



**Joel
Benjamin**

**BETTER
THINKING,
BETTER
CHESS**

**How a
Grandmaster
Finds his
Moves**

NEW IN CHESS



Better Thinking, Better Chess

Joel Benjamin

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How a Grandmaster Finds his Moves

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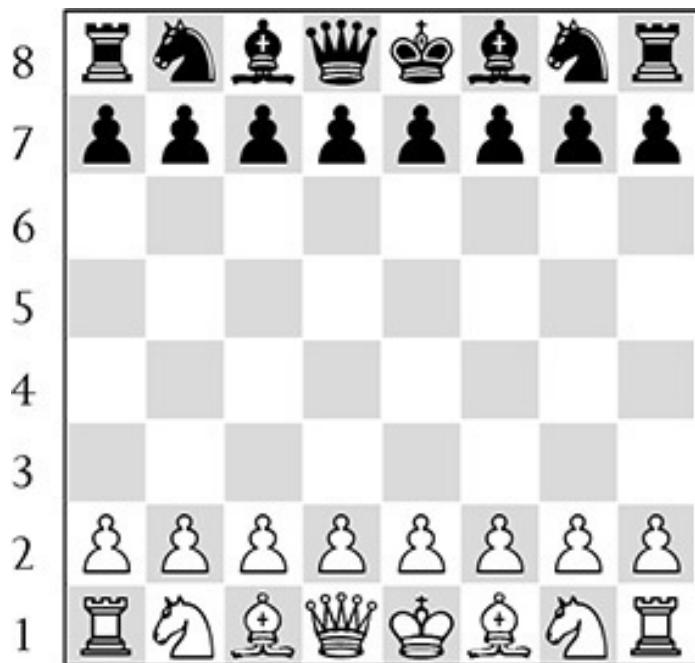
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Explanation of symbols

The chessboard with its coordinates:



a b c d e f g h

□	White to move
■	Black to move
♔	King
♕	Queen
♖	Rook
♗	Bishop
♘	Knight
±	White stands slightly better
∓	Black stands slightly better
±	White stands better
∓	Black stands better
+-	White has a decisive advantage
-+	Black has a decisive advantage
=	balanced position
!	good move
!!	excellent move

? bad move
?? blunder
!? interesting move
?! dubious move

Introduction

As a player I was aware of my own thought processes, but my second career as a teacher and coach gave me insights into the way other people approach their chess games. I realized that pointing out the moves players missed was just half the job. I needed to explain why they didn't arrive at the right move, and what they could do to improve their chances for the next time.

Most chess books focus on providing chess knowledge and positions for training and study. Developing these skills can help bring players up to a higher level. This is the work *between* games. But the work *during* games is no less important. I find that so many players could get more out of their abilities by doing a better job at the chessboard. This work manifests in many ways, such as looking for and thinking about the right things, not taking shortcuts in the search for moves, and not getting held back by preconceived notions and psychological limitations.

Stronger players have an advantage not only in what they know, but also in how they apply it. Working with students on virtually all levels, in classes, camps, and private lessons, I have seen players trip up not so much by lack of knowledge or skill but by flawed thinking. There will always be cases where a solution is beyond the abilities of a player, or, at the very least, a concentrated, good-faith attempt at finding the right path doesn't yield the correct continuation. A 2000 player cannot be judged by the same standard as a grandmaster. But that player should still make every move and every decision to the best of their abilities. How often are mistakes made by silly oversights or lazy calculation? How many strong moves are overlooked because we simply don't consider alternatives? Fundamental failings in the thought process cause so much damage, yet I believe we can all train to get better in those areas.

I have included several games played by students. Though these games generally represent 'failures', I must point out that my students are generally highly rated, especially for their ages (the range is about 2000-2500). If they were not so successful in most of their games, I could not in good conscience use their games for these purposes. If they make these mistakes, surely less talented players are as well. Because I have discussed the games with my students, I have a good sense of what they were thinking, and how their thought processes might have led to mistakes.

I have found that failure to calculate long variations correctly accounts for a small percentage of their errors. Usually problems occur from something more fundamental, often early in deliberations. Talent and maturation tend to overcome deficiencies in thinking, but I think that older players who may feel stuck at a certain level can still improve their performance with more structured and efficient thinking.

I have chosen my own games for the bulk of source material, not because they are more instructive than those of other players, but because the thought process is familiar to me. I can explain why my mind went in some directions and not others. Most of these games represent successful chess thinking, though a few failures stand out as well. I have tried to focus on the approach that brought me to the solutions of these practical problems. That is not to say that readers would necessarily find the same moves by reproducing my train of thought, but by using this type of (usually) clear thinking they can better solve problems in their own games.

I have tested many of these positions in lectures, classes, and lessons. The experience has helped me understand how other players approach practical problem solving, and how they might benefit from adjusting their thought process in line with a grandmaster's method.

Contemporary chess is inextricably linked with chess engines. How to properly understand and use chess engines is a topic that needs to be addressed in the chess literature, and I frequently discuss computer evaluations in this book. Every chess author uses engines to check and to some degree generate variations and assessments. Computers spot amazing possibilities that enrich our understanding and appreciation of chess. I found in writing the autobiographical *American Grandmaster* that many of my old games felt a lot different from this new perspective. During the process of writing this book, a decade later, engine analysis continues to shine new light on these older games. We should never ignore this output, but we need to remember we don't get machine assistance during our games (unless we are cheating; don't do that!). Much of what engines tell us is not accessible and meaningful when we are actually playing a game.

Komodo was my partner in this project; while its advice was welcome and enlightening, I did not treat its data as gospel. I have come to view chess positions as having alternative realities; an 'objective' reality based on computer analysis, and a practical reality based on what we can plausibly calculate or anticipate during a chess game. In this book I recommend a path towards practical reality.

Consider these situations: you have a large and potentially winning advantage that can be maintained by simple means, yet you embark on a wild sacrifice. The decision backfires and the game is lost. Afterwards, the computer confirms the sacrifice was sound, and winning by force. The decision was still foolish, in my opinion, because you put yourself under pressure to come up with a move you didn't foresee (and perhaps would not have been able to find), or perhaps you didn't anticipate your opponent's defense at all.

Another time you grab a pawn, believing you should have a way to defend (or perhaps just because it is there – see Chapter 6). But the opponent's pressure proves too strong and you lose. Afterwards, the computer confirms that with perfect defense you could have maintained an advantage. That still doesn't mean the decision was sensible. The risk/reward ratio just wasn't favorable.

Meanwhile, you had an alternative that would reap a less advantageous computer evaluation, but produce a good position that could be maintained with reasonable but not difficult moves.

Many players extract the wrong messages from engine analysis. I have seen people adorn their moves with question marks because the engine recommended a different move which scored half a point higher. Never mind there was no apparent tactical or strategical justification for the higher score. Sometimes engines just like certain opening positions better than others, for example. I have also seen players declare a missed win in an ending, because the engine gave a decisive advantage. Of course, fortresses and other situations where no progress can be determined continue to plague computer evaluation (and was quite frustrating in some parts of the endgame chapter in this book). I hope I can help readers use their engines with greater sophistication.

In this book the quickest win or the top computer move isn't always the right move to play. It can be advisable to avoid or enter complications based on the strength or weakness of your position. In my games, I don't regret missing the variations I had no real chance of discovering. I don't regret missing a stronger move when my move won the game just fine (well, sometimes if it's something particularly aesthetic). The computer assumes that both players will handle every situation perfectly, but human chess players are quite fallible. In general, a player who is able to give their opponent the more difficult problems to solve is in good shape to win.

Readers will of course find overlap in the material from different chapters. *Openings* and *Endgames* get their own chapters, and are both special in the way we can study them. In the former the position is often yet not clearly defined, while in the latter we can often see a glimpse towards the end of the game.

Tactics and Calculation may seem like very similar things. *Tactics* require calculation but involve forcing sequences. This chapter focuses more on individual moves or short variations. *Calculation* may involve tactics, but these chapters delve into the features of calculation, such as generating candidate moves, understanding what moves to be anticipating from your opponents, and knowing when and how far you need to calculate. I have found that more often than not, mistakes are made very early in the thought process. With some common-sense corrections, players can raise the level of their calculation and decision making.

The analytical process is often hampered by biases players may hold. *Material and initiative* tackles one I see very often in club players. Not every ‘free’ pawn has to be taken, or defended for that matter. Exchange sacrifices can be effective, even when they don’t lead to mate or win of material. Speculative sacrifices can often put a greater burden on the opponent. Material must be seen as just one factor of the equation of assessment of a position.

Winning the won game and *Swindling* are two sides of the same coin. Many amateurs lament how often they let great positions slip away. With patience, good clock management, and suppression of emotions, everyone can improve in that area. Staying alive and fighting back when the going gets rough is an equally important skill, and one where a positive mental attitude can also go a long way.

I have included ‘challenges’ for the reader within the body of the chapters. If you want to try to tackle a position before reading ahead, stop at the diagram; set up the position on your chessboard if you like. While some positions may be akin to standard tactics puzzles, others are centered on practical issues that players have to frequently contend with. So some challenges may not necessarily have one correct answer. The answer I’m looking for may illustrate a type of thinking I’m trying to encourage, but there may be other good moves or continuations as well. The pieces are black and white, but the answers often have shades of gray. Just be prepared to back up your answer with analysis or a logical argument.

Higher-rated players will have an easier time with some of the positions and analysis in the book, but since the theme is to think better and play to the maximum of your abilities, all players can profit and gradually make their game more ‘grandmasterly’.

*Joel Benjamin
Waldwick NJ, USA, August 2018*

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Allard Hoogland at New In Chess for appreciating my vision and offering useful advice to bring it out. Special thanks go out to my students who contributed games for this book: John Michael Burke, Brandon Jacobson, Trung Nguyen, Tan Nguyen, Sophie Morris-Suzuki, Ben Medina, and Lilia Poteat. They are all young stars with impressive achievements. I have enjoyed the opportunity to work with them. Thanks also to my old friend and frequent tournament roommate Dore Sheppard, who let me use his games as well.

I used Komodo for this project, Komodo 9.3 in the earlier stages and Komodo 11.2.2 later on. Thanks to Larry Kaufman and Mark Lefler for hooking me up with the newer model. Phrases like ‘the computer’ or ‘the engine’ refer to Komodo unless otherwise stated. Please note that engines change their scores and order of favored moves during a search, so you may get slightly different results from my comments if you run the engines for a different amount of time.

I used ChessBase 13 for database work, and the Shredder Online Tablebase when applicable (a lot less often than in the last book!). A few games were plucked from the headlines from various Internet sources.

The games all came from my own/students databases, or ChessBase, or whatever website I saw the recent games on. I didn’t consult any other books to come up with the ideas. I thought that if I read too much I would be inclined to try to incorporate less original ideas.

I would like to dedicate this book to a pioneer in scholastic chess who started a school chess club back in the early seventies, probably one of the earliest in an American elementary school. My dear mother, Phyllis Benjamin, still competes in tournaments and I hope that she will read this cover to cover and implement some of the ideas in her games.

CHAPTER 1

Openings

It makes sense to open the book with the opening. Chess games start with the fewest possible moves but the potential for future innumerable possibilities. Since we set up the pieces the same way every time, the opening can be studied like no other phase of the game. And study it we must, though to what degree varies according to one's level. A novice player needs to learn opening principles and the basic ideas and plans of certain openings. Further along, more knowledge of specific variations will be more helpful. Once you get to the U.S. expert or master level, you should be using a database to study openings, and try to prepare answers for the most likely ways opponents will meet your openings.

Since you bought this book, I'm going to assume you probably buy opening books, too, and very likely use ChessBase or something similar. I'm going to start with a few bits of advice:

- 1) Play over lots of grandmaster games in your openings, to learn different ideas. Don't worry if the move order is different from what you normally play.
- 2) Study typical structures. If you learn isolated d-pawn positions, you already know many openings. If you learn French-type structures, you are prepared for the center to become closed in other openings as well.

Understanding versus memorizing

The opening is of course the most scripted part of the game, but it is important to not rely too much on preparation. You must understand the strategies in an opening, especially if your opponent should deviate from the lines you have studied. If you play opponents below the master level, that is especially likely to happen!

Consider this well-explored position:

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♗f6 5.0-0 ♔e7 6.♖e1 b5 7.♗b3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3



As grandmasters happily trot out the Berlin Defense and Marshall Attack, this *tabiya* is perhaps less ubiquitous than it used to be. Still, pretty much anyone from novice to professional has been here at one time or another. We all know these moves, but do we know why they are played in this order?

After 9.d4 ♜g4, White's center immediately comes under fire. Now White can play that way, and often has. It's especially useful from an anti-Marshall move order. But Black certainly doesn't have to fear this position. A lot of amateurs play directly 8...♜g4 to prevent 9.d4.



Sure, it certainly discourages that move, but if White doesn't play d2-d4, the bishop has less purpose on g4. After 9.d3 0-0 10.h3 ♜h5 11.♗bd2, the bishop will be chased to g6 by ♗d2-f1-g3 or g2-g4, where it will, in the graphic imagery of the old books, 'bite on granite'. Mind you, respectable grandmasters have played 8...♝g4, even Anatoly Karpov (though it didn't work out too well for him). Grandmasters occasionally go against the grain to avoid routine positions and try to get something more interesting and challenging. But they understand what they are getting into, and have a plan to follow up their idea. [I still wouldn't recommend 8...♝g4.]

Now sometimes club players don't want to allow the pin and decide to stop for 8.h3. Even this has been played by grandmasters, though several examples are blitz games and agreed drawn in a few moves anyway. But if Black plays 8...♞a5, he gets to pocket the bishop pair. 8.c3 is played not just to prepare d2-d4, but to give the bishop an escape square that is now necessary because Black has defended the e5-pawn.

I think a lot of times amateurs get the move order wrong because memorization without understanding often proves faulty.

I am always wary about preparing a player with a new idea right before a game. It's something coaches have to hazard from time to time in youth and scholastic championships, but explaining something in a short amount of time is tricky. If one detail is misunderstood, disaster can ensue. Insufficient preparation can be worse than no preparation sometimes. Once at the World Youth I was asked to

show a medal contender a line against the Alapin Sicilian for a last-round game. I provided a good line, but the player didn't know that in a certain case the knight had to be developed to d7 instead of c6. That little detail was the difference between the position working and not working for Black. I'm speculating on the thoughts of Black in the next game, who was not my student but my student's opponent. I know nothing about him other than his rating at the time – 1800.

Game 1

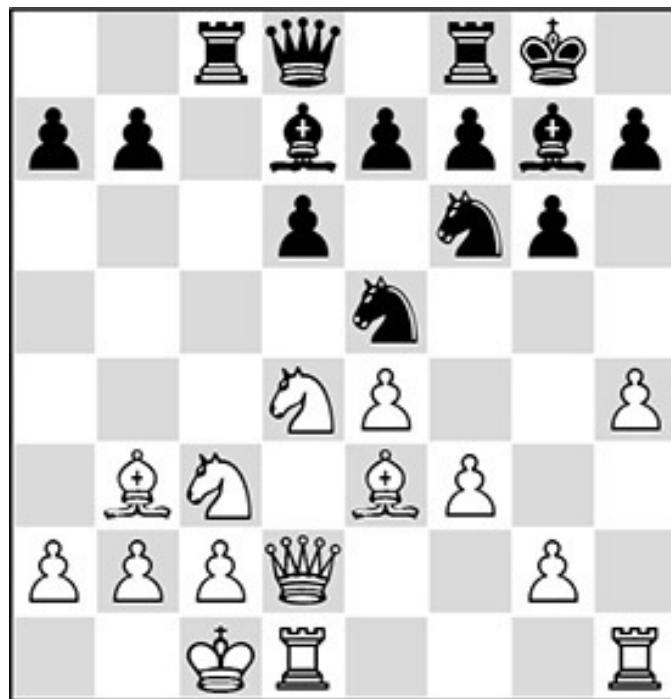
Benjamin Medina

Leonardo 1900

Liu

New York G45 2017

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ g6 6. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 0-0 8.f3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 10.0-0-0 $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 12.h4



The Dragon is a popular opening because it can offer great activity against indifferent play, but the kill-or-be-killed nature of this Yugoslav Variation demands understanding of its subtleties. Otherwise there will be hard lessons! This position has been contested many times, with 12...h5 the choice in more than 4,000 games.

12...a6?

This move seems indifferent to the demands of the position. Yet there is a

logical explanation, I believe.

The hot move over the last few years has been 12. $\mathbb{Q}b1$. It's a kind of high-class waiting move, with the main point that 12... $\mathbb{B}c4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{R}xc4$ 14. $g4$ has worked well for White. White is getting ready to throw the h-pawn forward, while the natural continuation 14... $\mathbb{W}a5$ 15. $\mathbb{B}b3$ $\mathbb{W}a6$ 16. $e5$ $dxe5?$ (16... $\mathbb{B}xg4$ has been tried with poor results) 17. $g5$ wins a piece for White. So Dragon defenders have turned to high-class waiting moves like 12... $a6$. Against the attacking move 12. $h4$ though, it's just a loss of time.

13. $\mathbb{Q}h6$

I would prefer the less complicated move, 13. $h5$.



13... $\mathbb{B}c4?$

One of the benefits of ... $\mathbb{B}e5-c4$ is that the rook on c4 prevents $\mathbb{Q}e3-h6$ because ... $\mathbb{R}c4xd4!$ wins material for Black. But here White continues his attack unabated.

When White tries to trade the bishops, the answer is almost always an exchange sacrifice. For instance, instead of 12. $h4$, many games have continued 12. $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ 13. $\mathbb{W}xh6$ $\mathbb{R}xc3$ 14. $bxc3$, and now either 14... $\mathbb{W}a5$ or 14... $a5$. I would try the same idea here, though the extra tempo changes the position from about equal to clearly better for White.

14. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{R}xc4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 16. $h5$ $b5?$

Black can fight on with something like 16... $\mathbb{W}a5$.

17. $hxg6$ $fxg6$



18.e5! dxe5 19.♗e6+

Tactics can always be overlooked. But a good book on the opening, with lots of explanation, could familiarize a player with tactics thematic to an opening. Playing through a lot of games on the database, even pretty quickly, can also help.

19...♝xe6 20.♛h6+ ♜g8 21.♜xd8 ♜xd8 22.♝e4 1-0

Recently my old friend Dore Sheppard posed an opening question from one of his games:

Game 2

Boris Privman

Dore Sheppard

Blitz 2017 (1)

1.d4 ♜f6 2.♗f4 g6 3.♘f3 ♜g7 4.e3 d6 5.h3 c5 6.c3 cxd4 7.exd4 0-0 8.♕c4

This had earlier caused some consternation, because it prevents the plan I had originally shown him, 8.♕e2 ♜e6, which I had used to defeat Kamsky years ago.

8...♝c6 9.♝bd2?!

Privman tried to improve on 9.0-0 ♛b6 10.♗b3?! ♜a5! 11.♗xb6 axb6, which is awkward for White because 12.♕e2? ♜b3 wins material. But what to do now?



9... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ (which Dore played) 10. $\mathbb{W}b3$ $\mathfrak{N}a5$?! 11. $\mathbb{W}xb6$ axb6 12. $\mathfrak{R}d3$ does not work the same way, as there is no stinger at the end. [Though retreating with 10... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ looks comfortable for Black. Probably 10. $\mathfrak{N}b3$ is better].

The question was, what should Black do here? The database hints to an answer, as 9.0-0 is almost exclusively preferred in practice. The engine also shows the way. But I took the challenge without ‘cheating.’ **9...e5!** is strong because White has dawdled in getting his king out of the center and thus is not ready to meet this thrust.

There are so many opening ‘questions’ like this that you cannot possibly anticipate all of them before you encounter them. You can’t simply plug in moves you know, because they may not fit when the position is slightly different. If one variable is different, you have to work out, either in prep or over the board, how it changes everything. You have to use the moves you know as a guide but not a mandate. As in other parts of the game, apply your general knowledge and powers of logic to get through the opening.

Getting through the opening

Opening preparation can be crazily sophisticated for top grandmasters. They seem to have tailed off on the sharpest lines, perhaps with the computers taking the fun out of them, and are often arguing minutiae in the Berlin Defense. That has been so frustrating that many super-strong players have tried to avoid even these positions. Consider Jobava and Rapport leading the way with 1.b3; Kramnik and others with 1.d4+ $\mathfrak{R}f4$, and just about anything Magnus Carlsen

does. For ordinary people, openings don't have to be such a headache. Yes, you study a few specifics in positions where you need to get a move right, but mostly it's about getting into a middlegame you can do something with.

Obtaining that serviceable middlegame is not a given for a whole lot of readers. Having a good approach helps. Don't obsess about theory so much that you skimp on the fundamentals. And don't take too casual an attitude either.

Indeed, the opening often takes a beating in contemporary chess. Between knowledge (or presumed knowledge) of opening theory and fast time controls, players often speed through this part of the game and decide to think in the middlegame. Now I don't have any problem with economizing on the clock, as important decisions in the middlegame, and potentially the endgame, await everyone. But there has to be some attention to detail. Planning is essential; even if you don't find the best plans, your moves have to be cohesive to the best of your ability. This may require investing more clock time and working harder than you are accustomed to.

Fitting your moves together

Opening disasters may combine insufficient preparation and poor over-the-board decisions. It's easy to tell people to learn what they need to know to be at least a little prepared for anything their opponents might try. In practice, people don't have the time to study that much, or the instincts to know all the bases to cover. [One recommendation: play through an opening with the ChessBase online database to see the various branches, and try to cover the ones that occur frequently.] That's why it's useful to learn plans from playing over games. If you find yourself in a situation where you can't access any plans from memory, you have to *do that work over the board*.

Game 3

Jay 2400

Bonin

Benjamin Medina

New York 2017

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.c4 c6 4.♗b3 e6

Ben wondered if it might be better to play 4...dxc4 5.♕xc4 ♘f5 in order to develop the bishop. Objectively it's just an option (though that is more frequently played), but he probably would have had easier play because he would then have a clear plan of development with ...e7-e6, ...♗b8-d7, ...♗f8-e7, and ...0-0.

5.♗g5 ♘e7

Ben decides to make a few developing moves before developing a plan, which is reasonable and practical for a fast time control game. Ultimately Black will have to solve the problem of mobilizing his blocked-in c8-bishop. A well-known typical solution is to play ...d5xc4 followed by ...b7-b5 to give the bishop a square at b7. There is an argument to do it sooner than later, while White has to recapture with the queen. While this won't help you during a game, knowing how to use your database can help you after the game, if you don't have access to a grandmaster's ear. I look for a specialist if I can; I noticed the very highly-rated Vladimir Malakhov throws in 5...h6 here, perhaps because it can be useful in the event White plays e2-e4 later. Now Bonin might take on f6 here, as he has always been fond of the 'knight life,' but let's follow a typical game: 5...h6 6.Qh4 dxc4 7.Qxc4 b5 8.Qc2 Qb7 9.e3 Qbd7 10.Qe2 Qe7 11.0-0 0-0 12.Qbd2 Qc8 13.a4 c5 and Black has simply equalized, Zhou Jianchau-Malakhov, China tt 2015. Note that Black was ready for the ...c6-c5 break because he had completed his development.

6.Qc3 0-0 7.e3 Qbd7 8.Qd1



CHALLENGE 1

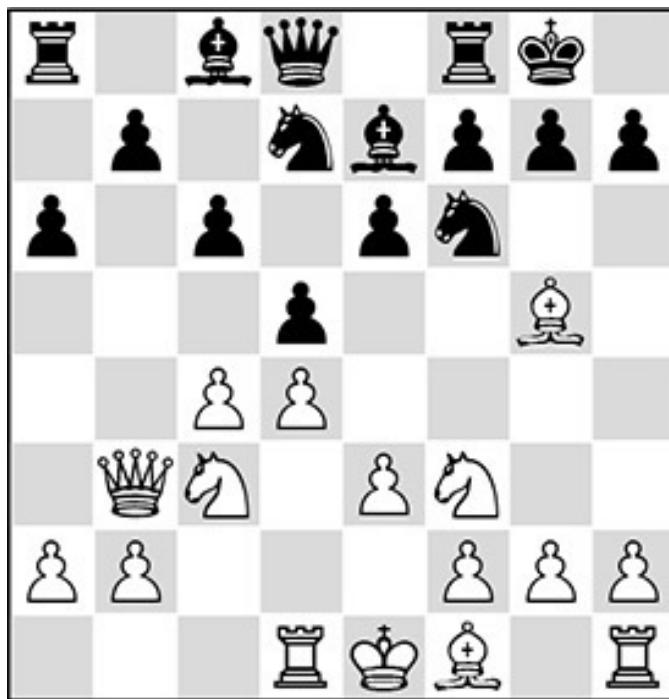
What is Black's main problem? Suggest moves or plans that can be part of the solution

We are still in known territory, with 66 games (as I'm writing this) in the database. So a number of players have shown a number of ways to go forward for Black. It's a fair statement to answer that Black's main problem is being

cramped. That might suggest 8...dxc4 9. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ (Capablanca's freeing maneuver) or the Lasker-style 8... $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ dxc4 12. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ (12. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ e5) 12...b6 followed by an eventual ...c6-c5. But I would say getting the bishop out is still the main problem.

8...b6 is an unsophisticated but acceptable continuation. After 9. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 10.0-0 c5 Black has achieved his main objectives, and might well have equalized.

8...a6 is somewhat more sophisticated.



analysis diagram

Black wants to wait for White to move his bishop before taking on c4. So we might see 9. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ dxc4 (9...b5 10.cxd5 cxd5, as Boris Kogan played against me in 1984, may suit those who like closed positions. Though I won, I remember not being enthusiastic about my position) 10. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ b5, and see how fast Black can break out if White is not careful: 11. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ c5 12.dxc5?! $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xh7+?$ $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8!$ and Black is winning. Or 11. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ c5 12.dxc5 $\mathbb{Q}a5!$ 13.c6 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ b4 15. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ b3+ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ with a slight edge for Black.

But what about 10. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$? It takes a bit of work to see 10...b5 is an effective counter. 11. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ (we've already seen 11. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ c5) 11... $\mathbb{Q}a7$ puts the white queen in danger, consequently exposing White's uncastled king: 12. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ f5 15. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}a5+$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xa2$; or 12. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$

13. $\mathbb{W}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{B}c7$ 15. $\mathbb{W}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{W}xe7$ 17. $\mathbb{W}xe4$ $\mathbb{W}b4+$, in both cases highly favorable for Black.

So Black has many different reasonable approaches, but they all address the problems in the position.

8... $\mathbb{W}b6?!$

Ben plays one move at a time for the next few moves, and nothing ends up fitting together. I suppose trading queens is okay for Black, but after White moves his queen away, Ben's queen is just in the way of what he needs to do for his bishop. Additionally the f6-knight is pinned, which rules out the plans we explored involving exchanging bishops.

9. $\mathbb{W}c2$



9... $dxc4?!$

Typically Black waits for the bishop to move first, picking up a tempo. For instance, Ben could probably have played 9... $\mathbb{B}e8$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $dxc4$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ and got the same position with an extra move.

It would have made more sense to capture here with the intention of following 9... $dxc4$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ up with 10... $c5$, but I don't think Ben had that idea yet. Even so, after 11. $0-0$ $cxd4$ 12. $\mathbb{B}xd4$ (or 12. $exd4$, according to taste) Black is essentially playing without one of his minor pieces.

10. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{B}e8$ 11. $0-0$ $c5$

Okay, Black typically plays this move in Queen's Gambits to gain space and fight at the center, but usually very *early* before White has advanced his

development (think Queen's Gambit Accepted) or *later* when Black is better developed.



12.d5!

Now Black will suffer from not having the rook still on f8.

12...exd5 13.♘xd5

Black is also hard-pressed after 13.♘xd5 ♘xd5 14.♗xd5, as attempts to develop may cost the c5-pawn, or worse: 14...♗f8 15.♕xe7 ♜xe7 16.♗xc5; or 14...♘f6 15.♕xf6 ♗xf6 16.♘g5 ♗g6 (16...g6 17.♘xf7 ♕e6 18.♘d6) 17.♗xg6 hxg6 18.♗e5.



For the first time in the game we have a confrontation of forces. Black is vulnerable at f7 and must think concretely about White's possible tactics and how to deal with them.

13... ♛c7?

This move was just not calculated at all. As we shall cover in more detail in later chapters, you absolutely cannot shirk calculation when the position is assuming a tactical nature. It even feels wrong, as Black may not have much time to move his d7-knight and wake up his bishop.

I propose here 13...h6, which not only attacks the bishop but anticipates a need to keep the knight off of g5.



analysis diagram

You want to notice 14. $\mathbb{Q}xh6!?$, taking advantage of the pinned f7-pawn (14... $g \times h6?$ 15. $\mathbb{W}g6+$), but Black has 14... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{W}xh6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{W}c6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$. White might even still be a little better after 18. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e5$, but beggars can't be choosers.

It's a sign of White's domination that Komodo gives strong consideration to answering 13...h6 with 14. $\mathbb{Q}fe1$ and 14.b3, random moves that no human would consider. After 14. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 17. $\mathbb{W}xc5$ White wins a pawn. At least Black has the bishop pair and didn't get mated! 14... $\mathbb{W}a6$ seems playable; it at least doesn't set the queen up as a target. The computer proposes 15.a3 $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{W}xf6$ 17. $\mathbb{W}b3$ and Black is very restricted. Still, where there's life, there's hope.

14. $\mathbb{Q}f4$

Bonin chooses the most natural refutation, but Black has no satisfactory answer to the simple capture 14. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$. 14... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ and 14... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}g5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 18. $\mathbb{W}c4$ both get smacked down.



14...Ba5?

Nobody wants to move a piece back to the square it just came from! But if Black wants to keep playing, 14...Bb6 is necessary to prevent mate. 15.Qg5 Rf8 16.Qc4 is thoroughly miserable for Black, but there will be times where a good sense of danger will save you. Here the g5-square has already been uncovered, so Black has to be looking for the following sacrifice. No doubt Ben would have seen it if he had played White!

15.Qxf7+ Qxf7 16.Qg5+ Qg8 17.Qb3+

Black resigned to avoid the flashy finish 17...Qh8 18.Qf7+ Qg8 19.Qh6+ Qh8 20.Qg8+ and mate next move.

Without planning, it's easy to get destroyed and look bad doing it! The great Walt 'Clyde' Frazier has made many references to the New York Knicks having to 'get down before they can get up'. I've seen Ben pull off many remarkable come backs (we will see one later) but I would rather have him not fall behind in the first place.

Be alert

In the previous game, Black had a lot of good options early, but needed to play very accurately after getting in trouble. Everybody has to appreciate times where you *must* make the right move in the opening. A quiet opening can intensify, or the issues can be more overt in gambit or other sharp openings, but we have to sense these moments.

Game 4

Edward Kopiecki 2000
Brandon 2153
Jacobson

New York 2015 (4)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗c4 ♗f6 4.d4 exd4 5.0-0 ♗xe4 6.♕e1 d5 7.♘c3 dxс4 8.♕xe4+ ♖e6
9.♘xd4 ♗xd4 10.♕xd4 ♔f6 11.♗b5



CHALLENGE 2

What should Black play?

Black has played the opening fine. 11...♖c8! would give him a winning position after 12.♘xa7? ♗c5 13.♕f4 ♖d8, and a slight edge on other moves because ...♗f8-c5 will consolidate nicely anyway. 11...♗d6 is playable but not as good: 12.♕xd6 (the trickiest) 12...cxд6 13.♕xd6 ♖c8 14.♘c7+ ♖xc7 15.♖xc7 ♖d8=.

11...♔e5??

This is the worst choice as Black goes from better to just about lost in one move.

12.a4 ♖c8

The best try was the ugly 12...g5, but 13.♗xg5 ♖xg5 14.♘xc7+ ♔e7 15.♘xa8 is no fun at all. Still, where there's life, there's hope.

13.♗f4 ♖c5 14.♘xc7+

Black resigned because his queen is lost.

I don't want to say that every reader should be able to see over-the-board that 11... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ is a good move and 11... $\mathbb{W}e5$ is a very bad one. But Black still lacks some development and his king is in the center. Everyone should appreciate that this decision is important and try to work it out to the best of their abilities, using clock time as necessary. Brandon was rated 2150 at the time and was quite capable of getting this problem right, but was too casual in his approach.

Defending tactically

Defending is not all about defensive moves, and tactics are not only for attacking. This is certainly true in the opening, when successful attacks often arise because the defender missed the opportunity to change the momentum with opportunistic play.

Game 5

Joel Benjamin

Dore Sheppard

USA training blitz 2017

1.e4 c5 2.c3 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 3.e5 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 4.d4 cxd4 5. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 6.cxd4 d6 7. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 8.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 9. $\mathbb{W}e2$ 0-0
10. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ dxe5 11.dxe5 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 12.bxc3 $\mathbb{W}a5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ b6 14. $\mathbb{W}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}ac8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}g5$



CHALLENGE 3

What should Black play?

On the surface White is threatening to take on e7, but the real plan is to jumpstart an attack with ♜b5-d3 and ♛e4-h4. **16...♜xg5?!** 17.♞xg5 g6 18.♛h4 h5 is too cooperative; we can do better than that. The move played was not an improvement, unfortunately.

16...♝c5?

This abandons the kingside, leaving a very difficult position to defend.

17.♝d3 g6 18.♛h4

As defensive moves go, **16...♝c7** looks better because it keeps Black's pieces well-coordinated for defense and might help activate the rooks as well.



analysis diagram

Yet it gives White time to develop pressure with 17.♝d3 g6 18.♛h4. Komodo is not flustered (having venomous drool does keep one calm) and points out a nice resource in 18...♝fc8 19.♝f6 ♞xe5!? 20.♞xe5 ♛xe5 21.♞xe5 ♜xh4 22.♜xc7 ♜xc7. Black has solid compensation for the exchange; one pawn, but the better pawn structure and the bishop pair.

I think I would be more worried about 21.♜xe7 ♛d5 22.f3 ♛xd3 23.♝f6; those kingside holes look pretty serious, and Black is only up one pawn. Moreover, it would be hard to anticipate how any of this would work from the analysis diagram above.

Let's examine the position with a more aggressive mindset. White's queen is

posted in a dangerous spot – for both sides. Given time, White will set up the battery, force a kingside weakness, than shift over to the kingside... but can we take advantage of the queen's position now? The more obvious possibility is **16...♞d8** 17.♕h4 ♜xg5 18.♞xg5 h6 (the mate threat from this angle is more comfortably parried!) 19.♞e4 ♜xe4 20.♕xe4 ♜xc3. Black wins a pawn *and* has traded off some attacking pieces, though I do have reservations about the poor placement of the knight on d8. I can see going with this in a blitz game for sure, but I prefer the next option.

One way to give ourselves the best chance of spotting tactics is to *aim high and scale down as necessary*. Imagine the best thing you can do, and then look for less ambitious ideas if it doesn't work.

A move by the knight will uncover an attack on the queen. While 16...♞d8 is a safe and obvious way to do it, might we be able to something bolder with the knight? Lesser players may be just as familiar with the patterns that make tactics easier to find, but grandmasters have the stronger instinct to explore these possibilities.

Here **16...♞xe5!?** is a move we should aspire to make work,



analysis diagram

especially after noticing 17.♖xb7 ♞xf3+ 18.♖xf3 ♜xg5. Of course after

17. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{B}xg5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ we need to find 18... $\mathbb{B}c5!$. If that is too much for you to visualize right now, you can train yourself to analyze deeper. For those stronger calculators, you just need to believe that resource could be there, and then you will find it.

If 16... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ turned out not to work, you can always move on to one of the easier continuations. But unless you are pressed for time, don't start with the easy but potentially less rewarding moves.



analysis diagram

Okay, back to our analysis. Komodo points out White can minimize the damage with 19. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{B}xb5$ 20. $\mathbb{B}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xf7!$ $\mathbb{B}xf7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}b8+$ $\mathbb{B}f8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$, and Black's advantage may not be enough to work with if White defends well.

Still, we are talking about a line that takes all the air out of White's attacking balloon (with a little psychological advantage included) and gets a very large advantage if White doesn't find an important resource. It certainly beats getting mated.

Grandmaster opening strategy

Let's kick it up a notch with examples of more refined strategy from some of my own games. Moving beyond the fundamentals, these games involve thinking outside the box in various aspects of opening strategy.

Flexibility in planning

The opening holds quite a number of options for piece placement and determination of pawn structure, so development and pawn play are very key elements.

Pawn play

Game 6

Sam Hamilton

Joel 2563

Benjamin

Albany 2010 (1)

1.c4 e5 2. \mathbb{N} c3 \mathbb{N} b4 3. \mathbb{N} d5 \mathbb{N} c5 4. \mathbb{N} f3 c6 5. \mathbb{N} c3 d6 6.e3 \mathbb{N} e7 7.d4 \mathbb{N} b4 8. \mathbb{N} e2 \mathbb{N} f6 9.0-0



CHALLENGE 4

How should Black continue?

Black's position contains elements of two plans – Nimzo-Indian like play against doubled pawns, and a Reversed French pawn chain plan.

Black could reasonably start with 9...e4 10. \mathbb{N} d2, but should then revert to Plan A: 10...d5?! 11.a3 \mathbb{N} d6 (11... \mathbb{N} xc3 is not desirable here, as White will then have two c-pawns to hit at Black's center) 12.cxd5 cxd5 13.f3! exf3 14. \mathbb{N} xf3! and White has good play in the center. Then 14... \mathbb{N} xe3+? 15. \mathbb{N} h1 would be too

dangerous, as both Black's queen and king come under fire.

In the game I played:

9... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 10. $bxc3$



10...c5!

I was not misled by the presence of the pawn on c6; I need it to keep White's pawn mass blocked. It would have been fine to push 10...e4 first, but not 10...0-0 11.c5! when suddenly White's doubled pawns are liquidated and White's minor pieces become liberated.

11. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ e4 12.f3

White's play is not accurate; the knight was probably better placed on d2 and 12.f4 was probably better as White does not have pressure on the e4-square.

12... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 13. $fxe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 0-0 15. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$

Black is comfortably better and went on to win:

16. $dxc5$ $dxc5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}ad8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}fe8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}axc4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 24.e4 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}e7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 0-1

Game 7

Eric Rosen 2328

Joel 2559

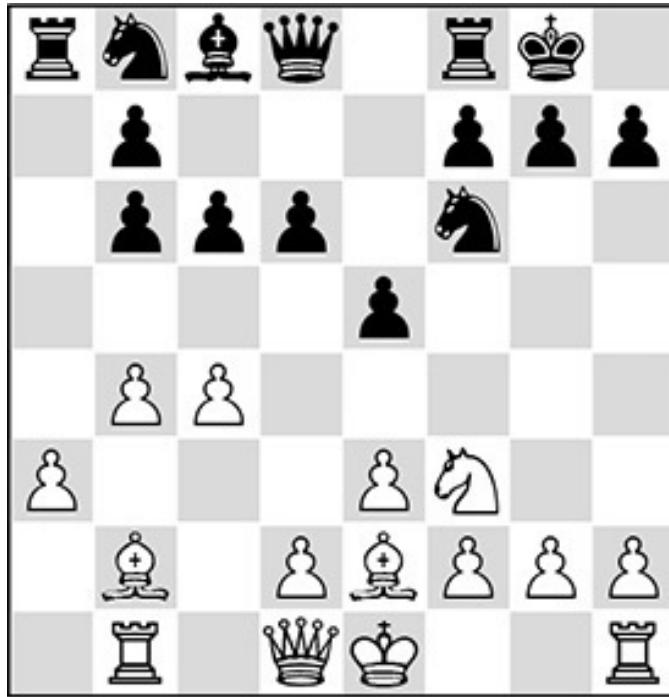
Benjamin

Washington 2012 (7)

1.c4 e5 2. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 4.b4 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ c6 6.e3 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ axb6 8. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ d6 9.a3
 $\mathbb{Q}f6$

White would love to unleash the power of the unopposed bishop on b2. Since d2-d4 might just end up blocking the center, White could consider 10.♗e2!? with the idea of advancing f2-f4 after castling.

10.♗f3 0-0 11.♗e2



CHALLENGE 5

How should Black handle his center and development?

It's somewhat subjective, but I think the pawn on c6 can again lead us in the wrong direction. Black will have to work a bit to achieve the advance ...d6-d5, only to have the responsibility of keeping the e5-pawn defended. And if the e5-pawn advances, White's unopposed bishop will be quite strong on the long diagonal.

In openings where Black has given the dark-squared bishop for the knight, it is important to use the pawns to keep the unopposed bishops under wraps. So Black's strategy is based on maintaining the pawn on e5 to keep that bishop blocked.

11...c5! 12.0-0 ♜c6 13.♗b3 ♜g4 14.♕h1 ♜e4 15.♗bd1 f5 16.d4 ♜e7 17.b5 ♜d8 18.dxe5 dxe5 19.♗g1? ♜h4 20.g3 ♜h5 21.♗c2 ♜xe2 22.♗xe2 ♜xe2 23.♗xe2 ♜f7 24.f3 ♜ed6 25.♗c1 ♜fd8 26.♗fd1? ♜xc4 27.♗xd8+ ♜xd8 28.♗xc4 ♜d2 29.♗a4 g6 30.♗c3 ♜g5

Black won without further difficulty.

Piece maneuvers

Game 8

Igor Ivanov 2485

Joel 2560

Benjamin

Jacksonville ch-USA 1990

1.c4 g6 2.e4 ♜g7 3.d4 d6 4.♘c3 ♜f6 5.♗e2 0-0 6.♗f3 e5 7.d5 a5 8.0-0 ♘a6 9.♗g5 h6
10.♗h4 ♛e8 11.♘e1 ♗c5 12.♗xf6!? ♜xf6 13.♗g4 ♜xg4 14.♕xg4



CHALLENGE 6

How did Black creatively redeploy his bishop?

Minor pieces are not all equal, and the value of a bishop depends on the pawn structure. Igor Ivanov, a great connoisseur of knights, employs a strategy common to a lot of positions with blocked pawn structures. He trades his good bishop for a knight in order to swap off his bad bishop. The hope is that the knight will dominate the bad bishop left on the board. The strategy carries some risk, however. Since White starts with a light-square heavy pawn structure, he has weaknesses on the other color. So if Black's bishop can play 'super breakout', it will get quite active and will no longer be opposable by White's missing good bishop.

The routine 'non-challenge' choice is 14...♝g7, and while it's perfectly okay, the bishop won't have anything to do for quite a while. A more active choice is

14... $\mathbb{B}g5$, or any method which places the bishop on the h6-c1 diagonal. I went a bit more outside the box.

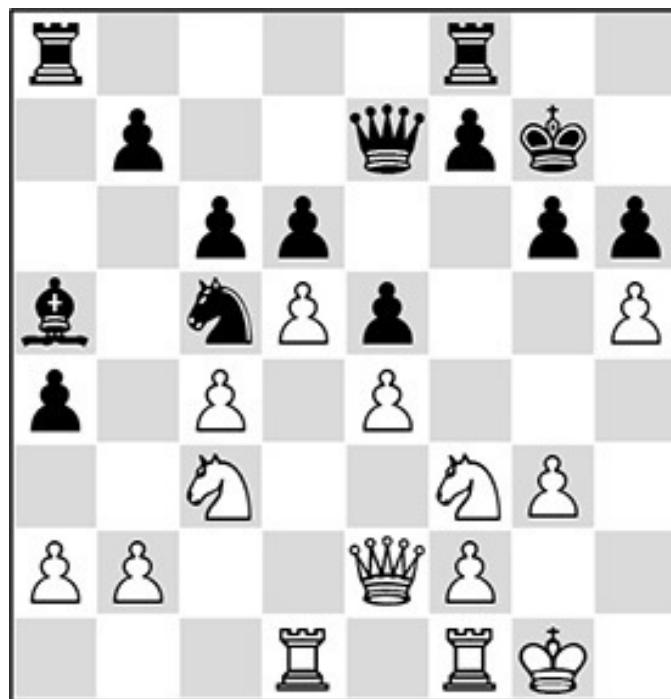
14... $\mathbb{B}d8!$

I don't think this move really changes the evaluation of the position, but it gives Black more upside if his bishop can reach its full potential outside the pawn chain. Note that the plan only gets off the ground because 15. $\mathbb{B}d1 \mathbb{B}a4!$ is unpleasant for White.

15. $\mathbb{B}e2 c6 16.\mathbb{B}d1 \mathbb{B}c7 17.h4?!$

White misses a few chances to block me on the queenside with 17.b3!.

17... $\mathbb{B}e7 18.g3 \mathbb{B}g7 19.\mathbb{B}f3 a4! 20.h5 \mathbb{B}a5$



My vision is consummated! The bishop had more to say, as we shall see in a later chapter.

Think not only about where your pieces can go *now*, but where they *want* to go. Let's look at a position where we focus on knight play.

Game 9

Alex London 2380

Joel 2585

Benjamin

Las Vegas 1993 (2)

1.c4 g6 2. $\mathbb{N}c3 \mathbb{B}g7 3.d4 \mathbb{N}f6 4.e4 d6 5. $\mathbb{N}f3 0-0 6. $\mathbb{B}e2 \mathbb{N}bd7 7.0-0 e5 8. $\mathbb{B}e3 h6 9.dxe5 dxe5 10. $\mathbb{N}d2 \mathbb{N}h7 11. $\mathbb{B}c2 \mathbb{N}g5 12. $\mathbb{B}g4$$$$$$$



CHALLENGE 7

How did Black look to improve the activity of his knights?

White's exchange on e5 has left the standard King's Indian hole on d4, but Black's pieces are not close to accessing it. After 12...h5 13.h4!? I don't really want to take on g4, but I don't want my knight sent farther from the d4-square.

12...♞b8!?

Okay, there should be some skepticism about undeveloping pieces. Back then I just loved to go for squares! I think the move is still sound though. White has to contemplate both knights headed for d4.

13.♚xc8 ♜xc8



14.f4?

Sometimes the threat is indeed stronger than the execution. Black is okay in any case, e.g. 14.♘b3 ♘c6 15.♗c1 ♘d4 16.♗xg5 hxg5 17.♗xg5 c6 with Black's activity compensating for the pawn. Later we will talk more about not being afraid to part with pawns!

14...exf4 15.♗xf4 ♘e6 16.♗e3 ♘d7

The knight returns to where it came from! But the other knight can go to d4, this one has a home on e5, and a pawn on c6 will control the center nicely.

17.♘f3 c6 18.♖ad1 ♖c7 19.♖d2 ♘e5

Black's dark-square dominance confers a sizeable advantage, and I won in 39 moves.

Planning and calculation

Planning is an essential component of higher-level chess, yet I see so many amateurs using it at a minimum. Part of the problem is (again) the fast time controls that have become so common, and often account for the majority of tournament games for many players.

In fast games (e.g. Game 30 or Game 45) deliberate play can often be punished by time shortage. In these games, perfection is not always worth the time invested. But slow games (e.g. 40/2 hours) need to be played differently. Players must take care not to let habits from quick play seep into their slow tournament play.

The following position represents one of the favorite moves of my career. Rather

than play an ‘obvious’ move quickly, I tried to work out how the game would unfold in the next few moves, and then work backward to make my decision.

Game 10

Joel Benjamin 2565

Igor 2535

Miladinovic

Yerevan ol 1996 (5)

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{N}f3$ $\mathbb{N}c6$ 3.c3 d5 4.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 5.d4 e5 6. $\mathbb{N}bd2$ exd4 7. $\mathbb{N}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 8.0-0 $\mathbb{N}e6$ 9. $\mathbb{N}xe6$ fxe6 10.cxd4 0-0-0 11.dxc5 $\mathbb{N}xc5$



CHALLENGE 8

Plan out White’s next few moves, and, based on Black’s plausible replies, find White’s best move

It’s early in the game, and White clearly has some more pieces to develop. The knight has to move to release the bishop, while the queen has to move to unpin the knight. So the next few moves are likely queen to somewhere, $\mathbb{Q}d2-b3$ (might gain a tempo) and $\mathbb{N}c1-e3$ (most natural square). Black will need to play ... $\mathbb{N}g8-f6$ and probably will retreat the bishop to b6.

So my working variation was 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{N}f6$ 13. $\mathbb{N}b3$ $\mathbb{N}b6$ 14. $\mathbb{N}e3$. But after 14... $\mathbb{N}xe3$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $\mathbb{N}d5$ is quite unpleasant. Still, I didn’t want to abandon the plan, so I looked further and thought of recapturing with the pawn. But 15.fxe3

$\mathbb{W}d3$ 16. $\mathbb{W}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ bothered me as well. The engines actually find a white advantage after 17. $\mathbb{B}c1!$, with the following peculiar line: 17... $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 18. $\mathbb{B}f2$ $\mathbb{W}d1$ 19. $\mathbb{B}e2$ $\mathbb{W}xe1+$ 20. $\mathbb{B}exe1$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}db4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{B}d2$ 23. $a3$ $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}ac4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{B}d8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $bxcc6$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xc6+$ $\mathbb{W}b8$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}c4$, etc. Suffice to say I didn't see any of that, but I did conclude that my queen wasn't ideal on e2 if I'm recapturing with the f-pawn. Thus my brain hit upon...

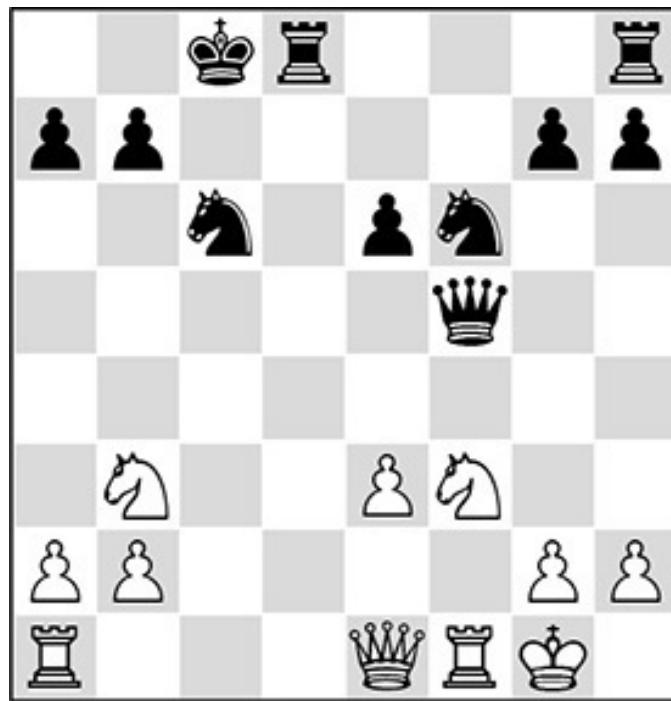
12. $\mathbb{W}e1!!$

The punctuation is really more for the ingenuity than for the actual strength. Though in the game, the move worked like a charm!

12... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3?$

As expected, though Black isn't badly off without this capture.

15. $fxe3!$



Suddenly Black is in real trouble – his queen is vulnerable, while my queen is poised to jump into a great attacking position on g3!

15... $\mathbb{W}d5$ 16. $\mathbb{B}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 17. $\mathbb{W}g3+$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}c5!$

Not 18. $\mathbb{W}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$, passing the initiative to Black. One of many instances of 'material isn't everything'.

18... $\mathbb{B}hg8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{W}d6$ 20. $\mathbb{B}f3$ $\mathbb{W}d5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}gxe6$ $\mathbb{W}xf3$ 22. $gxf3$

And White consolidated the extra pawn through the time scramble.

As I mentioned, the engines were not all that impressed with my analysis, explaining that 14... $\mathbb{Q}xe3$, though natural, is a significant mistake. Still, I am proud that planning out my development, rather than just starting with a routine

move, enabled me to find hidden resources in the position.

While the ‘backward candidate generation’ of that game hinged on a type of calculation, the planning in the following example was more along the lines of ‘wish fulfillment.’

Game 11

Joel Benjamin 2565

Dragan 2465

Paunovic

New York 1987

**1.d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2.c4 g6 3. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 4.e4 d6 5. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ 0-0 6. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ c6 7. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 8.0-0 h6 9. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ e5
10.d5 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ a5**

Black actually missed a nice shot with this routine move: 11...cxd5 12.cxd5 $\mathbb{Q}fxe4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ f5 16. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ e4 and Black has no problems. Even grandmasters miss opportunities with routine moves!

Even when your move seems obvious, it’s a good idea to keep your head up and check if there is something big you can do. If it doesn’t work, you can always scale down from there.

12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$



CHALLENGE 9

White played 13. $\mathbb{Q}xc5!?$ here. What was the plan?

13. ♔xc5!?

Arguably not the best move. I'm not sure it occurred to me that I could wait, say with 13. ♕fd1, and answer 13...cxd5 with 14. ♔xc5. But I have a good long-range plan with great potential if Black cannot combat it: I immediately obtain a protected passed pawn. Great, but I don't have any usable squares just yet. So I will maneuver my pieces to attack the c5-pawn. Black can easily defend it by playing ...b7-b6, but then I will trade on c6 and drop my knight on d5. He probably will have to take it, allowing me to re-establish my protected passer. But now I will have light-square control, which will help me make progress.

13...dxc5 14. ♕fd1

It would be premature to give up my primary asset, the protected passed d-pawn. 14.dxc6?! bxc6 produces ugly black pawns, but gives Black access to key squares. After ...♗f6-e8-c7-e6 Black's position looks a lot prettier.

14...♝g4

It's not ideal to trade the good bishop, but Black has problems finding squares for both this bishop and his knight. That's life with a space disadvantage.

15. ♜a4

15.d6 ♛e6 16. ♜a4 ♜d7 17.h3 ♔xf3 18. ♔xf3 h5 doesn't lead to anything concrete, and I was loathe to give up the pawn's 'protectedness' so easily.

15...♞fd8

I think Black should have gone ahead and chopped the knight, because the knight will hurt him more in this blocked position.

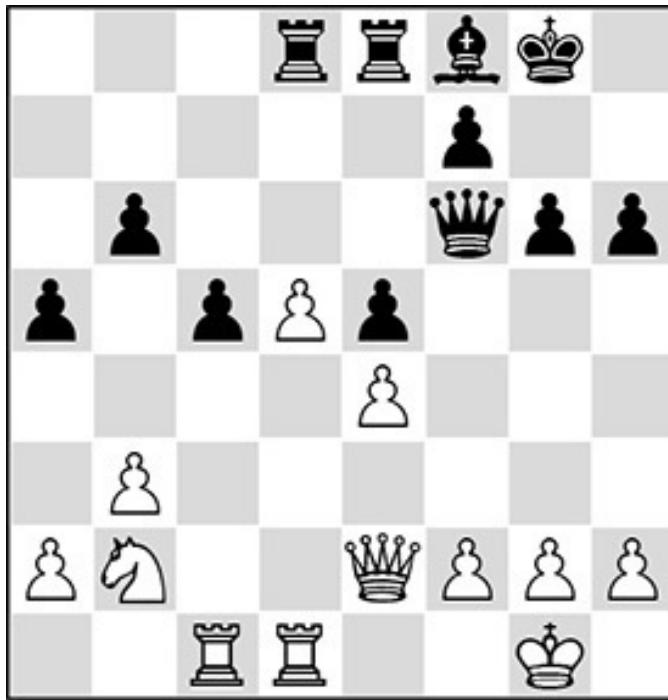
16. ♜e1! ♔xe2 17. ♜xe2 ♛f8 18. ♜ac1

Impatient play can squander a strategic advantage; 18. ♜d3 cxd5 19.cxd5 c4 unnecessarily concedes active play to Black.

18...♛c7 19.b3 b6

It was unlikely that Black could avoid this move forever, but now the d5-square is available and White's plan starts to bear fruit.

20. ♜d3 ♜e8 21. ♜c3 ♜ad8 22.dxc6 ♛xc6 23. ♜d5 ♜xd5 24.cxd5 ♛f6 25. ♜b2



Mission accomplished!

Now the d-pawn is buttressed by good knight vs bad bishop and weak light squares to exploit. Black is in danger now.

25...h5 26. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}bb7$
32. $\mathbb{Q}df3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 33. h3

Emphasizing Black's helplessness. Sometimes an indirect approach is a good way to coax fatal mistakes.

33... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}bc7$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 1-0

Formulation and execution

Opening preparation often steers us into plans, but inevitably we will find ourselves 'on our own'. Background knowledge on an opening can still guide us if the exact position is unfamiliar, but ideally principles should be enough to guide us to good opening play.

The following game is a good example of formulating and executing a plan in the opening. When my opponent surprised me, I was dropped in a position with no theoretical knowledge, with only principles and logic to guide me. The consummation of this plan involved concrete calculation. In this era of fast time controls, many players like to play the opening quickly and 'easily', only beginning to think when a confrontation occurs in the middlegame. Such shortcuts can lead to unhappy middlegames and missed opportunities to fight for the initiative. Be prepared to apply critical thinking, both strategic and tactical,

early in the game.

Game 12

Virginijus 2460

Grabliauskas

Joel Benjamin 2590

New York 2000 (7)

1.d4 ♜f6 2.c4 ♜c6 3.♘f3 e6 4.g3 d5

I have generally played 4...♝b4+, but I had prepared something different for this game.

5.♗g2 dxс4 6.♔a4 ♜b4+ 7.♔d2 ♜d5



8.♔b5

Uh-oh, I'm out of my preparation already! At the time there was a popular variation stemming from 8.♗xb4 ♜dxb4 9.a3 b5 10.♔xb5 ♜c2+, etc. I was prepared to grab this rook in the corner but knew nothing about the sidelines! It's a good lesson: when you prepare something in a new opening, don't focus so much on the main line that you will be at a loss if your opponent avoids it.

8...0-0

Black has scored pretty well with 8...♜xd2+ 9.♗xd2 c3 10.bxc3 ♜xc3 in recent years. Still, White's extra space, open lines on the queenside, and the weakness of my bishop indicate that Black's task will not be so easy. Knowing nothing about the position, I decided to try to play more actively – often a wise

practical choice.

9. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$



CHALLENGE 10

What is Black's basic plan for developing and freeing his position? What is the best way to execute this plan? Give variations if possible

Black has a typical problem in Queen's Gambit structures – the c8-bishop is hemmed in. A fianchetto is possible, but it is awkward to arrange (the c6-knight would hang) and would not address issues of space. Advancing ...e6-e5 would potentially solve Black's problems, so Black should analyze with an eye towards accomplishing this goal.

9... $\mathfrak{N}b6$

Finding your way forward in unfamiliar territory can be simplified with a smart move generation process. The text is an obvious candidate because it attacks a big piece with limited options of where to go.

10. $\mathbb{Q}d3$



10...e5!?

I didn't want to develop the white pieces with 10... \mathbb{Q} xd2+ 11. \mathbb{N} bx \mathbb{Q} d2, though this would be okay because of 11...e5. (11. \mathbb{W} xd2 looks less natural but I'm not sure how to execute my plan then.)

10... \mathbb{W} e7 is a routine move – which is not to say it is weak. I just didn't like that I haven't freed my position after, say, 11.0-0 \mathbb{R} d8 12. \mathbb{W} e4.

I had to do quite a bit of calculation to make this move work, and I might have regretted this decision if White had played all the best moves. Still, it's important to be prepared to *exert your will* on a position. If you spend too many moves preparing your plan, you may not get to do it in the end. But if you have a direct opportunity, investigate if you can make it work. No pain, no gain.

11. \mathbb{Q} xb4

The calculation was eased by the fact that no other move gave me concern.

11.dxe5 \mathbb{W} xd3 12.exd3 \mathbb{Q} f5 is clearly good for Black. 11. \mathbb{N} xe5 \mathbb{Q} xd2+ 12. \mathbb{N} xd2 (12. \mathbb{W} xd2 \mathbb{N} xd4=) and now my clever plan involved one more tactic – 12... \mathbb{N} b4 13. \mathbb{W} c3 \mathbb{W} xd4!. Curiously, Komodo slightly prefers 12... \mathbb{N} xd4 with a more or less equal position. It sees a slight edge for White after 12... \mathbb{N} b4 13. \mathbb{W} b1 \mathbb{W} xd4 14. \mathbb{N} df3. 13. \mathbb{W} b1 is not so obvious; I don't think I considered it, and I'm not sure my opponent would have played it. In any case, it was not necessary to work too much of this out on move ten – I could decide later which move to play, if the situation arose.

11... \mathbb{N} xb4 12. \mathbb{W} d2 a5

Another key move, as the inclusion of the a-pawns creates additional tactical

possibilities for me.

13.a3

Again the only concern, as I'm happy after 13. Qxe5 Qxd4 or 13. dxe5 Qxd2+ 14. Qxd2 Qf5 15. Qc3 Qad8+ .

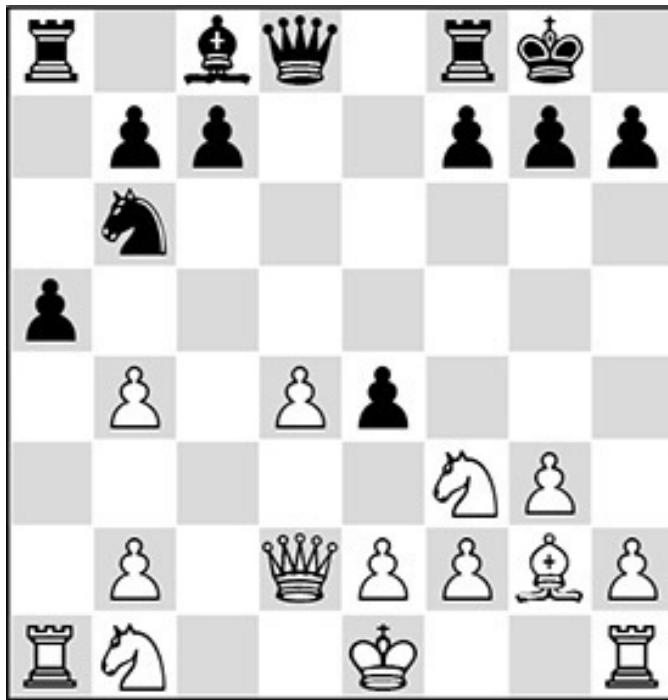


13...e4!

I didn't seriously consider 13... Qc6 , but it had been played before: 14. dxe5 Qe7 15. Qf4 a4 16.0-0 Qa5 17. Qc3 Qxe5 , and now a draw was agreed in Konopka-Grabliauskas, Litomysl 1996, though after 18. Qxe5 Black's position is actually rather uncomfortable. I was rather shocked to see that my opponent had played this all with colors reversed! Only the advent of ChessBase's online database brought this game to my attention, many years after the fact!

14.axb4

Once again there is not much in other moves: 14. Qg5? e3 15. fxe3 Qxg5 16. AXB4 Qc4 or 14. Qe5? Qxd4 .



14...♞c4!!

This move is the final piece of the puzzle. I saw that 14...exf3 15.♕xf3 ♜c4 is refuted by 16.♔d3! ♜xb2 17.♔c3 and White wins. I wasn't discouraged by that finding as all I needed to do was switch the order. We must remember how important move order can be in tactics.

15.♘c1?!

We are approaching the limits of calculation, even for a grandmaster. As fewer moves are captures and piece attacks, it is harder to foresee them. After Black captures the d4-pawn he has a comfortable game.

The strongest continuation (which was played in a couple of subsequent games) is 15.♘f4. I analyzed 15...exf3 16.♕xf3 ♔e7 17.♘c3 ♕xb4 18.0-0 ♕xb2 19.♘d5 ♘d2 20.♖fd1 ♘xf3+ 21.♕xf3) 21...c6 22.♘e7+ ♔h8 23.♖ab1 ♕c2 24.e3=, which is pretty close to the engine which finds a white advantage after 21.exf3.

There is a bizarre possibility of 16...♖e8 17.0-0 ♘e3!? with the strange idea of trapping the queen after 18.fxe3 g5 [I didn't see that during the game!]. While other moves fail, White wins after 18.♕h5 or 18.♖c1 c6 19.♖c5.

15...exf3 16.♕xf3 ♕xd4 17.♘d2 ♘e5

Taking a pawn is not an option – 17...♕xb2? 18.♕xb2 ♘xb2 19.♖a2 traps the knight – but giving a pawn is necessary to maintain the initiative.

17...♞xd2 18.♕xd2 ♕xd2+ 19.♕xd2 ♖d8+ 20.♔c3 axb4+ 21.♕xb4 leaves White with a strong position.

18.bxa5

18.0-0 ♕xb4 19.♕xc7 ♔xf3+ 20.♔xf3 ♕xb2 is clearly unsatisfactory for White, so White chances Black's attack.

18...♝h3!



19.♕c3

A passed pawn can provide good counterplay for a mating attack, but there is no time for 19.♝xb7? ♜ae8 20.♜a3 (20.♜e4 ♜g4+) 20...♝d3+ 21.♜xd3 ♜xd3 and White won't hold on much longer.

19...♝xf3+ 20.♝xf3 ♜e4

20...♜xc3+ 21.bxc3 ♜g2 22.♜g1 ♜xf3 23.exf3 ♜fe8+ is safe for Black, but the middlegame holds much greater dangers for White.

21.♞d4 ♜c6 22.♞c3 ♜a6 23.♞d4 ♜fe8 24.f3

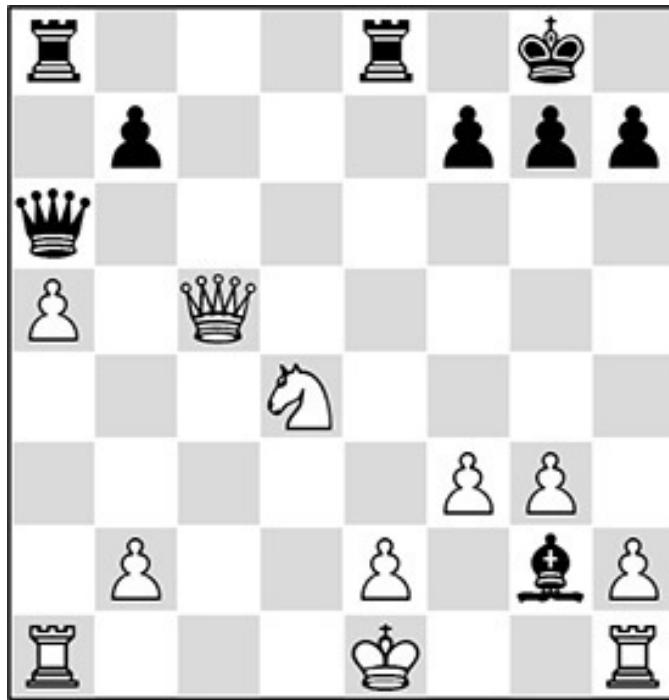


24...c5!

Here I rejected the plausible alternative 24... \mathbb{R} ad8. I didn't like that White had two moves he could try. The more obvious 25.e4 \mathbb{Q} g2 26. \mathbb{N} f5! (26. \mathbb{R} g1 \mathbb{Q} xf3+) 26... \mathbb{W} f6 27. \mathbb{W} xf6 gxf6 28. \mathbb{N} f2 \mathbb{Q} xh1 29. \mathbb{R} xh1 \mathbb{R} d2+ 30. \mathbb{N} e3 \mathbb{R} xb2 31. \mathbb{N} f4 is not conclusive, despite Black's material advantage, as the monster knight on f5 will spearhead a counterattack for White.

The other option – 25.0-0-0!? – is easy to overlook. Late castling tends to be surprising, especially when it happens on the unexpected side. 25...c5 26. \mathbb{N} b3 \mathbb{W} xe2 27. \mathbb{N} xc5 is precarious for White, but with a future if Black doesn't make good on his initiative.

25. \mathbb{W} xc5 \mathbb{Q} g2



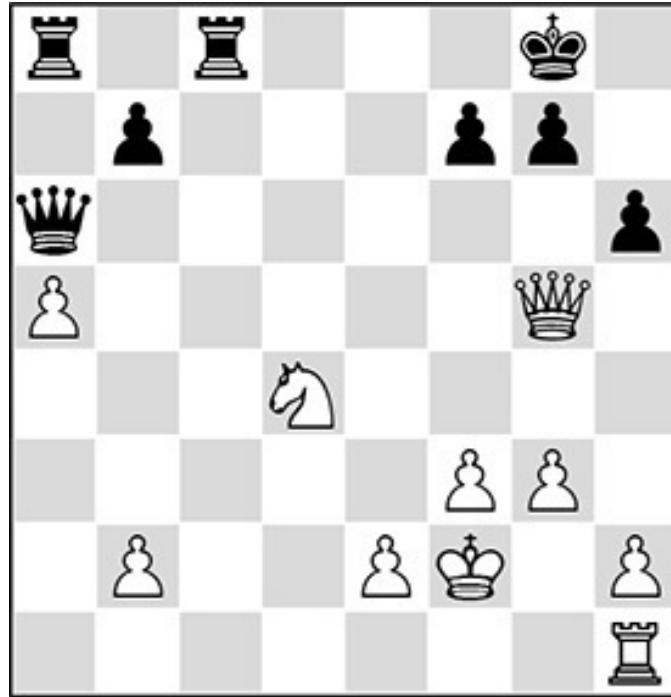
26. $\mathbb{Q}f2!$

Strong players offer maximum resistance by eschewing ‘forced’ but faulty moves like 26. $\mathbb{R}g1$. Black’s attack would be unstoppable: 26... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ (27. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{R}ac8$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{R}cd8+$) 27... $\mathbb{R}xe2+$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}d3+$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ and now 29... $\mathbb{R}xh2$, trapping the king and adding a threat of ...h7-h5+, is utterly devastating. It’s a move I would have found and detected if I felt I had clock time to use. Otherwise I might have gone for a line where I regain my piece and reach a winning position with a series of checks: 29... $\mathbb{Q}g6+$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}h6+$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{R}e4+$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e3+$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{R}xd4$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}f3+$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{R}d2$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}ag1$ $\mathbb{R}xb2$ and Black will win eventually.

26... $\mathbb{Q}xh1$ 27. $\mathbb{R}xh1$ $\mathbb{Q}ec8$

I don’t think I would be able to breach White’s position after 27... $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ $\mathbb{R}xa5$ 29. $\mathbb{R}c1$. White’s pawn structure is unblemished, his knight is anchored in the center, and he will not be compelled to trade rooks. This kind of move is hard for the average player to pass up, as we shall see later. It both takes a pawn and simplifies when ahead. But it doesn’t take Black where he needs to go.

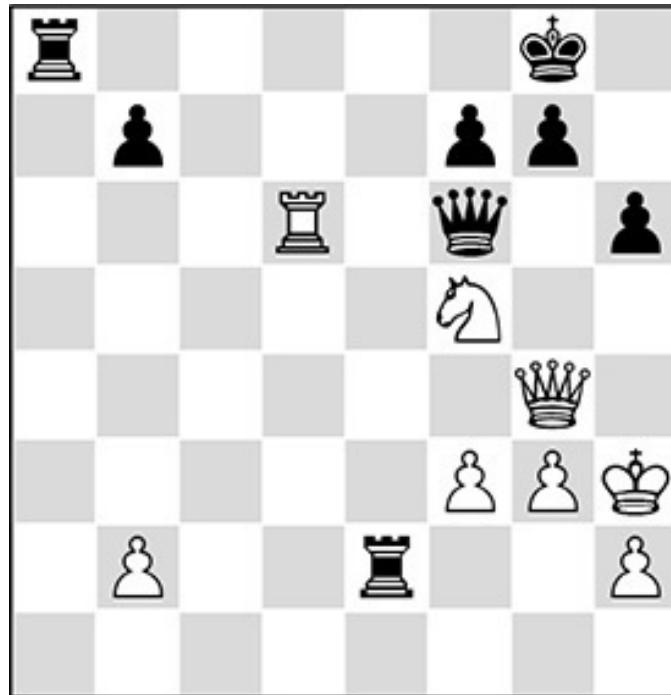
28. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $h6$



29. $\mathbb{Q}g4?$

Grabliauskas pins his hopes on a desperate counterattack, perhaps inspired by my shortness of time, but objectively he should have tried to force an endgame with 29. $\mathbb{Q}d2$.

29... $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ 30. $\mathbb{N}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}b6+$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{R}c2$ 33. $\mathbb{R}d1$ $\mathbb{R}xe2$ 34. $\mathbb{R}d6$



34... ♕e6?!

