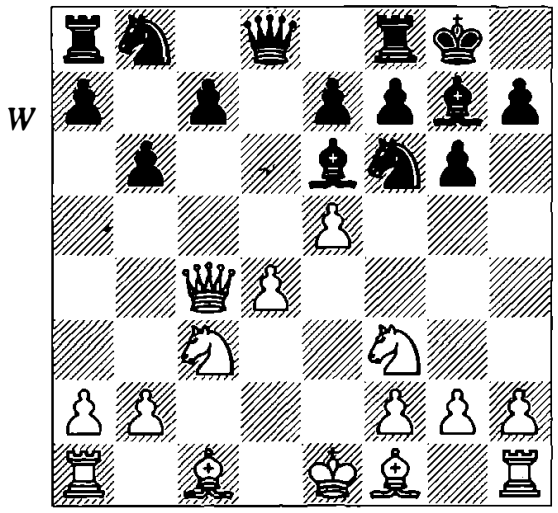
38 ♔xh6 ♖d2 39 ♗e6 ♖d3 40 g4 ♖xc3 41 g5 1-0

QUESTION 58 When are pieces stronger than a queen?

Most beginners think the queen all-powerful, but quite often three minor pieces (or even a rook and a minor piece) can be stronger than the queen. This is especially true when the pieces have secure central posts, and the queen lacks targets.

Szabo – Barcza
Budapest 1939

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 d5 4 ♘f3 ♗g7 5 ♕b3 dxc4 6 ♕xc4 0-0 7 e4 b6 8 e5 ♗e6 *(D)*



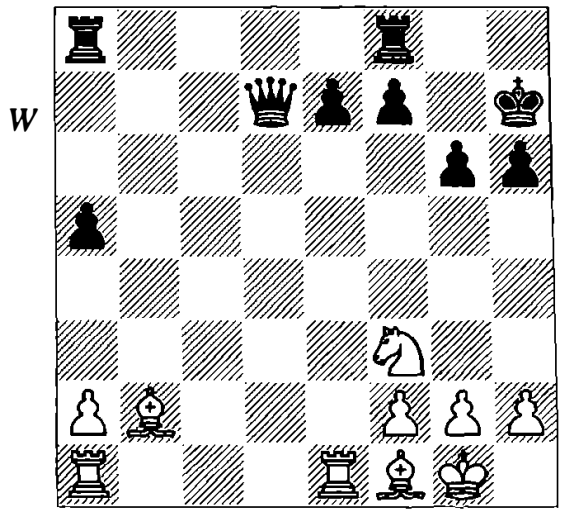
9 exf6! ♗xc4 10 fxg7 ♔xg7 11 ♗xc4 c6 12 0-0 a5

White's three pieces will take up active positions in the centre, whilst the black queen has no targets, since White's position is very solid.

13 ♖e1 h6 14 ♗f4 b5 15 ♗f1 ♘d7 16 d5! b4 17 dxc6 bxc3 18 cxd7 cxb2 19 ♗e5+ ♔h7 20 ♗xb2 ♕xd7 *(D)*

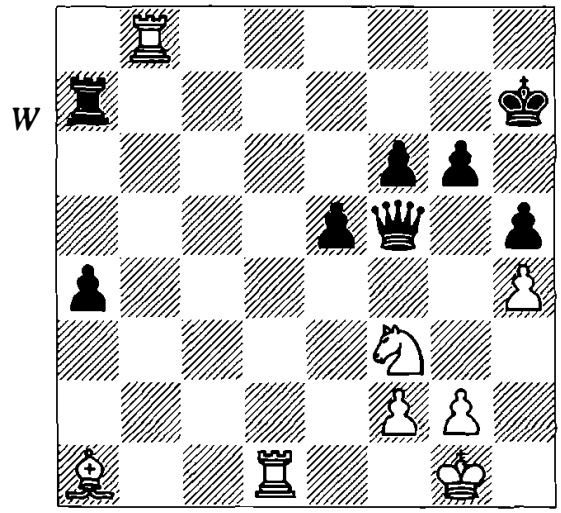
21 a4!

An important and thematic move. White creates a strong, secure outpost on b5 for his pieces, and will use it to support an invasion of the seventh rank with his rooks. Black decides the bishop is too strong to be tolerated



and must be removed at the cost of the exchange.

21...♖fb8 22 ♗b5 ♖xb5 23 axb5 ♕xb5 24 ♗a3 e6 25 ♖ab1 ♕d3 26 ♗c5 ♕d5 27 ♗d4 a4 28 ♗a1 h5 29 ♘e5 ♖a7 30 ♖ed1 ♕e4 31 ♘f3 ♕f5 32 ♖b8 f6 33 h4 e5 *(D)*



34 ♗xe5!! fxe5 35 ♘g5+ ♔g7 36 ♖dd8 ♖f7?

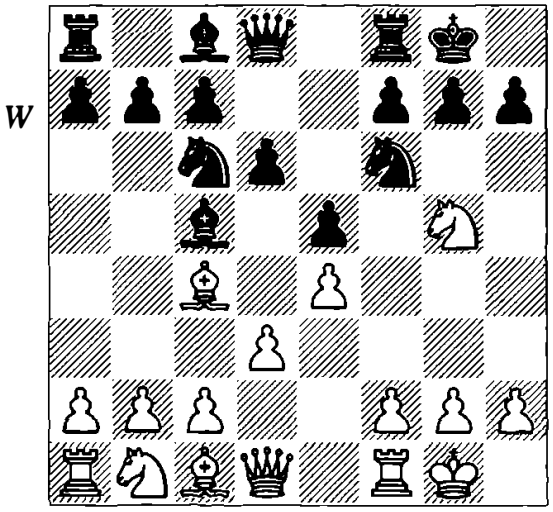
Black collapses under the enormous pressure of White's pieces. 36...♔f6 puts up more of a fight, although White is still much better.

37 ♖g8+ ♔f6 38 ♖b6+ ♔e7 39 ♖b7+ ♔d6 40 ♖xf7 ♕b1+ 41 ♔h2 a3 42 ♖a7 ♕b5 43 ♖xg6+ ♔d5 44 ♘h3 1-0

QUESTION 59

Which is stronger, two pieces or a rook and pawn?

Again, this depends very much on the position. In general though, a rook and pawn are sometimes stronger in the endgame, whereas in the middlegame, the support of other pieces often allows two minor pieces to create an attack.



For this reason, in a position such as the above, the exchange 7 ♘xf7 ♖xf7 8 ♗xf7+ ♔xf7 is rarely good. The two black minor pieces are likely to prove stronger than White's rook, since the latter has little scope due to the lack of open files.

Portisch – Panno
Madrid 1973

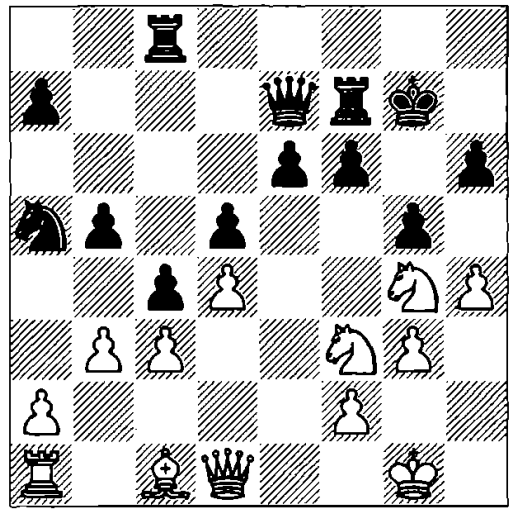
1 ♘f3 ♘f6 2 g3 b5 3 ♗g2 ♗b7 4 0-0 e6 5 d3 ♗e7 6 e4 d6 7 ♘bd2 0-0 8 ♘e1 c5? 9 e5! ♗xg2 10 exf6 ♗xf1 11 fxe7 ♕xe7 12 ♘xf1

Black's 8th move blundered two pieces for a rook and pawn. Black's position may look solid enough, but the two pieces soon start provoking weaknesses.

12...♘c6 13 ♘f3 ♖ac8 14 c3 d5 15 d4 c4 16 ♘e5 ♘a5 17 ♘e3 f6 18 ♘f3 g5?

This gratuitous weakening of the black kingside makes things worse.

19 b3 ♖f7 20 h4 h6 21 ♘g4 ♔g7 *(D)*

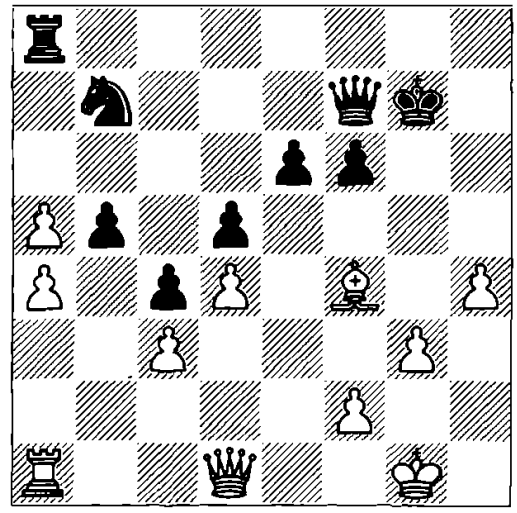


The white minor pieces are all attacking together, and now a winning combination follows.

22 ♘xh6! ♔xh6 23 ♘xg5 ♔g7 24 ♘xf7 ♕xf7

White's combination has yielded him an extra pawn, which he duly converted into victory.

25 b4 ♘b7 26 ♗f4 a5 27 bxa5 ♖a8 28 a4 *(D)*



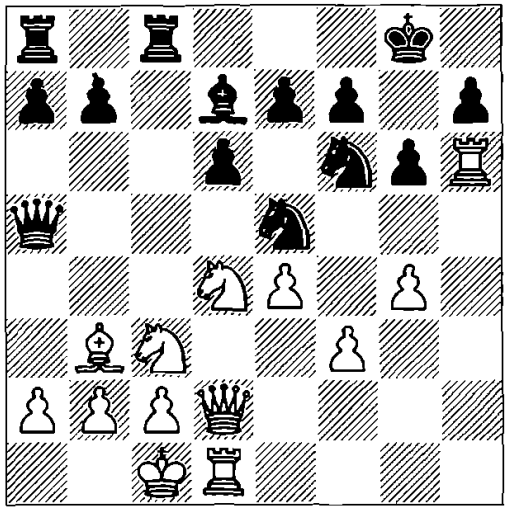
28...bxa4 29 ♖xa4 ♖xa5 30 ♖b4 ♖a8 31 ♖b6 ♘d8 32 ♕b1 ♖a7 33 ♔g2 ♖b7 34 ♖xb7 ♘xb7 35 ♕b6 ♕d7 36 ♕c7 1-0

QUESTION 60 What are 'positional exchange sacrifices' and when should I play them?

Positional exchange sacrifices are based on the idea that rooks need open files to be effective. If they lack these, a knight or bishop can often be more effective.

D. Holmes – Ward
London (Lloyds Bank) 1991

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 g6 6 ♗e3 ♗g7 7 f3 0-0 8 ♕d2 ♘c6 9 ♗c4 ♗d7 10 h4 ♕a5 11 h5 ♘e5 12 ♗b3 ♘xh5 13 0-0-0 ♖fc8 14 g4 ♘f6 15 ♗h6 ♗xh6 16 ♖xh6 *(D)*



16...♖xc3!

This sacrifice on c3 is a standard idea in many Sicilian positions. White should recapture with the pawn, as then he at least retains some kingside attacking chances.

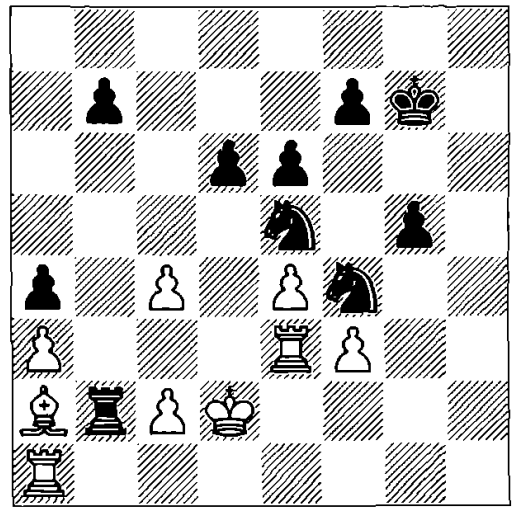
17 ♕xc3?! ♕xc3 18 bxc3 ♖c8

For his exchange, Black has one extra pawn, and White's pawn-structure is mangled. But the most important factor is the lack of open files, which prevents White's rooks from developing any activity.

19 ♔d2 ♔g7 20 ♖h4 g5 21 ♖h2 ♖c5 22 ♖e1 e6

The black pawns on d6 and e6 also deprive White's minor pieces of good squares.

23 ♖e3 a5 24 a3 a4 25 ♗a2 ♗b5 26 ♘xb5 ♖xb5 27 ♖h1 ♖b2 28 ♖a1 h5 29 gxh5 ♘xh5 30 c4 ♘f4 *(D)*

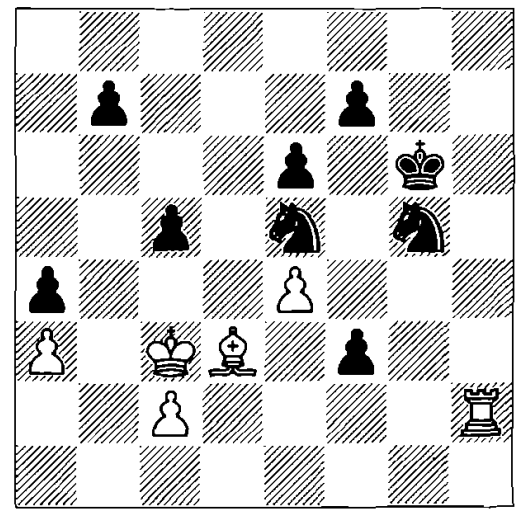


One can see at a glance that the black knights are much more powerful than the white rooks.

31 ♔c3 ♖b6 32 ♖b1 ♖xb1 33 ♗xb1 ♘g2 34 ♖e2 ♘h4

Now the f3-pawn is lost, after which Black's kingside pawns decide the game.

35 f4 gxf4 36 ♖h2 ♘hf3 37 ♖f2 ♔h6 38 ♗a2 ♔h5 39 c5 dxc5 40 ♗c4 ♔h4 41 ♗f1 ♘g5 42 ♖h2+ ♔g4 43 ♖g2+ ♔h5 44 ♖h2+ ♔g6 45 ♗d3 f3 *(D)*

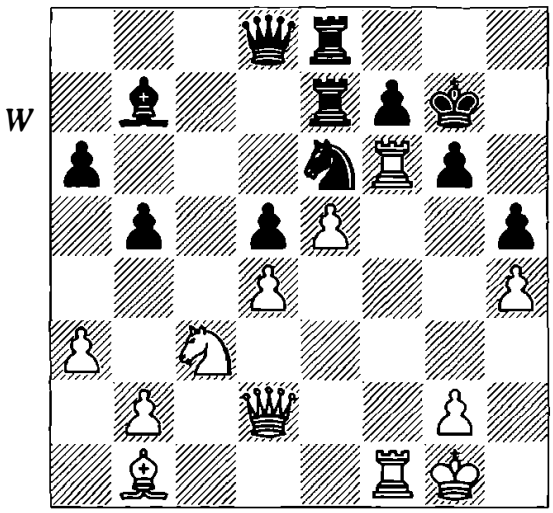


46 ♖h4 f2 47 ♗f1 ♘ef3 0-1

QUESTION 61

How does one judge exchanges of pieces of equal value?

Knowing which pieces to exchange and which to retain is an essential part of positional play. One very good reason for exchanging pieces is to remove a key enemy unit.



Polugaevsky – Short
Paris (Immopar Rapid) 1992

Black has serious weaknesses on the dark squares around his king. His only minor piece that can defend them is the knight on e6, so Polugaevsky exchanges it off.

33 ♘e2! ♗c8 34 ♘f4 ♘xf4 35 ♕xf4 ♗e6 36 ♕g5

With Black's knight gone, there is nothing to prevent White from occupying the dark squares and sacrificing on g6.

36...♕b6 37 ♖1f4 ♕c7 38 ♗xg6! fxg6 39 ♖xg6+ ♔h8 40 ♕h6+ 1-0

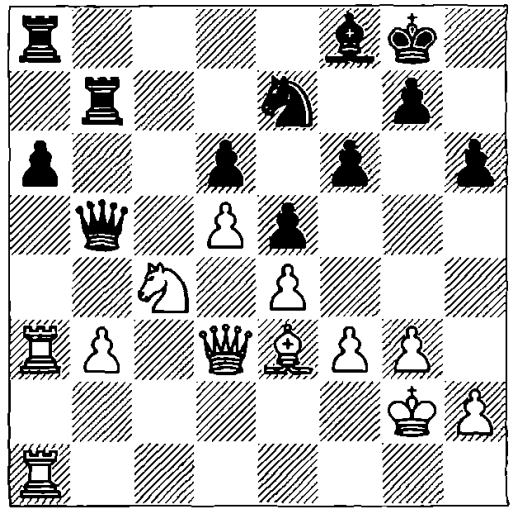
In the top diagram of the following column, the black queen is the key piece which defends a6 and holds his position together.

27 ♕f1!! ♘c8 28 ♘d2!

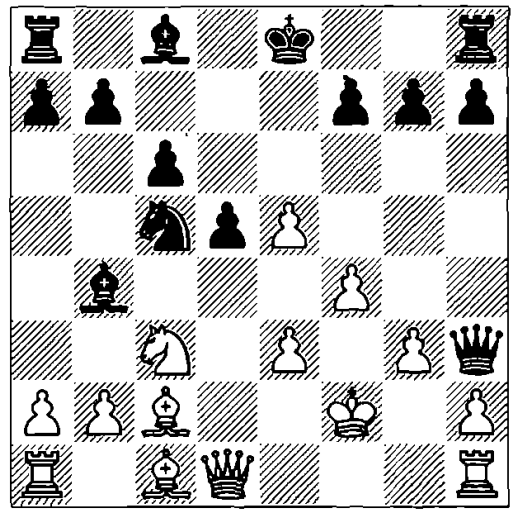
The exchange of queens could also have been achieved by 27 ♘b2 ♕xd3 28 ♘xd3, but this leaves the knight on a worse circuit.

28...♕b4 29 ♕c4 ♕xc4 30 ♘xc4 ♖ab8 31 ♘d2 ♖c7 32 ♖xa6

White has won a pawn and went on to win the game.



Rubinstein – Duras
Karlsbad 1911



Makogonov – Botvinnik
Sverdlovsk 1943

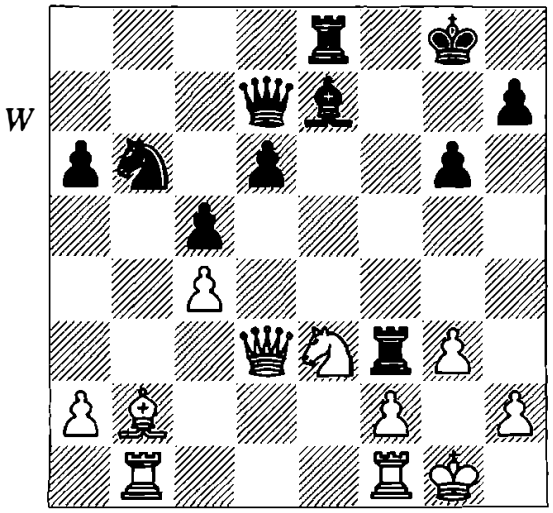
The light squares in White's camp, d3, e4, f3, etc., are weak. Botvinnik immediately exchanges off the two white minor pieces that can defend those squares, leaving White with only his dark-squared bishop:

13...♗xc3! 14 bxc3 ♗f5! 15 ♗xf5 ♕xf5

Now the weakness of the light squares is very clear. Black has a large positional advantage, and went on to win.

QUESTION 62 Is there a 'golden rule' about such exchanges?

Most golden rules are suspect in chess, but there is one for judging exchanges: look at what stays on the board, not what comes off.



Andersson – Browne
Wijk aan Zee 1983

24 ♗c3! ♗d8 25 ♗a5!

In view of Black's exposed king, it looks a bit strange to exchange off the white bishop. However, Andersson realizes that in the resulting position, the 'eternal' knight is more important.

25...♕c6 26 ♗xb6 ♗xb6 27 ♖fd1 ♗c7 28 ♖b3 ♗a5 29 ♕c2 ♗d8 30 ♘d5

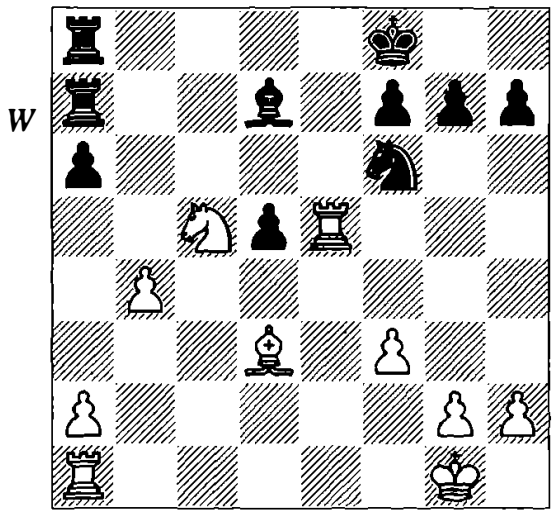
White has a classic good knight vs bad bishop position, and went on to win.

The diagram at the top of the next column features probably the most famous example of all. Fischer gave up his wonderful knight for the feeble-looking bishop, because he realized that his rooks and bishop will be stronger than Black's rooks and knight.

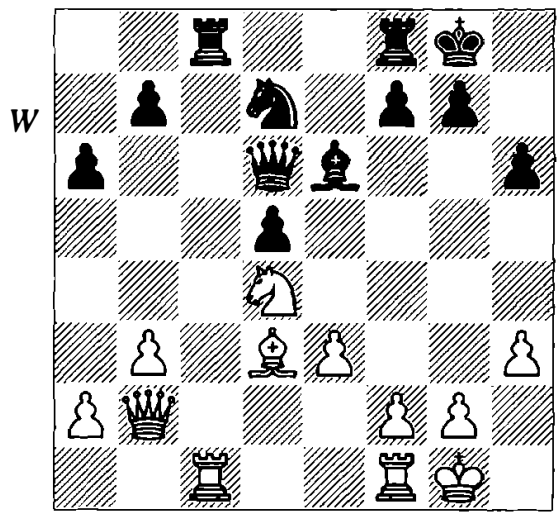
22 ♘xd7+!! ♖xd7 23 ♖c1 ♖d6 24 ♖c7 ♘d7 25 ♖e2 g6 26 ♔f2

White has a complete grip on the position and Black can undertake little.

26...h5 27 f4 h4 28 ♔f3 f5 29 ♔e3 d4+ 30 ♔d2 ♘b6 31 ♖ee7 ♘d5 32 ♖f7+ ♔e8 33 ♖b7 ♘xb4 34 ♗c4 1-0



Fischer – Petrosian
Candidates match (game 7), Buenos Aires 1971



Petrosian – Gipslis
USSR Ch, Riga 1958

20 ♘f5!

Exchanging the good knight for the bad bishop looks illogical, but Black's bishop defends the weak d5-pawn. After the exchange, White's bishop is stronger than Black's knight, and it is what stays on the board that matters.

20...♗xf5 21 ♗xf5 g6 22 ♗g4 h5 23 ♗f3

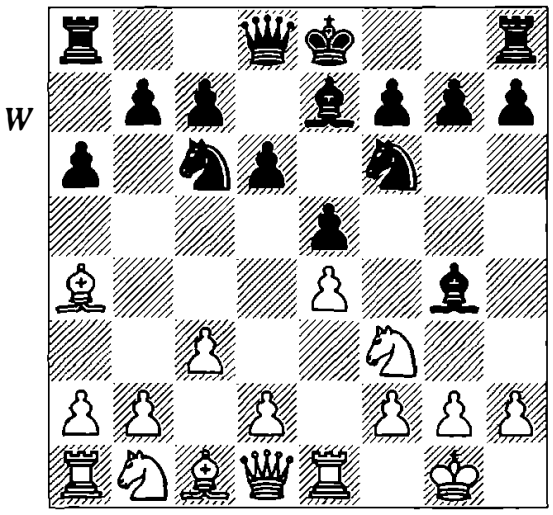
White has a clear advantage and duly went on to win.

QUESTION 63 What are the main principles of defence?

Just as the attacker will direct his attention at the weakest point in the enemy position, so the defender should look to strengthen his greatest weakness, and, most of all, to avoid creating additional weaknesses. Perhaps the best and simplest rule of thumb is 'do not move pawns on the side where you are under attack'. Many players are fond of playing h3 or ...h6 in front of their castled king to prevent an enemy bishop from pinning the knight on f3/f6, but very often this pawn move creates a serious weakness, as in this example:

De Jonghe – Winants
Belgian League 2005

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 a6 4 ♗a4 ♘f6 5 0-0 ♗e7 6 ♖e1 d6 7 c3 ♗g4 *(D)*



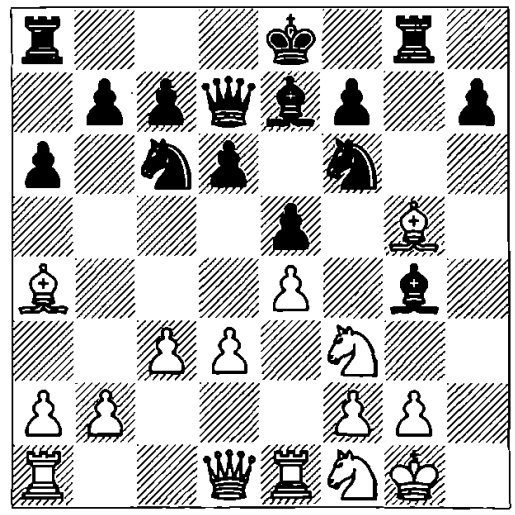
8 h3?!

A risky move. Since Black has not yet castled kingside, he can now use the h3-pawn as a target for a kingside pawn-storm.

8...♗h5 9 d3 ♕d7 10 ♘bd2 g5! 11 ♘f1 g4

Due to the weakness created by his 8th move, White cannot avoid the g-file being opened in front of his king.

12 hxg4 ♗xg4 13 ♗g5 ♖g8 *(D)*



Black takes aim along the open g-file.

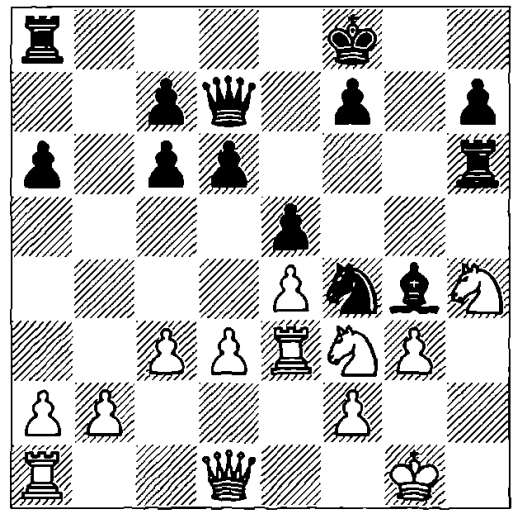
14 ♗h4 ♘h5?!

Rather a committal move. 14...0-0-0 may be better.

15 ♗xe7 ♔xe7 16 ♘e3 ♖g6 17 ♘f5+?

This manoeuvre achieves nothing. 17 d4 creates central counterplay.

17...♔f8 18 ♘5h4 ♖h6 19 ♗xc6 bxc6 20 ♖e3 ♘f4 21 g3 *(D)*



Now an exchange sacrifice fatally exposes White's king.

21...♖xh4! 22 gxh4 ♔e7 23 ♔h2 ♖g8 24 ♕h1 ♗h3 25 ♘g5 ♗g2 26 ♕d1 h6 27 ♘xf7 ♔xf7 28 ♕b3+ d5 0-1

QUESTION 64

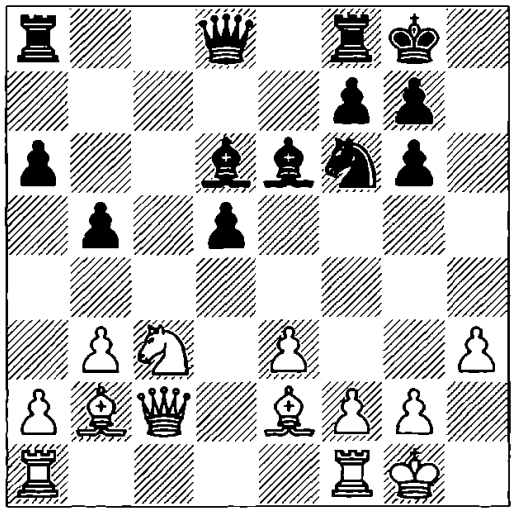
What are the typical plans in positions with an isolated queen's pawn (IQP)?

The player combating the IQP seeks to prevent the pawn's advance, exert pressure on it, and ultimately win the pawn.

Kasparov – Morozevich
Sarajevo 1999

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 e3 a6 5 ♕c2 b5 6 b3 ♗g4 7 ♘ge2 ♘bd7 8 ♘f4 e5 9 dxe5 ♘xe5 10 h3 ♗e6 11 ♗e2 ♗d6 12 0-0 0-0 13 ♗b2 ♘g6 14 ♘xg6 hxg6 15 cxd5 cxd5 *(D)*

W



16 ♗f3 ♖c8 17 ♕d2 ♗b8 18 ♖fd1

White methodically increases the pressure on the IQP.

18...♕c7 19 g3 ♖fd8 20 ♖ac1 ♕d7 21 h4 ♗a7 22 ♘e2

A standard manoeuvre in such positions. The knight takes control of the blockading square d4, preventing the advance ...d4.

22...♖xc1 23 ♕xc1 ♗g4

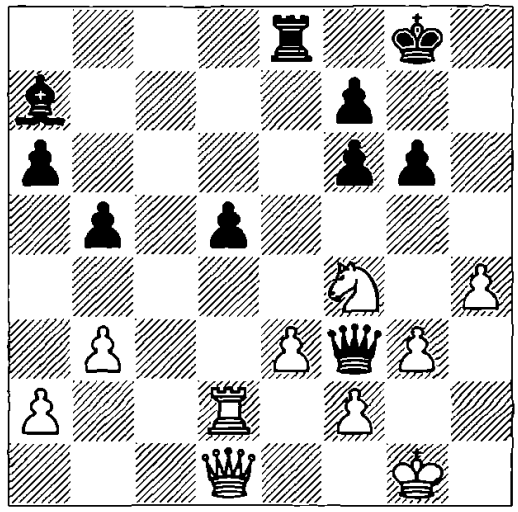
Black tries to create counterplay on the kingside.

24 ♗xg4 ♕xg4 25 ♗xf6 gxf6 26 ♖d2 ♖e8 27 ♕d1 ♕f3 28 ♘f4 *(D)*

28...♕xd1+

The tactical try 28...♖xe3 was also possible, when the simplest reply is 29 ♕xf3 ♖xf3

B



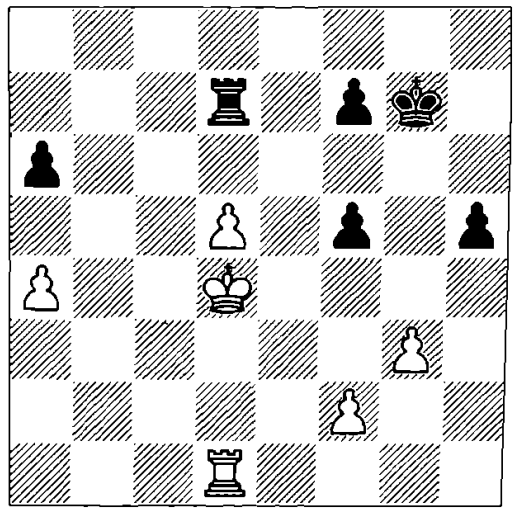
30 ♔g2 ♖c3 31 ♘xd5 ♖c1 32 ♘xf6+ ♔g7 33 ♘e4, with an extra pawn.

29 ♖xd1

Now the IQP is lost, and White went on to win the endgame.

29...d4 30 exd4 ♖d8 31 d5 ♗b8 32 ♘e2 ♔g7 33 ♔g2 f5 34 ♔f3 ♗d6 35 ♘f4 ♖d7 36 ♘g2 ♗b8 37 ♘e3 ♗a7 38 h5 ♗c5 39 a4 bxa4 40 bxa4 ♗xe3 41 ♔xe3 gxh5 42 ♔d4 *(D)*

B



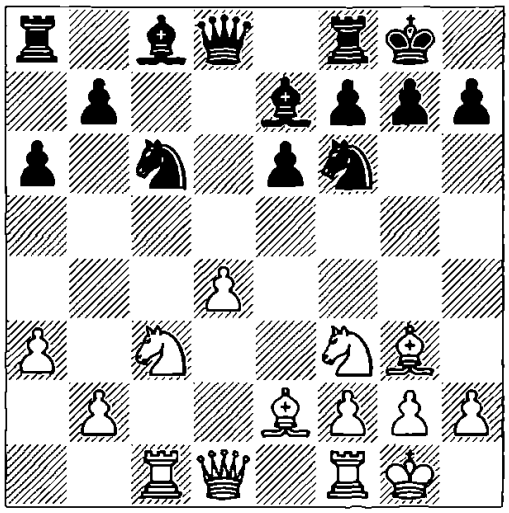
42...♔f8 43 ♖b1 f4 44 a5 fxg3 45 fxg3 ♔e7 46 ♖b6 ♖d6 47 ♔c5 ♖g6 48 d6+ ♔d7 49 ♖b7+ ♔c8 50 ♖c7+ ♔d8 51 ♖a7 ♖xg3 52 ♖xa6 ♖c3+ 53 ♔b4 ♖c1 54 ♖a8+ ♔d7 55 a6 1-0

QUESTION 65 — So what plan should the IQP holder adopt?

Statically, the IQP is usually a weakness, but it controls space and offers dynamic attacking chances. The player with the IQP should therefore usually try to develop a kingside initiative.

Rublevsky – Vitiugov
Kazan 2005

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 c3 d5 4 exd5 ♕xd5 5 d4 ♘f6 6 ♗e2 ♘c6 7 0-0 cxd4 8 cxd4 ♗e7 9 ♘c3 ♕d6 10 ♘b5 ♕d8 11 ♗f4 ♘d5 12 ♗g3 a6 13 ♘c3 0-0 14 ♖c1 ♘f6 15 a3 *(D)*



A typical IQP structure. White's last move hinders the manoeuvre ...♘b4-d5, a standard defensive idea in such positions.

15...b6 16 ♗c4 ♗b7 17 ♗a2 ♖c8 18 ♕d3 b5 19 ♖fd1 ♘a5 20 ♘e5

One advantage of the IQP is that it gives its possessor a strong outpost on e5.

20...♘d5?

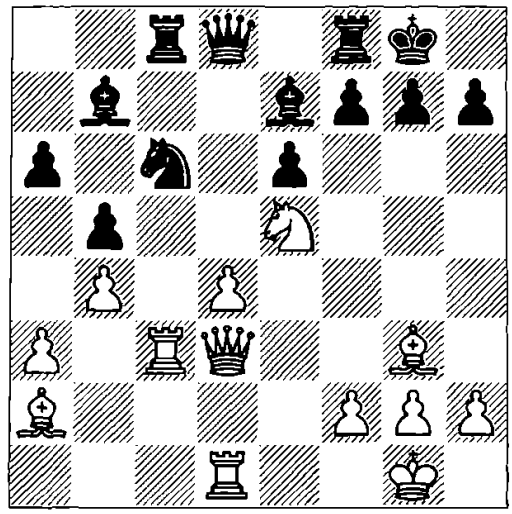
This proves bad. 20...♕b6 is better, although White retains attacking chances.

21 b4! ♘xc3 22 ♖xc3 ♘c6 *(D)*

23 ♘xf7!!

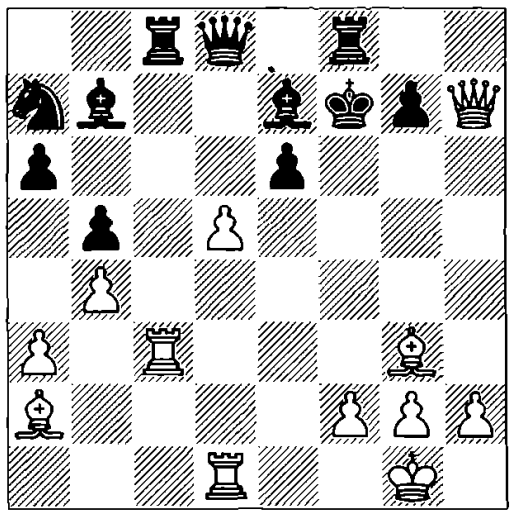
A typical sacrifice in such structures.

23...♔xf7 24 d5!



And this is another typical device. It is for this reason that the defender is usually well advised to keep a grip on the d5-square.

24...♘a7 25 ♕xh7 *(D)*



25...♗xd5

Taking the rook loses: 25...♖xc3 26 dxe6+ ♔f6 (26...♔e8 27 ♕g6+) 27 ♕h4+ (not 27 ♖xd8?? ♖c1+) 27...g5 28 ♕h6+ ♔f5 29 ♗b1+ ♗e4 30 ♕h3+ ♔f6 (30...g4 31 ♗xe4+ ♔xe4 32 ♕xg4+ and mate) 31 ♗e5+! ♔xe5 32 ♕xc3+ ♔xe6 33 ♖xd8 winning.

26 ♕h5+ g6 27 ♕h7+ ♔e8 28 ♕xg6+ ♖f7 29 ♖f3 ♗xf3 30 ♖xd8+ ♔xd8 31 gxf3 ♖f6 32 ♕e4 1-0

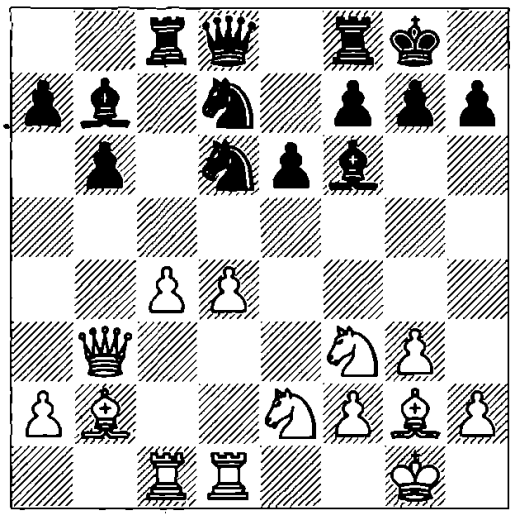
QUESTION 66

What are the two sides' plans with 'hanging pawns'?

The situation here is similar to that with the IQP. The pawns are statically weak, but dynamically strong, so the possessor needs to play actively, whilst the defender tries to neutralize the threats and exploit the weakness in the later middlegame or the ending.

Sarno – Doettling
Mitropa Cup, Leipzig 2002

1 c4 e6 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 g3 d5 4 b3 ♗e7 5 ♗g2 0-0 6 0-0 b6 7 ♗b2 ♗b7 8 e3 ♘bd7 9 ♘c3 ♘e4 10 ♘e2 ♗f6 11 d4 dxc4 12 bxc4 ♘d6 13 ♖c1 c5 14 ♕b3 ♖c8 15 ♖fd1 cxd4 16 exd4 *(D)*



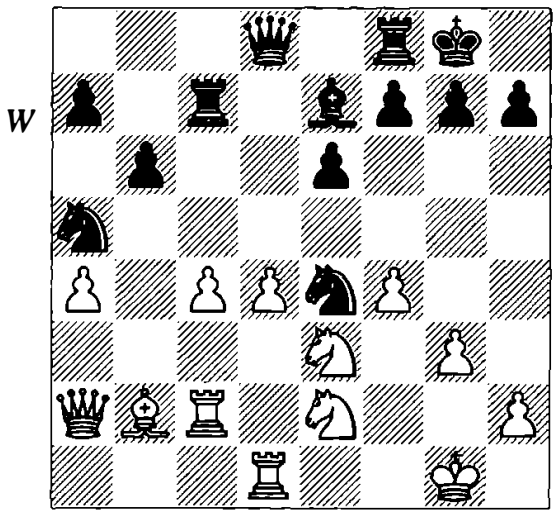
White has the typical hanging pawns on c4 and d4, which immediately come under pressure from the black minor pieces.

16...♗a6 17 ♘d2 ♗g5 18 f4

An ugly but forced weakening.

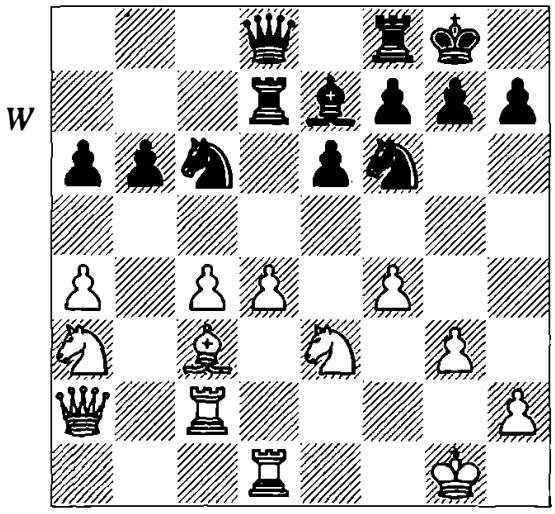
18...♗e7 19 a4 ♖c7 20 ♖c2 ♗b7 21 ♗xb7 ♘xb7 22 ♘f1 ♘dc5 23 ♕a2 ♘e4 24 ♘e3 ♘a5 *(D)*

Black systematically manoeuvres his minor pieces to increase the pressure on the



hanging pawns. White has lost the initiative, and his pawns are now just a weakness.

25 ♘c3 ♘f6 26 ♘b5 ♖d7 27 ♗c3 a6 28 ♘a3 ♘c6 *(D)*



29 d5

This advance is exactly what White is usually looking for as a dynamic measure, but in this case, it is more an attempt at self-preservation. The passive 29 ♖cd2 loses a pawn after 29...♘e4 30 ♖d3 ♘xc3 and 31...♘xd4.

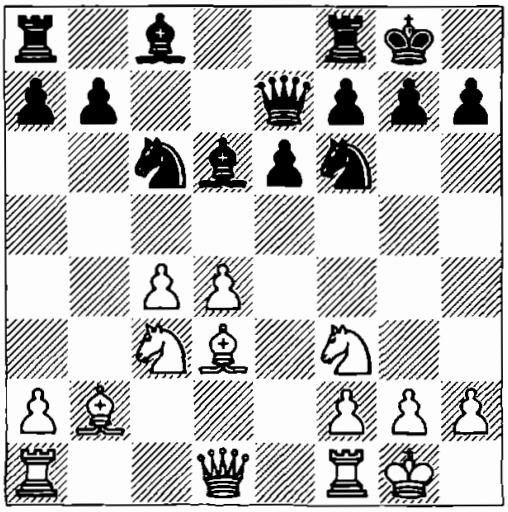
29...♗c5 30 ♖e2 exd5 31 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 32 ♖xd5 ♖xd5 33 cxd5 ♘d4 34 ♖f2 ♘f5 0-1

QUESTION 67 — So when are hanging pawns strong?

They are strong if their owner can use the extra space to create attacking chances, such as in this example.

Conquest – Hraček
Bundesliga 1996/7

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 e6 3 e3 c5 4 ♗d3 ♘c6 5 0-0 d5 6 b3 ♗d6 7 ♗b2 ♕e7 8 c4 0-0 9 ♘c3 cxd4 10 exd4 dxc4 11 bxc4 *(D)*



Another typical hanging pawns position. The white bishop on b2 is potentially very strong, after a later d5 break, so Black immediately seeks to exchange it off.

11...♗a3 12 ♖b1 ♗xb2 13 ♖xb2 ♖d8 14 ♖e1 b6 15 d5!

This is the thematic break, but in contrast to the previous game, here it is made 'with bad intentions', as Mike Tyson might say.

15...♘a5 16 ♕b1 ♕d6 17 ♘g5!

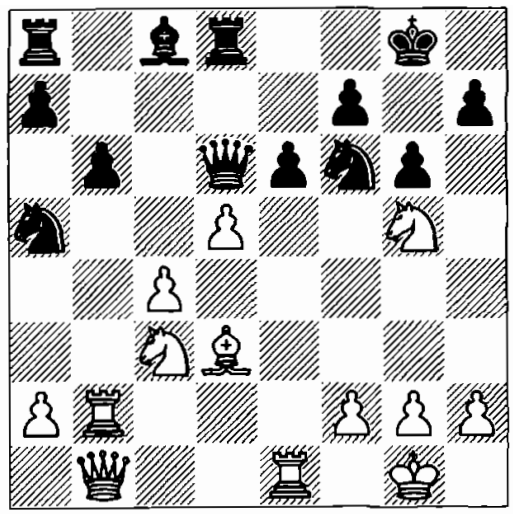
Continuing the policy of active play on the kingside. This move forces a weakening of the pawn-cover in front of the black king.

17...g6 *(D)*

18 dxe6!

This piece sacrifice is the culmination of the attack.

18...♕xd3 19 e7 ♖d7?



The only hope was to return the piece with 19...♖d4, but White still has a strong attack after 20 e8♕+ ♘xe8 21 ♖xe8+ ♔g7 22 ♕e1.

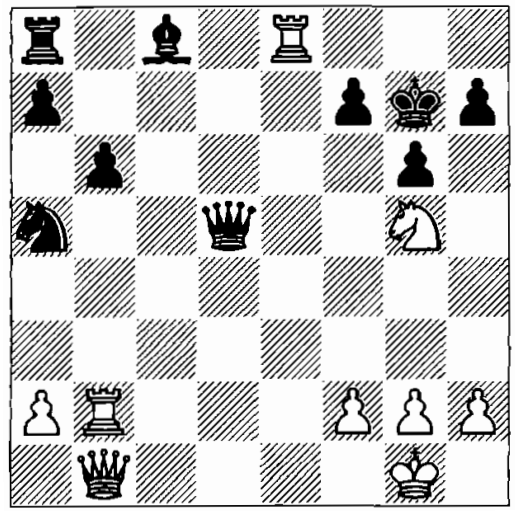
20 ♘d5!

Winning material.

20...♖xd5

20...♕xb1 21 ♘xf6+ ♔g7 22 e8♘+!! ♔h6 23 ♖bxb1 is the neat point.

21 e8♕+ ♘xe8 22 ♖xe8+ ♔g7 23 cxd5 ♕xd5 *(D)*



White has won the exchange, and the rest is just mopping-up.

24 ♖b5 ♕d6 25 ♕a1+ f6 26 ♘e4 ♕c6 27 ♘xf6! ♔f7 28 ♖g5 h6 29 ♖h8 hxg5 30 ♖h7+ ♔e6 31 ♕e1+ 1-0

Mate is forced.

QUESTION 68

Can we see an example of the importance of open lines?

Certainly. Control of open files and diagonals is an important element in any position, and can sometimes be a decisive factor in an otherwise balanced position.

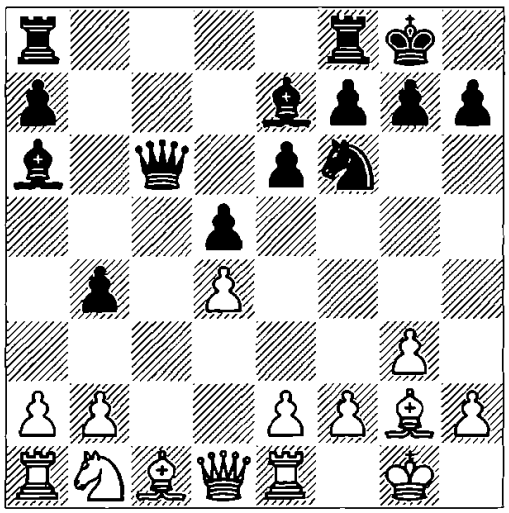
Ståhlberg – Taimanov
Zurich Candidates 1953

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 b6 4 g3 ♗a6 5 ♕a4 ♗e7 6 ♗g2 0-0 7 ♘c3 c6 8 ♘e5 ♕e8 9 0-0 d5 10 ♖e1 b5!

With this move, Black seizes the initiative, and also forces open the c-file.

11 cxb5 cxb5 12 ♕d1 b4 13 ♘b1 ♘c6 14 ♘xc6 ♕xc6 *(D)*

W



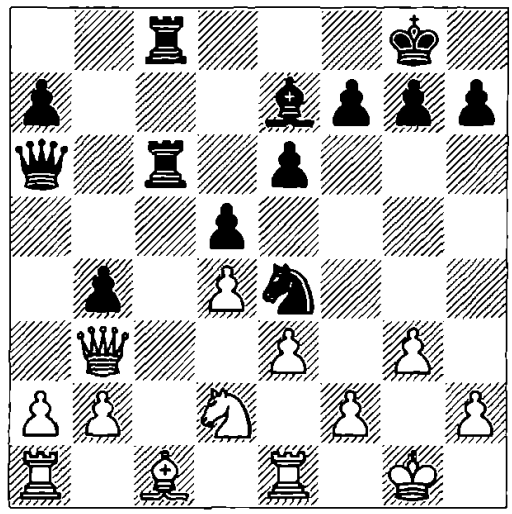
It is clear that Black will be able to seize control of the c-file first, thanks to his better development.

15 ♘d2 ♕b6 16 e3 ♖ac8 17 ♗f1 ♖c6

Preparing to double rooks on the c-file.

18 ♗xa6 ♕xa6 19 ♘f3 ♖fc8 20 ♕b3 ♘e4 21 ♘d2 *(D)*

B



21...♖c2

Black penetrates to the seventh rank, preventing White from bringing out his bishop.

22 ♘xe4 dxe4 23 a3 h5 24 d5 ♖8c4

The control of the c-file gives Black a vice-like grip on the whole position.