This safety-first move is natural but 34... ♕xb2 35. ♔xh6+ ♔f8 would have won more clearly.

35. ♖d7 b5 36.f4 b4?!

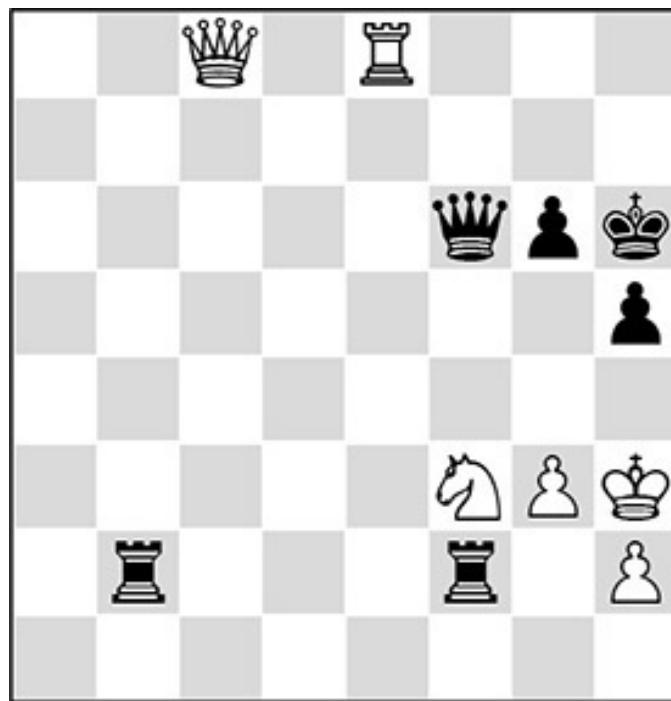
I missed a chance to simplify with 36... ♕xb2 37. ♖d4 ♖g6 38. ♔e7+ ♔h7 39. ♔xg6 ♕xd4.

37. ♖b7 ♕xb2 38. ♖xb4 ♕f6

My excess of caution has not spoiled much. With the time control in reach I'm ready to nail down the win.

39. ♖b7 ♖d8 40. ♖b5 ♖d2 41. ♖b8+ ♔h7 42. ♔h4 ♖ee2 43. ♔f3 ♖b2 44. ♖f8 ♖f2 45.f5

This allows my queen to penetrate, but 45. ♕h5 ♖xf3 46. ♕xf3 ♕f5+ 47.g4 ♕c2 also ends the game. The best try, 45. ♖e8, could have led to a fantastic finish: 45...g6 46.f5 h5 47.fxg6+ (47. ♕e4 g5) 47...fxg6 48. ♖d7+ ♔h6 49. ♕c8



analysis diagram

49... ♕h4+!! Quite pretty, if not strictly necessary. Mate is forced, e.g.

50. ♔xh4 ♖xh2+ 51. ♕h3 (51. ♔xh2 ♖xh2+ 52. ♕h3 g5#) 51... ♖b4+, etc.

45... ♕e7 46. ♖a8 ♕e2 0-1

CHAPTER 2

Endgames

Many players don't like to study endgames because they can't apply what they learn as easily as they can with openings, or because they aren't as fun as studying tactics. I could not disagree more with this notion. Endgames are intrinsically fascinating, and what's more, the proper play can lead directly to the desired result in a way you don't see in the other phases of the game.

Part of good endgame play is knowing fundamentals. In my book *Liquidation on the Chess Board*, I detailed many critical bits of pawn endgame knowledge that are building blocks for playing more complicated endgames.

Knowing where you would like to end up is only half the battle. Good endgame play takes patience, appreciation of the initiative, and, above all, good planning.

Initiative

Everybody knows that being ahead in pawns is usually conducive to endgame success. But it is not a be-all end-all. A material advantage can be a step towards ultimately queening a pawn, but it is not always part of the equation.

Game 13

Larry Kaufman 2425

Joel Benjamin 2575

Philadelphia 1999 (6)

1.d4 d6 2.e4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 3.f3 e5 4.dxe5 dxe5 5. $\mathbb{W}xd8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ a5 9.a4
 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3+$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}hd1$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}fd7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4+$
16. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ c5 19.c3 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}a1$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 21.h4 f6 22.g4 $\mathbb{Q}e6$
23. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 24.b3 c4 25.b4 axb4 26.a5 $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 27.cxb4 $\mathbb{Q}d3+$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 29.a6 bxa6
30. $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ $\mathbb{Q}b3$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}a7$



CHALLENGE 11

How can Black obtain a winning position?

Okay, it's a challenge, so you probably won't suggest 31...g6 32.♖xh7 ♕xb4 with a ho-hum draw in the offing.

But in a tournament game, would you appreciate that getting your pawns moving is more important than the relative number of pawns on the board?

31...♞b5! 32.♕xg7 ♞d4

In two moves Black has totally taken over the initiative.

33.♘xd4+

White doesn't want to give Black connected passed pawns, but the alternative 33.♘g3 was hardly more appetizing: 33...♗b2+ (stronger than 33...♗xf3+ 34.♔g2 ♔d6) 34.♗e1 (White has to go to the back rank because 34.♔e3 ♗g2 costs the knight) 34...c3 35.♗c7 (if 35.♘f5 ♗b1+! 36.♔f2 ♘xf5 37.gxf5+ ♔d6 finishes) 35...c2 36.♘f5 ♘xf3+ 37.♔f1 ♘d2+ 38.♔e2 ♘xe4 39.♔e3 ♘f2 and Black should win.

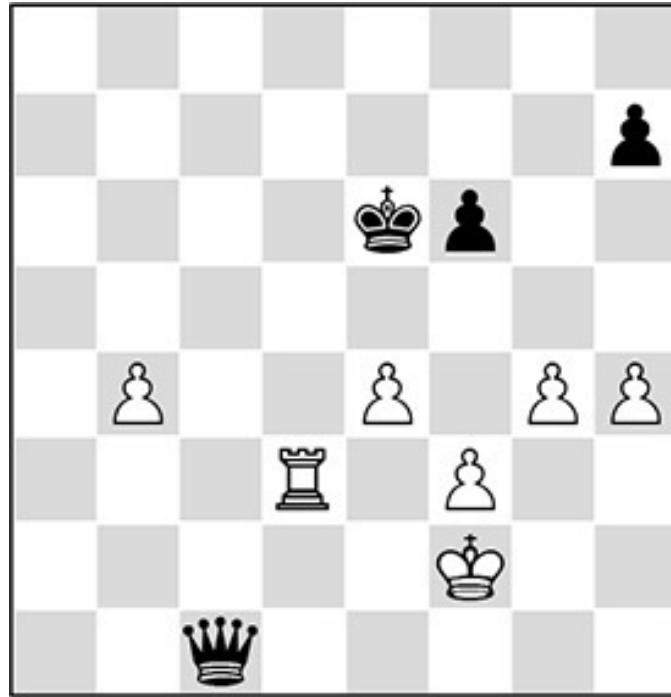
33...exd4



34. $\mathbb{Q}xh7?!$

White hopes a passed pawn will offer him counterplay, but the tempo is too important.

34. $\mathbb{Q}c7$ is tricky as the computer variation is not to be trusted: 34...c3 35. $\mathbb{Q}c6+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ (35... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}c7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 37.f4 d3 38.f5+ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ c2 40. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ even loses for Black!) 36. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ d3 37. $\mathbb{Q}d4+$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ c2 39. $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ c1 \mathbb{Q} 40. $\mathbb{Q}d3$.



analysis diagram

Komodo gives a lot of variations all scored at +2.50 for Black, the telltale sign that it does not see how to break a fortress. The rook is headed for d5 and f5, and that looks uncrackable to me. In any case, this is too close for comfort from such a dominating position.

Black has better alternatives: 34... $\mathbb{R}b2+$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ (if 35. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ c3 36. f4 $\mathbb{R}b3$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ c2 38. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ d3 Black wins) and now:

- A) 35...c3? 36. $\mathbb{R}c6+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 37. $\mathbb{R}c4$ gets the pawns stuck;
- B) 35... $\mathbb{R}xb4$ 36. g5 (36. $\mathbb{R}c6+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 37. $\mathbb{R}c5$ c3) 36...fxg5 37. hxg5 c3 38. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 39. $\mathbb{R}c8$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 40. $\mathbb{R}c5$ $\mathbb{R}b6$ 41. $\mathbb{R}c4$ d3 42. $\mathbb{R}xc3$ d2 43. $\mathbb{R}d3+$ $\mathbb{R}d6$ 44. $\mathbb{R}xd2$ $\mathbb{R}xd2-$;
- C) 35... $\mathbb{R}c2$ (this might make the pawns move slightly faster, though it is comforting to remove the b-pawn) 36. $\mathbb{R}c6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 37. $\mathbb{R}c7+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ and the pawns roll in.

34... $\mathbb{R}b2+$

I liked this move at the time, and I still like it. It seems that 34...c3 35. $\mathbb{R}c7$ d3 is good enough as well. Still, I thought there was a remote chance that an armada of white pawns might be able to fight against my rook, if I should win his rook for the passed pawns. I thought the surest course was to ultimately promote one of those pawns, even if White's rook gets to stay on the board for a while.

35. $\mathbb{Q}e1$

35. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ d3 is too easy.

35...c3 36.♖c7



36...♔e5!

Ah, that old cliché, ‘the king is a fighting piece’. Don’t forget that your king can become part of your attack in the endgame.

37.g5 fxg5 38.hxg5 ♔f4 39.♔d1

I like the variation 39.g6 ♔xf3 40.♔d1 ♔xe4 41.g7 ♔d3 42.♔e1 ♕g2 43.b5 c2 44.b6 ♕xg7, etc. Black is in no hurry to queen, systematically removing every shred of counterplay first.

39...♔e3 40.g6 ♕g2 41.♔c1 ♔d3 42.♔b1 ♔d2 43.f4 ♕xg6 44.f5 ♕g1+ 45.♔a2 c2 46.f6 c1♕ 47.♕xc1 ♔xc1 48.e5 ♕f1 49.b5 d3 0-1

Black will checkmate one move after queening.

White’s last move before the challenge diagram was actually a serious error. The rook was perfect on a6, pinning the knight. There was no need to chase after pawns! White would be no worse after most moves, e.g. 31.b5 ♕xb5 32.♘c3. Black’s extra pawn would count for little in the light of White’s activity.

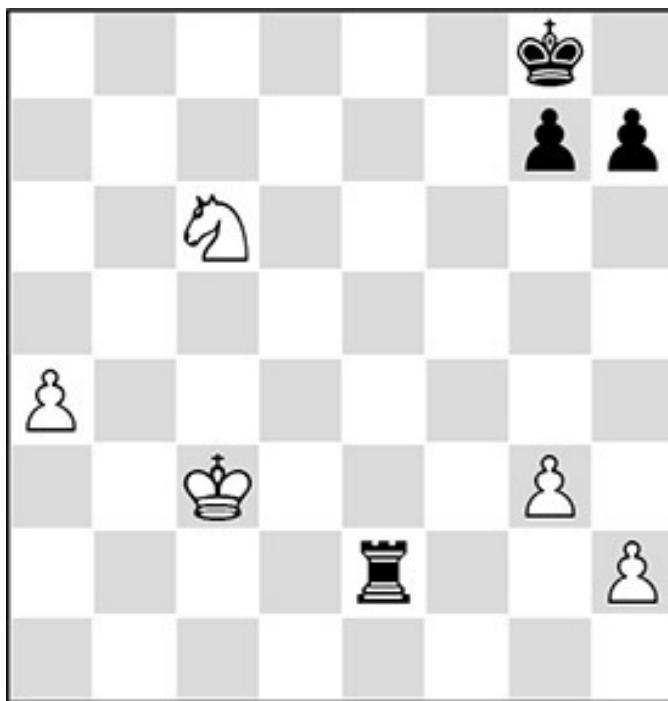
Planning

Endgames particularly lend themselves to planning because the reduced material reduces the variable, and the end of the game can often be in sight. When the planning involves a lot of calculation, too, it becomes crucial to avoid any time-wasting moves.

Game 14

Zurab Azmaiparashvili 2610
Joel Benjamin 2530
Reykjavik m 1990

1.d4 ♜f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.f3 e6 6.dxe6 fxe6 7.e3 d5 8.bxa6 ♜d6 9.♗b5+ ♜fd7
10.f4 ♜xa6 11.♗xa6 ♜xa6 12.♘f3 0-0 13.0-0 ♜b4 14.♘c3 c4 15.b3 cxb3 16.♕xb3 ♜a5
17.a3 ♜d3 18.♗d2 ♜7c5 19.♗c2 ♜a6 20.♗d4 ♜ab8 21.♗fb1 e5 22.♗f3 ♜c4 23.♗xb8
♗xb8 24.♗b1 ♜a7 25.♗a2 ♜xa2 26.♗xa2 ♜e4 27.♗f1 ♜xd2+ 28.♗xd2 ♜xe3 29.♗e2
♗xd2 30.♗xd3 ♜xf4 31.♗b4 ♜d8 32.g3 ♜g5 33.♗c6 e4+ 34.♔d4 ♜f6+ 35.♔c5 ♜e8
36.♗xd5 e3 37.♗e1 e2 38.♗c4 ♜e3 39.a4 ♜c3 40.♗xe2 ♜xe2 41.♗xc3



CHALLENGE 12

Formulate Black's winning plan from here; be as specific as possible

As in several of these positions, the time control has just been reached, and the players have time to think. Nowadays it is so much more difficult to play endgames because players are usually at sudden death by now. Still, it is important to catch your breath and assess the situation if you are coming out of a time scramble. This must be done more efficiently than ever, but if you invest some time you can always speed up later.

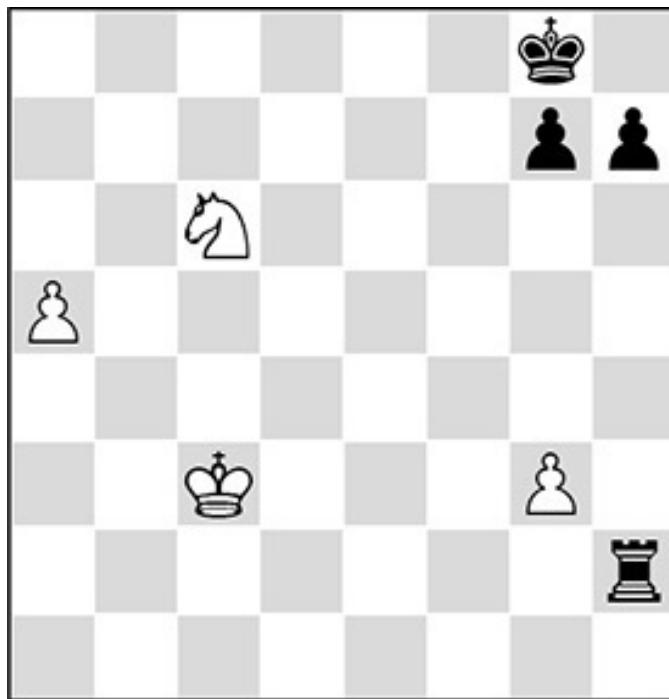
I certainly had the feeling I was winning here but I could see the position had to be approached *concretely*. Timing tends to be critical in positions with unrestrained passed pawns. I needed to find the correct plan and not waste any

moves.

41... ♜xh2!

Sometimes greed does pay! It seems prudent to introduce the king into the game with 41... ♔f7, but this only makes sense if the king has time to impact the proceedings. After 42.a5 ♕e8 (42... ♕e6?? 43.♘d4+) 43.a6 ♔d7 44.a7 ♜a2, now White has a surprising draw: 45.♔b3! ♜a1 46.♔b2!=. You might have missed this trick if your visualization skills are not strong. You can only ask of yourself that you make your best effort. However, if you blew it because you stopped your analysis one move too early, good lesson learned! Perhaps worst of all would be playing 41... ♔f7 on the basis that it must be useful, without any analysis or planning.

42.a5



42... ♜h6!

The plan is to take the white pawns, but we still have to focus on the details. The knight is optimally placed so Black needs to chase it away. Failure to include this finesse would cost Black a vital tempo.

43.♘b8

This is the best chance, as 43.♘b4? ♜h5 44.a6 ♜a5 completely neutralizes the a-pawn.

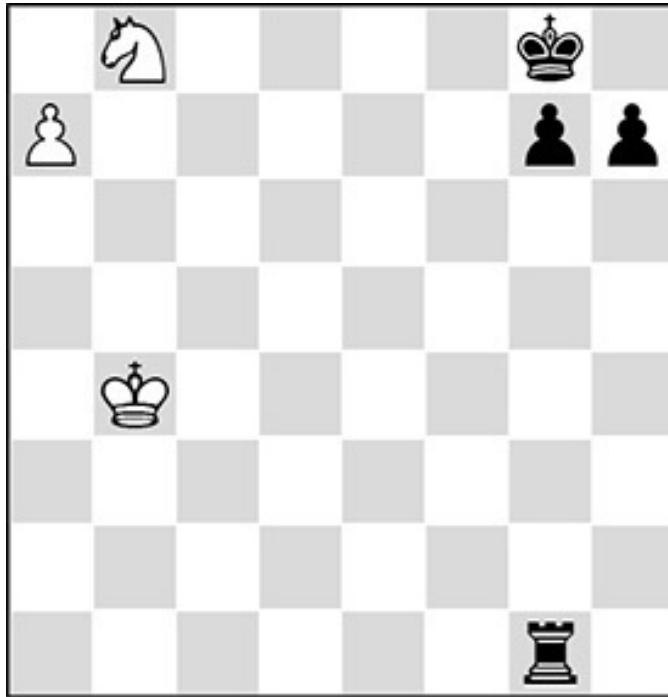
43... ♜g6 44.a6 ♜xg3+ 45.♔b4

White can't keep the rook from getting behind the pawn: if 45.♔b2 ♜g5 46.♘c6 ♜b5+ 47.♔a3 ♜b6 48.a7 ♜a6+ 49.♔b4 h5 50.♔b5 ♜xa7 51.♘xa7

h4 wins as in the game.

45... $\mathbb{N}g1$ 46.a7

46. $\mathbb{N}c6$ $\mathbb{N}b1+!$ 47. $\mathbb{K}c5$ h5 48.a7 $\mathbb{N}a1$ doesn't change anything.



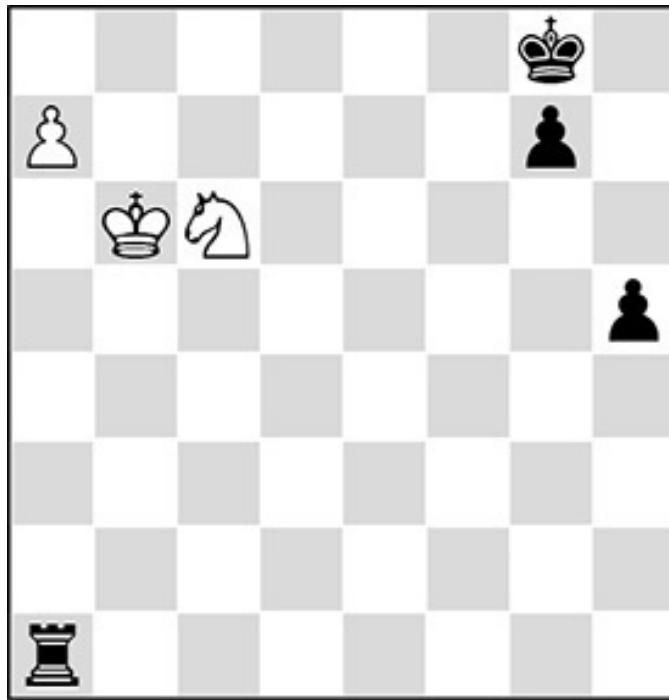
46... $\mathbb{N}b1+!$

The key move, winning an important tempo. You may not have calculated this from the beginning, but there is no excuse for not finding this move at this moment. In an endgame race, every tempo is critical, and you need to get the best version you possibly can. 46... $\mathbb{N}a1?$ 47. $\mathbb{N}c6$ forces Black to sacrifice right away because of the threat of 48. $\mathbb{N}a5$.

47. $\mathbb{K}c5$ $\mathbb{N}a1$ 48. $\mathbb{N}c6$

48. $\mathbb{K}b6$ threatens the sneaky 49. $\mathbb{N}a6$, but doesn't gain any time after 48... $\mathbb{N}xa7$ because the knight will still have to run back.

48... h5 49. $\mathbb{K}b6$



49... ♜xa7!

Not allowing 50.♘a5, of course! Now White has to displace one of his pieces to capture.

50.♕xa7 h4 51.♘e5 h3 52.♘f3

Or 52.♘g4 ♛f7 53.♔b6 ♛e6 54.♔c5 ♛f5+.

Azmai at least sets a trap – 52... ♛f7?? 53.♘g5+=.

52...g5 53.♘h2 ♛f7 54.♔b6 ♛e6 55.♔c5 ♛e5 56.♔c4 ♛f4 57.♔d3 g4

57... ♛g3 also does the trick.

58.♔e2 g3 59.♘f1 h2

Of course not 59...g2?? 60.♔f2=. But now White resigned.

I'm not sure if my method was the only way to win, but it gave me a clear path to the finish. The key was to avoid a casual move that might not fit the winning plan.

Endgame theory

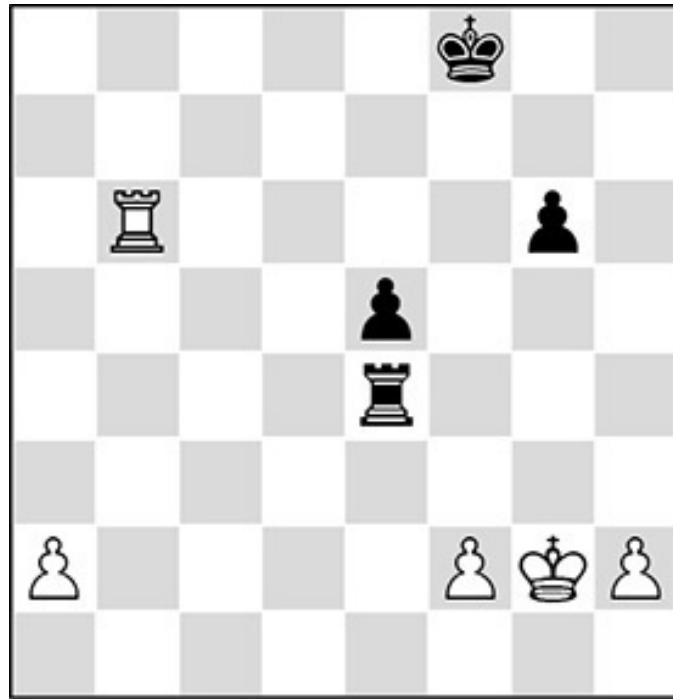
Planning can be affected and augmented by positions known to theory that may pop up along the way. Just like studying opening theory can steer you in that phase, knowing something about thematic positions can guide your decision-making in endgames.

Game 15

Vladimir Belous	2587
Zhansaya Abdumalik	2420

St Louis 2017 (5)

1. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2. $c4$ $c5$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $d5$ 4. $cxd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 5. $g3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $g6$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $e6$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}ge4$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 10. $d3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 13. $0-0$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $f6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 16. $b4$ $cxb4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $bxcc3$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}fc1$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}g5+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 25. $e4$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 26. $gxsf4$ $fxg5$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 28. $fxg5$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $e5$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}ac1$ $b6$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5+$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}h8+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}xf8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}b7$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$



CHALLENGE 13

What should White play and why?

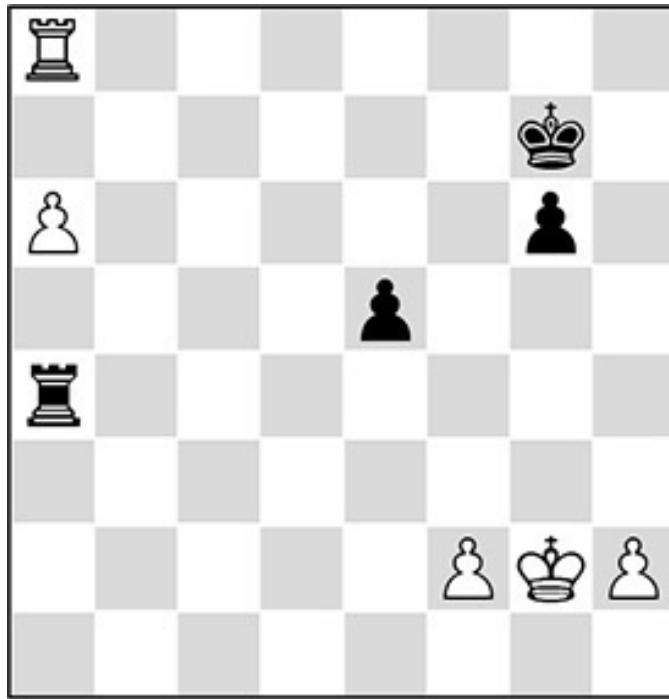
If White continues in chopping style, he can reach a position two pawns up after 45. $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$. This is where knowledge of special endgames comes in handy. While a solid two pawns to none advantage almost always wins in a rook endgame, the h- and f-pawns produce a theoretical draw. Even if White doesn't know how to play that endgame properly, it still helps to know that it is not a guaranteed win. I suspect that in a game between evenly-rated amateurs, White might win more often than not. But it is enough to suggest looking in a different direction.

Using a little planning and vision, Belous decided his best chances lay elsewhere.

45. $\mathbb{Q}a6$

White preserves the a-pawn, but still has to work out what to do with it. He can push it all the way to a7, which will keep Black's rook pinned to the a-file. Pawns should only be advanced that far if you can find your way to a promotion tactic, because the king cannot directly help queen the pawn on a7 as it will never be able to hide there.

45... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 46.a4 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}a7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}a8$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 49.a5 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 50.a6

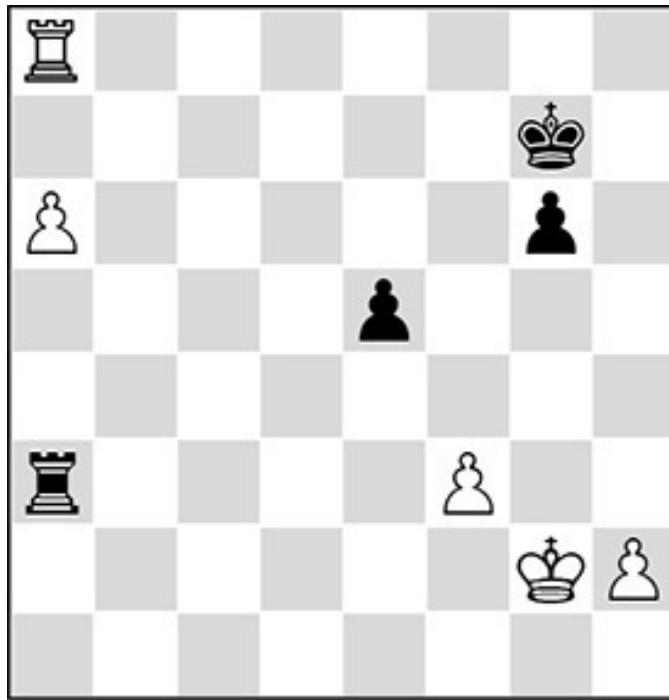


50... $\mathbb{Q}a3$

I love showing games in camps because every time I learn something new. A good question can alert me to a nuance I should show to future classes, but sometimes I find that my basic assumptions about a game are just wrong. At the ICA camp in New Jersey, I discovered that White's progress was hardly inexorable, and Black probably missed two draws along the way, beginning here with 50...e4. It is a bit counterintuitive to advance the pawn, as it seems harder to protect as it moves up the board. The real issue is that Black must avoid the zugzwang that happens in the game.

51. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}a2$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 53.a7 (White must unfortunately advance to proceed with the king) 53... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 55. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 56. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 57. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 58. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}a1$ 59. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 60. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ and I don't see what White can accomplish here. If White tries instead 51. $\mathbb{Q}g3$, 51...g5! walls in his king. 52. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ e3+ and 52. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}a1$ are dead ends. Black can shuffle his king between h7 and g7 so there can be no zugzwang.

51.f3

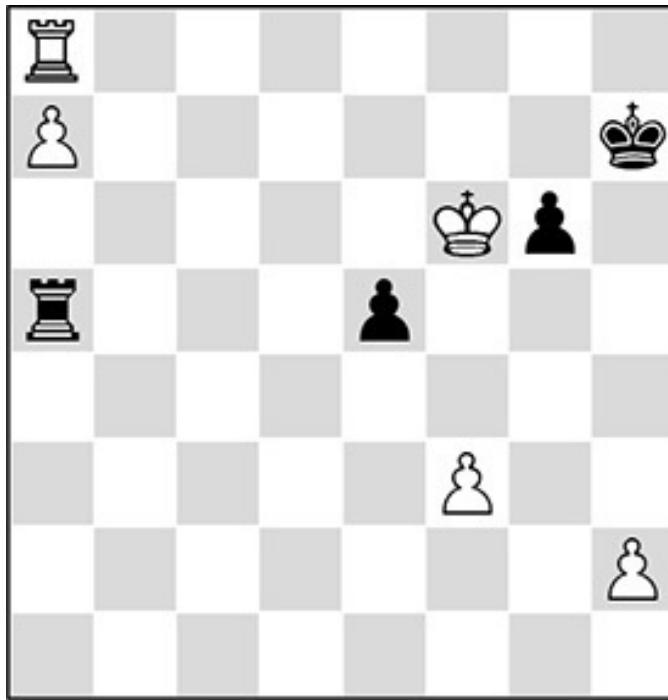


51... $\mathbb{Q}h7?$

51... $\mathbb{Q}a2+$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ (52. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}a1+$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}a2+$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xh2$ 55. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}e2+$ 56. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 57.a7 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ is a dead draw) 52... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 53.a7 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 54.h4 $\mathbb{Q}h7$ produces a frustrating position for White. He would win if he could make the rook move but he cannot. If he could swap the h- and g-pawns he would achieve the winning zugzwang, as Alex Stripunsky pointed out to me, but he cannot do that either! 55.h5 gxh5 56. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}a5!$ holds.

Only now Black is without resources.

52.a7 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 55. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 56. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 57. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 58. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 59. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 60. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}a2$ 61. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}b2+$ 62. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{Q}a2$ 63. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 64. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 65. $\mathbb{Q}f6$



It is important to look for zugzwang when your opponent's options are limited. The e-pawn falls, leaving one last thing for White to foresee.

65... ♕a6+ 66. ♔xe5 ♕g7 67. ♔f4 ♕a4+ 68. ♕g3 ♕h7 69. h4 ♕g7 70. f4 ♕a3+ 71. ♕g4 ♕a5 72. h5 gxh5+

In classes I often ask students how to answer 72... ♕xh5, and am dismayed to hear 73. ♕g8+?!. Why play queen vs rook when you can have a rook against nothing (73. ♕b8, for example)?

73. ♕h4 ♕h7 74. f5

Black played for another ten moves but the end is clear. 74... ♕g7 75. f6+ ♕f7 76. ♕h8 wins the rook with a skewer.

This ending was so difficult for me to work out because the engine assessed so many positions completely incorrectly. It just couldn't appreciate any of the fortress positions. [I checked it on Fritz and Rybka, too, so Komodo's feelings wouldn't be hurt.] Of course this makes no difference during the game, but it struck me that people analyzing this game on their own would miss so many nuances. I, too, became complacent when the computer did not show any red flags.

So it's hard to make the final verdict on the challenge diagram. I can't say 45. ♕xg6 is wrong, because Black could certainly make a mistake in ♕+f+h vs ♕. I've never played this ending, so I checked it on the tablebase. There are a few moments where Black has a forced move or has to avoid certain plausible moves, but most of the defense involves waiting.

All in all, I think the chances are a little better that Black will go wrong as she did in the game. Also, Belous might well have thought that he was winning by force in the game. In any case, knowing some endgame theory enabled him to make a more informed decision.

Understanding endgame principles is terribly important, but applying them properly to the given situation without prejudice is essential for endgame excellence.

Game 16

Joel Benjamin 2581
Gennady 2504
Zaichik

Philadelphia 2001 (8)

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.♗c4 ♘f6 4.d3 ♗c6 5.c3 d5 6.exd5 ♗xd5 7.0-0 e6 8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4 ♗e7
10.♘c3 0-0 11.♖e1 ♘f6 12.a3 b6 13.d5 exd5 14.♘xd5 ♗xd5 15.♗xd5 ♗b7 16.♗h5 ♗d6
17.♗g5 ♗g6 18.♗xg6 hxg6 19.♗f4 ♗xg5 20.♗xg5 ♗fe8 21.♖ad1 ♗xe1+ 22.♖xe1 ♗c8
23.h3 ♗f8 24.♖d1 ♗e5 25.♗b3 ♗a6 26.♗d2 ♗d3 27.♗c3 g5 28.♗d2 ♗c5 29.♗c2 ♗b5
30.♗f5 ♗e8 31.f3 ♗g8 32.b4 ♗e6 33.♗f2 ♗d8 34.♖xd8+ ♗xd8 35.♔e3 ♗c6 36.♗d3 ♗a4
37.♗e4 ♗b3 38.b5 ♗e7 39.♗e5 f6 40.♗b8 ♗c8 41.♗d4 ♗f7



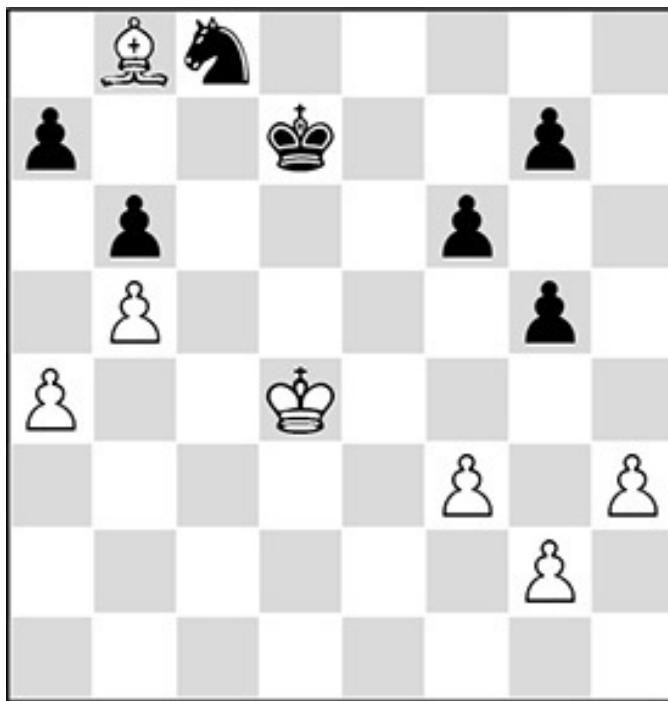
CHALLENGE 14

How should White continue? Is it favorable to exchange the light-squared bishops?

White stands clearly better here. Two bishops tend to reign in the endgame, especially in positions like this, with pawns on both wings and an open center to travel through. The best asset is the juicy target on a7. White has a bishop to attack it, and Black can only defend it passively with a knight on c8.

But we still have to proceed. The obvious continuation 42. $\text{e}4$ $\text{e}7$ 43. $\text{b}7$ $\text{d}7$ does not win the pawn because 44. $\text{xc}8+$ $\text{xc}8$ 45. $\text{xa}7$ $\text{b}7$ traps the bishop. The answer to the second part of the challenge suggests the answer to the first: the bishop swap is very favorable. The dogmatist in you may not want to give up the bishop pair, but part of its value is in facilitating a trade to create or accentuate weaknesses. The bishop swap works because it leaves Black with fewer pieces to move. The knight is stuck, and having only king moves leaves Black vulnerable to zugzwang.

42. ♕f5 ♔e6 43. ♕xe6+ ♔xe6 44.a4 ♔d7



Right now the board is still too closed for White to penetrate. Everyone has heard about creating a second front to break down the defense. The defender has a short-range knight, so White should stretch the board as much as possible.

45.f4

This is clearly the right way to start cracking the kingside. The outside pawns will be hardest for Black to deal with. If you wouldn't play this move because it undoubles Black's pawns, consider that overly stubborn adherence to rules will deter you from almost any action.

45...gxf4 46. fxf4 e6 47. b8 e7 48. d5 d7 49. h4 e7+ 50. e4 c8

50... $\mathbb{B}c8$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ and White can effect a decisive zugzwang after 53. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 54.h5 or 53. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 54.h5. It is always a good idea to be alert to favorable liquidations into the pawn endings.

51.h5 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 52.g4 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 55. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$



56.g5! $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 57. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$

Pawn exchanges often favor the weaker side in endgames, so they need to be done with a purpose. I've traded almost all the pawns, but now I have a second juicy target that my bishop can attack.

57... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 58. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 59. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 60. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 1-0

The return of the king to the center ends resistance, as the g7-pawn drops after 60... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 61. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7+$ 62. $\mathbb{Q}e4$. Each step in the plan increased the power of the bishop to the point where White could win without anything to calculate.

In endgames, we shouldn't be satisfied with simply being ahead, but must gauge which types of advantages are most conducive to victory. The process involves combining our general endgame knowledge with what we can work out over the board.

Game 17

Joel Benjamin 2320

Jeremy Silman 2370

Lone Pine 1979 (9)

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.b3 e5 4.c3 ♘f6 5.♗b5 ♘e7 6.0-0 0-0 7.d4 exd4 8.e5 ♘d5 9.cxd4 cxd4 10.♔b2 ♘c7 11.♕xc6 dxc6 12.♘xd4 c5 13.♘c2 ♕xd1 14.♖xd1 ♘e6 15.♘c3 ♕fd8 16.♘e3 f6 17.♘e4 fxe5 18.♕xe5 ♘b5 19.f4 ♘d4 20.♗f2 ♘f5 21.♘xf5 ♕xf5 22.♘f3 ♕d7 23.♘d6 ♘g6? 24.♘c8! ♕xd1 25.♘xe7+ ♔f7 26.♕xd1 ♕xe7



CHALLENGE 15

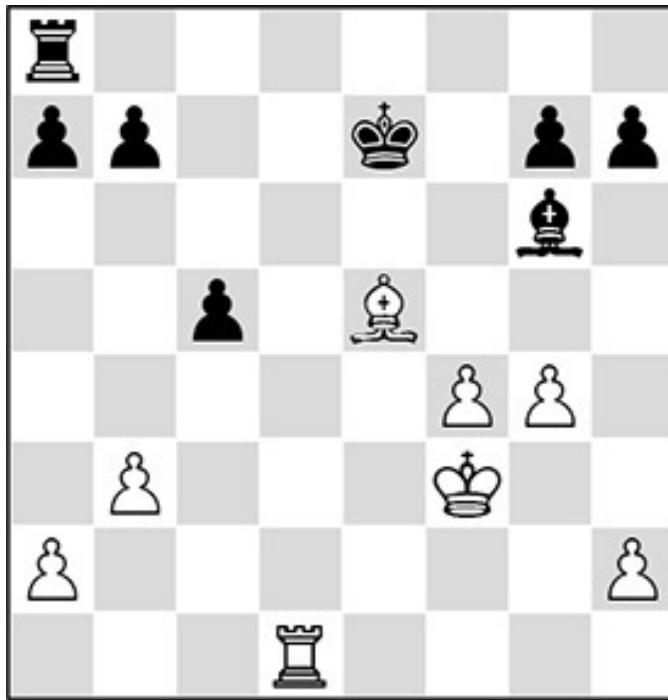
How should White continue?

White obviously has the potential to win a pawn, but this is a time we have to curb our impulses to grab. The simplest way is 27.♔d6+ ♘f6 28.♕xc5 ♘e8 but with just a fundamental understanding of bishops of opposite colors we know that White will not have an easy time winning.

It is strategically more desirable to win the g7-pawn. Then White establishes a two-pawn majority on the kingside which will be much more difficult to blockade. But 27.♔xg7 doesn't work because of 27...♔h5+! (27...♖g8 28.♖e1+) 28.g4 ♘xg4+ 29.♔xg4 ♖g8. White has greater activity but hasn't won any material.

27.g4!

Now I am in a position to win a pawn much more favorably.



27... ♕d8

Black has no good way to protect the g7-pawn. 27... ♕g8 28. ♔d6+ pockets the c-pawn, but also leaves the black pieces so disorganized that more losses are soon to follow. So Silman at least manages to trade rooks, generally a good idea in opposite-colored bishop endings because blockades are much harder to break down without the presence of rooks.

28. ♜xd8 ♕xd8 29.f5 ♕f7 30. ♔xg7 c4

Here it also makes sense to trade pawns when behind.

31.bxc4

White has an interesting choice here. To be confident of winning, I need to keep something on the queenside. 31.b4 c3 32.a3 (32. ♔xc3 ♕xa2 and compared to the game, I have a more ‘queenable’ b-pawn, but it is also easier to exchange) 32...c2 33. ♔b2 may be the best, but I was concerned about letting a pawn go all the way to the seventh.

31... ♔xc4 32.a3 ♕e7

The first step is to advance the pawns without getting them blockaded.

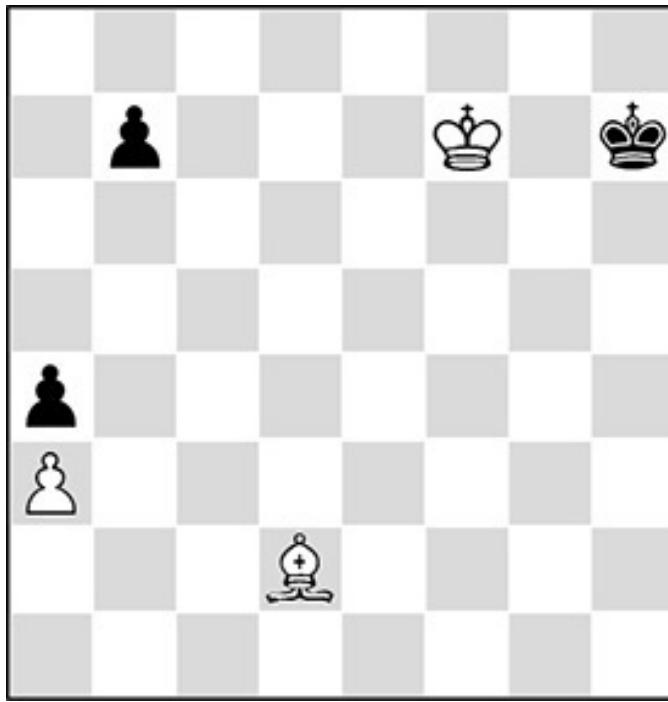
33.h4 ♔b3 34.h5

Not 34.g5? ♔d1+.

34... ♔d1+ 35. ♔f4 ♕f7 36.h6 a5 37. ♔c3 a4 38.g5 ♔c2 39.g6+ ♕g8

Of course not 39...hxg6 40.h7.

40. ♔g5 ♔b1 41. ♔f6 ♔c2 42. ♔d2 ♔d3 43.gxh7+ ♕xh7 44. ♔e6 ♔g8 45.f6 ♔c4+ 46. ♔e7 ♔b3 47.f7+ ♔xf7 48.h7+ ♕xh7 49. ♔xf7



I had to recognize I have the wrong bishop and wrong pawn combination here. If I waltz my king to his pawns, he will park his king on a8 and laugh. But the typical stalemating technique converts my a-pawn into a winner.

49... ♜h8 50. ♜c3+ ♜h7 51. ♜g7 b6 52. ♜f8 ♜h8 53. ♜h6 ♜h7 54. ♜g7 b5 55. ♜f8 1-0

Don't rush; value pawn moves

Every pawn move can potentially create a weakness, but each pawn push must be scrutinized even more in the endgame. A pawn move that gives up a reserve tempo or occupies an important square can impact a game permanently. I found out the hard way how an innocent pawn move can wreck your chances.

Game 18

Nick De 2605

Firmian

Joel Benjamin 2595

Denver ch-USA 1998 (4)

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♜g7 3.♘c3 d6 4.f4 ♜c6 5.♗e3 ♜f6 6.h3 e6 7.g4 0-0 8.♗g2 ♜e7 9.♕d2 b6
 10.♗ge2 ♜b7 11.0-0 c5 12.♗ad1 ♛c8 13.♘g3 cxd4 14.♗xd4 ♜c6 15.♗f2 ♜a6 16.♗fe1
 ♜d8 17.♘ce2 ♛c7 18.♗d4 ♜xd4 19.♗xd4 e5 20.♗c3 exf4 21.♗xf4 ♜e8 22.♗xg7 ♜xg7
 23.c3 ♜e6 24.♗e3 ♛ac8 25.♗f5 ♜b7 26.♗d4 ♛c5 27.♗xe6 fxe6 28.♗xc5 dxc5 29.♗f2 ♜f7
 30.♗e3 g5 31.♗f3 h6 32.♗xd8 ♛xd8 33.♗d1 ♛xd1 34.♗xd1 ♛f6 35.c4 ♛e5 36.♗c2 ♛c6
 37.a4



CHALLENGE 16

Formulate a plan to try to win for Black

This was a rather important game for me – I needed to win to send the final into a playoff. I felt my opponent had played a bit nervously over the last several moves, trading a lot of pieces while watching all his pawns get fixed on light squares. With so many targets, any king penetration should win the game for Black, but the position may be too blocked to get anywhere.

37...a6?

If the position had been winnable, I would have thrown in an extra question mark. I was due to get more thinking time in four moves, so I could have just maneuvered my bishop around for a few moves. Moreover, White would have a nervous time looking for tricks while deciding where to move his bishop. I guess I got caught up in the moment, perhaps wanting to make something happen during the last few moves of a time scramble. And besides, how can this move hurt?

38.b3 b5



39.a5!

Oh man, Nick totally slimed me! Now there is no hope of getting my king in anywhere.

39...bxc4 40.bxc4 ♜e8 41.♔d1 ♜c6 42.♔c2 ♜a8 43.♔d3 ♜b7 44.♔b1 ♜c8 45.♔c2 ♜d7
46.♔b3 ♜f6 47.♔c2 ♜c6 48.♔d1 ½-½

There is only one way to combat the plan of closing the queenside – I have to bring my king over there. But once I put my pawn on a6, there is no way to get my king to a5.

The right way to proceed is 37...♚d6 38.b3 e5! (38...♚c7 39.e5! ♜g2 40.♔g6 ♜xh3 41.♔f3=) 39.♔d3 ♚c7 40.♔c3 ♜b7 41.♔d3 ♜a6 42.♔c2 ♜a5 43.♔d3 a6 44.♔c2 b5 45.axb5 axb5.



analysis diagram

It looks like White is holding solidly with 46. $\mathbb{Q}b1!$ $bxc4$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ (48. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ is okay as well) 48... $\mathbb{Q}b5+$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}d5$, etc. But at least there is a chance to go wrong. 46. $\mathbb{Q}d3??$ $bxc4$ 47. $bxc4$ (47. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}b5+$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ c4+) 47... $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}c2+$ $\mathbb{Q}a3$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}a4$ and the black king will be able to crawl through to the other side, thanks to repeated zugzwangs. I still would have liked to get that far. Whenever you have a chance to pressure the opponent, there's always a possibility something good will happen.

Pursuing small advantages

'Playing for two results' is a phrase we hear a lot in contemporary chess. It describes a situation where you might not win, but you can hardly lose, except in the case of a gross blunder. You can imagine why grandmasters enjoy these situations. A lot of stress is eliminated when you aren't risking a zero.

Conversely, you would want to avoid being on the other side, unless the potential for a draw is high and the path not terribly onerous.

But ordinary chess players don't appreciate these situations as much.

Prosecuting small advantages can be hard work, and not so much fun. Still, as long as you can create problems for your opponent with no risk, accepting a draw would be giving something away.

Game 19

Aaron Pixton 2449

Joel 2587

Benjamin

Seattle ch-USA 2003 (3)

1.d4 $\mathbb{N}f6$ 2. $\mathbb{N}g5$ g6 3. $\mathbb{N}xf6$ exf6 4.c4 $\mathbb{N}g7$ 5. $\mathbb{N}c3$ 0-0 6.g3 f5 7.e3 c5 8. $\mathbb{N}ge2$ cxd4 9.exd4
 $\mathbb{N}c6$ 10. $\mathbb{N}d2$ $\mathbb{N}e8$ 11.0-0 d6 12. $\mathbb{N}g2$ f4 13. $\mathbb{N}xf4$ $\mathbb{N}a5$ 14. $\mathbb{N}d5$ $\mathbb{N}e6$ 15. $\mathbb{N}xe6$ $\mathbb{N}xe6$ 16. $\mathbb{N}d2$
 $\mathbb{N}ee8$ 17.f4 $\mathbb{N}ac8$ 18. $\mathbb{N}b1$ $\mathbb{N}b4$ 19.b3 $\mathbb{N}f5+$ 20. $\mathbb{N}b2$ a6 21.a3 $\mathbb{N}c6$ 22.d5 $\mathbb{N}a5$ 23. $\mathbb{N}d4$ $\mathbb{N}d7$
24. $\mathbb{N}he1$ $\mathbb{N}xc4$ 25. $\mathbb{N}xe8+$ $\mathbb{N}xe8$ 26. $\mathbb{N}e2$ $\mathbb{N}xe2+$ 27. $\mathbb{N}dxe2$ $\mathbb{N}e4$ 28. $\mathbb{N}c2$ $\mathbb{N}e3$ 29. $\mathbb{N}f1$ f5
30. $\mathbb{N}d2$ $\mathbb{N}e8$ 31. $\mathbb{N}b1$ $\mathbb{N}f7$ 32. $\mathbb{N}d3$ $\mathbb{N}c8$ 33. $\mathbb{N}d4$ $\mathbb{N}f6$ 34. $\mathbb{N}ce2$ b5 35. $\mathbb{N}c1$ $\mathbb{N}c5$ 36.b4 $\mathbb{N}xc1$
37. $\mathbb{N}xc1$ $\mathbb{N}c4$ 38. $\mathbb{N}e6$ $\mathbb{N}b2$ 39. $\mathbb{N}c2$ $\mathbb{N}xc1$ 40. $\mathbb{N}xc1$ $\mathbb{N}e7$ 41. $\mathbb{N}c7$



We start with another position right after the first time control. Black seems close to winning a pawn, but there are a lot of obstacles before I can enjoy any real winning chances. I was highly motivated for a number of reasons – the need to pile up points in the Swiss System event, and stubborn pride in not wanting to let my lower-rated and less experienced opponent nick me for a draw. Desire won't get you a full point in itself, but it can keep you looking. I am always frustrated to hear that frequent excuse for accepting a draw – 'I didn't see how to win.' But if you can see any progress at all, keep going. There isn't anything to lose here.

41... $\mathbb{N}d7$ 42. $\mathbb{N}e6$

42. $\mathbb{N}xa6$ $\mathbb{N}c8$ traps the knight. This will be a recurring theme.

42... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}d2$

After 45. $\mathbb{Q}f8+?$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ Black wins a pawn in a more meaningful way.

45... $\mathbb{Q}c4+$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$



48. $\mathbb{Q}g5$

Since White is in killing time mode anyway, it's smart to force Black to commit the h-pawn and weaken g6.

48... $h6$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}e6+$

Again the pawn isn't really *en prise* – 51. $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ – but it seems Black is spinning his wheels.

51... $\mathbb{Q}e8!$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}c7+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$

White finds himself in a mini zugzwang here; he has to play some move he doesn't like. It won't necessarily be enough to change the result, but when you have to choose between unpleasant moves, you might make the wrong call.

53. $h3?$

Of course the pawn is taboo again – 53. $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ – but weakening the pawns complicates White's task considerably. I don't see a way forward after 53. $\mathbb{Q}d3$, e.g. 53... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ (54... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 55. $h3$ and Black is not able to take kingside pawns fast enough) 55. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 56. $\mathbb{Q}d3$, etc.

53... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}e6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 55. $\mathbb{Q}c7+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$



56.g4?

This error will be decisive. Another wrong path is 56.h4 h5! (*zugzwang* again) 57. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ and Black can win directly with 57... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 58. $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 59. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 60. $\mathbb{Q}f8+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 61. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ 62. $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 63. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$, or more aesthetically with 57... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 58. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}e8!$ 59. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ (59. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6+$ 60. $dxe6$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 61. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7-$) 59... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 60. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 61. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 62. $\mathbb{Q}c7+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 63. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}xg3$. In both variations White can never take on either a6 or g6 without getting the knight trapped. Black should be able to regroup and win with two pawns relatively easily.

Only with 56. $\mathbb{Q}d3!$ can White put up resistance. 56... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 57. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 58. $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ 59. $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{Q}e2+$ 60. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 61. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}a2$ 62. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ allows Black to keep squeezing for the win, but with good drawing chances for White.

56...fxg4 57.hxg4 h5

The outside passed pawn is a big problem for White. Now Black is winning without more mistakes.

58.g5 h4 59. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 60. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ h3 61. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 62. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 63. $\mathbb{Q}f8+$



63... $\mathbb{Q}e7$

The computer tells me 63... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 64. $\mathbb{N}xg6$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ is an easy win, and while I won't dispute the evaluation, it looks much too messy for my taste. I preferred to completely neutralize White's counterplay, certain I would always have enough pawns left to win.

64. $\mathbb{N}xg6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 65. $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 66. $\mathbb{Q}h4+$

66. $\mathbb{N}f8$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4+$ 67. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ d5–+.

66... $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 67.g6 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 68.g7 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 69. $\mathbb{Q}f3+$

With 69. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 70. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 71. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 72. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ White will resist for some time, but you can generally feel confident about winning a knight ending with two clear extra pawns.

69... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 70. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 71. $\mathbb{Q}e6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 72. $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 73. $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 74. $\mathbb{Q}c7+$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 75. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 76. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 77. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ b4 78. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 79. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ d5 80. $\mathbb{Q}a8$ $\mathbb{Q}e3+$ 81. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ b3 82. $\mathbb{Q}b6+$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 0-1

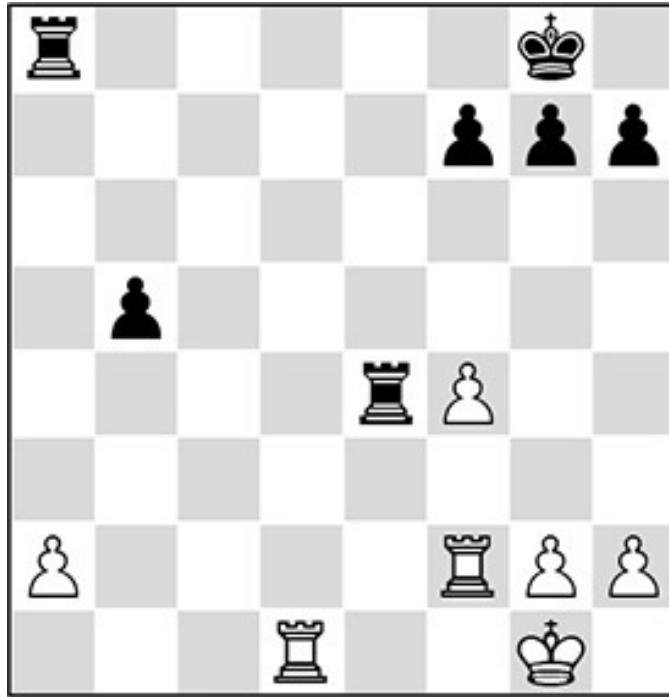
Game 20

Robert Hungaski 2507

Joel Benjamin 2552

USA tt 2011 (8)

1.c4 e6 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 3.e3 b6 4.b3 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ d5 6. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ a6 7.d4 $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 0-0
 10.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ dxc4 12. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 13.e4 b5 14. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ e5 15. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ c5 16.dxe5 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$
 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 19.f4 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ c4 21.bxc4 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$
 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 25.cxb5 axb5 26. $\mathbb{Q}f2$



Here we have a rook ending with equal pawns. One wouldn't expect to see much more in a grandmaster game, but my team needed a win so I wanted very much to drum something up. But how?

26...h5!

This move doesn't change the evaluation, but gives White a little something to be concerned about.

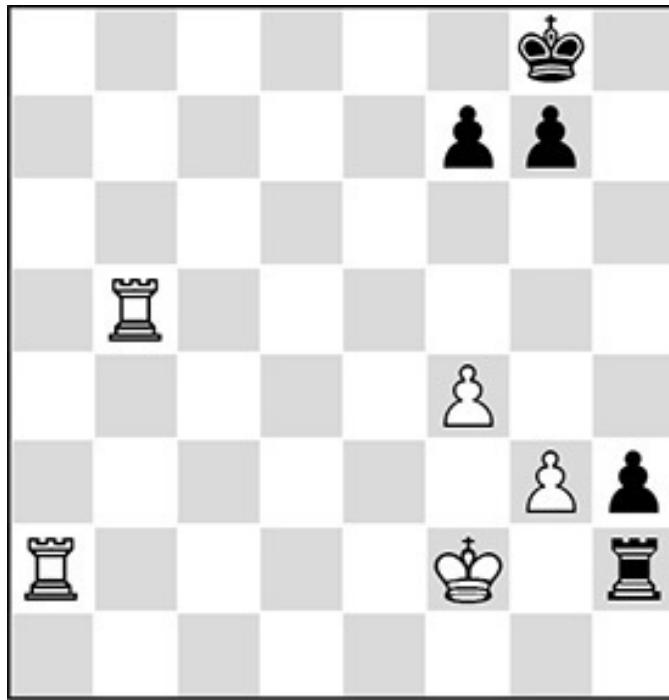
27.g3 h4 28.♖d3

Almost any continuation is good enough for a draw, but 28.♗g2 hxg3 29.hxg3 ♜a3 30.♗h3 would not even allow me to create a weakness.

28...h3! 29.♗b2 ♜e1+ 30.♗f2 ♜a1 31.♗db3

31.♗dd2 ♜a3 32.♗xb5 ♜3xa2 33.♗bb2 ♜a3 is also drawish but White still has to give up the h-pawn.

31...♜8xa2 32.♗xb5 ♜h1 33.♗xa2 ♜xh2+



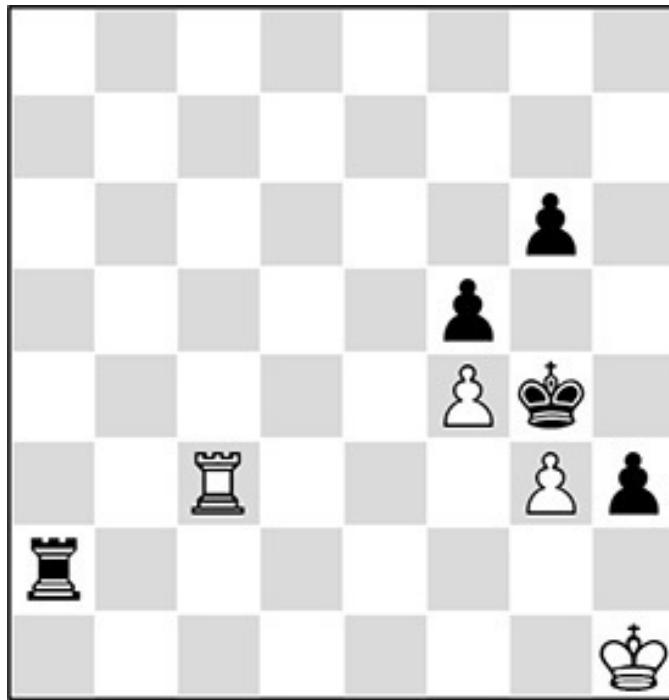
34. ♜g1?

This is the first moment where White has a serious disadvantage. This will not be the last example in the book of a king retreat to the back rank causing problems. The active king move should be the ‘default’ to be played unless you can prove that ♜g1 is better! White can draw easily after 34. ♜f3 ♕xa2 35. ♜g4 h2 36. ♜b1 f6 37. ♜h3 ♜f7 38. ♜h1 ♜g6 (38...g5 39.fxg5 fxg5 40.g4=) 39. ♜xh2 ♜xh2+ 40. ♜xh2. There are no real winning chances in the pawn endgame.

34... ♕xa2 35. ♜h1 ♜g2 36. ♜g5

White has the difficult decision of where to put the rook. In practice, any time you force your opponent to make a decision there is the obvious possibility that they may go the wrong way.

It seems White can draw with both methods, but only after precise play. The alternative was 36. ♜b3 g6 37. ♜c3 ♜g7 38. ♜a3 f5 39. ♜b3 ♜h6 40. ♜a3 ♜h5 41. ♜b3 ♜a2 42. ♜c3 ♜g4.



analysis diagram

A) 43. \mathbb{R} c6 \mathbb{Q} xg3 44. \mathbb{R} xg6+ \mathbb{Q} xf4 is winning for Black, according to the tablebase;

B) 43. \mathbb{R} b3! and now:

B1) 43... \mathbb{R} f2 44. \mathbb{R} c3 \mathbb{R} f3 45. \mathbb{R} c6 \mathbb{Q} xg3 46. \mathbb{R} xg6+ \mathbb{Q} xf4 47. \mathbb{Q} h2 is similar;

B2) 43...h2 sets up some stalemating possibilities that will do the job:

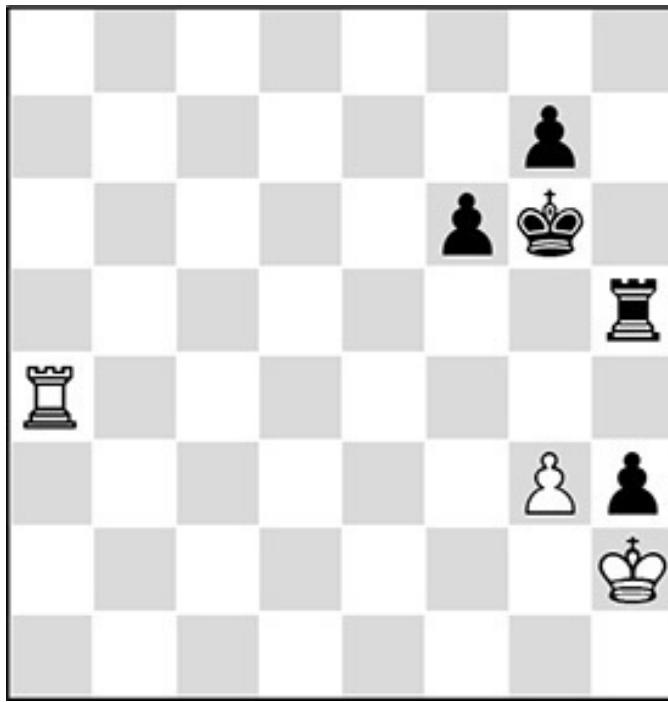
44. \mathbb{R} c3 \mathbb{R} e2 45. \mathbb{R} a3 \mathbb{Q} h3 46. g4+ \mathbb{Q} xg4 47. \mathbb{R} g3+ \mathbb{Q} xf4 48. \mathbb{R} f3+ \mathbb{Q} e4
49. \mathbb{R} f4+ \mathbb{Q} e3 50. \mathbb{R} f3+ \mathbb{Q} d2 51. \mathbb{R} d3+ \mathbb{Q} e1 52. \mathbb{R} d1+ \mathbb{Q} f2 53. \mathbb{R} f1+, etc.;

B3) 43... \mathbb{R} g2 44. \mathbb{R} b6 \mathbb{R} xg3 (44... \mathbb{Q} xg3 45. \mathbb{R} b3+? \mathbb{Q} g4 46. \mathbb{R} xh3 \mathbb{R} g1+!) loses but 45. \mathbb{R} xg6+ \mathbb{Q} xf4 46. \mathbb{R} h6 is a tablebase draw) 45. \mathbb{R} xg6+ \mathbb{Q} xf4 and White is supposed to hold. Of course, the tablebase result is not guaranteed in human play.

$36\ldots \mathbb{f}6$ 37. $\mathbb{R}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 38. $\mathbb{f}5$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 39. $\mathbb{R}g6$ $\mathbb{R}f2$ 40. $\mathbb{R}g4$

It's not the sort of mistake a grandmaster would make, but the I-must-protect-my-pawn 40.g4?? buries the rook and loses by zugzwang after 40... \mathbb{R} g2 or 40...h2.

40... $\mathbb{R}xf5$ 41. $\mathbb{R}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{R}h5$ 43. $\mathbb{R}a4$



Sigh. After all that, I can't make further progress with my rook tied down to the h-pawn. I tried, of course, but conceded the draw on move 117.

The missing piece of the puzzle

Then there are situations when you have a clear advantage, but the way forward is not easy. You may have some moves to get your bearings, but eventually you have to find the way forward. If you succeed, the chances are good that the opponent will get frustrated, spooked, or simply worn out.

Game 21

Joel 2534

Benjamin

John Bryant 2442

St Louis ch-USA 2013 (7)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 d6 5.♗xc6+ bxc6 6.d4 exd4 7.♗xd4 ♗e7 8.e5 dxe5
 9.♗xd8+ ♗xd8 10.♗xe5 ♗b7 11.c4 0-0 12.♗c3 ♗e7 13.♗e3 a5 14.♗a4 ♗d6 15.♗d3 ♗c8
 16.h3 ♗f5 17.♗dc5 ♗fb8 18.b3 h6 19.♗ad1 g5 20.♗fe1 g4 21.♗d4 ♗h7 22.hxg4 ♗xg4
 23.f3 ♗f5 24.♗e5 ♗e8 25.♗h2 ♗xe1+ 26.♗xe1 ♗g5 27.♗d1 ♗xc5+ 28.♗xc5 ♗e6 29.♗a4
 h5 30.♗e5 ♗h7 31.♗f2 ♗g6 32.g3 f6 33.♗c3 ♗g5 34.♗d2 ♗f7 35.♗e2 ♗g5 36.♗c5 ♗f7
 37.♗d2 ♗e6 38.♗a4 ♗e7 39.♗e3 ♗f7



I've been nursing a substantial advantage in pawn structure for quite some time. But with opposite-colored bishops and even pawns, I have a lot of work to do to win the game. It's been particularly frustrating that twice my knight had to retreat from the proud c5-square, because a knight trade is unthinkable for me unless I've won material or made some other kind of substantial progress. I felt that I could potentially break with g3-g4 and attack the f6-pawn. But it seemed that my king would always be a problem. On e3 or d2 it would be harassed by his rook, and on f2 it would be in the way of my rook. So I eventually realized that I needed to run my king to b2 to have the freedom to execute my plan.

40. $\mathbb{R}d7+$ $\mathbb{K}e8$ 41. $\mathbb{R}d1$ $\mathbb{K}f7$ 42. $\mathbb{R}d2$

The reader will notice that my rook seems to move around randomly. There are good reasons for the indirect route I take in this ending:

- 1) It's sudden death, and every move puts thirty seconds back on my clock.
 - 2) Confuse my opponent, who will have a hard time deciding if a move is shuffling or part of the plan.
 - 3) I get insight into how my opponent is trying to defend.
 - 4) I'm trying to make sure he doesn't have a chance to activate his rook.
- 42... $\mathbb{K}e7$ 43. $\mathbb{R}h2$ $\mathbb{R}g6$ 44. $\mathbb{R}d2$ $\mathbb{K}f7$ 45. $\mathbb{K}c1$ $\mathbb{R}g5$ 46. $\mathbb{R}f2$ $\mathbb{K}e6$ 47. $\mathbb{K}b2$ $\mathbb{R}a7$ 48. $\mathbb{R}h2$ $\mathbb{R}g5?$**



49. $\mathbb{Q}f2$

I should have taken the opportunity for 49. $\mathbb{Q}c5$. I don't recall if I missed it or thought I could do that or something just as good later.

49... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}d7+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}g5?$

After 54... $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 55. $\mathbb{Q}g4$, things are starting to go forward but Black still has good chances to hold.

55. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 56. $\mathbb{Q}d7$



The first pawn drops without Black getting any counterplay, and the collapse is swift.

56...a4 57.♕xf6 axb3 58.axb3 ♜c5 59.♘xc5 ♔xf6 60.♖e1 ♔f7 61.♘d7+ ♔g5 62.♖e5+ ♔h6 63.♖c5 ♔g7 64.♘e5 1-0

Know what you want to trade

Since I've written a book on liquidation, intelligent trading is a subject near and dear to my heart. Even if you don't know the details of how to draw a certain endgame, just knowing that you *should* be able to draw it tells you that it may be a better choice to go for than a different set of pieces on the board.

Game 22

David 2000

Shapiro

Petr Palachev 2287

Samara 2012 (8)



CHALLENGE 17

Choose between three moves for White: 46.h3, 46. \mathbb{R} e4 and 46. \mathbb{N} b3

I used this ending in *Liquidation on the Chess Board*, but I find it particularly instructive for students. The key is you have to know what ending you want, and what you don't want. You also need to appreciate that the c6-pawn is surrounded and likely to fall. White should be thinking about securing a draw, and the best way is:

46. \mathbb{N} b3! \mathbb{R} xc6 47. \mathbb{N} d4+!, forcing a rook + 3 vs. rook + 2 ending. Most players should be able to draw that. When Kasparov reached this endgame against me he didn't even bother to try to win.

But note that White should not pursue tactics with 47. \mathbb{R} a6+?! \mathbb{R} d7 48. \mathbb{R} xe6 \mathbb{R} xe6 49. \mathbb{N} d4+ \mathbb{R} e5 50. \mathbb{N} xf5 \mathbb{R} xf5. The pawn ending is lost! It's a good rule to avoid liquidating into a pawn ending down a pawn unless there are clear extenuating circumstances. The winning methods from this common pawn distribution are detailed in *Liquidation*.

In my experience teaching young players, I have found that trading into pawn endings when behind is very common. I'm sure that they don't learn this from any coach! My theory is that players who start very young are used to saving games by stalemate, and thus think the best way to draw is to get down to their king to be closer to stalemate. It is certainly a good habit to break.

The move **46.h3** is acceptable as it does no harm, though it gets White no closer

to a safe draw.

Anything but the game continuation

46. $\mathbb{Q}e4?? \mathbb{Q}xa5$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}xe6 \mathbb{Q}e5!$



and White found himself in an even more lost pawn ending.

The old adage ‘all rook endings are drawn’ is not exactly true but useful nonetheless, as the pure rook ending generally offers the best chance for the defender. Knights tend to increase winning chances, but bishops offer fewer winning chances when pawns are restricted to one side of the board.

Fundamental endgame knowledge would have guided both players in the following game.

Game 23

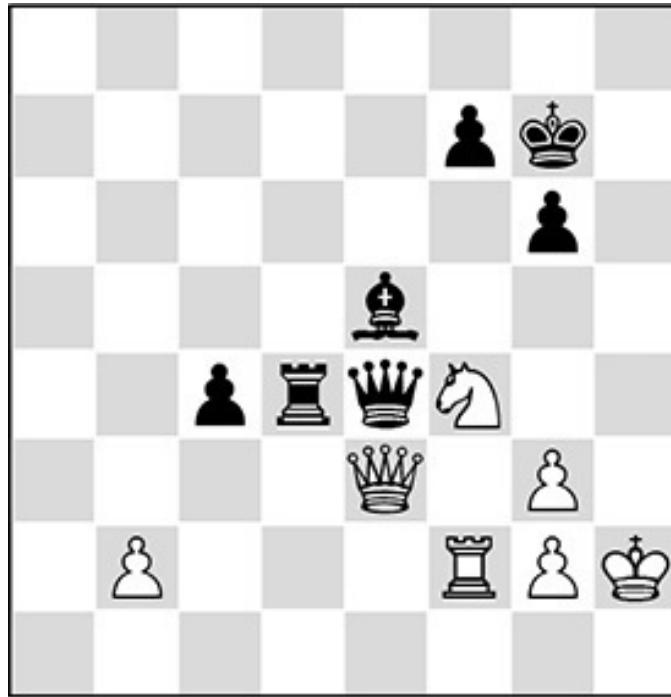
Nikita Vitiugov 2722

Peter Svidler 2765

St Petersburg ch-RUS 2017 (1)

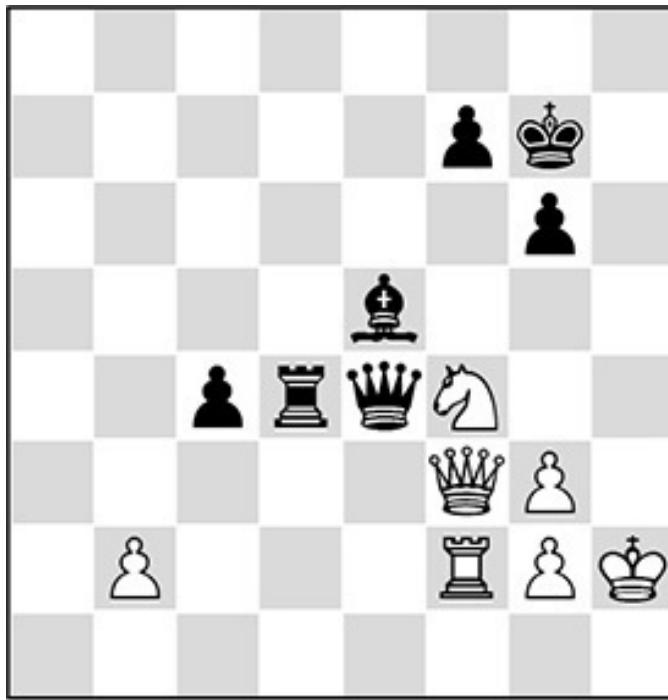
1.d4 $\mathbb{N}f6$ 2. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ e6 3. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ h6 4. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ d5 5.e3 c5 6.c3 $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ e5 8. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 9.0-0 0-0
10. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ exd4 11.exd4 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 12.dxc5 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}fe4$
16. $\mathbb{Q}2f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}ac8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ b5 20.a3 $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ 21.hxg3 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}bd4$
 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}cd8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ g6 27. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}fe1$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}f3$

a5 30. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe1+$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ b4 32. axb4 axb4 33. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ dxc4 34. cxb4 $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ h5 38. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ h4 39. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ hxg3+ 40. fxg3 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$



Facing unpleasant pressure, Vitiugov blundered with
45. $\mathbb{Q}h5+??$ gxh5 46. $\mathbb{Q}g5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}h6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$
and resigned.