25 ♖d1 exd5 26 ♗d2 ♕f6 27 ♖ab1 h4 28 ♕a4 ♕f5?!

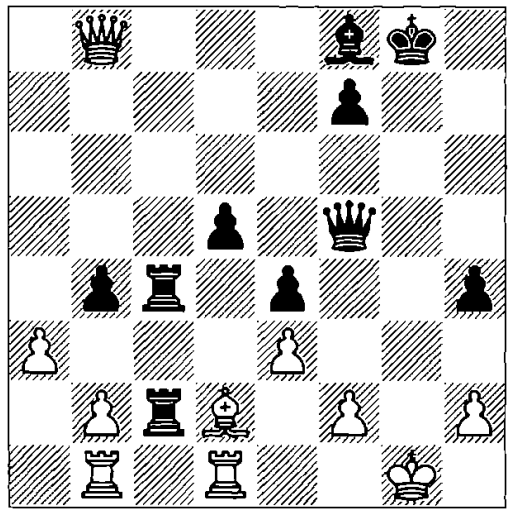
Missing a win by 28...♕f3 29 ♕d7 hxg3 30 hxg3 ♖c6, setting up the deadly threat of 31...♖h6.

29 ♕xa7 ♗f8 30 ♕b8 g5

Threatening ...h3 followed by ...♕f3, with mate on g2.

31 gxh4 gxh4 *(D)*

W



32 ♕f4

This prevents the mate threats, but at the cost of a hopeless ending.

32...♕xf4 33 exf4 d4 34 b3 ♖c6 35 axb4 f5 36 h3 ♖a6 37 ♖bc1 ♖xc1 38 ♖xc1 ♖a2 39 ♗e1 ♖b2 40 ♔g2 ♖xb3 41 ♖c8 ♖b1 42 ♗d2 e3 0-1

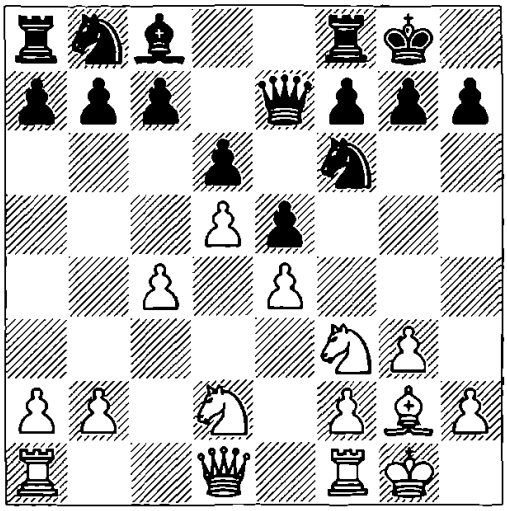
After 43 fxe3 ♖b2 Black wins a piece. White never escaped from the grip that control of the open file gave to Black.

QUESTION 69 What other strategies are there?

One of the most important strategies is play on squares of a certain colour, such as in the next game.

Thorfinnsson – Hraček
Selfoss 2002

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 ♗b4+ 4 ♗d2 ♕e7 5 g3 ♘c6 6 ♗g2 ♗xd2+ 7 ♘bxd2 d6 8 0-0 0-0 9 e4 e5 10 d5 ♘b8 *(D)*



Black has already made his plans clear. By exchanging dark-squared bishops, and then putting his central pawns on dark squares, he announces that he intends to pursue a strategy of playing on the dark squares.

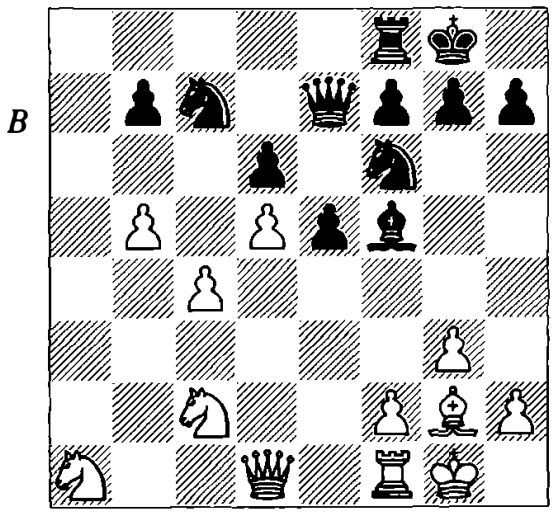
11 b4 a5 12 a3 ♘a6

Black would like to provoke 13 b5?, giving his knight a fine outpost on c5.

13 ♘e1 c6 14 ♘b3 cxd5 15 exd5 axb4 16 axb4 ♗f5 17 b5 ♘c7 18 ♘c2 ♖xa1 19 ♘bxa1 *(D)*

19...♗xc2!

This exchange is part of Black's plan. He removes one of the white minor pieces that can control the dark squares. Ultimately, his dream is a knight vs bishop position, in which the white bishop cannot control the dark squares.



20 ♘xc2 ♘d7 21 ♕e2 ♘c5

The black knight has arrived at an ideal square.

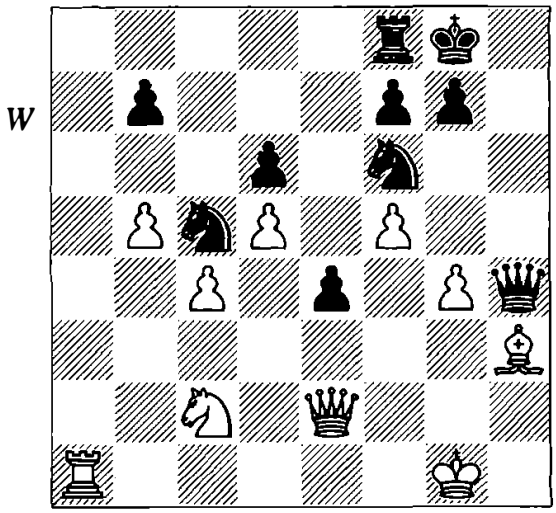
22 f4?

This and the next weaken the dark squares further, and play into Black's hands.

22...e4 23 f5 ♘e8 24 g4?

Consistent, but horribly weakening. 24 ♘e3 is better.

24...h5 25 h3 hxg4 26 hxg4 ♕g5 27 ♗h3 ♘f6 28 ♖a1 ♕h4 *(D)*



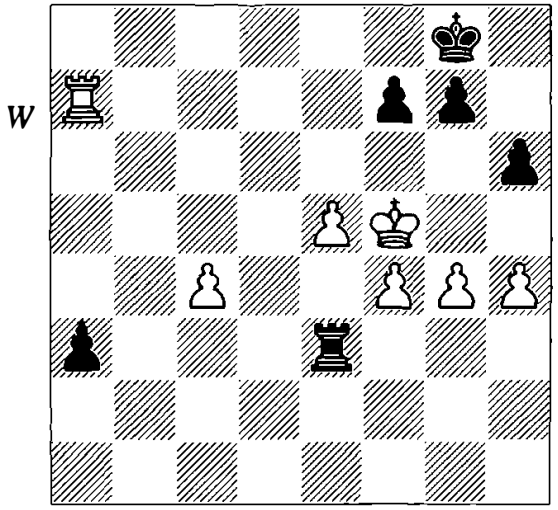
Black's pieces settle into the weak dark squares.

29 ♕g2 ♘d3 30 ♔h2 ♘e5 31 ♘e3 ♘f3+ 32 ♔h1 ♘h7 0-1

QUESTION 70

What are the most important endgame principles?

Probably the single most important difference between the endgame and other phases of the game is the strength of the king. In the middlegame, the king usually has to be kept safe and protected from attack, but in the endgame, it comes into its own. An active king can often be the decisive factor in endgames.



Tarrasch – Schlechter
Match (game 8), Cologne 1911

White has an extra pawn, but Black has the more advanced passed pawn. The factor that decides the game, however, is White's much more active king.

47 g5 hxg5 48 hxg5 ♖c3 49 g6 fxg6+ 50 ♔xg6 ♖g3+ 51 ♔f5 ♖c3 52 ♖a8+ ♔f7 53 ♖a7+ ♔g8 54 ♖a8+ ♔f7 55 ♖a7+

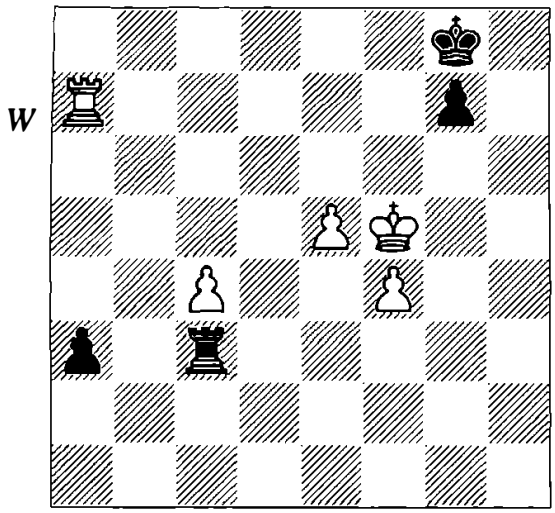
Under modern rules, this threefold repetition would have allowed Black to claim a draw.

55...♔g8 *(D)*

56 ♔e6!

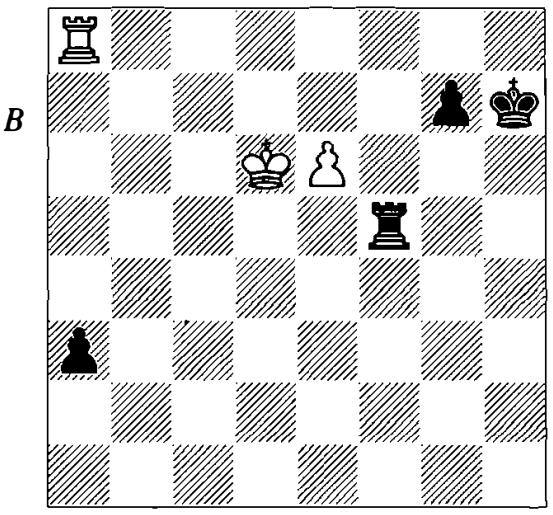
The decisive manoeuvre. The strength of White's passed e-pawn, supported by his king, settles the game. The c-pawn is irrelevant.

56...♖xc4 57 ♖a8+ ♔h7 58 f5



The contrast in the power of the two kings is striking. If Black's king were somewhere around the b2-square, supporting his own passed pawn, he would probably draw at least, but as it is, he is effectively playing a king down.

58...♖c3 59 ♔d7 ♖d3+ 60 ♔c7 ♖d5 61 e6 ♖xf5 62 ♔d6 *(D)*

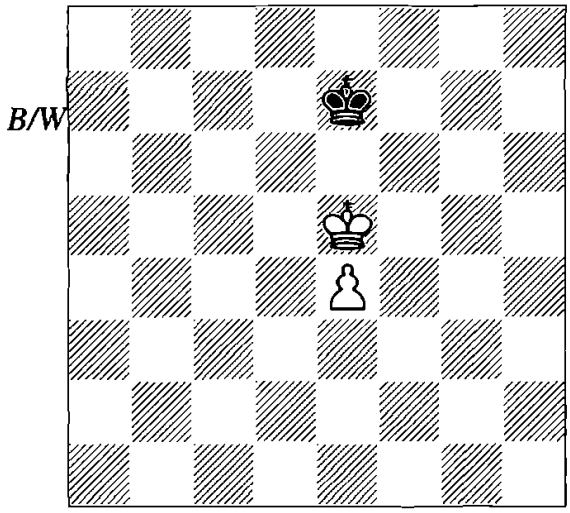


Even though White is nominally a pawn down now, the e-pawn will cost Black a rook.

62...♖f1 63 e7 ♖d1+ 64 ♔c5 ♖e1 65 e8♕ ♖xe8 66 ♖xe8 1-0

QUESTION 71 What is 'the opposition'?

'The opposition' is a vital part of endings with just kings and pawns on the board. It refers to a position where the kings face one another, and whoever is to move must give way.



In this elementary example, the result depends on who is to move. Black to move loses, because White has the opposition, i.e. Black's king must give way. For example:

1...♔f7 2 ♔d6 ♔e8 3 ♔e6

White ensures his king will reach one of the key squares, d7, e7 or f7. He can also win by 3 e5 ♔d8 4 e6 ♔e8 5 e7 ♔f7 6 ♔d7.

3...♔d8

Again, the black king must give way. 3...♔f8 4 ♔d7 is the same.

4 ♔f7 ♔d7 5 e5

and the pawn queens.

But if it is White to play in the diagram (i.e. if Black has the opposition), the game is a draw:

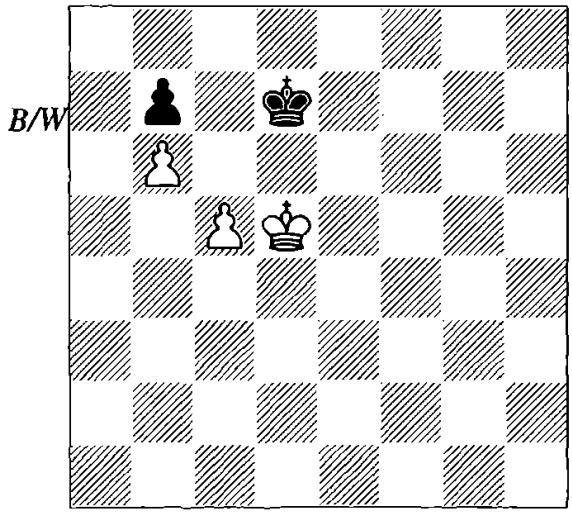
1 ♔d5 ♔d7 2 e5 ♔e7 3 e6 ♔e8!

Again, the only move. 3...♔d8? gives White the opposition after 4 ♔d6, winning.

4 ♔d6 ♔d8 5 e7+ ♔e8 6 ♔e6

with a draw.

Note too, that if White's pawn were on e3 is the above diagram, he would win regardless of whose move it was, since with White to move, he could play 1 e4, taking the opposition.



Sometimes a player will deliberately lose a move to acquire the opposition.

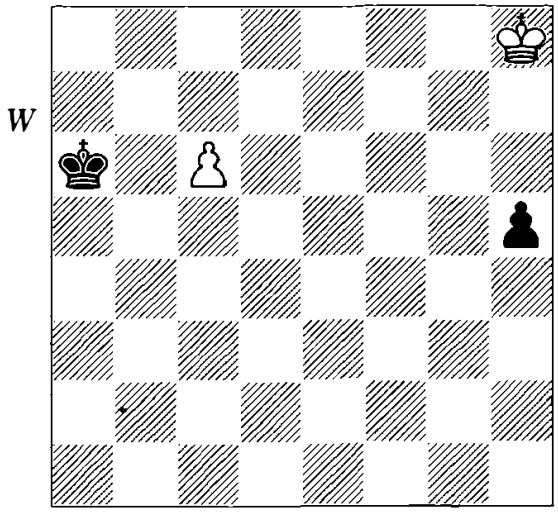
Black to move loses, because White has the opposition: **1...♔c8** (1...♔e7 loses to 2 c6) **2 ♔e6! ♔d8 3 ♔d6 ♔c8 4 ♔e7 ♔b8 5 ♔d7 ♔a8 6 c6!** (6 ♔c7?? stalemate) **6...bxc6 7 ♔c7** and White wins.

If White is to move, Black has the opposition, but White can employ a manoeuvre to lose a tempo, and return to the same position, but with Black to move: **1 ♔e5 ♔c6** (1...♔e7 2 c6 wins for White) **2 ♔d4 ♔d7 3 ♔d5**, and we have the diagram position, but with Black to move. This white king manoeuvre e5-d4-d5, is known, for geometrically obvious reasons, as 'triangulation', and is a common technique in king and pawn endings.

QUESTION 72

What other geometrical motifs appear in king and pawn endings?

There is one other very important geometrical feature of king and pawn endings. This is that on the chessboard, the shortest distance between two points is not always a straight line. The following classic endgame study by Réti is the most famous illustration of this:



R. Réti
Kagans Neueste Schachnachrichten, 1921

White's position appears hopeless, since he cannot stop Black's h-pawn, whilst his own c-pawn can easily be stopped by the black king. However, the straight journey h7-h6-h5-h4-h3-h2 takes exactly the same number of moves as the roundabout journey g7-f6-e5-f4-g3-h2. By using the latter route, the white king can make his own pawn into a threat, and thus gain vital tempi. He draws in seemingly miraculous fashion:

1 ♔g7 h4 2 ♔f6 ♔b6

Black must lose a tempo, since if 2...h3 then 3 ♔e6, and suddenly White's pawn queens as well.

3 ♔e5 ♔xc6

Again, the white pawn queens after 3...h3 4 ♔d6.

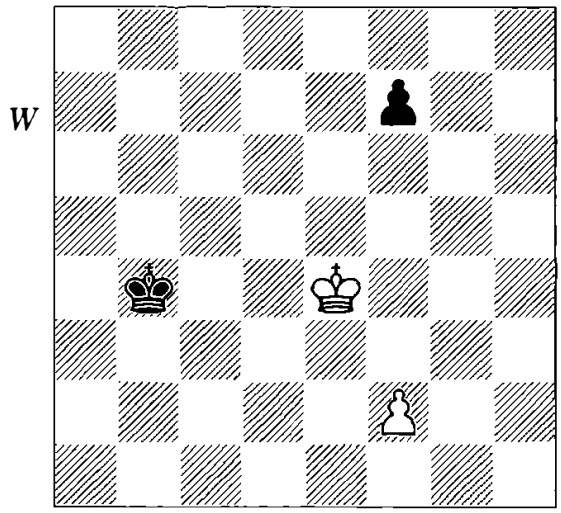
4 ♔f4

White has gained two tempi, enough to enable his king to catch the seemingly unstoppable black h-pawn.

4...h3 5 ♔g3

Draw.

A related geometrical idea can sometimes be used to 'shoulder-charge' the enemy king, i.e. prevent it from taking its desired route:



Malakhov – Nayer
Moscow 2007

Here, a strong grandmaster threw away half a point by failing to use the shoulder-charging technique. The game ended in a draw after...

61 ♔e5?? ♔c5 62 f3

Now Black's king is close enough to win the white pawn; e.g., 62 ♔f6 ♔d5 63 f4 ♔e4 64 f5 ♔f4 drawing.

62...♔c6 63 f4

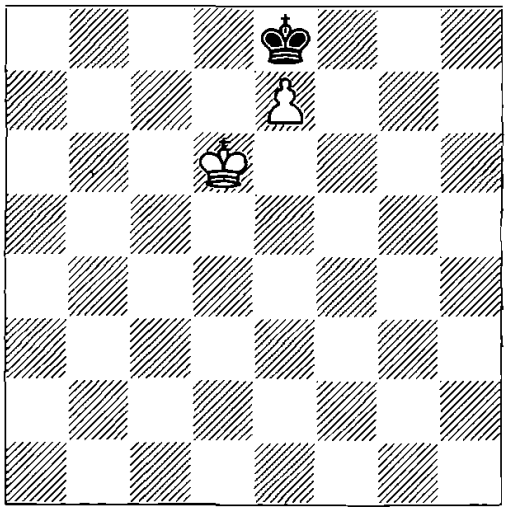
Again, 63 ♔f6 ♔d5 64 ♔xf7 ♔e5 is a draw.

63...♔d7 64 ♔f6 ♔e8 65 ♔g7 f5 66 ♔f6 ½-½

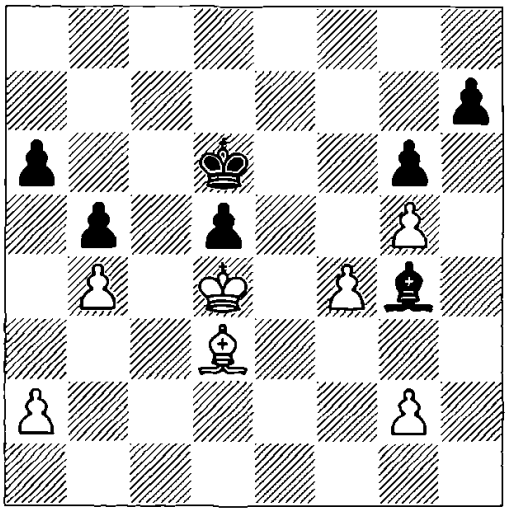
Instead, White could have won by **61 ♔d4!**, using his own king to keep the black king at a distance, while at the same time approaching the black f-pawn. For example, 61...♔b5 62 ♔d5! ♔b6 63 ♔d6! f6 64 ♔e6 ♔c6 65 ♔xf6 ♔d7 66 f4 ♔e8 67 ♔g7 and White wins.

QUESTION 73 What is 'zugzwang'?

Zugzwang is a situation where a player has to move, and must fatally weaken his position. It is from the German words *zug*, move, and *zwingen*, to compel; the term therefore means 'move-compulsion'. Zugzwang is an extremely important tool in the endgame.



This is a very basic example of zugzwang. If Black could 'pass' here, he would draw, but unfortunately, the rules of chess require him to move. He therefore loses after **1...♔f7 2 ♔d7**.



Karpov – Hort
Budapest 1973

It seems that Black can protect his weakness on d5, but Karpov won in a few moves. By using zugzwang, White either wins the d5-pawn or penetrates with his bishop.

41 ♗c2 ♗e6 42 ♗b3 ♗f7 43 ♗d1 ♗e6 44 ♗f3!

Now it is zugzwang. If the black king moves, the white king enters via c5 or e5. If the bishop moves off the a2-g8 diagonal, the pawn on d5 is lost. That only leaves...

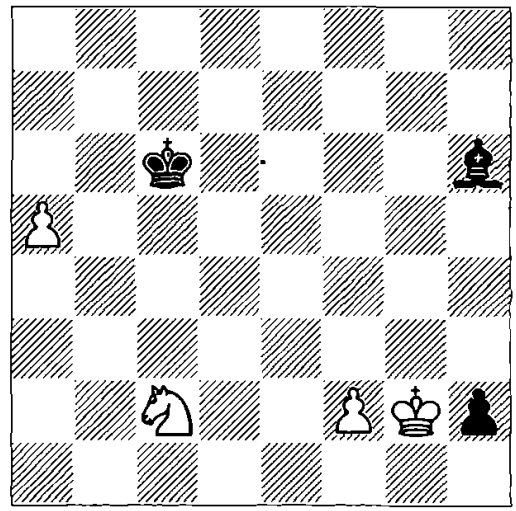
44...♗f7

44...♗g8 is equivalent.

45 ♗g4 1-0

The white bishop gets to c8 and wins the a6-pawn.

Many endgame studies use zugzwang beautifully, such as the Gurvich study shown in Question 7. Here is another example:



R. Réti
Hastings & St Leonards Post, 1922
White to play and win

1 ♘d4+ ♔c5

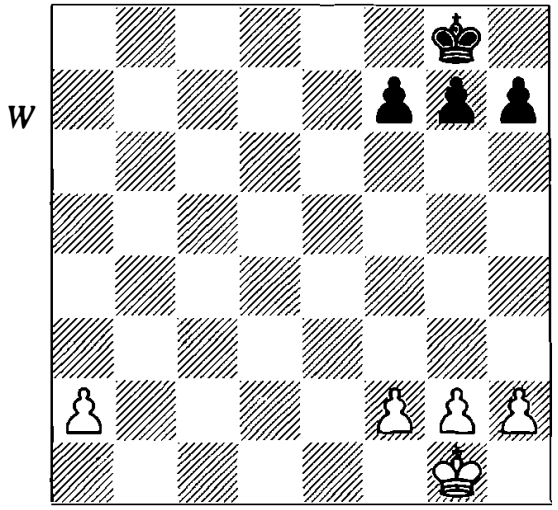
1...♔b7 2 ♔xh2 allows White a trivial win on material.

2 ♔h1!!

Black is in zugzwang. After 2...♔xd4 3 a6 the pawn queens, while every possible bishop move loses the bishop to a knight fork; e.g., 2...♗f8 3 ♘e6+, 2...♗c1 3 ♘b3+, etc.

QUESTION 74 — Which endings are most drawish?

If you have a choice of endings with an extra pawn, it is useful to know which endings offer the best winning chances. Everything depends on the exact position, of course, but if we take a very generic position, such as the following diagram, we can lay down some rough rules of thumb:



We can say the following:

The easiest position to win is the diagram itself, i.e. just king and pawns only.

Adding one knight each is still quite an easy win, as is one bishop each, *providing the bishops travel on the same-coloured squares.*

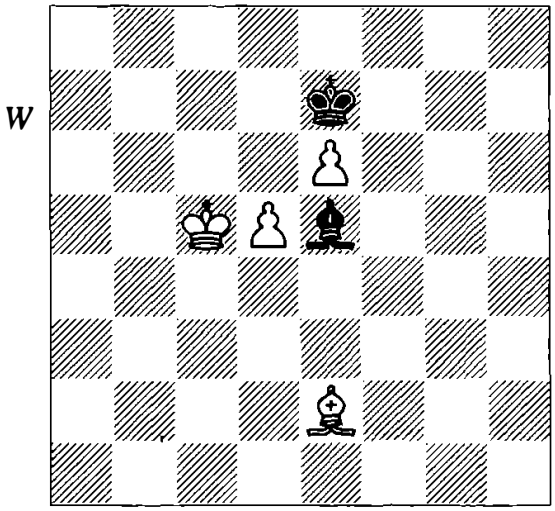
One queen each offers reasonable winning chances.