He could have tried 45. $\mathbb{Q}f3$.



CHALLENGE 18

Should Black play 45... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$?

45... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ looks strong with perfunctory analysis; 46. $\mathbb{Q}xf3?$ $\mathbb{Q}d2$ will give Black a lethal passed c-pawn. But 46.gxf3! improves White's position. Black would only ease White's burden by taking the pawn – 46... $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 47.gxf4 $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}c2$, followed by $\mathbb{Q}c2-c3$ and b2-b3, liquidates into a simply drawn $\mathbb{Q} + 2p$ vs $\mathbb{Q} + 1p$ ending. So the correct course for Black would be to maintain pressure against White's weaknesses (and his strong bishop) with 45... $\mathbb{Q}f5$.

Similarly, 45. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4?$ 47.gxf4 $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 48.b3 is a misstep for Black. He could instead preserve practical winning chances with 46... $\mathbb{Q}f6$. Attempts to force a draw would backfire, e.g. 47. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ (47.b3? $\mathbb{Q}xf4$) 47... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 48.b3? c3! 49. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4-$.

Complacency kills

It is true, of course, that letting your guard down can hurt you in any phase of the game. But thinking that your move doesn't matter, or the result of the game is already determined, can have particularly disastrous consequences in the endgame. Slight alterations of the position – a weak square, an unfavorable trade – can prove impossible to overcome. Even the best of players can be susceptible to this failing.

Game 24

Benjamin Gledura 2515
Viswanathan 2784
Anand
Gibraltar 2016 (7)

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♗c3 e6 5.e3 ♗bd7 6.♗c2 ♖d6 7.♗d3 0-0 8.0-0 e5 9.cxd5 cxd5 10.e4 exd4 11.♗xd5 ♘xd5 12.exd5 h6 13.♗xd4 ♔h4 14.♗f3 ♔h5 15.♗h7+ ♔h8 16.♗f5 ♗xf5 17.♗xf5 ♘f6 18.♗xc8 ♗fc8 19.♖d1 ♗d8 20.♗e3 ♗e7 21.d6 ♗xd6 22.♗xd6 ♘xd6 23.♖d1 ♖c7 24.♗f1 a6 25.h3 ♗g8 26.b3 ♗d8 27.♗xd8+ ♖xd8 28.♗e2



CHALLENGE 19

Why is 28...h5 a serious error?

It looks like a pretty ho-hum position. White's king is already centralized, but most likely Black will catch up in a few moves. Anand probably could not imagine that his inexperienced sixteen-year-old opponent would make him pay dearly for a careless move.

28...h5??

This move does have a certain logic – transferring pawns off the color of Black's bishop – but the timing is wrong. Black would be fine after 28...♗d5.



29.♗g5!

This move does not seem to ‘move the needle’ much; the computer still gives a small edge for White. But it sets in motion a plan that Black can find no answer for.

29...♝f8 30.♝d3 ♝e8

Anand should have tried 30...♝e7; it may look slightly awkward, but gives Black hopes of limiting the incursion of the opponent’s king.

31.♝xf6! ♞xf6 32.♝e4 ♞d8 33.♞e5 ♝e7 34.♝d5

White’s king cannot be moved out of this advanced outpost. The extra space gives the knight more available squares, and every black pawn is a potential target. Black’s bishop, meanwhile, can only strike at air.

34...♝b6 35.♞d3 ♝d7 36.♞c5+



36...♝xc5

The pawn ending is probably lost, but perhaps Anand hoped Gledura would not master the subtleties of the position. However, these days, young talents are capable of surprisingly mature play.

The alternative 36...♚c7 37.♞e4 would also offer White a large and very pleasant advantage to prosecute.

37.♝xc5 ♚c7 38.h4!

Gledura looks to create an outside passed pawn, a kingside weakness, or kill Black's reserve tempo moves. None of this is good news for Anand.

38...♝d7 39.♝b6 ♚c8 40.b4 ♚b8 41.f3 ♚c8 42.g4 hxg4

42...g6 43.g5 would not help Black.

43.fxg4 ♚b8 44.h5 f6

Now White has to count it out, with the option of 'one box or two' enabling White to get the tempi right.

45.a4 ♚c8 46.♝a7 ♚c7 47.b5 a5

It looks for a second like White has been outsmarted...



48. ♜a8!

Of course not 48.b6+?? ♜c6, turning the tables. Black resigned because 48... ♜c8 49.b6, 48... ♜b6 49. ♜b8, and 48... b6 49. ♜a7 are all hopeless.

Resistance is... not futile

Defending an inferior endgame can be a depressing task. We will often have to make difficult decisions just to stay in the game. We may not get it right, but without that extra effort resistance will definitely be futile.

Game 25

Joel Benjamin

Evgenny Postny

Norfolk 2016 (7)

1. ♜f3 d5 2. g3 ♜d7 3. d4 b5 4. c3 e6 5. ♜g5 ♜e7 6. ♜xe7 ♜xe7 7. ♜bd2 ♜gf6 8. ♜g2 0-0 9. 0-0
 c5 10. ♜b3 a5 11. ♜fe1 b4 12. e4 dx4 13. ♜xe4 ♜xe4 14. ♜xe4 ♜b7 15. ♜h4 h6 16. ♜e1 ♜fd8
 17. ♜a4 bxc3 18. bxc3 cxd4 19. ♜xd4 ♜c5 20. ♜b5 ♜c7 21. ♜e5 ♜xg2 22. ♜xg2 ♜db8
 23. ♜c6 ♜xc6+ 24. ♜xc6 ♜b6 25. ♜e5 ♜c8 26. ♜ed1 ♜bb8 27. ♜c4 f6 28. ♜f3 ♜f7 29. ♜d4 g6
 30. h4 e5 31. ♜c2 ♜e6 32. ♜e3 ♜d7 33. h5 gxh5 34. ♜a4 ♜c5 35. ♜h1 ♜b2 36. ♜xh5 ♜b6
 37. ♜a3 ♜d5 38. ♜xd5 ♜xd5 39. c4 ♜dd2 40. ♜f3 e4 41. ♜f4 e3



We have just come out of a time scramble where Postny was able to get a move ahead of me. I'm stuck with a difficult defense to try to make a draw. There's no way around it; I have to focus and do everything I can to resist.

42. ♜e4+

Postny suggested 42. ♜hf5 as a better defense. I rejected it because I feared the pawn endgame after 42... ♜xf2+ 43. ♜xf2 ♜xf2+ 44. ♜xf2 exf2 45. ♜xf2 ♜d6 46. ♜e3 ♜c5. Writing a book on pawn endgames unfortunately did not bring me any wisdom in this game! I didn't make the effort to calculate the pawn ending properly, despite having the time to do so. Basic arithmetic would have told me that White has time for 47. ♜e4 ♜xc4 48. ♜f5 (both sides will queen), but even in the worst case, 47. ♜d3 f5 48. ♜c3 h5 49.a3 f4 50.gxf4 h4 51.f5 ♜d6 52. ♜d4 h3 53.c5+ ♜d7 54.f6 h2 55.c6+ White still draws. Black could instead maintain good winning chances after 42... ♜xa2 43. ♜xf2+ ♜d7, but I would at least have given myself a chance.

42... ♜f7 43. ♜xe3 ♜xf2+



44. ♔g1??

Having your king stuck on the back rank in a rook ending is a killer, and doubly so in a double-rook ending! Benefit of the doubt should be given to getting your king free. So how did I make this clunker?

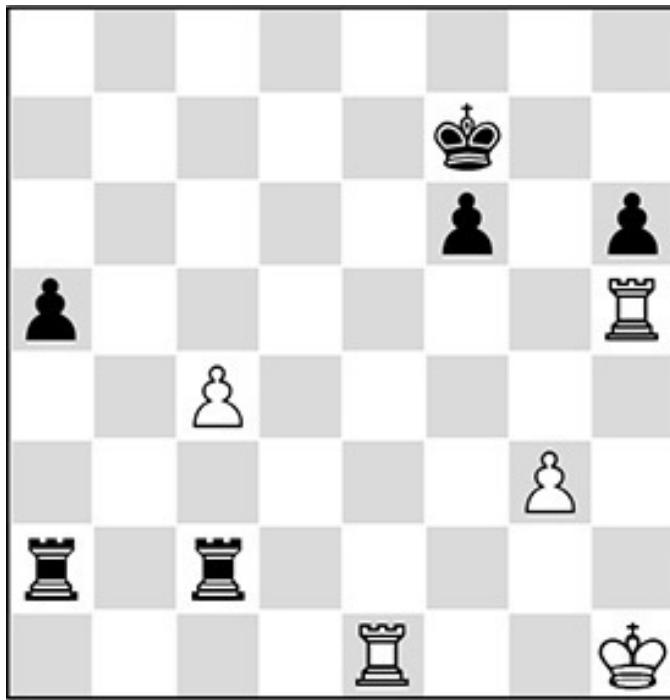
It comes down to a pair of mistakes in calculation. I thought that 44. ♔h3 would allow a forced win: 44...f5 45.g4 ♕h2+ 46.♔g3 ♕bg2+ 47.♔f4 ♕f2+ and now 48.♔g3? f4# is the ultimate price, while 48.♔e5 fxg4 looks lost. But I can just play 48.♕f3, and I'm fine! I even figured this out after my blunder during the game, which was all the more painful. So Black should probably be content with 44...♕xa2, maintaining good winning chances, but where there's life, there's hope.

44... ♕g2+!

And there is the second oversight. I was ready for 44...♕xa2 45.♕xa5 or 44...♕fc2 45.♕f3, in both cases with good chances to hold.

I didn't completely miss this move, but after 45.♔f1 ♕bf2+! was lost on me. Then 46.♔e1 ♕xa2 is as hopeless as the game.

45. ♔h1 ♕gc2 46. ♕e1 ♕xa2



I so regretted overruling my intuition, and my penalty is going down without a fight.

47. $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ a4 48. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ a3 49. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}h2+$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}ag2+$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ a2 52. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}b2$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}hg2+$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}gf2+$ 55. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}fd2$ 56. $\mathbb{Q}a7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 57. $\mathbb{Q}g4+$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 58. $\mathbb{Q}h4+$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 59. $\mathbb{Q}g7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 60. $\mathbb{Q}f4+$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 0-1

Active vs passive

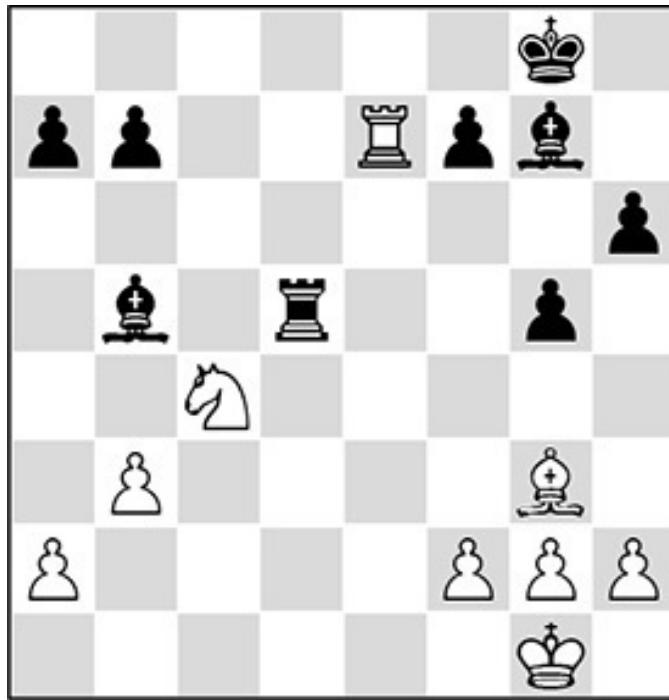
We started the chapter seeing how active play can bring victory in the endgame. But active play can help you save inferior positions, too. I think there is a fundamental difference in the way stronger and weaker players approach the problem of inferior endgames. Grandmasters will always look for an active way to defend, while amateurs are often content to wait for the opponent to come after them. The passive approach will not be wrong in every case, but as a rule of thumb it is better to have an active mindset in any kind of position.

Game 26

Joseph Mucerino
Joel Benjamin

Norfolk 2017 (2)

1.d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ g6 3. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 4. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ 0-0 5.e4 d5 6.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ h6 8. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 9.c3 c5 10.dxc5 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1+$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 14.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 15.cxd4 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 16.b3 g5 17. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}fd8$ 18.d5 $\mathbb{Q}ac8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}fe1$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}cxd5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$



22. ♔f1

I had expected the much safer 22.h3, when 22... ♕d1+ 23. ♔h2 ♕d7 would be more effective than in the game.

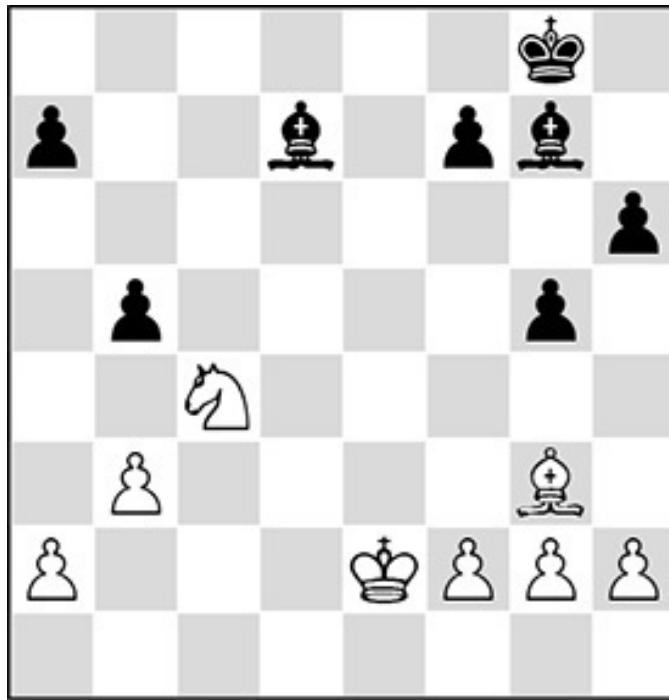
Having used a lot of clock time, I was inclined to simplify, rather than search for a tactical solution like 22... ♕d1+ 23. ♔e2 ♕b1!.

22... ♕d7 23. ♕xd7 ♔xd7

I was happy to have something to work with, but soon realized I had a long way to go before I could really enjoy the bishop pair.

24. ♔e2 b5

I didn't like committing my queenside pawns, but I didn't see how to go forward without chasing the knight away. 24...f5 25. ♔e5 ♔f8 26. ♔d6 'traps' my bishop, while 24... ♔f8 25. ♔d6+ ♔e8 26. ♔e5 sets up 27. ♔d6+.



25. $\text{N}d2?!$

This move was a total shock to me, as it violates my grandmaster instincts. White has a short-term advantage of active coordinated pieces. The white king is already in play, while Black will have difficulty mobilizing his monarch. So White has a small window to accomplish something in the position. It helps, of course, to know what you want to do. When you are facing the bishop pair in an ending, you normally want to trade one of them. If White trades the knight for the dark-squared bishop he will create opposite-colored bishops, so he can even afford to lose a pawn in the deal.

The best way to secure a draw is to play actively and keep Black from getting any winning attempt started. 25. $\text{N}e5$ $\text{B}e8$ 26. $\text{N}d3$ is a good start.



analysis diagram

Black can't overcome White's control of the center, e.g. 26...f5 27.♗e5 ♗f8 28.♔e3 ♔f7 29.♔d4 ♔e6 30.g3 and Black doesn't really have any edge at all. Instead, White falls back and tries to erect some kind of fortress. Mucerino told me that he had learned that if you don't see what to do in an endgame that it could be smart to not hurt your position. There is logic in that thought, and indeed if Black's king were on e6 in the diagram, the strategy would be wise. But fortresses are generally a last line of defense, rather than a first option. Magnus Carlsen said rather famously that he didn't believe in fortresses, only to have Sergey Karjakin alter his thinking in the 2016 World Championship. But it may take the precision of a grandmaster to execute a fortress with so many pieces and pawns on the board. When the position is this fluid, chances are the defense will break down eventually, even if it takes an error to make that happen.

So while 25.♘d2 is hardly a losing move, I think it starts the slippery slope towards defeat and cannot be recommended.

25...f5 26.♗b8 a6 27.♔d3 ♔f7

27...♗c6 was more accurate, as 28.♘f3 ♗c6 29.♘e5+! would be a problem.

28.♗c7 ♔e6 29.♗b8 ♔d5 30.♗a7 ♗e5 31.h3 ♗e8 32.♗b6 ♗g6 33.f3 ♗d6



With my king in the center I am in total control, but breaking down White's position may be a subtle process. I had used a lot of clock time on early decisions, so I wanted to get to move forty (the second time control gave a generous hour for the rest of the game) before committing myself. So I wasted several moves on random maneuvers before deciding what to do with my pawns. While maneuvering, I did get some insight on my opponent's approach; he was playing quickly, and not looking to improve his formation.

34. ♕d4 ♔f8 35. ♕b6 ♔e7 36. ♕d4 h5 37. ♕b6 ♔f6 38. ♕a7 ♔d8 39. ♕d4 ♔e7 40. ♕b6 ♔f6
41. ♕a7 ♔e5 42. ♕f2 g4

I didn't see how to proceed after 42...f4+ 43. ♔e4 g4 44.hxg4 hxg4 45. ♕e1 ♔f5 46. ♕b4.



43.hxg4?

My opponent played much more quickly than I did and built up a big reserve of time on the clock. But now that a confrontation is on the board, he has a decision to make, and he would have been wise to painstakingly consider and analyze his possibilities.

43. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ gxh3 44. gxh3 $\mathbb{Q}g3!$ hurts White, as Black will target the h3-pawn (45. $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ f4+ wins).

The only chance to resist lay in 43.fxg4 fxg4+ 44. $\mathbb{Q}e2$. Perhaps this is counterintuitive, as now the h7-b1 diagonal is wide open and the white pawns do little to control central squares. However, the minor pieces pick up the slack in covering invasion squares. Black has to make an immediate decision, and I would lean towards not capturing on h3 and maintaining a pawn on g4. Black may make further progress advancing ...a5-a4 and opening up the queenside to attack.

I don't know if Black can win against perfect defense, but I think it is likely White would not hold.

43...fxg4+ 44. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$

The problem is White's central blockade crumbles with the advance of the h-pawn.

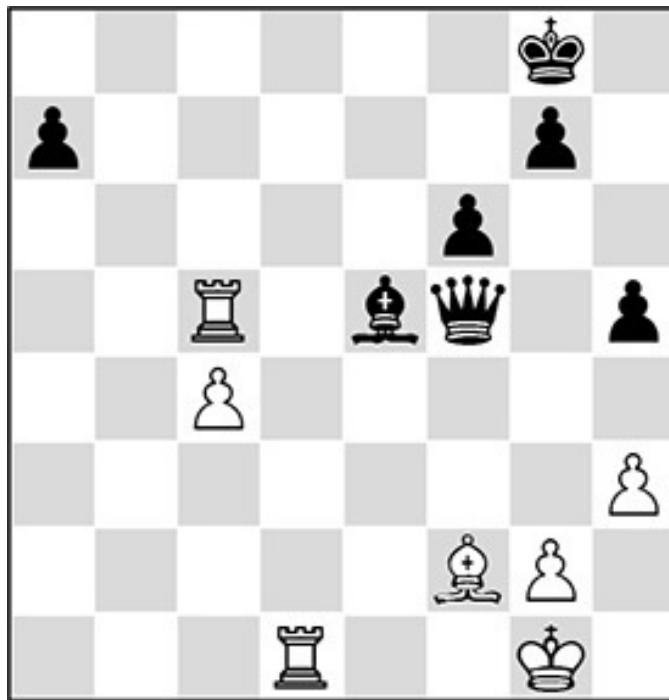
45. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ h4 47. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ gxf3+ 48. gxf3 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 49. fxe4+ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 0-1

To be fair, there are times when recognizing a path to a fortress can spare you unpleasant defending.

Game 27

Joel Benjamin 2475
Leonid Shamkovich 2480
New York 1983

1. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ c5 2. e4 e6 3. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 4. d4 cxd4 5. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ d6 6. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 7. f4 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e5 9. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6 10. f5 $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 11. 0-0-0 0-0 12. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ d5 14. exd5 cxd5 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ e4 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}ab8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6+$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}a3+$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ h5 26. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 30. h3 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 31. c4 f6



Black possesses whatever winning chances exist in this position. The queen and bishop coordinate well, and keep the white rooks a little on the defensive. If White does not eliminate the a-pawn, it could become difficult to corral. Heading for the fortress is the way to go.

32. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}cxe5$ $fxe5$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ e4 36. h4

Tightening the fortress and deadening the kingside makes the fortress even easier to maintain.

36... $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}c7+$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}f2$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}e1$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f2$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}b2$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}a1$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}e1$ 55. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f2$ 56. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ g6 57. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 58. $\mathbb{Q}g3 \frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$

CHAPTER 3

Tactics

In this chapter I hope to zero in on the process that leads us to recognizing and solving tactical opportunities, including hidden or unusual possibilities. We will also examine the conditions that lead us into blunders.

Game 28

Joel Benjamin 2585

Eduard Gufeld 2465

Kona 1998 (8)



CHALLENGE 20

White to play and win

This is a pretty straight-up tactics quiz. But what is the process in solving it? You start by looking for forcing moves. White has a piece capture, and though it looks at first to be securely defended, it only takes a moment to see that there is something to look into there. The d-pawn can't recapture, and the f-pawn capture

opens up for the queen to invade. The hardest part is to resist the most familiar ‘smothered mate’ pattern and find the less common, but still well-known to tactics books, pattern.

30. $\mathbb{Q}xe4!$ $f \times e4$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}e6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$



32. $\mathbb{Q}xh6!!$

You're in good company if you selected 32. $\mathbb{Q}f7+$ here. After 32... $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ Black can hardly defend, but it's not as decisive as the text move. The good news is that even if you don't visualize 32. $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ in your mind's eye, you can still get to the position and find the stronger move then.

32... $\mathbb{Q}f5$

32... $g \times h6$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}f7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}xh6\#$ is one of those cool mates that you may wait a lifetime for, but you certainly don't want to miss when it comes around.

33. $\mathbb{Q}g6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 1-0

Gufeld pondered his fate for twenty minutes before resigning. A nice little piece of art, don't you think?

Game 29

Joel Benjamin 2565

Johann Hellsten 2490

Stockholm 1996/97 (6)

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{N}f3$ e6 3. c3 d5 4. exd5 exd5 5. d4 $\mathbb{N}c6$ 6. $\mathbb{N}b5$ $\mathbb{N}d6$ 7. dxcc5 $\mathbb{N}xc5$ 8. 0-0 $\mathbb{N}ge7$

9. Qbd2 0-0 10. Qb3 Qd6 11. Qd3 Qh8 12. h3 Qg6 13. Qc2 Qc7 14. Qe3 Qce7 15. Qbd4 $a6$
 16. Qd3 Qd6 17. Qad1 Qd7 18. Qfe1 Qac8 19. Qg5 Qfe8 20. Qxe7 Qxe7 21. Qxe7 Qxe7
 22. Qf5 Qf8 23. Qe3 Qc6 24. Qxd5 Qd8 25. Qf5 Qb8 26. Qg5 Qg8



CHALLENGE 21

How should White continue?

White is already a pawn up with clear pressure on the black king. Black has a vulnerable point at f7. White has the forcing move

27. Qe7+

With experience and training, we don't reject it out of hand, even though that square is seemingly defended. The capture with the knight is ruled out by mate on h7. The queen capture sets up an overload which gets the white queen to f7.

After

27... Qxe7 28. Rxd8+ Rxd8 29. Qxf7+ Kh8



we need to visualize well, and hopefully pick up the queen and king in ‘fork position.’ Then we can look at ways to clear the square, like

30.♕xg6! hxg6 31.♘f7+ ♔g8 32.♘xd8

That’s how the game continued, and after

32...♗d5?! 33.♗b3!

the endgame was easy to finish off.

The calculating process contains two major parts. The first is detecting the weak points and understanding we should look into the sacrifice, and the second part is visualizing the final knight fork. The weirdest part of all this is the ‘computers ruin everything’ moment. White’s pressure, particularly on f7, is so strong that the simple 27.♗b3 ♕d7 28.♕e1 leaves Black helpless, e.g. 28...♗c7 29.♘xc7 ♕xc7 30.h4! and Black’s position collapses. I’m not sure which continuation is more difficult to find. We are trained to look for combinations; no one ever wrote a book about not playing them. 27.♗b3 is easy enough to see, but it can be harder to grasp Black’s futility when seemingly he has more opportunity than when facing more obviously forcing moves. The sacrificial and non-sacrificial path both work here, so whichever choice you make is fine.

Mating patterns

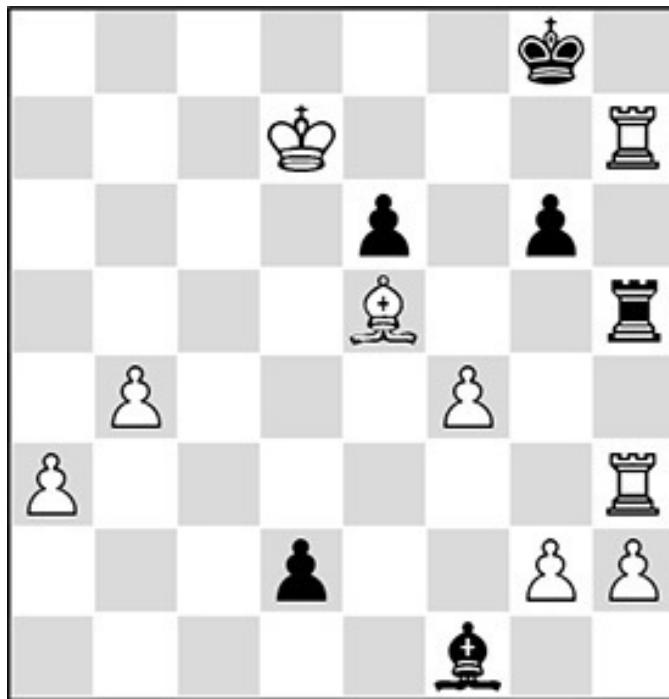
Game 30

Joel Benjamin 2585

Aviv 2325

Friedman

St Martin 1993 (2)



CHALLENGE 22

White to play and win

Of all the positions that I've shown in advanced camp classes, this one seems to stump students the most. It's a bit curious, because the solution simply requires recognition of mating patterns.

49. $\mathbb{Q}3xh5$

After 49. $\mathbb{Q}h8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xh8$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}xh8+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ White can only draw by perpetual check.

49... $g\mathbb{x}h5$



50. $\mathbb{R}h6!!$

This is the key move. White only needs to bring the king to e7 to tighten the mating net. Once you realize you have time to do this, the process becomes so much easier. 50. $\mathbb{R}g7+?$ $\mathbb{K}f8$ is a dead end, leaving White struggling to draw.

50... $\mathbb{K}f7$

50... $d1\mathbb{W}+$ 51. $\mathbb{K}e7$ ends the game – not the first time, or the last, we shall see this theme.

51. $\mathbb{R}f6+$ $\mathbb{K}g8$ 52. $\mathbb{K}e7!$



Not everybody sees the problem with 52...d1 \mathbb{Q} ; checks don't help White but 53. \mathbb{Q} h6! returns to the pattern we've seen before.

52... \mathbb{Q} h7 53. \mathbb{Q} f7+

We are into matters of style and taste now. Given another chance I might prefer the stylish 53.f5, which actually forces mate in six. Back then I went for the more 'forcing' continuation.

53... \mathbb{Q} g6 54.f5+ exf5

On 54... \mathbb{Q} g5 55. \mathbb{Q} f4+ \mathbb{Q} xf4 56.fxe6+ is the simplest win.

55. \mathbb{Q} f6+

55. \mathbb{Q} g7+ \mathbb{Q} h6 56. \mathbb{Q} f6 h4 57. \mathbb{Q} f4+ \mathbb{Q} h5 58.h3 d1 \mathbb{Q} 59. \mathbb{Q} h7# is a cute mate. But there is also something to be said for inducing quick resignation.

55... \mathbb{Q} g5 56. \mathbb{Q} d6 1-0

Black's last move before the diagram position, 48... \mathbb{Q} f5-h5, was actually the losing blunder. There 48...d1 \mathbb{Q} + 49. \mathbb{Q} e7 leads to mate, but Black could have forced a draw with 48... \mathbb{Q} f7+ 49. \mathbb{Q} xf7 \mathbb{Q} xf7. White cannot win without the use of the sixth rank.

Combining elements

The study of tactics is universally recommended because the more themes we add to our knowledge base the more likely we can apply them in our games. In practice, tactical shots often require us to combine elements in a position, even when they don't seem to fit together at first.

Game 31

Joel 2591

Benjamin

Walter Browne

Philadelphia 2000 (6)

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d6 3. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4.d3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 5.c3 g6 6.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ 0-0 8. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ b6 9. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}fd7$ 13.h4 e6 14. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ h6 15. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3+$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ d5? 19.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$



CHALLENGE 23

White to play and win

Walter Browne's frequent battles with time pressure attested to his commitment to deep calculation. At 51 he was still a formidable opponent, and not one to ignore danger signs. But here he allows a decisive combination. He obviously saw the elements of the combination, but then didn't connect them together. It is always easier to see combinations for oneself because we are invested in making them work. Sometimes we have to try harder to make tactics work for our opponents, and not dismiss the ideas too quickly.

Two elements and one finesse lead us to the combination. The first element, which seems insignificant at first, is that White can capture on e5 and create a double attack with $\mathbb{Q}h2-g4$. The second element is that White can attack the queen with c3-c4. That isn't even possible on the first move – 20.c4? $\mathbb{Q}xc4$. The finesse part is White has to consider taking with the rook on e5. Once you grab

these three points the rest is relatively easy to figure out:

20. $\mathbb{Q}xe5!$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 21.c4



Now the queen does not have a suitable retreat square.

21... $\mathbb{Q}xc4$

21... $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$; 21... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ (this is why the rook captured on e5!) 22... $f6$ (22... $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xh6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}f6\#$) 23. $\mathbb{Q}xh6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xg6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 25. $d4$ with annihilation.

22. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 23. $dxc4$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$

Browne was never one to give up easily, and he plays the engine's best suggestion. 23... $\mathbb{Q}xb2$? 24. $\mathbb{Q}xg6+$ was not an option, but he had one other try: 23... $\mathbb{Q}cd8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xh6+!$ $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}g4+$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ $fxg6$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xg6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ and White should convert the rook ending.

24. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $cxd4$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 26. $f4$ $\mathbb{Q}fd8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}cd6$ 29. $g4!$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $h5?!$ 31. $g5$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}cd8$ 33. $b4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}a6$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 40. $b5$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 41. $a4$ 1-0

Vision and creativity

Even when the basic plot is relatively simple to work out, creative thinking may be needed to find the critical details.

Game 32

Drazen
Marovic

2470

Joel Benjamin 2530

Toronto 1990 (7)

1.d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.bxa6 g6 6. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d6 8.g3 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$
10.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ 0-0 12. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 14.b3 $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}ac1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$
17.e4 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}fa8$ 23.a4 $\mathbb{Q}d4$
24. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 28.f3 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$
31. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 34.a5 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 35.b4?! $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}c4$
 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}b1$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}a2$ $\mathbb{Q}g1+$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7+$ 42.g4



CHALLENGE 24

Black to play and win

Of all the problem-solving positions I like to show to students, this is the one with the most obvious goal (I tend to start two moves earlier). Black is going for checkmate; there is simply no other plan. It appears that the h-file will play a role in the finish, but the route of the queen to the Promised Land is not all that obvious.

Firstly, you must appreciate what the opponent's plan for defense is, in order to calculate properly. Here White defends against mates by queening his a-pawn. The plan of bringing the queen to h6 via f8 is foiled by $\mathbb{Q}e2-d2$.

42...h5

This looks obvious enough, but the next part is harder to see.

43.a6 hxg4+ 44.fxg4



It seems clear I need to get my queen to the h-file, but it's rather surprising how I get there.

Now 44... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 44.a7 $\mathbb{W}c8$ 45.a8 \mathbb{W} guards the mating square. Something more clever will be required.

44... $\mathbb{W}a7$ is a suggestion from camp. If you really can't find the mate, this move at least doesn't lose and forces White to play accurately. The only good defense to the slow motion net of ... $\mathbb{Q}g8-g7$ and ... $\mathbb{W}a7-a8$ is 45. $\mathbb{N}d2!$, which the engine, in its infinite wisdom, calls dead even.

44...f5!

Black threatens 45...fxg4+ 46. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ mate, so White has to respond

45.exf5 e5!!



Rarely does one play a move which allows two *en passant* captures, but neither one does any good for White. Nor does 46.fxg6 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ avoid the inevitable.

46. $\mathbb{Q}g2 \mathbb{Q}h7+$!

The hard part is over, but it's no time to relax. A lot of players would grab the queen and think later, but after 46... $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ Black has to block the a-pawn with the queen. It seems like that should be sufficient, but I wanted to leave nothing to chance.

47. $\mathbb{Q}g3 gxf5!$

The whole idea is to keep the a-pawn from moving.

48. $\mathbb{Q}xg1$

After 48.gxf5 $\mathbb{Q}xg2+$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ White still can't push the a-pawn; or 48.a7 f4+ 49. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d3+$, etc.

48...f4+ 49. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d3+$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}g2$

50. $\mathbb{N}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5+$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ e4 wins the house in short order.

50... $\mathbb{Q}e4+$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}xg1$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}a3$

I'm always looking to freeze that a-pawn – 52.a7 $\mathbb{Q}h7+$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}xh2+$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xa2$.

52... $\mathbb{Q}h7+$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}xh2+$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f2+$ 55. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}c2+$ 56. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 0-1

57.a7 $\mathbb{Q}xd5+$ 58. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ and the queen finally blockades after feasting on white pieces.

From the starting position one would not expect the queen to get to the h-file on the second rank. It takes a certain vision – talent, if you will, to detect this. It's a pretty complex solution in a position that does not look very complicated.

Motivation

You can't find what you don't look for. It's a simple but powerful mantra for this book. Players often find tactics because they are more motivated to make them work than their opponents are to spot and prevent them.

Game 33

Lance Henderson De La Fuente

2429

Daniil Dubov

2694

Gibraltar 2018 (7)

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♗c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♗f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5 d6 7.♗g5 a6 8.♘a3 b5 9.♘d5 ♗e7 10.♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.c3 ♕b8 12.♘c2 ♗g5 13.a4 bxa4 14.♘cb4 ♗xb4 15.cxb4 0-0 16.♖xa4 a5 17.b5 ♗d7 18.♘c3 d5 19.♘xd5 ♗xb5 20.♗xb5 ♕xb5 21.0-0 ♕xb2 22.♔a1 ♕b5 23.♕xe5 ♔h8 24.♕c3 f5 25.♘c7 ♗d2 26.♗c4?

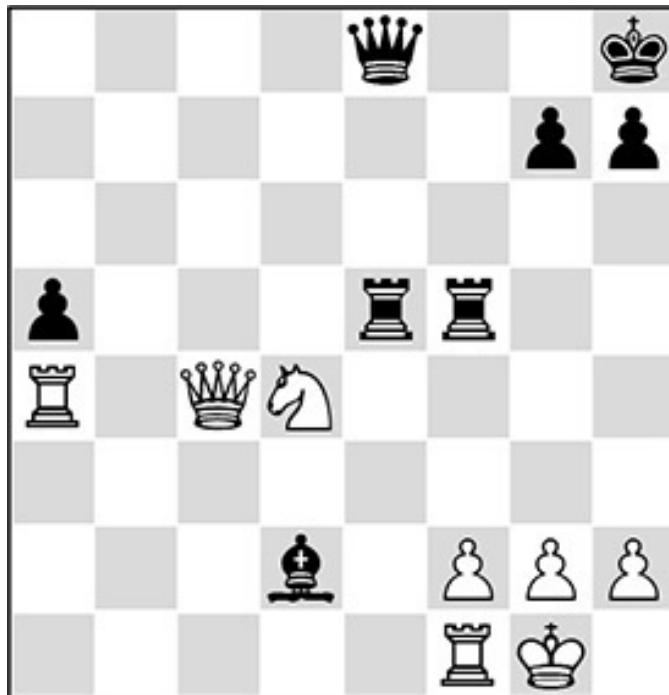
With 26.♗c2! ♕b7 (26... ♕e5 27.♗d1) 27.♘e6 ♕c8 28.♗xd2 ♕xe6 29.exf5

White wins a pawn.

26... ♕e5 27.♘e6 ♕e8 28.exf5?!

28.♗xf8 ♕xe4 29.♗d5 ♕xa4 30.♗e6 ♕c3 31.♗xf5 and White may be a tiny bit better.

28... ♕fxf5 29.♗d4?



Black took some liberties striving for dynamic play, but after faltering twice, White is on the defensive. Henderson was only fourteen, in the process of earning his first grandmaster norm. With more experience he might have sensed

the danger with a safer move like 29. $\mathbb{Q}a2$, keeping his disadvantage minimal for the time being.

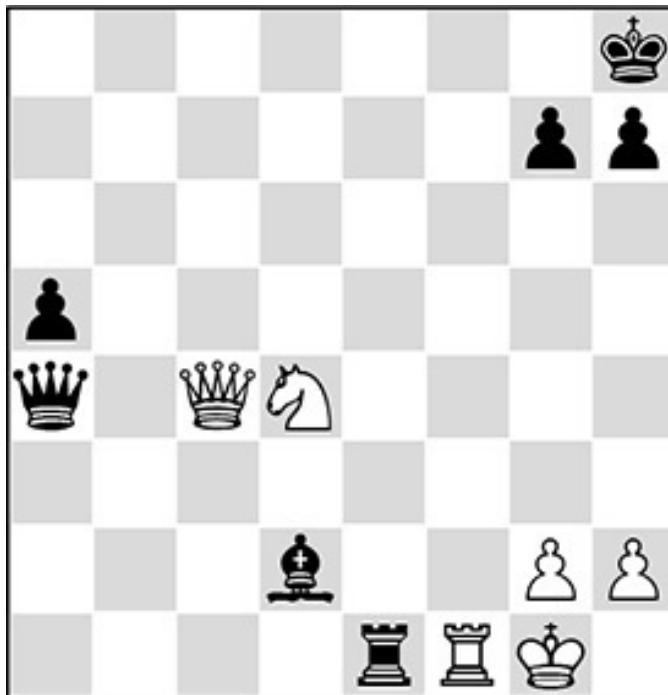
29... $\mathbb{Q}xf2!$

Black has his forces concentrated in the sector, while White's pieces are not on effective defensive squares. A couple of features jump out – the weak back rank and the g1-a7 diagonal – which makes this move worth investigating. After the game, Dubov confessed his first thought was this move was too good to be true. He would see this kind of move but it never seemed to work in his games. But he didn't let that put him off and discovered rather quickly that his luck was changing.

30. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$

White would have rather more chances to survive after 30. $\mathbb{Q}xf2 \mathbb{Q}e3+$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ (mate comes after 31. $\mathbb{Q}g3 \mathbb{Q}g6+$ or 31. $\mathbb{Q}f3 \mathbb{Q}h5+$) 31... $\mathbb{Q}xd4+$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ (32. $\mathbb{Q}d2 \mathbb{Q}e3+$ is even worse) 32... $\mathbb{Q}c3$ but Black has a powerful attack for minimal investment. White is unlikely to be able to defend.

30... $\mathbb{Q}e1+$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}f1 \mathbb{Q}xa4!$

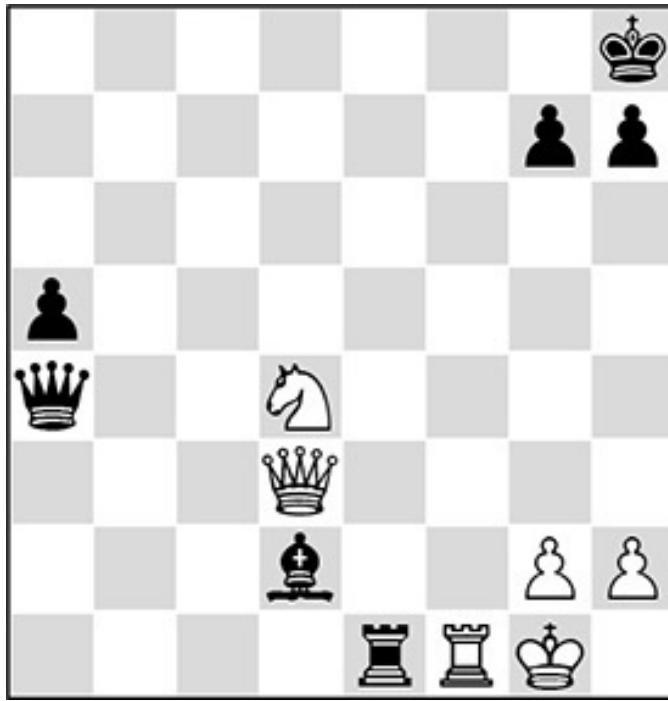


That's the last piece of the puzzle, exploiting White's weak back rank. It's an easy calculation for a grandmaster, of course, but reachable for lesser players, too. It's three moves deep in a forcing variation. You'll need a little visualization, but the biggest key may be getting to this point in the first place.

32. $\mathbb{Q}d3$

White allows a nice finish, but 32. $\mathbb{Q}c8+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ (32... $\mathbb{Q}e8??$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}f8+$ turns the

tables) 33. $\mathbb{W}xe8+$ $\mathbb{B}xe8$ and 32. $\mathbb{B}xe1$ $\mathbb{W}xc4$ 33. $\mathbb{B}e8+$ $\mathbb{W}g8$ should be hopeless in the long run.



32... $\mathbb{B}xf1+$

The computer advocates 32... $\mathbb{W}d1$, but forcing the pawn ending is so clean that there's no need to calculate anything else.

33. $\mathbb{B}xf1$ $\mathbb{W}d1+$ 34. $\mathbb{B}f2$ $\mathbb{B}e1+$ 35. $\mathbb{B}e3$ $\mathbb{B}f2+$ 36. $\mathbb{B}e4$ $\mathbb{W}xd3+$ 37. $\mathbb{B}xd3$ $\mathbb{B}xd4$ 38. $\mathbb{B}xd4$ $g5$
39. $\mathbb{B}c4$ $\mathbb{B}g7$ 40. $\mathbb{B}b5$ $\mathbb{B}f6$ 41. $\mathbb{B}xa5$ $\mathbb{B}e5$ 42. $\mathbb{B}b5$ $\mathbb{B}e4$ 43. $\mathbb{B}c5$ $\mathbb{B}e3$ 44. $\mathbb{B}d5$ $\mathbb{B}f2$ 45. $g3$ $g4$ 0-1

Unlikely moves

The chess literature is replete with examples of startling moves. The human eye is trained to recognize a myriad of patterns, and some moves fall outside of what we are accustomed to. But even the craziest moves are in some way connected to something more familiar and obvious. The key to finding them is to not scale down our ambitions or settle too quickly for a normal move.

Surprise moves are, if anything, overlooked more often by the defense; in some cases they can be described as blunders. It's easy to become complacent, especially as game factors can weaken our sense of the danger. The game may be going too smoothly, or the opponent may be not fearsome enough, or the position may seem too simple to expect a surprise.

We would all like to spot these hidden moves to catch out opponents or avoid sudden defeats. So I will be sure to discuss just how I was able to conjure up these special moves.

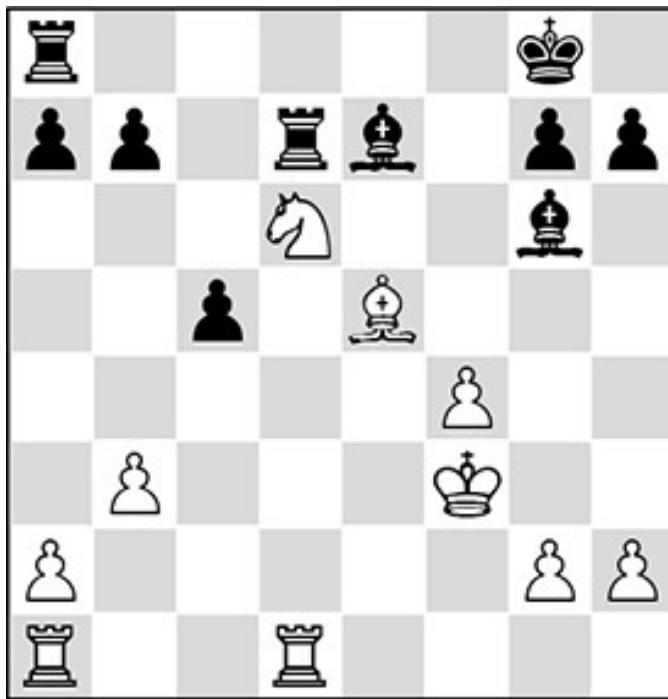
Game 34

Joel Benjamin 2320

Jeremy Silman 2379

Lone Pine 1979 (9)

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3.b3 e5 4.c3 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 6.0-0 0-0 7.d4 exd4 8.e5 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 9.cxd4 cxd4 10. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ dxc6 12. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ c5 13. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}fd8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ f6 17. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ fxe5 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 19.f4 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}g6?$



CHALLENGE 25

White to play and obtain a big advantage

Black would go on to write a series of excellent books on chess strategy. I was a kid, talented but unsophisticated, about to be schooled by the bishop pair. That's how it must have seemed; Black has not been under any pressure thus far, which makes it easy to let your guard down. To avoid blunders, we must carefully investigate the same features that lead to us finding combinations. Here the rook on d7 is unprotected, and any knight move creates an attack on it.

The obvious move is 24. $\mathbb{Q}f5$, but Black simply takes it and defends the rook. The idea is right, but the square is wrong. But there is another one to attack the e7-bishop.

24. $\mathbb{Q}c8!$

This square is not normally available to a knight, especially with a rook on the back rank. I was incentivized to look for it, while Silman was not sufficiently concerned to look deep enough.

24... $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xe7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$

The combination has led to a favorable endgame for White, which was explored in Chapter 1.

Game 35

Alexander 2545

Ivanov

Joel Benjamin 2570

Durango ch-USA 1992 (3)

1.e4 e5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4. $\mathbb{W}e2$ a6 5. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ dxc6 6.b3 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ 8.d3 $\mathbb{Q}g4$
9. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 10.h3 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 11.g4 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 12.d4 0-0-0 13.0-0-0 $\mathbb{Q}he8$ 14.dxe5 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ f6
16. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}b1$



CHALLENGE 26

Black to play and win

A first glance shows Black to have a comfortable position. It is a good time to look for a line to calculate; all of Black's pieces are developed and active, and there are no obvious maneuvers to improve his position.

I found a spectacular move that was relatively easy to calculate to a much better

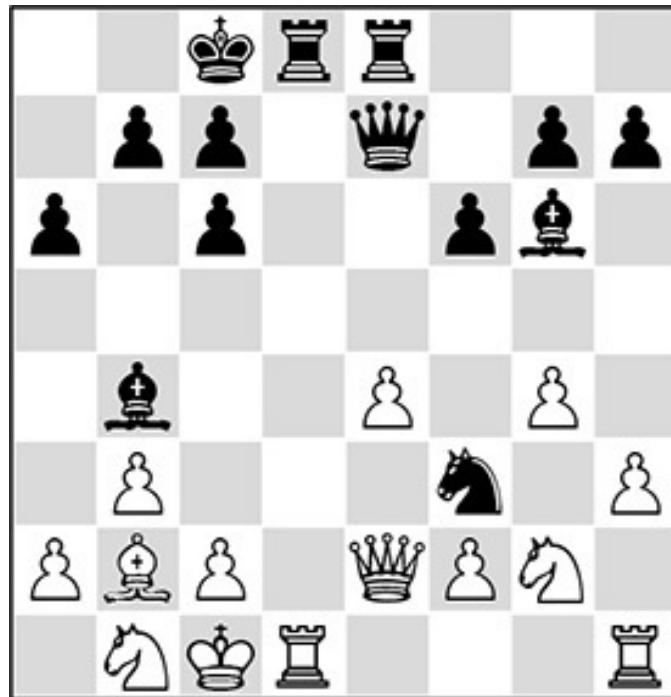
if not winning position. Though I don't want to trivialize that part to the readers, I feel that *finding* the first move is really the hardest part! But how did I do it? The black forces are concentrated on the center, particularly on the e4-pawn. Three pieces are itching to take it, but the e5-knight is in the way. But most knight moves are frustrated when White pushes f2-f3, guarding the pawn securely against all those pieces.

It helped that I had calculated variations with a conventional sacrifice on f3:

17.f3? ♜xd2+ 18.♕xd2 ♜xd2 19.♔xd2 ♔xf3+ 20.♗xf3 ♜xe4 21.♗e2 ♜xg2 22.♗xg2? ♗e3+ 23.♔d1 ♜d8+ game over. It's hard to conjure up moves that simply put pieces *en prise*, but we are trained to anticipate sacrifices that capture pawns to break down a chain.

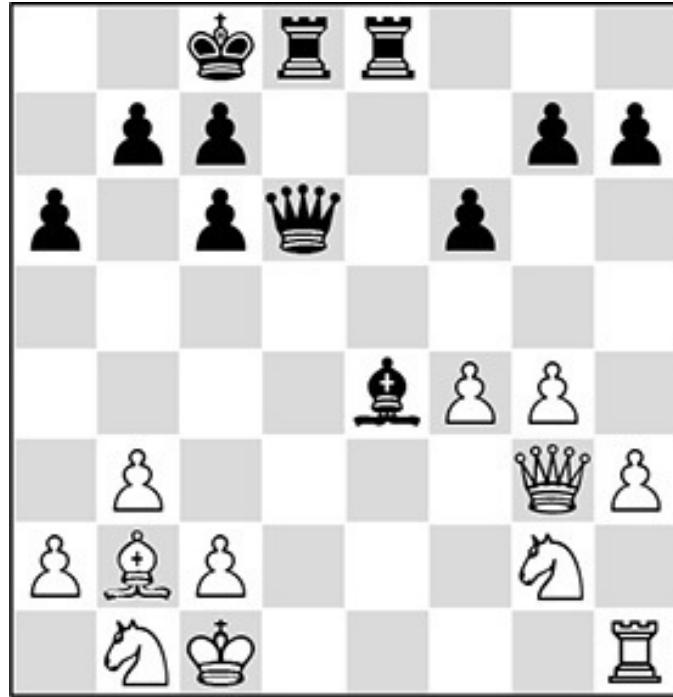
Having the conventional sacrifice pop up in my thought process helped me think of the most unconventional one!

17...♞f3!!



18.a3

18.♗xf3 ♜xe4 19.♗g3 ♜d6 20.♗xd6 (avoiding the spectacular 20.f4 ♜xg2 21.♗xg2 ♜xf4+ 22.♘d2 ♜xd2 23.♗xd2 ♗e1+ 24.♗xe1 ♜xe1#) 20...♗xd6 21.f4 (21.♗xd6 cxd6! 22.♗g1 ♜xg2 23.♗xg2 ♗e1+ 24.♔d2 ♗xb1)



analysis diagram

and now 21...♝xc2!? 22.♝xc2 ♕e2+ 23.♝c1 ♔d5 is pretty strong. I had not detected that possibility, but might have if we got to the position. I intended 21...♝xg2 22.♝xg2 ♕xf4+ 23.♞d2 ♕e3 with an overwhelming position, e.g. 24.♕f1? ♕xd2 25.♝xd2 ♕f3+ 26.♝e1 ♕e4+, winning.

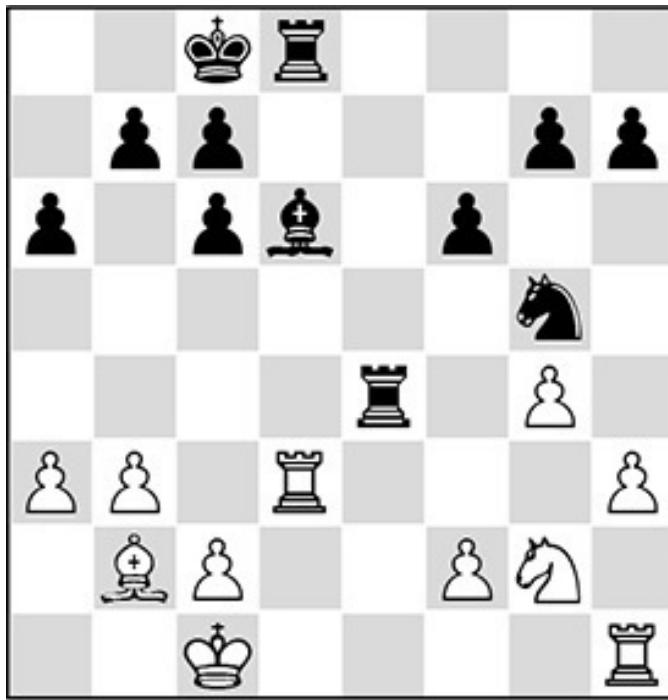
18...♝d6



19. $\mathbb{Q}c3$

19. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ requires a bit more precise calculation: 19... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}e2$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ (on 22. $\mathbb{Q}d2$, I might have intended 22... $\mathbb{Q}e5$, but 23. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2+$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ is not as clear as 22... $\mathbb{Q}b4!$ 23. $a xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}xc2-$) 22... $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}exf3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2!$ (even stronger than 24... $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}f1!$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}b1$) 25. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf1+$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ $\mathbb{Q}f4+$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}1d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2+$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}e3$ and the rook cleans up the kingside pawns.

19... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$



23.h4?

23. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ would have offered sturdier resistance. Ivanov's habitual time pressure simplified the technical process.

23... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}hxg5$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ $\mathbb{Q}g1+$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}d1$

Or 28. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $c5$.

28... $\mathbb{Q}xd1+$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}f4+$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}xh6$

White lost on time.

Pattern recognition

Sometimes accumulated bits of random knowledge can suggest a tactic, as in the next two cases.

Game 36

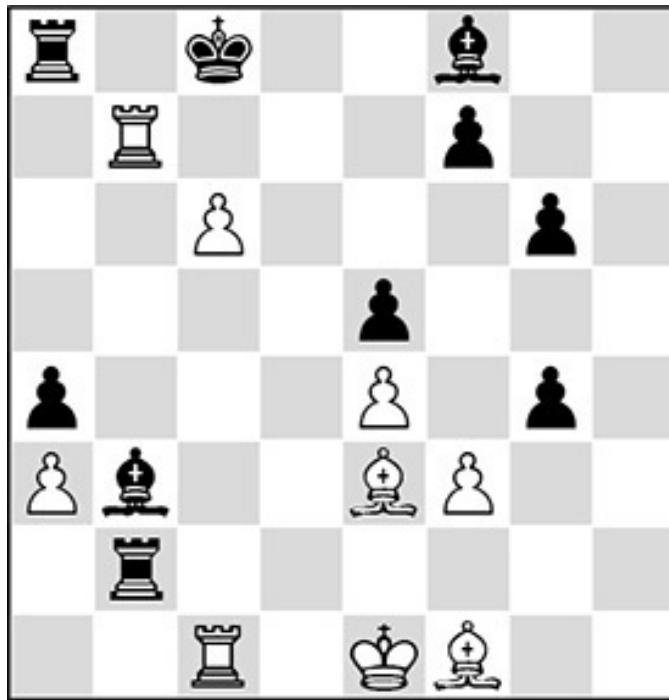
Joel Benjamin 2565

Smbat 2500

Lputian

Moscow 1987

1. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2. $c4$ $g6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $d5$ 4. $cxd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}a4+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}8c6$ 8. $a3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 11. $dxc3$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xc6+$ $bxc6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}b3$ 15. $g3$ $e5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $a5$ 18. $c4$ $a4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 20. $g4$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}a2$ 24. $f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}f5+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}c5+$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 30. $g5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 31. $c5$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}aa8$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $h6$ 36. $e4$ $\mathbb{Q}b3$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}b7$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}a6$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $hxg5$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ $\mathbb{Q}xh2$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}xc6+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $g4$ 43. $c6+$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}b7+$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$



CHALLENGE 27

White to play and win

46. ♜a7!

The point of this move is simply to block the rook on a8 to enable ♜f1-a6, which Black now has no defense against. Pattern recognition can often send us in the right direction. I saw a similar blocking motif (though not in a tactical situation) many years ago in the classic game Karpov-Unzicker!

46... ♜e6 47. ♜a6 ♜xa7 48. ♜xa7+ ♜b8 49. ♜xf7 ♜d6 50. c7+ ♜xc7 51. ♜fxc7 gxf3 52. ♜7c2 ♜b3 53. ♜c4 1-0

Game 37

Stephen Brudno

Joel 2587

Benjamin

Framingham 2001 (6)

**1.d4 ♜f6 2.c4 ♜c6 3. ♜c3 e5 4.d5 ♜e7 5.e4 ♜g6 6. ♜e3 ♜b4 7.f3 ♜xc3+ 8.bxc3 d6 9.c5 0-0
10. ♜d3 ♜d7 11.cxd6 cxd6 12. ♜e2 ♜a5 13.0-0 ♜c5 14. ♜c4 ♜d7 15. ♜b3 ♜ac8 16.g3 f5
17. ♜c2 fxe4 18.fxe4 ♜xf1+ 19. ♜xf1 ♜h3+ 20. ♜g1 ♜f8 21. ♜d2**



CHALLENGE 28

Black to play and win

I'm pretty good at finding tactics, but I already had the answer when I got to this position. I knew Georgy Orlov had won the same way years earlier – I think I saw his game in a book on the opening, which is a specialty for both of us. It turns out the positions are completely identical, though reached in slightly different ways!

21... ♜xa2!



Brilliance from my memory banks. White resigned in Spiller-Orlov at the US Open in Los Angeles 1991, while my opponent tried a few more moves.

22.♕e1 ♕c4 23.♗f2 a5 24.♘c1 ♕f3 25.♘e2 a4 26.♗g5 ♘xe4 0-1

Sometimes unexpected moves can transform a position. They can be particularly easy to overlook when they are unthinkable a few moves before!

Game 38

Joel Benjamin

Antonio Fernandes

Belfort Wch jr 1979 (7)

1.c4 e6 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 d5 4.b3 d4 5.e3 ♘c6 6.d3 dxе3 7.fxe3 e5 8.♘c3 ♘c5 9.a3 a5 10.♗e2 0-0 11.♗b2 ♘g4 12.♗d1 ♕d6 13.♗d2 ♔h6 14.e4 f5 15.exf5 ♘xf5 16.♗g2 ♘d4 17.♗xd4 ♘xd4 18.♗a2 ♕ad8 19.♗e4



White has a miserable position. A simple retreat of the f5-bishop leaves White pretty helpless. If Black wants to force matters, 19... $\mathbb{Q}f2$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2+$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}h3$ maintains a huge edge.

19... $\mathbb{Q}f2+?$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 21.0-0!!

The king and rook ‘snubbing’ the adjacent knight to castle is easy to overlook to begin with, but with the bishop sitting on d4 just a moment ago, castling was hard to imagine. Just being aware of the pattern, however, can help a player avoid this kind of oversight. After my trick White is still much worse, but after some further errors by Black I was able to win.

Don't trust your opponent

Game 39

Joel Benjamin 2530

Leonid Yudasin 2575

New York 1990 (7)

1.d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ c5 4.e3 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 7.0-0 d5 8. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ gxf6 9.dxc5 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 11.e4 dxe4 12. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}b5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ a6 15. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}fd1$ h5 17. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ h4 18. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ h3 19.g3 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 21.c3 $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$



CHALLENGE 29

What is the best square for the white queen?

Nobody taps you on the shoulder and says ‘PSST! You have a combination now!’ We often miss tactical possibilities because we don’t see a reason to look for one. Here I respected my grandmaster opponent, who could have simply recaptured the piece on the previous move. It may have been a better move even without the combination! I may have taken a glance at 24. $\mathbb{Q}d8+$ $\mathbb{N}xd8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc8$, which would totally backfire. If I’d had a little more healthy skepticism (hmm, his rook can’t see the back rank with my knight there) I would have found 24. $\mathbb{Q}a3+!$,



analysis diagram

leaving me a piece ahead, since 24... $\mathbb{W}xa3$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}d8+$ leads to mate.

Instead

24. $\mathbb{W}c2?? \mathbb{Q}xc8$

led to equal chances, though I eventually lost the game (proper punishment for missing something so simple). These kinds of missed opportunities happen frequently in time pressure when you don't have time for a proper thought process, but can happen at any time if you settle too quickly. If I aimed high, I certainly scaled down too quickly!

It has to be said as well that Yudasin's *sense of danger* failed him here. He has always had a tendency to play very quickly, but even in a short time he could have detected a potential mating pattern. Both players should have been extra wary of Black's *zwischenzug* as he is starting out a piece down.

Sense of danger

Game 40

Joel 2610

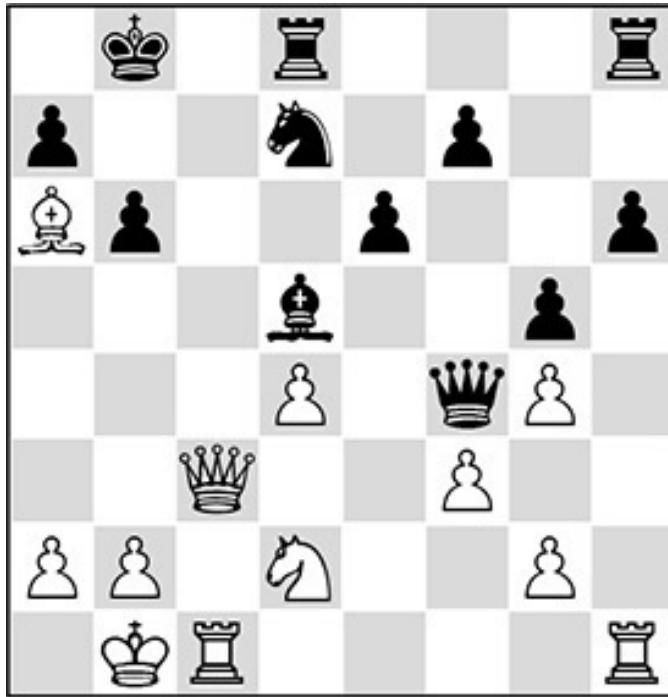
Benjamin

Marc Arnold 2575

Philadelphia 2009 (4)

1.d4 $\mathbb{N}f6$ 2.c4 e6 3. $\mathbb{N}f3$ b6 4. $\mathbb{N}c3$ $\mathbb{N}b4$ 5. $\mathbb{N}g5$ $\mathbb{N}b7$ 6. $\mathbb{W}c2$ h6 7. $\mathbb{N}h4$ g5 8. $\mathbb{N}g3$ d6 9. $\mathbb{N}d2$ $\mathbb{N}bd7$ 10.0-0-0 $\mathbb{N}h5$ 11.e3 $\mathbb{N}xc3$ 12. $\mathbb{W}xc3$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 13.f3 $\mathbb{N}xg3$ 14.hxg3 0-0-0 15. $\mathbb{N}d3$ $\mathbb{N}b8$ 16.g4

c5 17. ♜b1 d5 18. cxd5 cxd4 19. exd4 ♜xd5 20. ♜c1 ♜f4 21. ♜a6



CHALLENGE 30

What is White's threat, and how should Black best defend against it?

Black's position makes a nice impression. The isolated d-pawn looks feeble, blockaded by a proud bishop. White's major pieces dominate the c-file, and combined with the bishop, create vague mating threats around the king. If you're playing Black, you need to see the pattern – White has three pieces trained on the c8-square. So that leads us to the threat, namely 22. ♜xh6.

That in itself is not fatal; Black could overlook this detail, lose the h-pawn, and still be able to fight on. But because he didn't detect the threat he blundered with 21... ♜f6? 22. ♜xh6!

and the roof caved in. The rook is invulnerable because of mating ideas on c8, but defending against that now costs Black his knight.

22... ♜b7 23. ♜xf6

and Black resigned.

The most obvious cure is actually worse than the disease. 21... ♜b7? 22. ♜xb7 ♜xb7 23. ♜e4 (but not 23. ♜c6+ ♜b8 24. ♜e4 ♜f6!) leaves Black unable to protect all his loose squares from invasion.

The answer is 21... ♜a8!, covering the back rank by enabling the knight to go to b8. The position would then be more or less equal.

Game 41

Joel 2610
Benjamin
Ivan Sokolov 2625
Amsterdam 1994 (7)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗xc6 dxc6 5.0-0 f6 6.d4 ♗g4 7.c3 ♗d6 8.♗e3 ♗e7 9.♘bd2
♖d7 10.dxe5 fxe5 11.h3 ♗e6 12.♘g5 ♗g8 13.♔h5+ ♗g6 14.♕fd1 0-0-0 15.♘f1 ♕e8 16.♘g3
h6 17.♘f3 ♗e6 18.♘f5



CHALLENGE 31

What is Black's best move?

White has just brought the knight to f5 with an obvious threat to take the g7-pawn. I think that sometimes this can be a particularly vulnerable moment – when we decide on our opponent's purpose or threat, we get distracted from looking for other situations a move might create. Not all of us will detect the tactical pattern here. For some it will come with experience and improvement. But for a player as strong as Ivan Sokolov, he only needed to take a brief step back from move generation to notice the problem and then defend the threat.

18...♜f7??

18...♜d7 would have defended both threats and provided equality.

19.♕xd6! cxd6

Perhaps 19...♜xd6 20.♗xg6 ♜xg6 21.♘e7+ ♔b8 22.♘xg6 ♜hd8 was a

better try, as the minor pieces have more trouble without the support of a rook.

20. $\mathbb{Q}xg6!$ $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e7+$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xg6$

I was able to win without difficulty.

Misdirection

We can easily miss an opponent's tactic when we think we have worked out a defense to what we *think* his idea is. Occasionally that move can be a red herring that distracts us from the real problem. If we don't stop to check for other possibilities, disaster can befall even the strongest players.

Game 42

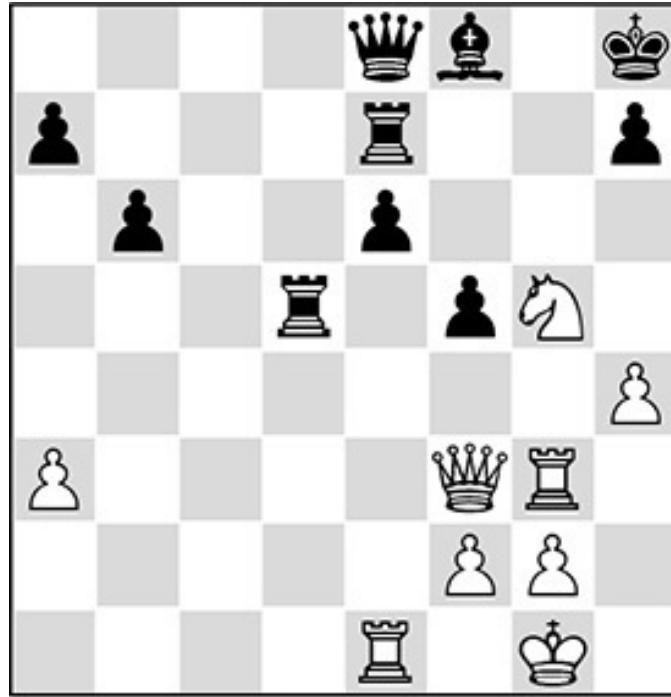
Abhijeet Gupta 2610

Vasiliy 2726

Ivanchuk

Gibraltar 2018 (8)

1.d4 e6 2.c4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ b6 4.a3 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ d5 6.cxd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 8.bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 9.e4 0-0 10. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ c5 11.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 15.e5 cxd4 16.cxd4 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 17.h4 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ f6 20.exf6 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ gxf6 22. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ f5 24. $\mathbb{Q}g3+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 29.d5! $\mathbb{Q}xd5$



30. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$

30. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$! is also strong, especially after 30... $\mathbb{Q}xe6$?! 31. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}xh7$, but Black could resist after 30... $\mathbb{Q}e5$. It is actually an easier move to play, but by sizing up his options Gupta spots a diabolical trap.



CHALLENGE 32

What is White's intended response to 30... $\mathbb{Q}xe6$? Should Black take the knight?

30... $\mathbb{Q}xe6$?

30... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ would compel White to play accurately; he should win after 31. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}c1$, but at least Black could keep fighting.

31. $\mathbb{Q}g8+$! $\mathbb{Q}xg8$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$

32... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}xf5+$ is no help for Black.

33. $\mathbb{Q}xe6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ 1-0

So why did Ivanchuk miss such an obvious (for his level) tactic? He grabbed the knight without thinking because he anticipated the more obvious but less effective follow-up 31. $\mathbb{Q}c3+$, which he could answer with 31... $\mathbb{Q}ee5$ 32. $f4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5+$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 35. $fxe5$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ and Black should be able to hold.

If the move 31. $\mathbb{Q}c3+$ didn't exist, Ivanchuk would have been alerted to look for something else.

Time pressure

Game 43

Joel 2545

Benjamin

Rudy Douven 2445

Wijk aan Zee 1989 (1)

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4 ♜f6 5.♘c3 e6 6.♘f3 ♜b4 7.cxd5 exd5 8.♗d3 0-0 9.0-0
 ♜g4 10.♗g5 ♜xc3 11.bxc3 ♜bd7 12.♗d2 ♜xf3 13.gxf3 ♜c8 14.♗h1 ♜c6 15.♗g1 ♜h8
 16.♗ab1 ♜c8 17.♗f4 ♜h5 18.♗h4 g6 19.♗b5 ♜e6 20.c4 ♜b6 21.♗e7 ♜g8 22.c5 ♜d7
 23.♗d3 ♜e8 24.♗d6 ♜hf6 25.♗g5 ♜c6 26.♗b5 ♜c8 27.♗gc1 ♜d8 28.♗f1 ♜a5 29.♗xb7
 ♜xa2 30.♗g3 ♜e1



CHALLENGE 33

Does Black have a threat? Does White need to make a defensive move?

I was very proud to receive an invitation to the illustrious Wijk aan Zee tournament, and I looked forward to playing a lot of big name grandmasters. In the first round I played the lowest-rated player from the home country. I've dominated to this point, using my bishop pair to play on both sides of the board. Only problem was I'd played too slowly and had very little time left on the clock.

In the pages of *New In Chess* magazine, Indian GM Parimarjan Negi offered good advice for players working through time pressure. There are a lot of times when you should scale down and not try to do too much with your moves. If you can make a reliable move that doesn't require calculation, go ahead and do it. This both saves precious time and helps you avoid blunders.