The ending with one rook each is more drawish, although much depends on the positions of the respective rooks. We shall examine this issue in more detail later on, but the general rule is that the rook belongs behind the passed pawn, whether it is its own passed pawn, or the enemy's.

If the two sides have opposite-coloured bishops, the position should be drawn with correct play.

In almost all cases, the winning plan in such endings is to use the passed pawn as a decoy, and then when the defending side's forces are tied down to stopping the a-pawn, White switches his attack to the other wing and mops up the poorly defended kingside pawns.

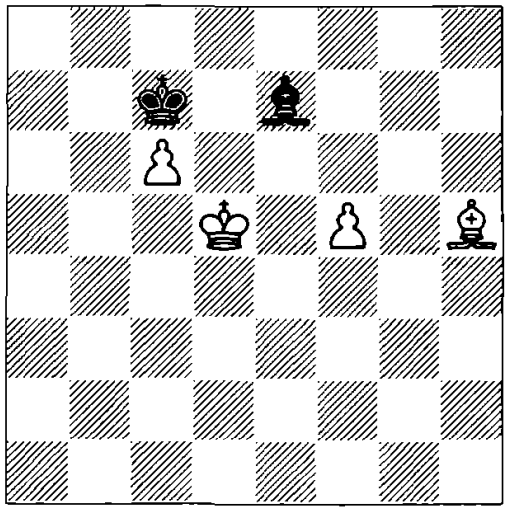
The overall rule of thumb is that opposite-coloured bishop endings tend to have a high drawing factor. This is because the defence can often set up a fortress position, blockading the enemy pawns on squares of one colour. The next diagram is a typical example.



Despite his two extra pawns, White cannot make any progress. Black just shifts his bishop up and down the b8-h2 diagonal. White's own bishop cannot contribute to lifting the dark-square blockade.

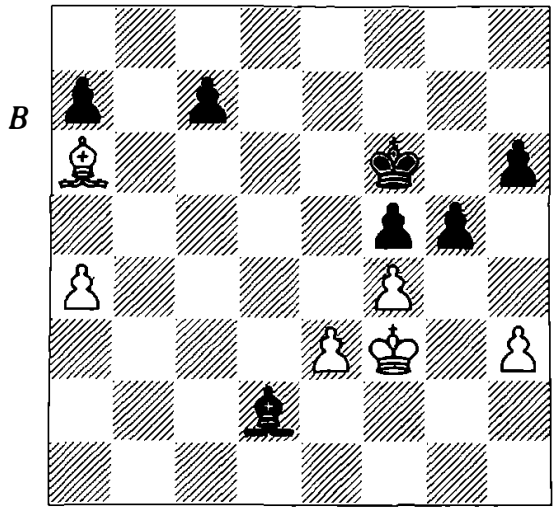
QUESTION 75 — So how does one win opposite-coloured bishop endings?

The main technique in such endings is to create two widely-separated passed pawns. This enables the defence to be stretched, and the stronger side's king can break through.



R. Fine
Basic Chess Endings, 1941

Here, White wins easily by 1 ♗f3 and 2 ♔e6, when the f-pawn will cost Black his bishop. But if the f5-pawn stands on e5, White can only draw, because the black king can assist in the defence.



Polovodin – Zviagintsev
St Petersburg 1994

Black has one passed pawn on the c-file, and now he creates another on the h-file:

43...g4+! 44 hxg4 fxg4+ 45 ♔xg4 ♗xe3

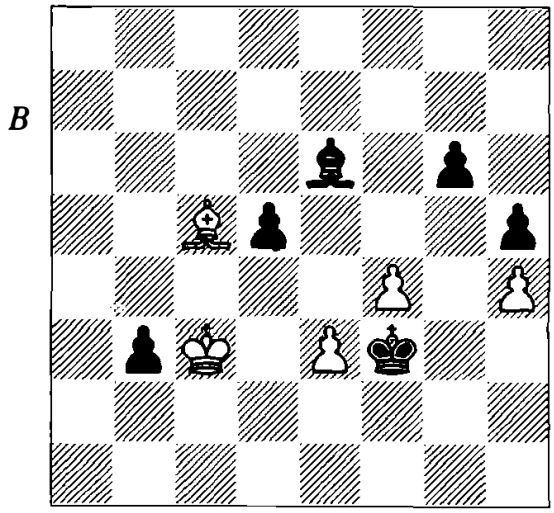
Now White has no defence, even though he has a passed pawn of his own.

46 ♔f3 ♗c1 47 ♔e4 ♔e6 48 ♗e2 a5 49 ♗h5 ♔d6 50 ♗d1 ♔c5 51 ♔e5 ♔b4 52 f5 c5 53 f6 ♗b2+ 54 ♔f5 c4 55 f7

55 ♔g6 ♗xf6 56 ♔xf6 ♔c3 57 ♔g6 ♔d2 is also a win for Black.

55...♗g7 56 ♔e4 ♔c3 57 ♗g4 ♔d2 0-1

And now the most famous practical example of all:



Kotov – Botvinnik
USSR Ch, Moscow 1955

Black won spectacularly:

59...g5!! 60 fxg5 d4+! 61 exd4 ♔g3

Now White cannot stop ...♔xh4, when Black will have a decisive second passed pawn on the h-file. By contrast, White's two passed pawns can be stopped by the black bishop operating on one diagonal.

62 ♗a3 ♔xh4 63 ♔d3 ♔xg5 64 ♔e4 h4 65 ♔f3 ♗d5+ 0-1

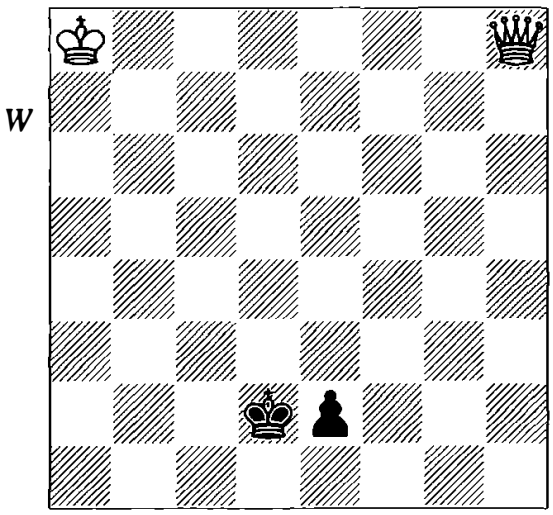
After 66 ♔f2 ♔f4, the black king penetrates to the queenside and wins the bishop.

QUESTION 76

Which endings are the most important to know?

King and pawn endings are the basic building-blocks of endgame theory, so a knowledge of them is indispensable. In other endings, there are relatively few positions that need to be known by heart. The endings with most 'theory' that needs to be known in some detail are rook and pawn endings. We shall come to those later, but for now, we shall look at a couple of other important positions.

A queen beats a lone pawn easily if it is any further back than its 7th rank (apart from a few exceptional positions where the pieces are badly placed). When the pawn is one square from queening, matters are more complex:



The winning technique here is to bring the white king closer. To do so, White must first force the black king in front of its pawn, as follows:

1 ♕d4+ ♔c2 2 ♕e3 ♔d1 3 ♕d3+

This is the basic position. Now Black must block his own pawn.

3...♔e1 4 ♔b7

With the pawn blocked, the white king takes a step nearer.

4...♔f2 5 ♕d2 ♔f1 6 ♕f4+ ♔g2 7 ♕e3 ♔f1 8 ♕f3+ ♔e1 9 ♔c6

White repeats this pattern until his king is close enough to win.

9...♔d2 10 ♕f2 ♔d1 11 ♕d4+ ♔c2 12 ♕e3 ♔d1 13 ♕d3+ ♔e1 14 ♔d5 ♔f2 15 ♕d2 ♔f1 16 ♕f4+ ♔g2 17 ♕e3 ♔f1 18 ♕f3+ ♔e1 19 ♔d4 ♔d2 20 ♕f2 ♔d1

Now the white king is close enough, and he wins by:

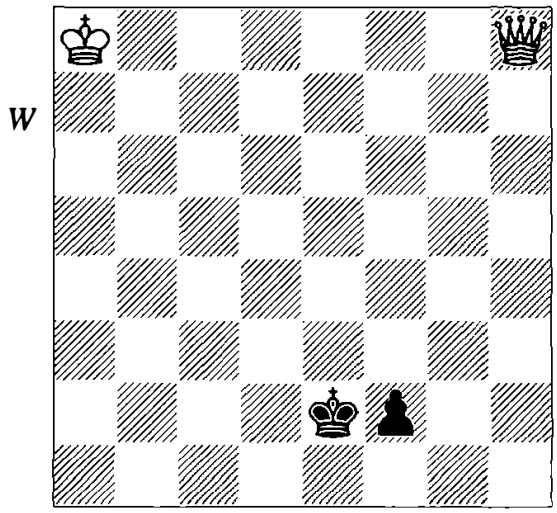
21 ♔d3 e1♕

After 21...e1♘+, 22 ♔c3 decides.

22 ♕c2#

This technique applies to all pawns on their 7th rank, with two exceptions. The first is the a- or h-pawn, which draws. This is because in the basic position, ♕g3 vs ♔g1 + ♙h2, Black plays ...♔h1, and White has no time to bring his king up, because Black is stalemated.

A similar problem occurs with the c- or f-pawns:



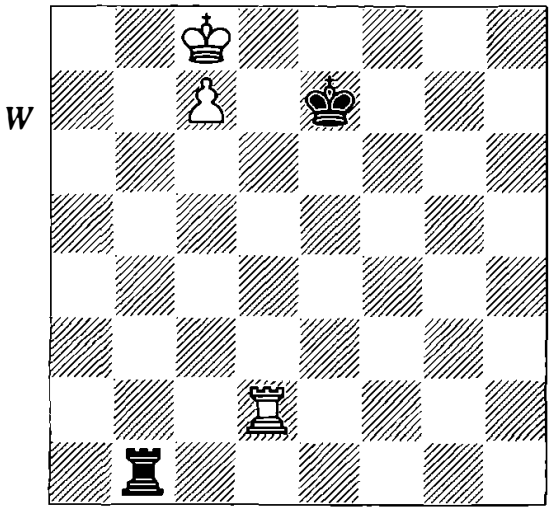
Here the problem is that after 1 ♕e5+ ♔f3 2 ♕f5+ ♔g2 3 ♕g4+ ♔h2 4 ♕f3 ♔g1 5 ♕g3+, reaching the basic position, Black abandons the pawn with 5...♔h1!. White cannot take on f2 without giving stalemate, so he can make no progress.

So, the conclusion is that a queen beats a lone pawn on the 7th rank, unless it is a rook's pawn or a bishop's pawn, when the position is drawn (unless the attacking king is already close enough to force a win).

QUESTION 77

What are the most important rook ending positions?

There are too many important positions to be shown here, but we can deal with a few of the most vital.



This is the famous *Lucena Position.* How does White win? Bringing out his king by 1 ♖e2+ ♔f7 2 ♔d7 does not help, since Black just checks: 2...♖d1+ 3 ♔c6 ♖c1+ 4 ♔d6 ♖d1+ 5 ♔c5 ♖c1+ 6 ♔b6 ♖b1+ 7 ♔a6 ♖c1 8 ♔b7 ♖b1+ 9 ♔c8 ♖b3. The only way to avoid the checks and keep the pawn is to take the king back to c8. White has made no progress.

The winning technique is called 'building a bridge' White starts with:

1 ♖d4!

This prepares to use the rook to shelter the king from checks.

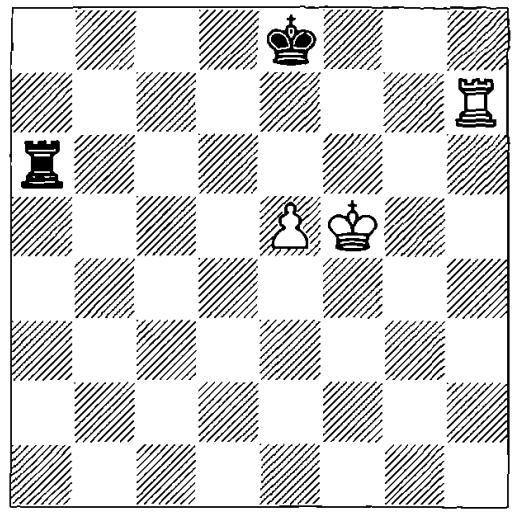
1...♖b2

Black can only wait.

2 ♖e4+ ♔f7 3 ♔d7 ♖d2+ 4 ♔c6 ♖c2+ 5 ♔d6 ♖d2+ 6 ♔c5 ♖c2+ 7 ♖c4!

and White wins.

The following diagram is the most famous drawn position with ♖+♙ vs ♖, the *Philidor Position.* Black keeps his rook on its 3rd rank, to prevent the white king from advancing. White's only attempt to make progress is:



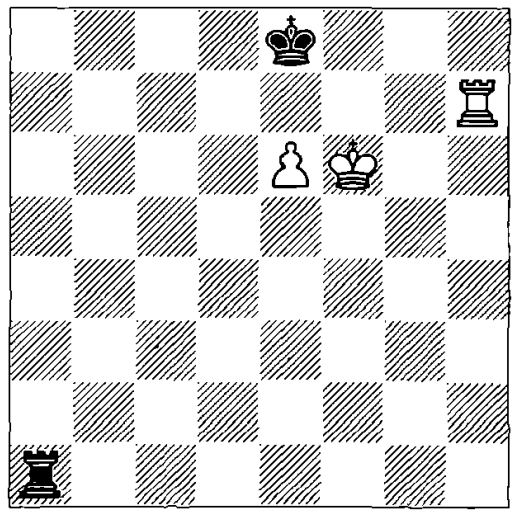
1 e6

White achieves nothing by 1 ♖h8+ ♔e7 2 ♖h7+ ♔e8.

1...♖a1!

Black takes his rook to its eighth rank, and checks the white king from behind. Note that this is the only drawing method; Black loses if he continues to wait: 1...♖b6? 2 ♔f6 ♔d8 3 ♖h8+ ♔c7 4 ♔f7, and the pawn queens.

2 ♔f6 *(D)*

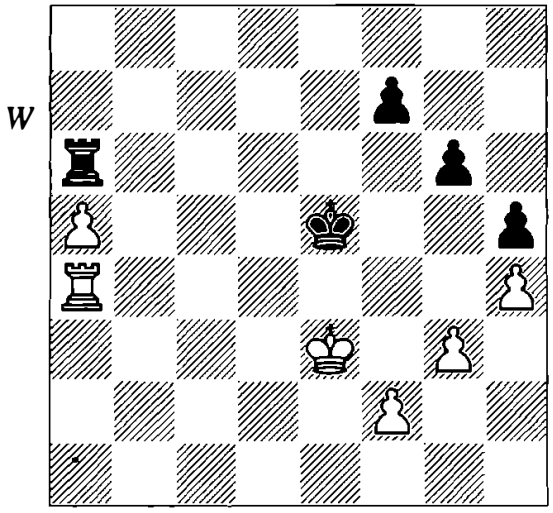


2...♖f1+

And so on. Now that his pawn is on e6, the white king has no shelter for his king. The position is drawn.

QUESTION 78 What about more complicated rook endings?

The main rule of thumb here is that it nearly always pays to keep your rook active. In practice, this usually means that the rook is well-placed behind passed pawns, both your own and the opponent's.



Alekhine – Capablanca
World Ch match (game 34), Buenos Aires 1927

This is the most famous practical example of this ending. If the rooks were the other way round, it would be a draw with best play, but here, White's rook is ideally placed. Alekhine won as follows:

57 ♔d3 ♔d5 58 ♔c3 ♔c5 59 ♖a2!

Now Black is in zugzwang and his king must give way.

59...♔b5 60 ♔b3

60 ♔d4! is better immediately.

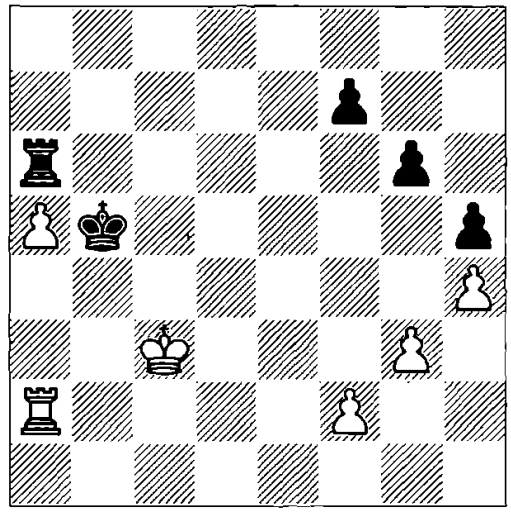
60...♔c5

60...♖xa5 61 ♖xa5+ ♔xa5 62 ♔c4 leads to a pawn ending that is lost for Black.

61 ♔c3 ♔b5 *(D)*

62 ♔d4!

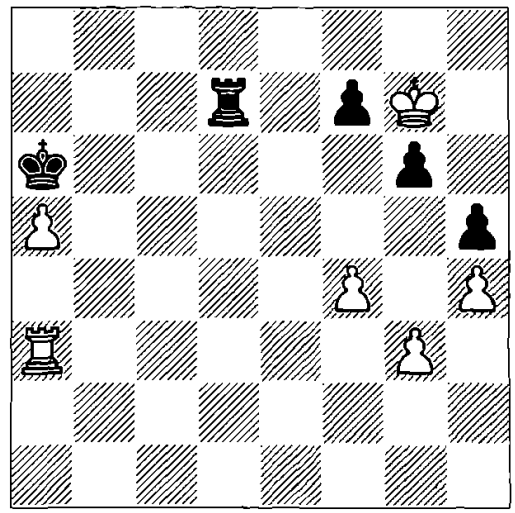
The key idea. Using the a-pawn as a decoy, the white king attacks the black pawns on the kingside.



62...♖d6+ 63 ♔e5 ♖e6+ 64 ♔f4 ♔a6 65 ♔g5 ♖e5+ 66 ♔h6 ♖f5 67 f4?!

Premature. 67 ♔g7! is more accurate.

67...♖c5 68 ♖a3 ♖c7 69 ♔g7 ♖d7 *(D)*



70 f5!

Black has so far managed to defend his kingside pawns, but this breaks them up decisively.

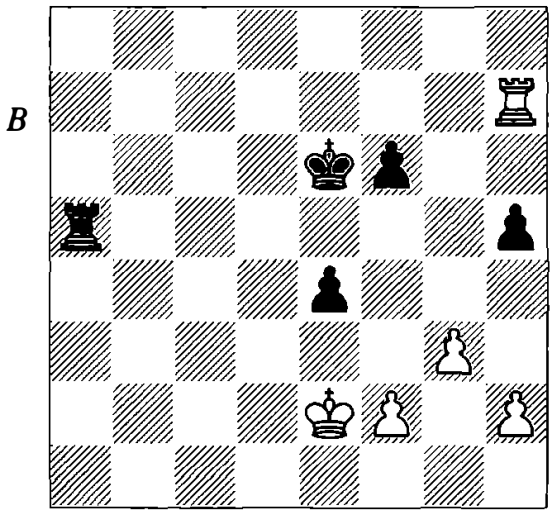
70...gxf5 71 ♔h6 f4 72 gxf4 ♖d5 73 ♔g7 ♖f5 74 ♖a4 ♔b5 75 ♖e4 ♔a6

75...♔xa5 76 ♖e5+ and White wins.

76 ♔h6 ♖xa5 77 ♖e5 ♖a1 78 ♔xh5 ♖g1 79 ♖g5 ♖h1 80 ♖f5 ♔b6 81 ♖xf7 ♔c6 82 ♖e7 1-0

QUESTION 79 Does the same rule apply to the defence?

It certainly does. In rook endings, activity is frequently more important than an extra pawn. The following is a typical example, with the then world champion salvaging half a point from a desperate-looking position, thanks to playing actively:



Kashdan – Alekhine
Folkestone Olympiad 1933

Black is in trouble, because the white king is coming after the weak e-pawn via e3 and f4. Alekhine saved the draw by sacrificing two pawns in order to maximize the activity of his pieces.

38...f5! 39 ♖h6+ ♔e5 40 ♖xh5 ♖a2+ 41 ♔f1 e3!

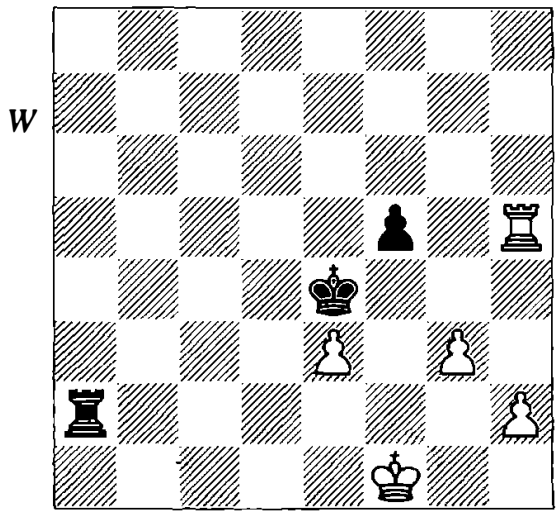
A second pawn sacrifice, so as to allow the black king to penetrate.

42 fxe3 ♔e4 *(D)*

White has two extra pawns, but Black's pieces are so active, and the white king so passive, that Black has full compensation and draws without difficulty.

43 ♔g1 ♖e2 44 ♖h4+ ♔e5!

Again, activity is more important than material. 44...♔xe3? 45 ♖f4 would allow White

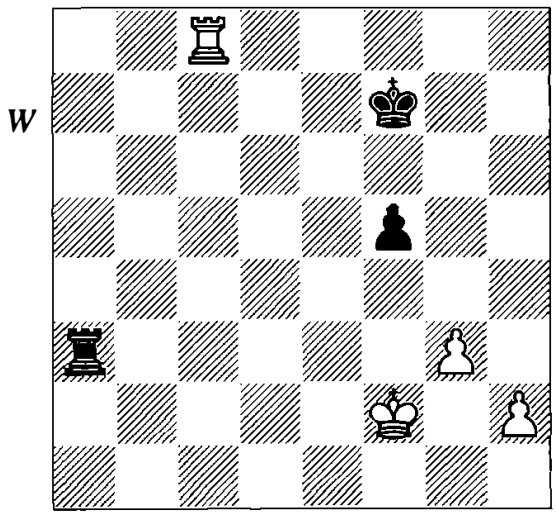


to post his rook effectively, safeguarding his own king and cutting off Black's.

45 ♖h8 ♔f6

45...♖xe3?? 46 ♖e8+ leads to a lost pawn ending for Black.

46 ♖f8+ ♔g6 47 ♖e8 ♔f7 48 ♖c8 ♖xe3 49 ♔f2 ♖a3 *(D)*



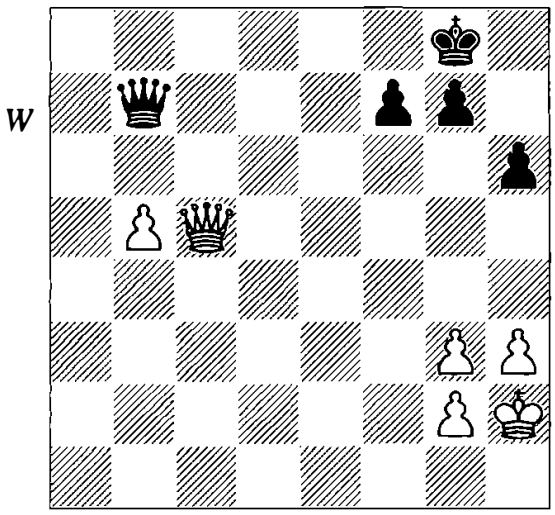
Black has regained one pawn, and the resulting position with two pawns against one, on the same side, is a known draw.

50 h4 ♔f6 51 ♖c6+ ♔f7 52 ♖c2 ♖b3 53 ♖e2 ♔f6 54 ♖e3 ♖b4 55 ♔f3 ♖a4 56 ♖b3 ♖c4 57 ♖b6+ ♔f7 58 ♖d6 ♖a4 ½-½

QUESTION 80

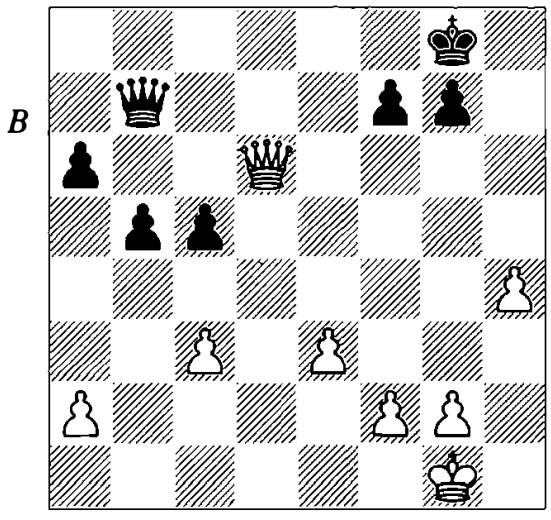
What are the main principles of queen endings?