An objective look at our position here tells you that White's threat to advance the c-pawn is unstoppable. There may be a need to play a quick move, but not a rash one. You don't have to *find* the cheapos in order to *anticipate* them.

31.c6??

Simply 31. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ wins, as does 31. $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ 33. c6.

31... $\mathbb{Q}a6!$

Oops! Now I'm mated.

32. $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}b8+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 0-1

Tactical danger zones

Fundamental tactic errors are more than a matter of not seeing a move. They tend to result from a kind of complacency or failure to anticipate danger. We see two danger zones in the following game. Answering an attack on a piece with a counterattack on another piece is an advanced outside-of-the-box type of thinking. However, it is inherently risky because of all the ways something can go wrong. The counterattacked piece can escape with gain of tempo, or perhaps utilize a desperado tactic. Or the counterattacked piece may be defended with gain of tempo, as we see here. These potential problems must be ruled out before we can deem a move safe to play.

Another issue is playing moves that were planned in advance without checking them as you update the position. I think that happened here, too.

Game 44

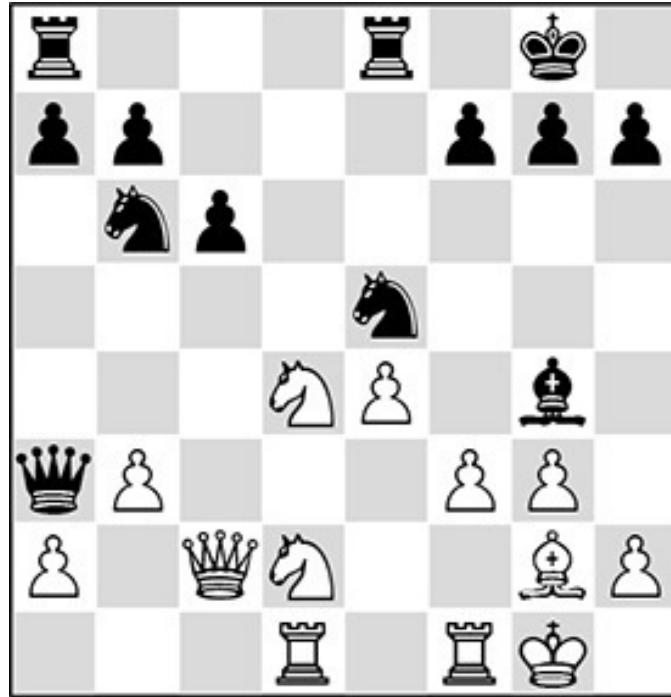
Joel 2593

Benjamin

Leif Karell 2123

Parsippany tt 2002 (1)

1. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d5 2. c4 c6 3. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4. g3 e6 5. d4 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ 0-0 8. 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 9. b3 e5
10. dxе5 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 12. cxд5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}a3$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ 15. e4 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$
 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 17. f3



Black is a strong enough player to look for a *zwischenzug* here, but he miscalculates.

17... $\text{Bd}8??$

The idea is good; Black wants to retreat his bishop to c8 where it won't be in the way.



18.♘b1!

Black resigned because 18...♝b4 19.a3! costs him a piece. Black's whole maneuver (...♝g4, ...♝ad8, ...♝c8) was likely planned out before his sixteenth move. Ideally, you would want to catch the tactical problem before the start of the sequence, though in this case 16...♝g4 doesn't harm Black's position. Two-or-three-move plans often contain a certain danger because we tend to play the second or third move right away. But it is important to take advantage of the improved board sight that every move gives us.

Care for your king

Game 45

Joel 2608

Benjamin

Liang Chong 2529

Qingdao 2002 (2)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♘e7 6.♕e1 b5 7.♗b3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 ♘b8
10.d4 ♘bd7 11.♘bd2 ♘b7 12.♗c2 ♘e8 13.♘f1 ♘f8 14.♘g3 g6 15.♗g5 h6 16.♗d2 c5 17.d5
c4 18.b4 cxb3 19.axb3 ♘c7 20.♗e2 b4 21.♗ec1 bxc3 22.♗d3 ♘c5 23.♗xc3 ♘b6 24.b4
♘xd3 25.♗xd3 ♘ec8 26.♗ca3 ♘c7 27.♗e3 ♘c4 28.♗b1 ♘ab8 29.♗a7 ♘a8 30.♗e3 ♘ab8
31.♗d2 ♘c2 32.♗f1 h5 33.♗3a2 ♘c3 34.♗e2 ♘d3 35.♗a3 ♘b5 36.♗c3 ♘xf1+ 37.♗xf1
♗d7 38.♗e2 ♘c7 39.♗d3 ♘bc8



CHALLENGE 34

Why was 40.♘e2 a really bad idea?

In this position I can see a number of reasonable moves – 40.f3, 40.g4, 40.♗a4, and the computer favorite 40.b5 for example – which all offer White a slight advantage.

40.♘e2?

This seemed reasonable because the knight covers the back rank while I prepare to trade a pair of rooks with ♜a3-c3. But I wish my spidey-sense had been more attuned to the positioning of my king, which has just been deprived of a critical flight square. Kudos to my opponent for spotting why it matters.

40...f5 41.f3 ♜xd5! 42.exd5

I didn't like 42.♜xa6 ♜b7 43.♜a7 d5, so I'm walking a tightrope.

42...e4+ 43.♘xe4

43.fxe4 ♘e5+ 44.♔d4 ♜c4+ 45.♘xc4 ♜xc4# would be embarrassing.

43...♘e5+ 44.♔d2 fxe4 45.fxe4 ♘c4+ 46.♔d3 ♘b2+

Black's initiative would dissipate if he took the exchange, leaving chances balanced.

47.♔d2 ♜g7 48.♜1a2



48...♘c4+

Black could certainly play on here, as White would have to play accurately to hold: 48...♜c2+ 49.♔e1 ♜e8 (49...♞d3+ 50.♔d1 ♜xb4 51.♜xc2 ♜xc2 52.♜b3 ♜xe3+ 53.♜xe3 is also slightly better for Black) 50.b5! axb5 51.♜a8 ♜d3+ 52.♔d1 ♜xa2 53.♜xe8+ ♔f7 54.♜b8 ♜b2+ 55.♔c1 ♜c4 56.♜b7+

$\mathbb{Q}g8$ 57. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 58. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 59. $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ and Black maintains slight winning chances.

49. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5+$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}c4+$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5+$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}d2$

½-½

I was lucky things didn't turn out worse. I didn't see it coming at all. When the queens are off the board, it is especially easy to get complacent about your king.

Maintain objectivity

Complacency can leave your king unattended, but overconfidence and/or overpressing can do the trick as well.

Game 46

Joel Benjamin 2608

Artashes 2545

Minasian

Manila ol 1992 (11)

1.d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2.c4 c5 3.d5 g6 4. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 5.e4 d6 6. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 0-0 7.h3 e6 8. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ exd5 9. exd5 $\mathbb{Q}e8+$
10. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ a6 11.a4 $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 12.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 16. a5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$
17. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe1+$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 23. fxe3
 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ f5 25.g4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 26.h4 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 27.gxf5 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ gxf5 29. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$
31.h5 $\mathbb{Q}d8$



After some tense maneuvering, Black snags a pawn. Objectively, this brings no advantage, as White's counterplay is easily enough to secure a draw.

32. ♜d3 ♜xa5 33. ♜e2 ♜f7 34. ♜g3 ♜f6 35. e4 ♜e1 36. exf5 ♜xg3 37. ♜xg3



37... ♜g5?

Olympiad time scrambles pack an extra element of pressure, as you are playing for more than yourself. Minasian, the final champion of the USSR, was proudly representing his brand new country of Armenia. No doubt he was confident and motivated, but you can't have what isn't there. He had to settle for the draw after 37... ♜xf5 38. ♜h4+ ♜e5 39. ♜g3+, etc.

38. ♜f4+ ♚xh5??

There was a chance to swallow his pride and start defending by 38... ♜f6 39. ♜g4 ♜a4 40. ♜d2.

39. ♜g3!

The threat of 40. ♜e2# essentially ends the game.

Watching from a distance, Larry Christiansen had anticipated this trap and was laughing with great gusto.

39... ♜xf5 40. ♜xf5 b5 41. b3 bxc4 42. bxc4 a5 43. ♜c2 h6 44. ♜f3

Black resigned.

CHAPTER 4

Grandmaster calculation and analysis

Strong players are often said to have a good ‘feel’ for the game that guides them to good moves. But chess success is highly related to the quality of work done during a game. A logical and efficient thought process goes a long way in this regard.

In this chapter we will explore (more or less) proper calculation from several of my own games. There are limits to what even grandmasters can expect to achieve, and I can’t claim I got everything right in these games. Engines are particularly harsh critics, but can be misleading. We can only find what is humanly possible, and that will vary for each player. Here we will try to develop better habits.

The most fundamental rule is that we must work out our moves and leave the guesswork to a minimum. Look for candidate moves and analyze them. We cannot shirk this responsibility if we want to improve.

Straightforward calculation

Before we step up to pretty difficult calculation, let’s examine a case where the idea was rather obvious, there were not many branches, and the opponent’s move choices were rather limited. It’s the best kind of situation to calculate perfectly; grandmasters will get it right every time, but mere mortals can aspire to do it, too. Some players may not be able to see far enough in their mind’s eye, but generally practice will help people see farther.

Game 47

Joel Benjamin 2575

Yasser 2645

Seirawan

Seattle ch-USA 2000 (10)

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♘d7 5.♘f3 ♘gf6 6.♘xf6+ ♘xf6 7.♗g5 c5 8.♗b5+ ♘d7 9.♗xd7+ ♘xd7 10.♗e2 0-0-0 11.♗d1

Advanced players can adjust their approach for particular players. I went for a position with kings on opposite wings because I always felt my best chance to beat Yasser was to play for the attack – he wasn’t the sort of player you outplay strategically.

11...♘c7 12.0-0 cxd4 13.♘xd4



13...a6?

13... \mathbb{Q} c5 is not entirely safe either, but would have been a better option.



CHALLENGE 35

Analyze 14. \mathbb{N} x e6 to a win

The upcoming sacrifice is one of the most important of my grandmaster career – it helped me win my third U.S. Championship title – but also one of the easiest. I write that in hopes I am not belittling anyone who might not be able to work it out.

In many positions in this book the hardest part of the process is finding the first move, but here it is screaming to be analyzed. The supporting tactics are not well-hidden either, and it only took me about ten minutes to work everything out.

14.♘xe6! fxe6

14...♝e8 is not a problem due to 15.♞d8+!.

15.♛xe6+ ♜d7

15...♝b8 16.♝f4 ♛xf4 17.♝xd8+ ♚a7 and now White has two apparent winning moves. 18.♝f7 seems simplest and was my intention, but 18.♛c8 ♝g4 19.g3 ♛f3 20.a4 also seems to win. It wasn't necessary to work out which one was better; I could save time and choose between the two when I got there. Finally, I wasn't too concerned about 15...♞d7 16.♝xd8 ♛xd8 because I haven't really sacrificed any material. After 17.♝d5 ♛e7 18.♛h3 ♚c7 19.♝fd1 ♞f6 20.♛c3+ ♛b8 21.♝d8+ ♚a7 Black is so tied up that any reasonable continuation wins for White.

16.♝xf6 gxsf6



17.♝d4!

I just had to put two ideas together; doubling rooks and pinning on the c-file.

Because White will need the possibility of b2-b4, c4 is the right square for the rook, and thus 17. $\mathbb{R}d3$ would be a mistake.

17... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 18. $\mathbb{R}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$

18... a5 19. a3 (or even 19. c3) would not help.

19. $\mathbb{R}xc5$ $\mathbb{W}xc5$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xd7$ $\mathbb{W}xc2$ 21. $\mathbb{W}d6+$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 22. $\mathbb{W}xf6$

Seirawan was always a dogged defender, and found a way to resist for a long time. Nevertheless, I was able to bring the point home after fifty more moves!

The process

Now we move on to positions where the top choice is not obvious. The following position shows the challenges of calculation and the basic workings of the process.

Game 48

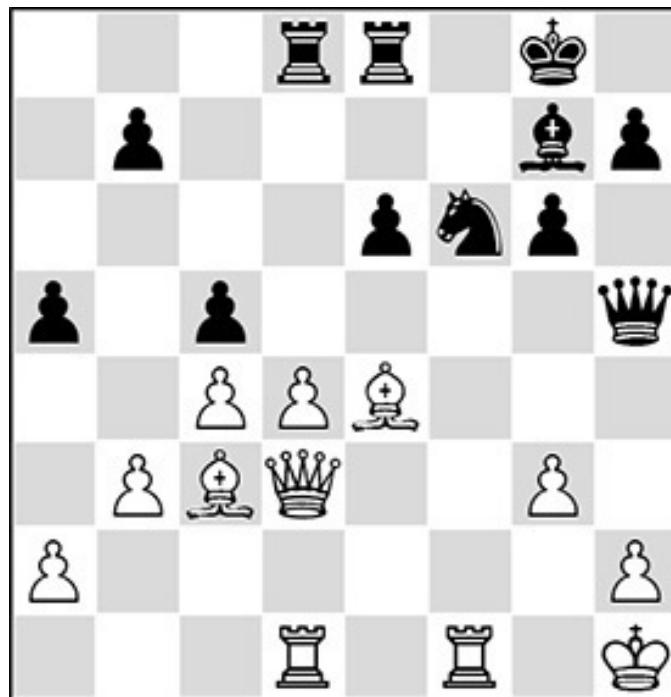
Jonathan 2345

Schroer

Joel Benjamin 2575

USA tt 2009 (3)

1.d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2.c4 g6 3. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 4.g3 0-0 5. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ d6 6.0-0 c6 7. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 8.b3 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 11. $\mathbb{W}d2$ e6 12. $\mathbb{W}e3$ d5 13. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 14. $\mathbb{W}xf3$ f5 15. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 16.f3 a5 17. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{W}g5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{W}h5$ 19. $\mathbb{W}e3$ $\mathbb{W}fe8$ 20. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 21.e4 dx e 4 22.fxe4 $\mathbb{W}ad8$ 23. $\mathbb{W}ad1$ c5 24. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ fxe4 25. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$



CHALLENGE 36

Find the top two candidate moves for Black, choose one and give supporting analysis

Choosing between good options can be one of the more difficult assignments in chess. It is especially difficult when the second option doesn't get on the radar screen. There are of course times when these decisions can be made quickly; opening moves can be a matter of taste. But when there are captures and other confrontations, we don't want to get lazy.

In this position, first up is 25...cxd4, a move everybody likes. If you start with the false assumption that White *must* move the attacked bishop, it's an easy choice: 26. $\mathbb{Q}xd4?$ e5 (26... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 27. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{B}xd4$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}f3!$ $\mathbb{W}h3$ 29. $\mathbb{B}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xh2$ 30. $\mathbb{B}h4$ $\mathbb{W}xf1+$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xh2$ is less convincing) 27. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ and Black wins a piece.

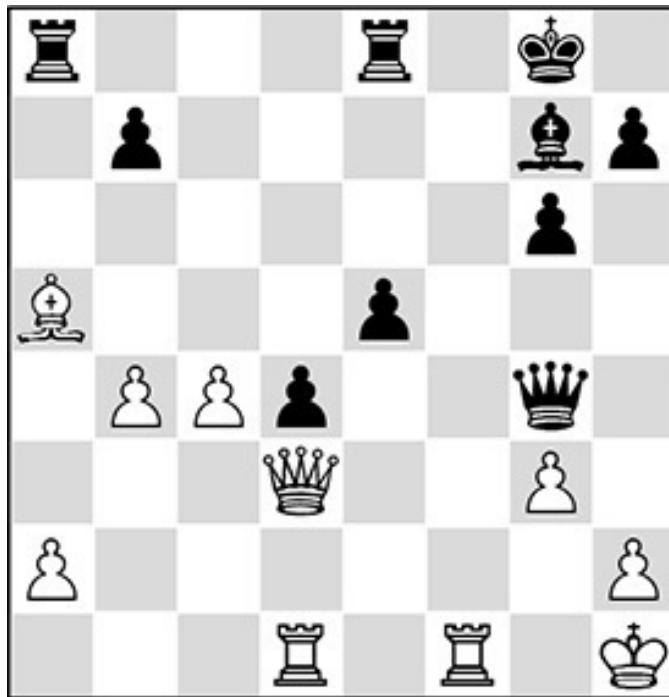
A lot of players would stop there and make their move. Please don't! The move to calculate is 26. $\mathbb{Q}f3!$. Forcing moves like counterattacks of pieces (particularly valuable ones) should always be on our radar when calculating.

Black has one strong answer in 26... $\mathbb{Q}g4!$, blocking the attack rather than running away with the queen (26... $\mathbb{W}g5?$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ e5 28. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ and White is simply better).

In turn White has two plausible candidates, but the counterattack with 27. $\mathbb{W}e2$ is smashed by 27... $\mathbb{W}xh2+!$ 28. $\mathbb{W}xh2$ $\mathbb{Q}xh2$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xh2$ dxc3 and the passed pawn will be decisive. Note that desperados are often a good answer to counterattacks. So 27. $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ $\mathbb{W}xg4$, and now two more possibilities:

A) 28. $\mathbb{B}f4$ is strongly met by 28... $\mathbb{W}xd1+!$ 29. $\mathbb{W}xd1$ dxc3 and the passed pawn again decides the game. I don't think I saw that line in the game;

B) 28. $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ $\mathbb{B}a8$, and now I think I missed 29. $\mathbb{B}f4$ (I don't catch every counterattack) 29... $\mathbb{W}h5$ 30. b4 e5 31. $\mathbb{B}e4$ b6 (or 31... $\mathbb{B}f8$) and White's blockade will soon collapse. I saw the position after 29.b4 e5.



analysis diagram

I knew this was good, but in my mind's eye I didn't realize that Black's central connected passed pawns are unstoppable. In the game I chose the other candidate, which I thought was absolutely overwhelming.

25...♝g4

This is also an obvious candidate – a mate threat with intensified pressure on the d4-pawn.

26.♜e2 ♜f8

My intention was to press home the attack. After grinding through all the tactics, engines give preference to 26...cxd4, but after 27.♝xa5 (we have already seen 27.♝f3 ♜xh2+ 28.♝xh2 ♝xh2 29.♝xh2 dxc3) 27...♜xa5 28.♝xg4 ♛xa2 29.♝d3, I don't think Black really has any advantage at all. If my move does not force an advantage, it at least pressures White to find difficult moves.

Now we determine Black's main threat (27...♝f2) and conclude that White must defend against it. One move stands out...

27.♝f3 ♜xf3! 28.♝xf3 ♝xh2



It was relatively easy to get this far. I think I can hardly be blamed for thinking White had no hope of surviving.

29.♕g2?

This move succeeds in keeping the roof from falling in, but I had no trouble converting the ending after

29...♚xf3+ 30.♚xf3 ♜xf3 31.♗xf3 b6 32.♗e4 cxd4 33.♖d3 e5 34.c5 bxc5 35.♗xa5 ♖a8
36.♗b6 ♖xa2 37.♖xc5 ♖e2+ 38.♗f3 ♖e1 39.♗f2 ♖c1 40.b4 e4 41.♖a3 e3+ 42.♗e2 ♖c2+
43.♗e1 ♖e5 44.♖a8+ ♗f7 45.♖f8+ ♗e6 46.♖e8+ ♗d5 0-1

Another defensive-minded move falls flat:

A) 29.♖f2 ♜f3+ 30.♗g2 ♚h2+ 31.♗xf3 ♖f8+ 32.♗e3 ♖xg3+ 33.♖f3
♚h6+ with a total collapse.

But two continuations are playable, with the most plausible one being...

B) 29.g4. After 29...♜xg4+ 30.♗g1, I probably intended 30...cxd4
31.♖xe6+ ♚h8, but after 32.♖xd4! there is surprisingly no win.



analysis diagram

32... $\mathbb{Q}h2+$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}h1+$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}g2+$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}g1+$ 36. $\mathbb{R}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}g3+$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}e2=$. Therefore Black should play 30... $\mathbb{Q}h2$ 31. $\mathbb{R}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 32. $\mathbb{R}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}f3+$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$, and now White can stay in the game with 34. $\mathbb{R}ee1!$; Students tend to come up with 29.g4 in class, and with proper desperation one can play it over the board. But the remarkable best continuation is...

C) 29. $\mathbb{Q}xe6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 30. $\mathbb{R}f7!!$.



analysis diagram

The white pieces seem to be fleeing the defense of the king, but are actually preparing shocking counterplay.

C1) 30... $\mathbb{W}xd1+$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xh2$ $\mathbb{W}c2+$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{W}xc3$ and now 33. $\mathbb{W}e7$ and 33. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ are both good for perpetual check. Black has a more testing try in 31... $cx d4$, because 32. $\mathbb{Q}xg7?$ is insufficient after 32... $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 33. $\mathbb{W}e7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 34. $\mathbb{W}xd8$ $\mathbb{W}e2+$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{W}f1+!$ (35... $dxc3$? 36. $\mathbb{W}f8+$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 37. $\mathbb{W}f4$ $g5$ 38. $\mathbb{W}f5=$) 36. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{W}f2+$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{W}f5+$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{W}e4+$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $dxc3$ and Black wins easily. The correct defense is 32. $\mathbb{Q}xa5!$ $\mathbb{W}h5+$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}g1!$ (though 33. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{W}xa5$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{W}d2+$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ also holds) 33... $\mathbb{W}xa5$ 34. $\mathbb{W}e7$ and Black must acquiesce to a perpetual again (34... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$, etc.);

C2) But what about 30... $\mathbb{Q}f3+$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$, leaving almost every white piece hanging?



analysis diagram

Normal replies won't get it done (for instance, 32. $\mathbb{Q}e7 \mathbb{N}xf7$), but amazingly White is perfectly fine after 32. $dxc5!!$.

The wrong captures led to back-rank mates – 32... $\mathbb{N}xf7$ 33. $\mathbb{R}xd8+$ $\mathbb{N}xd8$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}e8\#$ or 32... $\mathbb{N}xe6$ 33. $\mathbb{R}xd8+$ $\mathbb{N}xd8$ 34. $\mathbb{R}f8\#$.

32... $\mathbb{R}xd1$ is forced, when White has to find one more move: 33. $\mathbb{Q}xg7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 34. $\mathbb{R}f8+$! $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}f6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ and White can take with either piece on d8. It's only a question if White can play for a win at this point.

I included all those variations because they are extremely cool. At some point it has little to do with the over-the-board experience from the opening diagram.

I didn't appreciate 29. $\mathbb{Q}xe6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 30. $\mathbb{R}f7$ at that moment in the game, let alone from the point I started to calculate my combination. We humans have limits to our calculative powers, but I think the depth that I managed to get to is a realistic goal because there were enough forcing moves along the way to narrow things down.

I can't regret my choice of continuation, as it had a high probability of success, as it ultimately did in the game.

I've always found that choosing between two tempting continuations is one of the most difficult (and for me, often unpleasant) tasks in chess. Next up are two of my toughest decisions.

Game 49

Joel Benjamin 2587

Alex 2613

Shabalov

Seattle ch- USA 2003 (8)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♗f6 5.0-0 ♔e7 6.♕e1 b5 7.♗b3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 ♘a5
10.♗c2 c5 11.d4 ♕c7 12.♗bd2 cxd4 13.cxd4 ♜d8 14.d5 ♔d7 15.♗f1 ♜dc8 16.♗e2 ♘b7
17.♗g3 ♘c5 18.♗e3 b4 19.♗c1 ♔b5 20.♗e1 g6 21.♗b1 ♘fd7 22.♗h2 ♜d8 23.♗g4 ♔g5



CHALLENGE 37

How should White continue?

There are two good moves in this position. Your candidate search should turn up 24.♔d2 and 24.♗h6+. This decision proved to be quite stressful for me, as the situation had all the ingredients for overthinking. Shabalov had a knack for creating and navigating his way through complications, I was happy to get a position that was fairly closed, and I wanted, above all, to avoid conceding the initiative.

24.♗h6+ affords Black three plausible replies. 24...♗f8 can be easily eliminated; after 25.♔f3, Black is forced to play either 25...♗xh6 (which would be better played a move earlier) or 25...♗f6, which nullifies his whole plan.

Then there is 24...♗xh6. Even though this is given by the computer as the best

move, I doubted Shaba would play it. After 25. $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ Black is not in any immediate danger, but the dark-square control will offer White long-term chances. It will be hard for the black pieces to really make an impact for quite a while.

So I thought 24... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ was the key reply, when I'm forced to sacrifice:

25. $\mathbb{Q}hf5+$ $gxf5$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xf5+$ and now:

A) 26... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ (27. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $h6$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xh6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}g5+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}g8+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}g5+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ is a draw) 27... $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}c7?$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ and White is probably winning, though Black would do better to sacrifice the exchange;

B) 26... $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ $\mathbb{Q}xc8$. The engine says I have a nice advantage, but I wasn't convinced. Black has something of a dark-square blockade and my remaining bishop is pretty lifeless.

So I decided against 24. $\mathbb{Q}h6+$, mainly because the sacrifice gave Black too many options and some positions were difficult to evaluate.

24. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$



I thought of this continuation as essentially winning a pawn. Here the average player would defend the pawn as a reflex, but 25... $a5$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}f3!$ (more accurate than 26. $\mathbb{Q}h6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$) leaves Black unable to defend the kingside: 26... $f6$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}h6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ (27... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}gf5+$ $gxf5$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}g3+!$ ends the discussion) 28. $\mathbb{Q}hf5$ $gxf5$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}h6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}h5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ and Black is

utterly defenseless. But I wasn't holding out any hope for this.

25... $\mathbb{Q}g5!$

Most annoying! I net a pawn but my initiative completely vanishes. Black can also play 25... $\mathbb{Q}f6$, but it seems more logical to keep pieces on.

26. $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ $h5$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $h4$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}gf1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$

I wasn't enthusiastic about the situation, but perhaps if I had been coldly rational I might have grabbed the pawn sooner and had more time to think!

29. $\mathbb{R}ce1?$

I should have defended with 29. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}e1$. The queen needs to retreat anyway, while the rook can stay active on the c-file. After my inaccuracy Black has sufficient compensation for the pawn. I somehow survived a vicious onslaught and won in 61 moves.

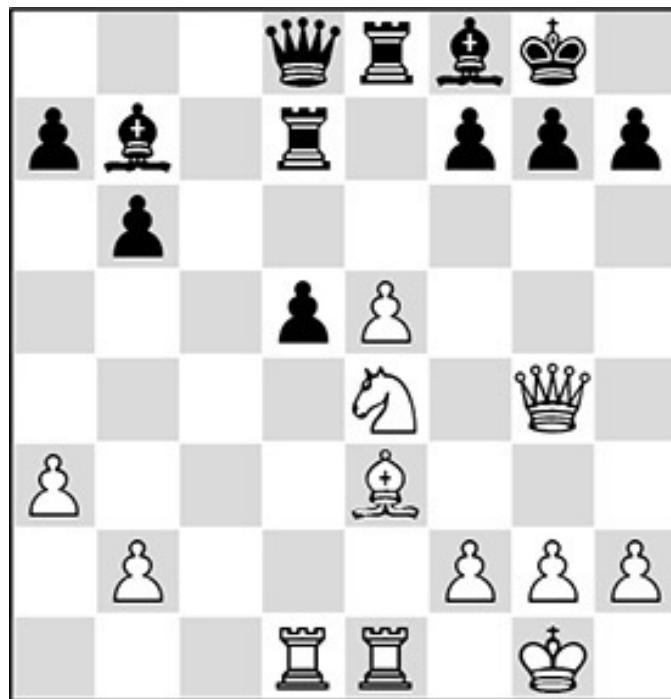
Game 50

Joel Benjamin 2587

Fabian Döttling 2518

Framingham 2001 (9)

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ e6 6. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 7.cxd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 9.0-0 0-0 10. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 11.a3 b6 12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}a2$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 18.dxe5 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xd5!$ exd5 20. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e4$



I can't decide how to punctuate this move. On the surface it earns a 'former

oyster' ('exclam'), and it clearly steps up the attacking potential of White's position. The only problem is the move I spent seven minutes worrying about, 21... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$!. Döttling later confided that he had not seriously considered sacrificing the exchange here. He should have! Grandmasters are generally on alert for any way to eliminate or reduce the opponent's initiative, and the exchange sacrifice is often an effective tool to that end.

I calculated 21... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 22. $\mathbb{N}f6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ d4 25. $\mathbb{Q}d2$, but after 25... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$, White's advantage is not that great; a healthy passed pawn and the bishop pair largely compensates for the exchange. The engine helpfully points out that 24. $\mathbb{Q}a4!$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ d4 26. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ offers White a larger edge, but rather unhelpfully improves with 23... $\mathbb{Q}c6$!. 24. $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ attempts to refute, but Black seems to equalize with accurate play: 24...d4! 25. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 26.g3 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 28.f3 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 29.g4 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$, and with my kingside compromised I'm not optimistic about winning. So White should prefer 24. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$! when Black will force the pawn to d4 with a reasonable position. It's true that Black has to find a few resources to make this work, but better to look for them in an active position.

I understood that I could maintain a grip on the position with the simple 21. $\mathbb{Q}d4$, but just how great would my expectations of winning be?

Despite my concerns I opted for the potential high reward of the text move. I won this battle, but you already know I had another hurdle coming up.

21... $\mathbb{Q}h8$



CHALLENGE 38

Find the top two candidates for White and choose the best one

22. $\hat{Q}g5$

It's clear that something should go to g5, but which piece? With hindsight I feel my decision was guided by too great a need to force my opponent's responses. The other option, 22. $\hat{Q}g5$, creates great threats but leaves a lot of plausible moves to calculate. None of them look all that successful, however, and even if one defended reasonably well, Döttling would have been hard pressed to find it.

A) 22... $\hat{Q}xe5$ 23. $\hat{Q}h5$ and Black must sacrifice the exchange in less favorable conditions than before;

B) 22... $\hat{Q}e7$ 23. $\hat{Q}f5$ g6 24. $\hat{Q}h3$ h5 25. e6 fxe6 26. $\hat{Q}d4+$ $\hat{Q}g7$ 27. $\hat{Q}xe6+-$;

C) 22... h6 23. e6 fxe6 24. $\hat{Q}xe6$ $\hat{Q}c8$ (24... $\hat{Q}e7$ 25. $\hat{Q}xf8$ $\hat{Q}xf8$ 26. $\hat{Q}xb6$)

25. $\hat{Q}c1$ $\hat{Q}c6$ 26. $\hat{Q}xf8$ $\hat{Q}xf8$ 27. $\hat{Q}d4$ (or 27. $\hat{Q}xh6$, with the idea that 27... gxh6 28. $\hat{Q}e6$ wins on the spot) and White's threats are unstoppable;

D) 22... $\hat{Q}g8$ 23. $\hat{Q}f5$ g6 24. $\hat{Q}h3$ h5 25. e6 fxe6 26. $\hat{Q}xe6$ $\hat{Q}f6$ 27. $\hat{Q}xf8$ $\hat{Q}de7$ (a nifty resource that isn't easy to anticipate, but it only goes so far)

28. $\hat{Q}xg6$ $\hat{Q}xg6$ 29. $\hat{Q}d4$ and White will eventually win.

I didn't see anything wrong with 22. $\hat{Q}g5$, but found myself seduced by the other path. Maybe there was some sudden inspiration that sparked my decision. With the clock ticking, the decision-making process is often going to be less than perfect.

22... $\hat{Q}c8$ 23. $\hat{Q}f6$ $\hat{Q}c7$



24. $\mathbb{W}xc8$

I think this was one of those, ‘maybe I can mate him with 24. $\mathbb{W}h4$, and if it doesn’t work, I’ll take the pawn’. Well, 24... $gxf6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xg7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 27. $\mathbb{W}f6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ forces White to take the perpetual because 28. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}g3+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 30. $\mathbb{W}h8+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}g8$ $\mathbb{Q}c1!$ wins for Black. I think I would have been wishing I had played 22. $\mathbb{Q}g5$!

24... $\mathbb{Q}exc8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}c2$

Black could also try to survive with 25... $\mathbb{Q}d7$.

26. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$

Or perhaps 26... $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}d7$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ – it’s two pawns now, but Black is quite active.

27. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 28. $h3$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$

White still has excellent chances to win, but good technique is not easy in time pressure and I didn’t break down Black’s defenses. It was a real pity for me, as a win would have brought me my only clear first in a U.S. Open, instead of a tie.

Attack and defense

Combinational attacking play starts with generating offensive elements that form the basis for a tactical continuation. We must combine these ideas with our best determination of the defensive ideas for our opponent. Many foolish sacrifices are made due to wishful thinking. We can avoid mistakes by zealously searching for our opponent’s resources.

Sometimes you are the windshield, and sometimes you are the bug. When we find ourselves defending, we must leave no stone unturned in our effort to stay alive.

Game 51

Joel Benjamin 2570

Eduard Gufeld 2445

Honolulu 1996 (5)

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d6 3.c3 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ e6 5.d3 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ 0-0 7.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 11.a3 d5 12.e5 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ dxc4 18. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ f5 19. $exf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}cf8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ g6 23. $\mathbb{Q}ae1$ $\mathbb{Q}4f7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$



CHALLENGE 39

Should White start with 26.d5, or 26. \mathbb{Q} xg6 ?

In the diagram, it is easy to see that White can sacrifice his bishop to eliminate Black's kingside pawns. This isn't enough by itself, but there is a second idea to open the long diagonal with d4-d5. Black can push his e-pawn to block the diagonal. Here many players would give up on the idea, but if you continue to work on the plan you can come up with the third, and most difficult element: the sacrifice of the rook to reopen the long diagonal.

That part was relatively easy. I calculated the main variations pretty well, but stumbled on the details of the execution.

26. \mathbb{Q} xg6

I thought I was actually being clever here, because I took away the possibility of 26.d5 \mathbb{Q} f4. However, after the simple retreat 27. \mathbb{Q} h4 Black is busted, as 27...e5 (27... \mathbb{Q} d8 28. \mathbb{Q} xd8 \mathbb{Q} xd8 29.g3 \mathbb{Q} h6 30.dxe6 \mathbb{Q} xe6 31. \mathbb{Q} xg6 wins at least a pawn) 28.g3 traps the bishop. Here I outsmarted myself, as sacrificing the bishop first gives Black a more important extra option.

26...hxg6 27.d5



27...e5

Black misses his chance for 27... \mathbb{Q} xh2+ (I don't recall what I overlooked here)

28. \mathbb{Q} h1 (if 28. \mathbb{Q} f1 e5 29. \mathbb{Q} xh2 \mathbb{R} h7 30. \mathbb{Q} g1 \mathbb{Q} f5 Black takes the initiative)

28...e5 29. \mathbb{R} xe5 \mathbb{Q} xe5 30. \mathbb{Q} xe5 \mathbb{W} xe5 31. \mathbb{R} xe5 \mathbb{R} h7 32. \mathbb{W} xh7+ \mathbb{Q} xh7

33. \mathbb{R} e7+ \mathbb{Q} g8 (33... \mathbb{Q} h6 34. \mathbb{R} xd7 \mathbb{R} xf2 35. \mathbb{R} xb7) 34. \mathbb{R} xd7 \mathbb{R} f7. I want to say that White can win the pawn ending after 35. \mathbb{R} d8+ \mathbb{R} f8 36. \mathbb{R} xf8+ \mathbb{Q} xf8, but if a win does exist it would be beyond my ability to calculate over the board.

28. \mathbb{R} xe5



Now we turn to the defense. I think it was easy for both grandmasters to foresee the next move. Black cannot take the rook without losing his queen, and any ‘quiet move’ will get mated in three, e.g. 28... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 29. $\mathbb{R}h8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xh8$ 30. $\mathbb{R}h5+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 31. $\mathbb{R}h8\#$.

Black can also try to block the long diagonal, but these moves give White too much of a free hand, and unsurprisingly fail: 28... $\mathbb{R}g7$ 29. $\mathbb{R}e7$ (29. $\mathbb{R}h5$ is also good enough) 29... $\mathbb{R}ff7$ 30. $\mathbb{R}xf7$ or 28... $\mathbb{R}f6$ 29. $\mathbb{R}e7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 30. $\mathbb{R}xe7$ $\mathbb{R}8f7$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$. In both cases White forces mate.

28... $\mathbb{R}h7!$

This was the only move I had to seriously calculate. By winning a tempo, Black maintains hopes of defending.

29. $\mathbb{Q}xg6+$ $\mathbb{R}g7$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}h6$



Here Black has a little more leeway as White is strongly threatening to move the rook from e5, but is *not threatening to mate with checks*. This means Black can look for a ‘loud quiet move’ – one with a strong enough threat to slow down White’s attack. Gufeld finds the only move to stay in the game.

30... ♜b6!

The threat to f2 limits White’s possibilities. Often the best defensive moves are counterattacks!

Note that Black must be precise: 30... ♜c5? is smashed by 31. ♜f5!, while in the game that move is refuted by 31... ♜xh2+!, uncovering an attack on White’s queen.

Alternatively, Black has defensive moves, but none of them are particularly useful.

30... ♜ff7 31. ♜h5 does nothing to help. On 30... ♜f5 White has a spectacular win with 31. ♜e8 ♜d7 32. ♜1e7!, but simply 31. ♜xf5 ♜xf5 32. ♜xg7 is enough to make Black look for something better.

31. ♜5e3 ♜ff7 32. ♜xg7 ♜xg7 33. ♜e4

33. ♜f3 is probably a stronger move. But it takes a computer a minute or two to work that out: 33... ♜c7 34. ♜h5 ♜g6 35. ♜xg6 ♜xg6 36. ♜e7 ♜g7 37. ♜fe3 ♜d6 38. ♜xg7+ ♜xg7 39.h3.



33... $\mathbb{Q}c5?$

Gufeld finally falters. After 33... $\mathbb{Q}c5!$ White has no immediate way forward.

34. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $axb6$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$

White's pressure has dissipated but without the c4-pawn Black has no counterplay. The final moves were blitzed out.

35... $\mathbb{Q}h3$

35... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}c2$.

36. $g3$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ $\mathbb{Q}d1+$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 1-0

Game 52

Joel 2554

Benjamin

Yury Shulman 2549

San Diego ch-USA 2004 (5)

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ c5 4. $\mathbb{Q}gf3$ cxd4 5. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6 7. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 8.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}e7$
 9. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ a5 10. c3 $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ 0-0 14. exd5 cxd5 15. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}h4$
 $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}axc1$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d4$

I think this pawn sacrifice is an easy decision. White can trade queens, but there is no way I am going to win that position.

18... $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e3$



The thematic rook lift threatens 20. $\mathbb{R}xh7+$.

19...h6

The computer indicates that Black could have forced a draw with 19... $\mathbb{W}xb2$ 20. $\mathbb{B}b1$ $\mathbb{W}a2$ 21. $\mathbb{B}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 22. f3 (White has many paths to a perpetual, e.g. 22. $\mathbb{W}h6$ g6 23. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ fxe6 24. $\mathbb{B}xg6+ =$) and now the unlikely move 22... $\mathbb{Q}d3!$ 23. fxe4 (23. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{W}f2+$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}xg3+$ 25. hxg3 h6#) 23... $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ 24. $\mathbb{B}xg7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 25. $\mathbb{W}g5+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 26. $\mathbb{W}f6+$, etc. but I don't think too many humans would have played differently from Shulman.

20. $\mathbb{B}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$



21. $\mathbb{Q}xg7!$

This sacrifice is also easy to make. White will have the option of perpetual check with an opportunity to play on. Since there is no way to continue the attack by ordinary means, it makes sense to play this move relatively quickly and figure it out later.

21... $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}g3+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}g3+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}e5$

Repeating moves to ‘gain time on the clock’ has been in our vernacular for years. The original idea, to get closer to move forty, applies here, but nowadays moves can literally gain time because of increments. If I knew what my next move would be, I would not repeat moves. At some point the defender is likely to need a deep think as well.

25... $\mathbb{Q}g7$



CHALLENGE 40

What are White's options for continuing the attack? What move would you play?

I have a tempting way forward in 26.g4, looking to undermine the defense of the f6-knight. Black has an unlikely-looking defense in 26... $\mathbb{Q}d3!$??. The point is 27. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{W}xb2$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{W}d2!$ allows Black to consolidate. Other rook moves allow the attack-killing 28... $\mathbb{W}b8$, but White has a clever answer in 28. $\mathbb{N}b3!$. Komodo zeroes out in a lot of variations, but the coolest is 28... $\mathbb{Q}fc8$ 29.h4! $\mathbb{Q}xc3!$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 31. $\mathbb{N}c5!$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 32.g5 $\mathbb{W}xc3$ 33.gxf6+ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 34. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{W}xf6$ 35. $\mathbb{W}b8+$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ (35... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 36. $\mathbb{W}g3+=$) 36. $\mathbb{W}xc8+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 37. $\mathbb{W}c7$ $\mathbb{W}xh4$ and Black probably has at least some winning chances.

White can meet 26... $\mathbb{Q}d3$ with 27.g5 $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ 28. $\mathbb{W}xf6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 29. $\mathbb{W}xh6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ $\mathbb{W}a1+$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{W}d1$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{W}d3$, and again the computer finds the chances dead even, whether White goes for the perpetual with 33. $\mathbb{N}xe6$ $f xe6$ 34. $\mathbb{W}xe6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 35. $\mathbb{W}h6+$ or not.

I didn't calculate 26... $\mathbb{Q}d3$, and I don't think I would ever anticipate such a move, giving a piece just to open up a square (d2). The much more likely response would be 26... $\mathbb{Q}g8$. Then after 27.h4 $\mathbb{W}xb2$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{W}a3$ 29.g5 hxg5 30.hxg5 $\mathbb{Q}ae8$ 31. $\mathbb{W}xf6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ White can give perpetual check again, but no more. So then 27. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{W}xb2$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ and now:



analysis diagram

- A) 28... $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ $\mathbb{R}d3$ 30. $\mathbb{B}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}e4+$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 32. $f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 33. $h3$ with a position that looks a lot more pleasant for White to play;
- B) 28... $\mathbb{Q}a3$ 29. $g5$ $hxg5$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xg5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{B}e8$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}h6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}c6+$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}f4+$ $e5$ (if 34... $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}a4+$ wins) 35. $\mathbb{Q}f6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}xg8$ $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}d8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 39. $\mathbb{B}b6+$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}c7+$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ $\mathbb{B}xb6$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}d2+$ and the computer says White is winning, but I tend to think Black should hold.

That is all very hard to calculate. I mainly eschewed 26.g4 because I didn't want to expose my king to counterattack and I liked the path I chose. 26.g4 doesn't force a win, though it certainly compels Black to make hard decisions and find tricky moves. But that can be said about the game continuation as well.

I don't know if the best players in the world can accurately calculate this position over the board, especially with more than one promising continuation. You do the best you can. Make sure you sidestep any obvious refutations and make the call.

26.h3

It seems a strange time for such a quiet move, but there is a certain logic behind it. My plan was to lift my rook to the kingside, but I will naturally need to make *luft* to do this. Black has a plan to take the b2-pawn and break my attack with ... $\mathbb{Q}b2-b8$. I can never let that happen, so I will chase the queen away with $\mathbb{B}b1$. Thus in order to not lose time, I need to make *luft* first.

26... $\mathbb{W}xb2$ 27. $\mathbb{B}b1$ $\mathbb{W}a3$ 28. $\mathbb{B}e1$



CHALLENGE 41

How can Black brilliantly force a draw?

It seems that Black is forced to try to hang on for dear life: 28... $\mathbb{W}g8$ 29. $\mathbb{B}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 30. $c4!$ $\mathbb{W}c1+$ (30... $\mathbb{W}c5$ 31. $\mathbb{B}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 32. $\mathbb{W}xf6$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ 33. $\mathbb{W}xh6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 34. $\mathbb{W}h7$ $\mathbb{B}f8$ 35. $cxd5+-$) 31. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{B}a7$ 32. $cxd5$ and White will have a terrific initiative after collecting the f6-knight. I don't remember my thoughts during the game, but I might well have gone for the line 30. $\mathbb{B}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 31. $\mathbb{W}xf6$ (31. $\mathbb{B}xf6!?$ $\mathbb{W}c1+$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{W}g5$ 33. $\mathbb{W}d6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 34. $\mathbb{B}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ seems roughly balanced) 31... $\mathbb{W}e7$ 32. $\mathbb{W}xh6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ and things are still up in the air.

Grandmasters have a natural aversion to lines that allow the attacker to push them around and prefer to find a way to fight back. The first step of finding a brilliant defense is perceiving the need, then opening the mind to all possibilities, and finally, voila...

28... $\mathbb{Q}e2!!$



Wow. This move completely shocked me. The lovely point is 29. $\mathbb{Q}xe2 \mathbb{Q}c1+$
30. $\mathbb{Q}h2 \mathbb{Q}g5!$, breaking the attack.

29. $\mathbb{Q}xe2 \mathbb{Q}b2$

Black could actually play for a win with 29... $\mathbb{Q}fc8$ but after 30. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ the chances are about balanced anyway.

30. $\mathbb{Q}f4$

30. $\mathbb{Q}d4?$ $\mathbb{Q}b8!$ – the move I can never allow!

30... $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}h5+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}d7+$

I don't have much choice but to go for the draw, as the a-pawn looms in the future.

33... $\mathbb{Q}h7$

33... $f6$ doesn't help: 34. $\mathbb{Q}h5 \mathbb{Q}h7$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}xf8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ and Black has to take a perpetual with 36... $\mathbb{Q}c1+$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}h2 \mathbb{Q}f4+$.

34. $\mathbb{Q}f6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}d7+ \frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$

This was truly a head-spinning game, and one I felt pretty proud of even if I didn't win it. When your opponent finds a move like 28... $\mathbb{Q}e2$, you just tip your proverbial cap to him.

How did Shulman find such a ridiculous move? Well, the first part of it was that he looked for it. He understood the stakes were high and he needed to find a move that worked. Black may not be lost without 28... $\mathbb{Q}e2$, but he will reel backward without any apparent way to slow down the attack.

I cannot speak for the cognitive connection in Shulman's brain, but I would

speculate it started with something like, ‘it’s too bad that when he lifts the rook it blocks my queen’s path to g5.’

Later it occurred to me that pushing the pawn two boxes might have made a difference. I considered 26.h4, which has some logic to it.



analysis diagram

The pawn might aid a future g4-g5. I felt I was going for the rook lift, and it might be useful to keep the g4-square guarded. I had no idea it would be so important to cover g5! After 26... $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 27. $\mathbb{R}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}a3$ 28. $\mathbb{R}e1$ $\mathbb{R}g8$ 29. $\mathbb{R}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ (29... $\mathbb{Q}ae8$ 30. $\mathbb{R}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}c6$) 30. $\mathbb{R}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}xh6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ White’s strong attack more than compensates for the sacrificed exchange.

However, Black can draw with another form of the resource used in the game: 26... $\mathbb{Q}e2!!$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ (27. $\mathbb{R}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$) 27... $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ and with White’s pieces strangely tethered together, he must take perpetual check.

How much of all these crazy variations did I see over the board? Not all that much, actually. Many of these variations are quite lengthy, with pieces moving all over the board. You can push a little more when you need to make a decision, because you never want to take a step the wrong way. But a lot of time the process is a bit more general, e.g.: I see I will get the f6-knight and then I will still have a good attack for the exchange.

Multiple skirmishes

Many of our favorite attacking games seem to lead inexorably from the opening to the decisive attack, with all its cool tactics. But in practice, tactics pop up from positions that we would not necessarily describe as tactical. The following game I would describe as highly strategical, with the main theme being the creation and exploitation of a space advantage. But a strong player rarely lets you win routinely. I needed to calculate through several pockets of tactics throughout the game. I am very proud of much of what I saw and played, though I didn't catch everything.

Game 53

Joel 2580

Benjamin

Xu Jun 2655

Seattle US-China Summit 2001 (1)

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ a6 6.a4 g6 7. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 8.0-0 0-0 9.f4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$
10. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}b6?$ 11.a5!



Xu has walked into a trap. I get a useful move in for free because all captures lead to trouble for Black: 11... $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ 12.e5 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ (12...dxe5 13.fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ (14... $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xe7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}ed5+-$) 15. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 16.e6 fxe6 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ e5 (18... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}g4$) 19. $\mathbb{Q}d5+-$) 13. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xe7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}b6\pm$; 11... $\mathbb{Q}xb2?$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 13.c3

\mathbb{W} xa5 14. \mathbb{Q} xc6 bxc6 15. \mathbb{A} b6+–.

11... \mathbb{W} c7 12. \mathbb{Q} b3 \mathbb{A} e6 13. \mathbb{Q} d5 \mathbb{A} xd5 14. exd5 \mathbb{Q} b8 15. c4 \mathbb{Q} bd7 16. \mathbb{Q} d4

At a certain level 16. \mathbb{Q} d4 may seem attractive, but trading the opponent's fianchettoed bishop is often overrated. Here it would probably help Black (16... \mathbb{Q} e8), as he could move a bit more freely on the dark squares.

16... \mathbb{Q} fe8

Black hopes for counterplay with ...e7-e5 or ...e7-e6, but I do not oblige.

17. f5! \mathbb{Q} e5 18. b3 \mathbb{Q} ac8

Black could consider 18... \mathbb{Q} ab8 with the idea of ...b7-b6. It is often difficult to decide when to risk weakening the position to make a bid for more space. If nothing seems to work, you can patiently wait for a better opportunity.

19. \mathbb{Q} h1 \mathbb{Q} d8

It was better to retreat 19... \mathbb{Q} b8 as the queen finds unexpected trouble here.

20. g4! \mathbb{Q} fd7?

The exclamation point for my move is old school – the pawn storm accentuates White's space advantage. In the new school concrete approach, Black has an effective counter in 20... \mathbb{Q} e4. It looks at first a bit silly in view of 21. \mathbb{Q} c2, but after 21... \mathbb{Q} f6, White hasn't gained anything. So Komodo suggests 21. \mathbb{Q} f3, maintaining a plus.



21. g5

Here I totally missed the cool shot 21. fxg6 hxg6 22. \mathbb{Q} xf7!. After 22.... \mathbb{Q} xf7 23. \mathbb{Q} e6 \mathbb{Q} xa1 24. \mathbb{Q} xa1 \mathbb{Q} de5 25. \mathbb{Q} xd8 \mathbb{Q} xd8, White's complete diagonal domination makes a win likely. How to see such a combo? It helps to always be

a bit aware of all possible captures and ‘wish lists’ – squares that are seemingly not available but would do great damage if they were. Even so, these tactics can slip through the cracks even for grandmasters.

21...b6



22.♘d2?

22.axb6 ♘xb6 23.fxg6 hxg6 24.♘f5 ♘c5 25.♘xg7 ♘xg7 doesn’t lead to anything tangible due to Black’s anchored knights, but 22.fxg6! is even stronger than a move ago: 22...hxg6 23.♖xf7 ♘xf7 24.♘e6 and White is winning easily.

22...bxa5 23.♖xa5 ♘c5

The engine tells us, quite correctly, that this is a mistake, and 23...♘b8 should be preferred. It is natural for grandmasters to try to make a challenge somewhere and not defend completely passively.

24.b4 ♘cd7

I worked out that 24...♘b7 25.♖xa6 ♘xc4 26.♗xc4 ♕xc4 27.♕c6! ♕xc6 28.dxc6 wins a piece. The lack of squares for the knight on b7 drew my eyes to look for an exploitation.

25.fxg6

This move commences a deep combination leading to win of material. Yet Komodo advocates keeping the pressure on with 25.♔a2, with the idea that Black’s pieces are stuffed after 25...♘b8 26.c5. It’s very difficult to compare a line where ‘nothing’ happens to one where material is gained, seemingly in

stride. How to know where the defender can best fight back?

25...hxg6 26. $\mathbb{Q}xa6$

The moment has passed – 26. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{W}xa5$ 28. $bxa5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ is not clear.

26... $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 28. $\mathbb{W}f2!$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$

There is no satisfactory defense for Black. 28... $f5$ 29. $gxf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 30. $\mathbb{W}g2$ or 30. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ will likely lead to mate. The ‘best’ try is 28... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{W}c8$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 31. $\mathbb{W}xf7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 32. $b5$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ when White is in control but with more work to be done for the win. But maybe I’ve gone off the rails? I had to have the sacrifice prepared to make this all work.

29. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{W}e8$



CHALLENGE 42

Does White have a winning sacrifice? (calculate at least four moves deep)

30. $\mathbb{Q}a8!!$ $\mathbb{W}xa8$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xe7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 32. $\mathbb{W}g3$

Not 32. $\mathbb{Q}f4$? $\mathbb{Q}f6!$, defending. In my youth, my friends and I would talk about the second layer of defense that grandmasters brought to the table. Xu is on a precipice but doesn’t give up without a fight.

32... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$!

I had to foresee this move, as 33. $gxf6$? $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{W}a1+$ wins for Black.

33... $\mathbb{W}a1+$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{W}d1$

34... $\mathbb{W}c3$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{W}xb4$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}f2+-$.

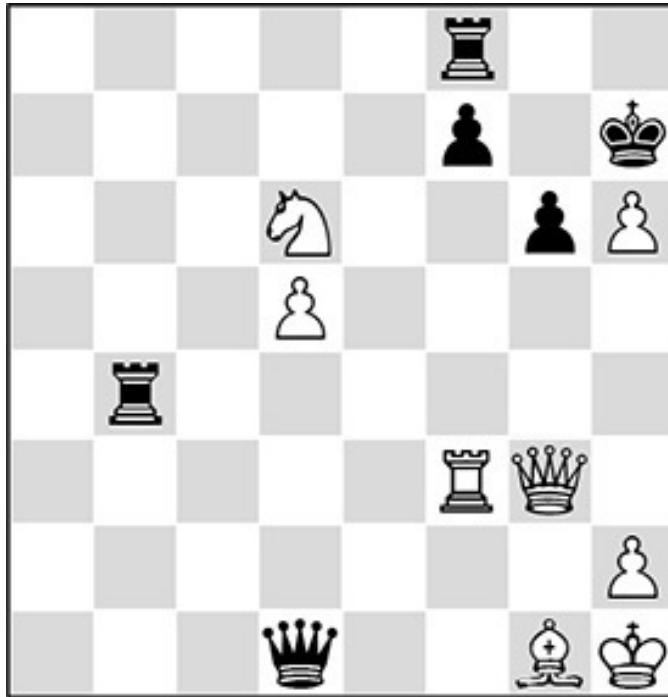
35. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$

Like Black's 32nd, the only way to keep playing.

36.gxh6

The careless 36.♔h3? ♜h4! would lead to pain and remorse.

36...♜b1 37.♝f5! ♜xb4 38.♝xd6 ♔d1



39.♜d3

I felt in my bones that 39.♝xf7! was the right move, but with my time shortage I was afraid to risk it. I saw 39...♛xd5 40.♝g5+ ♛xh6 (40...♛g8 41.♚c7 ♜b7 42.h7+ ♛h8 43.♝d4+; 40...♛h8 41.♚e5+) 41.♚h3+ ♛xg5 42.♝e3+ ♜bf4 43.♚g3+? ♛h5 44.♝xf4 g5 with Black surprisingly holding, but I missed 43.♚g2+!, breaking the pin and winning easily.

There is no question I would have calculated this properly if I had played 39.♝xf7, but I didn't know for sure that the win was there. So instead of going for the knockout blow, I played the steadier move which would definitely maintain a winning advantage, but would take longer. This is a classic type of calculation decision one has to make, and I wouldn't say there is a right or wrong answer. It was certainly possible I might have gone wrong in the technical phase. If you are far stronger in tactics than technique, it might make more sense to go for the gusto here.

By the way, you might ask how I calculated all that rook sacrifice stuff but not this. I think both lines are doable because they involve so many forcing moves, but in the first situation I had time, and in this one I didn't.

39...♛e2 40.♚e3 ♛h5 41.♝f3 ♛xf3+ 42.♚xf3 f5 43.♝c5 ♜b1+ 44.♚g2 ♜d1 45.♝e4! ♜a8

46. $\mathbb{Q}f6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 48. d6 $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}h7$ $\mathbb{Q}a2+$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}f2$



50... $\mathbb{Q}aa1$

It doesn't help Black to simplify because he can't liquidate enough. There's even a sweet knight's tour to show White's dominance: 50... $\mathbb{Q}xf2+$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{Q}d2+$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ f4+ 53. $\mathbb{Q}h3!$ (leaving yourself with just one pawn is very risky, and indeed 53. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}xh2$ looks like a draw) 53... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}f8+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ (54... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 55. d7 g5 and now not 56. d8 $\mathbb{Q}??$ g4+ 57. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}xh2\#$, but 56. $\mathbb{Q}xg5!$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 57. d8 $\mathbb{Q}+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 58. $\mathbb{Q}e6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 59. $\mathbb{Q}xd8)$ 55. $\mathbb{Q}d7$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 56. $\mathbb{Q}c5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 57. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}e2$ 58. $\mathbb{Q}g5+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 59. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ and the f4-pawn drops.

51. $\mathbb{Q}g5+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 53. h3 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}a2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 55. $\mathbb{Q}a7+$ $\mathbb{Q}c6?$

55... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ would have posed a greater challenge.

56. $\mathbb{Q}c7+$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 57. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 58. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 59. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2+$ 60. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 61. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 1-0

Anticipate and react

Opponents will often throw down a challenge to you. If you don't formulate a plan to meet their brazen play, they may well get away with it.

Game 54

Joel 2590

Benjamin

Emory Tate 2305

Philadelphia 2000 (1)

1. e4 e6 2. d3 c5 3. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d5 4. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ dx $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 5. dx $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}a3!$

A reminder about flexible thinking in the opening: after the exchange of pawns there is no longer any reason to fianchetto.

6... $\text{N}c6$ 7.c3 $\text{N}e7$ 8. $\text{N}f4$ 0-0 9. $\text{B}c2$ $\text{N}d7$ 10. $\text{B}b5$



10...g5?

Black's opening play has been unconventional, but forthright play in the center can reduce his difficulties. 10...e5! 11. $\text{N}g3$ (11. $\text{N}xc6$ exf4) 11... $\text{B}c7$ gives Black a little time and space to get his pieces out.

The late Emory Tate was a kind of cult hero for his imaginative approach to chess. The brilliant victories came at a cost of occasional smackdowns. While creative and gutsy, this move flies in the face of principles. I could not believe that Black's more passive position could support the flinging of pawns in front of the king. So I resolved to take advantage of my superior mobility and meet my opponent's plan head-on.

First I had to figure out what he was up to. Okay, it seems he wants to continue with ...f7-f5, and possibly ...f5-f4 to harass/trap my bishop. This plan is actually not so crazy if White replies timidly.

11. $\text{N}e3$

I think I liked having extra options for this piece, though 11. $\text{N}g3$ is just as good and perhaps even simpler, meeting Tate's plan in the same way: 11...f5 12.exf5 exf5 13.0-0-0 f4 14.h4!.

11...f5 12.exf5 exf5 13.0-0-0

A few moves earlier I was on the fence about where to castle, but the pawn

advances have made it a clear choice.

13...f4 14.h4!

Be prepared to impose your will on your opponent! Black is hard-pressed to back up his bold play even after 14.♕d2, but what a missed opportunity! I felt that Black's play must be punished, so I was looking for ways to hit back as hard and swiftly as possible.

14...gxh4



CHALLENGE 43

White to play and win

Tate had pinned his hopes on this move, but it fails to keep the hatches battened down. Other moves lose prosaically, e.g. 14...fxe3 15.hxg5 ♜f7 16.♕c4+–; and 14...g4 15.♘g5 ♜xg5 16.hxg5 ♜e7 17.♕d3+–.

15.♕xc5!! ♜xc5 16.♗xh4 ♜e7

Underdeveloped and pinned, the black forces can't defend the weak point on h7. 16...♝f7 17.♕c4 ♜f6 18.♗xh7+ ♜f8 19.♕xf7 ♜xf7 20.♗h8+ ♜e7 21.♝h7 costs the queen.

17.♕c4+ ♜h8 18.♝dh1 ♜f6 19.♘g5 ♜e3+

Characters like Tate would always make it interesting to the end. I didn't see why I can't take this piece, though I certainly don't need to.

20.♗b1 h5 21.♝xh5+ ♜xh5 22.♝xh5+ ♜g7 23.♗h7+ ♜f6 24.♝h6+ ♜e5

Or 24...♜xg5 25.♛g6#. I was puzzled that Tate didn't resign, but perhaps he was being sporty in allowing me to put the mate on the board. But which one?

25.♘f3#

I think the knight mate is slightly more aesthetic than 25.♔e4#.

Be consistent

Chess guidelines can be so confusing. You have been told not to move the same piece twice in the opening, but after 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 a5?, you're going to take the e5-pawn. Rules constantly come into conflict with each other. So when I tell you to be consistent, it doesn't mean I lied when I told you to be flexible!

Flexible thinking is important because it is a natural trap to play what is obvious and on the surface. But it is important to follow the strategy dictated by the position whenever possible. We can't abandon that plan just because it is 'safe' or easy. It may just require a little work to validate it.

Game 55

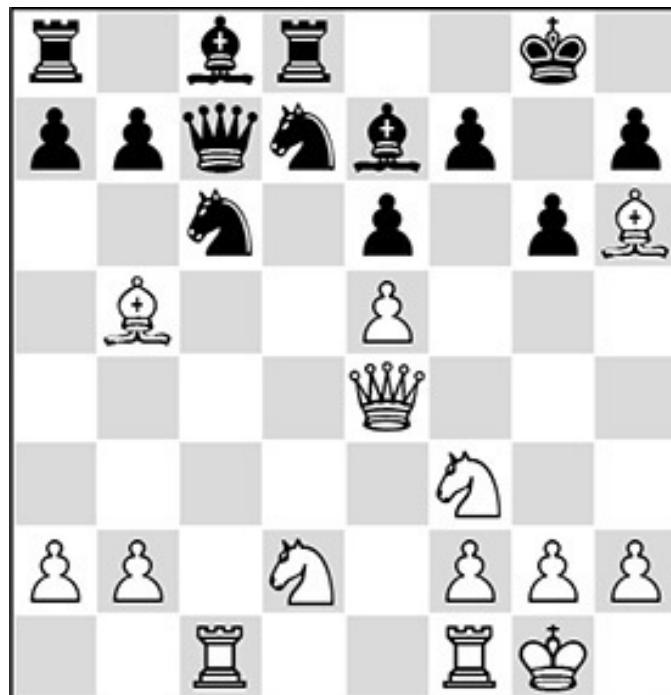
Igor 2321

Nikolayev

Joel Benjamin 2608

Kerhonkson 2002 (3)

1.e4 c5 2.c3 ♘f6 3.e5 ♘d5 4.d4 cxd4 5.♘f3 e6 6.cxd4 d6 7.♗c4 ♘c6 8.0-0 ♖e7 9.♔e2 0-0
10.♗e4 ♖c7 11.♗d3 g6 12.♗h6 ♕d8 13.♗bd2 dxe5 14.dxe5 ♗b6 15.♖ac1 ♘d7 16.♗b5



CHALLENGE 44

Can Black safely capture the e5-pawn? Why or why not?

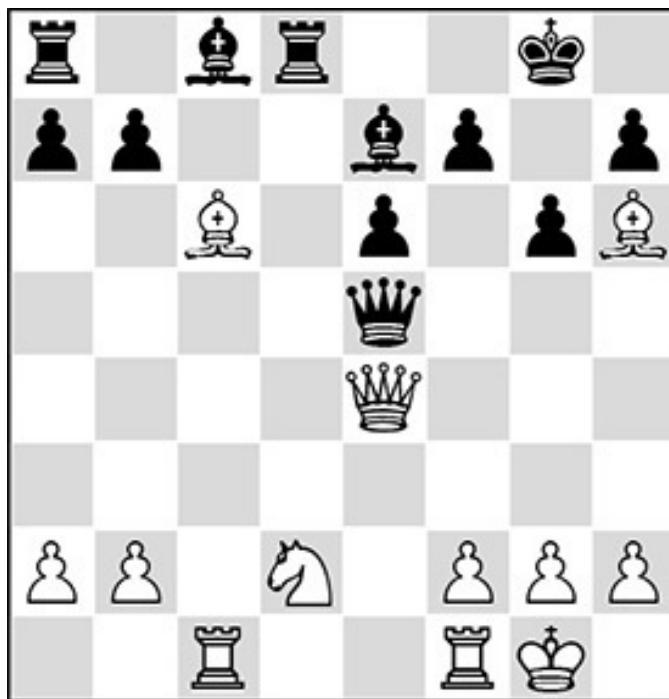
Black's opening strategy hinges on the ability to quickly establish pressure on the e5-pawn. It appears that White has found enough time to protect the pawn using a little tactical trick. This is where most players get scared off and look for alternatives. 16... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ leaves White in control, while 16... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ (attacking the queen! What could be easier?) 17. $\mathbb{W}f4$ is probably even worse because the knight is unstable and White will have a big attack if his knight gets to e4. So Black needs to look deeper at the move that is consistent with his strategy.

16... $\mathbb{Q}dxe5!$

It's the kind of move that can be played by someone very weak or very strong. Those in between will see a problem.

17. $\mathbb{Q}xe5 \mathbb{W}xe5 18.\mathbb{Q}xc6$

This is the move that seems to rule out capture of the e-pawn. But the stakes are high enough for us to look *one move beyond the last capture* to find a resource.



18... $\mathbb{W}h5!$

Some moves have a power beyond the assessment of the resulting position. Black isn't winning anything, or even necessarily obtaining an advantage, but has managed to free his position. Such a sudden change of circumstances can often have a frustrating effect on the opponent, and perhaps affect their play.

19. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$

19. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ bxc6 20. $\mathbb{W}xc6 \mathbb{Q}d7$ gives a comfortable position with a future for the bishop pair.

19... $\mathbb{Q}xb7 20.\mathbb{W}xb7 \mathbb{Q}d6$

Strengthwise, it's a toss-up between this and 20... $\mathbb{W}xh6$. I'm trying to keep pieces on for winning chances, and if it costs me a tiny disadvantage I can live with it.

21.h3

That last decision starts to pay off for me, as this move opens the door for me a little. Frankly I think 21.g3 is a more logical way to make *luft*.

Which pawn to push is not always obvious (and beginners/kids have a bias towards h2-h3, as that's how they first learned to make air for the king) but it makes sense to limit the dark-squared bishop which cannot take advantage of any light-square weakness.

21... $\mathbb{W}xh6$ 22. $\mathbb{B}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 23. $\mathbb{B}cd1$ $\mathbb{W}h5$ 24. $\mathbb{B}d7$ $\mathbb{B}xd7$ 25. $\mathbb{W}xd7$

White's previous move was inaccurate, but after the wrong rook capture Black develops nice pressure.

25... $\mathbb{W}e2$



26. $\mathbb{W}d4?$

It could still be a long game after 26. $\mathbb{W}c6$ $\mathbb{B}d8$ 27.g3.

26... $\mathbb{Q}h2+$ 27. $\mathbb{B}xh2$ $\mathbb{W}xf1$

It's not a done deal yet, as I will have to snuff out White's attacking chances.

Winning the won game!

28. $\mathbb{B}e5$ $\mathbb{W}b5$

28... $\mathbb{W}c1$ 29. $\mathbb{B}g4$ $\mathbb{W}c7+$ 30.f4 $\mathbb{B}d8$ is the 'best' (computer) solution but looks a bit scary. I preferred to give up a pawn to prevent White's pieces from getting at my king.

29.♘g4 e5 30.♗xe5 ♕b6 31.♕d5 ♔f8 32.♗d7 ♕c7+ 33.f4?

After 33.g3 ♔d8 34.♗f6+ ♔g7 35.♕g5 ♔d6 Black will soon consolidate.

33...♕xf4+ 0-1

Maneuvers and timing

Calculation can be misguided and useless if you don't know what you want to achieve in a position. But good planning needs good calculation to execute those plans.

Game 56

Joel Benjamin 2534

Varuzhan 2616

Akopian

St Louis ch-USA 2013 (4)

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♕e7 4.♗f3 ♘f6 5.♗g5 0-0 6.e3 h6 7.♗h4 ♗e4 8.♗xe7 ♕xe7 9.♗c1 c6 10.h4 ♘xc3 11.♗xc3 ♘d7 12.g4 e5 13.cxd5 cxd5 14.g5 e4 15.♗d2 g6 16.♗g1 h5 17.♗e2 ♘b6 18.♗f1 ♕e6 19.♗xh5 ♕b4 20.♗g4 ♕xb2 21.♗c2 ♕b4+ 22.♗d2 ♕xd2+ 23.♗xd2 ♕ac8 24.♗d1 ♕xc2 25.♗xc2 ♕g7 26.♗b3 ♘d7 27.♗d1 ♕h8 28.♗h1 f6 29.f4 b6 30.♗e2 fxg5 31.fxg5 ♘b8 32.♗d2 ♕c8 33.♗f1 ♕f8 34.♗c1 ♕c8



CHALLENGE 45

Identify White's best short-term plan; what should be the first move?

I don't have this in the endgame section because my short-term plan is not about

how to ultimately win the game, but just to move the position along to the next stage. My position was rather dubious earlier, but at this point I was buoyed by the shift in momentum. Playing one game a day made me fresher and highly motivated to defeat a strong opponent.

It certainly looks like nothing now because my pieces are not doing much. When pieces are poorly placed, ask yourself: where do they want to be? Clearly the knight on b3 is poorly placed, but it is not far from a good square on f4. So that's the first part of the process – transfer the knight to f4. Now calculation enters the fray, because we want to make this happen without Black improving his position too much. 35. \mathbb{N} c8+ \mathbb{Q} x8 36. \mathbb{B} c1 \mathbb{B} c6 is very poor timing. My knight doesn't even have access to e2, while his knight is already headed for greener pastures (possibly f5 to attack my pawns). While I can't profitably avoid a rook exchange, I can certainly wait for him to take first, which takes my knight where it wants to go. So I need to start with a bishop move, but f1 is not an impressive square. So I looked for a finesse.

35. \mathbb{B} b5! a6

The bishop is in Black's face, hitting the c6-square the knight wants to move to. The text is certainly better than 35... \mathbb{Q} d7? 36. \mathbb{Q} xd7 \mathbb{N} xc1 37. \mathbb{N} xc1 \mathbb{Q} xd7 38. \mathbb{N} e2, when Black is already losing a pawn. Komodo recommends 35... \mathbb{R} f8 36. \mathbb{R} c7+ \mathbb{R} f7 37. \mathbb{R} xf7+ \mathbb{Q} xf7 38. \mathbb{N} c1 \mathbb{Q} g4 to interfere with White's plans, though it is certainly not obvious to force a rook trade by moving yours to a different file.

36. \mathbb{B} f1 \mathbb{Q} f7



37.a3!

This is another move which does not move the needle on the computer but has good practical value. The players are waiting each other out on the rook trade. In a mild time scramble I throw the ball back in his court, but maybe the knight will also be able to access the a2-square to find a future on the queenside.

Komodo also considers 37.a4, but I felt that would be way too risky as I would have to work out whether the pawn would become vulnerable on that square, while I needed to play a move relatively quickly.

37...♘e7

It's not clear that this move is actually useful, as the knight will soon want this square. In any case I have no more useful waiting moves.

38.♖xc8 ♖xc8 39.♗c1 ♗c6 40.♗e2 ♔d6

Akopian was very unhappy with this move, believing 40...♔f7 to be stronger. But it was move forty, with not much time to work that out.

41.♗f4 ♗e7 42.♗e2 a5

This is a consequence of my 35th move. Black wants to free the bishop, but his pawns would be much safer on a7 and b6.

43.h5

I have found my way to a big advantage and was able to eventually overcome my opponent's determined resistance.

We've explored the fundamentals of calculation, complex problem solving, and factors that help take our analysis in the right direction. In the next chapter we

will see insufficient or negligent calculation, and factors that may inhibit or prevent us from tackling a position with a clear, focused mindset.

CHAPTER 5

Problems in calculation and cognitive approach

So far we have examined more or less successful and proper calculation. There was certainly room for improvement in the examples from my own play; I would have liked to see more than I did. There is as much to learn, perhaps more, from examples of faulty calculation. In this chapter we see games where things went wrong early in the calculation process. Players get tripped up by cutting corners and not following fundamentals.

My best observation from my coaching work is that stronger players don't just calculate better, they have a fundamentally sounder approach to their thought process. [Not that you will perfect the process when you get to a certain rating; you will make these mistakes less often.]

Lesser players don't often slip up in long variations – indeed, they often take measures to avoid having to calculate too deeply. Very often mistakes come very early in the thought process. Failure to generate candidate moves, searching zealously for the opponent's possibilities, and premature truncating of variations are frequent culprits in poor analysis.

We will now examine examples where things go wrong in these areas.

The concept of candidate moves has become ingrained in Caissic memory since Alexander Kotov's book *Think Like a Grandmaster*. That seminal work included many examples of rigid calculation with long variations, calculated one at a time. We are at least indebted to Kotov for making us aware of the importance of carefully considering alternatives. That formulaic style can lead to impressive work, but it is not natural, nor even productive, for most people to think that way. People tend to jump around between candidates; a few moves into a variation, players might find they would prefer to look in a different direction. This is not necessarily inefficient, as you may save clock time by foregoing unnecessary analysis. I'm not making an earth-shattering point here – other authors have noted this in the past. Probably John Nunn gets the most credit, but Jonathan Tisdall wrote about this as well, inspired by the comments of the great Anatoly Lein, 'Do you think like a tree? I don't think like a tree.'

But it is still important to *choose* the candidate moves in the first place. When

students pass up a strong move in their games, I usually get the same answer – ‘I didn’t see it.’ Not that they didn’t calculate the move properly, but they only looked in a different direction. So many mistakes like that are actually easily correctable. I believe that even at or around the master level, many players are still playing the first move that pops into their heads. Fast time controls and end-of-game sudden death condition players to use this type of thinking to the point that they often don’t look around for alternatives even when they have lots of time. I’ve seen players spend a few minutes on a turn but only consider one move. They can give me good reasons why they played a move, but not why they didn’t play a different one.

Players can exhaust themselves and/or run out of time if they are constantly calculating in every position. Certainly there are many moments in a game where you only need to exercise your good judgment, with maybe some light calculation to guide your decisions. But there are other times when calculation is absolutely necessary. When tactics enter the picture, you have no choice. Players often don’t recognize the moments, but there are a lot of signs to look for: lots of captures, exposed king or pieces near the king, several pieces pressuring the same point, etc. I think a further problem is that players often rush their decisions and simply don’t want to calculate. Treat your game like it is the most important thing on earth (at that moment) and put in the work. Otherwise, there may be tears.

I have also found that calculation failures are rarely due to difficulty with long variations or hidden moves. Oversight tend to be rather early in the process, say two to four moves deep. It is often lack of commitment to accurate calculation that trips people up. As my students tend to be particularly accomplished young players, I have to conclude that other players will have these faults, too. And I believe it is possible for players to train themselves to handle the process better, which will eliminate a lot of errors.

A few years ago an old friend told me about a book he had been working on for years, and asked me to write the foreword for it. I agreed and smartly suggested he pitch his manuscript to *New In Chess*. Charlie Hertan’s *Forcing Chess Moves* became a big success. The painstakingly researched plethora of tactical positions is a delight, but the best part of the book for me is actually the *title*. [Actually, the foreword is really good. And the muscles on the cover.] It suggests a truism that I can’t remember seeing articulated before, that players should start calculation by examining the most forcing moves – checks, captures, attacks on

pieces. From there we can resolve to examine forcing move candidates to a depth of, say, three or four moves.

Most of you have said at some point something like ‘I didn’t see he would take my bishop, and when I took his rook, he would fork my queen and king.’ If you had just examined the captures and looked another move further you might have caught the tactic. I think a fair standard, which I have preached to my students, is this: *If you lose to a tactic that you would have played if you had your opponent’s position, you should have seen it coming.*

No shortcuts

It is important to anticipate tactics beforehand when you have the opportunity to avoid them, if necessary. And when the tactics are upon you, calculate objectively and completely, using your time as necessary. Even in a fast time control game, you must get your move right if the game might hinge on it.

Game 57

Megan 2300

Lee

Benjamin Medina

New York 2017 (5)

**1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 dxе4 4.♘xe4 ♘d7 5.♘f3 ♘gf6 6.♘g3 e6 7.c3 ♘d6 8.♗c4 0-0 9.0-0 b6
10.♖e1 ♖c7 11.♘g5**

This is an aggressive move, but its value depends on whether the sacrifices this move sets up will really be effective.

11...♝b7

This move is okay, but only if it is played after analyzing White’s sacrificial possibilities. 11...h6 looks even simpler because there is no promising way forward – 12.♘xf7 ♖xf7 13.♗xe6 ♘f8 is good for Black – so the knight will just have to retreat.



12. $\mathbb{Q}xe6?!$

12. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $fxe6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{W}b8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ is nothing special for White, but it is less of a material investment.



CHALLENGE 46

What should Black do?

This is really a bluff, played on the speculation that White will have a follow-up.
12...h6??

This must have felt like an ‘easy’ alternative to the complications of grabbing the rook. But it is only easy if it works! White has two pieces attacked so Black must expect a capture here. If you follow the line through, White reaches a winning position, so you would have to reject 12...h6.

Meanwhile, the alternative may look scary, but there is really nothing wrong with taking the rook. After 12...fxe6 13.♘xe6 ♕b8, what can White really do with the discovered check?



analysis diagram

Black cannot be pushed off this variation by general fear; there needs to be a concrete reason. Otherwise I invoke the Ghostbusters Rule. We make like Ray Parker Jr. in the theme song – ‘I ain’t afraid of no ghosts.’ The computer recommendation, which was probably not White’s intention, is 14.♘xg7+!? ♕xg7 (14...♔h8 or 14...♘d5 are also playable) 15.♘f5+ ♔h8 16.♗h6 ♕g8 17.♗xg8 ♔xh2+! (17...♔xg8 18.♕b3+ ♘d5 19.c4) 18.♔h1 ♔f4. Black stands better with a piece for two pawns. More likely was 14.♘xf8+ ♔xf8 with some vague attacking chances for White but Black should be able to defend. It is not even necessary to perfectly evaluate positions resulting from 12...fxe6. When you properly examine the other option, it becomes clear which way to go.
13.♖xd6! ♕xd6

Unfortunately, the other capture is just as bad. After 13...h_xg5 14. $\mathbb{Q}f5$, White is still attacking with extra material, e.g. 14...g6 15. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ gxf5, when 16. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ is most crushing but 16. $\mathbb{K}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ should also do the trick.

14. $\mathbb{Q}f5$

White's combination involves all piece attacks, checks, and captures, so it would not have been difficult to calculate.

14... $\mathbb{Q}c7$



15. $\mathbb{Q}e7+$

White has an even more devastating continuation: 15. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{W}d8$ (15... $\mathbb{W}xf4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$ $\mathbb{K}xf7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}g6+$ picks up the queen) 16. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ $\mathbb{K}xf7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d6+$, etc. White didn't find it because she didn't really need to; still, if you're in a slow time control game, you always want to pause a bit in the midst of combinations to see if something stronger has popped up.

15... $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$ $\mathbb{K}xf7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$

White won easily with two extra pawns.

We will see a similar theme in many of our other examples. Lack of skills can cause us to err in our calculations, but we must not let *lack of commitment* do us in.

In the following game White doesn't quite appreciate the need to back up his moves with solid calculation.

Game 58

Tan Nguyen

2000

Shawn Rodriguez-

2150

Lemieux

Morristown jr 2017 (5)

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♗e7 5.♗g2 0-0 6.0-0 ♘bd7 7.♘bd2 b6 8.b3 ♗b7 9.♗b2 c5 10.cxd5 exd5 11.♖c1 ♗c8 12.♘h4

Here White should probably not get too ambitious. 12.e3 with the idea of ♔d1-d2 and ♕f1-d1 looks like a sensible continuation.

12...♗e8 13.♘f5 ♗f8 14.♘c4

White's maneuvers look logical, and perhaps even strong. But White needs to be prepared to answer Black's next move.

14...♔a6



CHALLENGE 47

Where should White move his knight?

15.♘ce3

This move was played relatively quickly on feel, but just a little bit of calculation would have helped.

15...g6 16.♘h4

Now 16...♗h6! would have given Black a big edge, as White's structure will be ripped apart.

16... ♜g7 17. ♜e1?

White is okay after 17. ♜c2.

17... ♜h6

Better late than never.

Black won quickly after

**18.dxc5 ♜xe3 19.cxb6 ♜xc1 20. ♜xc1 ♜xb6 21.fxe3 ♜xe3+ 22. ♜h1 ♜g4 23. ♜f1 ♜xc1
24. ♜xc1 ♜xe2 25. ♜f5 ♜xf1 26. ♜c8+ ♜f8 27. ♜e7+ ♜g7 28. ♜xg4 ♜f2 29. ♜xd5 ♜g2+ 0-1**

If you are extending your analysis for forcing moves, you catch 16... ♜h6.

Consequently, Tan could have considered two alternatives which seem more promising to me.

A) 15. ♜cd6 doesn't work that well after 15... ♜xe2 16. ♜a1 ♜xd6 17. ♜xd6
♜c6 18.dxc5 ♜e6 19. ♜xd5 (19. ♜e1 ♜xe1+ 20. ♜xe1 bxc5 21. ♜f5 ♜e6)
19... ♜exd6 20. ♜xc6! ♜xd1 21. ♜fxd1 ♜e7 22. ♜xd7 ♜xd7 23.c6 ♜c5 24.c7
♜xc7 25.b4 h6 and the long diagonal will be a major problem for White. But
this line is complicated and not all that obvious. Black might well opt for 15...
♜xe2 16. ♜d2 ♜xf1 17. ♜xf1 when White's activity will greatly compensate
for the pawn deficit;

B) 15. ♜e5 is totally fine except for 15...g6 16. ♜e3 ♜xe5 17.dxe5 d4!,
which gives Black an advantage. But even if Black finds this, White is still better
off than in the game.

Normally you would want to be calculating this earlier; at least before move
fourteen, and ideally before 12. ♜h4. The moves in this sequence are somewhat
forcing and predictable, so it's not unreasonable for a strong, hard-working
player to do so. But at minimum, White should stop at move fifteen and
seriously consider the ramifications of different knight moves.

This is where discipline in the calculation process is so important. So many
mistakes are made not by miscalculating, but by not calculating. If you let
yourself be dragged along by the flow of the position, anything can happen to
you.

Compare candidates

Players often assume that they must reject a move when they spot a flaw. But
before you go in a different direction, you must make sure the alternative isn't
worse. You may have to come back to the rejected move and try to make it work
better. Otherwise, it's from the frying pan into the fire.

Game 59

Trung Nguyen 2147

Brandon 2333

Jacobson

Morristown jr 2017 (4)

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 g6 5.♗g2 ♗g7 6.0-0 0-0 7.♘bd2 b6 8.b3 ♗b7 9.♗b2 ♗a6
10.♖c1 c5 11.dxc5 bxc5 12.cxd5 exd5 13.♕c2 ♖e8 14.♖fe1 d4 15.a3 ♖b8 16.♕d3 ♘d7
17.h4 ♘c7 18.♘c4 ♗a6 19.♕c2 ♘b5 20.e3 dxe3 21.♖xe3 ♖xe3 22.♘xe3 ♗d4 23.♘xd4
cxd4



CHALLENGE 48

Where should White move his knight?

We have another position where White has a knight attacked and more than one plausible square to go to. To make a proper decision, White has to analyze both moves rigorously before deciding on one of them.

24.♘c4

On the surface, d5 looks like a better square for the knight. But after 24.♘d5 d3 the white queen has to cede protection of the b3-pawn. Fair enough, but that doesn't have to be a deal breaker. After 25.♕d2 ♖xb3 26.♗xg7 ♔xg7, there are various moves one might find to give White a reasonable game. It turns out that 27.h5! offers quite a bit more. Suddenly Black has a major problem on the dark squares, e.g. 27....♘e5 28.♗f4 ♕d6 29.♘f6 and White is winning. The best Black can do is 27...♘b6 28.h6+ ♔f8 29.♕a5 ♖b5 (29...♗b5 30.a4) 30.♕xa6 ♖xd5 31.♗xd5 ♕xd5 32.♕xa7 d2 33.♖d1 ♘c4 with chances to hold. Black would actually be better off playing 24...♔b7 with equality. Even masters can't be expected to anticipate 27.h5 or appreciate its strength.

However, it is fair to expect that you recognize that White could have compensation for the pawn, and this *may very well be better than the alternatives, once you consider them.*

24...d3

This advance comes anyway!



25.♔d1??

This blunder is related to the mistake on the previous move. Trung had a starting point that he must not lose the b3-pawn and didn't consider worse things could happen!

Indeed, after 25.♔d2 ♜xb3! White lacks an effective comeback and stands significantly worse (though not immediately lost). But the apparent knockout blow 25...♞c5 would actually fail to deliver against best play: 26.♝xg7 ♞xb3 27.♔h6 ♞xc1 28.♝e5! f6 29.h5!! ♜xc4 30.hxg6 ♔d7 31.♜xb8 d2 32.♝f3 ♞e2+ 33.♛xe2 ♜xe2 34.gxh7+ ♛h8 35.♚xf6+ ♛xh7 36.♚h4+ ♛g8 37.♚g5+ ♛f7 38.♚f4+ ♛e8 39.♚e5+ ♛d8 (39...♛e7 40.♚h8+ ♛d7 41.♚d4+ ♛c8 42.♚d6) 40.♚h8+ ♛e8 41.♚d4+ ♛c8 42.♚xd2 ♛xb8 43.♚d6+ and White has high hopes for a draw based on the wrong rook pawn and bishop combination. It isn't actually necessary to foresee that drawing possibility, because White has no choice but to play 25.♔d2 !

25...♜xc4 26.♝xg7 ♜xb3

Black won a piece, and the game without further difficulty.

Most of us can recognize many situations that require we get down to work and calculate to the best of our abilities. But do we answer the challenge?

Game 60

Robert Forney

Sophie Morris-Suzuki

2177

Philadelphia 2017 (7)

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3.c3 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4.e5 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 6.0-0 d6 7.d4 cxd4 8.cxd4 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ 0-0
10. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ b6 11. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ dxe5 12.dxe5 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ g6 15.a3 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ b5
17. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}db4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}g4$



CHALLENGE 49

What is Black's best move?

To this point Sophie has played an excellent game. Forcing variations are coming into play, and calculating accurately can mean all the difference in getting the right result.

She has her opponent set up for a discovered attack on the queen. Sophie sees the nice idea ... $\mathbb{Q}c6-d4$, and it looks pretty powerful. White will not be able to hold things together. But maybe there can be counterplay. This has to be checked. And there may be a better move for Black anyway. It's a good idea to check for candidates right away, as you may quickly find a move you like even

better anyway.

18...♞d4?

Black is apparently the clear aggressor, which lulled Sophie into not looking for White's counterplay. This error made her life a lot more difficult.

19.♝h6+ ♜g7 20.♝f4

Suddenly White has big counterplay. Now more than ever, Black has to get this right!



20...♞xd3??

Black clearly has to focus on eliminating the most dangerous pieces. That's why 20...♝xf3! had to be played. 21.♝xf7+ (21.gxf3 ♜g5 22.♝xf7+ ♜xf7 23.♝xf7 ♜xf3+ 24.♝g2 ♜xd3 25.♝xd8 ♜fe1+ 26.♝f1 ♜xd8 27.♜xe1 ♜xe1 28.♝xe1 ♜b6 with a slightly nicer endgame for Black) 21...♝h8 22.♝g5 ♜d5 23.♜xe7 ♜xe7 24.♝xe7 ♜xe7 25.gxf3 ♜xf3+ and Black will maintain an edge after capturing the e5-pawn. It is difficult to calculate these variations accurately, but easier to see they avoid the immediate danger of the game continuation.

21.♝xf7+ ♜h8 22.♝g5

Sophie should have been pushed off her 20th move because 22.♝xd4 and 22.♝g5 are even stronger than this pretty strong move!

22...♝xf3+

Desperate times call for desperate measures. If she had seen some or all of this line, she might have ventured a tricky try that forces White to find a number of

only moves: 22... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}e2+$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2+$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $\mathbb{W}b7+$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}df4+$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $g5+$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}g6+$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}ef4+$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{W}f3+$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{W}h5+$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{W}xh6$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ and White should win.
23.gxf3 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ **24.Qxd3**

The position is lost now and Sophie resigned after a few more moves.

She should have played a simple move which she didn't give much consideration – 18... $\mathbb{Q}xd3!$. After 19. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ Black has two strong possibilities:



analysis diagram

A) 19... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ is effective because 20. $\mathbb{Q}xd8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 21. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{W}c2!$ presents huge problems for White: 20. $\mathbb{Q}h6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 21. $\mathbb{W}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3!$ (not 21... $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 22. $\mathbb{W}xf7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}g5+-$) 22. $\mathbb{W}xf7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ and White's attack is completely foiled;

B) 19... $\mathbb{Q}d4$ is much stronger than in the game because the queen cannot go to f4 to attack the f7-pawn. White can sacrifice the queen with 20. $\mathbb{W}xd4$, but I don't think Black should be too concerned about winning that position. So 20. $\mathbb{W}e3$ may be a better practical try, leaving another choice for Black:



analysis diagram

- B1) 20... $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}h6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ (other king moves win, too) 22. $\mathbb{W}f4$ $\mathbb{R}xd3$
 23. $\mathbb{W}xf7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}xa1$ 25.h4 $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 26. $\mathbb{W}xc7$ $\mathbb{R}d1+$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}f4+$
 28.g3 $\mathbb{R}h1+$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xh1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3+$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ with four pieces for a queen;
 B2) 20... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}h6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 22. $\mathbb{R}xd4$ $\mathbb{R}xd4$ 23. $\mathbb{W}xf3!$ (23. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ $\mathbb{R}d8-$)
 23... $\mathbb{R}f8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ and White still has some tricks left;
 B3) 20... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 21. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{R}xd3$ 22. $\mathbb{W}xd3$ $\mathbb{R}d8$ 23. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 24. $\mathbb{W}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}c2$ –
 Black has a winning position as White will drop a pawn or two.

Which of these paths should Black, as a fallible human, go down? It all depends on what you find, but whatever you choose, see it to the end. You can choose 19... $\mathbb{Q}d4$ and change your mind after 20. $\mathbb{W}e3$, if you figure out how 20... $\mathbb{Q}c2$ wins or reason that 20... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ offers no opportunity to miscalculate.

Calculate carefully

It can be frustrating to blow a game due to a simple oversight in calculation. But when we rush to judgment we can be making *two* mistakes – the line we analyze incorrectly, and the line we don't examine properly.

Game 61

Alan Zhang	2161
Brandon Jacobson	2452

Chessanity Masters 2017 (1)

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗e3 e5 7.♘b3 ♗e6 8.f4 exf4 9.♗xf4 ♗e7 10.♔e2 ♘c6 11.h3 ♛c8 12.0-0-0 ♛c7 13.g4 h6 14.♗b1 0-0 15.♔g2 ♘e5 16.♘d4 ♘fd7 17.♘f5 ♗f6 18.♘xd6?



CHALLENGE 50

What is the strongest move for Black?

White's last move was actually a serious error. He could have had a good position with 18.♘d5 ♗xd5 19.♖xd5, though the position is complicated and it isn't easy to be sure. But one can work out that 18.♘xd6 is risky, perhaps even reckless.

Brandon played

18...♘c4?

thinking it was pretty strong. He simply missed that after

19.♘xc4 ♗xf4 20.♘d5 ♗xd5

White can recapture with the rook. Oops! White has everything covered, and Brandon had to scramble to secure a draw in the end.

The alternative 18...♘g6 calls for attention because it creates two threats; a cursory glance indicates that White may not be able to stop both of them.



analysis diagram

Let's consider two lines:

- A) 19. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ (20. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$) 20... $\mathbb{Q}a5+$;
- B) 19. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ (on 20. $bxc3$ Black has many strong moves, e.g. 20... $\mathbb{Q}a5$ and 20... $\mathbb{Q}cd8$) 20... $\mathbb{Q}a5$ or simply 20... $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ with a large advantage.

What did Brandon miss? The problem was he decided 18... $\mathbb{Q}c4$ was good enough and didn't get to a serious analysis of the alternative move. I call this the 'I got this' phenomenon. When you decide you have the right answer before considering all the relevant information, you are likely to 'not have it.'

Aim high

So many tactical opportunities start with moves that may get our attention briefly but seem too unlikely to work. If we spend a little time looking into these high-reward moves, we may tilt at windmills occasionally, but we may discover gold as well. Possibilities can seem even more hidden when great players allow them. We saw a gross example of this in chapter three; now for a more subtle case of back-to-back missed opportunities at the elite level.

Game 62

Vladimir
Kramnik

2787

Maxim Matlakov 2718

Wijk aan Zee 2018 (10)

1.e4 e5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 4.c3 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5.d3 0-0 6. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ h6 7. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ d6 9. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 14.g3 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ c5 16.0-0-0 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 17.d4 cxd4 18.cxd4



CHALLENGE 51

What tactical possibility did Black miss here?

I feel there's something a bit suspicious in Kramnik's handling of the opening, with surprising queenside castling. Matlakov needed to put aside his respect for Kramnik as a player to find the flaw in his moves. He probably felt that 18... $\mathbb{Q}xa2!$ could not be playable, but it doesn't require very deep thought to conclude that the move actually works:

- A) 19.b3 a5 (the typical attempt to save the 'Bobby Fischer trapped bishop')



analysis diagram

A1) 20.♝b2 a4 21.♝xa2? axb3++ 22.♝xb3 d5 and Black's attack is decisive, e.g. 23.♚b2 ♖d6 24.♜a1 dxе4, etc. White would do better to decline the sacrifice with 21.bxa4 ♜e6, but there is nothing to calculate here; it is only a question of how pleasant the position is for Black;

A2) The variation 20.d5 a4 21.bxa4 b5! 22.axb5 ♜fc8 is a bit more complicated, but since the bishop is still alive, Black has a big attack for virtually no investment.

B) 19.d5 ♜fc8 rescues the bishop;

C) If White doesn't try to trap the bishop his exposed king will suffer, e.g. 19.dxe5 dxе5 20.♝g4 ♜e6 21.♝gxe5 ♜ac8.

18...♝ac8

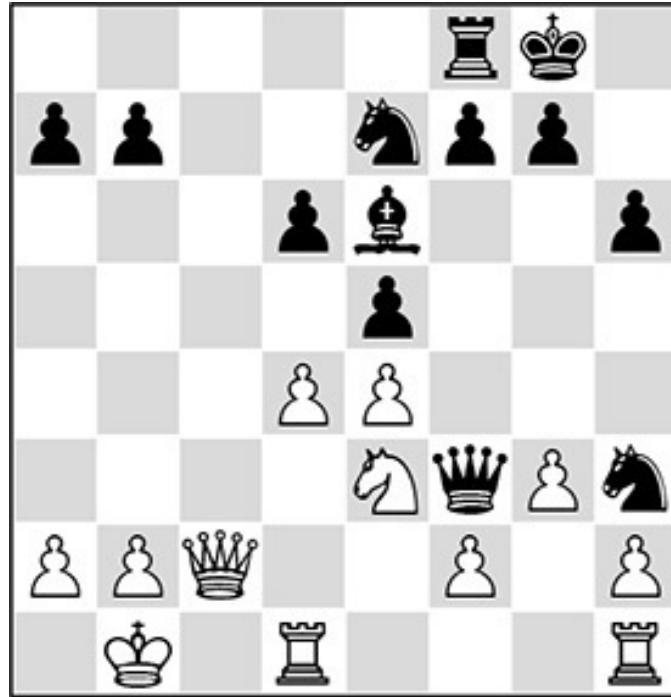
No punctuation for this missed opportunity, only because another one is around the corner!

19.♝b1



19... \mathbb{R} c7?

This moment is a perfect illustration of why I say captures should not be dismissed too automatically. A rook is worth more than a bishop, but it doesn't take much for the scales to tip in the other direction. 19... \mathbb{R} xc2! allows three recaptures, but in quickly eliminating the first one, 20. \mathbb{W} xc2? \mathbb{W} xf3, we narrow those odds and perhaps grant a further examination. The other captures are met by two different moves which are not hard to find if you are looking for them.



analysis diagram

A) 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ is strongly answered by the pinning 20... $\mathbb{R}g4$, though it takes some analysis to see how strong it is. White faces difficult choices.

A1) 21. $\mathbb{Q}ce1?$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 22. $\mathbb{K}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ (the computer says 22... exd4 and 22... d5 are even more decisive, but you would only have to visualize this more direct continuation at move 19) 23. $\mathbb{W}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 25. $\mathbb{W}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 26. $\mathbb{W}xf6$ $gxf6$ 27. $\mathbb{K}hd1$ and I don't expect White to be able to hold;

A2) 21. $\mathbb{K}d3$ is stronger: 21... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 22. $\mathbb{W}e3$ (22. d5 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ exd4 and ... $\mathbb{Q}h3-g5$ will be decisive) 22... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 23. $\mathbb{W}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 24. $\mathbb{W}xf6$ $gxf6$ 25. $\mathbb{K}hd1$ and Black's extra pawn may not provide big winning chances.

B) 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ $\mathbb{W}g6!$ leaves White unprepared to meet the simple threat to the e4-pawn.



analysis diagram

B1) 21. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4+$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}a1$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 23. $\mathbb{N}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 24. $\mathbb{N}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}f3$ wins for Black, but defending the pawn is also calamitous:

B2) 21. $\mathbb{N}d2$ $exd4$ 22. $\mathbb{N}g2$ $d3+$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ is decisive for Black – and there are other strong paths as well;

B3) Finally, Black has a few attractive continuations after 21. $\mathbb{N}g2$. The long computer line 21... $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ 22. $b3$ $f5$ 23. $\mathbb{N}fh4$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 24. $d5$ $fxe4$ 25. $\mathbb{N}e3$ $\mathbb{N}c6$ 26. $\mathbb{N}hf5$ $\mathbb{N}a5$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}a1$ $b6$ is interesting but impractical.

21... $\mathbb{Q}c4!$ is a much simpler solution: 22. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{N}d5$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{N}xf2$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4+$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ produces a killing mating attack, while 22. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $f5$ is untenable for White, a fine point being 23. $\mathbb{N}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d3+$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $fxe4+$ 25. $\mathbb{N}xe4$ $\mathbb{N}xf2+ -$. White can take the bishop, but after 22. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xc8+$ $\mathbb{N}xc8$, white pawns will fly off the board shortly.

The bottom line is that White would have to defend very resourcefully to survive 19... $\mathbb{Q}xc2!$ and Black has many good choices along the way. I think even just two or three moves deep would be enough to conclude the exchange sacrifice is well worth the risk.

20. $\mathbb{N}d2$

With the position stabilized, Kramnik went on to win.

Don't settle

So many opportunities are lost by settling for a move or continuation that you know will offer you less than you want in a position. This can be a failure to

maintain or maximize an advantage or to prevent a disadvantageous development. I know that the right move or idea may not come to you, but at least recognize the importance of getting it right, and make every effort to find a good solution. Sometimes the best continuation is shunted aside because something else is found to be ‘good enough’.

Game 63

Rajaram Laxman 2502

Brandon Jacobson 2419

Philadelphia 2017 (4)

1. Qf3 d5 2. d4 Qf6 3. c4 c6 4. e3 Qf5 5. Qc3 e6 6. Qh4 Qe4 7. f3 Qg6 8. Wb3 Wc7 9. Qd2 Qe7
10. Qxg6 hxg6 11. cxd5 cxd5 12. Qb5 Wd7 13. Qe2 Qc6 14. g3 a6 15. Qc3 Wd8 16. f4 b5
17. Qxb5?

White has misplayed the opening and now makes things worse with a low percentage sacrifice. Black can effectively decline (or at least postpone) the acceptance of the sacrifice with 17... Qe4 18. Qc3 Qxg3 or 17... Wb8 18. Wa4 Qe4 . Taking the piece is not a mistake because Black should win cleanly. However, if he hadn’t worked out how to hold on to the piece – and he hadn’t – he should have given these alternatives strong consideration.
17... axb5 18. Qxb5 0-0 19. Wc1 Wc8 20. Wa4



CHALLENGE 52

What is Black’s best move?

20... ♜b7?

Black still has a strong position after this move. If that's the best you can come up with, fine. But Black is simply winning after 20... ♜a8!. It's true the move is somewhat counterintuitive because it seemingly provides *less* defense for the knight. But it's a forcing move (must be noted) and once you start to calculate, it's very easy to see for a master (and perhaps possible to see for weaker players) that White has no good answer: 21. ♜b3 ♜fc8, 21. ♜xc6 ♜xa4 22. ♜xd7 ♜xd7 and 21. ♜c2 ♜xd4 are all hopeless for White.

21. ♜xc6 ♜xb2 22. ♜c2 ♜b6 23. ♜a4 ♜e4 24. ♜e2 ♜xd2?!

Black maintains an advantage with several moves here, perhaps most plausibly 24... ♜b8 25. ♜c2 ♜fc8. Brandon wants to go forward but 24... ♜c7 is met by 25. ♜a5 ♜a6+ 26. ♜b5. Trading the dominant knight is hit or miss and after White's repetition resource Black is left with nothing.

25. ♜xd2 ♜c7 26. ♜b5 ♜a7 27. ♜a4 ♜b6 28. ♜b5 ½-½

Of course, drawing with a grandmaster is a pretty good result for a senior master. But you want to avoid the trap of playing it too safe when you have some chance to win.

One-way thinking

This is an extremely common kind of flawed thinking; it is just so easy to get so excited about your own plans that you lose any sense of danger. Even when you are seemingly in control of a position, it is important to recognize unfavorable patterns developing and pay them some attention.

Game 64

Benjamin Medina

Eugene 2000

Yoo

New York 2017 (6)

1.e4 c5 2. ♜f3 ♜c6 3.d4 cxd4 4. ♜xd4 ♜f6 5. ♜c3 e5 6. ♜db5 d6 7. ♜g5 a6 8. ♜a3 b5 9. ♜d5 ♜e7 10. ♜xf6 ♜xf6 11.c3 0-0 12. ♜e2 ♜e6 13. ♜c2 ♜g5 14. ♜ce3 ♜e7 15.a4 bxa4 16.0-0 ♜b8 17. ♜c4 ♜xd5 18.exd5 ♜c8 19. ♜xa4 ♜b7 20. ♜fd1 ♜c7 21. ♜a5 ♜a8 22. ♜c2 ♜c5 23. ♜f5?! ♜d8 24. ♜c6?! ♜xb2 25. ♜xa6



CHALLENGE 53

How did White refute 25... \mathbb{Q} d8-b6, and how should Black have played instead?

White has spoiled his position in the last few moves by not keeping his pawns protected. Black should have been content with 25... \mathbb{Q} xc6 26.dxc6 \mathbb{R} xc6. He would be a pawn up with continuing threats. White would have no real play and would have to grovel, quite possibly unsuccessfully, for a draw.

25... \mathbb{Q} b6?? 26. \mathbb{N} e7+ \mathbb{K} h8

Black should have been more suspicious about the placement of the kingside pieces. There is a suggestion of a mating pattern if a rook has access to the h-file. Black cannot block the b1-h7 diagonal with ...g7-g6 because of \mathbb{R} f5-f6 mate. These features should have convinced Black to look beyond the surface of his opponent's replies.

27. \mathbb{R} d4!!



Necessity is the mother of invention, but this is still an awfully good find by Ben. Black thought his threat to f2 would deter any counterattack, e.g. 27. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2+$.

27...h6

27...exd4 28. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ g6 29. $\mathbb{Q}f6\#$ is the lovely point of White's rook offer. As mate is now threatened with 28. $\mathbb{Q}xh7+!$, Black has few options to consider. Paradoxically, that can actually help you find the best defense when you can reject anything that allows an immediate mate.

Black's only hope of continuing the game is 27...e4!. It is an unlikely looking move, and certainly no fun to give up the attack on the rook, but Black must make every effort, no matter how long it takes, to prevent White from mating. Granted, White has a decisive attack after 28. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ g6 29. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 30. $\mathbb{N}f5+$ $gxh5$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ (threatening mate beginning with 32. $\mathbb{Q}g4+$). But there's no guarantee that Ben would find that continuation. Even then Black could try to wriggle free somehow.

28. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ g6 29. $\mathbb{Q}f6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xg6+$ $fxg6$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xg6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}xh6\#$

Don't let your opponent dictate the action

Chess is a battle between two players trying to impose their will on the game. While you don't want to be so focused on your own plans that you give your opponent opportunities, you don't want to play with an overly defensive mindset either. The most desirable way to stop your opponent is by making the game about your own plans.

Game 65

Lonnie Kwartler

Dore Sheppard

Albany 2017 (9)

1. $\mathbb{Q}f3 \mathbb{Q}f6$ 2. $g3 b6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}g2 \mathbb{Q}b7$ 4. 0-0 $g6$ 5. $c4 \mathbb{Q}g7$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 0-0 7. $d3 c5$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}d2 d6$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}b1 \mathbb{Q}c6$
10. $a3 e6$ 11. $b4 \mathbb{Q}e7$ 12. $bxc5 dxc5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}c1 \mathbb{Q}fe8$

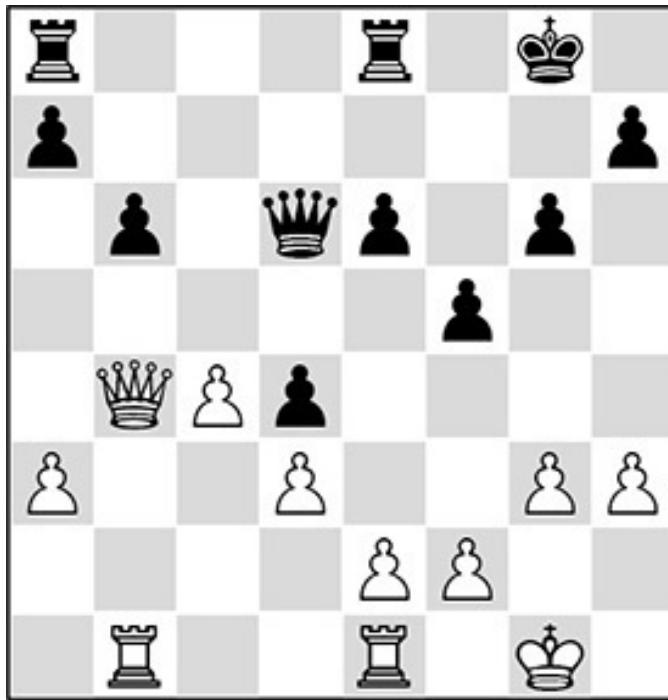


This move isn't bad, but it shows that Dore is overly concerned with the 'non-threat' of $\mathbb{Q}d2-h6$. As I noted before, overrating the value of swapping a fianchettoed bishop is very common.

14. $\mathbb{Q}h6 \mathbb{Q}h8?$

Played reflexively, but after 14... $\mathbb{Q}d4$, the natural move to gain space and generate play, Black will be happy to have his dark-squared bishop swapped off.

15. $\mathbb{Q}g5 \mathbb{Q}d7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e1 \mathbb{Q}g4$ 17. $h3 \mathbb{Q}ge5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe5 \mathbb{Q}xe5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e4 f5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}f6+ \mathbb{Q}xf6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$
 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xb7 \mathbb{Q}xb7$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xd4 cxd4$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}b2 \mathbb{Q}d7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}b5 \mathbb{Q}d6$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}b4$



CHALLENGE 54

How should Black respond to White's offer of a queen trade?

There were some awkward moments but Black has never been far from equality. However, the next move is a bad decision, whatever the computer might say.

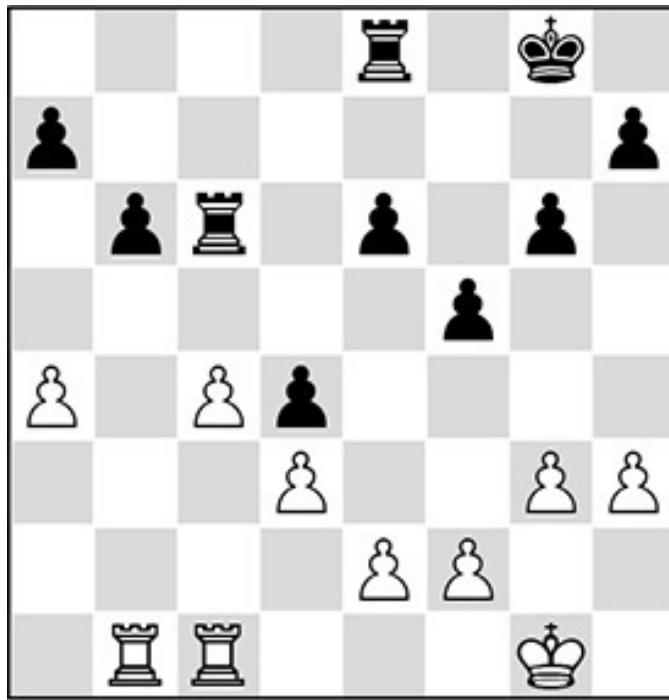
26... ♕ad8?!

Played with respect for his slightly higher-rated opponent, but being okay with a draw doesn't get you one. Black's trumps are in the center and on the kingside, where he has more space and a potential pawn roller. This is stuff augmented by the presence of queens. White's queenside play works just as well without queens, so the trade plays into White's hands.

Komodo will tell you that Black has a number of options that are worth just about the same; it even gives 26... ♕xb4 as best for a minute or two. But while the position may remain about equal with best play, White starts to play for two results without queens on the board. The 'better' equality will be the one that maintains winning chances for you, or at least forces your opponent to take risks to try to win. Moreover, Dore knows that Kwartler loves to play endgames and is getting exactly what he wants.

Dore should have gone for 26... ♕c7. After 27.a4, Black can begin immediate action with 27...f4 or 27...e5, or consolidate for the moment with 27... ♕e7.

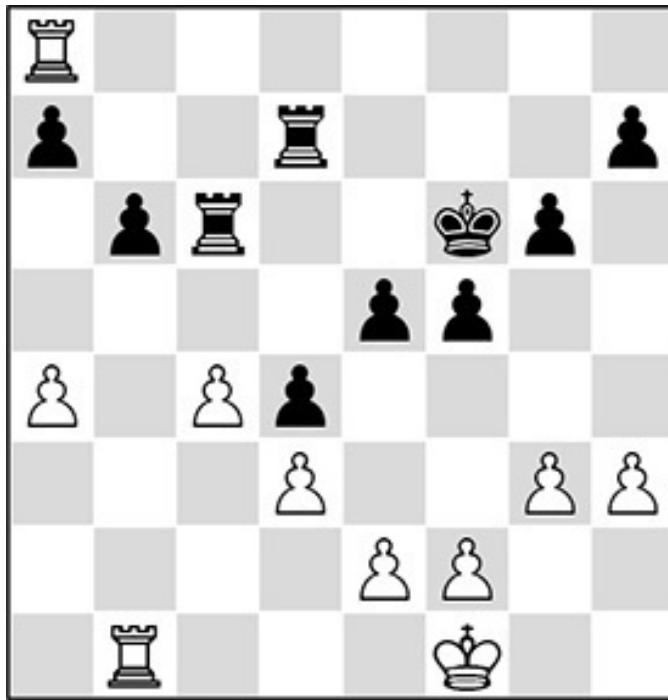
27.♕xd6 ♕xd6 28.♖ec1 ♕c6 29.a4



29...e5

White's play has not been totally accurate (28. $\mathbb{Q}ec1$ was unnecessary), and Black could have stopped him in his tracks with 29... $\mathbb{B}c5$ 30. $\mathbb{B}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}ec8$, the main point being 31. $\mathbb{B}cb1$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 32. $a5!?$ $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}c5!$. Black has to find this idea to equalize, and when he plays this natural move instead he finds himself totally on the defensive for the rest of the game.

30. $\mathbb{B}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 31. $\mathbb{B}cb1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 32. $\mathbb{B}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}ee6$ 33. $\mathbb{B}d8$ $\mathbb{Q}ed6$ 34. $\mathbb{B}a8$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}f1$



35...e4

Now this attempt at activity does little, and the position slips away move by move.

36. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ exd3 37. exd3 $\mathbb{Q}cd6$ 38. a5 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 39. axb6 axb6 40. $\mathbb{Q}b8$ $\mathbb{Q}cc6$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}b7$ h6 42. h4 g5?

42...h5 is not pretty but would have made White work to score the point.

43. hxg5+ hxg5 44. $\mathbb{Q}b8$

The black pawns started dropping in a few moves.

Black made no obvious blunders, and his moves made sense on the surface, but he did nothing to challenge his opponent, to give him any problems to worry about. This is a trap that lower-rated players often fall into, trying to hang on (consciously or not) rather than playing to win.

Tenacious D

Difficult situations may require working till your brain hurts. The seemingly best continuation may just not be good enough. There are times when we should sense the moment and try to think outside the box while we have a chance to change our fate.

Game 66

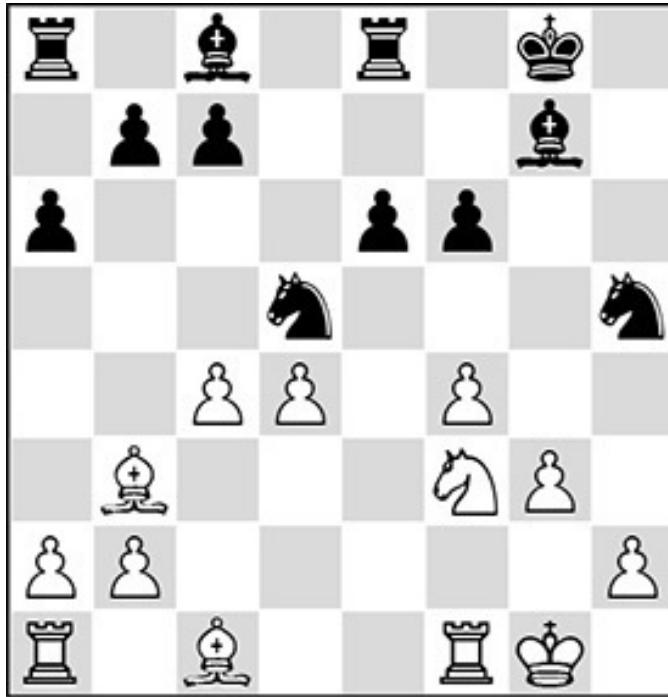
Carissa Yip 2187

Trung 2181

Nguyen

Manchester jr 2017 (8)

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♜g7 3.♘c3 a6 4.f4 d5 5.♘f3 dxе4 6.♘xe4 ♜d7 7.♘c4 e6 8.0-0 ♜gf6 9.♘eg5
 ♜b6 10.♔b3 0-0 11.♘e5 ♜bd5 12.♗d3 ♜h5 13.g3 f6 14.♘xh7 ♔xh7 15.♗xg6+ ♔g8 16.♘f3
 ♗e8 17.♗xe8 ♗xe8 18.c4



CHALLENGE 55

What continuation will allow Black to best stay in the game?

The young talent Carissa Yip has played a long combination which has come to the end. Black is up a piece for two pawns but has to give back his extra material. Trung recouped one pawn with

18...♘hxf4 19.gxf4 ♜e7

but his position remained cramped and he was not able to hold.

A) His best chance was 18...♘e7 19.g4 e5! 20.gxh5 e4 and now:



analysis diagram

A1) 21.c5+ ♜h7 22.♕c2 ♜f5 23.♘h4 ♜h3 24.♖f3 ♜g4 25.♗xe4+ f5 26.♗g3 ♜xd4+ 27.♔g2 fxe4 28.♗xg4. Black has several possible moves here, but in any case his activity compensates for the slight material disadvantage;

A2) 21.♘h4 ♜h3 22.♖f2 f5 23.♗e3 ♜h7 with a slight edge for White but active counterplay for Black.

B) Black can try the same idea with 18...♝b4 19.g4 e5, e.g. 20.c5+ ♜h7 21.gxh5 e4 22.♗d2 ♜h3 23.♖fe1 ♘d3 24.♖f7 ♗xe1 25.♗g6+ ♔g8 26.♖xe1. It's not likely that one can figure out which knight move is better over the board, but the key is to find the idea 21...e4.

To this point, Black had a difficult game, with many choices and mini-calculations to make along the way. So it is not a surprise that Trung was getting short of time, with about thirty minutes (plus increment) left on the clock. That of course affected his ability to work out the best path to take. Still, this is a good moment to invest your time, even at the risk of time pressure. With experience, we may detect the importance of the moment. White needs to recover the piece so there is a breath to look for a resource. And it might not take that much time, because the key is to find one move that sets everything in motion. After that it is not necessary to calculate deeply before making a move. Black only needs to have faith that an active defense will give more chances than a pawn minus with a passive position.

Serious but not desperate

Desperate times call for desperate measures, but when a situation is not so dire, patience is a virtue.

Game 67

Lilia 2054

Poteat

Jay Bonin 2436

New York 2013 (1)

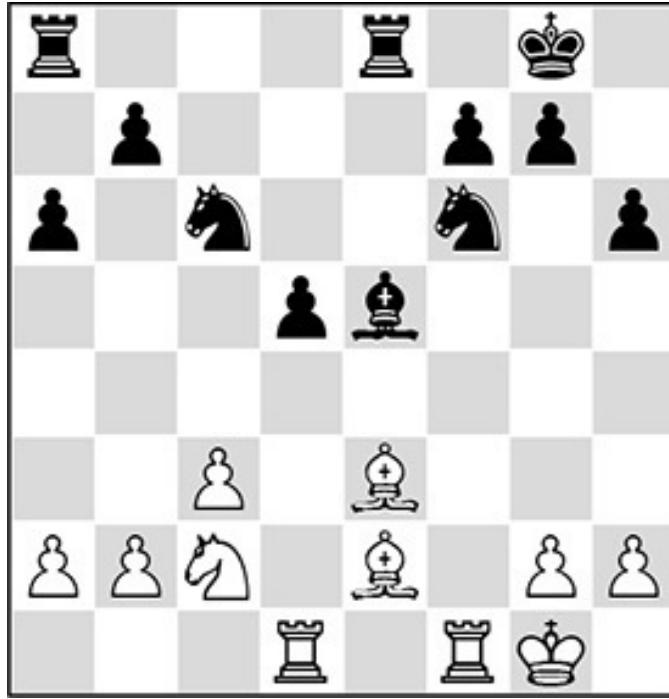
1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ e5 5. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ d6 6. $\mathbb{Q}1c3$ a6 7. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 10.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}a5+$ 11.c3 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$



12. $\mathbb{Q}c2?$!

I think that in most cases this position has been reached by White blundering the pawn, and that's probably what happened here. One should not let the material situation provoke assumptions about exchanges. White is not badly off after 12. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1+$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ gxf6 14. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}b6$. The iron grip on the light squares compensates for the missing pawn. Still, Lilia fights back pretty well for a while.

12... $\mathbb{Q}e4+$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ d5 15. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ h6 16.f4 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 17.fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 18.0-0 0-0 19. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}fe8$



White has the bishop pair and the sounder pawn structure. The pawn should be worth more, but perhaps not that much more. So there's no need to go crazy here. A simple improving move like 20. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ will do nicely.

20.c4?

I'm not sure what Lilia intended on 20... $dxc4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ b5 followed by 22... $\mathbb{Q}xb2$. But Bonin finds an even more clear-cut continuation.

20...d4 21. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}xh2+$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xh2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4+$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ f5 28. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ f4+ 29. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4+$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ g5 32. b4 $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 33. a4 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 34. c5 g4 35. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ f3 36. gxf3 gxf3 37. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 38. c6 bxc6 0-1

Never assume

Faulty assumptions lead to a great number of unforced errors. Apparently forcing moves do not always force the response we expect. In the following game both players overlooked the best capture in a tactical sequence.

Game 68

Noah Flaum

Sophie Morris-Suzuki 2177

Philadelphia 2017 (5)

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3. c3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 4. d4 d5 5. exd5 exd5 6. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 7. 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}ge7$ 8. dxc5 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ 0-0 10. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 12. h3 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}f4$



CHALLENGE 56

How does White refute 13... \mathbb{N} f2+ ?

Here Sophie spotted the clever resource

13... \mathbb{N} f2+

but does it actually work? She spent eleven minutes on this decision but had a typical kind of blind spot which her opponent shared.

14. \mathbb{N} x f2 \mathbb{W} b6+ 15. \mathbb{Q} bd4 \mathbb{N} xd4



Here White thought for four minutes and found a clever way to hang on to the extra piece.

However, after

16.cxd4 ♜g6 17.♔c7! ♛xc7 18.g4 ♜f4 19.gxh5 ♜xh3+ 20.♔g2 ♜f4+ 21.♔f1 ♜xh5

Black had reasonable compensation for the piece, and in fact later achieved a winning position. That would make the sacrifice a bit of a speculation but playable.

However, there was a giant hole in the calculation. Both players fell victim to an assumption: it makes no sense to capture with the queen because the rook will be hanging in the corner. But this is in fact the refutation of the sacrifice:

16.♕xd4! ♛xb5 17.♖xe7 ♛xb2+ (17...♗xf3 18.♔xf3 doesn't help) 18.♖d2 ♛xa1 19.♖e1 and the queen is trapped.

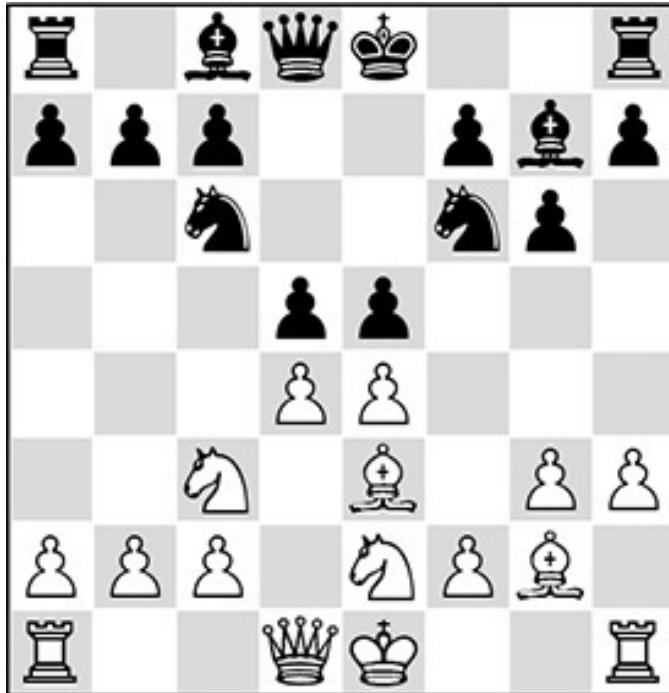
Both players were talented enough to find clever resources but glossed over the most important tactical point. 16.♕xd4 may feel unlikely, but it eliminates the ...♝e7-g6 option for Black. It is a wise step to calculate at least a half-move beyond the last capture in a tactical variation – that is, confirm you can not only take material, but you can do it safely!

Captures of pawns provide an even more insidious attention trap. Since there is usually less urgency to recapture pawns than pieces, we need to be especially careful about assumptions.

Game 69

Martha Samdashvili 1979
Trung Nguyen 2147
Philadelphia 2017 (2)

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♜g7 3.♘c3 d6 4.g3 ♜c6 5.♗e3 ♜f6 6.h3 e5 7.♗ge2 d5 8.♗g2



Here Trung was trying to work out a way to play for an advantage. He apparently succeeded...

8...dxe4

In hindsight, better was 8...♞xe4 9.dxe5 ♜e6=.

9.dxe5 ♜xd1+?

9...♞xe5 avoids the path of ruin.

10.♕xd1 ♜xe5 11.♗xe4 ♜xe4 12.♗xe4 0-0 13.♗g2?!

13.b3 would be equal.

13...♞c4

Black has a nice edge which he converted to a win comfortably.

What is wrong with this picture? Both players missed a crusher on move eleven.



11. $\mathbb{N}b5!$ would win a lot of material. Black can't defend c7, or even save his rook. It isn't a hard move to find. Both players got caught up in the obvious captures and didn't pause to look around.

Stay focused

Game 70

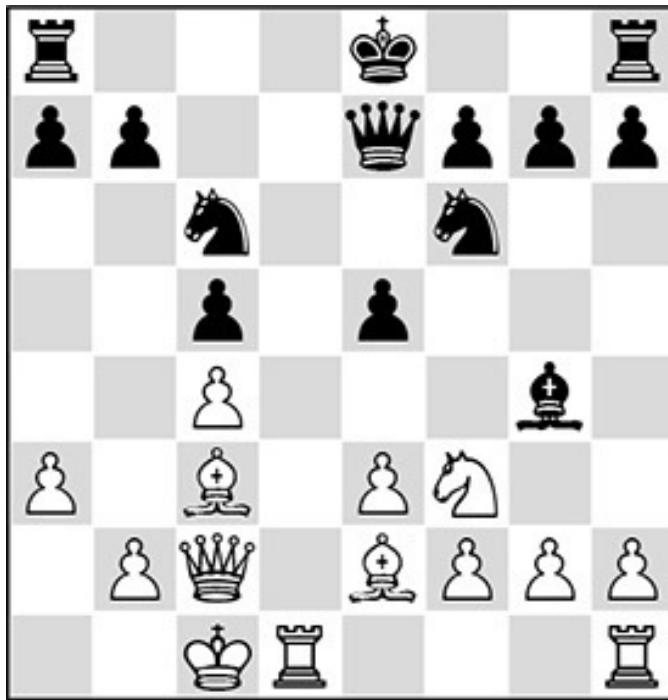
Gil Popolski 2542

Joel 2544

Benjamin

Indianapolis 2016 (9)

1.d4 $\mathbb{N}f6$ 2.c4 e6 3. $\mathbb{N}c3$ $\mathbb{N}b4$ 4. $\mathbb{W}c2$ d6 5. $\mathbb{N}d2$ c5 6.dxc5 dxc5 7.e3 $\mathbb{N}c6$ 8. $\mathbb{N}f3$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ 9.a3
 $\mathbb{N}xc3$ 10. $\mathbb{N}xc3$ e5 11.0-0-0 $\mathbb{N}g4$ 12. $\mathbb{N}e2$



This game was played in the last round of the U.S. Open, with first place on the line. I was playing well, coming off a nice win over Timur Gareev in round eight. Whatever confidence one may have during a tournament, the last round is a different animal. In addition to the prize money, the tournament winner would earn a spot in the next U.S. Championship. Now I've played in so many of those that I've lost count, but the field is so super strong now that the U.S. Open seed is the only way in for me. And the prize money there is much more generous than when I was able to win the title.

So with a big professional and financial opportunity on the line, it was impossible not to be a little nervous about this game. Especially in a period in my career where I play very infrequently, and seldom against grandmasters. I wasn't sure he would open with 1.d4, and made some opening decisions over the board, but I was happy how it turned out. I've used a pet variation to come out of the opening in good shape. I had been nervous about getting a good position in such an important game, but now in my relief I began to get complacent. Though I'd never had this position before, the broad strokes were quite familiar to me. In my mind I somehow had a big advantage, though objectively Black cannot be more than very slightly better. I began to see the finish line way, way too early.

12...0-0??

I'm castling on move twelve, and it's not like I'm hanging anything. Yet this natural move spoils everything, and is actually worse than not moving at all!

Of course I considered 12... $\mathbb{Q}h5$; the idea of ... $\mathbb{Q}h5-g6$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}f6-e4$ is terribly thematic. I rejected it for a completely ridiculous reason: 13. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ and now 14... $\mathbb{Q}e4$ is not good because of 15. $\mathbb{Q}g4$... but 14... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ is perfectly good, with a nice position.

So I just decided I'll castle first and play ... $\mathbb{Q}h5$ later, totally forgetting to consider the specifics.

13.h3!



13... $\mathbb{Q}h5$

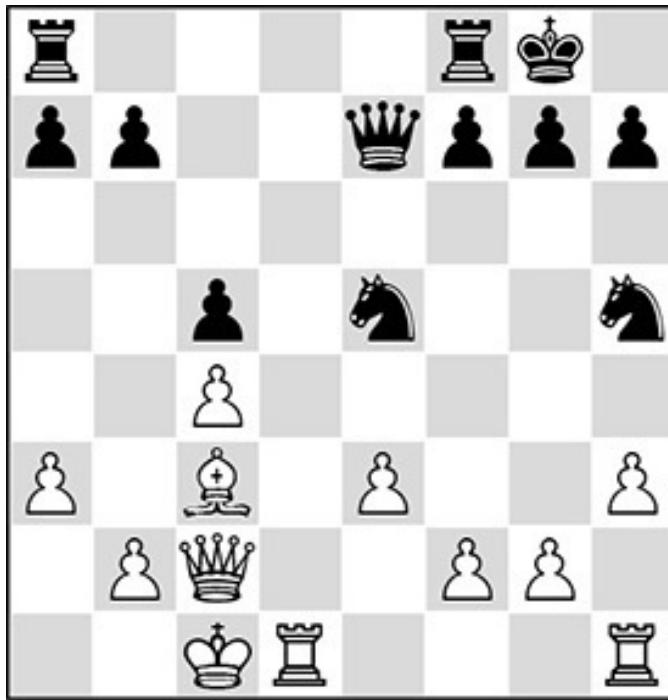
I woke up to the danger but failed to calculate properly. This failure I don't regret so much, as 13... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 14.g4 is depressing for Black. The whole strategy for Black hinges on bringing the bishop around, and here I would have given him extra time to stop it. I would be in the game, of course, but I just couldn't accept the opening failure.

14. $\mathbb{Q}xe5!$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$

The point is 14... $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ works because White is threatening to take on e7 with check. Without castling, White's trick never works because of ...

$\mathbb{Q}e2xd1$.

15. $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ $\mathbb{Q}xh5$



16. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$

Ugh! So simple and yet overlooked. Wishful thinking? I saw 16. $\mathbb{W}f5 \mathbb{N}g3$ 17. $f\text{x}g3 \mathbb{Q}\text{x}c4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}\text{x}g7 \mathbb{W}\text{x}e3+$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}b1 \mathbb{N}\text{x}a3+$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}a2 \mathbb{Q}\text{x}g7$ and 16. $\mathbb{R}d5 f6$ 17. $g4 \mathbb{N}g3$, both working out for me. But I missed a capture!

16... $\mathbb{W}\text{x}e5$ 17. $\mathbb{R}d5 \mathbb{W}e6$ 18. $\mathbb{R}\text{x}h5 g6$

When you blunder, it seems that every little point conspires against you, as if you don't deserve for the tactics to bail you out. There is no hope in 18... $f5$ 19. $g4!$ $g6$ 20. $gxf5 \mathbb{W}c6$ and now 21. $\mathbb{R}g1$ protects everything.

19. $\mathbb{R}d5$

I went down in flames in twenty more moves.

As a Nimzo-Indian player with experience in this structure, it was particularly galling to lose to a tactic that I'm so familiar with. It just shows how badly things can turn when you stop thinking clearly. If I had won, I would still have needed to win a playoff against Alexander Shabalov to get the seed into the U.S. Championship. Now Shaba is the consummate money player. He doesn't win all of these games, but it sure seems like he does. It helps that he has always played so frequently that he knows his next chance is right around the corner, but it seems like he always plays with total focus and without fear.

CHAPTER 6

Material and initiative

In 1997, a man wise in the ways of chess but less so in the ways of computers, travelled America giving speeches on the nature of computer chess. Garry Kasparov's description of engine 'priorities' was nonsense; every aspect of chess gets a numerical value, but Deep Blue (or any other engine I imagine) was never given instruction about the bishop pair being more important than king safety, or any similar equation. One might be inclined to extrapolate based on one move in one game, but that would be overly simplistic. Computers count up all the points and make their decision on what gets the highest possible score.

Many chess fans still have an outdated view of computers as greedy material grabbers (Kasparov certainly believed that in 1997). But if you have your engine analyze positions you will see many cases where one side has an extra pawn, is not about to lose the pawn or get mated, and is assigned little or no advantage by the engine. As evaluation functions became more sophisticated (as we believe Deep Blue's were for 1997) computers began to see compensation much better than before – in some cases better than humans. I think that computers have actually nudged grandmasters in the direction of more sacrifices. [I often quip that nobody cares about the c4-pawn in the Catalan anymore.]

In any case, strong players understand that there is a complicated equation to work out between material and other factors in any position. I believe many players have a kind of mental block against moves that don't take available pawns or protect pawns or recapture pawns. With more complex material relationships like exchange sacrifices and queen sacrifices, the taboo is even greater. The assessment of the true value of a material advantage will remain a complicated problem, but players can accelerate their development if they can train their mind to consider the possibilities which leave them, in the strictest sense, behind in material.

The first challenge is one of my favorite positions for students.

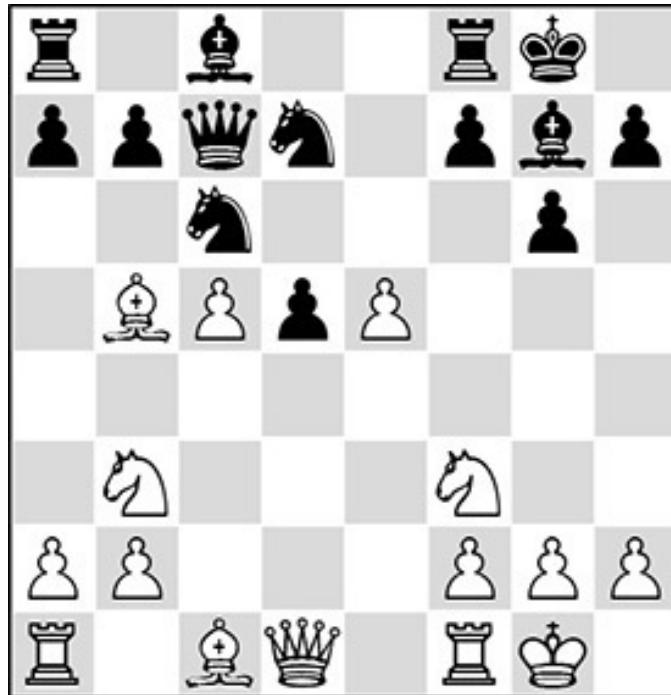
Game 71

Joel Benjamin 2570
Larry 2420

Remlinger

Honolulu 1996 (1)

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 ♘f6 4.e5 ♘fd7 5.♗d3 c5 6.c3 ♘c6 7.♗gf3 ♖b6 8.0-0 g6 9.dxc5 ♖c7
10.♗b5 ♗g7 11.c4 0-0 12.cxd5 exd5 13.♗b3



CHALLENGE 57

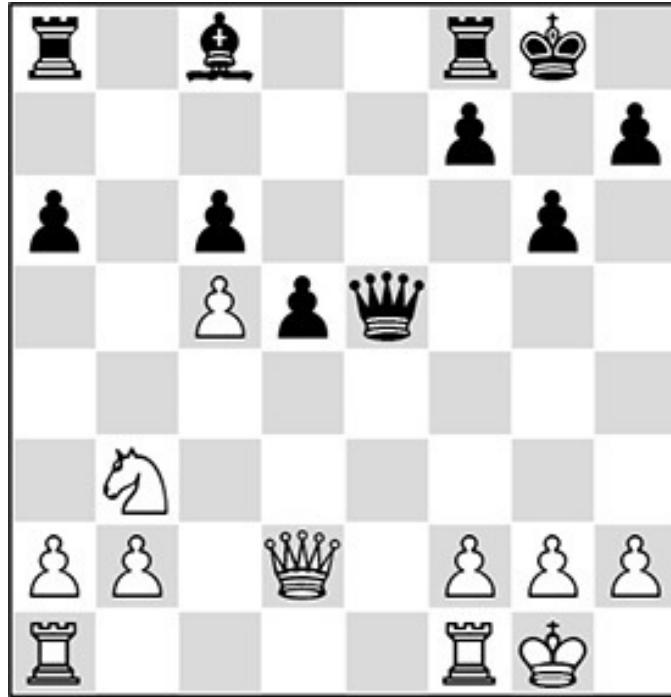
Should Black play 13...a6, 13...♗dxe5, or 13...♗cxe5 ?

13...a6

This was the choice of an international master, so you are in good company if you went this way. Unfortunately, it led to an unpleasant position for Black:

14.♕xc6 bxc6 15.♗f4 ♗xe5 16.♗xe5 ♗xe5 17.♗xe5 ♖xe5 18.♖d2

Engines assess this position as just a tiny bit worse for Black, but I see it as a step away from strategically lost! The protected passed d-pawn is overrated; it will be permanently blockaded by White's strong knight. Black's bad bishop will have nothing constructive to do for the rest of the game. Black lost the game despite playing only one move that was clearly an error.



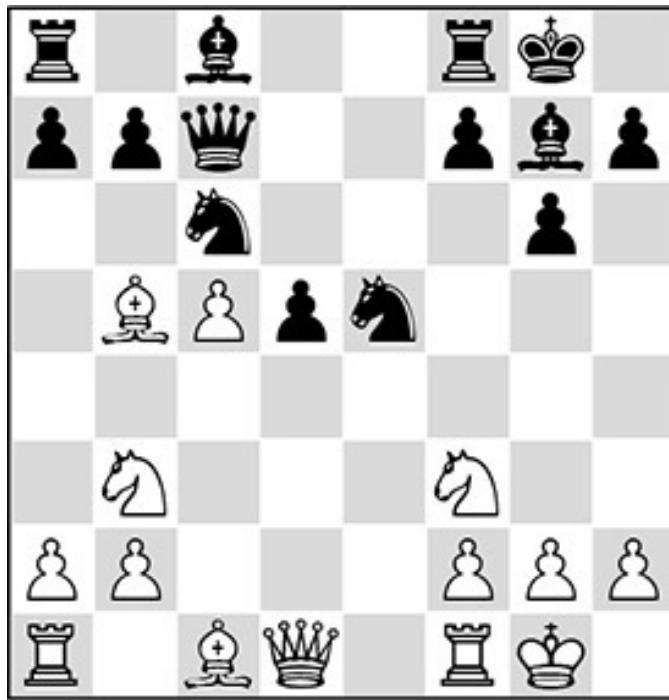
18... ♜d7 19. ♜fe1 ♜f6 20. ♜d4 ♜xd4 21. ♜xd4 ♜fb8 22. ♜e7 ♜b4 23. ♜d1 ♜e8 24. ♜xe8+ ♜xe8 25. b3 f6 26. ♜f1 ♜d7 27. ♜e2 ♜f7 28. ♜d3 ♜b8 29. ♜e1 g5 30. ♜c3 h5 31. b4 h4 32. a3 ♜a8?

This is perhaps the first significant mistake since move thirteen, allowing White to make a passed a-pawn. But even after 32... ♜f8 33. ♜b3 a5 34. ♜a1 ♜e7 35. ♜c3 Black still has big problems.

33. ♜b3 a5 34. bxa5! ♜xa5 35. ♜b4 ♜a8 36. a4 f5 37. a5 ♜f6 38. ♜a1 ♜a6 39. ♜c3 ♜c8
40. ♜c2 ♜a8 41. ♜b4 ♜a6 42. ♜d4 ♜b5 43. a6 g4 44. ♜a5 ♜g5 45. ♜xb5 cxb5 46. c6 f4 47. g3 fxg3 48. fxg3 h3 49. c7 1-0

Next up is 13... ♜cxe5. This capture looks quite awkward, and shows Black is really hoping not to give up a pawn. I only mention it because it was suggested in one of my classes. It too shows too much connection to material. Just the same, after 14. ♜f4! Black may be forced to part with a pawn anyway. There is some compensation after 14... a6 15. ♜a4 ♜d8 16. ♜xd5 ♜f6; White might instead opt for a positional advantage with 15. ♜xd7 ♜xd7 16. ♜xe5 ♜xe5 17. ♜xe5 ♜xe5 18. ♜d2 – another advantage I think underestimated by the engine.

13... ♜dxe5! was the choice in all three games from this position played after mine.



analysis diagram

Black offers a pawn, but it isn't difficult to see that White cannot rest easy after taking it: 14. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ (14. $\mathbb{W}xd5$ is also not dangerous for Black; one possible line is 14... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 15. $\mathbb{W}d6$ $\mathbb{N}xf3+$ 16. $gxf3$ $\mathbb{W}c8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{R}d8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{W}xb7$ 19. $c6$ $\mathbb{W}a6$ 20. $\mathbb{W}c7$ $\mathbb{R}ac8$ 21. $\mathbb{W}b7$ $\mathbb{W}xc6$ 22. $\mathbb{W}xc6$ $\mathbb{R}xc6$; Black's bishop pair more than compensates for the pawn) 14... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 15. $\mathbb{W}xd5$ $\mathbb{R}ad8$ 16. $\mathbb{W}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 17. $gxf3$ $\mathbb{W}c8$ was Solovjov-Nikolenko, Minsk 1998. White has to play accurately to hold the balance and did not succeed.

Star Trek: The Next Generation is one of my favorite television shows. I remember one classic episode where Counselor Troi was struggling with the Commander's exam. Only in the end did she figure out what the test required from her. She needed to be willing to send a crewman to his death in order to save the ship! So the moral of this story is, you sometimes need to sentence a pawn to death for the overall health of your position.

I know that below the master level many players have a difficult time doing this. You have to accept that it isn't always necessary to work out a way to regain the pawn or win other material. It is enough to know, as it is in this case, that you have good play for the pawn with chances to make something positive happen. Furthermore, every move is a comparison. If your answer is 'I don't want to sac a pawn so I choose 13...a6,' you need to first know what you are getting into with 13...a6. It is not safer or more solid. Your risk can be greater with a

strategic disadvantage than a material one. And it is almost always better to have the initiative than to grimly defend – even if a pawn is the cost.

Game 72

Robert Gruchacz

Joel Benjamin

New York 1980

1.e4 ♜f6 2.e5 ♜g8

Kids, don't try this at home. Let's just say I had different ideas about chess back then.

**3.d4 d6 4.♘f3 ♜g4 5.h3 ♜h5 6.g4 ♜g6 7.e6 fxe6 8.♗d3 ♜xd3 9.♕xd3 ♜c6 10.♗b3 ♜d7
11.♕xb7 ♜b8 12.♗a6 ♜f6 13.♗e2 g6 14.0-0 ♜g7 15.c3 0-0 16.♗g5 ♜d8**



CHALLENGE 58

Find three candidate moves for White and choose your favorite

Before selecting a move here, I ask students to identify where White has weaknesses. The advance of the g-pawn has left weak squares on f3 and f4. Right now they don't look like much, but they bear monitoring because the f-file is open for Black.

I would be tempted to play 17.f4 (even more so in 1980, when I thought chess was all about pawn structure) in order to plug up the hole. Other possibilities include 17.♗a3 and 17.♗d2, catching up in development. Most students choose

the move played in the game.

17. $\mathbb{Q}e1$

Black does not have any more pieces to defend the pawn. Students get caught up analyzing 17...e5 18.dxe5 dxe5 19. $\mathbb{W}xe5?$ $\mathbb{N}xg4$, but there is no reason for White to grab this crippled pawn; after 19. $\mathbb{N}d2$ White has a great game. 18... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ is a much better idea, which seems to give Black full compensation for the pawn. But Black does not have to even try to save the pawn.

17... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$

The only follow-up to White's last move.

18... $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 19. $\mathbb{W}xe6+$ $\mathbb{W}xe6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{R}f3$



Let's take stock of the moves so far. White has grabbed a pawn, but in doing so traded his two best pieces. Black has unloaded his knight on d8 which was functioning only on defense. As a result, White has one piece developed while Black is playing with four. And remember how we opened by considering White's weak squares? Black is already starting to occupy them.

21. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{R}d3!$

Okay, how many of you would have played 21... $\mathbb{R}bf8$ without thinking? It's quite natural to double the rooks, but after 22. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ there is no clear way forward. After the text move, Black's rooks are working less conventionally but more concretely, and White seemingly has only one move to defend against Black's two threats.



CHALLENGE 59

What is White's best defense?

22. $\mathbb{R}e1$

Otherwise either 22... $\mathbb{R}xb2$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ $\mathbb{Q}f4+$ or 22... $\mathbb{R}d1$ would be unpleasant.

22...e5

Now the bishop joins the party.