In queen endings, the two main factors are king safety and passed pawns. King safety matters because the power of the queen frequently enables it to give perpetual check. Passed pawns tend to matter more than material, because the queen can escort a passed pawn home by itself, without the aid of the king, as in the next diagram.



If this were a rook ending, it would be a draw, but here White wins trivially by 1 b6 and 2 ♕c7, when the pawn queens. White's king is safe, so there is no danger of perpetual check.

And now a famous and instructive queen ending from grandmaster practice.



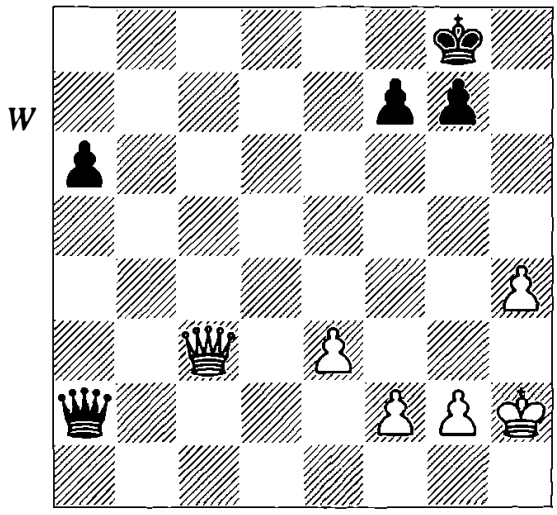
Rubinstein – Capablanca
St Petersburg 1914

White has an extra pawn, and his queen is much more active. Black's position seems hopeless, but Capablanca found an excellent defence, based on the strength of a passed pawn.

27...b4! 28 ♕xc5

28 c4 was a better winning try, although analysis by Keres suggests that 28...♕a7 or 28...♕c8 gives Black good drawing chances.

28...bxc3 29 ♕xc3 ♕b1+ 30 ♔h2 ♕xa2 *(D)*



Now Black has a passed pawn on the a-file, which offsets White's extra pawn.

31 ♕c8+ ♔h7 32 ♕f5+ g6 33 ♕f6 a5

If White did not have counterplay here, he would be losing. As it is, Rubinstein secures a draw by remembering the other key principle of queen endings – king safety.

34 g4 a4 35 h5!

Using his pawns to lever open the position of the black king, after which White can give perpetual check.

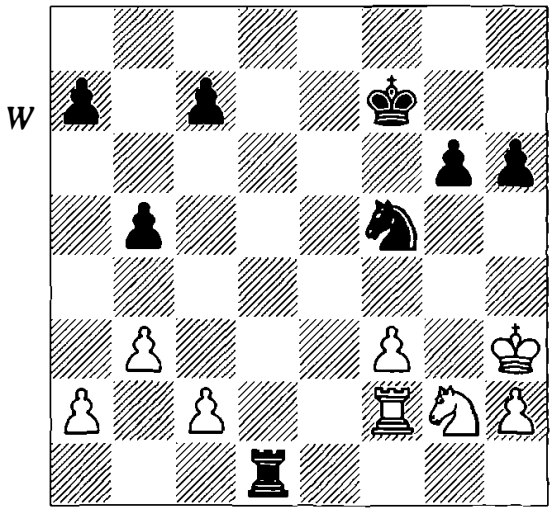
35...gxh5

35...a3 also leads to a draw provided Black meets 36 h6 by 36...♕b2! 37 ♕xf7+ ♔xh6. However, he must not play 36...♔xh6? due to 37 ♕h8+ ♔g5 38 ♔g3! when Black must give up his queen to avoid immediate mate.

36 ♕f5+ ♔g7 37 ♕g5+ ♔h7 38 ♕xh5+ ♔g7 ½-½

QUESTION 81 What is the role of pawns in the endgame?

There are two main respects in which pawns are important in the endgame. The first is passed pawns, which are frequently the key to endgames. The other key factor is pawn weaknesses. In the middlegame, as we have already seen, a potentially weak isolated or hanging pawn can often have its positive side, in terms of dynamic attacking chances. In the endgame, such dynamism is much harder to achieve because of the simplified position, and such pawn weaknesses tend to grow in importance.



Lindberg – E. Berg
Swedish Ch, Stockholm 2007

This is a typical case. In the middlegame, White's split kingside pawns could even work in his favour if he could use the open g-file to attack Black's king. In the endgame, however, the pawns are just a weakness. White should still draw, but he must defend carefully, and in practice many such positions are lost.

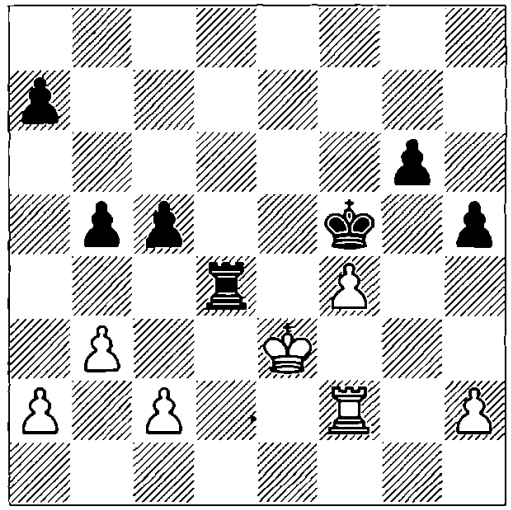
31 ♘f4 c6 32 ♘d3 ♔f6 33 f4 ♘e3 34 ♘e5 c5 35 ♔g3 ♔f5 36 ♔f3 ♘d5

Black gradually strengthens the pressure against the isolated pawn on f4.

37 ♘g4?

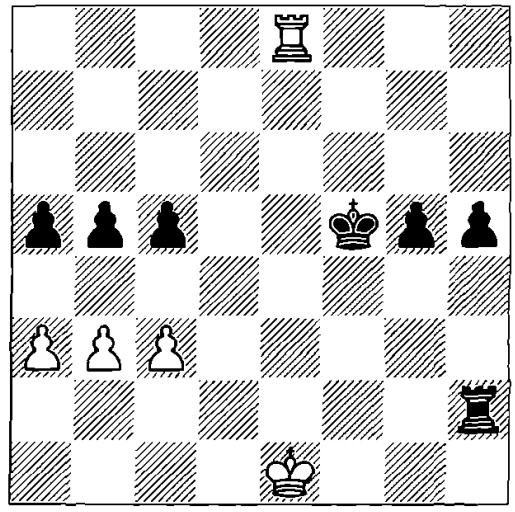
Missing a clear drawing chance with 37 ♘f7, threatening both 38 ♘xh6+ and 38 ♘d6+.

37...h5 38 ♘e3+ ♘xe3 39 ♔xe3 ♖d4! *(D)*



Now White is losing a pawn, due to the threat of 40...♖e4+.

40 c3 ♖e4+ 41 ♔d2 ♖xf4 42 ♖e2 g5 43 a3 a5 44 ♖e8 ♖f2+ 45 ♔e1 ♖xh2 *(D)*

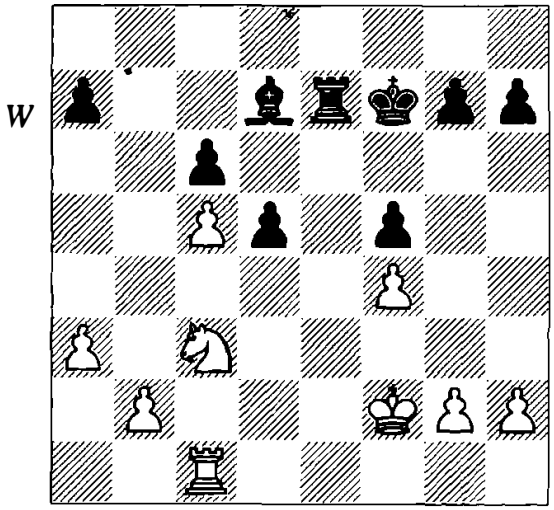


46 ♖c8 h4 47 ♖xc5+ ♔f4 48 c4 ♖b2 0-1

QUESTION 82

What are the other principles of good endgame technique?

There are quite a few, too many to cover fully here. But perhaps the most important is 'do not hurry' The pace of endgames is generally slower, with fewer sharp attacks, and much more quiet manoeuvring. Endgames require patience, attention to detail, care to prevent unnecessary counterplay, etc. There are no prizes for winning a game in the fewest possible moves, and good technique is about winning slowly but surely, without endangering the win by giving the opponent unnecessary chances. The following is an example of many of these qualities.



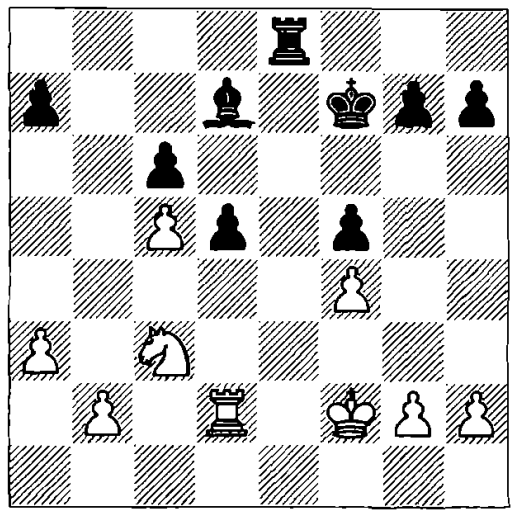
Botvinnik – Konstantinopolsky
Sverdlovsk 1943

With knight vs bad bishop, White has an obvious advantage. His long-term plan is to create a passed pawn on the queenside by b4, a4 and b5, but rather than start that process immediately, Botvinnik first attends to other matters. The queenside pawn advance cannot be stopped in the long term anyway, so he first improves the position of his pieces, including his king.

24 ♖d1!

Prophylaxis. White keeps the black pawns fixed on light squares, where they obstruct his bishop. The hasty simplification 24 ♖e1? allows 24...♖xe1 25 ♔xe1 d4! 26 ♘e2 ♔e6 27 ♘xd4+ ♔d5, when Black has enough counterplay to hold. Botvinnik plays more patiently.

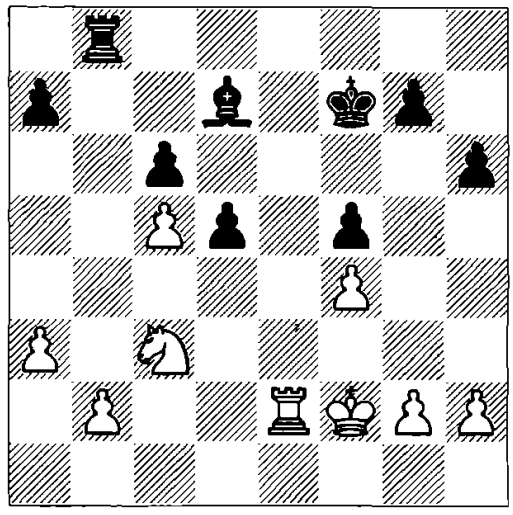
24...♖e8 25 ♖d2! *(D)*



This defends the b2-pawn, and prepares White's next move.

25...h6 26 ♖e2! ♖b8 *(D)*

Now 26...♖xe2+ is met by 27 ♘xe2, when after 27...d4, 28 ♘xd4 keeps the black king out.



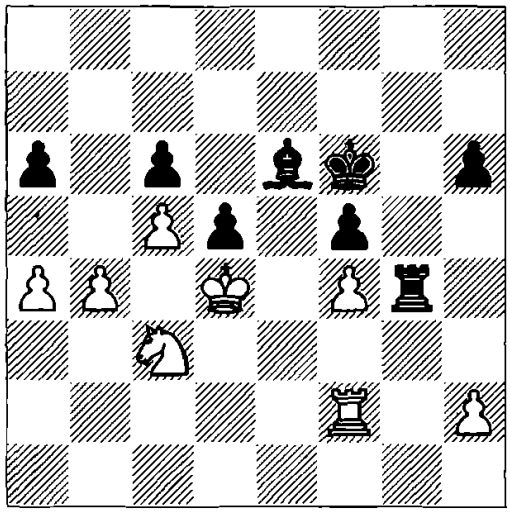
27 ♔e3

Centralization of the king, which heads for its ideal square on d4, blockading the d5-pawn.

27...♖b3 28 ♔d4 ♔f6 29 ♘a2 ♖b8 30 b4 g5

Black seeks counterplay on the kingside.

31 g3 gxf4 32 gxf4 a6 33 ♘c3 ♖g8 34 a4 ♖g4 35 ♖f2 ♗e6 *(D)*



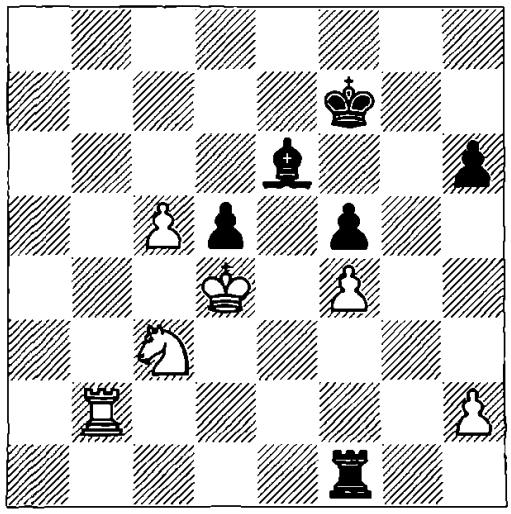
36 b5

Having placed his pieces optimally, White finally creates a passed pawn on the queenside. Note that it has taken him 13 moves to do so since the first diagram position, but by taking all possible preparatory steps, Botvinnik has ensured that the passed pawn comes into the world in the best possible circumstances.

36...axb5 37 axb5 cxb5 38 ♘xb5 ♖g1 39 ♘c3!

Do not hurry! Rather than rushing ahead on the queenside, White takes steps to remove any counterplay. The knight prevents a check on d1.

39...♔f7 40 ♖b2 ♖f1 *(D)*



41 ♘e2!

Again, White takes care not to allow unnecessary counterplay, such as would arise after 41 ♔e5 d4.

41...♖e1

If 41...♔f6, White pushes the passed pawn with 42 c6, thereby showing another point of his last move – the knight prevents Black from playing ...♖c1, getting his rook behind the passed pawn.

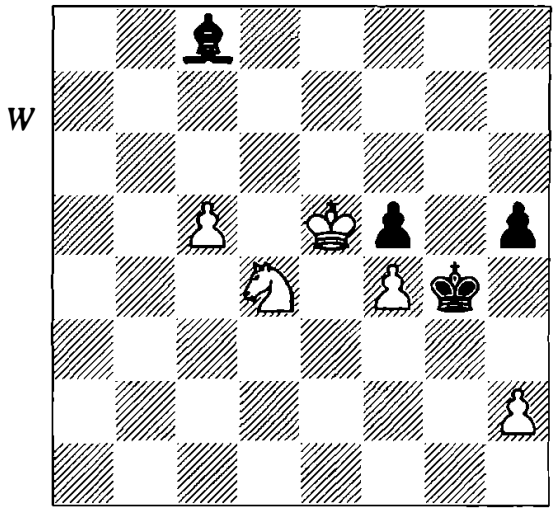
42 ♔e5 d4

Black finally gets the chance to offload this pawn and activate his bishop, but by now White has made enormous progress, and so the counterplay is less dangerous. This is typical of good, patient endgame technique.

43 ♔xd4 ♔g6 44 ♘c3 ♔h5 45 ♖e2

Finally forcing off the rooks, after which the c-pawn will decide matters.

45...♖xe2 46 ♘xe2 ♔g4 47 ♔e5 ♗c8 48 ♘d4 h5 *(D)*



49 ♘xf5!

The final tactical blow.

49...♗d7

After 49...♗xf5 50 h3+ White regains the piece and queens the c-pawn.

50 ♘g7 ♗a4 51 f5 ♔g5 52 ♘e6+ 1-0

The second passed pawn is too much. Superb and instructive endgame play by Botvinnik.

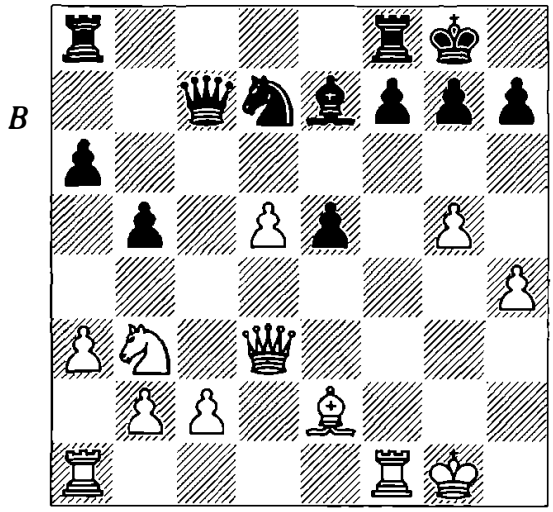
QUESTION 83 How does one deal with losses?

Losing is an unavoidable part of chess, and however unpleasant it is, a player must learn to cope with it. There are many players throughout history, at all levels, who play markedly weaker in a tournament once they have lost a game. Even such great players as Anand have shown this tendency. Players with relatively brittle self-confidence are especially vulnerable to this. Naturally, any loss is disappointing, and a loss which results from a particularly stupid blunder, perhaps in a winning position, is especially hard to take. But in a tournament, it is essential to put the loss out of your mind, and come back next day with a clear head. Fretting over the previous day's defeat is a sure way to lose today's game, and before you know it, you have lost a whole series of games.

The best example that I recall of a player coming back really well from losses was Nigel Short, during his run through the 1991-3 Candidates matches. Several times, he lost appalling games, yet came out the next day and played really well. Take, for example, this shambolic first game of his match with Gelfand:

Short – Gelfand
Candidates match (game 1), Brussels 1991

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 f4 ♕c7 7 ♗e2 e5 8 ♘b3 b5 9 0-0 ♗b7 10 ♕d3 ♘bd7 11 a3 ♗e7 12 g4 exf4 13 ♗xf4 ♘e5 14 ♗xe5 dxe5 15 g5 ♘d7 16 h4 0-0 17 ♘d5 ♗xd5 18 exd5 *(D)*

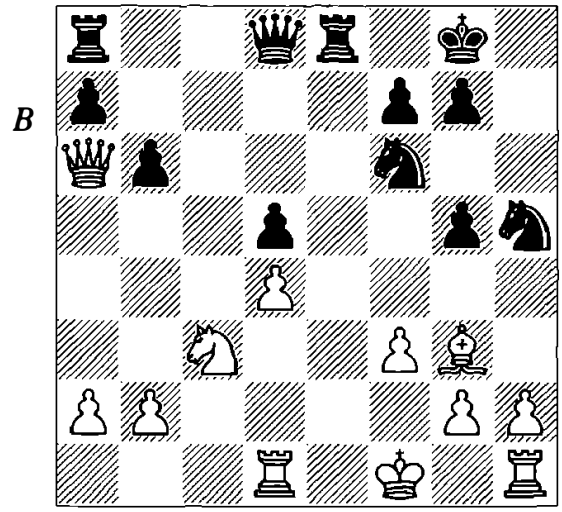


18...e4! 19 ♕xe4 ♕g3+ 20 ♕g2 ♕xh4 21 ♖ad1 ♗xg5 22 ♖d3 ♖ae8 23 ♖f5 h6 24 ♘d2 ♘c5 0-1

This is probably the worst game I have ever seen at such a level and would be enough to shatter anyone's self-confidence. Yet just 24 hours later, this was Short playing Black:

Gelfand – Short
Candidates match (game 2), Brussels 1991

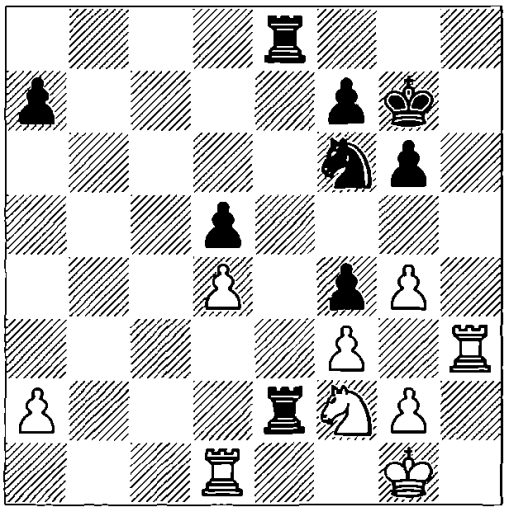
1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 ♘bd7 5 ♗g5 ♗e7 6 e3 0-0 7 ♖c1 b6 8 cxd5 exd5 9 ♕a4 c5 10 ♗a6 h6 11 ♗h4 cxd4 12 exd4 ♘h5 13 ♗g3 ♗xa6 14 ♕xa6 ♗g5 15 ♖d1 ♖e8+ 16 ♔f1 ♘df6 17 ♘xg5 hxg5 18 f3 *(D)*



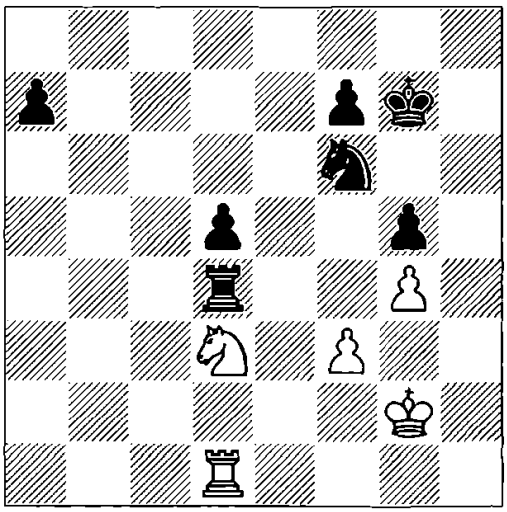
18...b5! 19 ♕xb5 ♘xg3+ 20 hxg3 ♖b8 21 ♕d3 ♖xb2 22 ♖d2 ♕b6 23 g4 ♕b8

23...♘xg4! was possibly an even stronger move.

24 ♘d1 ♕g3 25 ♘f2 ♖b6 26 ♖h3 ♖be6 27 ♖d1 ♕c7 28 ♕d2 ♖e3 29 ♖c1 ♕f4 30 ♖d1 g6 31 ♔g1 ♔g7 32 ♕c1 ♖e2 33 ♕xf4 gxf4 *(D)*

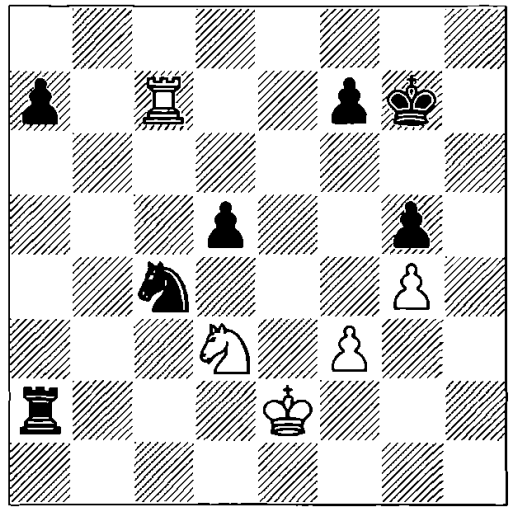


34 ♘d3 g5 35 a4 ♖a2 36 g3 fxg3 37 ♘c5 g2 38 ♖g3 ♖ee2 39 ♘b3 ♖eb2 40 ♘c1 ♖xa4 41 ♘d3 ♖ba2 42 ♖xg2 ♖xg2+ 43 ♔xg2 ♖xd4 *(D)*



44 ♔f2 ♘d7 45 ♔e3 ♖a4 46 ♖c1 ♘b6 47 ♖c7 ♘c4+ 48 ♔e2 ♖a2+ 49 ♔e1 ♖a3 50 ♔e2 ♖a2+ *(D)*

51 ♔e1 a5 52 f4 gxf4 53 ♘xf4 ♘e3 54 ♖a7 a4 55 g5 a3 56 g6 ♘g2+ 57 ♘xg2 ♖xg2 58 ♖xa3 fxg6 59 ♖a6 ♔h6 60 ♖d6 ♖g5 61 ♔f2 ♔h5 62 ♔f3 ♔h4 63 ♖a6 ♔h3 64 ♔f2 ♖g4 65 ♖a3+ ♔h2 66 ♖a6 ♖f4+ 0-1



So how does one regain self-confidence after a loss? Partly, it is an in-built quality – some players are just more resilient psychologically. Even so, every player must find his own way to cope with a defeat. Some do so by analysing the game thoroughly, as if trying to expurgate it from their system. Others do the opposite, and just try to forget, maybe going out for the evening with friends, or watching a movie. One chess friend of mine swore by the latter – after a bad loss, he would find a cinema and watch the most violent and ridiculously unrealistic action movie they were showing! This is not my cup of tea, but it worked for him.