23. $dxe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}a3$



Students are invariably drawn to the flashy 24... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$. Even in the best scenario 25.bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ $\mathbb{R}d1$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ matters are hardly clear. But the knight on c3 does not hit anything, and with a passive sacrifice, you must consider not taking the piece. 25. $\mathbb{Q}c4!$ is stronger, the point being that White will hold on to his material after 25... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 26.bxc3 $\mathbb{R}xc3$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ or 26... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}b2!$.

But there is a stronger and simpler alternative. Don't get caught up in the fireworks and you will find it.

24... $\mathbb{Q}f4!$

My dream of landing a knight on f4 is coming true.

25. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ 26. $\mathbb{R}axc1$ $\mathbb{Q}f4+$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}xh3+$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{R}f8$ 29. $\mathbb{R}c2$ $\mathbb{R}g3!$

Black's threats are now decisive.

30. $\mathbb{R}e7$ $\mathbb{R}g1+$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{R}xf2+$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}f4+$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{R}xc2$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{R}f2+ 0-1$

Engines like to complicate our tidy little narratives. Komodo likes the move 17. $\mathbb{R}e1$, finding it as good as or better than the alternatives. Other paths lead to murky, difficult to assess tactical possibilities. Practically speaking, chances there are about equal. But 17. $\mathbb{R}e1$ only holds up because of one hidden resource.



Remember I asked about this position? It turns out White can defend with 22. $\mathbb{Q}e4!!$. The main point is that Black cannot exploit the back rank weakness: 22... $\mathbb{Q}d1$ and now:

A) 23. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ (if 23...e5 24.dxe5 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ seems to hold) 24. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ (25.c4 is possible, when Black has to find 25... $\mathbb{Q}xb2!$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}c3$ to hold the balance) 25... $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 27.c4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 29.g5! $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xa2=$;

B) 23. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ (Black can maintain sufficient compensation more quietly with 23...e5 24.dxe5 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}c2$, but again no breakthrough) 24. $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ $\mathbb{Q}xa1$ 25.c4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$. White has, at least for the moment, two pawns for the exchange with well-coordinated pieces. I think he is at least equal.

22. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ is a very hard resource to find. It is counter-intuitive to leave the back rank vulnerable, and even if immediate tries for Black don't work, it is hard to feel certain White can clean up the problem. Furthermore, you have to look beyond the surface to see that 22. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ holds everything, but only for a few moves.

I don't know how much of this a grandmaster would calculate from move seventeen. The whole variation, even with 22. $\mathbb{Q}e4$, seems to have too high risk versus reward.

There are many lessons to be learned from this fascinating position. In the starting diagram I wanted readers to focus on White's weak squares, which factored greatly in his demise. The computer wordlessly reinforces this lesson by

constantly defending the f4-square, advocating not only 22. $\mathbb{E}e4$, but the same move on the 24th and 25th turn as well (albeit with much less success)!

The dangers of pawn-grabbing in the opening are pretty well understood because the punishment is usually swift and severe, and the literature is replete with cautionary tales like this one.

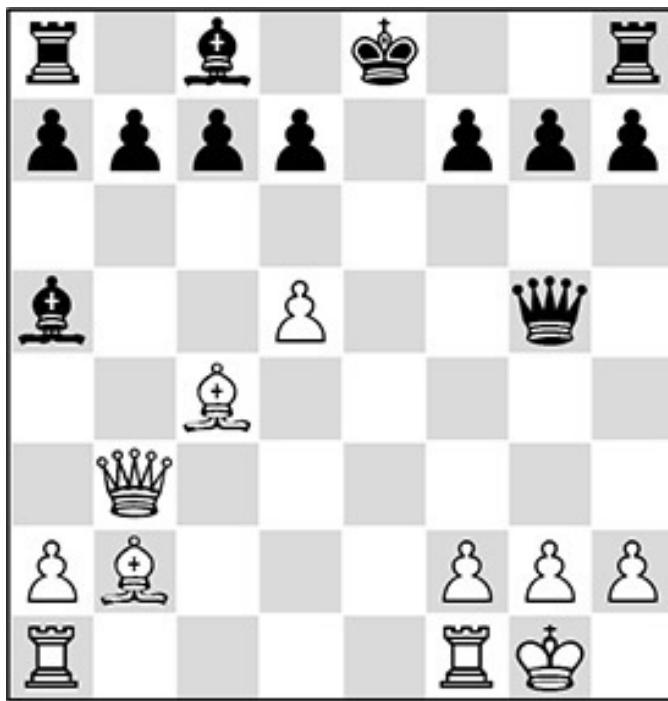
Game 73

Robert Fischer

Reuben Fine

New York 1963

1.e4 e5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 4.b4 $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 5.c3 $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 6.d4 exd4 7.0-0 dxc3 8. $\mathbb{W}b3$ $\mathbb{W}e7$
9. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 11.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{W}xe5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{W}g5$



14.h4 $\mathbb{W}xh4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{W}g8$ 16. $\mathbb{W}fe1+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 17. $\mathbb{W}g3$ 1-0

But most of the time the issues are much subtler. Just because you *can* take a pawn without the roof caving in, doesn't mean you *should* take a pawn. Losing your initiative or ceding one to your opponent are subtler penalties but must be taken seriously. Yes, material matters, but all chess factors matter.

Grandmasters routinely decide between taking pawns or pressing their initiative. I was very impressed by the number of times Hou Yifan eschews an available pawn in the following game. One can debate how many of these decisions were

'objectively' correct, but they did ultimately keep the pressure on a very strong opponent.

Game 74

Hou Yifan 2666
Etienne 2715
Bacrot

Biel 2017 (7)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.d3 ♗c5 5.c3 0-0 6.0-0 d6 7.h3 ♗e7 8.♕e1 c6 9.♗a4 ♘g6
10.d4 ♘b6 11.♗bd2 ♜e8 12.♗c2 h6 13.a4 ♘c7 14.♗f1 d5 15.♗xe5 ♘xe5 16.dxe5 ♘xe5
17.f4 ♘c7 18.e5 ♗e4 19.♗xe4 dxe4



20.♗h5

After 20.♗xd8 ♘xd8 21.♗xe4 f6 Black will likely win the pawn back, or at least obtain completely sufficient compensation with the bishop pair.

20...♗e6 21.♗g3 ♘b6+ 22.♗e3 ♜d3 23.♗f1 ♜ad8 24.f5 ♘b3 25.f6 ♜d5 26.♗xb6 axb6
27.fxg7

If 27.♗g4 g6 28.♗xe4 ♜xe4 29.♗xe4 c5 White will have a hard time making something of the extra pawn.

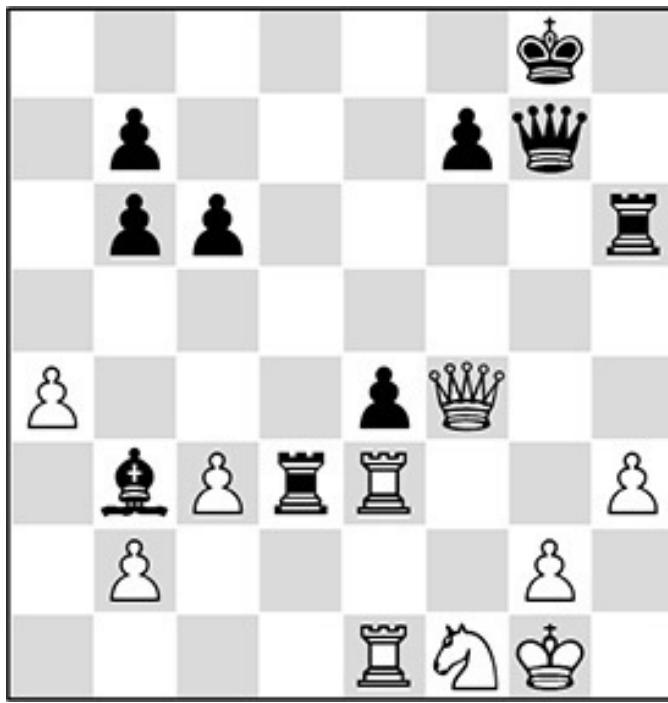
27...♜xe5 28.♗xh6 ♜xg7 29.♗h4 ♜d3 30.♗e3 ♜e6 31.♗ae1

31.♗xd3 exd3 32.♗d8+ ♜f8 33.♗xd3 ♜c5+ 34.♔h2 was a worthy alternative.

31...♜h6 32.♗f4

32.♗xe4 ♘d5 33.♗g4 ♜xg4 34.hxg4 depletes White's attacking chances and

leaves her with a less than stellar extra pawn.



32... $\mathbb{Q}xh3?$

Bacrot maintains material equality but at the cost of a perilous position. The task is not easy but Black should probably have forced White to capture the pawn – 32... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}e8+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 35. $g4$ is still better for White but with more counterplay for Black.

33. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d8??$

Blunders of course happen more frequently under pressure. Black can resist in a number of ways, for instance 35... $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 37. $c4$ with White maintaining a persistent initiative.

36. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 1-0

Black cannot defend against 37. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ without hanging the rook to 37. $\mathbb{Q}g5+$.

Sometimes having a pawn to capture can distract a player from pressing their advantages in a position, resulting in total concession of the initiative.

Game 75

Nasser Ahmed 2295

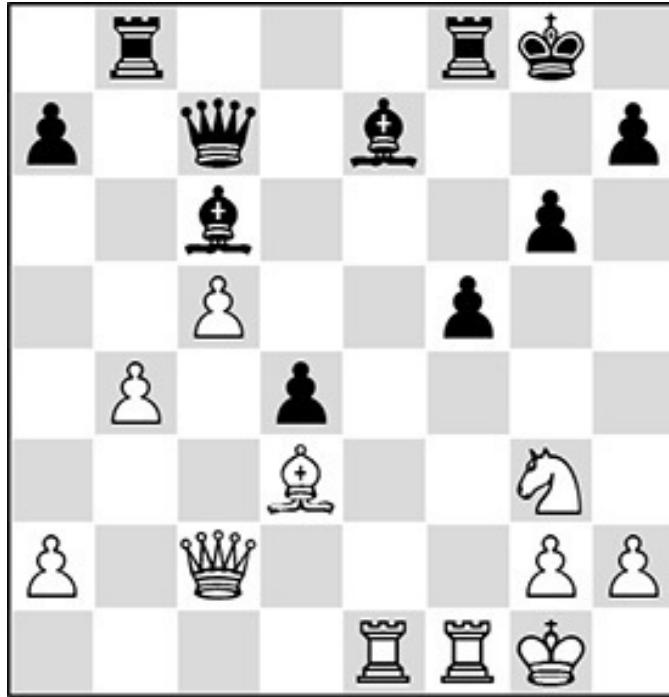
Saeed

Joel Benjamin 2475

Copenhagen Wch U20 1982 (2)

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6 6. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 7. 0-0 d5 8. exd5 cxd5 9. c4

♜b7 10.♘c3 d4 11.♗a4+ ♜d7 12.♘e4 ♗c7 13.c5 e5 14.♗d2 ♗c6 15.♗c2 ♜e7 16.b4 ♖b8
 17.♘g3 g6 18.f4 f5 19.fxe5 ♘xe5 20.♗f4 0-0 21.♘xe5 ♗xe5 22.♖ae1 ♗c7



White has a chance to make an impact with his pawn majority before Black's bishop pair establishes its dominance: 23.b5! ♜d5 24.♗c4 ♖bd8 (on 24...♗f7 White can speculate with 25.♘xf5!? or play simply 25.c6) 25.c6 ♜xc4 26.♗xc4+ ♜g7 leaves the position roughly balanced.

23.♗c4+?! ♜h8 24.♗xd4+?

Black's pieces spring to life after this untimely capture. White can still minimize the damage and look for activity with 24.♗e2!.

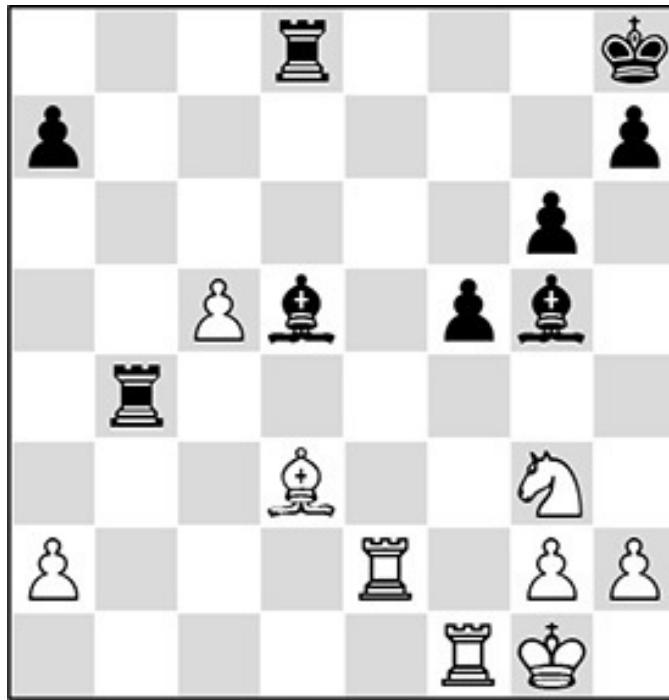
24...♗f6 25.♗f4

White can hardly do better with 25.♗c4; Black has a number of good moves but I think the most solid choice is 25...♗d7 26.♗e2 ♗d4+ 27.♗h1 ♖xb4, similar to the game.

25...♗xf4

25...♗d7 is also strong. When I know I have a very strong position I often prefer to keep things simple.

26.♖xf4 ♖fd8 27.♖e6 ♗g5 28.♖f1 ♗d5 29.♖e2 ♖xb4



Material is equal but the bishop pair is now completely dominant. In such positions it's easy to see something drop off.

30. $\mathbb{Q}b1?$ $\mathbb{Q}xb1+$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xb1$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $fxe4$ 0-1

Even grandmasters can fall prey to assuming pawn grabs are more meaningful than they really are, as I found out the hard way.

Game 76

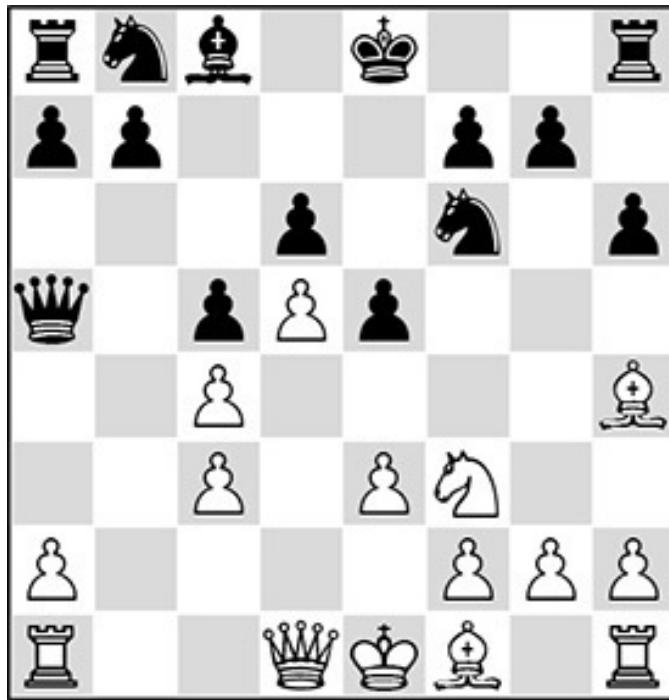
Ben Finegold 2563

Joel 2576

Benjamin

San Diego ch-USA 2006 (9)

1.d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2.c4 e6 3. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 4. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ c5 5.d5 h6 6. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3+$ 7.bxc3 d6 8.e3 e5 9. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}a5?!$



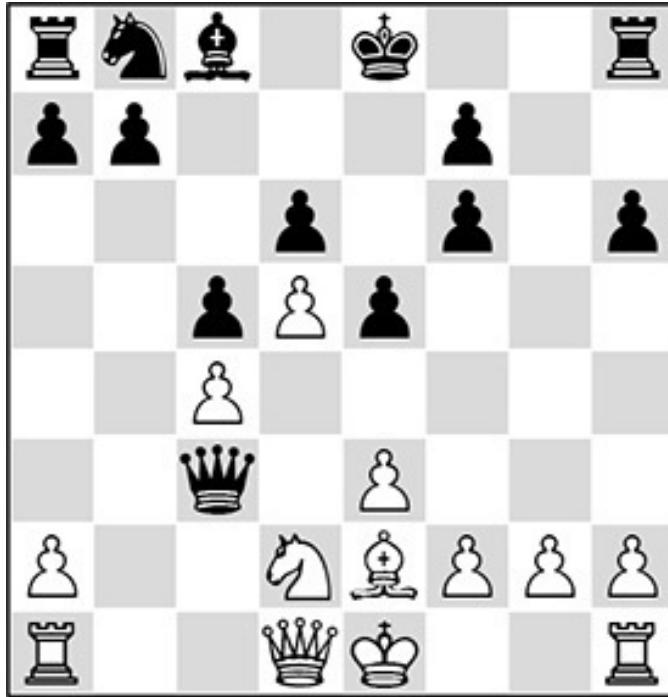
I had two factors working against me here. One, it was my birthday. I believe no one should ever play on their birthday; my personal record is abysmal. Two, I wasn't familiar with 9.♘f3, and naively believed that it was a mistake because of this sneak attack... which has not been played by another strong player, before or since.

Simple development with 9...♗f5, 9...♗bd7, 9...♔e7 – take your pick – would have been better.

10.♕xf6!

I suppose I had expected 10.♔c2, after which I hope my intention wasn't 10...♗f5? 11.♕xf5 ♗xc3+ 12.♔e2, but 10...♘e4 with a good position for Black.

10...♗xc3+ 11.♘d2 gxf6 12.♘e2



It dawned on me that I shouldn't have been so enthusiastic about winning the c3-pawn, which has little value in this kind of position. Meanwhile I've lost time and weakened my structure. Black's position isn't horrible, but it's much easier to play White and the game bore that out.

**12... ♜f5 13.0-0 ♜a6 14.e4 ♜d7 15. ♜b1 0-0-0 16. ♜b3 ♜a5 17. ♜c1 ♜b4 18. ♜a3 ♜b6
19. ♜b2 ♜b8 20. ♜b1 f5 21. ♜b3 ♜a4 22.a3 ♜xb3 23.axb4 cxb4 24. ♜xb3 fxe4 25. ♜a4**

Objectively White should have kept a significant edge with 25. ♜xe4, as I could complicate with 25...e3 26. ♜xb4 exf2+ 27. ♜f1 ♜c7 here.

25...a5?? 26. ♜b3 ♜c7 27. ♜c1!

Now I get totally rolled.

27... ♜a8 28.c5 ♜a7 29. ♜b5 ♜hd8 30. ♜c4 ♜b8 31.c6 ♜c7 32.cxb7+ 1-0

To take or not to take can be a complicated question. Pawns are entities that appreciate in value, while initiatives can be short-lived. So calculations often have to be made: how simple or difficult will the defense be with extra material, and how enduring will the initiative be?

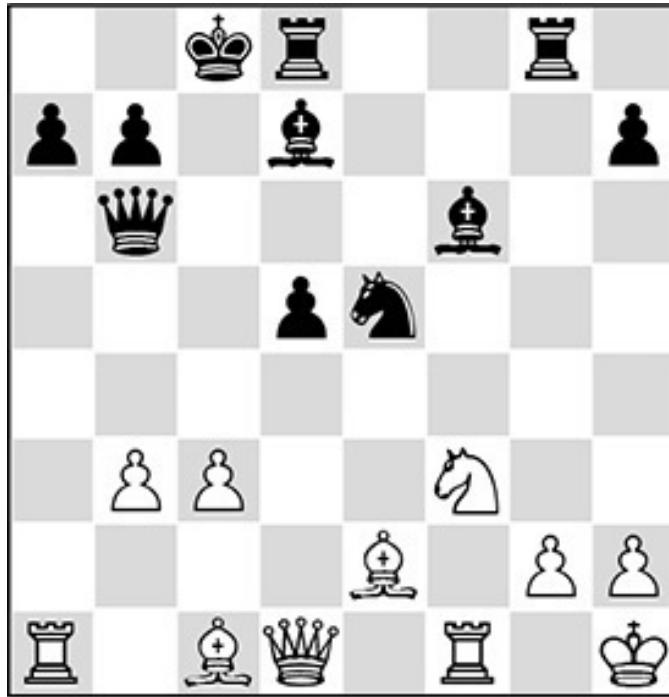
I feel it is easier to play good attacking moves than good defensive ones. The fundamental goal is to be in a position where good moves are easier to find for you than for your opponent.

Game 77

John Burke 2502
Daniel Gurevich 2471

St Louis 2017 (8)

1.e4 c6 2.♘c3 d5 3.♗f3 ♘f6 4.e5 ♘e4 5.♗e2 ♖b6 6.d4 e6 7.♗g3 c5 8.♗d3 ♗xg3 9.fxg3 c4
10.♗e2 ♗e7 11.0-0 ♗c6 12.g4 ♗d7 13.c3 f6 14.exf6 gxf6 15.g5 0-0-0 16.gxf6 ♗xf6 17.♔h1
♖hg8 18.b3 cxb3 19.axb3 e5 20.dxe5 ♗xe5



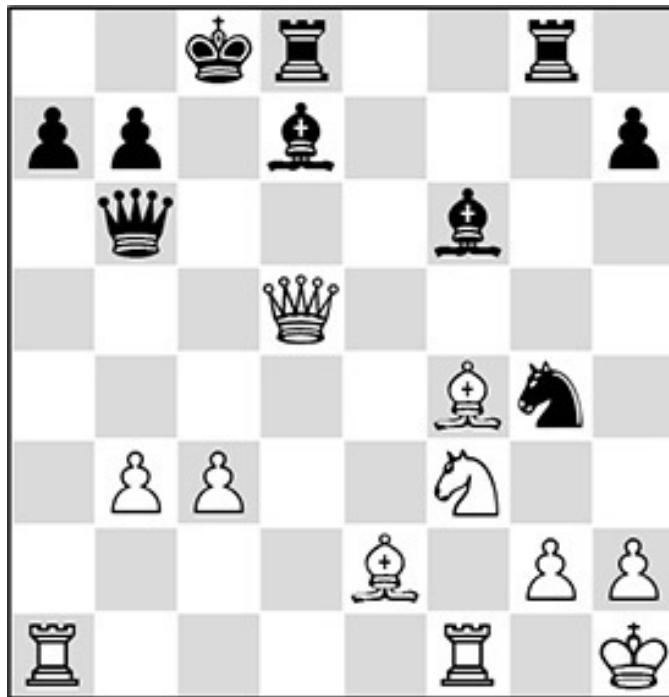
21.♗xe5

This is actually an atypical misjudgment for John, who understood the material vs initiative dynamic pretty well when I met him as a nine-year-old. Of course he considered the natural developing move 21.♗f4! but understandably couldn't gauge just how strong it would be. Control of this key diagonal makes Black's king uncomfortable, and it's easy to go wrong right away with 21...♜de8?

22.♗xe5 ♗xe5 23.♗h5! ♜e7 24.♖xd5 and the g8-rook is hanging.

I suggested 21...♗g4, which John parried with 22.♗d4 ♜de8 23.♗d3 (also good are the more complicated 23.♗b5 and 23.♗xg4) which the three of us (Komodo included) agreed is much better for White.

The computer points out that White can play 22.♗xd5,



analysis diagram

producing the following long line: 22... $\mathbb{Q}f2+$ 23. $\mathbb{R}xf2 \mathbb{W}xf2$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}f1 \mathbb{R}g7$ 25. $\mathbb{W}d6 \mathbb{Q}c6$ 26. $\mathbb{W}xf6 \mathbb{W}xf3$ 27. $gxf3 \mathbb{Q}xf3+$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}g2 \mathbb{R}xg2$ 29. $\mathbb{W}f5+ \mathbb{R}d7$ 30. $\mathbb{W}f8+ \mathbb{R}d8$ 31. $\mathbb{W}c5+ \mathbb{Q}c6$ 32. $\mathbb{W}xc6+ bxc6$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ and White wins.

It's not so obvious how helpless Black is after the exchange sacrifice, but if Black declines it – 22... $\mathbb{Q}e3!$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xe3 \mathbb{W}xe3$ – he is better off than if White doesn't take the d5-pawn at all.

The best option for Black is probably the subdued retreat 21... $\mathbb{Q}c6$; after 22. $\mathbb{W}c2$ there is no immediate catastrophe, but White's advantages – open a-file, better pawn structure, exposed black king – are likely to pay off in the near future.

21... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 22. $\mathbb{W}xd5 \mathbb{W}g6$

Black opts for counterplay mode, but endgame neutralization mode with 22... $\mathbb{W}c6$ was probably stronger. It's a tough call, and either way White has to play very accurately.

23. $\mathbb{Q}f3 \mathbb{Q}c6$ 24. $\mathbb{W}c4 \mathbb{R}df8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xc6 \mathbb{W}xc6$ 26. $\mathbb{W}xc6+?$

After this White has nothing to work with. John had to find 26. $\mathbb{R}xf8+ \mathbb{R}xf8$ 27. $\mathbb{W}g4+ \mathbb{Q}b8$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ to maintain a lasting, though not necessarily decisive, advantage.

26... $bxc6$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}e3 \mathbb{Q}xc3$ 28. $\mathbb{R}xf8+ \mathbb{R}xf8$ 29. $\mathbb{R}c1 \mathbb{Q}b2$ 30. $\mathbb{R}b1 \mathbb{R}e8$

30... $\mathbb{Q}a3$ would be even easier, as 31. $\mathbb{Q}xa7 c5$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}b6 \mathbb{Q}b4$ 33. $\mathbb{R}d1 \mathbb{R}e8$ might even allow Black to dream about winning.

31. $\mathbb{Q}xa7 \mathbb{R}e2$ 32. $g3 \mathbb{Q}b7$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}g1 \mathbb{Q}c7$ 34. $\mathbb{R}f1 \mathbb{Q}d6$ 35. $\mathbb{R}f7$

White has to settle for 35. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ but I doubt he can win.

35... $h6$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}c1$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}b2$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 39. $h4$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 40. $g4$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 42. $g5$ $hxg5$ 43. $hgx5$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$

More is not always better

What you can do with your extra material matters more than how much extra stuff you have. Be open to giving some away to clarify the situation.

Game 78

Majur Juac
Sophie Morris-Suzuki

New York 2017

1. $e4$ $e6$ 2. $d4$ $d5$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 5. $e5$ $h6$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $c5$ 9. $dxc5?$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2!$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xh1$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$

White has fallen into an opening trap and gifted Sophie a winning advantage. She might not want to burn a lot of clock time over the details in such a situation, but it's still worth getting them right. The knight is a useful piece for busting any blockade White might hope for. So it made sense to start with 11... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ or 11... 0-0.

12. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 14. 0-0-0 0-0 15. $\mathbb{Q}xh1$



In the game Sophie played

15... $\mathbb{Q}e7$

which is not so bad in itself (Black may still have time ford5-d4), but she allowed White to place the knight on d4 and push the kingside pawns. This led to a scramble where White was able to win.

With my experience, the move 15...d4! is calling out to be played.



analysis diagram

The bad bishop immediately comes to life, with the queen to follow, and the rooks shortly thereafter. Sophie rejected the move because she wasn't convinced by 16.♘xd4 ♛xg2 17.♖g1, quite rightly as after 17...♝e4 18.c6 Black has given back most of the advantage. However, it isn't necessary for Black to take anything, as the move functions perfectly well as a pawn sacrifice. Much stronger is 16...♛d5!, putting White's position under fire in several directions. 17.♘xc6 ♜xa2 is winning for Black, e.g. 18.♞e7+ ♔h8 19.♜e1 (otherwise the rook drops to ...♜a2-a1+) 19...♜a1+ 20.♔d2 ♜xb2 21.♜e4 a5 and White's position collapses. That is all a bonus for me – maybe you have a look when you get here, and if you can calculate this, great. But otherwise 17...♛xc6 will do just fine. Black's exchange advantage is accentuated by the open d-file. There is some further judgment required here; Black should avoid routine simplification with 17...♜xd2+?! 18.♝xd2 bxc6 19.♔a5, or, for that matter, 17...bxc6?! 18.♛xd5 exd5 19.♝c3. In both cases the rooks have become jammed up, and thus their advantage is lessened.

Knee-jerk defense

Sometimes having a weak pawn can end up being worse than not having one at all. I've seen students back their pieces into passive positions to grimly defend a pawn, only to fall to a tactic or get mated. The explanation for these moves was usually 'I had to, otherwise he would take my pawn.'

It is useful to remember that you don't have to defend every pawn. Often that move can be invested in a more positive direction.

Game 79

Roshan Idnani
Alex Stripunsky

New Jersey 2017



This game was played on the adjacent board to my game. It is clear Black has a large advantage with a more mobile majority, but the bishops of opposite colors severely hamper his winning chances. [Move number and previous moves not available.]

1... $\mathbb{Q}d3$

Stripunsky overlooked White's resource, but he might have been right to gamble anyway.

2. $\mathbb{Q}c1?$

Roshan Idnani is not one of my students, but like other talented youths in New Jersey occasionally do, he falls prey here to knee-jerk defending. This was

played at a 60-minute time limit, which makes quality defense more difficult. Still, my recollection is White had ten minutes left and could have reflected a bit here. Instead he played the move reflexively – my pawn is attacked, I must defend it. But White's problem isn't the material balance, and the c3-pawn has little value. What really matters is containing Black's initiative; White must at all costs preserve the f-pawn, keeping Black from creating a super majority.

2. $\mathbb{Q}e2!$ had to be played here, with the idea of simplifying after 2... $\mathbb{R}xc3$ 3. $\mathbb{R}c1!$. Trading rooks is highly advantageous to the opposite-colored bishop defender. The engine says (and remember engines are notoriously poor at appreciating fortresses) Black should take the pawn and play 3... $\mathbb{R}c4$ 4. $\mathbb{R}xc4$ $bxc4$. It's true that Black has the potential for two passed pawns, but they will be very close together. I suspect Stripunsky would have retreated (2... $\mathbb{R}d7$) and regrouped, but he would have had a lot longer to go to win the game.

2... $\mathbb{A}d5$



3.a3?

This mistake is fatal. Stripunsky probably had no intention of taking this pawn, which would only activate White's rook. It was okay to defend the pawn with 3. $\mathbb{R}c2$, only because it threatens 4. $\mathbb{R}d2$. Then 3... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 4. $\mathbb{Q}e2!$ $\mathbb{R}c4$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ keeps White in the game, as does 3. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{R}c4$ 4. $\mathbb{Q}f2$.

3... f5 4. gxf5 gxf5 5. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{R}c4$ 6. $\mathbb{R}c2?$

A rushed, panicky move. Try to stay calm and find the best defense! 6.f4 would have put up some resistance.

6...f4 7.♗c5 ♕xc3+ 8.♔d2 ♕xa3 9.♕c3 ♕xc3 10.♔xc3 ♔e2

And Black won easily.

Grandmaster outplaying expert is not exactly a news flash. But the underdog can increase his chances to hold by avoiding unnecessary, automatic reactions like we saw in this game.

Exchange sacrifices

I usually work with students through the expert and master class. I have noticed that players below 2300 tend to be hesitant to sacrifice the exchange. Yes, they will do it to mate, or win material, or earn something tangible like dangerous passed pawns. But if they can't calculate an immediate return they get put off of it. Sacrificing a pawn can be daunting enough, but an exchange seems like too much.

Remember that material is just one feature of chess, and in some instances, a rook might not represent a true advantage in force over a knight or a bishop. Sometimes an exchange sac can just lead to a dominant board position, or take over/increase an initiative.

The best example of an exchange sacrifice for ‘nothing’ I was fortunate enough to personally witness.

Game 80

Garry Kasparov 2805

Alexei Shirov 2740

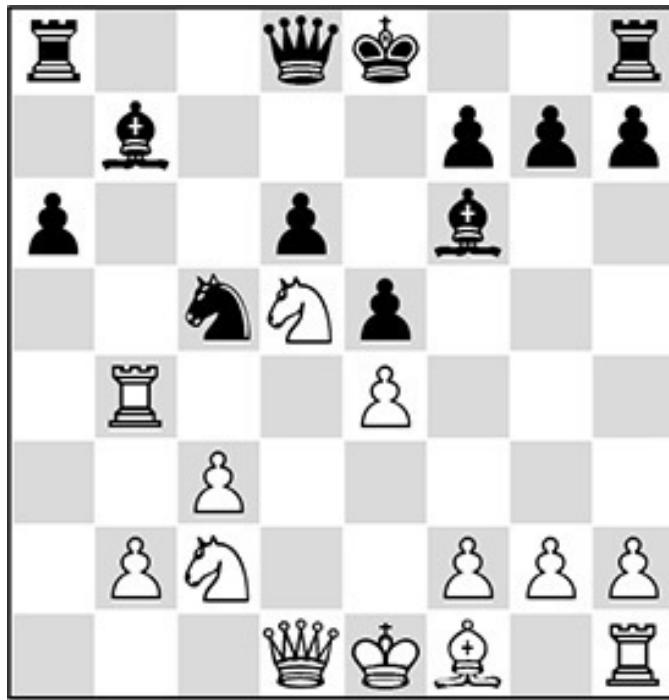
Horgen 1994 (9)

**1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♘db5 d6 7.♗f4 e5 8.♗g5 a6 9.♘a3 b5
10.♘d5 ♔e7 11.♗xf6 ♔xf6 12.c3 ♔b7 13.♘c2 ♘b8**

Black's last two moves represent a Sveshnikov fad that lasted a few years. This game didn't help its popularity, to say the least.

14.a4 bxa4 15.♕xa4 ♘d7 16.♗b4!? ♘c5?!

After this game players tried 16...♗b8 for a while, but who would anticipate what happens next?



17. $\mathbb{Q}xb7!! \mathbb{Q}xb7$ 18.b4

White lacks tangible compensation – no pawns, no immediate attack or passed pawns to compensate for the exchange. Kasparov is hanging his hat on some poorly placed black minor pieces. There is the usual bad dark-squared bishop, but without its light-squared comrade to help it out. The knight on b7 is just in the way with nowhere to go. The position is still quite tense but more comfortable to play for White. Kasparov won in fine style (punctuation from Kasparov).

18... $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}a3!$ 0-0 20. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ a5 21. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ axb4 22. cxb4 $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 23. h4! $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}cb6$ $\mathbb{Q}a2$ 25. 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}d7$ $\mathbb{Q}d8?$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ 29. b5! $\mathbb{Q}a3$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}f5!$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}xh7!$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}g8+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}b6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}a1!$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}a3!$ $\mathbb{Q}c1$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}e3!$ 1-0

In the same era, Kasparov's eventual vanquisher made a great case for the power of minor pieces.

Game 81

Vasili Ivanchuk 2735

Vladimir Kramnik 2775

Kramnik

Dos Hermanas 1996 (8)

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3. d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ d6 6. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ e6 7. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ a6 8. 0-0-0 h6 9. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 10. f4 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ b5 12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 13. e5 dxе5 14. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$



Black can have an okay position with 14... $\mathbb{Q}a7$ or 14... $\mathbb{Q}a5$, but Kramnik sees virtue in a line most players would not think to pursue.

14... $\mathbb{Q}g4!$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ $\mathbb{Q}d7!$

The more willing calculators among us might get this far and notice 16... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xb5!$ is strong for White. But Black still has good prospects without trapping the queen.

17.g3?

This gets White into trouble, but his position is already a bit uncomfortable. In the *Informant* Kramnik simply noted 17. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ as unclear, but a slight look forward shows how awkward White's position is. Both 18. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ and 18. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ are effectively met by 18... $b4$. Komodo suggests the relatively best course may be to give back the exchange with 18. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xd6!?$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ with a small edge for Black.

17... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $f5!$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}h5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}f2$



21... ♕f6!

This is a really great moment in the game. Kramnik is not content with reducing his risk by grabbing back the exchange; after 21... ♕xh1 22. ♔xh1 ♖a4 23. ♔f2 ♕f6 24. ♔d3, White can hold things together. 21... ♕c5 looks tempting but 22. ♔h3! is an effective answer, with 22... ♕xh1 23. ♔g5 hxg5 24. ♕xh8+ ♔f7 25. ♕h5+ leading to perpetual check. Kramnik realizes how the minor pieces control the action, and picks a vulnerable point (b2) that White has no good way to defend.

22. ♔d3

22. ♕g1 ♖a4 23. ♔d3 ♕e4 would reward Black for keeping his bishop.

22... ♕a4 23. ♕he1 ♕xb2+ 24. ♔b1 ♕d5! 25. ♕xb5 ♕xa2+!

Kramnik calculates perfectly and finishes in great style.

26. ♕xa2 axb5 27. ♕b1 ♕a5 28. ♔d3 ♕a3 29. ♕a2 ♔c3+ 30. ♕b3 ♔d5 31. ♕a2 ♕b4+ 32. ♕b1 ♕c3 0-1

The value of an exchange advantage differs according to the structure of the position, and often the phase of the game. As the Killer Ks demonstrated here, rooks are not usually effective early in the game when the position is too blocked for them to assert their power.

Minor pieces can be particularly effective in positions with rigid pawn structures. The rooks don't have a lot of open lines and lines may not easily be opened up for them. Meanwhile, bishops and knights can operate effectively on weak squares.

Game 82

Daniel Roos
Joel Benjamin

New York 1984

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3.g3 g6 4. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 5.d3 d6 6.f4 e6 7. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}ge7$ 8.0-0 0-0 9. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}ec6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ cxd4 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ f5 13.c3 dxc3 14.bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ b6 16.exf5 gxf5 17.d4 d5 18. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 19.g4 $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 20.gxf5 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}f3$



Black does not need to sacrifice the exchange to be better, but it is the most direct continuation:

22... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$

In the openings section we learned that a bad bishop breaking free of the pawn structure can be effective against a knight, but it can work well against a rook, too! White's major light-square weaknesses will be occupied because the attackers outnumber the defenders.

24. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$

Anticipating the capture of the rook with 24... $\mathbb{Q}e8!$ was even stronger.

25. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}f2$

White can try to give back the exchange with 32. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ or 32. $\mathbb{Q}g2$, but it won't cure all ills so he waits.

32... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$

Apparently hasty. I should have tidied up a bit more with 33... $\mathbb{Q}g6$.

34. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ dxe4 35. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}a3$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}c2?$

White had a surprising way out here: 36. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ 37. $\mathbb{W}e8+$! (after 37. $hxg3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ White is still suffering) 37... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 38. $\mathbb{W}xe6$ and Black has lost his advantage.

36... $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ 37. $hxg3$ $\mathbb{W}a4$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{Q}xg3+$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}h1$



39... $\mathbb{Q}g7!$

Black only needs to kill White's cheap threats with queen and knight to finish the game. 39... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ would let White hang around a bit.

40. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $h6!$

There's no need to even consider 40... $\mathbb{W}xc2?$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}g5+$, which leads to perpetual check. White has no tricks left and so resigned.

Sometimes exchange sacrifices may be a bit difficult to recognize. Once found, the amount of calculation you need to take the plunge is in the eye of the beholder.

Game 83

Igor Ivanov 2485

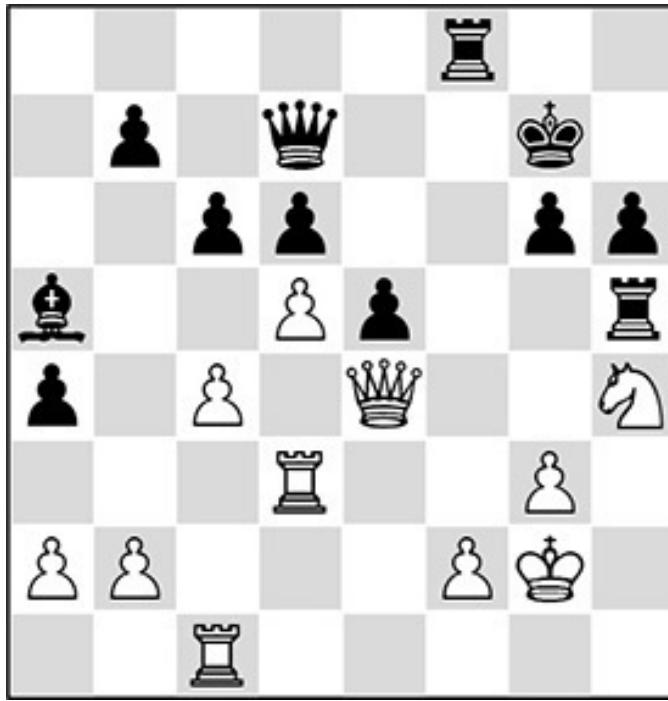
Joel 2560

Benjamin

Jacksonville ch-USA 1990 (2)

1.c4 g6 2.e4 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 3.d4 d6 4. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ 0-0 6. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e5 7. d5 a5 8.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ h6
10. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{W}e8$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ 14. $\mathbb{W}xg4$ $\mathbb{Q}d8!$ 15. $\mathbb{W}e2$ c6 16. $\mathbb{Q}d1$

$\mathbb{Q}c7$ 17. $h4$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ 18. $g3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ a4 20. $h5$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}fd1$ $\mathbb{Q}ae8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ f5
 24. $exf5?!$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}ef8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}h4$



Black cannot rest easily with his extra pawn. White has a pretty good blockade on the light squares.

28... $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 29. $dxc6$ $bcx6$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}gf5$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ gives White something of a blockade on the light squares that might be tough to crack.

28... $\mathbb{Q}xh4!$

My experience trained me to always be on the alert for exchange sacrifices. This one is a bit hidden because White has two ways to take the rook, but after only a moment, you can see that neither capture is ideal. [Take a moment to work out Black's response if you like.]

29. $gxh4$

This is very possibly the best defense, though in the game I spent more time calculating the other possibility. The other line involves more concrete moves and thus lends itself more to calculation. Perhaps I even *over-calculated*, considering that clock time can always become a critical factor (and it did!). I was a bit concerned though, that if White had time to bring a rook to the f-file he might neutralize my initiative and make the exchange advantage relevant.

Let's get into it: 29. $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ $\mathbb{W}f5$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}dd1$ (30. $\mathbb{Q}cd1$ g5 31. $\mathbb{W}h5$ $\mathbb{W}xf2+$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ e4 33. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}e1!-+$) 30... $\mathbb{Q}d8!$ (this move is important to foresee, as it disrupts the coordination of White's defenses; 30... $\mathbb{W}xf2+$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}h3!$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 32. $\mathbb{W}g4$ would miss the mark) 31. $\mathbb{W}h3$ $\mathbb{W}xf2+$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{W}f3+$ 33. $\mathbb{W}g2$ $\mathbb{W}h5+$ 34. $\mathbb{W}h2$ $\mathbb{W}g4$ (if

I land a blow with my rook I finish him off; now 35... $\mathbb{R}f5$ is a huge threat, e.g. 35.dxc6 $\mathbb{R}f5$ 36.cxb7 $\mathbb{W}f3+!$ 37. $\mathbb{W}g2$ $\mathbb{R}h5+$ 38. $\mathbb{W}g1$ $\mathbb{R}b6+$ 39.c5 $\mathbb{R}xc5+-$), so I continued with 35. $\mathbb{R}f1$ $\mathbb{R}xf1+$ 36. $\mathbb{R}xf1$ $\mathbb{W}xc4$. Now Black has so many pawns I just had to check for blowback from White's major pieces: 37. $\mathbb{W}h3$ (37. $\mathbb{W}f2$ $\mathbb{W}xd5+$ 38. $\mathbb{W}h2$ $\mathbb{A}e7-+$) 37... $\mathbb{W}xd5+$ 38. $\mathbb{W}h2$ $\mathbb{W}d2+$ 39. $\mathbb{W}h1$ $\mathbb{W}g5$ 40. $\mathbb{W}e6$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ and Black consolidates and wins.

29... $\mathbb{R}f4$ 30. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{W}f5$



Black is clearly dominating. White's king is exposed, I have great pressure with all my pieces, and I'm likely to pick up a second pawn (h4) at some point. But one slip could easily jeopardize the win, so I was perhaps a bit overconfident here.

31.c5

With a time scramble approaching, Ivanov makes a bid to complicate. I imagined something like 31. $\mathbb{R}g3$ $\mathbb{A}b6$ 32. $\mathbb{R}f1$ cxd5 33.cxd5 e4, though it turns out that last move would be an error in view of 34.f3!, getting the rooks working again. Instead 33... $\mathbb{R}xh4$ or 33...h5 would maintain a big advantage.

31...cxd5 32.cxd6 $\mathbb{A}b6$ 33. $\mathbb{R}f1$ e4 34. $\mathbb{R}g3$ d4 35. $\mathbb{R}d2$ e3 36. $\mathbb{R}e1$ $\mathbb{R}d5+$ 37. $\mathbb{W}h3?$



37... ♜e6+?

Okay, I took a lot of flak for this one. If you aren't old enough to remember 1990, we were still using analog clocks back then. No time delay, no increment... just a hanging flag. And it was really hard to know how many seconds you had left. So it was a good idea to just make sure you got to the time control when you had a winning position. Of course, as soon as I made this quick move, I realized what I had missed. Unfortunately, so did Igor! What the grandmaster is supposed to find, is 37... ♛xh4+! 38. ♔xh4 ♜h5#.

38.♔g2 ♜d5+ 39.f3 ♜xd6

Rats, he didn't give me a second chance. But his position is hopeless, and Ivanov did not make the last move of the time control and overstepped.

Keep the attack flowing

In this chapter we are developing a feel for exchange sacrifices. That sense can be particularly strong when it seems to be the natural way to progress in a position.

Game 84

Joel Benjamin 2320

Yasser Seirawan 2485

Los Angeles ch-USA jr 1979

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 ♘f6 4.e5 ♘fd7 5.♗d3 c5 6.c3 ♗c6 7.♗gf3 cxd4 8.cxd4 ♗b6 9.0-0

♜d7 10. ♜e1 ♜b4 11. ♜b1 ♜b5 12. ♜f1 ♜e7 13. ♜g3 a5 14. ♜h5 ♜f8 15. h4! h6 16. ♜h2 g6
 17. ♜f4 ♜e8! 18. ♜g4 ♜d7 19. ♜f3 ♜g8 20. ♜d2 ♜c8 21. a3 ♜c6 22. ♜c1 ♜c7 23. ♜a2 ♜d8



CHALLENGE 60

After 24. ♜xc6, how should Black capture the rook?

24. ♜xc6!?

After much analysis, this sacrifice seems sound, good for some advantage with best play. I can't say that I saw all the right moves or calculated completely accurately, though. I think that many readers will hesitate to make sacrifices unless they are completely confident of them working out. So how was I able to pull the trigger here?

Firstly, the investment is not *that* major. In my view, an exchange is worth a pawn and a half. So two pawns is more than enough, one pawn is less than enough. That, of course, is an extreme generalization – every position is different – but perhaps a handy generalization. So if you think of it as sacrificing a pawn, maybe that makes the task seem less daunting.

Secondly, White's position has been building up to this move. There are not a lot of other ways forward. After crunching deep into the sacrifice, Komodo concludes 24. ♜c3 is stronger and somewhat advantageous. I think I did not like 24...a4, after which Black might block the queenside, and perhaps look for an opportune moment for ...g6-g5.

I don't quite want to say I *have* to sacrifice here, but I think there is value in

keeping the momentum going forward for your pieces.

24...bxc6?

Yasser wanted to close the c-file and support the d5-pawn against possible sacrifices. The problem is White will be able to break open even more lines, while Black's position is entirely passive. He had to brave the other capture, and look for an escape in the tactics.

After 24... \blacksquare xc6 25. \blacksquare xa5,



analysis diagram

25...g5 is refuted by 26. \blacksquare xd5 (26. \blacksquare xd5 is also sound, but Black can resist a little with 26...gxf4 27. \blacksquare xc6 \blacksquare xc6) 26...exd5 27. \blacksquare xd5 f5 (27... \blacksquare c7 28. \blacksquare xc6 bxc6 29.d5 cxd5 30. \blacksquare d4 \blacksquare g6 31.e6+–) 28.exf6! \blacksquare xd5 29.fxe7+ \blacksquare xe7 (29... \blacksquare c7 30. \blacksquare g3+ \blacksquare c8 31. \blacksquare e5 is also dismal) 30. \blacksquare e1+ \blacksquare d8 (30... \blacksquare d6 31. \blacksquare e5 \blacksquare c4 32. \blacksquare f5+–) 31. \blacksquare e5 \blacksquare d6 (31... \blacksquare f6 32.hxg5; 31... \blacksquare e8 32. \blacksquare xc6+ \blacksquare xc6 33. \blacksquare xe8+ \blacksquare xe8 34.hxg5±) 32. \blacksquare c1 and Black has no adequate defense to the threat of a rook invasion.

So Black has to unpin with 25... \blacksquare e8. My plan was to play 26. \blacksquare xb6 \blacksquare xb6 27. \blacksquare xd5 exd5 28. \blacksquare c8+ \blacksquare d8 29. \blacksquare xd5 with a winning attack. I worked out that 27...g5 28. \blacksquare h5 exd5? 29. \blacksquare c8+ \blacksquare d8 30. \blacksquare f6+ \blacksquare xf6 31.exf6 \blacksquare d7 32. \blacksquare e1+ \blacksquare e6 33.h5 \blacksquare h7 34. \blacksquare xb7 leaves Black helpless despite the extra piece. But I missed 28...gxf4! 29. \blacksquare h3 \blacksquare g6, which seems slightly better for Black. So I would be better off with the more subtle 26.a4, trying to chase the bishop out of

defensive position.



analysis diagram

Now 26... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 28. $\mathbb{N}xd5$ $exd5$ 29. $\mathbb{W}c8+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{W}f8$ 31.a5 $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}c6+$ $bcx6$ 33. $\mathbb{W}xc6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 34. $\mathbb{W}xa6$ is decisive, so Black must play 26... $\mathbb{Q}c4!$, after which White has two possibilities:

A) 27. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ (28. $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ would be strong if not for the timely resource 28...g5!) and White has enough for the exchange but perhaps not more;

B) So that leaves 27.b3 $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 28.b4 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 29.b5 $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ 30.bxc6 bxc6 31. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ with some edge for White as Black's wings are not communicating with each other.

25. $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 26.a4! $\mathbb{Q}a6$

26... $\mathbb{Q}xa4?$ simply loses a piece to 27. $\mathbb{Q}b1$; on 26... $\mathbb{Q}c4$ I intended 27.b3 $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 28.b4, transposing into the game.

27.b4

This crushes Black's hopes, leaving him with no way to keep the position from ripening open.

27... $\mathbb{Q}e8$

27... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ is a better try, but the precise move order 28.b5 $cxb5$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xd5!$ (29. $axb5$ $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}a7!$ allows Black to slime out) 29... $exd5$ 30. $axb5$ $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}a8+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 33. $\mathbb{W}c8$ wins easily.



Now I get to decide the game with a flourish.

28.b5 cxb5 29.Qxe6+!

It's not a difficult sacrifice, as the b6-knight drops immediately. You just need to be looking in the right place.

29...fxe6 30.Qxe6 Qd7 31.Qxb6+ Qc8 32.Qxd5

32.Qxg6 bxa4 33.Qc5 may be more destructive, but here, as in many other cases, I go for the simplest route when it is sufficient for victory.

32...Qxe6 33.Qxe6+ Qb8 34.axb5

34.a5 worked, too, but I felt more comfortable eliminating any potential counterplay from the b-pawn.

34...Qxb5

34...Rxb6 35.Rxa6 wouldn't give Black much chance against the onslaught of White's pawn majority.

35.Qd5!

Black resigned.

Yasser was able to bounce back to win the tournament and ultimately the World Junior. I was only sixteen at the time and I feel like this game was as good as any I ever played since!

Take my rooks, please

A recent high-level game hit home to me how unprejudiced grandmasters are about the value of pieces. In the span of five moves, we see four offers of the exchange (one declined)!

Game 85

Magnus Carlsen 2837

Viswanathan Anand 2782

Anand

Riyadh Wch Rapid 2017 (9)

1.d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2.c4 e6 3. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 4.e3 0-0 5. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ d5 6.a3 $\mathbb{Q}xc3+$ 7.bxc3 dxc4 8. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ c5 9. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ b6 11. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 12.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 13.c4 $\mathbb{Q}ac8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}fd8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 16.g3 $\mathbb{Q}gf6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}fd1$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 19.d5 exd5 20.cxd5 c4 21. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ b5 22. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ f5 26. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}cd7$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}b3$



28. $\mathbb{Q}e6!?$

White would be okay after 28. $\mathbb{Q}c2$, but Magnus only looks for okay in the opening. I can't question this decision; perhaps Black is somewhat better objectively, but there are many ways to go wrong in the complications. Plus this was a rapid game – sometimes players have to rely on intuition.

28... $\mathbb{Q}xc1$

It seems more active to chase the queen away first with 28...a5, e.g. 29. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$, but here White holds a balance after 31. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ fxe4 32. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 33.a4.

29. $\mathbb{Q}xc1$



29...♝c8

Now 29...♝e4? 30.♛xe7 ♜xe7 31.♝xd8 is not possible, though Black could again toss in 29...a5. The one non-starter is moving the rook away. After 29...♜c8? 30.♝xg7 the gaping hole in Black's kingside, accentuated by White's bishop pair (the dark-squared bishop is an unopposed monster), offer White way too much for the exchange. I think many readers would grab for their rook, but Black must instead fight for the initiative.

30.♛xb5

White can grab back the exchange but at the cost of trading queens. 30.♝xd8 ♜xb4 31.axb4 ♜xd8 leaves the d-pawn surrounded, though White gets a measure of counterplay with 32.g4.

30...♜xd5!

Black hardly has an alternative – 30...♝xd5 31.♝xd8 ♜xf3 32.♛xc4+ ♔d5 33.♛xc8 leaves White much better. But this move illustrates how giving back the exchange on your own terms, like securing big-time play on the long diagonal, can be superior to grimly holding onto material.

31.♝xd5

White could reasonably decline this one, too. 31.♛b4 ♜xe6 32.♛xb7 ♜d7 should favor Black's material, but the bishops offer opportunities for practical play.

31...♜xd5!

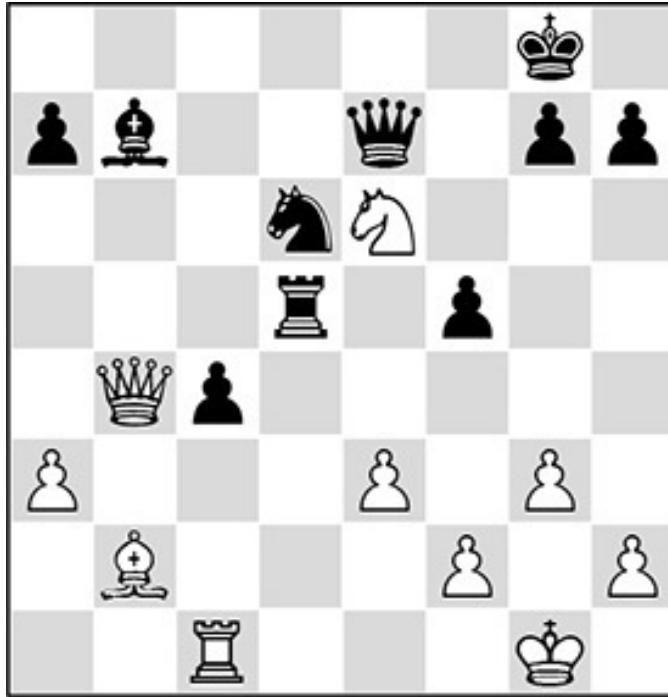
31...♜xd5 is faulty not because of 32.♝xd8? ♜e4 33.♔f1 c3! when White must find 34.♛b4 cxb2 35.♛xb2 ♜b6, and the computer sees perpetual check

coming.

But 32.♘f4! completely neutralizes Black's play on the long diagonal while pocketing the c4- or f5-pawn.

White's move is now forced.

32.♗b4 ♘d6



33.♘c5??

33.♘f4 looks suspicious but seems good enough to draw: 33...♚e4 (33...♜b5 34.♝c3 offers counterplay on the other long diagonal; 34...♜xb2 35.♝xb2 ♚e4 36.♚f1 is no more than a draw, while 34...♜b3 35.♝d4 h6 looks nicer to play for Black) 34.♘xd5 ♜xd5 35.♚f1 f4 and now White is advised to force a perpetual with 36.exf4, as 36.gxf4? ♜d3+ 37.♚e1 (37.♚g1 c3+) 37...♞f3 38.♝d2 ♜g6 wins for Black.

33...♜xc5!

One last exchange sacrifice does the trick.

34.♝xc5 ♚e4

Carlsen resigned because 35.♚f1 ♜h1+ 36.♚e2 ♜f3+ 37.♚d2 ♜e4+ 38.♚c2 ♜xc1+ costs him a piece.

Piece sacrifices

We are stepping up when we invest a whole piece to improve our position. Not all piece sacrifices can be calculated to a definite conclusion. Sometimes we have to go on intuition. With many intuitive sacrifices the threats are fairly clear but we may not be able to determine if a successful defense is available

(Benjamin-Shulman is an example).

Next I have two games where the threats were not well-defined but useful defensive moves were hard to come by. I didn't need to see that my attack would crash through, just that my opponent had no apparent way of stopping my attack. Remarkably, both games featured a knight sacrifice on the same square and were played in back-to-back years.

Game 86

Jay Whitehead

Joel Benjamin

Greenville ch-USA 1983 (2)

1.d4 $\mathbb{N}f6$ 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4. $\mathbb{N}d2$ d6 5.e4 bxc4 6. $\mathbb{N}xc4$ g6 7.b3 $\mathbb{N}g7$ 8. $\mathbb{N}b2$ 0-0 9. $\mathbb{N}gf3$ e5 10.dxe6 fxe6 11.e5?!

This doesn't really make sense because Black can pin. 11.0-0 $\mathbb{N}c6$ is roughly equal.

11... $\mathbb{N}h5$!?

11... $\mathbb{N}g4$ 12.h3 $\mathbb{N}h6$ 13. $\mathbb{N}c2$ d5 gives Black a comfortable edge.

12. $\mathbb{N}c2$ d5 13. $\mathbb{N}d3$ $\mathbb{N}d7$ 14.g3 $\mathbb{N}b7$ 15.0-0 $\mathbb{N}c8$ 16. $\mathbb{N}ac1$



16... $\mathbb{N}f4$!?

It is certainly possible to play without sacrificing here. 16... $\mathbb{N}e7$ 17. $\mathbb{N}d1$ $\mathbb{N}f7$ 18. $\mathbb{N}e2$ $\mathbb{N}h6$ 19. $\mathbb{N}c2$ $\mathbb{N}cf8$, for example, would be roughly equal. The knight on h5, however, remains a frustration for Black. After the knight sacrifice, all

my pieces have a chance to participate. I could not see how White would be able to maneuver his pieces into effective defensive positions. My slow-motion attack might just pick up steam in a few moves.

17.gxf4 ♕xf4

My first threat is 18...d4. White's next move prepares to meet 18...d4 with 19.♗e4, but now f2 is weakened.

18.♕fe1 ♔f8

At the time this seemed like a strong finesse to tie down the white pieces, but perhaps the simple 18...♔e7 was better.

19.♔d1 ♗h6 20.h3

White has no time to reposition his bishop: 20.♗f1 d4 21.♗g2 ♕g4 22.h3? ♕xg2+ 23.♗xg2 ♕xd2 with total destruction.

20...♗f7

By uncovering the bishop, I continue to deter White from reorganizing.

21.♔e2?!

It is natural for White to defend the f2-pawn, but the threat is questionable and the queen gets in the way on e2. If White has a chance to refute the sacrifice it would be with 21.♕c2, e.g. 21...♗xd2 22.♘xd2 ♕xf2 23.♔g4 with advantage to White.

21...♔e7 22.♕c2

Robert Byrne pointed out an interesting regrouping: 22.♘f1!? ♕cf8 23.♘h2 with the idea that after 23...♗xc1?! 24.♗xc1 White gains control of squares on the kingside. But Black can lose his nerve and concede his initiative to take back some material.

Instead 23...♗f4! may lead to a crushing attack, e.g. 24.♕f1 d4 25.♘d2 ♔h4 26.f3 ♔xh3 27.♔g2 ♔xg2+ 28.♔xg2 ♕h4 29.♕cd1 ♗f4 30.♕h1 ♕h5 31.♗e4 ♕g5+ 32.♔f2 ♗g3+ 33.♔e2 ♗a6+ 34.♘c4 ♘xe5 and Black is well on top.

22...♕cf8 23.♘h2?

Whitehead finally loses his patience. 23.♕f1 would still keep a balance between attack and defense. One possibility is 23.♕f1 d4 24.♗e4 ♗xe4 25.♔xe4 ♗xd2 26.♘xd2 ♕f4 27.♔g2 ♕8f5 28.♘e4 ♘xe5 29.♘g3 ♘f3+ 30.♔h1 ♕d5 31.♗c1 ♕f7 (31...♘h4 32.♔xf4 ♗xg2 33.♗xg2 e5 34.♕e2 probably favors White) and the game remains unclear.



23... ♜xf2! 24. ♜xf2 ♜xf2 25. ♜xf2 ♜h4+

The white pieces have no footholds. It's just a matter of time before Black picks one off.

26. ♜e2 ♜xh3 27. ♜hf3 d4 28. ♜f1

28. ♜e4 ♜xe4 29. ♜xe4 d3+.

28... ♜g4 29. ♜c4 ♜f4 30. ♜f2 ♜g3 31. ♜f1 ♜xe5 32. ♜cd2 ♜f4 33. ♜g1 ♜h5 34. ♜e4?

If 34. ♜e4 ♜g7 would win in due time.

34... ♜xe4 35. ♜xe4 d3+ 0-1

Game 87

Vaidyanathan 2385

Ravikumar

Joel Benjamin 2520

Hastings 1984/85 (1)

1.d4 ♜f6 2.c4 e6 3. ♜c3 ♜b4 4.e3 0-0 5. ♜d3 d5 6.a3 ♜e7 7. ♜f3 c5 8.0-0 ♜c6 9.dxc5 ♜xc5
 10.b4 ♜d6 11.cxd5 exd5 12. ♜b5 ♜b8 13. ♜b2 ♜g4 14. ♜e2 ♜e4 15. ♜c1 ♜e8 16. ♜c2 a6
 17. ♜bd4 ♜d6 18.g3 ♜h3 19. ♜e1 ♜a7 20. ♜c1 ♜e7 21. ♜f1 ♜d7 22. ♜a1 f6 23. ♜a2 ♜h8
 24. ♜b3 ♜ad8 25. ♜g2 ♜g6 26. ♜d2 f5 27. ♜f3 ♜f8 28. ♜d1



White looks pretty well barricaded and ready to turn his attention towards exploiting the isolated d-pawn. Black's position points one way forward, but on the surface it seems to have no chance to work.

28...f4!? **29.exf4** **Qxf4** **30.gxf4** **Rxf4** **31.Qc1** **Rg4**

White is a piece up for no pawns, and Black does not have a direct threat. Yet I saw potential in Black's position; it is easy to find moves to strengthen the attack. So when I could see no refutation, I decided to take a shot.

32.Qh1

White struggles for a clear way to shake off Black's pressure. White's pieces look sturdy enough but it's hard to move them without exposing points to attack. Ravikumar's move is natural, and early in the search, the engine gives it a winning score. But in getting out of the pin White makes himself more vulnerable to attack on h2.

Komodo's best suggestion to begin the unraveling process is **32.Qe3 Rf8** **33.Qe1 Qb8** **34.Qdf3 Qc6** **35.Qd4**. I don't think the knight maneuver is easy to find, and in any case, this seems to be White's last possession of better chances.

32...Rf8



33. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

Komodo claims an advantage, and recants, in the fascinating variation 33. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ (35... $\mathbb{Q}xg2?$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ offers Black no follow-up) 36. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}c8$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2+$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1+$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}gf4$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}c5!!$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}e3+$ and matters peter out to a draw. I saw all that during the game, of course.

33... $\mathbb{Q}b8$

More Krazy Komodo analysis: 33... $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 35. $h3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ (35... $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}e6!$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}de1$ and White is consolidating) 36. $hxg4$ $\mathbb{Q}xg4+$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}h5+$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2+$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}hf3$ with the piece worth a bit more than the pawns. I don't think I even considered 33... $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ because I had a simple continuation that looked good enough.

34. $b5$

Apparently White can still hold: 34. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 36. $h3$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2+$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ 38. $f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g3$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}ee1$ (there are other rook moves that may draw, but not 39. $\mathbb{Q}de1$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2$) 39... $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ (box) 41... $\mathbb{Q}g6+$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ and now White can draw with either 43. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ or 43. $\mathbb{Q}h3$. Over the board though, I think it is a long shot for White to survive from the game position.

34... $\mathbb{Q}h4$



Now Black objectively has a large advantage.

35. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{B}xh2$ 36. $\mathbb{W}b4$ $\mathbb{B}xg2+$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $\mathbb{W}g6+$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{A}d6$ 39. $\mathbb{W}b3$ $\mathbb{A}h3+$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{W}g2$
41. $\mathbb{W}xe4$ $dxe4$ 42. $\mathbb{W}d5$ $\mathbb{A}g3$ 43. $f\#xg3$ $exf3$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{A}g4$ 45. $\mathbb{W}f7$ $\mathbb{W}xg3+$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}f1$



46... $\mathbb{W}b8$

I thought this move very cool when I played it, but I overlooked White's reply.

46... $\mathbb{W}xf3+$ 47. $\mathbb{W}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 48. $\mathbb{B}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6+$ was simple and quite good enough. Fortunately, I can still liquidate to a winning endgame.

47. $\mathbb{Q}f4!$ $\mathbb{B}xf7$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}xb8$ $\mathbb{B}xf3+$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{B}f8$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ $axb5$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $g5$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $h6$ 55. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 56. $\mathbb{Q}d8$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 0-1

‘In objective reality’ White probably should have defended after the piece sacrifice, but I think the ‘practical reality’ is quite different. Ravikumar’s defense was entirely plausible, yet it fell apart in a few moves. I think that generally speaking, defense is more difficult than attack. It is particularly true in this case that my moves were quite a bit easier to find.

Development

In the nineteenth century, players used to shuck pawns right and left to get a jump on development. Nowadays players prefer more restrained approaches, but one must not forget that development can outweigh material considerations. This awareness can often help you fight for the initiative out of the gate.

Game 88

Joel Benjamin 2555

Alonso 2515
Zapata

St Martin 1992 (5)

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 6.g3 d6 7. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$



CHALLENGE 61

How can White offer a sacrifice to exploit his better development?

In similar positions I have used the plan 9. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}f4$, but here Black is in time with 10... $\mathbb{Q}g4$, or even 10... $h6$ 11. 0-0-0.

9. $\mathbb{Q}f4!$ $e5$

Black accepts the challenge. Zapata also tried 9... $\mathbb{Q}c6$, but after 10. $\mathbb{W}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 11. 0-0 $a6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}fe1$ (G. Hernandez-Zapata, Bucaramanga 1992) White has the more pleasant position.

10. $\mathbb{Q}d5$



10... $\mathbb{Q}b8$

I won't say Komodo advocates 10... $\mathbb{W}xc2$, but it at least likes it pretty deep in the search. However, few humans would want to defend after 11. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $dxe5$ 12. $\mathbb{W}xe5+$; I think White should definitely be preferred. So all three human games have featured the text move.



11. $\mathbb{W}c4$

Perhaps this move is inaccurate, as Black may improve his position by flicking in 11...b5. Still, after 12. $\mathbb{W}c3$ exf4 White can try 13.e5!? with a dangerous initiative.

Later games featured 11. $\mathbb{W}c3$ exf4 12. $\mathbb{Q}c7+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ $\mathbb{W}xa8$ 14.0-0-0 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ (14...b6 from Della Morte-Duarte, Villa Martelli 2004, allows 15. $\mathbb{R}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 16. $\mathbb{W}xg7$) 15.e5 dxe5 16. $\mathbb{W}xe5$ $\mathbb{W}c8$ and now instead of 17. $\mathbb{W}a5+$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 18. $\mathbb{W}xa7$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 19. $\mathbb{W}a8+$ $\mathbb{W}c8$ (Felgaer-Needleman, Buenos Aires 2004), 17. $\mathbb{R}d3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 18.gxf4 leaves White in charge.

11...exf4 12. $\mathbb{Q}c7+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ fxg3 14.hxg3 $\mathbb{W}xa8$ 15.e5 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 16. $\mathbb{W}b4$ $\mathbb{W}c8$ 17.0-0-0 b6 18. $\mathbb{R}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 19. $\mathbb{W}a4$ a5 20. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 22. $\mathbb{W}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 23. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 24. $\mathbb{W}f5+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 25. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 26. $\mathbb{R}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 27. $\mathbb{R}hd1$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 28. $\mathbb{R}c3$ $\mathbb{W}d8$ 29. $\mathbb{W}f5+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 30. $\mathbb{R}e1+$

Black resigned because 30... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 31. $\mathbb{R}c8$ is fatal.

In very sharp positions, possession of the initiative can mean everything. In such positions one has to give priority to making threats, keeping pieces active, and limiting the damage your opponent can do.

Game 89

Lajos Portisch
Joel Benjamin

Szirak izt 1987 (11)

1.d4 $\mathbb{N}f6$ 2.c4 e6 3. $\mathbb{N}f3$ c5 4.d5 exd5 5.cxd5 $\mathbb{Q}d6?$! 6. $\mathbb{N}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 7. $\mathbb{N}d2$ d6 8. $\mathbb{N}c4$ a6 9.a4

♕bd7 10.♔g5 0-0 11.e4 ♕e8 12.♕d3 ♕b8 13.♘e3 h6 14.♗h4 ♘e5 15.0-0 ♔d7 16.♗c2 ♘g6
 17.♗g3 b5 18.axb5 axb5 19.f3 c4 20.♘e2 ♘h5 21.♗f2 ♘b6 22.g3 ♘e5 23.♗g2 b4 24.♗e1
 ♕c8 25.♘g1 ♘f6 26.♗c1 ♘c5 27.♗f1 ♔xf2 28.♔xf2 ♕b6+ 29.♔g2 ♕a8 30.♔b1 ♕ec8?!
 31.♘e3 c3 32.b3 ♕a3?! 33.h3 ♔b5?! 34.f4 ♘ed7 35.♗f3 ♕e8 36.♗f5 ♘c5 37.e5 dxe5
 38.fxe5



CHALLENGE 62

How should Black continue?

Playing the snake against the legendary Lajos Portisch? Surprising. Though he scoffed at my opening, which is admittedly on the edge of soundness and respectability, he didn't handle it all that well. I've had the initiative for most of the game but several missteps have allowed Portisch to storm back and attack in the center.

First of all, if your candidate list consisted of only 38...♘h7 and 38...♘fd7, you are not going with the flow. 38...♘fd7 39.e6 (or perhaps 39.♖d4 first) 39...fxe6 40.♕d4 leaves Black under serious attack.

38...♘h7 39.♘d4 might be salvageable, but only if Black is ready to sacrifice – 39...♘xb3 40.♘xb3 ♔c4. Black has to make a stand, and there is no time like the present. I didn't realize at the time that I have quite a choice of how to sacrifice.

I don't think I considered the computer line 38...♗xb3 39.exf6 ♕xe1 40.♕xe1 ♕xf6 41.♘d4 ♕b2+ 42.♔c2 ♘d3 with equality, though I'm not sure I would have evaluated it that way.

An even more complicated option is 38... $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ 39.exf6, and now two computer lines lead to equality: 39... $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}e7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 41.fxg7+ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}b3=$ and 39... $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}a1$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ c2 43. $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ $\mathbb{Q}a2$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ b3 46. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ g6 47. $\mathbb{Q}xh6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f1+$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}c1$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}f5+$ gxf5 51. $\mathbb{Q}g5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}h6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}g5+=$. I gave the whole line for fun, but clearly when you get to 41... $\mathbb{Q}a1$ you've lost me.

So while 38... $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ and 38... $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ may be ‘correct’ answers, I think they are a lot less intuitive than what I chose. Plus, I’m sure I didn’t have a lot of time to make the next three moves so I had to simplify the process a bit.

38... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}d4$



40... $\mathbb{Q}xb3?$

My choice is very plausible, but wrong. I need to prevent Portisch’s next move, which weakens my kingside further and creates a strong passed pawn. I probably rejected 40... $\mathbb{Q}d8!$ because it drives the queen to threaten mate, but after 41. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}d2+$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ (42. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$) 42... $\mathbb{Q}xf3+$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ Black should have enough for the piece.

41.e6 f6 42.e7?

Portisch is surprisingly sloppy, as 42. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}b2$ 43.e7 would have won without drama.

42... $\mathbb{Q}xf3+$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ c2+ 44. $\mathbb{Q}g4!$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$

Both players thought 44... $\mathbb{Q}xb1$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}d5+$ would win for White, but Black has

surprising resources. 45... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 46. $\mathbb{B}xb1$ $\mathbb{Q}xb1$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ looks crushing, but after 47... $\mathbb{Q}d1!$ White's queen is unable to maintain the diagonal: 48. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ (48. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}c1$) 48... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ and White has no knockout, e.g. 49. $\mathbb{B}xf6$ (49. $\mathbb{Q}xh6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8=$) 49... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 50. $\mathbb{B}e6$ (50. $\mathbb{B}g6?$ $\mathbb{B}xe7$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{B}d4+$) 50... $\mathbb{Q}d3=$. 45. $\mathbb{Q}h5!$ $\mathbb{C}xb1\mathbb{Q}$ 46. $\mathbb{B}xb1$ $\mathbb{W}f3+?$

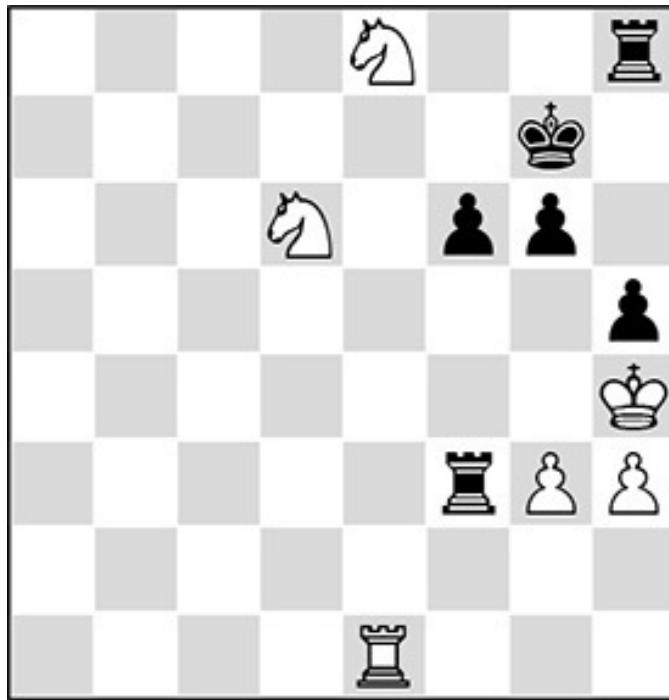
There was a certain degree of wishful thinking in this move, which comes up just short of a brilliancy. But I didn't detect the hidden alternative, 46... $\mathbb{Q}h7!!$.



analysis diagram

Black wins after 47. $\mathbb{B}xb3$ $\mathbb{G}6+$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ 49. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}d2!$ 50. $\mathbb{W}xd2$ (50. $\mathbb{B}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c4+$) 50... $\mathbb{G}5+$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{H}5+$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ $\mathbb{W}f3+$ 53. $\mathbb{G}4$ $\mathbb{W}xh3+$ and mate next.

But the attempt to restrict White's king looks pointless after 47. $\mathbb{W}g4$; I needed to stay with the idea a few moments longer to notice the trick 47... $\mathbb{W}f3$ 48. $\mathbb{W}xf3$ $\mathbb{G}6+$. Then it really gets crazy: 49. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ (49. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{H}5+)$ 49... $\mathbb{B}xf3$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{H}5$ 51. $\mathbb{B}xb4$ (51. $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ mates) 51... $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 52. $\mathbb{B}bb1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ 53. $\mathbb{B}xe1$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}f7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 55. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{H}8$ (if 55... $\mathbb{B}d3$ 56. $\mathbb{B}e6!$ $\mathbb{B}xd6$ 57. $\mathbb{B}xd6$ $\mathbb{B}xe7$ 58. $\mathbb{G}4$ White should hold) 56. $\mathbb{E}8\mathbb{Q}+!!$.



analysis diagram

Underpromotion is the only way to stave off mate. White still has work to do, but after 56... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 57. $\mathbb{N}e4$ (looks better than 57. $\mathbb{N}xf6$) 57... $g5+$ 58. $\mathbb{N}xg5$ $fxg5+$ 59. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{R}xg3+$ 60. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ I think White can hold.

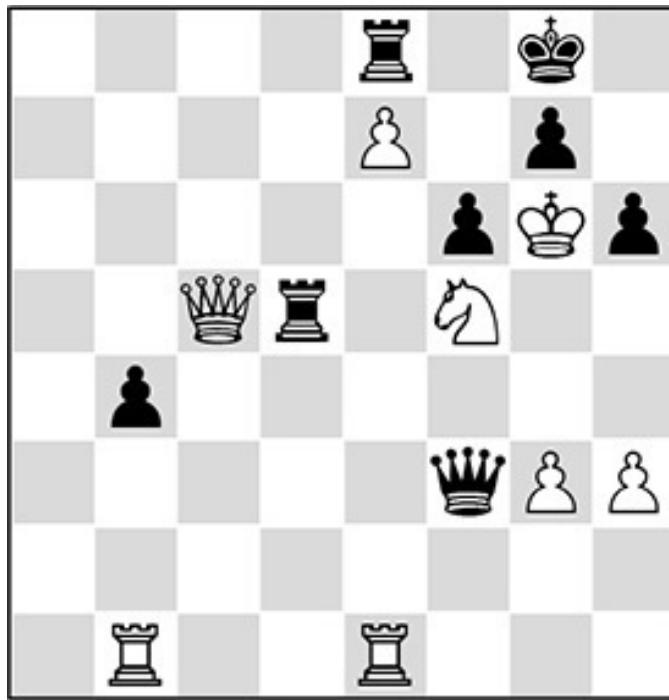
Alternatively, 48. $\mathbb{R}xb3?$ $g6+$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{R}xb3$ 50. $\mathbb{N}d6$ $f5$ 51. $\mathbb{N}xe8$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ (or 51... $g5+$) wins for Black.

The best move seems to be 48. $\mathbb{R}bd1$, not taking anything, but threatening to bring the rook to d8. I've found no win – the best try might be 48... $g6+$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{R}b7$ 50. $\mathbb{R}d7$ $h5$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{R}xf3$ 52. $\mathbb{R}xb7$ $\mathbb{R}xf5$ 53. $g4$ $g5+$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $h4+$ 55. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{R}f4$, when White should be able to hold a rook ending with two pawns against three.

There is a lot to find there, but you only have to go a few moves deep to determine Black is doing well. I just needed to turn my attention away from the fireworks I went for.

Curiously, in the main line after 47. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ Black can simply recapture 48... $\mathbb{R}xf3$ as well: after 49. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{R}d3$ 50. $\mathbb{R}xb4$ Black retains winning chances with 50... $g6$ or 50... $h5+$. Probably Black will get an ending with three against two. So White is probably advised to opt for 49. $\mathbb{N}d6$ $g6+$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}h4!$ (50. $\mathbb{Q}g4?$ $\mathbb{R}d3-$), transposing into the main line.

47. $\mathbb{Q}g6$ $\mathbb{R}d3$ 48. $\mathbb{R}xc5$ $\mathbb{R}d5$



49. $\mathbb{Q}f1!$

One move is all you need. Of course both 49. $\mathbb{Q}c2??$ and the fancy 49. $\mathbb{Q}c8??$ allow the gold coin finish 49... $\mathbb{Q}xg3+!$ 50. $\mathbb{K}xg3 \mathbb{Q}g5\#.$

49... $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}xf5 \mathbb{Q}xg3+$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}h5?$

It may not seem to matter, but White could end resistance with 51. $\mathbb{Q}g4!$ $\mathbb{Q}d3+$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}f5!$ (52. $\mathbb{Q}h5 \mathbb{Q}xe7$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}be1$ might be good enough as well) 52... $\mathbb{Q}xb1$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}c4+ \mathbb{Q}h8$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}c6.$

51... $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}g1 \mathbb{Q}c3$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}bc1 \mathbb{Q}e5$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}xc3 \mathbb{Q}xf5+$ 55. $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 1-0

This was a painful loss, all the more so when I realized the opportunities I'd missed – more on that at the end of the book. Still, it was the most exciting game I've ever been involved in.

Queen sacrifices

We all appreciate the beauty of a queen sacrifice for checkmate, but sacrifices of a more strategic nature can be harder to evaluate. Moreover, there is often a mental block against them. Just as most players are hesitant to part with the exchange, they are often hard-pressed just to *detect* possible queen sacrifices.

Game 90

Mike Valvo 2385
Joel Benjamin 2530

Philadelphia 1990 (6)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 exd4 4.♗c4 ♗f6 5.e5 d5 6.♗b5 ♗e4 7.♘xd4 ♗c5 8.♗e3 ♗d7
 9.♗xc6 bxc6 10.♘d2 ♗xd2 11.♗xd2 ♗b6 12.0-0 c5 13.♗g5 ♗c8 14.♗e2 ♗c6 15.♗fe1 h6
 16.♗h4 0-0 17.c3 ♗f5 18.♗f4 d4 19.c4 ♗fe8 20.♗g3 ♗xe5 21.♗xe5 ♗xe5 22.♗d5



CHALLENGE 63

Find the sequence that will give Black the best chance to play for a win

Black is a pawn up but my queen is about to get chased around while White gains some initiative.

22...♗e6 23.♗e1



23... $\mathbb{W}d7$ seems forced here. I wasn't too concerned about 24. $\mathbb{R}e7 \mathbb{W}d8$, which doesn't leave a good way forward for White. 25. $\mathbb{B}xb6?!$ $a xb6$ 26. $\mathbb{R}xc7 \mathbb{R}xa2$ is a comfortable (dangerous) extra pawn, though 25. $\mathbb{R}e5$ might still be okay as I do not agree with the engine's assessment of 25... $\mathbb{B}xd5$ 26. $\mathbb{R}xd5 \mathbb{W}e8$.

I actually didn't like the simple 24. $\mathbb{B}e7+ \mathbb{Q}h8$ 25. $\mathbb{B}xc6 \mathbb{W}xc6$. I'm left with an awful bishop and my protected passed d-pawn is firmly blockaded. The engine claims I am considerably better, but as long as the bishops are on the board I can't imagine how I can win. For example, 26.b3 $\mathbb{R}e8$ 27.a4 a5 28.f3, and so on. Unhappy with this option, I looked deeper and found something less obvious but more interesting.

23... $\mathbb{B}xd5!$ 24. $\mathbb{R}xe6 \mathbb{B}xe6$ 25.b3

Perhaps 25. $\mathbb{W}d3$ was stronger, though it allows my bishop to activate to a5.

25... $\mathbb{R}e8$ 26.f3 $\mathbb{B}f5$ 27. $\mathbb{B}f2 \mathbb{B}b1$ 28. $\mathbb{W}c1 \mathbb{B}g6$



29. ♜e1?

It is not surprising that White loses after this move. Perhaps more surprising is that White can hold after 29. ♜d2 d3 30. ♜e3 ♜a5 (Black can try to prepare this idea, but I don't see how to make it work) 31. ♜xa5 ♜xe3 32. ♜xc7 ♜e1+ 33. ♜f2 ♜e2+ 34. ♜f1 ♜xa2 35. ♜d8+ ♜h7 36.h4. It looks like the d-pawn should queen, but there is no way to get through, as 36...d2?! is answered by 37. ♜e2.

29... ♜e2 30. ♜d2 c6 31.a3 d3 32. ♜f1 ♜c7 33.h3 ♜e5 34.b4 ♜d4 35. ♜e1 d2 0-1

The computer-approved continuation probably would have allowed White to hold without problems. While the queen sacrifice was not technically winning – and even more or less equal according to the computer – it provided practical winning chances, with opportunities for White to make plausible mistakes. If my opponent played correctly, I would still have a draw, no less than if I had kept my queen.

Game 91

Sergey 2535

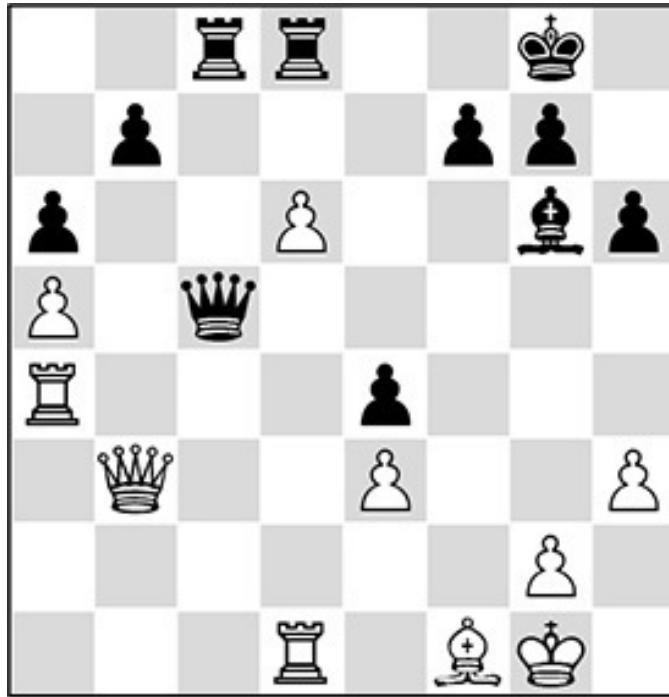
Zagrebelny

Joel Benjamin 2620

Lucerne Wch tt 1993 (3)

1.e4 c5 2. ♜f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4. ♜xd4 ♜f6 5. ♜c3 ♜c6 6. ♜e2 e5 7. ♜f3 h6 8.0-0 ♜e7 9. ♜e1 0-0
 10.h3 ♜e6 11. ♜f1 ♜b8 12.a4 ♜bd7 13.a5 a6 14. ♜d5 ♜xd5 15.exd5 ♜f5 16.c4 ♜e8 17.b4
 ♜f6 18. ♜e3 e4 19. ♜d4 ♜g6 20. ♜b3 ♜c8 21. ♜ed1 ♜g5 22.c5 ♜xe3 23.fxe3 dxc5 24. ♜e6

$\mathbb{W}e7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 26. $bxc5$ $\mathbb{W}xc5$ 27. $d6$ $\mathbb{E}d8$ 28. $\mathbb{E}a4$



CHALLENGE 64

How can Black remove all risk with a sacrifice?

White's passed d-pawn provides sufficient compensation for the sacrificed pawn. The computer's favorite line is 28... $\mathbb{E}c6$ 29. $\mathbb{E}d5$ $\mathbb{W}c1$ 30. $\mathbb{E}d1$ $\mathbb{E}c3$ 31. $\mathbb{E}xc1$ $\mathbb{E}xb3$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $b5$ 33. $\mathbb{E}xb3$ $bxa4$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ $\mathbb{E}xd6$ 35. $\mathbb{E}c6$ $\mathbb{E}d3$ 36. $\mathbb{E}xa6$ $\mathbb{E}xe3$ with an unclear endgame. I didn't see that, or much else to my liking, other than one super-safe possibility.

28... $\mathbb{E}xd6!$ 29. $\mathbb{E}c4$ $\mathbb{E}xd1$ 30. $\mathbb{E}xc5$ $\mathbb{E}xf1+$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ $\mathbb{E}xc5$

Black's fortress is so perfect that really only he can think about winning. White does not find a successful strategy and slides downhill.

32. $\mathbb{W}b6$ $\mathbb{E}b5$ 33. $\mathbb{W}d8+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 34. $g4?!$ $f6$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $h5$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $hxg4$ 37. $hxg4$ $\mathbb{E}e5$ 38. $\mathbb{W}c7$ $\mathbb{E}b5$ 39. $\mathbb{W}d8$ $\mathbb{E}b3$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{E}b1$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{E}b5$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{E}e5$ 43. $\mathbb{W}c7$ $\mathbb{E}g5$ 44. $\mathbb{W}b6$ $\mathbb{E}b5$ 45. $\mathbb{W}d8$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{E}g5$ 48. $\mathbb{W}c7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg4+$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{E}e5+$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 52. $\mathbb{W}d8$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$



The 1993 World Team Championship was actually one of the last FIDE events with adjournments. So the game took three sessions over the course of two or three days to finish. I had a rest from the line-up, while Alex Yermolinsky, who also had a day off, helped me analyze. Larry Christiansen occasionally chimed in with some clever stalemate tricks to avoid. I can't say our work (old-fashioned, *sans* computer) was perfect, but I brought home the point on move 100. It wasn't fun to have a game hanging over my head for days. But the endless time controls of the old days lessened the chance of spoiling hard work in a beat-the-clock session, a frequent occurrence in today's sudden death landscape.

53.♘g3 ♘g6 54.♗c7 ♞f5 55.♘h2 ♗g5 56.♘h3 ♘g2+ 57.♘h2 ♘c6 58.♗d8 ♞d5 59.♗b6
 ♞b5 60.♗c7 ♞e5 61.♗b6 ♘h5 62.♘g1 ♔g4 63.♘f2 ♞f5+ 64.♘e2 g5 65.♗c7 ♘b5+ 66.♘d2
 ♞f2+ 67.♘d1 ♘c6 68.♘e1 ♞g2 69.♘f1 f5 70.♗f7 ♘e4 71.♗e6 ♘f3 72.♗h6 ♘xe3 73.♗d6
 ♘f3 74.♗a3+ ♘g4 75.♗b3 ♘f3 76.♗b4+ f4 77.♗c3 ♘g3 78.♗e5 ♞f2+ 79.♔g1 ♘g2+
 80.♘f1 ♘e2+ 81.♘e1 g4 82.♗c3+ ♘f3 83.♘f1 ♞h2 84.♗e1+ ♘h3 85.♗c3 ♞e2 86.♗h8+
 ♘g3 87.♗c3 ♞e3 88.♗d2 ♞e2 89.♗c3 ♞e3 90.♗d2 ♞b3 91.♗c2 ♘a3 92.♗f2+ ♘h3
 93.♗b2 ♞e3 94.♗d2 ♘e2+ 95.♘g1 ♘g3+ 96.♘f2 ♘b5 97.♗b4 ♞f3+ 98.♘e1 g3 99.♗f8
 ♘g2 100.♗f7 ♞f1+ 0-1

My intention is not to turn you all into sack-happy maniacs, but I hope that this chapter will help you look at material relationships in a different way. Keep your minds open to sacrificial possibilities that may require trust in your intuition.

CHAPTER 7

Winning the won game

I am sure that failure to finish off dominant positions is a frequent complaint of readers of this book. There is no surefire route to perfect technique, but we can help ourselves by improving our approach.

Search for clarity

We may go through a lot of complications and uncertainty to get to a winning position. But once there, our standards should change. A line that leads to a position that might win is not so impressive starting from a position that feels like a definite win. We don't want to walk on eggshells; sometimes wading into complications can be the right tack. But a simple, straightforward continuation is more desirable.

Contemporary time controls do not always permit the deep assessment found in the next two games, but if you can invest the time, a mental step back can find a better way forward.

Game 92

Joel 2610

Benjamin

Petar Popovic 2530

Moscow ol 1994 (14)

1.d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ d5 4.f3 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5.e4 e6 6.e5 $\mathbb{Q}fd7$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ c5 8.c3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 9.f4 cxd4
10.cxd4 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ a5 12.a3 a4 13. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 15.0-0 g6 16.g4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}g3$
 $\mathbb{Q}bc4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ b5 20.f5 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$?! 22.fxe6 fxe6 23. $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}f2$
0-0-0 25. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}hd8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ b4 29. $\mathbb{Q}f8$ b3! 30. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}b4$
 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 36.g5 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}c3$
 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}f7$ $\mathbb{Q}cc7$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$



CHALLENGE 65

What is the best move for White and why?

I reached the diagrammed position at the end of a time scramble. As I caught my breath and looked around, I sensed that I had let some winning opportunities go by (in fact, 40. $\mathbb{Q}xe6!$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}f6!$ would have been annihilating), but I was still in quite good shape. I have the bishop pair and control of the only two open files in the position. The e6-pawn is a major weakness.

Students often suggest a continuation that did not wow me at all: 41. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$. True, White wins a pawn, but I throw away everything I have and leave Black with a better minor piece and play on the light squares. I was sufficiently skeptical to not consider this a serious possibility, but there is also a concrete reason in 42... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3+$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{Q}f5!$. Now if White trades he will have to scramble just to draw: 46. $\mathbb{Q}xf5?!$ $gxf5$ 47. $h4$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 48. $e6!$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 49. $h5$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 50. $e7$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 51. $g6$ $hxg6$ 52. $h6$ $b2$ 53. $h7$ $b1\mathbb{Q}$ 54. $e8\mathbb{Q}+$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ 55. $h8\mathbb{Q}+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 56. $\mathbb{Q}h7+$ with a perpetual.

I have a much more serious candidate in 41. $\mathbb{Q}f8$, and I would not blame anyone for choosing this move; indeed it probably should win the game: 41... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ and now Black has two main possibilities:



analysis diagram

A) 42... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}e8$ $\mathbb{R}d8$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}f7+$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $gxf5$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ and now both 46... $\mathbb{Q}e2$ and 46... $\mathbb{Q}f1$ are met by 47. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ and Black's counterattack is immediately broken;

B) 42... $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}xa8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $dxc4$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}xa4+$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ with an ending where White may or may not be able to break the blockade.

In Variation B there is an unlikely crusher for White: 43. $\mathbb{Q}b8!!$.



analysis diagram

I didn't see this in the game, nor am I certain I would ever think of it without an engine. White should win after 43... $\mathbb{Q}c4$ (43... $\mathbb{Q}xb8$ 44. $\mathbb{W}b4+$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 45. $\mathbb{W}xa5+$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 46. $\mathbb{W}c5$ with a winning attack) 44. $\mathbb{W}e8$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 46.e6 $\mathbb{W}xb8+$ 47. $\mathbb{W}xb8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xb8$ 48.exd7 $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ etc.

I didn't see Variation A clearly – I was afraid of the black queen invading – and I wasn't certain I could win the endgame in Variation B.

Because the initial position looks so dominating, my standards were high. I wanted something more than a maybe! After much time, I took a step back and tried to reason why Black was in the game at all. I concluded that Black could be saved by two moves: ... $\mathbb{Q}d3-f5$ (which has to come first) and ... $\mathbb{Q}a5-c4$. This enables Black to plug up two open files. That led me to a simple but elusive solution.

41. $\mathbb{Q}b4!!$



One simple trade and everything falls into place.

41... ♕f5 42. ♔xa5! ♖xa5

42... ♔xh3 43. ♖f8+–.

43. ♖c5 ♖d8

The queen will be harassed if it tries to stay – 43... ♖b6 44. ♔f1, or 43... ♖a6

44. ♔f1 ♕d3 45. ♖f8.

44. ♖d2 ♖c7



45. ♜xf5

At this point several winning options open up for White. 45. ♜b4+ ♔c8 46. ♜xc7+ ♔xc7 47. ♜f1! is crushing, and White can also profitably play for mate with 45. ♜a5.

I didn't consider these possibilities, as I was locked into a course I felt was 100% winning.

45...gxf5

I calculated 45... ♜xc5 46. ♜b4+ ♔a8 47. dxcc5 ♜xg5+ 48. ♜g4 ♜xe5+ (if 48...h5 49. ♜xa4+ ♔b7 50. ♜d7+ ♔b8 51. ♜e8+ ♔c7 52. ♜f7+ ♔b8 53. ♜f4 wins in the pawn ending) 49. ♜h3 ♜e3+ 50. ♜g2 and Black has run out of checks.

45...exf5 was the most testing, when White is likely to win in a lot of ways, but 46. ♜b5+ ♔c8 47. ♜f3! is the surest.

46. ♜b4+ ♔c8 47. h4 ♜e8

White cleans up after 47... ♜xc5 48. ♜xc5+ ♔b7 49. ♜b5+, while 47...f4+ 48. ♜f2! keeps the king safely out of range.

48. ♜a5!

I went straight for the easiest finish, forcing an elementary pawn ending. It turns out the checkmating approach with 48. ♜a5 works as well.

48... ♜xc5 49. ♜a8+ ♔d7 50. ♜xe8+ ♔xe8 51. dxcc5 1-0

The best continuation was difficult to see but not difficult to calculate. In hindsight, I might have saved myself clock time – if I needed to do it – by

expanding the initial candidate search before getting into calculation.

Game 93

Bosko Abramovic

Joel Benjamin

New York 1984



CHALLENGE 66

What is the surest way for Black to win from this position?

The slightest glance at the position will tell you Black must be winning. But how exactly? The black king and queen are in an awkward position vis-à-vis White's rook. The earlier moves are lost to the sands of time (and thus we start with move one), but I'm sure this position arrived immediately after the time control had been reached. [This position was only preserved because I sent it to the *Informant* combination section.] I had time to think, and I used it. I examined several continuations, and while some looked like they certainly might win, others turned up empty.

I found two leads that don't get the job done:

A) 1... ♕h6 2.b6! ♔xg5 3.♗c6 ♕xc7 4.bxc7 ♔f5 5.♔f2 and Black has to give up a bishop for the c-pawn;

B) 1... ♕d3 2.d6! (2.b6 ♔g7) 2... ♕f1+ (2... ♕g7 3.d7 ♕f1+ 4.♔h2 ♔e4 5.♕c2!) 3.♔h2 ♔e4 4.♗d5+ ♔h8 5.♗e3 and White defends g2 in the nick of

time;

D) 1... $\mathbb{Q}h8$ is okay, but after 2. $\mathbb{B}c8$ (2.b6 $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{W}xd5!$ 4.b7 $\mathbb{W}d4+$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{W}b2-$ +) the king will have to come back to h7, either right away or after 2... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 3. $\mathbb{B}a8$;

E) 1... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 2.b6



analysis diagram

and now Black has a few winning moves: 2... $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 3.b7 $\mathbb{W}f1+$ 4. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 5. $\mathbb{B}c2$ $\mathbb{W}b1$, and 2... $\mathbb{W}e8$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{W}a8$ 4. $\mathbb{B}a7$ $\mathbb{W}f8$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{W}e8$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 7.b7 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 8. $\mathbb{B}a8$ $\mathbb{W}xa8$ 9.bxa8 \mathbb{W} $\mathbb{Q}xa8$.

I couldn't work any of this out to my satisfaction. It felt like White's pawns are so close to queening that my margin for error is quite small. It just seemed like there had to be an easier way.

Here too, I took a step back and cast a wider net. My queen has the potential to be so powerful, if I just gain some time. My bishop looks good on e4, but it seems that I need my e-pawn to advance to get my play going. And then it hit me.

1... $\mathbb{Q}xg2!!$

Not the only way to win, but most efficient and easiest to work out. If you can just open your mind enough to consider this move, it's actually not very difficult to work out. Note that after 1... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 2.b6, the sacrifice is still the most efficient

winning method.

2. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ e4 3. d6 $\mathbb{W}f3+$ 4. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{W}e2+$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ e3 7. $\mathbb{Q}e7$

If 7. d7 $\mathbb{W}e1+$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ e2 9. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ h4! cleans up.

7... $\mathbb{W}d1+$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{W}d5+$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{W}xb5+$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{W}xc6$ 11. d7 $\mathbb{W}c1+$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{W}d2+$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{W}f2+$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{W}f5+$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $\mathbb{W}xg5+$ 0-1

Technique

Everyone enjoys seeing their opponents waiting for the axe to fall. You want to recognize when your opponent is unable to mount an offensive, because it may give you more time to finish him off. Develop your plan while recognizing where your opponent might potentially develop counterplay. Move towards the win without letting things get out of control.

Game 94

Roza Eynula 2179

Joel 2530

Benjamin

Parsippany tt 2013 (6)

1. d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2. c4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ e5 4. d5 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 5. e4 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 7. h3 0-0 8. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ a6 9. a3 d6 10. b4 $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ c6 13. a4 $\mathbb{W}b6$ 14. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{W}xb4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}hb1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 17. h4 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 18. h5 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ h6 20. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}g4+$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ cxd5 22. cxd5 $\mathbb{Q}ac8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{W}d8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ f5 25. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ f4 26. exf4 $\mathbb{W}xf4$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}ce2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}cf8$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{W}xf6$ 31. a5 $\mathbb{W}d8$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ 34. gxf3 $\mathbb{W}f8$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 37. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{W}g5$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{W}xf1$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}h2$



The position is obviously winning for Black – healthy extra pawn, good knight vs bad bishop, safer king – but the position still has to be won. White is moving back and forth so Black will need to step up the pressure to break her resistance. One plan is to go and take the a-pawn with the queen, but it would have to be timed perfectly. White will obtain counterplay with $\mathbb{Q}g3-f5$ as soon as my queen leaves the kingside.

I don't need to be in a rush to force matters, but I need to move the position forward in some way.

42... $\mathbb{Q}f8$

Just transferring the king to the other side is a positive development, because it will be out of range of a knight coming into f5. But I also have the idea of making a passed pawn to try to stretch the defense.

43. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}g2$



47...b5

It wouldn't hurt to start with 47... $\mathbb{Q}c1$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ and now, in addition to my plan, I can squirm with my queen to pinch the a5-pawn: 48... $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}b2$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}c3$ and now 51. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ is met strongly by 51... $\mathbb{Q}xh5!$. Note that my king is out of the range of the f5-knight.

48.axb6+ $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}h2$

'Objectively' White should wait with 50. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}c1$ but Black will combine kingside pressure with threats to advance the a-pawn. So White might as well take a shot now.

50... Qxh5 51. Wb4+ Ka7 52. Qf5 Wf4+

52... g6 53. Qxd6 Wg3+ 54. Kh1 Wxh3+ 55. Qg1 We3+! totally cleans up, but what I saw was good enough.

53. Qg2 Wc1 54. Qxd6 Qf4+

I didn't want that d6-pawn to drop until I had forced mate, and that's how it went down. White resigned.

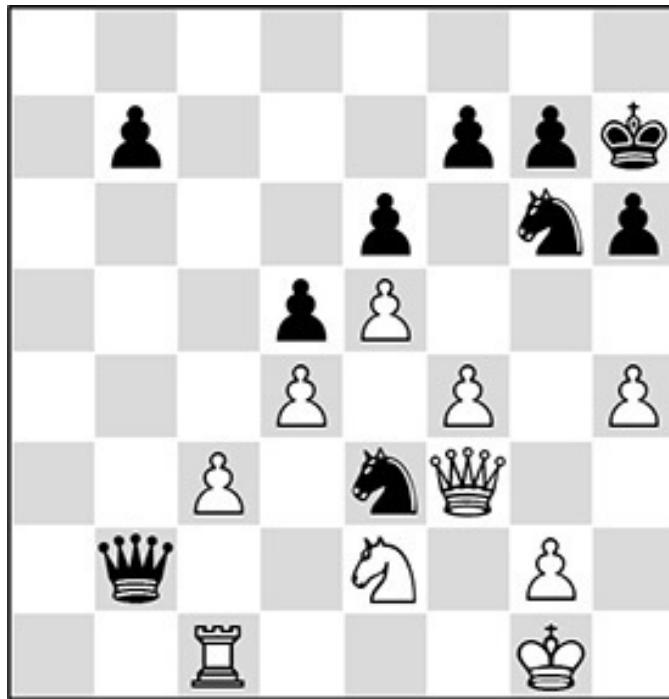
Game 95

Joel Benjamin

Greg Hjorth

Las Vegas 2000

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 c5 4.c3 Qc6 5. Qe3 Qd7 6. Qf3 cxd4 7. cxsd4 Qb4+ 8. Qc3 Qxc3+ 9. bxc3 Qa5 10. Qb1 Wc7 11. Qd2 Qe7 12. Qd3 h6 13.0-0 a6 14. Qe1 Qb5 15. Qxb5+ axb5 16. Qxb5 Qc4 17.a4 0-0 18. Qc1 Qa7 19. Qd3 Qfa8 20. Wg4 Qh7 21. Qf4 Qxa4 22. Qh5 Qg6 23.f4 Wd7 24. Qb1 Qa1 25. Qxa1 Qxa1 26.h4 Wb5 27. Qg3 Qxc1 28. Qxc1 Qb2 29. Qe2 Qe3 30. Qf3



30... Qxg2?

Clever but flawed. Black would have enough compensation for the exchange with 30... Wd2 .

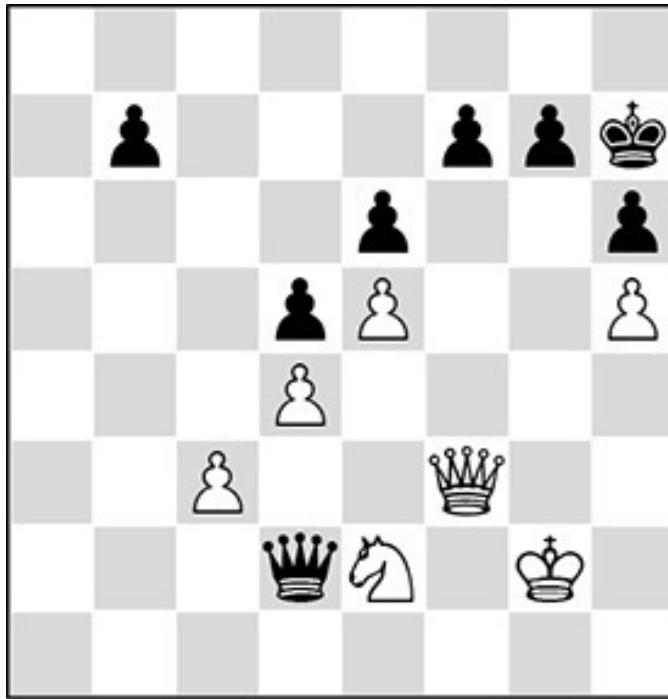
31.h5!

31. Wxg2 Qxf4 32. Qxf4 Wxc1+ 33. Wf1 Wxc3 is a different story from the game. The missing c3-pawn changes everything; White has to deal with a passed pawn and the d4-pawn will need constant protection.

31... 6xf4

After 31... κ 6h4 32. κ d3+ κ g8 33. κ d1 Black won't hold onto his knights much longer. I might have opted for 33. κ b1, when 33... κ xf4 34. κ xf4 κ f3+ 35. κ xf3 κ xb1+ would be like the game.

32. κ xf4 κ xc1+ 33. κ xg2 κ d2+ 34. κ e2



White has stabilized the position, with everything neatly protected. But to win, White will have to use the knight to launch a counterattack while keeping the king protected from checks.

34... ♕g5+?!

This makes the process easier by allowing White to immediately transfer the king to the queenside. Better was 34... \mathbb{Q} g8.

35. $\text{f}2$ $\text{g}8$ 36. $\text{f}4$ $\text{h}4+$ 37. $\text{e}2$ $\text{h}2+$ 38. $\text{d}1$ $\text{b}2$ 39. $\text{d}3$ $\text{f}2$ 40. $\text{d}2$ $\text{f}3+$ 41. $\text{c}2$
 $\text{e}4+$ 42. $\text{b}2$ $\text{f}5$

Black tries to resist by sitting on the knight and the h5-pawn. There is no need to give Black anything; with a little more patient maneuvering I get my knight to a better place.

43. h^1 $\text{h}2$ $\text{f}8$ 44. $\text{e}2$ $\text{g}8$ 45. $\text{c}1$ $\text{e}4$ 46. $\text{e}2$ $\text{f}5$

Trading queens looks hopeless. The black pawns are too well blocked and White is in good position to win on the queenside.

47. $\text{h}4$ d3 b6 48. $\text{h}5$ b4 $\text{h}8$ 49. $\text{a}6$ $\text{g}8$ 50. $\text{c}7$

Black resigned. The knight is coming to d6, after which White will win easily by a kingside attack or by taking the b-pawn, depending on what Black chooses to defend.

Be clock-smart

Time shortage can be a randomizing factor. When both players get more time to think, it favors the player who is clearly winning. You can earn more time to think by repeating moves and taking the long way around.

Game 96

Peter Svidler 2660

Joel 2580

Benjamin

Lucerne Wch tt 1997 (8)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♗f6 5.0-0 ♗c5 6.c3 b5 7.♗c2 d6 8.a4 ♗g4 9.h3 ♗h5
10.b4 ♗b6 11.axb5 axb5 12.♖xa8 ♖xa8 13.♘a3 ♗d8 14.♘xb5 ♗xe4 15.d4 0-0 16.dxe5
dxe5 17.♔e2 f5 18.♔h2 c6 19.♘a3 ♗c7 20.g4 ♗f7 21.♗xe4 fxe4 22.♘g5 ♗g6 23.♗c4+ ♔h8
24.♗xe4 ♗e6 25.f3 ♗f4 26.♗xf4 ♖xf4 27.♘b1 ♗b6 28.♘bd2 ♖f8 29.♗g2 ♗e3 30.♗e2 ♗f4
31.♘b3 ♗xe4 32.fxe4 ♖a3 33.♗c2 ♖a6 34.♗c5 ♖c4 35.♗d3 ♖g8 36.♗d7 ♖d8 37.♗e6
♖d2+ 38.♔f2 ♖d8! 39.♘b3?
39.♖xd2 ♖xd2+ 40.♔f1 would have led to a draw.
39... ♖d3! 40.♖f3 ♖xf3 41.♗xf3 ♖d3+ 42.♔f2



White finds himself in a helpless situation. In order to avoid mate, he will have to let not one, not two, but three pawns drop with check. With an imminent two-pawn advantage, I can expect to win the game if I don't make further mistakes. The clock can be a complicating factor, so I would like to remove it from the equation if I can. To do this I took as many moves as possible (without a triple

repetition) to remove the three pawns. Nowadays players put thirty seconds back on the clock with each move. In this case, I was just accelerating to move 60 when I would get another hour to work things out.

42... ♜e3+ 43. ♜f1 ♜f3+ 44. ♜e1

White's moves were clear to both players due to a number of mating traps. We see one here: 44. ♜g1 ♜e3+ 45. ♜h2 ♜f2+ 46. ♜h1 ♜g1#.

44... ♜xc3+ 45. ♜f2

Here is another one: 45. ♜d1 ♜d3+ 46. ♜e1 ♜g3#.

45... ♜e3+ 46. ♜f1

And for good measure, White must avoid 46. ♜g2 ♜e2+ 47. ♜g1 ♜e3+ 48. ♜h1 ♜f1+ 49. ♜h2 ♜g1#.

46... ♜f3+ 47. ♜e1 ♜g3+ 48. ♜e2 ♜e3+ 49. ♜f1 ♜xh3+ 50. ♜f2 ♜g3+ 51. ♜f1 ♜d3+ 52. ♜f2 52. ♜g1 ♜e3+ is another mate trap... 53. ♜g2 ♜e2+ 54. ♜h3 ♜f1+ 55. ♜h4 g5+ and mate next.

52... ♜e3+ 53. ♜f1 ♜f3+ 54. ♜e1 ♜xe4+ 55. ♜f1



I don't have a knockout blow, so at some point I will simply have to make luft. I just have to decide where I want my pieces, and, of course, take my time getting there.

55... ♜f3+ 56. ♜e1 ♜e3+ 57. ♜f1 ♜d3+ 58. ♜f2 ♜e3+ 59. ♜e1 h6

I managed to get all the way to the next time control!

60. ♜c8+

On 60. ♜e8+ ♜h7 61. ♜xe5, 61... ♜g6 looks the most convincing.

60... ♜h7 61. ♜f5+ ♜xf5 62. gxf5 ♜g8

The computer suggests a more direct method: 62...h5 63.♘a5 h4 64.♗f1 h3 65.♘xc6 ♕f4 66.b5 ♔h6 67.b6 ♔g5 68.b7 e4, etc. I didn't see that idea, but the way that I played is ultimately as convincing. Sometimes it isn't practical to burn time delving into alternatives if you are pretty sure about the path you are choosing.

63.♘a5 ♔f7 64.♔e2 ♕b6 65.♔d3 ♔f6 66.♔e4 c5!



67.♘c6

67.♘c4 cxb4! 68.♘xb6 b3 is the nice point. The b-pawn will tie down the knight so it is easy to see the kingside pawns will be unstoppable.

67...c4

It's a matter of taste here. 67...cxb4 68.♘xb4 is 'simpler', but having a second outside passed pawn to stretch the defense is pretty convincing, too.

68.b5 c3 69.♘b4 ♕a5 70.♘d5+ ♔g5 71.♔d3 e4+ 72.♔c2 ♕xf5 73.b6 ♕xb6 74.♘xb6 h5
75.♘d5 h4 76.♕xc3 h3 77.♘e3+ ♔f4 78.♘f1 g5 0-1

Svidler and Azmaiparashvili are two of the highest rated players I have beaten, with both games ending in a curiously similar pattern!

Take your time, do it right

I know from personal experience that time pressure can be a killer; if you manage to keep some reserve on your clock as you approach the time control, I applaud you! But there are times we have to force ourselves to use that time in the lead-up to move forty. It will be a lot easier to sort out the details in the sudden death if we put the hammer down before we get there.

Game 97

Trung Nguyen 2267
Andrew Samuelson 2369

Washington 2017 (4)

1.d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2.c4 e6 3. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ c5 4.d5 d6 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ exd5 6.cxd5 g6 7.e4 a6 8.a4 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$
10.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 0-0 14. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}fe8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}fe1$ h5 16.h3 $\mathbb{Q}h7$
17.g3 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ g5 19. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ g4 20.h4 c4



21. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

Trung regretted not sacrificing the exchange with 21. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}e3$. This type of sacrifice will become more instinctive as Trung develops.

21... $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}eb1$ f5 23. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ fxe4 24. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 26.dxe6 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$
28.b3 cxb3 29. $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xb7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}b2+$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ e3 34.fxe3
 $\mathbb{Q}xe3+$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$



It's been a sharp, tough battle, and Trung has emerged with a decisive advantage. The material is even, but the a-pawn is a monster. If Black can manage to stop it, he will surely leave his kingside vulnerable to a lethal attack. Trung is only two moves from the time control, so he can take his time and make sure Black does not create any tricks.

One good option is 39. $\mathbb{Q}f4$, which forces 39... $\mathbb{N}h7$. At minimum White can repeat, but also 40. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ leaves Black with no weapons to fight back.

39.a5 is perhaps most natural, putting the #1 asset in motion. Then after 39... $\mathbb{Q}d4$ (39... $\mathbb{Q}e1$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}b6$), the computer gives 40.a6 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}g5+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ as almost winning, but forcing an immediate queen trade with 40. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 41. $a xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ (41... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}d5$) 42. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ will win quite easily.

39. $\mathbb{Q}b6?!$

It's easy to get caught up in the excitement and play an aggressive move like this, but it's a poor choice because it doesn't serve the critical function of protecting against cheapos. White has so many advantages that Black needs a miracle, so White needs to be on the lookout for them. And while 39... $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ is not threatened, it becomes a possibility now, which is more than Black deserves. Black has to take his shot now. There is also the interesting try 39... $\mathbb{Q}f3!?$, which might force White to find 40. $\mathbb{Q}b1!$ to maintain his decisive advantage.

39... $\mathbb{Q}xg3$



CHALLENGE 67

What should White play?
(you have seven minutes)

40. $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$?

It actually isn't difficult to calculate that this should lead to a draw – which makes it curious that two masters got it wrong! Adrenaline kicked in here, as Trung took just one of his remaining seven minutes here! This needs to be coldly calculated with hands back until the final minute.

The alternative 40. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ looks slightly messy but wins easily. Black runs out of checks and defenses after 40... $\mathbb{Q}h3+$ (40... $\mathbb{Q}xg2+$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $\mathbb{Q}h3+$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}e3+$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}f2$) 41. $\mathbb{Q}g1!$ (not 41. $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ $\mathbb{Q}c2+$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ and White mourns for that g3-pawn!) 41... $\mathbb{Q}e1+$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}e3+$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}f2$, etc.

The key is to stay focused on the process and not rush to get to the imminent victory.

40... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}xg3$



41... ♜e5+??

Such a strange mistake to make with oodles of time on the clock! 41... ♜c3+ forces a draw, as White will lose all his pawns to avert perpetual check: 42. ♔h2 (42. ♔f2 ♜d2+ 43. ♔g1 ♜e1+ is the same) 42... ♜e5+ 43. ♔g1 ♜e1+ 44. ♔f1 ♜g3+ 45. ♔h1 ♜xh4+ 46. ♔g2 ♜h3+ 47. ♔f2 ♜f3+ 48. ♔e1 ♜c3+ 49. ♔d1 ♜a1+ 50. ♔e2 ♜xa4, etc.

42. ♔f2 ♜f4+ 43. ♔g1 ♜xa4 44. ♜xd6+ ♔g7 45. ♜e7+ ♔h8?

This allows mate. 45... ♔h6 46. ♜g5+ ♔h7 47. ♜xh5+ should be hopeless, but White does have to remember not to trade queens.

46. ♜e5+! ♔g8 47. ♔d5+ ♔h7 48. ♜e7+ ♔h8 49. ♜f8+ ♔h7 50. ♔g8+ ♔g6 51. ♜f7+ ♔h6 52. ♜f6#

So a happy ending after all, but this well-deserved win nearly slipped away with less than perfect focus.

Winning the winnable positions can come down to being aware of when to make sure to take enough time to get a critical move correct. Even in the sudden death segment we need not rush things.

Game 98

Brandon Jacobson 2416

Carlos Hevia 2567

Alejano

Washington 2017 (2)

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗e3 e5 7.♘f3 ♗e7 8.♗c4 0-0 9.0-0 ♗e6 10.♗b3 ♗c6 11.♗e2 ♗a5 12.♗fd1 ♗xb3 13.axb3 ♗c7 14.♗g5 ♗fc8 15.♗xf6 ♗xf6 16.♗e1 ♗b8 17.♗d5 ♗d8 18.c3 b5 19.♗c2 ♗b7 20.♗ce3 g6 21.♗h1 ♗g7 22.♗d3 a5 23.g3 b4 24.c4 ♗xd5 25.♗xd5 ♗a7 26.f4 exf4 27.gxf4 ♗c5 28.f5 a4 29.♗f3 axb3 30.f6+ ♗h8 31.♗xa8 ♗xa8 32.e5 ♗c6 33.exd6 ♗a5 34.♗e4 h5 35.♗e1 ♗h7 36.♗e8 ♗xc4 37.♗xf7+ ♗h6 38.♗f8+ ♗g5 39.♗g1+ ♗h4 40.♗e3 ♗c6+ 41.♗g2+ ♗h3



CHALLENGE 68

What is White's strongest move?

Brandon has outplayed a strong player and now needs to sidestep Black's desperate tactics to finish the game. The second time control provided a relatively small twenty minutes, but with a thirty-second increment. Brandon also had ten minutes left over from the first time control. It is easy to see that the next few moves will be critical. White will likely end all resistance or let the game slip away. The game will not go another fifty moves – unless, perhaps, White goes horribly wrong. The worst mistake here was not the miscalculation, but that White took very little time to work out the next move, and paid little attention to candidate moves.

42.♗h6?

There was some good calculation here, and after

42...♗f3? 43.♗f4!

Black resigned.

No harm done, but if Black had played 42... $\mathbb{Q}b6!$ it would have been a different story.



analysis diagram

- A) Now 43. $\mathbb{W}f4?$ $\mathbb{W}xg2+!$ 44. $\mathbb{M}xg2$ $\mathbb{M}a1+$ would end in tears;
 - B) Brandon intended 43. $\mathbb{W}xg6$ $\mathbb{W}f3$ 44. $\mathbb{W}d3$ (nice, though White can also win by pushing either passed pawn) 44... $\mathbb{W}xd3$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}f4+$ $\mathbb{K}h4$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}xg1$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}xg1$ and the passed pawns will cost Black his rook.
- The problem is that Black has a much better answer in 43... $\mathbb{W}xd6!$.



analysis diagram

White can just barely hold after 44. $\mathbb{Q}f4+$ $\mathbb{W}xf4$ 45. $\mathbb{W}g2+$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 46. $\mathbb{R}f1$ $\mathbb{W}g4$ 47. $f7$ $\mathbb{W}xg2+$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $\mathbb{R}g5+$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 50. $f8\mathbb{W}$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ 51. $\mathbb{R}xf8$;

C) White can try 43. $\mathbb{W}d2$, but I don't see more than a draw: 43... $\mathbb{Q}xg1$ 44. $\mathbb{W}d3+$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 45. $\mathbb{W}xg6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 46. $\mathbb{W}g3+$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 47. $\mathbb{W}f4+$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 48. $f7$ $\mathbb{R}a1$ 49. $\mathbb{W}f3+$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 50. $f8\mathbb{W}$ (50. $\mathbb{W}xc6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 51. $f8\mathbb{W}$ $\mathbb{Q}c5+$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{R}xe1+$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{R}e2+$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{R}f2+$ 55. $\mathbb{W}xf2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 56. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 57. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 58. $h4=$) 50... $\mathbb{Q}d4+$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{R}xe1+$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{R}e2+=$.

I would be very antsy about allowing the bishop into the game, so I would really triple-check that line. I would try to squelch any possible attempt at activity, and I think investing half my remaining time would be worth it. Once everything is worked out, you would not need much time to finish things off (especially with the increment).

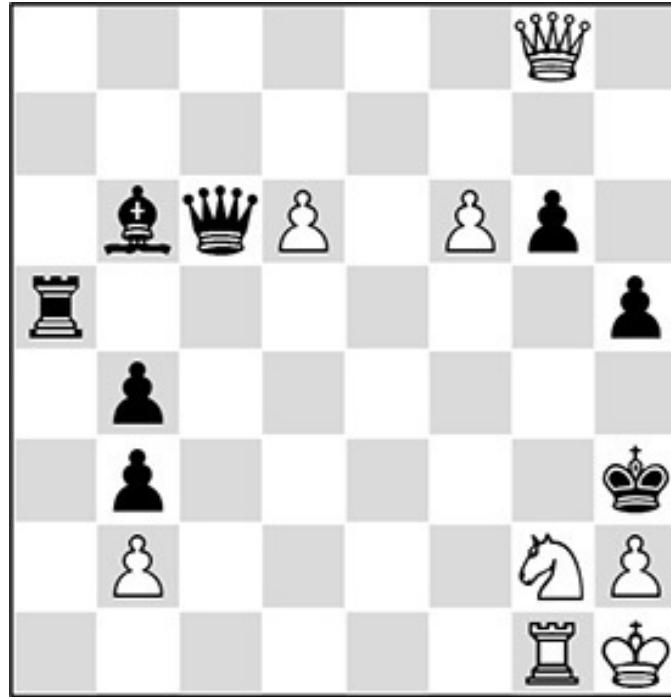
There is a major trap to avoid – 42. $\mathbb{W}xd8??$ $\mathbb{R}g5!$ (42... $\mathbb{R}a1$ 43. $\mathbb{W}c8+$ $\mathbb{W}xc8$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}f4+$ draws) wins for Black!

The right way was 42. $\mathbb{W}g8!$ with the following possibilities:



analysis diagram

- A) 42... $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ wins now because 43... $\mathbb{Q}g5$ is met by 44. $\mathbb{Q}c8+$;
- B) 42... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}xb3+$ $\mathbb{Q}f3$ (43... $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}e6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}e1$) 44. $\mathbb{Q}xf3+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}e1$. This is the only winning move, but it essentially forces mate because either $\mathbb{Q}g3+$ or the advance of the f-pawn will end the game;
- C) 42... $\mathbb{Q}b6$



analysis diagram

43. $\mathbb{Q}c8+$! (sweet, but 43. $\mathbb{Q}xb3+$ is just as effective if you don't see the sacrifice) 43... $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}f4+$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}xg6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h3$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}g3\#$.

Keep calm and calculate

Sophie completes a trio of impulsive students, but hers is not a happy ending as she cannot recover from her mistake.

Game 99

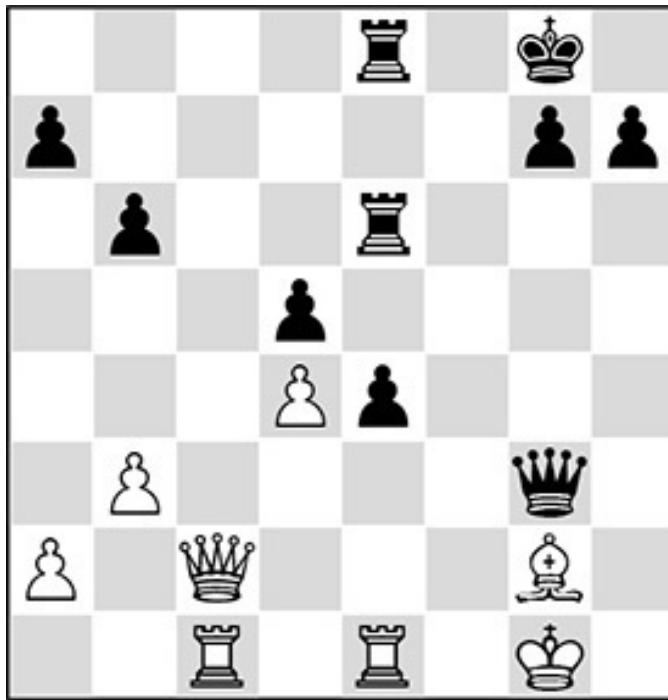
Noah Flaum

Sophie Morris- 2177

Suzuki

Philadelphia 2017 (5)

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3. c3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 4. d4 d5 5. exd5 exd5 6. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 7. 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}ge7$ 8. dxc5 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ 0-0 10. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 12. h3 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2+$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{Q}b6+$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}bd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 16. cxd4 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ 18. g4 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 19. gxh5 $\mathbb{Q}xh3+$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}f4+$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}g3+$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}ad8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}ac1$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 29. b3 $\mathbb{Q}fe8$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ f6 33. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}g3$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ b6 36. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ f5 37. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ fxe4 38. $\mathbb{Q}g1$



CHALLENGE 69

What is Black's best move?

We saw the early part of this game in Chapter 5. After some seesawing, Black is now on the cusp of bringing the game home. Unfortunately, Sophie sensed that and played too impulsively.

38... $\mathbb{Q}h6?$

Sophie had about twenty minutes on the clock, and would receive another thirty after move forty. Plenty of time to enjoy the position. But she used about *one* minute here. She thought her move won straight up and so didn't see a reason to look any further.

Many times when I think I see a killer move I actually pull back to double- or triple-check it, even if I'm a little short of time. Why? If the move works as I think it does, the game will be over and I won't need any time to win the game. If I'm wrong, I may need a different move. Sophie's excitement clouded her thinking and caused her to unnecessarily rush her move. I don't know if it made any difference here, but her opponent was low on time, though he only needed to make two moves in his three minutes to reach the time control. You should only consider blitzing your opponent when winning on time or soliciting a time-pressure blunder is the *only* way you can win. The best way to take advantage of an opponent's time pressure is by making good moves.

39. $\mathbb{Q}c7!$



39... $\mathbb{Q}g4?$

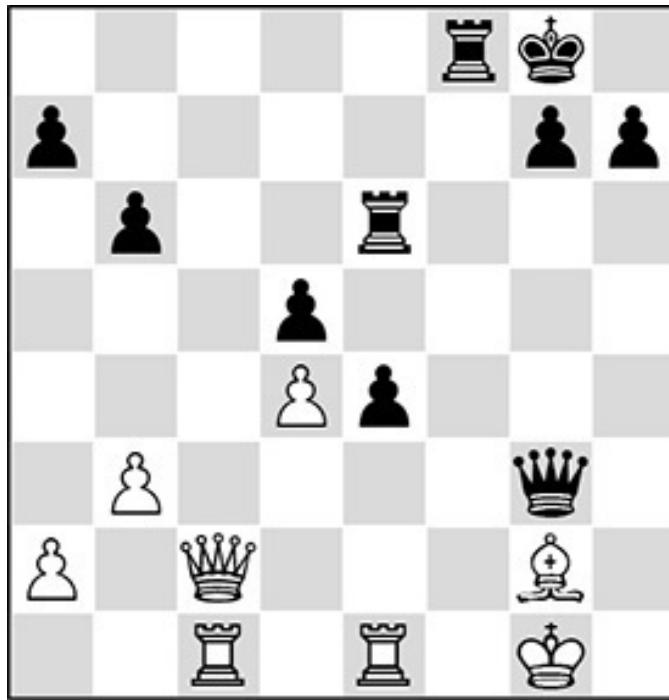
The surprise defense caused Sophie to compound her error. Only two moves from the time control, she needed to take her time, regroup and get thinking clearly again. 39... $\mathbb{Q}g5$ was still good enough for a draw: 40. $\mathbb{W}d7$ $\mathbb{R}f8$ 41. $\mathbb{R}c8$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2+$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $\mathbb{R}g6+$ forces a perpetual. Even without that tactic Black should draw. The queen simply does more on g5, keeping the e1-rook from moving.

40. $\mathbb{R}f1$

White is clearly better and it went downhill from here.

In the diagram White was actually threatening 39. $\mathbb{W}c7$ as well as some other important defensive moves. I would have started by seeking out those attack-killing moves I needed to prevent. Calm calculation would have turned up White's defense, and brought Black to this stage anyway.

The right move from the diagram is 38... $\mathbb{R}f8!$ (though 38... $\mathbb{R}f6$ also works, it is less natural because it doesn't threaten ... $\mathbb{R}h6$).



analysis diagram

Black kills White's key defensive ideas – 39. $\mathbb{Q}c7?$ $\mathbb{Q}f2+$ and 39. $\mathbb{Q}f1?$ $\mathbb{Q}e3+$ are both immediately decisive.

The best White can do is 39. $\mathbb{Q}e2$, when Black just needs to eliminate defensive moves again with 39... $\mathbb{Q}ef6!$ (though here even 39... $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ is clearly better for Black). White is essentially frozen; 40. $\mathbb{Q}c7$ (or 40. $\mathbb{Q}c3$) loses the queen to 40... $\mathbb{Q}f1+$. The best try is 40. b4 e3 41. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}f2$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2+$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}xd5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}c8+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ and Black wins easily.

We see from this batch that the key to bringing the point home is often to discover what your opponent needs to do to stay in the game and prevent it – then you can carry out your diabolical plans in good time.

Unnecessary counterplay or complications

The technical process can start before one has subdued counterplay, or even obtained a material advantage. Sometimes the key idea is to limit your opponent's possibilities before they can mount any kind of counterattack or create complications.

Game 100

Lilia Poteat 2054

Loren Weiss 2133

New York 2013 (3)

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ g6 6. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 7.h3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 0-0 9. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 10.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 11.f4 e5? 12. $\mathbb{Q}db5$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$



CHALLENGE 70

What is White's best move?

After Black's anti-positional eleventh move, White is in the driver's seat. 13.f5! would seal Black's doom. The d6-pawn is ready to drop anyway, Black's queen is in some danger and there is no counterplay to speak of: 13...gxf5 (after 13... $\mathbb{Q}d4$ White has five different moves in the +– range, so it is hard to go wrong) 14.exf5 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ (14...d5 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}bc7$) 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ and Black doesn't even have any practical counterplay.

13. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$

White has a great position here as well, but now Black can force her to make accurate calculations and decisions to win.

13... $\mathbb{Q}xh3$

Black's position is quite bad anyway, so he might as well mix it up.



14. ♕xb6?

The idea is not completely wrong, but the timing is. White is swapping a bishop which holds the position together for a barely relevant knight.

The right way was 14. ♔xf7 ♕xf7 15. ♕xb6 (only now!) 15...axb6 16. ♔xf7+ ♕xf7 17. ♔d5+ ♕e6 (17... ♕e7 18. fxe5 ♔d8 19. ♔d6+ ♕e8 20. ♔d5 ♕c8 21. ♔f6+ ♕f7 22. ♕ad1; Black can hardly move a piece in the face of discovered check, and a crushing blow will come shortly) 18. fxe5+ ♕f6 19. ♔d6 ♔xe5 20. ♕xf6+ ♕xf6 21. ♕f1 ♕f5 22. ♔d5+ ♕f8 23. exf5 and White should eventually win easily.

14...axb6

14...exf4!? seems to put up more stubborn resistance.



analysis diagram

15. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ and 15. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $axb6$ are not impressive.
Perhaps best is 15. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ and now 18. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ seems to preserve an edge for White, though it's not at all easy to find these moves.

15. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ exf4!

Black has this resource only because the bishop has left prematurely.

16. $\mathbb{Q}g5+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xh3$



17... \mathbb{Q} d4+?

17...g5 18. \mathbb{Q} e6 \mathbb{Q} d4 19. \mathbb{Q} g4 \mathbb{Q} e5 20. \mathbb{Q} e2 would only be better for White.

18. \mathbb{Q} h1 g5 19. \mathbb{Q} e1?

With 19. \mathbb{Q} e6 White could successfully blockade the kingside.

19... \mathbb{Q} h5



20.♘e2?

The position is tenable but White has to look to give back the piece. 20.♗e6 g4 21.♗xg4 ♗xg4 22.♗e2 is one way to equality.

20...g4!

Now Black is already clearly better.

21.♗b5 f3 22.♗d3

On 22.gxf3 ♔e5 23.f4 ♔xf4! wins most decisively, though 22...gxf3 23.♗h2 ♔e5 24.♗f4 ♗g4 should win too.

22...fxg2+ 23.♔xg2 gxh3+ 24.♔h1 ♗g4 25.♗d2 ♗xe4+ 26.♔h2 0-1

In passing on the shutdown option 13.f5, Lilia navigated a slippery slope where inaccurate move orders and missed defensive resources could let the position turn upside down. It is especially important in fast time control games like this one to keep control whenever possible!

Sometimes counterplay can come out of nowhere when a fancy move is preferred over a more sure-handed course.

Game 101

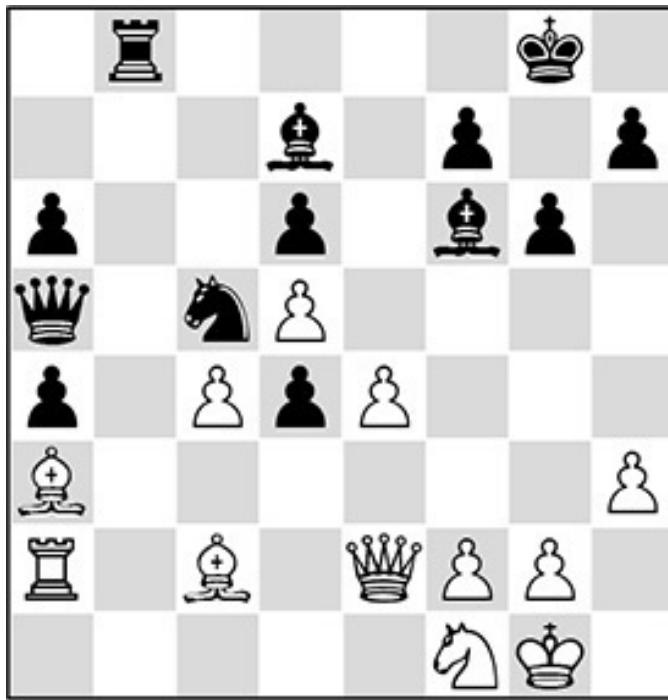
Joel 2583

Benjamin

Irina Krush 2452

St Louis ch-USA 2009 (2)

**1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.♗b5+ ♘d7 4.c3 ♘gf6 5.♗e2 a6 6.♗a4 e5 7.d4 b5 8.♗c2 ♘e7 9.0-0 0-0
10.a4 ♘b7 11.d5 c4 12.b3 cxb3 13.♗xb3 ♘c5 14.♗c2 bxa4 15.♗a3 ♘fd7 16.c4 ♘a5 17.♗e3
♗fb8 18.♗c3 ♘c8 19.♗fb1 ♘b3 20.♗a2 ♘dc5 21.h3 ♘d7 22.♗e2 ♘f6 23.♗g3 ♘d4
24.♗xb8+ ♘xb8 25.♗xd4 exd4 26.♗e2 g6 27.♗f1**



I've been thoroughly outplayed to this point. Irina tries to crown her advantage with a fancy move, but miscalculates. In a dominant position, more straightforward ways of achieving your goals can make such creativity unnecessary. Here Black could get there with the relatively simple 27... $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $dxc5$. All plausible continuations find big trouble for White:

- A) 29.e5 d3 30. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$;
- B) 29.f4 $\mathbb{Q}b2$;
- C) 29. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}b3$ (29... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ is slower but steady) 30.e5 $\mathbb{Q}e7$;
- D) 29. $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ $\mathbb{Q}b1$.

In the first three cases the a-pawn is unstoppable, while the d-pawn decides in the fourth.

A very simple, no-calculation move will suffice as well.

27... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ is less powerful but preserves a massive advantage. With no pressure on, Black should at least 'do no harm' here.

27... $\mathbb{Q}b3??$

I can only speculate what Krush overlooked, but if you put your rook on a square to be taken, you want to be sure you don't miss something.

28. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ d3

Black could bail out into an okay position with 28... $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ $axb3$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xa6$, but at this point there was seemingly no need to think about that.

29. $\mathbb{Q}f3!!$



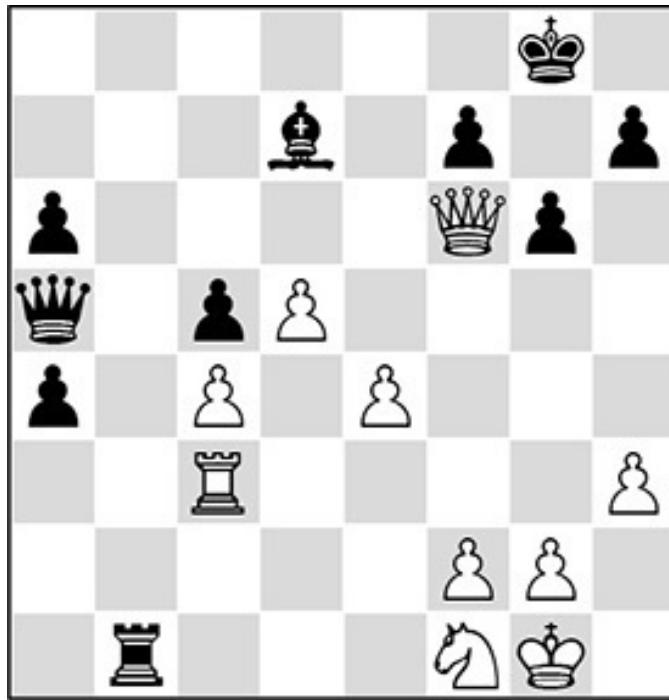
We've seen how easy it is to assume obvious captures. No way am I missing this move, because otherwise my position is still pretty ugly.

29...dxc2 30.♕xf6 dxc5

It doesn't help to queen: 30...c1♕ 31.♔d4 ♕xf1+ 32.♔xf1 (32.♔h2? ♜xh3+ 33.gxh3 ♜xh3+ 34.♔g1 ♕e1#) 32...♜b1+ 33.♔e2 ♕e1+ 34.♔f3 ♜b3+ 35.♔e3 ♜b1 36.♜d2 and White is virtually winning. After all the checks, the white king is still much safer than its counterpart.

The other capture, 30...♝xc5, gives up play on White's king and undefends the d8-square, but gets back in keeping White's center restrained. After 31.♜xc2 ♜b1! 32.♝d8+ (32.♜c3 ♔c8 33.♜f3 ♛c7 holds the balance, with the idea of pitching the a-pawn to get in ...♛c7xc4) 32...♚g7 33.♛xd7 ♛b4 gets the piece back, with equality.

31.♜xc2 ♜b1 32.♜c3!?

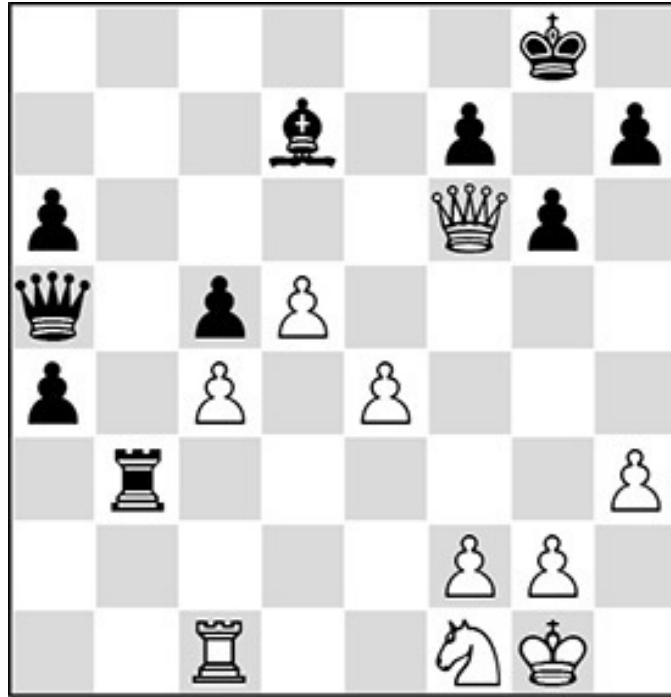


This move is a bit riskier than others, but after seeing my position improve so dramatically I'm ready to let it ride. It's uncomfortable to suddenly be in a tense game after being in control.

32...♝b3?!

I don't know if Krush miscalculated 32...a3, or was still hoping to win. There would still be no objective danger, e.g. 32...a3 33.♜f3 ♛e8 34.♜e5 ♛a4 35.♜xa3 ♜xf1+ 36.♝h2 and now Black can take her chances with 36...♛d7 37.♜xa6, or accept the perpetual after 36...♛xa3 37.♜xe8+ ♛g7 38.♜e5+.

33.♜c1



With the back rank secured, White has an easier time of it.

33...a3?

Black had to try to defend with 33... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 34.e5 $\mathbb{Q}b6$.

34.e5 $\mathbb{Q}b6$

After 34...a2 35.e6 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}a1!$ (37. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ a1 \mathbb{Q} 38. $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ is cute but not as good) 37...fxe6 38. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ White is winning. But now the end is straightforward.

35.e6 fxe6 36. $\mathbb{Q}e7$ a2 37. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}b1$ 38.dxe6 $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}f7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 40.e7 1-0

Routine simplification

I'm sure that readers have been told many times to trade when they are ahead. When you have a large material advantage, this can be a no-brainer. But with smaller advantages, mindless trading can make the win harder to come by. When trading gives away some of the advantages in a position, simplification can actually equal complication.

Game 102

Agata Seyfi	873
Sophie Morris-	
Suzuki	2171

Morristown jr 2017 (4)

1.d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.b3 g6 5. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 0-0 7.e4 d6 8. $\mathbb{Q}gf3$ e6 9. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ exd5 10.cxd5 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ a6 12.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ axb5 15.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}fe1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe1+$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}c3$

23. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 24. g4?



Black has outplayed her much lower rated opponent and should win easily. However, Sophie stopped looking for tactics (that had gotten her to this dominant position) and went into total technical mode, believing that is what good players do when they win a pawn.

24...b4?!

24...c4! would have won another pawn and eliminated any technical difficulties.

25. $\mathcal{Q}d2$



25...♝d4?

Almost any move in pursuit of the initiative would have crushed White, for example: 25...♛g5 26.h3 h5 27.♞e4 ♛e5.

Such a continuation requires no special knowledge and allows Sophie to use her natural abilities to finish the game off.

26.♝xd4+ cxd4 27.♞c4

There is no question Black is winning here, yet the position requires more difficult decisions.

27...♞xd5 28.♞xd6 ♛f6 was the right way to go.

27...d3?! 28.♚f1

Black won but ultimately needed some mistakes from her opponent to score the point.

Winning the not quite won game

Sometimes it seems that our advantage is not enough to bring us victory. Still, we can remember that our opponent does not always see everything we do. We might also come upon traps we might underestimate or not anticipate.