One technique which I have found useful is to create a database on my laptop of my best-ever games. Whenever I lose a particularly bad game, I spend some time that evening looking over some of my best games, in an attempt to remind myself that I can play decent chess after all. This goes some way towards repairing the loss of self-confidence, which is the biggest danger after a defeat.

QUESTION 84

If I need to draw or win a particular game, what is the best approach?

Situations where a particular result is needed often occur in tournament play. Sometimes a win or a draw in a last-round game will guarantee first place, or maybe an international master or grandmaster norm. There is naturally a strong temptation in such cases to change one's style of play to suit the result; for example, a player needing a win decides to adopt an especially sharp approach, or a player who needs to draw deliberately chooses a very tame, drawish opening.

In practice, though, such an approach frequently backfires. By playing in this way, the player often finds himself in an unfamiliar position, which he does not handle well. Similarly, a player who deliberately strives for a draw can often end up playing too passively, and turning down what he knows to be the best move, in favour of an inferior but apparently safer choice. The result can often be disaster, as in the following game.

Tatai – Korchnoi
Beersheba 1978

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5

At the time of this game, Tatai was an international master, whilst Korchnoi was world no. 2. Despite having White, the Italian decides that he is only after a draw, and makes his intentions clear from the start.

3...exd5 4 ♗d3 c5 5 ♘f3 ♘c6 6 ♕e2+?!

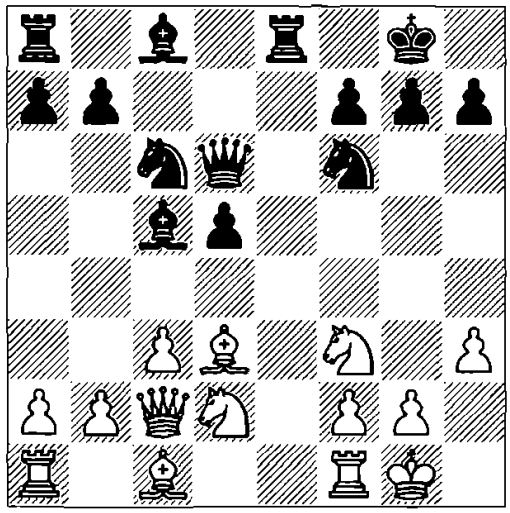
A move typical of the draw-seeker. White hopes for more simplification after 6...♕e7, but Korchnoi does not oblige, and the white queen turns out to be misplaced on the open e-file.

6...♗e7 7 dxc5 ♘f6 8 h3?!

Rather passive play, another characteristic of the player seeking only to make a draw.

8...0-0 9 0-0 ♗xc5 10 c3 ♖e8 11 ♕c2 ♕d6 12 ♘bd2 *(D)*

B



12...♕g3!

An extremely rude shock for White, who is already quite lost. The threat of 13...♗xh3 is hard to meet.

13 ♗f5 ♖e2 14 ♘d4 ♘xd4 0-1

A real fiasco for White, but a typical example of the dangers of playing for a draw. My advice is therefore as follows: try to play your normal style in every game, regardless of the result needed. If you need to make a draw, the best way to do so is to play normally, get an advantage, and then offer a draw from a position of strength. Likewise, when playing for a win, slow steady pressure is often more effective than trying to blow your opponent off the board in double-quick time, especially if such fireworks are not your normal style.

QUESTION 85 How should I prepare for a tournament?

The main question is what work before a tournament will ensure you are in the best form. There are essentially three main things you should do:

- physical preparation
- opening preparation
- tactical training

We shall now discuss these in a little more detail.

1) Some physical preparation is always useful. Tournaments can be tiring affairs, with hours of intense concentration, day after day, and most players find their play deteriorates in the later rounds. It certainly helps to be physically fit, and a player who is will stand the course better. Some physical preparation, even if it is just walking, is therefore a valuable part of pre-tournament preparation.

2) Opening preparation is the thing most players concentrate on. To some extent, this makes sense. It is certainly worth making sure that your repertoire is in reasonable shape. If you have recently lost a bad game in your favourite opening, make sure you know what you did wrong and can improve next time. But beyond that, it is not necessary to spend a lot of time on openings, especially at the amateur level. At world-class level, grandmasters will prepare specific openings for their future opponents, but at the amateur level, you usually do not know who you will play in the forthcoming tournament, nor do you know what openings they play.

3) Most tournament games are decided by tactical oversights, and so the most important element in pre-tournament preparation is to ensure that your brain is working well. This means calculating tactics properly and taking sensible decisions at the board. The best way to train these qualities is to solve puzzle positions for a hour or so each day, in the week or two before the tournament. The standard 'Spot the winning move' puzzles that appear in most chess magazines and newspaper columns are good for this purpose, as also are endgame studies.

If you are not a professional player, and have a normal job and family, you will not have much free time to prepare for a tournament. It is therefore all the more important to use the limited time you do have as effectively as possible. For this reason, it is '3' above that should get the lion's share of your attention, since seeing tactics quickly and accurately will have the most dramatic impact on your ability to score more points in the tournament.

QUESTION 86

Should I vary my openings to catch out my opponent?

Many players feel uncomfortable about allowing their opponents to play their favourite opening schemes. Such players tend to find out their opponent's repertoire, and then deliberately play an opening they themselves have rarely, if ever, played before, so as to avoid their opponent's knowledge or pre-game preparation.

This is perhaps understandable; after all, nobody likes the idea of walking into a well-booked-up opponent, and potentially losing without the opponent having had to find any good moves for himself. However, the drawback of such an approach is that the player handicaps himself by choosing an unfamiliar opening. As emphasized earlier in this book, good opening play is much more about experience, and understanding typical middlegame positions and plans, than it is about just remembering a few concrete variations. Such experience and understanding only come with time, and cannot be acquired in just an hour or two of reading a book on an unfamiliar opening. As a result, there is a real danger that in trying to surprise the opponent, and throw him onto unfamiliar ground, the player will actually do this to himself, and it will be he who suffers, rather than the opponent.

However, if you have a broad enough repertoire (see Question 15) that you can surprise the opponent while remaining on familiar ground, then you might as well do so. Likewise if your surprise weapon has a lot in common strategically with an opening that you know well.

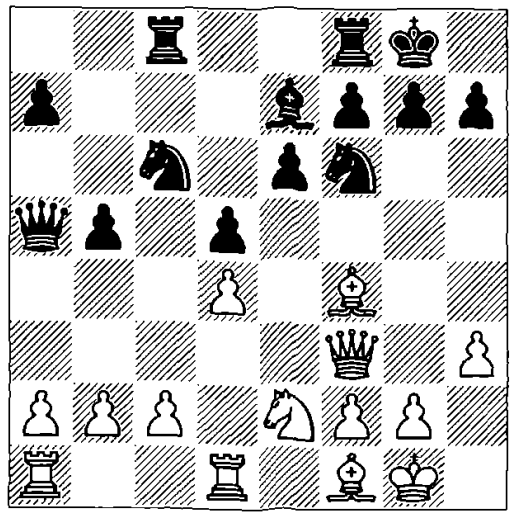
Even world-class players can find it hard to adapt to an opening with which they have little experience. In the following game, Kamsky avoids mainstream theory in favour of a harmless set-up which he had rarely used in high-level games. However, he quickly found himself in trouble.

Kamsky – Gelfand
Candidates match (game 3), Elista 2007

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 d5 3 ♗f4 c5 4 e3 ♘c6 5 ♗b5?!

5 ♗d3 is better.

5...cxd4 6 exd4 ♕a5+ 7 ♘c3 ♗g4 8 0-0 e6 9 h3 ♗xf3 10 ♕xf3 ♖c8 11 ♖fd1 ♗e7 12 ♗f1 0-0 13 ♘e2 b5 *(D)*



White is already clearly worse, and goes on to lose badly.

14 c3?! b4 15 ♕d3 ♕b6 16 cxb4 ♘xb4 17 ♕b3 ♘e4 18 a3 ♘c6 19 ♕xb6 axb6 20 b4 g5 21 ♗e3 ♘d6 22 ♘c1 f5 23 ♘b3 ♘c4 24 b5 ♘d8 25 a4 ♘b7 26 ♗c1 f4 27 ♗e2 ♗b4 28 ♖a2 ♘bd6 29 ♗d3 ♖a8 30 ♔f1 ♘xb5 31 ♖c2 ♘bd6 32 ♗d2 ♖xa4 33 ♗xb4 ♖xb4 34 ♘c1 ♘f5 35 ♗xf5 ♖xf5 36 ♘d3 ♖b3 37 ♖a2 ♖f7 38 ♔e2 ♘d6 39 ♖da1 ♘b5 40 ♔d2 ♘xd4

White could certainly have resigned at this point.

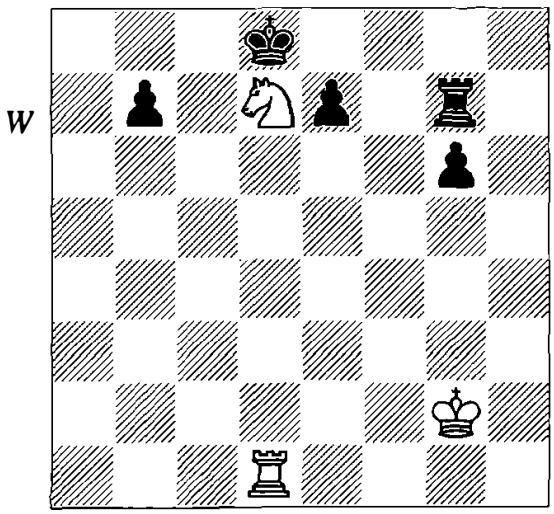
41 ♖c1 ♖b5 42 ♖c8+ ♖f8 43 ♖c7 ♖a5 44 ♖b2 ♖f7 45 ♖c8+ ♔g7 46 ♘e5 ♖b7 47 h4 gxh4 48 ♖b4 ♖a2+ 49 ♔d3 ♘f5 50 ♖xf4 ♖ba7 51 ♖c3 ♖7a3 52 ♖xa3 ♖xa3+ 53 ♔e2 b5 54 ♖g4+ ♔f6 55 ♘d3 ♖a8 56 ♔d2 e5 57 ♖b4 e4 58 ♘c5 ♖g8 0-1

QUESTION 87 What is the best way to train?

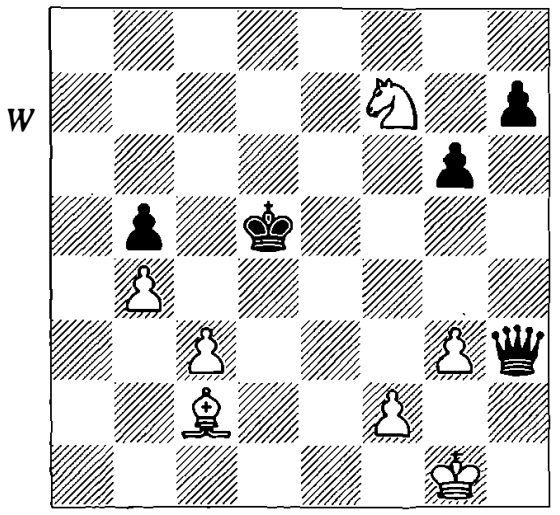
As discussed above, the most important skill for any chess-player is to be able to calculate. Petrosian's former trainer, Alexei Suetin, told a story of how he and Petrosian spent three months preparing for a world championship match against Spassky. After three months of analysing Spassky's games and studying the minutiae of opening schemes many moves deep, they went for dinner after finishing their final training session. Over dinner, Petrosian looked at Suetin and said "You know, we've done all this work, but in the end, the match just comes down to who is better at going 'He goes there, then I go here, then he takes that and I take this...'"

An excellent way to train your calculating skill is to solve endgame studies, without moving the pieces. Studies are ideal because they usually have relatively clear answers. To be sound, a study must have only one solution, so there is little danger of being confused by alternative solutions. With a study, you have to find a specific, tactically accurate sequence of moves, and this is perfect material for training your calculating abilities.

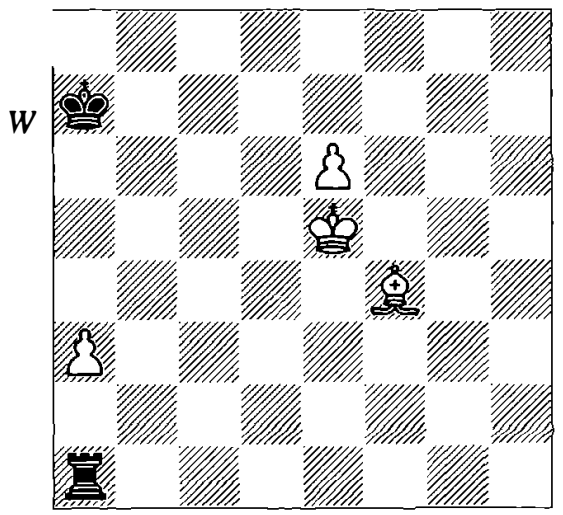
Here are three studies for this purpose. Answers below.



L. Kubbel
2nd Prize, Chigorin Memorial, 1938
White to play and win



V. & M. Platov
Sbornik Shakhmatnikh Etiudov, 1914
White to play and win



H. Mattison
Rigascher Rundschau, 1914
White to play and win

Solutions

L. Kubbel

White is clearly not winning on material, so he needs to exploit the awkward position of the black pieces.

1 ♘f8+! ♔e8

1...♔c8 leads to a nice mate on the edge of the board: 2 ♖c1+ ♔b8 (2...♔d8 3 ♘e6+) 3

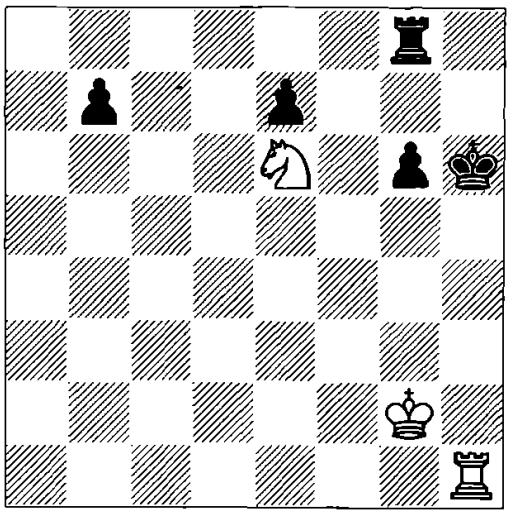
♘d7+ ♔a7 4 ♖a1#. A harbinger of things to come!

2 ♘e6 ♖g8

2...♖f7 3 ♖d8# is mate, whilst after 2...♖h7 3 ♖d8+ ♔f7 4 ♘g5+ White wins a rook.

3 ♘c7+ ♔f7 4 ♖f1+ ♔g7 5 ♘e6+ ♔h6 6 ♖h1# *(D)*

B



A lovely echo of the variation after 1...♔c8.

V. & M. Platov

Again, material is against White, but the awkward position of the black queen is the decisive factor. White wins by exploiting a series of knight forks.

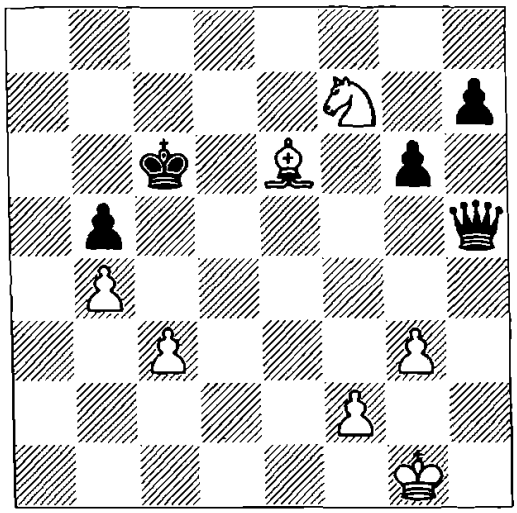
1 ♗b3+ ♔c6

If 1...♔e4, 2 ♘g5+ wins the queen.

2 ♗e6! ♕h5 *(D)*

2...♕xe6 3 ♘d8+ wins for White.

W



3 ♗g4! ♕d5 4 ♗f3! ♕xf3 5 ♘e5+

and White wins.

H. Mattison

One of the difficulties in this study is spotting Black's defences. Such studies are also excellent training for over-the-board play, where seeing the opponent's resources is just as important as exploiting your own tactical chances.

1 ♗e3+ ♔b7 2 e7 ♖xa3

Now Black threatens both 3...♖xe3+ and 3...♖a8.

3 ♗a7!! ♖a1

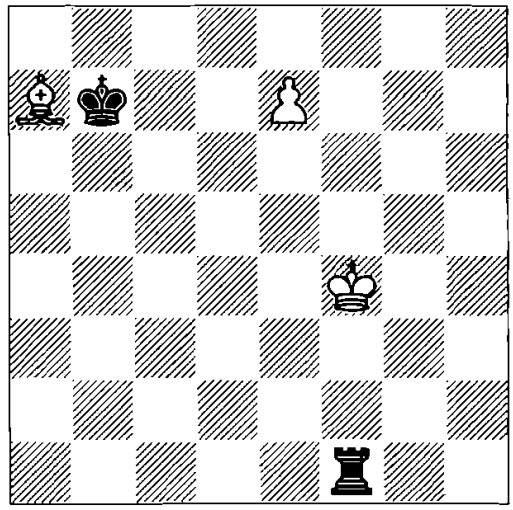
The point is that 3...♔xa7 is met by 4 ♔f4! (but not 4 e8♕?? ♖e3+, nor 4 ♔e4? ♖a1!, followed by ...♖e1+).

4 ♔f4!

Again not 4 ♔e4? ♔xa7.

4...♖f1+ *(D)*

W



5 ♗f2!!

The only move. Both 5 ♔g3? and 5 ♔e3? fail to 5...♖e1(+).

5...♖xf2+ 6 ♔e3! ♖f1 7 ♔e2

and White wins. A beautifully simple and natural position, with surprising depth of resources.

Solving such studies on a regular basis will do wonders for your calculating ability, as well as (I hope) bringing great enjoyment. Mark Dvoretsky, widely regarded as the world's finest chess trainer, frequently uses endgame studies as part of his training technique, and other top trainers have followed his example.

QUESTION 88 Where can I find good material for study?

As discussed in Question 87 above, endgame studies are an excellent source of material for training your calculating skill. When it comes to improving your positional understanding, the best method is by the study of annotated games. There are many collections of such games, including best-game collections of most of the great players, such as Capablanca, Alekhine, Botvinnik, Fischer, Karpov, Kasparov, Kramnik and Anand.

For the beginner, an old book by the American writer Irving Chernev can be recommended: *The Most Instructive Games of Chess Ever Played.* It contains 64 striking positional games, annotated largely in words rather than variations, and is an excellent introduction to many of the basics of positional play. The Chernev book is great, but a little outdated. If I may be forgiven a small piece of self-promotion, I have myself written two similar volumes, concentrating on more modern examples, and dealing with a variety of openings and pawn-structures. My two books, both published by Gambit, are called *50 Essential Chess Lessons* and *50 Ways to Win at Chess.* A further book based around annotated games with instructive annotations is John Nunn's *Understanding Chess Move by Move.*

Study of the four books mentioned above should give you a good grounding in basic positional ideas. As an example, here is one of the games from *The Most Instructive Games of Chess Ever Played.* Entitled 'That old black magic', the game drastically illustrates the strategy of playing on weak squares of one colour.

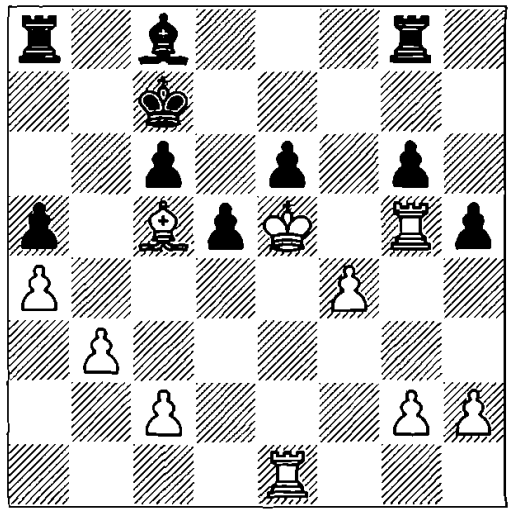
O. Bernstein – Mieses
Coburg 1904

1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 e6 3 ♘f3 ♘c6 4 d4 cxd4 5 ♘xd4 ♘f6 6 ♘xc6 bxc6 7 e5 ♘d5 8 ♘e4 f5 9 exf6 ♘xf6 10 ♘d6+ ♗xd6 11 ♕xd6

Already the dark squares in Black's camp are seriously weakened, and the rest of the game is played almost entirely on those squares.

11...♘e4 12 ♕d4 ♘f6 13 ♕d6 ♘e4 14 ♕b4 d5 15 ♗d3 ♕d6 16 ♕xd6 ♘xd6 17 f4 a5 18 ♗e3 ♗a6 19 ♔d2 ♘c4+ 20 ♗xc4 ♗xc4 21 a4 ♔d7 22 b3 ♗a6 23 ♗b6 ♗c8 24 ♔e3 ♖a6 25 ♗c5 ♔c7 26 ♔d4 ♗d7 27 ♖he1 h5 28 ♖e5 g6 29 ♖g5 ♖g8 30 ♔e5 ♗c8 31 ♖e1 ♖a8 *(D)*

W



32 ♔f6 ♗d7 33 g3 ♖ae8 34 ♖ee5 ♖h8 35 ♖xg6 ♖h7 36 ♖g7 ♖eh8 37 ♖xh7 ♖xh7 38 ♔g6 ♖h8 39 ♔g7 ♖d8 40 ♖xh5 ♗e8 41 ♖h7 ♖d7+ 42 ♔h6 ♖xh7+ 43 ♔xh7 ♗h5 44 h4 ♗d1 45 c3 ♗xb3 46 g4 ♔d7 47 g5 e5 48 f5 ♗xa4 49 f6 1-0

QUESTION 89

How do I get to understand my strengths and weaknesses?

In order to train effectively, you must have a clear picture of your strengths and weaknesses. As in any other walk of life, improvement at chess involves diagnosing your weak points, and then training systematically to eliminate them. The player himself is rarely a good judge of his own strengths and weaknesses. Most of us have an image of the player we would like to be, and this makes it hard to view our play objectively, as we tend to think we have the qualities that we would like to have. You may think of yourself as an attacking player, but all too often, it is obvious to your friends and opponents that, for instance, you are much better at boring positional grinds than at attacking *à la* Tal!

Help from Others

For this reason, it is helpful to have a stronger player look through a representative selection of your games and make a diagnosis of your strengths and weaknesses. And it is vital to ensure that he sees a truly representative selection. Only showing him your best games will give a distorted view of your abilities, as also will only showing him the bad losses. Ideally, you should find an experienced coach, but in many countries this is difficult, and a strong player from the local chess club can do just as good a job.

Self-Assessment

On an ongoing basis, the most effective method of self-improvement is conscientious analysis of your own games. It is vitally important to devote time to thoroughly analysing, and writing annotations, to each game you have played. This is especially true of your losses. There is a natural tendency to want to forget your lost games, and to bury the pain associated with them, but this is a serious mistake. Once the immediate emotions of the game have dissipated, you should analyse the game properly, and establish as honestly as possible the reasons for your defeat. Despite what many players think, these reasons are rarely related to the opening. Too many players are inclined to dismiss their defeats as just a case of the opponent knowing the opening better than themselves, whereas in reality, it is mistakes in the middlegame and endgame that account for almost all defeats. You must therefore strive to be as objective as possible in analysing your own games.

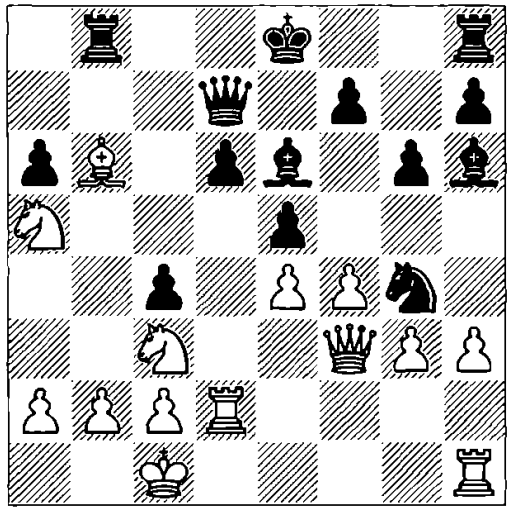
When annotating your own games, it is useful to have a trainer or stronger player review the notes occasionally. This will help to maintain greater objectivity, and ensure that you are not deluding yourself as to the true cause of your losses. The same is true with games you have won. Just because the result was favourable does not mean that you played perfectly, and even your best games are liable to contain moments where you could have played more strongly.

QUESTION 90 Is it worth buying a computer program?

I would say, definitely yes. Computer programs have improved out of all recognition in the past decade or so. It is now possible to buy a program for less than £40 (about US$80 or 50€), against which most players will probably never win a single game, if the program is playing on its strongest level. There are also good free engines, such as Crafty (http://www.webkikr.net) and Fruit (http://www.fruitchess.com). Alternatively, you can buy a dedicated chess computer, with board and pieces, against which to play. However, by far the best value for money is a chess program to run on your PC or laptop (or even your palmtop). Such programs can play at over 2700 strength, even on a normal home computer, and can also analyse positions, solve problems, etc.

Computer programs tend to play in a distinct style, rather different from humans. They are especially strong in tactics, and also have the capacity to find astonishing moves, of the type that simply would not occur to a human. This is because programs do not have the intuition and instinctive capabilities of the human brain. Human players choose moves only partially by calculation, a large part of the decision-making process being driven by gut feeling and judgement. This often enables humans to take effective decisions without needing to spend lots of time calculating numerous variations. However, this comes at the cost of our instinct tending to limit our imagination, and makes us reject certain moves purely on the intuitive feeling that the move 'cannot be good'. Computers often prove that when one analyses all the concrete variations, the move is good after all, and our instinctive fears are unfounded.

A typical example occurs in the following position:



Anand – Kasimdzhanov
FIDE World Ch, San Luis 2005

Since 19...♖xb6? 20 hxg4 ♗g7 21 f5 costs him a piece, Black instead chose **19...♘f6?** and lost after **20 ♗c5** (picking up the d6-pawn, after which Black's position collapses) **20...exf4 21 gxf4 ♖c8 22 ♗xd6 ♕d8 23 ♗b4 ♕b6 24 a3 ♘h5 25 ♔b1 ♗xf4 26 ♘d5 ♗xd5 27 ♖xd5 ♗b8 28 ♖hd1 c3 29 ♖d7 1-0**.

Both players agreed that Black was already lost in the diagram position. But any program immediately points out that Black is still very much in the game after the extraordinary **19...♘h2!!**; for example, 20 ♖hxh2 ♖xb6 21 f5 0-0! or 20 ♕e3 ♘f3!, etc. Neither of the world-class players in the game saw this move, because it is so counter-intuitive. The human brain just does not consider putting the knight on an attacked square, such as h2, but the computer has no such inhibitions and considers each move regardless of whether it appears 'natural'.

QUESTION 91 Which program should I choose?

There are at least five main programs, all of which are fully adequate as a training opponent or an analytical assistant. Fritz (probably the best-known of all), Shredder, Junior and Hiarcs are all sold via ChessBase, and are of roughly similar strength. The 'new kid on the block' is Rybka, which is probably the strongest on the market at present, while 'Fruit' is perhaps the best of the free engines.

Aficionados of such matters will tell you that there are certain differences in style between the different programs. Junior, for example, is exceptionally tactical, even by computer standards, and is also more ready to sacrifice material on general grounds than most programs. I am also told that Hiarcs's positional evaluations tend to be somewhat more reliable than most of the other programs.

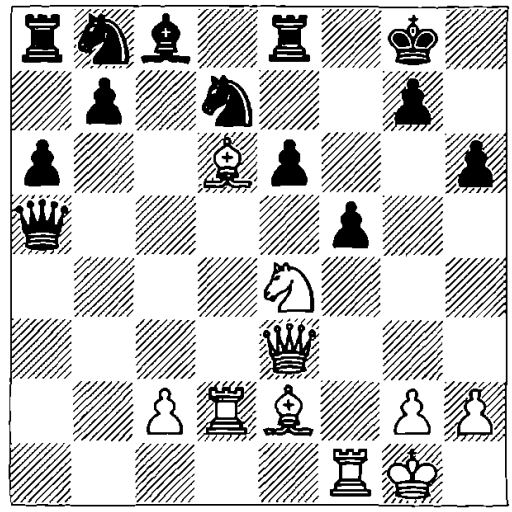
If you prefer hard statistical evidence to guide your choice, extensive testing has been done in multi-game matches between the engines at SSDF – http://ssdf.bosjo.net/list.htm. There is also an annual world championship, which was won by Rybka in 2007, defeating the defending champion Shredder along the way:

Rybka – Shredder
ICGA World Computer Ch 2007

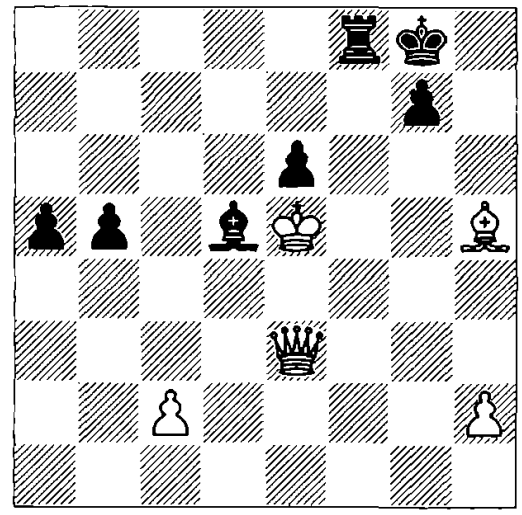
1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗g5 e6 7 f4 ♕b6

Beginning a long theoretical line of the Sicilian, known as the Poisoned Pawn Variation.

8 ♕d2 ♕xb2 9 ♖b1 ♕a3 10 e5 dxe5 11 fxe5 ♘fd7 12 ♘e4 h6 13 ♗h4 ♕xa2 14 ♖d1 ♕d5 15 ♕e3 ♕xe5 16 ♗e2 ♗c5 17 ♗g3 ♗xd4 18 ♖xd4 ♕a5+ 19 ♖d2 0-0 20 ♗d6 ♖e8 21 0-0 f5 *(D)*



22 ♕g3!? fxe4 23 ♕g6 ♖d8 24 ♖f7 ♕c3 25 ♗g4 ♘f8 26 ♗xf8 ♕a1+ 27 ♖f1 ♕xf1+ 28 ♔xf1 ♖xf8+ 29 ♖f2 ♘c6 30 ♗h5 ♖xf2+ 31 ♔xf2 ♘e5 32 ♕e8+ ♔h7 33 ♔e3 b5 34 ♔f4 ♗b7 35 ♕e7 ♗d5 36 ♔xe5 a5 37 g4 e3 38 g5 hxg5 39 ♕xg5 ♔g8 40 ♕xe3 ♖f8 *(D)*



41 ♗e2 b4 42 ♗d3 ♖f3 43 ♕g5 b3 44 ♗g6 ♖f6 45 ♕h5 ♖xg6 46 ♕xg6 b2 47 ♕e8+ ♔h7 48 ♕b5 ♔h6 49 ♕xb2 ♗a8 50 ♕c1+ ♔h5 51 ♕f4 ♗d5 52 c4 ♗c6 53 ♕f7+ ♔g4 54 ♕xe6+ ♔f3 55 ♕xc6+ ♔e3 1-0

QUESTION 92 How can I use my computer to help me train?

There are a number of ways computer programs can be used to help you train. The most important element in serious training is to simulate the conditions of a real tournament game, and for that, you need an opponent! Not everybody has access to another player of the right strength to serve as a training partner, and a program can often fill the gap.

One especially useful training technique is use the computer as an opponent against which to play training games. For example, if you wish to practice a certain opening, you can play training games against the computer using that opening (most programs can be set up so as to adopt a specific opening, if required). In this way, you can gain the necessary experience in the typical middlegame positions arising from the opening concerned.

The same technique can be used to work on other specific areas of your chess, such as certain aspects of the middlegame and endgame. Assume, for example, that you wish to practice playing rook and pawn endings. You set up the starting position of such an ending (e.g. one taken from a grandmaster game), give yourself a hour or so on the clock, and then play the position out as though it were a tournament game, using the computer as your opponent.

In using computers for this type of training, it is important to bear in mind the strengths and weaknesses of the programs. Computers are very good at tactical play, and they defend incredibly well, but they are still relatively weak in some other areas of the game, notably long-term positional manoeuvring. Consequently, if it is the latter that you wish to work on, a computer may not be the best opponent, but if you wish to practice attacking, you are unlikely to find a better opponent.

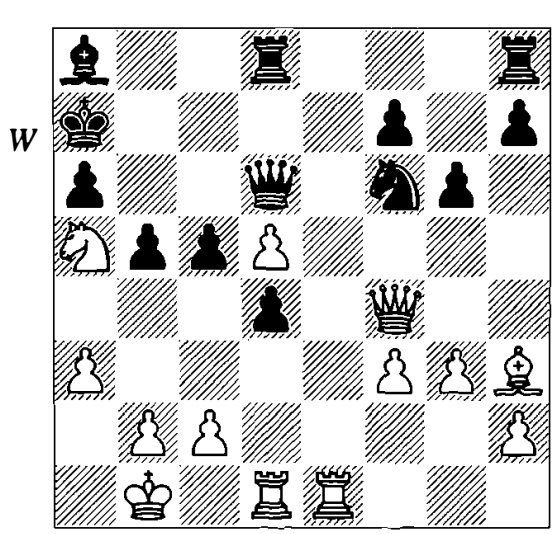
Grandmaster Jonathan Rowson, a three-time British champion, who has written extensively on self-improvement in chess, has mentioned that one of his techniques for preparing for tournaments uses computers. Given that calculating concrete variations is such a huge part of chess, and is especially important in winning 'won' positions, he trains his calculation skills by setting up a position where he has a large advantage, and then playing it out against the computer. It is precisely when defending such positions that the computer is at its strongest, and the program can usually be relied upon to put up much tougher resistance than most human players, hence such training is an especially effective way of training your calculation.

QUESTION 93 What is the best game of chess ever played?

Such a question is highly subjective, of course, and there are many potential candidates. Adolf Anderssen's two famous games against Kieseritzky (London 1851) and Dufresne (Berlin 1852), known respectively as the Immortal and the Evergreen, would be near the top of most people's shortlist, including my own. Steinitz-von Bardeleben (Hastings 1895) and Pillsbury-Lasker (St Petersburg 1895/6) both take some beating, as do Alekhine's two classics against Bogoljubow (London 1922) and Réti (Baden-Baden 1925), and the young Bobby Fischer's queen sacrifice against Donald Byrne (New York 1956). Every other great player also has outstanding games to his credit, but overall, I think the following has to be regarded as the best ever, especially given the quality of modern-day defensive abilities.

Kasparov – Topalov
Wijk aan Zee 1999

1 e4 d6 2 d4 ♘f6 3 ♘c3 g6 4 ♗e3 ♗g7 5 ♕d2 c6 6 f3 b5 7 ♘ge2 ♘bd7 8 ♗h6 ♗xh6 9 ♕xh6 ♗b7 10 a3 e5 11 0-0-0 ♕e7 12 ♔b1 a6 13 ♘c1 0-0-0 14 ♘b3 exd4 15 ♖xd4 c5 16 ♖d1 ♘b6 17 g3 ♔b8 18 ♘a5 ♗a8 19 ♗h3 d5 20 ♕f4+ ♔a7 21 ♖he1 d4 22 ♘d5 ♘bxd5 23 exd5 ♕d6 *(D)*



The first part of the game is of limited interest, but now the fun starts.

24 ♖xd4!!

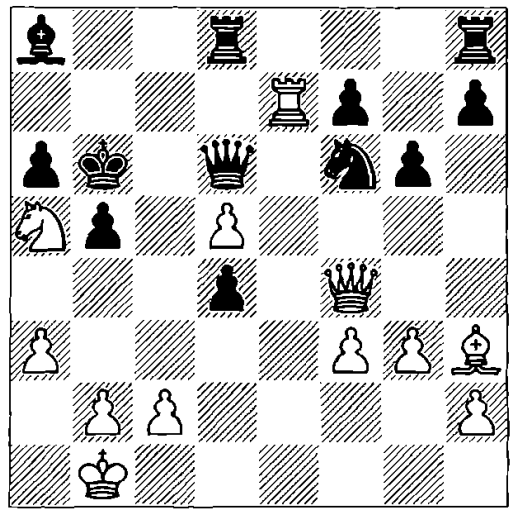
The first in a stunning series of sacrifices.

24...cxd4?!

Strictly speaking, Black should decline the rook with 24...♔b6!, when he should draw, but thankfully, Topalov could not see a mate after accepting the sacrifice, and so decided to invite his opponent to show what he had in mind.

25 ♖e7+! ♔b6 *(D)*

After 25...♕xe7 26 ♕xd4+ White wins immediately.



26 ♕xd4+ ♔xa5 27 b4+ ♔a4 28 ♕c3?!

A tiny blemish. It was later shown that 28 ♖a7 wins even more quickly, but Kasparov's move is good enough. Now 29 ♕b3# is the threat, and after 28...♗xd5?, 29 ♔b2!! decisively renews that threat.

28...♕xd5 29 ♖a7 *(D)*

Now 29 ♔b2? fails to 29...♕d4, pinning the white queen.

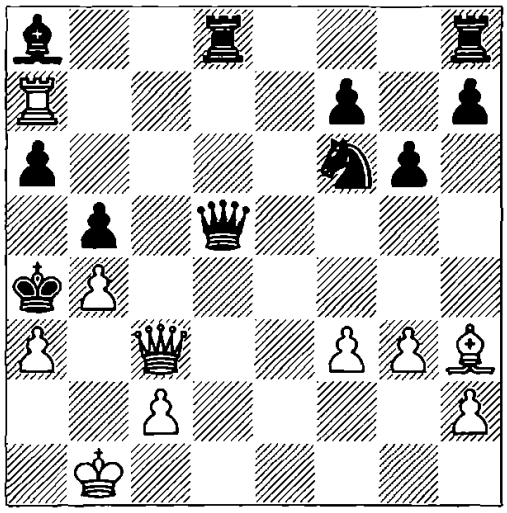
29...♗b7

Forced, since 29...♖d6? loses to 30 ♔b2 ♕d4 31 ♕xd4 and mate on a6.

30 ♖xb7 ♕c4?!

This is not the toughest defence, which was 30...♖he8. Even then, however, White has a brilliant win by 31 ♖b6 ♖a8 32 ♗f1!!,

B



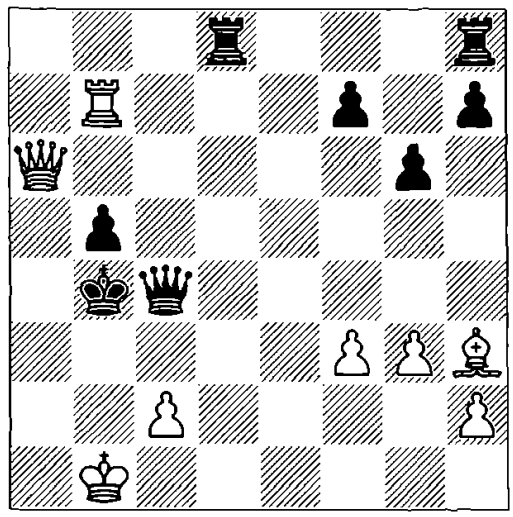
when he threatens 33 ♖d6!, deflecting the black queen from control of b3.

31 ♕xf6 ♔xa3?!

Here, too, Topalov misses a slightly more stubborn defence. 31...♖d1+ 32 ♔b2 ♖a8 33 ♕b6 ♕d4+ 34 ♕xd4 ♖xd4 35 ♖xf7 leads to a position where Black has an extra exchange, but his king position is still awful (♗e6-b3# is a big threat) and he is still losing, albeit less spectacularly than in the game.

32 ♕xa6+ ♔xb4 *(D)*

W



33 c3+! ♔xc3 34 ♕a1+ ♔d2 35 ♕b2+ ♔d1

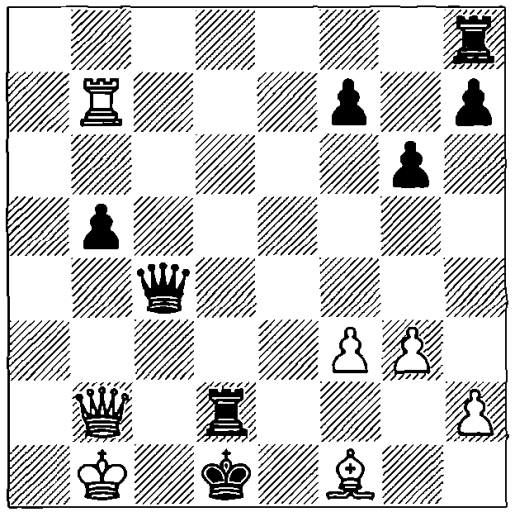
Thus the black king has been chased all the way from e8 to d1!

36 ♗f1!

Another fantastic move. If now 36...♕xf1, then 37 ♕c2+ ♔e1 38 ♖e7+ mates.

36...♖d2 *(D)*

W



Black seems to have found a way to hang on, but now comes yet another stunner of a move, and one which Kasparov had seen as far back as move 24!

37 ♖d7!!

Incredible. The white rook pins its counterpart, thus threatening both 38 ♕xd2# and 38 ♗xc4. Black must give up his queen.

37...♖xd7 38 ♗xc4 bxc4 39 ♕xh8

Were it not for the fact that this rook is hanging, Black would actually be winning, so Kasparov also had to see this as far back as move 24. Now the rest is easy.

39...♖d3 40 ♕a8 c3 41 ♕a4+ ♔e1 42 f4 f5 43 ♔c1 ♖d2 44 ♕a7 1-0

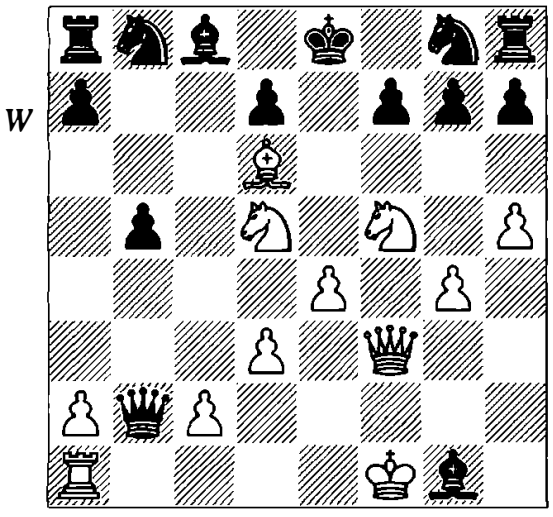
One of the most stunning king-hunts in chess history, and carried out against a world-class player at the turn of the third millennium. Given the extent to which modern-day defensive technique has been improved, it is truly astonishing to bring off such a game, and for this reason, it my choice as the greatest game of chess ever played.

QUESTION 94 How has chess style changed over the years?

Up until the late 19th century, almost the entire emphasis in chess was on attack. Players sacrificed left and right, and the victory went to whoever landed his mating attack first. Defensive technique was virtually non-existent. This made for spectacular chess, and many 19th century games remain amongst the most brilliant ever played, such as the following, known as the Immortal Game, and one of the most famous ever played:

Anderssen – Kieseritzky
London 1851

1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 ♗c4 ♕h4+ 4 ♔f1 b5 5 ♗xb5 ♘f6 6 ♘f3 ♕h6 7 d3 ♘h5 8 ♘h4 ♕g5 9 ♘f5 c6 10 g4 ♘f6 11 ♖g1 cxb5 12 h4 ♕g6 13 h5 ♕g5 14 ♕f3 ♘g8 15 ♗xf4 ♕f6 16 ♘c3 ♗c5 17 ♘d5 ♕xb2 18 ♗d6 ♗xg1 *(D)*

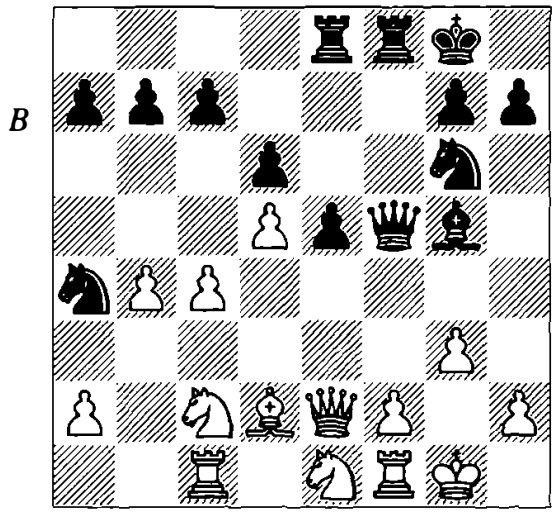


19 e5 ♕xa1+ 20 ♔e2 ♘a6 21 ♘xg7+ ♔d8 22 ♕f6+ ♘xf6 23 ♗e7# (1-0)

By the latter part of the 19th century, however, play became more solidly based, with greater attention paid to defence. The main influence in this direction was Steinitz, the first official world champion. Although capable of brilliant attacks and sacrifices, he generally preferred to adopt a more solid build-up, emphasizing small positional advantages, and only using his tactical skill when it was fully justified. The following game is characteristic, and offers a marked contrast to the previous one:

Gunsberg – Steinitz
World Ch match (game 2), New York 1890

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 d6 4 c3 ♗d7 5 0-0 ♘ge7 6 d4 ♘g6 7 d5 ♘b8 8 ♗xd7+ ♘xd7 9 ♘a3 ♗e7 10 ♘c2 ♘c5 11 ♕e2 ♕d7 12 b4 ♘a4 13 ♗d2 0-0 14 c4 f5 15 exf5 ♕xf5 16 ♖ac1 ♖ae8 17 ♘fe1 ♗g5 18 g3 *(D)*

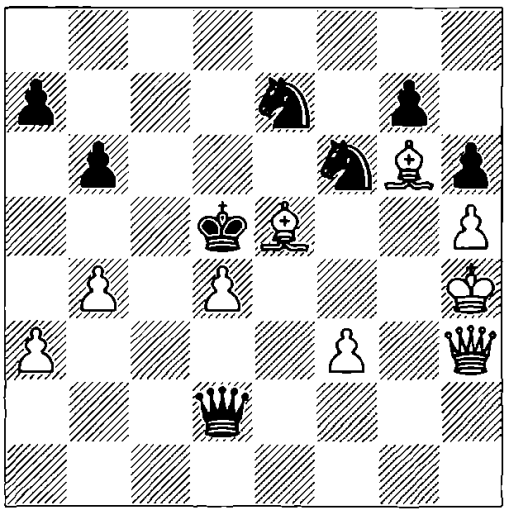


18...♘c3 19 ♗xc3 ♗xc1 20 ♘g2 ♕f3 21 ♕xf3 ♖xf3 22 ♘ge3 ♗xe3 23 ♘xe3 ♖ef8 24 ♔g2 c6 25 ♗b2 cxd5 26 ♘xd5 ♖d3 27 ♗c1 b5 28 ♘e3 bxc4 29 ♘xc4 ♖d4 30 ♘e3 ♖xb4 31 ♖d1 ♖b1 32 ♗a3 ♖xd1 33 ♘xd1 ♖d8 34 f3 d5 35 ♘c3 d4 36 ♘e4 ♖b8 37 h4 h5 38 ♔f2 ♖b1 39 ♗d6 ♖b2+ 0-1

QUESTION 95 Is it true that there is no luck in chess?

It is often claimed that there is no luck in chess. This is true to the extent that chess is not a game of chance, such as dice games or most card games. In chess, each player starts with the same array of pieces and pawns, each player moves alternately, neither is allowed outside help during the game, etc. As such, one can argue that whoever wins the game has done so 'deservedly' and it was not the product of luck. By contrast, even the best poker or backgammon player can lose a game against a beginner, if the latter just happens to draw a lucky ace or roll double-6 at the right moment.

On the other hand, there are many situations in chess when it is hard not to invoke the dreaded L-word. Take this position:



Korchnoi – Karpov
World Ch match (game 5), Baguio City 1978

This position arose in a world championship match. Korchnoi, one of the strongest players of all time, could have forced mate by an elementary series of checks: 56 ♗f7+ ♔c6 57 ♕e6+, etc. Ordinarily, one would expect even a fairly weak club player to find such a mate, yet Korchnoi played 56 ♗e4+?? and the game was eventually drawn. Korchnoi went on to lose the match by just one point.

While it was Korchnoi's own mistake that cost him victory in this game, I don't think one can deny that Karpov was lucky not to lose it. He had been outplayed, he reached a lost position, and his opponent could have given forced mate with a simple series of checks. Even the most die-hard advocate of the 'no luck in chess school' would be hard put to describe this as anything other than a lucky escape.

There is another form of luck that occurs in chess. This is when a player plays the right move, without seeing why it is right, or, more often perhaps, avoids a bad move without having seen what is wrong with it. There are few things more frustrating, after a game, than asking the opponent "What would you have done if I had played this move?", only to have him indicate a reply that loses at once! In such cases, most players will describe their opponent as a "lucky *&%!", whatever their philosophy about luck in chess may be!

QUESTION 96

Is there a link between chess and mathematics ability?

In my experience, one of the first questions people ask, when they discover that someone is a strong chess-player, is "I suppose you were good at maths?" There are certainly many strong chess-players who have shown exceptional ability at mathematics. Emanuel Lasker, world champion for 27 years, was also an eminent mathematician, and I understand that within the realms of Number Theory, there is even a Lasker's Theorem, named after him. English grandmaster John Nunn has a doctorate in maths, and was the youngest undergraduate at Oxford since Cardinal Wolsey, some 400 years before him. The association between chess and maths in the public mind is so strong that when the British intelligence services were recruiting staff for the secret code-breaking organization at Bletchley Park, during World War Two, they specifically approached known chess-players, and several of Britain's strongest players were involved in the breaking of the German Enigma codes.

Given that chess involves the ability to visualize spatial geometry, it is not so surprising that chess and maths should go together. On the other hand, there are many great players who have had no noticeable mathematical talent. One of the earliest and greatest chess pioneers, the 18th century French master Philidor, was a prominent musician and composer, and in the 20th century, Russian grandmaster and former world-title contender Mark Taimanov enjoyed a successful second career as a concert pianist. Ex-world champion Vasily Smyslov is a fine singer, as is Lajos Portisch, for many years the top Hungarian grandmaster.

It is probably fair to say that most great chess-players have been highly intelligent in one sphere or another, and most have enjoyed higher education. Bobby Fischer was a notable exception to the education, dropping out of high school at the earliest opportunity, but estimates of his intelligence suggested that he had a very high IQ. Again, most chess-players have a very good memory, and this was certainly true of Fischer, about whose prodigious memory for chess games and positions there are legions of stories. Many chess-players prove highly adept at languages, although that may partly result from the somewhat well-travelled, bohemian existence that many lead. The Yugoslav grandmaster Ljubojević speaks upwards of a dozen languages, whilst the great Savielly Tartakower, one of the strongest players in the first 40 years of the 20th century, spoke half a dozen languages fluently, and published poetry in at least three.

So the answer to the standard question is that there is often a correlation between chess and mathematical ability, but it is by no means a *sine qua non.*

QUESTION 97

How did chess originate, and how similar are other variants of chess?

Early History

Chess is believed to have originated in India in the 6th century AD, and did not spread to Europe until several centuries later. The original Indian form of the game was slightly different from the modern version, with both the queen and bishop being much less powerful pieces than their modern equivalents, and the contemporary Western version of the game did not start being played until the late 15th century. Throughout Asia, different forms of the game still exist, and whilst one can easily see that they all come from the same original, there are important differences between them.

Xiangqi (China)

The two most widely-played alternatives to Western chess are the Chinese and Japanese versions. Although in recent years, China has become a major power in the world of Western chess, its own version of the game, Xiangqi, is technically the most commonly-played variety of the game, simply for reasons of population. It is a heavily tactical game, lacking much of the long-term positional strategy of Western chess. It is almost certainly for this reason that the Chinese players of Western chess tend to have a predominantly tactical style. The first Chinese player to make a really major impact on Western chess was Xie Jun, who became women's world champion in 1991. She started out playing Xiangqi, and switched to Western chess at the age of ten.

Shogi (Japan)

The other major oriental form of chess is Japanese chess, or Shogi. This is hugely popular in Japan, where the leading players enjoy celebrity status and considerable wealth. Thanks to promotion by leading Japanese multinationals, the game has attracted a small but dedicated hardcore of fans in the West, and I know several strong chess-players who have been attracted to it. The main distinguishing feature of Shogi is that captured pieces do not disappear from the board forever, but can be reintroduced on the side of the capturer. This means that positions do not simplify, like normal chess, and draws are almost unknown in Shogi. For those who are concerned that the impact of computers on Western chess is causing the game to become increasingly played out and drawish, Shogi can seem an attractive alternative. The possibility of 'drops' (i.e. putting captured pieces back on the board on the capturer's side) means that the game has vastly more possibilities than ordinary chess, and to the best of my knowledge, even the best computer programs are still very weak at Shogi.

Crossovers

One obvious question is how well skills cross over from one version of chess to another. This is not easy to answer, because very few top players in one form of the game have ever played another form seriously. German grandmaster Robert Hübner has tried his hand at Chinese chess, participating in several master tournaments in China. He certainly did not disgrace himself, although he was unable to put up too much resistance against the very best players.

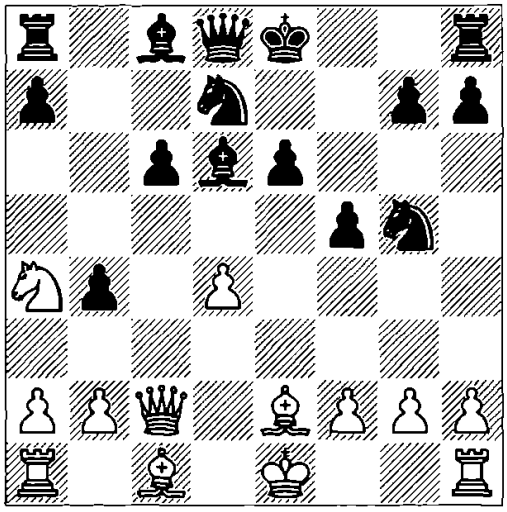
One significant problem Western players of the Chinese game face is the relative lack of accessible literature on the game, and until a serious English-language Xiangqi literature develops, it will remain very difficult for Westerners to make significant progress in Chinese chess.

The best practical example of crossover that has occurred, however, suggests that the skills of the various games are transportable. Yoshiharu Habu is widely regarded as the greatest Shogi player ever. Now aged 38, he has won more titles than any other player in Shogi history, and in 1995, became the first player ever to hold all four major titles at once. Around that time, he started dabbling in Western chess, and entered a handful of Western chess tournaments. His progress was so rapid that he made an International Master result at only his second attempt. A few years later, he played an international tournament in the Netherlands, where he won the following remarkable brilliancy against a highly experienced English grandmaster:

Wells – Habu
Hoogeveen 2005

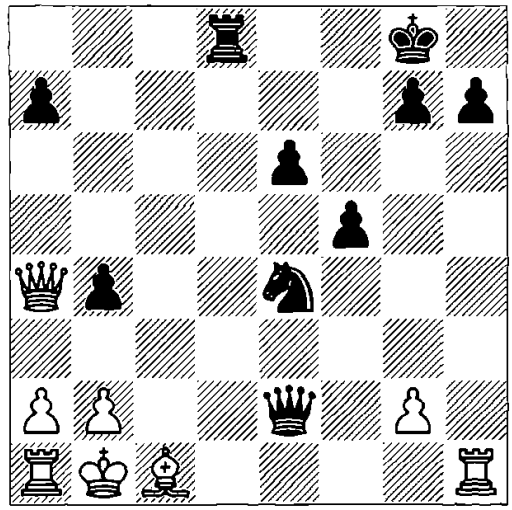
1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 e6 5 e3 ♘bd7 6 ♗d3 dxc4 7 ♗xc4 b5 8 ♗e2 b4 9 ♘a4 ♗d6 10 e4 ♘xe4 11 ♕c2 f5 12 ♘g5 ♘xg5 *(D)*

W



13 ♕xc6 ♘e4 14 ♕xa8 0-0 15 ♕c6 ♘df6 16 f3 ♗d7 17 ♕a6 ♗xa4 18 ♕xa4 ♗xh2! 19 ♖xh2 ♕xd4 20 fxe4 ♘xe4 21 ♖h1 ♕f2+ 22 ♔d1 ♖d8+ 23 ♔c2 ♕xe2+ 24 ♔b1 *(D)*

B



24...♘c3+! 25 bxc3 bxc3 26 ♗a3 ♖b8+ 27 ♕b3 ♕d3+ 28 ♔c1 ♕d2+ 0-1

QUESTION 98

Can you recommend a small selection of the best chess books?

It is often claimed that there are more books published on chess than on all other games put together, so making a small selection can be difficult. However, precisely because of the huge choice available, I am sure that many readers will welcome some guidance as to the best choices, so here are my eight recommendations:

1) *Basic Chess Endings* (Reuben Fine)

Although written in the 1940s, this remains the classic textbook on the endgame. The clarity with which Fine presents the material is unsurpassed, and although some analytical mistakes have been uncovered over the years, these in no way detract from the instructional value of the book. Generations of players have honed their endgame technique on this book, and you can do the same.

2) *My System* (Aron Nimzowitsch)

Nimzowitsch was one of the fathers of Hypermodern chess, and this book is the classic exposition of his theories of positional play. So many of the positional concepts that we take for granted today, such as blockade, doubled-pawn play and prophylaxis, were first expostulated by Nimzowitsch, as well as being brilliantly illustrated in his games. Nimzowitsch's literary style was also remarkable, being both witty and eminently quotable. Precepts like "First restrain, then blockade, and finally destroy" have gone into chess folklore. A chess-player who has not read *My System* is like a Christian who has not read the New Testament.

3) *New York 1924* (Alexander Alekhine)

Alekhine was not only one of the greatest players of all time, but also one of the greatest chess writers. His annotations to games are amongst the most instructive ever written, and almost all great players since his day have learned from them. This book has the added benefit of being about one of the strongest international tournaments ever played, which featured three world champions. Both the games and the notes are a treasure-house of chess instruction. If you enjoy this book, you will also want to get hold of Alekhine's similar volume on the Nottingham 1936 tournament, which is equally good.

4) *My 60 Memorable Games* (Bobby Fischer)

An objection often raised to chess books is that they fail to put across the personality of the player. Nobody could say that of this book. Fischer's annotations of his 60 most memorable games is one of the most frank and honest chess books ever written. He makes no attempt to deny his own mistakes, even including three losses, and his own striking personality shines through like a beacon. Given that he was also one of the very greatest players that ever lived, you have an unmissable collection of great games and even greater annotations. Many would rate this as **the** greatest chess book ever written, and it would be hard to argue with them.

5) *The Life & Games of Mikhail Tal* (Mikhail Tal)

This book is another where the personality of the subject dominates. Tal was one of the most charismatic and brilliant players of all time, whose slashing sacrificial attacks captured the hearts of chess-players all over the world. He was also an immensely likeable, intelligent and

witty man, with an inexhaustible love of chess, and all of these traits are clear from this book. It is written in the form of a mock interview between Tal and a journalist, but in reality, the latter did not exist, and it is just Tal talking about his life and games. If you can get the original hardback edition, you will also find it contains some fine photographs, but if not, settle for the pictureless paperback reprint.

6) *Capablanca's 100 Best Games* (Harry Golombek)

Capablanca is often regarded as possibly the most naturally gifted player of all time, and his classical positional style makes his games one of the best models for the young player. His own commentaries on his games are often not very enlightening, possibly because his style was so intuitive that he himself often could not explain why a certain move was correct – he just *knew* that it was. Golombek's collection, however, has tremendously instructive notes, and although some of his comments on openings are rather old-fashioned, this book is a huge source of instruction, not to be missed.

7) *My Best Games of Chess* (Alexander Alekhine)

As mentioned above, Alekhine was a great annotator, as well as a great player. His best games collection, originally published in three volumes, but now available as one, is another classic. Kasparov is only one of the great players who acknowledges its influence on his own play. By nature, Alekhine had a dynamic attacking style, but by sheer hard work, he turned himself into an all-round master of all aspects of the game, and this contributes to making his annotations especially instructive.

8) *My Great Predecessors*, vols. 1-4 (Garry Kasparov)

Kasparov's four-volume history of the world chess championship is totally unique. Never before has a world champion analysed the best games of his predecessors in such depth, and written a whole history of the great players and their challengers. It makes for fascinating reading, and although critics have pointed out some analytical and factual errors, I do not believe that any true chess lover could be other than delighted with these volumes.

QUESTION 99

What is the current situation in the chess world?

International Chess

At the time of writing in early 2008, the situation in the chess world is rather mixed. At the very top level, there are more big tournaments than has been the case for a number of years. In addition, we have a whole generation of highly talented young grandmasters, who are really starting to make a serious mark at the world-class level. Most striking of all is the 17-year-old Norwegian, Magnus Carlsen, who began the year by becoming the youngest-ever winner of the Corus tournament, probably the most prestigious of all international tournaments. Carlsen's astonishing progress is such that it will be a major surprise if he does not become world champion one day.

It will not happen at least until 2010, however, because the cumbersome cycle of qualifying events to determine the champion does not give him an earlier opportunity. In September 2008, the world champion, Viswanathan Anand, will defend his title in a match against his predecessor, Russia's Vladimir Kramnik. This is a match that is extremely hard to call, although I personally believe that Kramnik's style makes him slightly better suited to match play than Anand.

Domestic Chess

Whilst chess is in reasonable shape at the world-class level, the same unfortunately cannot be said for many individual countries. Certain European countries, such as the Netherlands, seem to be bucking this trend, but in both Britain and the United States, international tournaments are a great rarity, which makes it extremely hard for professional players to earn a decent living. This is especially true in the USA, since the travelling distances to the big European tournaments are that much greater. In both countries, this has been reflected in the loss of many of the most promising players of recent years, including Matthew Sadler and Luke McShane in England, and numerous talented Americans – Michael Wilder, Patrick Wolff, Ilya Gurevich, Max Dlugy, Stuart Rachels ... the list goes on. All of the above-named have abandoned professional chess in favour of conventional careers.

This decline is also mirrored at the ordinary club level. Almost all local chess clubs, leagues and weekend tournaments have seen a significant decline in attendance in recent years. Whilst some of these lost players may just prefer to play on the Internet, one cannot help but feel that chess has been losing out, largely due to under-funding. In Britain, chess is not recognized as either a sport or an art, and consequently attracts no funding from either the Sports Council or the Arts Council.

The one bright spot is at the scholastic level, where the efforts of a few dedicated organizers have led to a massive upsurge in the number of children playing chess at school. In Britain, IM Mike Basman's annual event attracts over 70,000 children, whilst in the USA, Susan Polgar, the former women's world champion, has done a great deal of work in recent years to promote scholastic chess. The task for British and US chess now is to ensure that those youngsters who wish to continue their involvement with the game can find the clubs, leagues and tournaments in which to do so. If that happens, chess may yet have a bright future in both countries.

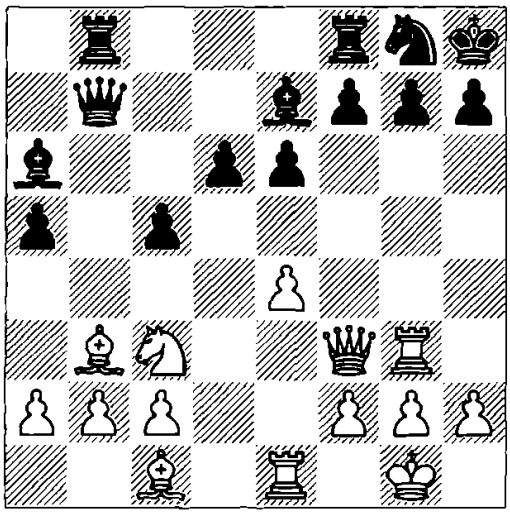
QUESTION 100 — Do computers mean the end of chess?

In recent years, computer programs have improved at a remarkable rate, and now it is clear that no human player can compete on equal terms against a computer. The most recent attempt by a top player to do so saw the then world champion, Vladimir Kramnik, play a match against a computer in Bonn, Germany, in 2006. Despite the fact that Kramnik's intricate positional style should, on paper at least, make him a particularly difficult opponent for the computer, he failed to win a game, drawing four and losing two. This was how the machine demolished him in the final game:

***Deep Fritz 10* – Kramnik**
Man-Machine match (game 6), Bonn 2006

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗c4 e6 7 0-0 ♗e7 8 ♗b3 ♕c7 9 ♖e1 ♘c6 10 ♖e3 0-0 11 ♖g3 ♔h8 12 ♘xc6 bxc6 13 ♕e2 a5 14 ♗g5 ♗a6 15 ♕f3 ♖ab8 16 ♖e1 c5 17 ♗f4 ♕b7 18 ♗c1 ♘g8 *(D)*

W



19 ♘b1

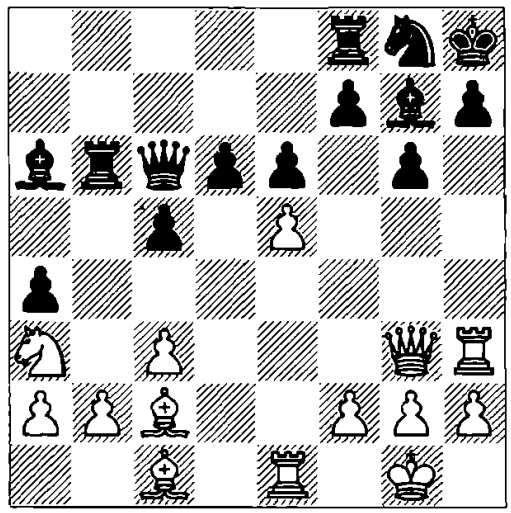
The start of a bizarre manoeuvre, which would never enter the head of any human player, but which proves very effective.

19...♗f6 20 c3 g6 21 ♘a3 ♕c6 22 ♖h3 ♗g7 23 ♕g3 a4 24 ♗c2 ♖b6?

A small error, after which he is given no chance at all by the machine.

25 e5! *(D)*

B



25...dxe5 26 ♖xe5 ♘f6 27 ♕h4 ♕b7 28 ♖e1 h5 29 ♖f3 ♘h7 30 ♕xa4 ♕c6 31 ♕xc6 ♖xc6

The complications have left White a pawn up for no compensation.

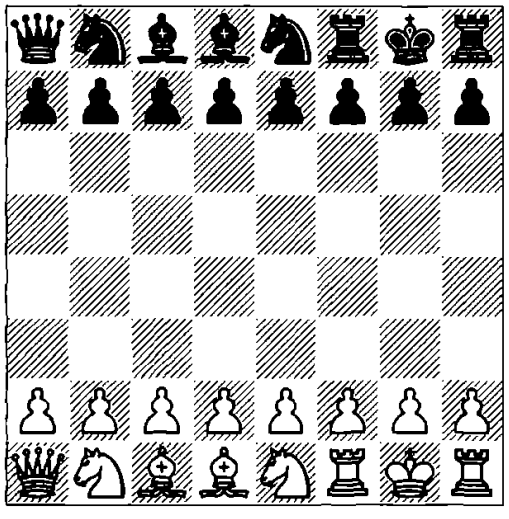
32 ♗a4 ♖b6 33 b3 ♔g8 34 c4 ♖d8 35 ♘b5 ♗b7 36 ♖fe3 ♗h6 37 ♖e5 ♗xc1 38 ♖xc1 ♖c6 39 ♘c3 ♖c7 40 ♗b5 ♘f8 41 ♘a4 ♖dc8 42 ♖d1 ♔g7 43 ♖d6 f6 44 ♖e2 e5 45 ♖ed2 g5 46 ♘b6 ♖b8 47 a4 1-0

Many argue that it does not matter if a computer can beat a human at chess; after all, just because a car can go faster than a human, that does not mean that athletics is pointless. But this argument may not stand up to scrutiny, because chess is a game of knowledge. Having seen a car move at 90 miles an hour, a human cannot just watch how it does it and copy, but once a computer has shown how to win a particular chess position by force, any human can study the analysis and reproduce it himself. The analysis itself may be spectacular, but not the result purely of human creativity. Top chess nowadays is increasingly influenced by lengthy computer analysis, whilst allegations of players cheating by using computer suggestions during play has also become a major issue.

QUESTION 101 What is the future of chess?

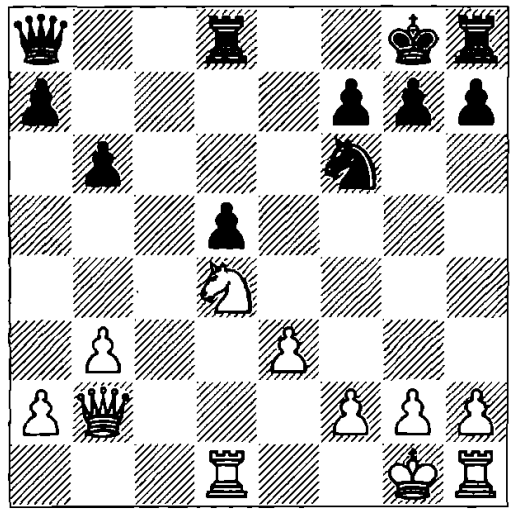
I mentioned in response to Question 100 that the chess world faces some important issues, with the growing influence of computers. The growth of opening preparation is seen by some as a major problem. One response to this has been the proposal that we abandon the traditional starting position of the game, and instead choose an arrangement of pieces at random. This would reduce the role of opening preparation and transfer the weight of the struggle to the over-the-board contest.

This idea was advocated strongly by Bobby Fischer in his later years, and is often known as Fischerrandom chess as a result. It is also sometimes called Chess960, after the number of possible starting positions of a particular set of rules for "shuffle chess" Some tournaments of such chess have been held, featuring the world's top players. The unofficial world championship of Chess960 was won in 2007 by Levon Aronian, a top-ten player. Here is one of his games, which might show us what the future holds:



Aronian – Bacrot
Chess960 Rapid World Ch, Mainz 2007

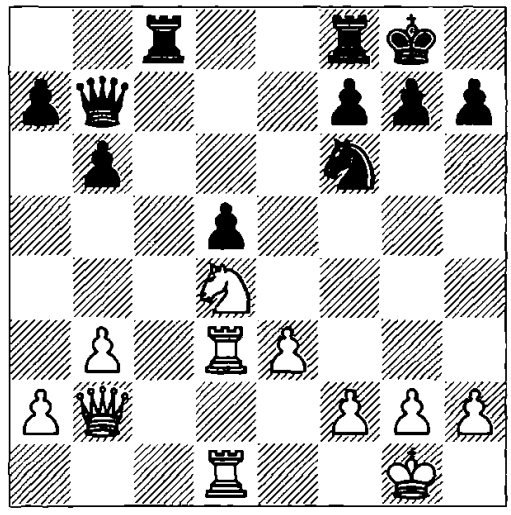
1 c4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 b3 e6 4 d4 cxd4 5 ♘xd4 ♗f6 6 ♗b2 b6 7 ♘f3 ♗xb2 8 ♕xb2 ♘f6 9 ♘c3 d5 10 cxd5 exd5 11 e3 ♖d8 12 ♘b5 ♗g4 13 ♘bd4 ♘xd4 14 ♘xd4 ♗xd1 15 ♖xd1 *(D)*



15...0-0 [♖h8-f8] **16 0-0** [♖h1-f1]

Not a form of castling one is used to seeing, but that is how the rules operate in Chess960! Remarkably, despite the strange starting line-up, the position has now 'normalized' We have a typical IQP position, very like what we saw in the game Petrosian-Gipslis (see Question 62). White has a clear advantage, and Aronian won easily.

16...♕b7 17 ♖d3 ♖c8 18 ♖fd1 *(D)*



18...♖c5 19 ♘f5 ♔h8 20 b4 ♖c7 21 ♖xd5 ♕c8 22 h3 ♖c2 23 ♕a1 ♖g8 24 ♘h6 ♕e6 25 ♖d6 1-0

Index of Players

Numbers refer to pages. When a player's name appears in **bold**, that player had White. Otherwise the FIRST-NAMED PLAYER had White.

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Steve Giddins is a FIDE Master from England who has frequently contributed to the *British Chess Magazine* and the ChessBase website. He has gained a reputation as a writer who provides useful, no-nonsense advice on topics of genuine practical importance, drawing especially upon his familiarity with Russian chess literature and training methods. This is his sixth book for Gambit.

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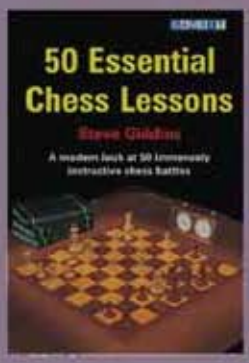

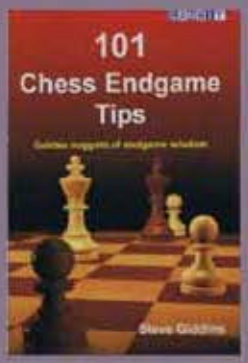

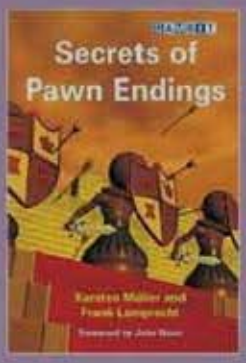

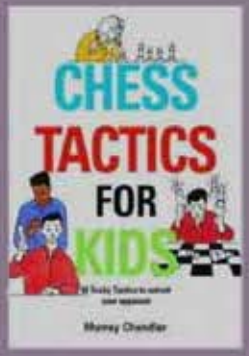

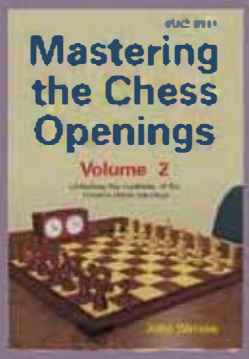

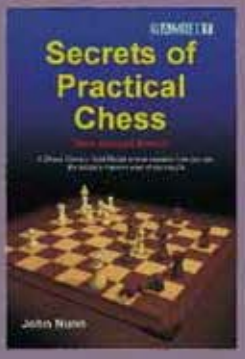

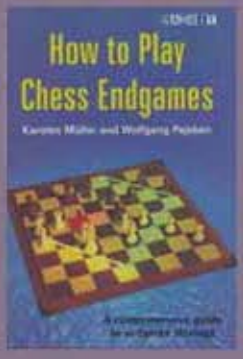

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