Game 103

Joel Benjamin

Doug Root

Los Angeles ch-USA jr 1980

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♞d2 ♞f6 4.e5 ♞fd7 5.♝d3 c5 6.c3 b6 7.f4 ♜a6 8.♝xa6 ♞xa6 9.♞df3 ♜c7

10. Qe2 h5 11. Qe3 c4 12. 0-0 Qe7 13. We1 b5 14. g3 Qb6 15. h3 Wd7 16. Qg5 a5 17. g4 hxg4
 18. hxg4 f6 19. Qf3 0-0-0 20. Qg2 We8 21. Wb1 Wg8 22. Qg3 Wh7 23. Wb1 Wxb1 24. Waxb1 b4
 25. Qd2 b3 26. Wa1 Wxh1 27. Wxh1 Wb8+ 28. Qg2 a4 29. a3 Qd7 30. We1 fxe5 31. fxe5 Qd8
 32. Wf1 Qe8 33. Qh5 Wg8 34. Qg3 g6 35. Qf4 Qf7 36. Qh3?

I missed a sweet win here with 36. Qg5+ Qxg5 37. Qxd5+ Qg7 38. Qxc7
 Qxd2 39. Qxe6+ and Wb1+ on the next move kills.
 36... Qg7 37. Qg5 Wb8 38. Qh4 Qxg5+ 39. Qfxg5 Wb7 40. Wf2 Qf8 41. Wf3 Qe8 42. Qf4 Qc7
 43. Wb3 Wd7 44. Qg3 Qg8 45. Wb6



The game was adjourned, with this move going in the envelope. I went into this last-round game a half-point behind Root. I'd played a good tournament, and a good game here (outside of move 36), but adjournment analysis indicated that Black's position was impregnable with proper defense. The prospect of such a near miss was disheartening, but after some reassurance from my colleagues, I resolved to maneuver around and test his defenses. If he found an answer to a threatened breakthrough, I would reshuffle my pieces and try something else. Maybe I would get lucky along the way. This approach is particularly relevant in the sudden-death time controls of the current era. Players who are adept at constructive maneuvering (Nakamura comes to mind) can score a lot of points this way.

45... Qg7 46. Wb1 Qg8 47. Qf3 Wb7 48. Qh3 Qb5 49. Qh4 Wd7

Even simpler is 49... Wb7 50. Qg5 Qg7 51. Wf1 Qd7 with no progress made.
 50. Qg5



50... $\text{Nc}7$

Now Black requires a cleverer defense. Having put the knight on an active square, he could utilize it with 50... $\text{R}e7$ 51. $\text{R}f1$ $\text{Qg}7$, and I'm stymied again because 52. $\text{R}xf8?$ (52. $\text{Qf}4$ $\text{Na}7$ 53. $\text{Qe}3$ $\text{Nd}7$) 52... Qxf8 53. Nxg6+ $\text{Qe}8$ 54. $\text{Nx}e7$ $\text{Nx}c3!$ might well produce a queen for Black.

51. $\text{Rf}1$ $\text{Qe}8?$

This was the last chance to frustrate me with 51... $\text{Rg}7$ 52. $\text{Rf}6$ $\text{Qe}8$ 53. Rxf8+ Qxf8 54. $\text{Nx}e6+$ $\text{Qg}8$ 55. $\text{Nx}g7$ Qxg7 and though I have won a pawn, I'm no closer to breaking through.

52. Rxf8+ Qxf8 53. Nxg6+ $\text{Qg}8$ 54. $\text{Nx}e6$



Black will never have quite enough time to get to my soft underbelly (the b2-pawn) and thus will watch his own structure collapse.

54... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 55. $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ $\mathbb{R}xc7$ 56. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{R}d7$ 57. $g5$ $\mathbb{R}h7$ 58. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 59. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{R}h5$ 60. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{R}xg5+$ 61. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{R}g2$ 62. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 63. $d5+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 64. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{R}g3$ 65. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 66. $e6$ $\mathbb{R}h3$ 67. $d6+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 68. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{R}xc3$ 69. $bxc3$ $b2$ 70. $\mathbb{Q}c6+$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 71. $d7+$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 72. $d8\#$ $b1\#$ 73. $\mathbb{R}b8+$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 74. $\mathbb{Q}a7\#$

I pretty much bombed out in the World Junior, failing to even get paired against Kasparov. However, I did get to play blitz with him (he would not give me more than 5-3 time odds) and it was quite a learning experience just watching him work.

CHAPTER 8

Swindling

We will all hit rough patches in games. How well we persevere from bad positions is one of the major challenges we face as chess players. The luck factor exists in chess, and while much of it is out of our control, there are things we can do to increase our chances of turning the tables on our opponents.

Our opponents of course play a big role in the success or failure of our comeback attempts. One must fight overconfidence and keep a sense of danger turned on to keep the game from slipping away.

The following game demonstrates the role of each player in the evolution of a swindle.

Game 104

Joel 2644

Benjamin

Maxim Dlugy 2618

Norwalk 2017 (4)

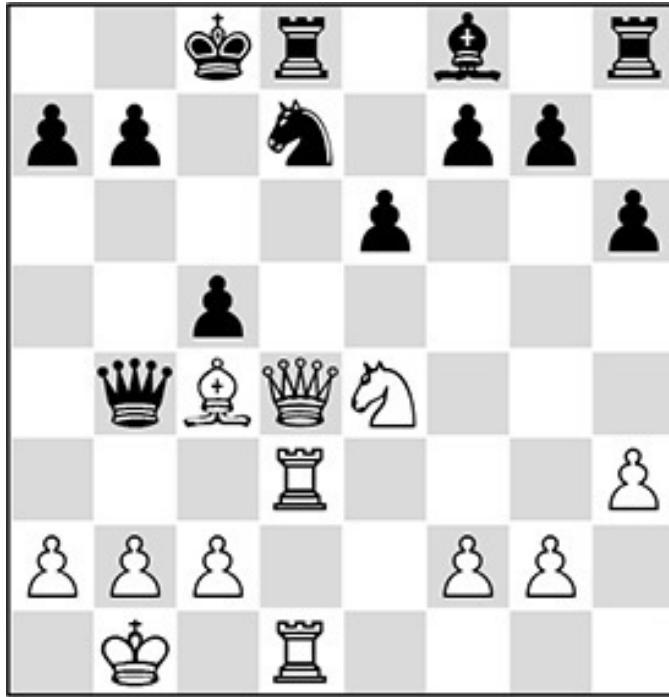
1.e4 d5 2.exd5 ♜xd5 3.♘c3 ♜d6 4.d4 c6 5.♘f3 ♜g4 6.h3

Hell-bent to win, I played more recklessly than usual. After winning the game I bought Max's book *Grandmaster Insides*, and learned that he had a lot more experience in this variation than I realized.

**6...♜xf3 7.♝xf3 ♜xd4 8.♝e3 ♜d8 9.♝d3 ♜d7 10.0-0-0 ♜gf6 11.♘e4 ♜a5 12.♗b1 e6
13.♗d2 ♜b6 14.♗c3 ♜d5 15.♗c4 ♜xc3+ 16.♝xc3 h6 17.♝d3?! 0-0-0 18.♝hd1 ♜b4**

I had forgotten about this move. I didn't want to trade queens so I played

19.♝d4 c5!

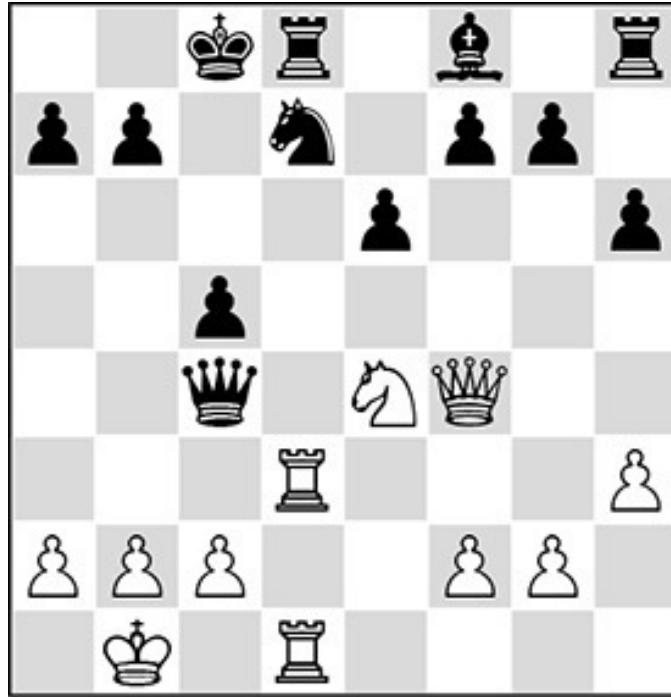


CHALLENGE 71

What continuation represents White's best practical chance?

I had hoped to have an answer to this move but a few seconds in I realized how stuck I was. Apparently I have to trade queens, but I couldn't bring myself to do it. After 20.c3 cxd4 21.cxb4 ♜e5 22.♖xd4 ♖xd4 23.♖xd4 ♜c6 24.♖d3 ♜xb4 White can grimly grovel for a draw, with zero chances to win. Against a poorer endgame player I might try this, but I thought a loss was highly likely. The equation would be similar after 20.a3 or 20.♕c3. So I decided I *had* to do something else, and kept looking. Even in a rapid game, I felt the time investment would be worth it, because the game was on the line.

20.♘e3! ♘xc4 21.♗f4



It's not that White has a good position. The engine will tell you that Black is more winning than he is in the pawn-up endgame. But here Black is at least under pressure to find accurate and possibly difficult moves. And White at least has a chance to *win* if Black goes wrong.

21... ♜b5 22. ♜xf7



22...c4?

The first mistake, which actually should have thrown away the win on the spot. I was concerned about the solid 22... $\mathbb{Q}c6$!, which kills any tricks. Still, White can put up resistance: 23.a3 c4 24. $\mathbb{Q}d6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ and untangling is not a trivial matter for Black.

23. $\mathbb{Q}d4$?

This is after all a rapid game, now entering blitz game mode. 23. $\mathbb{Q}c3!$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}e8+$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xd7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}b5+$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xa7+$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}b5+$. The trick is hard to spot right away because the queen on c6 seems to dominate the knight on c3. Here I did not invest the time to look deeper and missed a draw – though all's well that ends well.

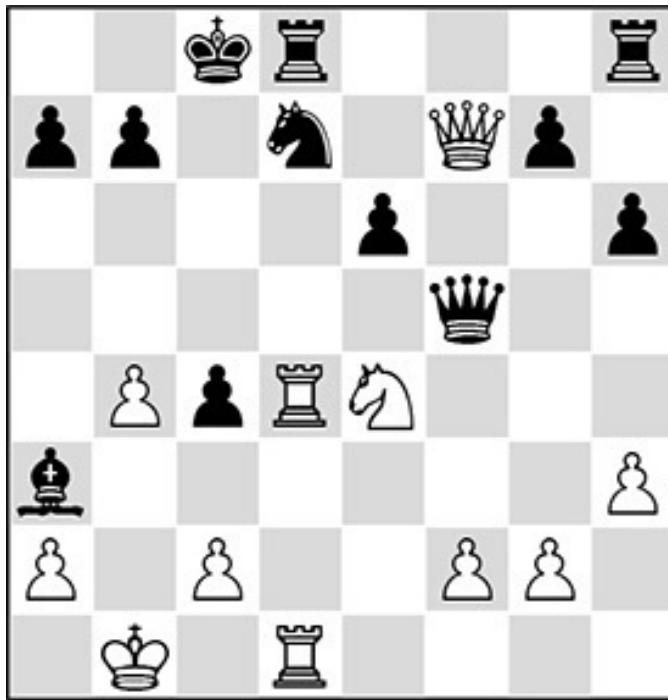
23... $\mathbb{Q}a3$ 24.b3



24...cxb3?

I was hoping Dlugy would play this quickly, figuring there's no reason to let me take this pawn for nothing. But by making *luft* for me, Black loses a lot of tactical opportunities. We must be careful about flicking in obvious moves that can't hurt – sometimes they can!

At the time I thought I would be finished after 24... $\mathbb{Q}f5$, e.g. 25. $\mathbb{Q}xc4+$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}d1\#$. But the computer points out 25.b4!!, a move I had no chance finding under the circumstances.



analysis diagram

Suddenly Black has to scramble to keep the situation from getting out of hand. Bad are both 25... $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 26. $\mathbb{N}d6+$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xf7\pm$ and 25... $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 26. $\mathbb{R}xc4+$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 27. $\mathbb{R}xd7$. Black can only hold the balance with 25... $\mathbb{N}b6$ 26. $\mathbb{W}e7!$ $\mathbb{R}xd4$ 27. $\mathbb{R}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4!$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ $\mathbb{W}e5=$.

If you fail to win because you miss a crazy resource like 25.b4, you can chalk it up to bad luck. Even a careful search might not turn it up!

The best move again seems to be 24... $\mathbb{W}c6$, with the idea that 25. $\mathbb{R}xc4?$ $\mathbb{N}c5$ wins immediately for Black.

25.axb3 $\mathbb{R}hf8$ 26. $\mathbb{W}xe6$ $\mathbb{R}fe8$ 27. $\mathbb{W}g4$ $\mathbb{R}e7?$

This complacent move strands the bishop. Black could have quelled White's initiative with 27...h5 28. $\mathbb{W}xg7$ $\mathbb{W}e5$, maintaining a definite advantage. Dlugy just didn't want to give up a pawn, thinking he should win without any problems.

28. $\mathbb{Q}a2$

I understood that the tables had turned, but Dlugy did not sense any danger.

28...h5

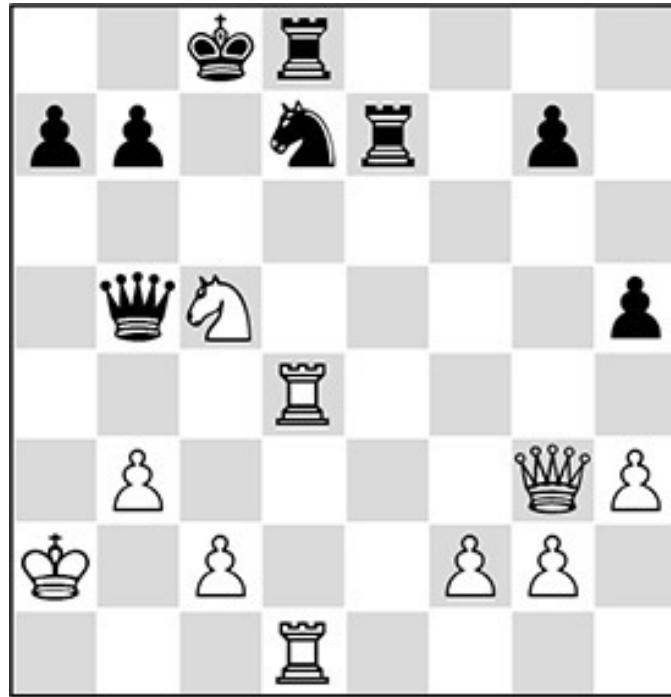
28... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 29. $\mathbb{R}xb4$ $\mathbb{W}xb4$ 30. $\mathbb{N}d6+$ wins the queen.

29. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5??$

I was still calculating 29... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ when this blunder showed up. I had worked out 30. $\mathbb{R}xb4$ $\mathbb{W}xb4$ 31. $\mathbb{N}d6+$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}e8+$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 33. $\mathbb{W}c7+$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 34. $\mathbb{W}xd8$, but after 34... $\mathbb{Q}a5+$ 35. $\mathbb{W}xa5+$ $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ White has a lot more work to do, though with a clear extra pawn I should win. I'm not sure I would have found 33. $\mathbb{R}d6+!$

$\mathbb{Q}a5$ 34. $\mathbb{W}g5+$, avoiding the queen trade and winning easily.

30. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$



Oops. After taking a minute to get his bearings, Dlugy continued.

30... $\mathbb{W}c6$ 31. $\mathbb{W}d3$

I took a few breaths before finding this solid move, preparing my favorite liquidation into the pawn ending.

31... $\mathbb{W}xc5$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}xc5+$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$

Dlugy played on because I was down to about a minute here. I give the rest of the game not because my technique was impressive, but because I made a bevy of safe moves all in less than five seconds. Because of the time delay, I still had forty seconds left at the end. The worst thing you can do is search so hard for a knockout that you get down to ten seconds or so; players tend to panic when they get that close to forfeiting.

34. $c4$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 35. $\mathbb{W}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 36. $\mathbb{W}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $g6$ 38. $f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 39. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 40. $g3$ $h4$ 41. $gxh4$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 43. $\mathbb{W}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $a6$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}d5+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 46. $h5$ $gxh5$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $b6$ 49. $h4$ $a5$ 50. $\mathbb{W}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 52. $\mathbb{W}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 53. $\mathbb{W}e4+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 54. $\mathbb{W}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 55. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 56. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 57. $\mathbb{Q}c7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 58. $\mathbb{W}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 59. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 60. $c5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 61. $c6$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 62. $c7$ $\mathbb{Q}d3+$ 63. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}f1$ 64. $\mathbb{W}b5+$ 1-0

I'd clearly needed some help from my opponent, who underestimated my chances on a few occasions. But to be in a position to get lucky, I had to give myself the best *practical* chances to score.

Keep it tricky

Ultimately we cannot control if our opponents play the best moves, but we can try to give them the best opportunity to fail. In the next game my opponent made a plausible error which allowed me to stay in the game. Momentum shifts are often hard to stop, and a few more plausible errors gave me a decisive advantage.

Game 105

Justin Sarkar 2389

Joel 2661

Benjamin

Albany 2010 (3)

1.d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2.c4 e6 3. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 4. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ d6 5. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ c5 6.dxc5 dxc5 7.g3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 9.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ e5 11. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 0-0 12. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e1$



The opening has not gone that well for me. I had underestimated this move, which leaves me unable to protect both my c and e-pawns.

15...b6

I wasn't happy about giving up the pawn, but I figured I would have some compensation after 16. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}ad8$. I would have been better off scaling down to 15... $\mathbb{Q}ac8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ b6 and I'm worse but still in the game.

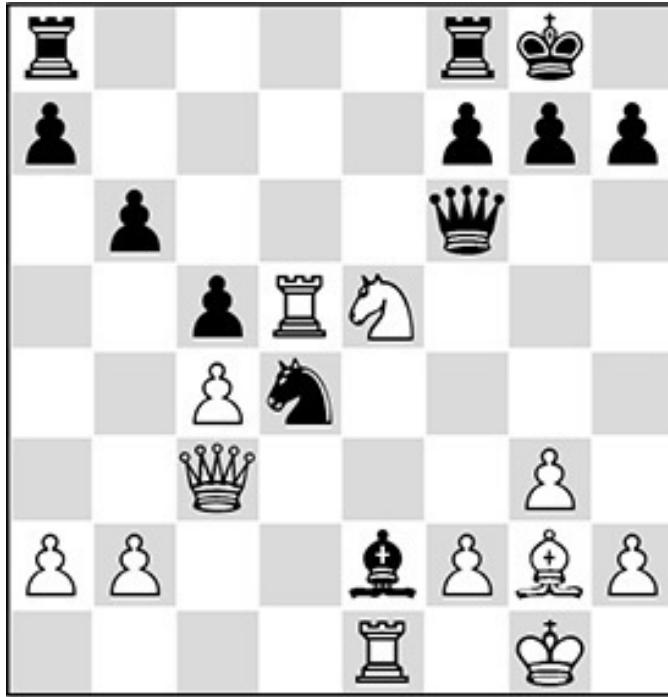


16. $\mathbb{Q}xe5!$

This move surprised me, as I had naively assumed that my lower-rated opponent would make the ‘safe’ capture with the rook. But Sarkar is a very concrete thinker, and he is quite right to play what he believes to be objectively stronger. The safe move is only to be preferred if both moves offer a winning advantage. Now I had to dig deep, as I felt the possibility of a total collapse. I’m not sure how much I saw, but 16... $\mathbb{Q}xe2+$ 17. $\mathbb{R}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 18. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d7$ $\mathbb{W}g6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ $\mathbb{R}xf8$ 21. $h3!$ $h6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}h2!$ $f5$ 23. $\mathbb{R}d7$ offers White a very big, nearly decisive advantage. True, there are a couple of nice moves in there ($21.h3$ and $22.\mathbb{Q}h2$) but Black’s moves are pretty well forced. I needed something a little trickier than that.

16... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ offers an even simpler route: 17. $\mathbb{Q}d7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 18. $\mathbb{R}xd7$ $\mathbb{W}e6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ and White wins a pawn cleanly.

16... $\mathbb{Q}xe2!?$



White has a few plausible moves here, and Sarkar's choice on the surface looks quite sensible.

17.♕e3?

In actuality it wasn't necessary to cover the f3-square:

- A) 17.♔d2! ♔f3+ 18.♕xf3 ♕xf3 19.♘d7 ♔c6 20.♖d3 (even 20.♘xf8 ♔xd5 21.cxd5 ♔d6 22.♘e6 is a clear pawn advantage) 20...♖fe8 (20...♔h1 21.f3) 21.♘e5, winning an exchange free and clear;
 - B) 17.♘d7 ♔f3+ 18.♕xf3! ♕xf3 19.♔xf3 ♔xf3 20.♖d3 ♖fd8 21.♘xc5 is a direct way to win a pawn, though it is not a knockout blow;
 - C) White has one other completely convincing option in 17.f4, leaving Black without a viable response. However, because it is so quiet in a position where more direct moves are available, I find it an unlikely human choice.
- After Sarkar's move there is just one hope, but one is enough.



CHALLENGE 72

What must Black play to stay in the game?

17... ♜xc4! 18. ♜xc4 ♜c2 19. ♜d2 ♜xe1 20. ♜xe1 ♜ad8

As material dwindles, the advantage of the two minors vs the rook lessens. The absence of any white pawns in the center to anchor his pieces also helps me.

Even 21. ♜e5 b5 22. ♜a5 ♜d1! 23. ♜xd1 ♜xe5 allows me to trade rooks and provide obstacles to victory. But White's next move lets most of his edge slip as he allows too much trading.

21. ♜e5?! ♜e6 22. ♜d2 ♜xd5 23. ♜xd5 ♜e8 24. f4 ♜xd5 25. ♜xd5 ♜f8



26. ♜f2?!

After this bobble Black has the edge. Necessary was 26. ♜c4 f6 27. ♜f3 ♕d8 28.b3 and White may still hope to squeeze something out.

26... ♕d8

The rook gets loose now and Black's queenside majority becomes serious.

27. ♜xf7 ♕d2+ 28. ♜e3 ♕xb2 29.h4

Saving the pawn is natural but it was more important to slow down Black's pawns with 29. ♜b3.

29...b5 30. ♜d5 c4 31. ♜xc4

Too desperate and depressing. 31. ♜c6 still offered hopes to hold.

31...bxc4 32. ♜xc4 ♕c2 33. ♜d5 ♕c3+ 34. ♜f2 h5

I was able to win the ending without difficulties.

35. ♜g2 ♜e7 36. ♜b3 ♜f6 37. ♜h3 ♕d3 38. ♜c4 ♕d4 39. ♜b5 ♕d2 40.a4 ♕a2 41. ♜e8 ♜f5 42. ♜c6 a5 43. ♜b5 ♜e4 44. ♜c6+ ♜e3 45.g4 ♜xf4 46.gxh5 ♕a3+ 47. ♜g2 ♜g4 48. ♜e8 ♕a2+ 49. ♜f1 ♜xh4 50. ♜g1 ♜g4 51. ♜f1 ♕h2 52. ♜g1 ♕xh5 53. ♜xh5+ ♜xh5 54. ♜f2 ♜g4 55. ♜g2 ♜f4 56. ♜f2 ♜e4 0-1

Speculation

I have told many a kiddie not to play 'hope chess'. The term, coined by my good friend Hall-of-Fame Grandmaster John Fedorowicz, suggests that you should play moves you will be comfortable with if your opponent makes the best reply. But desperate times change the equation and may call for desperate measures. If the 'best' move gives your opponent an easy advantage, an argument can be made for going with a speculative continuation, even if you think there is a likely refutation.

Game 106

Alexandre 2340

Kretchetov

John Burke 2554

Washington 2017 (5)

1. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d5 2. d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 3. c4 e6 4. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ c6 5. e3 $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 7. b3 0-0 8. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ b6 9. 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}b7$
10. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}ad8$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}fe1$ $\mathbb{Q}fe8$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ e5 14. e4 dx c 4 15. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ b5 16. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ exd4

It makes sense to wait here, with 16...a6 looking most useful.

17. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ g6?

17... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ would stay out of the mess that follows.



18. e5!

This is a moment when our sense of danger can easily betray us. Black has so many pieces trained on e5 it's understandable that John thought he had it covered. Why should we detect this problem in advance? Because it is a fork on a potential pin file. 18.e5 is a move that can be potentially damaging so we should be motivated to check it out.

18... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$

John might have assumed he could capture 18... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$, but after 19. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ Black has no entirely satisfactory way to hold things together: 19... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 22. b4 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ cx b 5 24. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ leaves White much better.

19. f4



19...Bg4

There are no moves that entirely solve Black's problems. This is a tough decision even with perfect analysis! The goal is not to get the least negative score, as a computer does, but to present practical problems to the opponent. From the computer standpoint, 19...Rc5 20.Be4 Rxd7 21.Qxc5 Rxc5 22.Rxc5 Rxc5 23.Qxb5 Rxd1 24.Rxd1 cxb5 25.Qxf6 a6 is the indicated line. Black's position may well be tenable but it is a bit depressing facing the bishop pair without much hope for offense.

A compromise line might be 19...Rc7 20.fxe5 Rxе5 21.Bf3 Rxd1 and now 22.Rxd1 Bg4 would offer reasonable compensation, but 22.Qxd1! Rxh2+ 23.Bxh2 Rxе1 24.Qc3 Rxd1 25.Qxf6 leaves White with an advantage in force and an initiative. Of course, it is impossible to truly know *what your opponent sees*.

20.h3

White plays the most obvious move, and it's not bad. But 20.Be4! would have set even more problems. Black can't get his pieces off the fishhook: 20...Bd7 21.Qxc6 Rxс6 22.Qxd6 collapses his position. 20...Rc7 21.h3 gives a more favorable version of the game for White.

Of course John was only dreaming of 20.fxe5? Rxе5 when Black already stands much better.

20...c5 21.Qdxb5 Rh4 22.fxe5 Rxе5 23.Rxe5

White had to find this move. After 23.Rxd8?? Rh2+ 24.Qh1 Rxd8 Black's threats are suddenly decisive.

23... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 24. $\mathbb{W}f2$ $\mathbb{W}g5$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}d6?$!

White needs to make one more safe move, 25. $\mathbb{Q}c1$, to maintain a clear advantage.

25... $\mathbb{Q}f3+$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{W}f4$



27.g3??

This blunder was caused by severe time pressure, but you want your intuition to guide you away from allowing potentially devastating discovered checks.

After 27.gxf3, Black cannot take on f3 and collect the knight on d6, so he has to settle for 27... $\mathbb{R}xd6$ 28. $\mathbb{R}xd6$ $\mathbb{W}xd6$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}g1$, when White may still be a little better.

27... $\mathbb{Q}d4+$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{W}xd6$

Black won shortly.

The game would have followed a completely different path if Black had tried to make the most of a bad situation in a different way. You may often be posed with a choice between simple and bad and complicated but potentially losing.

Go down fighting

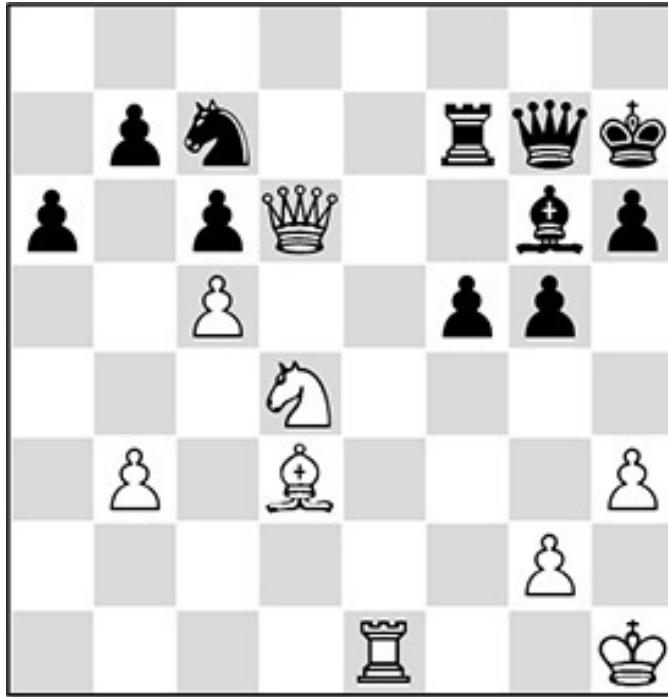
Game 107

Benjamin Medina

NN

New York 2017 (1)

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 5.c4 ♘f6 6.♘c3 ♘b4 7.♔d3 ♘c6 8.♘xc6 dxc6 9.0-0
 e5 10.♗e2 0-0 11.h3 ♘e6 12.f4 exf4 13.♘xf4 ♘e7 14.♗h1 ♘ad8 15.♗g5 ♘d7 16.♗c2 ♘e7
 17.e5 ♘e8 18.♗ad1 ♘c7 19.♗e4 ♘xg5 20.♗xg5 g6 21.♗f2 ♘xd1 22.♗xd1 ♘xe5 23.♗h4
 ♘g7 24.c5 ♘xa2 25.b3 ♘b1 26.♗e1 h6 27.♗f3 f6 28.♗d4 ♘c7 29.♗e2 g5 30.♗c4+ ♔h7
 31.♗g3 ♘g6 32.♗d3 f5 33.♗d6 ♘f7



CHALLENGE 73

What should White play?

White had a number of chances for a big advantage in this game, but now stands two pawns down. At the moment White's four pieces are active and coordinating well. It's now or never to make something happen.

Ben played

34.♗c4?

A natural try to dislodge the rook. The problem is

34...♖d7

is too easy to find, and after

35.♘e6 ♘xd6

Black won the endgame easily.

There was a chance to get back in the game with 34.♘xf5! ♘xf5 35.♘xf5
 ♘xf5



analysis diagram

36. $\mathbb{W}d3!$ (36. $\mathbb{B}e7$ $\mathbb{B}f7$ 37. $\mathbb{W}d3+$ $\mathbb{N}g8$ 38. $\mathbb{W}d8+$ $\mathbb{W}f8$) 36... $\mathbb{W}f7?$ (36... $\mathbb{W}g6$ 37. $\mathbb{B}e7+$ $\mathbb{N}g8=$) 37. $\mathbb{B}e5!$ (37. $g4$ $\mathbb{W}d5+$) 37... $\mathbb{N}g6$ 38. $g4$ and White even wins. Okay, Black doesn't have to lose; 34... $\mathbb{N}d5$ and 35... $\mathbb{W}f6$ are playable in this line, though not winning for Black. It's not necessary to see that to play 34. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$. It is also not even necessary to work out all these tactics with clock times running low. If you just see some of the puzzle – the b1-h7 diagonal and the possibility of the rook coming to e7, you can go for it and hope it fits together.

The only tough decision is which way to take on f5 – 34. $\mathbb{N}xf5$ would be even stronger if Black doesn't find 34... $\mathbb{N}b5!$. But either capture on f5 is clearly the only hope in the position. Like when Spock used the last reserves of fuel in the shuttle to send up a flare, it's the logical thing to do.

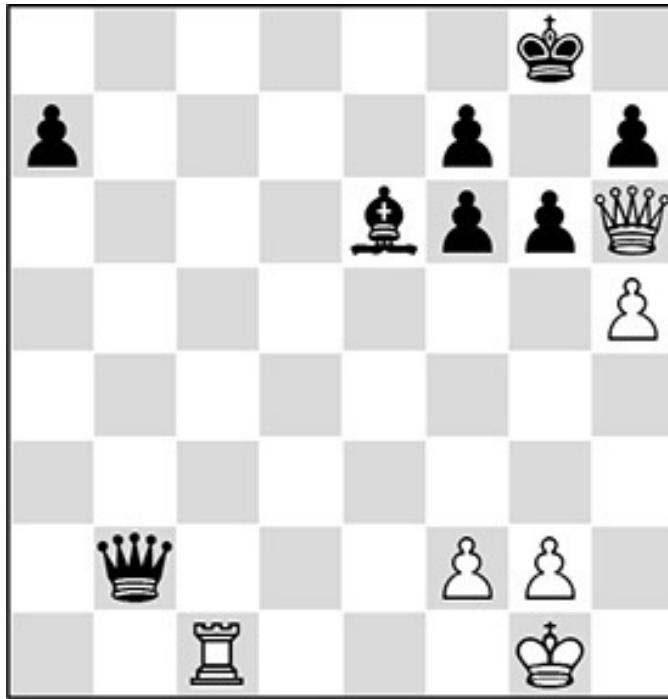
Be opportunistic

Game 108

Jay Bonin	2391
Brandon	2376
Jacobson	

New York 2016 (4)

1.d4 ♜f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.♗g5 ♗g7 4.♗bd2 0-0 5.c3 d5 6.♗xf6 ♗xf6 7.e4 c5 8.dxc5 ♘d7 9.exd5
 ♘xc5 10.♘c4 b5 11.♘e3 ♘a4 12.♗xb5 ♘xb2 13.♗b3 ♗a5 14.♗c1 ♗b8 15.♗xb2 ♗xb5
 16.♗d2 ♗a6 17.0-0 ♗a3 18.c4 ♗b2 19.♗c2 ♗fb8 20.h3 ♗xa2 21.♗xb2 ♗xb2 22.♗d3 ♗b3
 23.♗e4 ♗xe3 24.♗xe3 ♗xc4 25.♗c1 ♗g7 26.♘e5 ♗xd5 27.♘g4 ♗e6 28.♗h6+ ♗g8
 29.♘xf6+ exf6 30.h4 ♗b2 31.h5!?



CHALLENGE 74

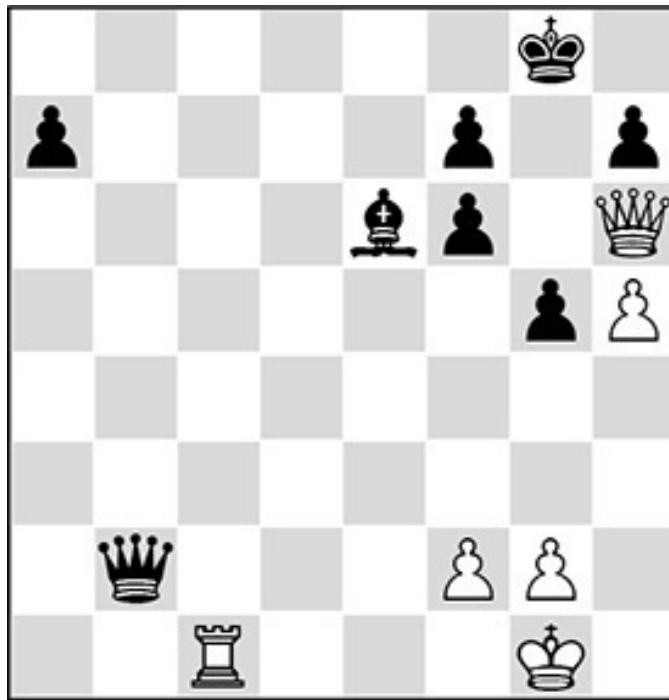
How can Black save the game?

Tempting as it was, White's last move was actually an error. Instead, he should have kept nagging pressure with 31.♗d1 ♗b6 32.h5 ♗a5 33.♗f4 ♗xh5 34.♗d8+ ♗g7 35.♗d6 g5 36.♗h8 ♗g4 37.♗f8+ ♗g6 38.♗g8+ ♗f5 39.♗xh7+ ♗e5 40.♗b1. Black would have to find some tricky moves to get that far.

In the game Brandon missed his chance and lost quickly after

31...a5? 32.♗d1 ♗b6 33.♗f4 ♗b3 34.♗d6 ♗c7 35.♗xf6 ♗c1+ 36.♔h2 ♗c7 37.f4 1-0

Black's salvation lies in 31...g5!,



analysis diagram

but you have to see that on 32. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}d5!!$ holds, e.g. 33. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{W}c1+$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{W}f4+$ with a perpetual. That's hard to spot in time pressure. But Black could be inclined to look deeply at 31...g5 because of its potential high reward. Black has a chance to profit from walling off the white queen. If you don't find a resource like that, you will likely succumb in time pressure one way or another.

It is no fun when your opponent can play for two results, but it's especially unpleasant when he is 'sitting on the position'. He can maneuver as he wishes while you just have to wait around. Eventually he may spot an opportunity and initiate action. If you have a chance to change this narrative, go for it. If your opponent is in time pressure, or it is a fast time control game, all the better.

Game 109

Boris Gelfand 2697

Vladislav 2691

Artemiev

Moscow rapid 2017 (1)

1. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ b6 2. e4 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4. e5 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 6. d4 e6 7. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ c5 8. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 9. 0-0
 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ f6 11. exf6 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 0-0 14. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 16. c3 d5
17. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 20. h3 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3+$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$
24. g3 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}ac8$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}ae1$
 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 32. f4 g6 33. h4 h5 34. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}dd6$



Black is suffering because White can organize a break on the kingside while Black's rooks are confined to the other side.

36.♔f3?

Perhaps angling for f4-f5, but this seems to be the wrong approach. The most straightforward continuation is 36.♕g5, with ideas of ♕e1-e5 and g3-g4. White might even have a direct threat of 37.g4 hxg4 38.h5. If I wasn't sure of my plan, I would be tempted to start with 36.♖1e2; it is generally useful to secure the second rank against checks, and actually becomes a specific problem in the game.

36...d4!

Artemiev seizes his opportunity to fight back. Analysis confirms this move as more or less sound. In any case, giving Gelfand the opportunity to go wrong, and perhaps introducing the 'third result', is worth a shot.

37.cxd4 ♕c2+



38.♔h3

White would like to maintain control with 38.♖1e2 ♜xe2+ 39.♕xe2 ♖xd4, but his advantage would be gone. It's counter-intuitive to pin your king to the back rank (see how well that worked in the endgame section), but there is the point that 38.♘f1 ♖xd4 39.♖xe6! is possible. It almost wins by force, but 39... ♜xe6 40.♖xe6 ♜xe6 41.♗e3+ ♔d5 42.♗e5+ ♔c4 43.♗e6+ ♔d3 44.♗xg6+ ♕e4 45.♗xh5 ♜e3! is less hopeful the more you look at it. White will eventually have to give perpetual check because his king is stuck on the back rank.

White can try 42.♗b3+ ♔dc4 43.♗d3+ ♔c5 44.a3 a5, and now both 45.♗xg6 ♔d4 46.♗xh5 ♜e3 and 45.f5 gxf5 46.♗xf5+ ♔d4 47.♗xh5 ♜e3 look like the same story. But White is no better off in the game.

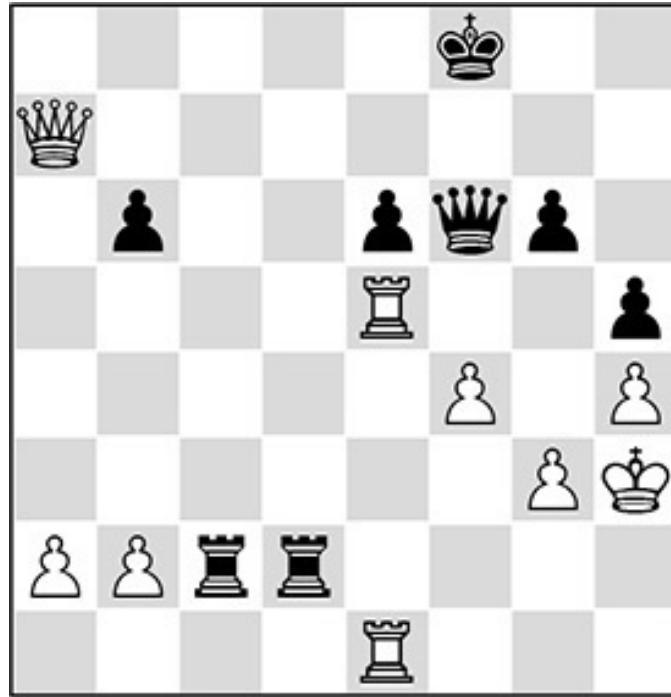
38...♖xd4 39.♗b7+

Now 39.♖xe6? ♗f5+ is a non-starter.

39...♘f8 40.♗a8+

Again White is dissuaded from the safe continuation 40.♖1e2 ♜xe2 41.♖xe2 ♜e7 when he has no winning chances. But the slippery slope is getting greased up.

40...♖d8 41.♗xa7 ♖dd2



42. $\mathbb{Q}a8+$

Under pressure, Gelfand gets caught between two defenses. 42. $\mathbb{R}h1$ defends because 42... $\mathbb{Q}xf4?$ (42... $\mathbb{R}xb2=$) loses to 43. $\mathbb{Q}a3+$, or he can play the text and retreat the queen to h1 (still only good enough to draw).

42... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 43. $\mathbb{R}h1??$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4!$



Nice. If 44.gxf4 $\mathbb{Q}d3+$ mates.

44. $\mathbb{W}b7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 45. $\mathbb{W}e4$ $\mathbb{W}f1+!$

White resigned because of 46. $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ $\mathbb{Q}h2\#$.

The slippery slope: ignoring or underestimating the opponent's counterplay

There are times when you require some carelessness from your opponent to create chances to turn the tables.

Game 110

Lilia Poteat

Kadhir Pillai

New York 2013

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ dxc4 7.d5 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 8. $\mathbb{W}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ exf6 10. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 0-0 12.0-0 a6 13. $\mathbb{Q}fe1$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3+$ 16. gxf3 $\mathbb{W}xd6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 18. a4 $\mathbb{Q}fe8$ 19. f4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xe8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 23. b3 $\mathbb{W}g4+$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ g6 25. $\mathbb{W}d2$ h5 26. f3 $\mathbb{W}h3$ 27. f5 g5 28. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$



CHALLENGE 75

What is White's best move?

The passed d-pawn gives White a definite edge, but she must take a little care with the black queen parked near the exposed king. The right move is 29. $\mathbb{W}d4!$. Black cannot defend the f6-pawn (29... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 30. $\mathbb{W}c5$ wins) and 29... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{W}xf5$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ should not be difficult for White to win either.

If you don't see that, and are in time pressure and/or rely on your endgame technique, 29. $\mathbb{W}g2$ $\mathbb{W}xg2+$ 30. $\mathbb{W}xg2$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 31. a5 preserves winning chances with no risk.

29. $\mathbb{W}a5?!$

This is an obvious move that one would be tempted to play right away. But it is decentralizing (a bit of a red flag) and needs to be calculated properly. Black surprisingly has not one but two possible resources.

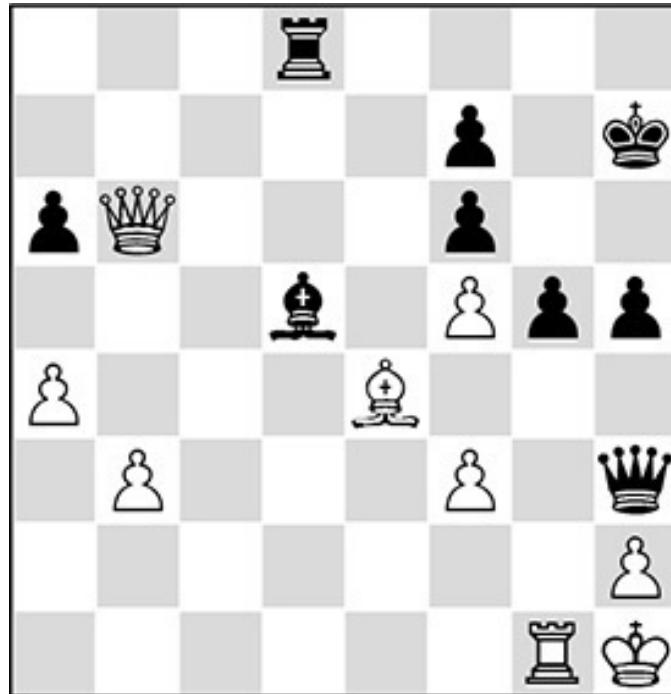
29... b6

Possibly 29... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ is even better, as 30. dxc6 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ sets up a perpetual check.

30. $\mathbb{W}xb6$

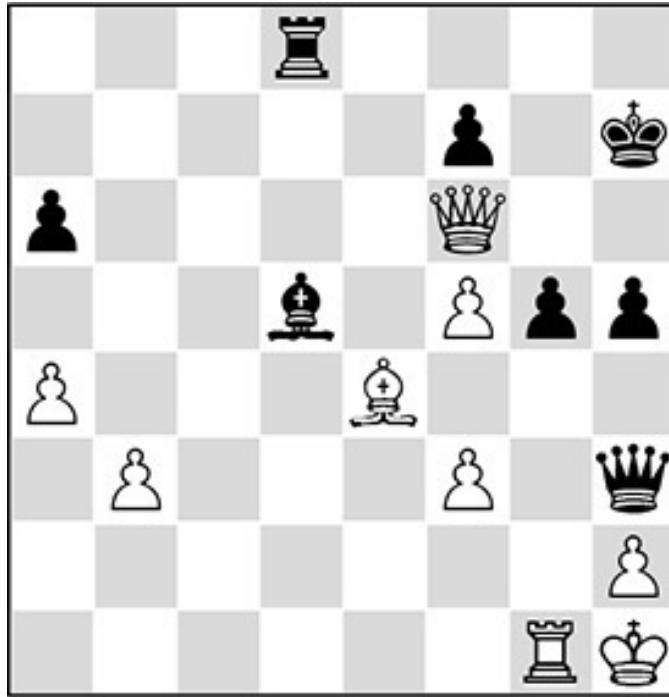
Objectively the best move is 30. $\mathbb{W}d2$, though it's a bit sad to return home with nothing to show for it. I don't recall if Lilia played this with the next move already intended. The bishop capturing the d5-pawn creates contact with the king position that cannot be ignored,

30... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$



31. $\mathbb{W}xf6??$

Half a loaf is better than none. White had to take the draw with 31. $\mathbb{W}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 32. $f \times e4$ $\mathbb{W}f3+$ 33. $\mathbb{W}g2$ $\mathbb{W}f1+$, etc.



Lilia correctly calculated 31... ♜xe4 32. ♜xf7+ ♔h8 33. ♜f6+, forcing mate for White, but she needed to do that extra step of starting at the top of the forcing hierarchy – looking for the opponent's *checks*!

31... ♜xf3+! 32. ♜xf3 ♜xf3+ 33. ♜g2 ♜d1#

Game 111

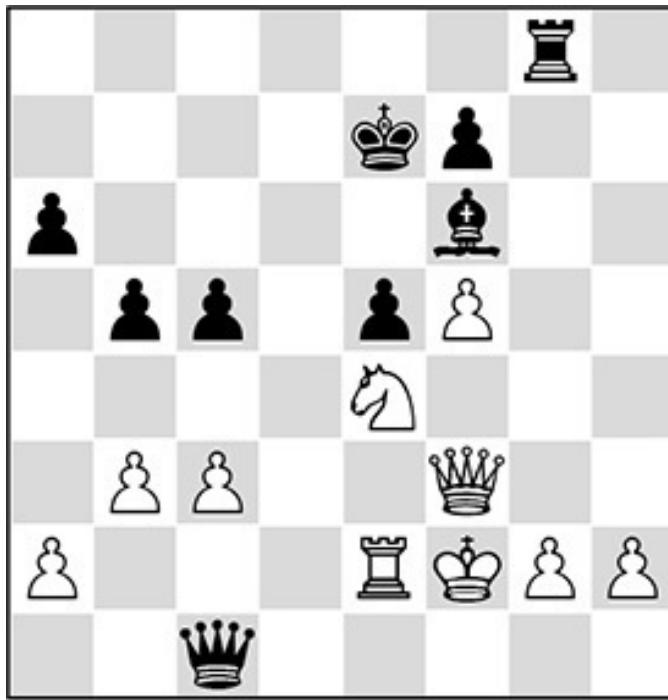
Yury Lapshun 2505

Joel 2575

Benjamin

Philadelphia 1999 (4)

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘c3 ♘c7 6.♗e2 a6 7.0-0 b5 8.♗xc6 dxc6 9.♗e3 ♗b7 10.f4 ♗d8 11.♗e1 ♗e7 12.♗g3 g6 13.♗f2 c5 14.f5 gxf5 15.exf5 e5 16.♗f3 ♗f6 17.♗g5 ♗d4 18.♗xf6 ♗xf6 19.♗e2 ♗e7 20.♗ae1 ♗g8 21.♗xb7 ♗xb7 22.♗e4 ♗d5 23.♗f3 ♗d8 24.♗ff1 ♗g8 25.b3 h5 26.c3 ♗d3 27.♗xh5 ♗d2 28.♗f2 ♗xf2 29.♗xf2 ♗d3 30.♗f3 ♗c2+ 31.♗e2 ♗c1



I'm man enough to admit I've been outplayed and I'm on life support now.

32.♘xc5

There doesn't seem any reason not to take this pawn, and yet White doesn't exactly need it either. He had a few safe and strong alternatives. 32.♗e3 is a safe move, not the most decisive, but eliminating all cheapos by trading queens.

32.g3 is a nice consolidating move, based on 32...♜d8 being hit hard by

33.♘xf6 ♛xf6 34.♗e4!, threatening 35.♗xe5+ and 35.♗h4+.

32.♜d2 is strongest of all. It looks sensible to grab the d-file before Black can, but it actually creates immediate overwhelming threats, like 33.♜d7+ and

33.♗e3.

32...♜d8

Perhaps 32...♗h6 was trickier. It's rated higher by the computer, which shows swindling isn't all about playing the best moves.

33.♘e4

Here 33.♗e3 would preempt anxious moments. If Black doesn't trade, the knight retreat to e4 sets up decisive threats.

33...♜d1 34.♘g3??

With black pieces circling the king, the margin for error is gone. 34.♗e3 would still be good enough for the win, though Black could retain some swindling chances with 34...♞f1+ 35.♔g3 ♗xe3+ 36.♗xe3 ♜f4.



34... $\mathbb{Q}d3!$

Ouch! It's the queen or mate after 35. $\mathbb{Q}xd3 \mathbb{Q}f4+$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}h3 \mathbb{Q}h4\#.$

35. $\mathbb{Q}f2 \mathbb{Q}xf3+ 36. gxf3 \mathbb{Q}f4 37. \mathbb{Q}g3 \mathbb{Q}f8 38. \mathbb{Q}g2 \mathbb{Q}h4 39. \mathbb{Q}e4 \mathbb{Q}xg3 40. \mathbb{Q}xf4 \mathbb{Q}xf4 41. h4 \mathbb{Q}e7 42. \mathbb{Q}h3 \mathbb{Q}f6 43. \mathbb{Q}g4 \mathbb{Q}d2 44. c4 bxc4 45. bxc4 \mathbb{Q}e7 46. \mathbb{Q}g3 \mathbb{Q}e3 47. \mathbb{Q}g2 \mathbb{Q}f6 48. \mathbb{Q}f1 \mathbb{Q}xf5 49. \mathbb{Q}e2 \mathbb{Q}c5 50. \mathbb{Q}d3 \mathbb{Q}e6 51. f4 exf4 52. \mathbb{Q}e4 \mathbb{Q}d6 0-1$

Endgames

Game 112

Boris Kreiman 2425

Joel Benjamin 2610

Key West ch-USA 1994 (9)

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ a6 6. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ b5 8.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 11. h3 b4 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 0-0 15. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}fc8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}fe1$ $\mathbb{Q}ab8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 18. c3 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}ac1$ a5 21. $\mathbb{Q}ed1$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 23. c4 d6 24. b3 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ h6 26. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}cc8$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ 32. hxg4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ $\mathbb{Q}cd8$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 37. e5 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 39. gxf3 $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}a6$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}d7$



I never had any luck against the junior representatives in the U.S. Championship. There were a lot of draws and few wins, and here I'm hanging on for dear life. Round-robbins often have trap games, where you think you are supposed to beat someone, but they have other ideas. I perhaps felt safer against the tough Boris Kreiman than I should have, but I'm wide awake now!

42... ♜g8

The engine says 42... ♜xe5 43. ♜aa7 ♜g8 44. ♜xf7 ♜g5 is about the same, but that looked more routine than this way.

43. ♜aa7?!

It seems natural to tie a rook to the defense of the f-pawn, but that rook wasn't doing much anyway, while White gets distracted from attacking the a-pawn. White had a straightforward continuation in 43.f4 g5 44. ♜da7 gxf4 45. ♜xa5 ♜xa5 46. ♜d8 47. ♜g2, when White has two solid extra pawns and no problems with his king.

43... ♜f8 44.f4 g5 45. ♜ac7

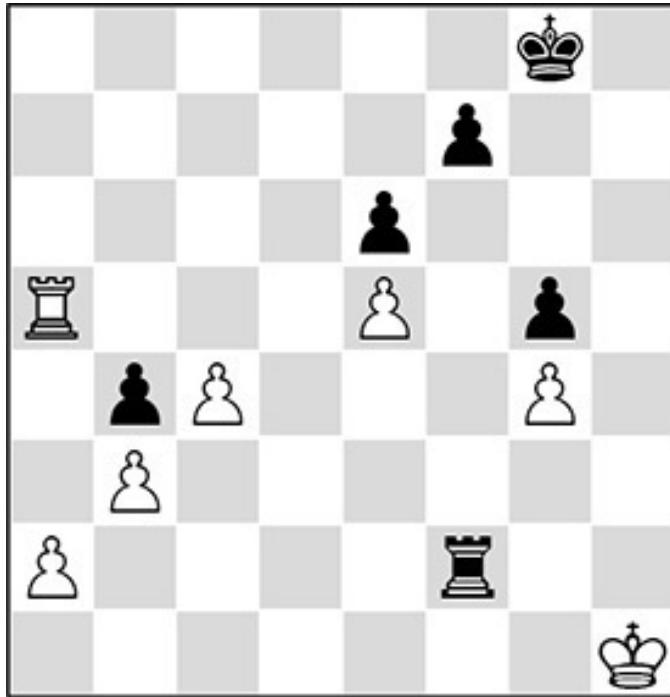
There were two other promising continuations of differing natures. White could utilize his active rooks with 45.f5 ♜xe5 (45...exf5 46.e6) 46. ♜e7, or consolidate with the unlikely-looking 45. ♜d4 gxf4 46. ♜e4. It isn't very natural to deactivate the rook, but the black rook on c5 is kept at bay. Surprisingly the other rook can't easily activate because White will capture on f4 and attack the f7-pawn. Kreiman's move is perhaps more intuitive, but the timing is not ideal.

45... ♜xc7 46. ♜xc7 ♜d8 47. ♜a7 ♜d2 48. ♜xa5

White only gets the a-pawn at the cost of the f2-pawn, leaving the white king

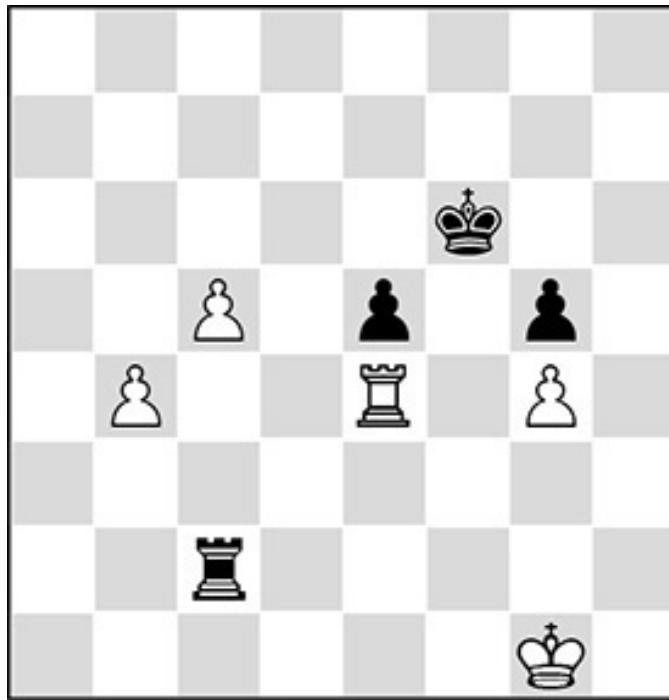
permanently cut off on the back rank (which seems to spell doom everywhere in this book).

48... $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 49. $f \times g5$ $h \times g5$



50. $\mathbb{Q}b5?$

I guess the idea is to hold the e5-pawn, which does indeed slow down Black's counterplay. But losing a tempo means the queenside pawns get shut down, and White's winning chances are crippled. Kreiman may have avoided 50. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ because he did not want to part with the e5-pawn, which would speed up Black's counterplay. However, it seems that Black's pawns don't move all that fast with the white king sitting in front of them, and they could never compete with *three* connected passers. I don't see how Black could actually hold. Play could continue: 50... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ (50... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}e2$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 53. $a4$ $f5$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 55. $a5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 56. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ and White's pawns are unstoppable) 51. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ 53. $c5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ (54. $\mathbb{Q}b7+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 55. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 56. $b4$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ would not be clear) 54... $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 55. $b4$ $f6$ 56. $exf6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 57. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $e5$



analysis diagram

58.b5!!

It turns out White's pawns are not so well restrained. White wins after 58...

$\mathbb{N}xc5$ (58... $\mathbb{N}b2$ 59.b6 $\mathbb{N}e6$ 60. $\mathbb{N}c4$ $\mathbb{N}d7$ 61.c6+ $\mathbb{N}c8$ 62.b7+ $\mathbb{N}c7$ 63. $\mathbb{N}f1+-$) 59. $\mathbb{N}b4$ $\mathbb{N}c7$ 60.b6 $\mathbb{N}b7$ 61. $\mathbb{N}f2$ $\mathbb{N}e6$ 62. $\mathbb{N}e3$ $\mathbb{N}d7$ 63. $\mathbb{N}e4$ $\mathbb{N}c8$ 64. $\mathbb{N}f5$, etc.

50... $\mathbb{N}xa2$ 51. $\mathbb{N}xb4$ $\mathbb{N}c2$

White's pawns have been slowed to a crawl and the counterplay comes easily in time.

52. $\mathbb{N}b5$ $\mathbb{N}g7$ 53.c5 f6 54.b4

Or 54. $\mathbb{N}b7+$ $\mathbb{N}g6$ 55. $\mathbb{N}e7$ $\mathbb{N}xc5$ 56. $\mathbb{N}xe6$ $\mathbb{N}b5$ 57. $\mathbb{N}xf6+$ $\mathbb{N}g7$ and White has no winning chances.

54...fxe5 55. $\mathbb{N}g1$ $\mathbb{N}f6$ 56. $\mathbb{N}f1$ e4 57. $\mathbb{N}e1$ e3 58. $\mathbb{N}d1$ $\mathbb{N}d2+$ 59. $\mathbb{N}e1$ $\mathbb{N}c2$ 60. $\mathbb{N}d1$ $\mathbb{N}d2+$ 61. $\mathbb{N}e1$ $\mathbb{N}c2$ ½-½

Be a barnacle

Leonid Shamkovich and Anatoly Lein were chess pilgrims, coming to America from the Soviet Union in the mid-seventies. They were of similar strength with chess styles seemingly mismatched to their personalities. Shamkovich was small, quiet and reserved (to some degree because he never really learned to speak English) and played wild, aggressive chess. Lein was big, burly, and gregarious, but played technical chess. Victims of Lein's patient endgame prosecutions were, in our vernacular, trapped in the 'Anatoly Lein Chamber of

Horrors'. It was a lot more pleasant to give than to receive, but Lein was such a dogged defender – in the same parlance, a ‘barnacle’, that it was easy to fear something would go wrong.

Perhaps Lein's reputation caused me to overthink matters near the end of the time control in the following game. Though it was long ago and my memory is imperfect, I'm sure that time pressure had a lot to do with it as well. Time shortage can lead players to decisions they might not ordinarily make upon more reflection, and that gives the swindler a chance to make a comeback.

Game 113

Joel 2480

Benjamin

Anatoly Lein 2465

Greenville ch-USA 1983 (5)

1.e4 e5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ a6 4. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ d6 5.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 6.c3 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 8.d4 0-0 9.h3 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 10.d5 $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ a5 12.c4 $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ c6 14. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ cxd5 15.cxd5 b5 16.a4 b4 17. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}dc5$ 23.b3 h6 24. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 27.axb5 $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}a1$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}a7$ f5 31.exf5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 32.f6 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ e4 34. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}dc5$



The pre-diagram moves are sometimes mostly historical record, but here they show two things. One, I was executing a nice positional squeeze, and two, Lein has already been jumping through hoops just to stay alive.

In time pressure, players can throw caution to the wind because they don't have time to perceive the dangerous side of their moves. In winning positions, the greater human tendency may be to play it too safe. At nineteen, I was already well-educated about reducing or eliminating counterplay. Here I certainly overestimated my opponent's potential to do any real damage.

36. $\mathbb{B}xc5?$

Present-day me is cringing at giving away the bishop pair so cheaply. I suppose I had the thought that I was clearing the way for my b-pawn, but this trade is likely to be a step backward.

Rather than trying to force his pieces off the board, I could soberly defend against his 'threats' with 36.g3!. This move improves my *luft* and thus eliminates simplifying tricks. I can meet 36...e3 with 37.f4, while 36... $\mathbb{C}c3$ 37. $\mathbb{C}xe4$ gives me a much better version of the game. Even 36. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{B}xe4$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{W}a1+$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{W}e5+$ 39. $\mathbb{W}xe5$ dxe5 40. $\mathbb{B}b8$ is a lot easier than what I did. With two bishops and two passed pawns, I should know Black will not get his counterplay off the ground.

36... $\mathbb{B}xc5$



37. $\mathbb{B}xe4?$ $\mathbb{B}xe4$ 38. $\mathbb{W}xe4$ $\mathbb{W}a1+$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{W}e5+$

Perhaps I thought I would queen my b-pawn or mate him and I just missed this maneuver. If so, why did I create bishops of opposite color and *not* look out for queen trades?

40. $\mathbb{W}xe5$ dxe5 41. d6 $\mathbb{B}d8$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}g3$

I can't explain why I didn't play 42. $\mathbb{Q}e6+$ here. Perhaps I just couldn't see what he was up to. After 42... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 45. $d7$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$, Black still has something of a blockade though I don't see how he can hope to hold.

42... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $a4$ 44. $bxa4$ $b3$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $b2$



46. $\mathbb{Q}b1?$

Strange not to at least displace the black king with 46. $d7$. I think White should win after 46... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 47. $g4!$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $e4$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 50. $f4$ and marching the king to the kingside.

46... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$



49. ♜g6

This appears odd, but I need to decoy the bishop to keep my queenside pawns.

49. ♜xe5 ♜b4 50. ♜f5 g5 51. ♜g6 ♜xa4 52. ♜d3, and now 52...b1♛ 53. ♜xb1 ♜xb5 seems to lose in problem-like fashion: 54. ♜xh6 ♜c5 55. ♜g6 ♜d6 56. ♜f5 ♜d7 57. g4 ♜e8 58. ♜a2 ♜f8 59. ♜g6 ♜e7 60. ♜c4 ♜d8 61. f3 ♜e7 62. ♜d5 ♜d8 63. h4 gxh4 64. f4 and the white pawns are unstoppable. But 52... ♜b4 53. ♜xh6 ♜c3 54. ♜b1 ♜c4 looks sufficient to draw. Keep in mind that White has the wrong bishop and rook pawn combination.

49... ♜f6 50. ♜e4 ♜b6 51. f3 ♜a5 52. g3 ♜b6 53. h4 ♜a5 54. ♜c2 ♜b6 55. ♜f7 ♜a5 56. ♜e6 ♜b6 57. ♜d5

This is a step in the wrong direction. White had a subtle winning zugzwang in 57. ♜d6!. ♜a5 58. ♜d7! ♜b6 (if 58...e4 59. fxe4 ♜e5 60. g4 ultimately wins) 59. ♜e4!. Now 59... ♜a5 60. ♜c7 is completely decisive, so Black can try 59... g5 60. h5 g4 61. fxg4, when White will bring the king to the queenside and break the blockade, or 59... h5 60. ♜e6 and White marches the king to the h5-pawn.

57... ♜a5 58. h5 ♜d8 59. g4



Now Lein works out a brilliant fortress.

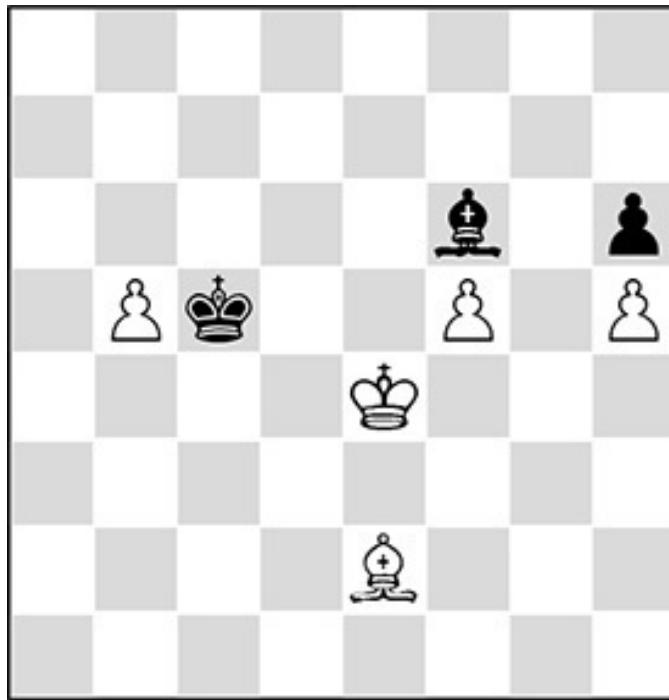
59...b1!
60. xb1 xa4
61. d3 a5
62. xe5 b6

Despite majorities on both sides, White cannot break through.

63. f5 c7
64. f4

64. g6 e5
65. g5 f4!

is the same.
64...c5
65. e4 d8
66. f1 e7
67. f5 d6
68. g5 c7
69. e2 d6
70. e4 e7
71. gxh6 gxh6
72. f5 f6



73.b6

There is no chance to win without the b-pawn, but no other way to break my king through the roadblock, e.g. 73. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 74. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 75. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 76. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 77. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 78. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 79. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 80. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ and the mirror image is just as effective.

73.b6 $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 74. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 75. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 76.f6 $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 77. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}b2$ 78. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 79.f7 $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 80. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}a3$ 81. $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{Q}b2+ \frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$

I should never have been in that bishop endgame in the first place, and still could have won in a few places, but Lein defended incredibly tenaciously and eventually found one resource too many for me to overcome.

An offer you can refuse

Sometimes when there seems to be no escape available on the chessboard, the devious draw offer can be a lifesaver. This will really only work if your opponent is much lower rated. It may be surprising how often this works, as so many opponents may lack confidence or may only be thinking of easy rating points. The following example from my own history became permanently lodged in my consciousness.

Game 114

Joel Benjamin
Michael Rohde

New York 1976

1.e4 g6 2.♘c3 ♜g7 3.f4 c6 4.♘f3 d5 5.e5 h5 6.d4 ♘h6 7.♗d3 ♜g4 8.h3 ♜xf3 9.♕xf3 ♘f5
 10.♗e3 h4 11.♗f2 e6 12.0-0 ♘d7 13.♘b1 ♜f8 14.♘d2 ♜c7 15.♗e2 c5 16.c3 ♜e7 17.♘f3 0-0-0 18.♗xf5 gxf5 19.♗e1 ♜b6 20.b3 ♜dg8 21.♗h2 cxd4 22.cxd4 ♜b8 23.♗d1 ♜a6 24.a4
 ♜c8 25.♗xh4 ♜xh4 26.♗xh4 ♜c6 27.♗f3 ♜c2



Rohde had the misfortune of playing an opening I knew, and I had no trouble reaching this crushing position. So he resorted to the favorite weapon of higher-rated players in a jam. He offered a draw (no doubt trying to make it sound as legitimate as possible). Now I was twelve and had only been playing tournaments seriously for three years. At about USCF 2100, I was expected to lose to everybody. But I could have won this position (I probably would have played the pretty powerful 28.♗b4), and I kind of knew it. But the draw offer can have strange effects on your mind. I began to rationalize; thoughts like ‘I know an extra pawn is not always enough to win’ ran through my brain. And so I extended my hand to my sheepish opponent.

Looking back, I feel pretty foolish to have taken a draw in a winning position. Yet I see this pattern played out over and over again. My students show me games where they have one foot in the grave but manage to hoodwink their opponents. This magic seems especially powerful in the U.S., where players obsess about ratings and gaining rating points. But you get a lot more points for a win than for a draw! When your significantly higher rated opponent offers you a draw, he is probably trying to pull a fast one. Stay objective about the position.

If you think you should beat a lower-rated player, you should beat a higher-rated one. Or at least try.

By the way, when playing higher-rated players, there is almost never a good moment to offer a draw. If you are better you should try to win. If you are worse, it's just an insult. [I have been offered draws by much lower rated players when I had completely dominant positions. I think excitement caused by finding a good move under the circumstances makes people forget the big picture.] If it is equal you will get a flat refusal. If you have a trivially drawn position with a cosmetic advantage, e.g. bishop and pawn vs bishop, that is the one situation that seems appropriate.

While it is nice to save half-points here and there, I fear that players who trick lower-rated players often risk developing a certain complacency that they can always bail out of a tough situation. Getting properly punished now and then reminds you of the consequences of taking your opponent lightly, or playing with insufficient focus or intensity.

You also have to balance whether it is time to invoke the draw trick or tough it out a bit longer.

Game 115

Joel 2576

Benjamin

David Harris 2140

Albany 2007 (1)

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ a6 6.a4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ e5 8. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 12.a5 0-0 13.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ g6 17. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ f5 18.exf5 gxf5 19. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}ad8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ d5 22. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ d4 24. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}g4??$ d3!



Ugh! I let down my guard for a moment and now have to lose a piece. I'm not the kind of player to take things for granted. Normally I practice what I preach, taking every player and every game seriously. But this game was played under a new circumstance for me, one that helped me suddenly understand why I had seen so many masters lose to much lower rated players in first rounds, then demonstrate far greater skill in the rest of the tournament. The New York State Championship has two schedules for the first round, Friday night or Saturday morning. If you can make it Friday, you can take it easy the next day – sleep in, sightsee, whatever you like. The problem was I had just started driving (yes, in my forties) and I'd never before had to play a game after driving to the tournament. The three-hour drive had me tuckered out, and I was thinking with something less than my usual clarity.

26. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}c5$



I'm down a piece for two not particularly dangerous pawns. But my position is solid and my king better protected. I wasn't sure but I reckoned I might still be a slight favorite against an opponent more than 400 points lower rated. It's not just the rating differential that matters, but the level of competence of the opponent. If we were both rated 200 points lower, I would have expected my opponent to go wrong for sure.

I didn't offer a draw, and I think I would not have accepted one (though I admit part of that was stubbornness because I had been winning earlier). The next few moves would be crucial.

28... ♜f7

This move is solid enough but it allows me to hang around. 28... ♜g6 was more to the point and harder to meet. I'm objectively lost, e.g. 29.♘xb7?! ♔e7 30.g3 ♕c8 works out nicely for Black.

29.c3 ♜g7 30.♕d5 ♔e7

Black is getting into tactics, but he will need to follow up correctly.

31.♘xb7 e4

Nope. 31... ♜g6, boxing in my knight, would have been strong. And pretty good on the next move.

32.g3 ♕c8? 33.♘d6



Now the position is objectively equal. Once the losing side develops that much momentum it is pretty tough to stem the tide, much like a sports team that has blown a sizeable lead.

33... ♜xd6 34. ♛xd6 ♖xa5

Objectively, not a bad move, but I think it's more important to coordinate the pieces with a move like 34... ♜g6 than to grab this pawn.



35. $\mathbb{Q}d1$

My best line, according to the computer, is 35. $\mathbb{W}f6 \mathbb{A}c6$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}e1 \mathbb{W}e8$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{W}xe4$ 38. $\mathbb{W}f8+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 39. $\mathbb{W}f6+$ with a draw. But I don't want that! Even if I fall into a slightly worse position I'm confident I could still manage a half point.

35... $\mathbb{A}c6$ 36. $\mathbb{W}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7?$

And there's my chance! While quite plausible, this move is actually much worse than not defending the pawn at all. Black is still not worse after 36... $\mathbb{W}e8$.



37. $\mathbb{Q}d6$

Suddenly the knight is in trouble. Black had to play 37... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ (but who would? – the rook just came from there!), but after 38. $\mathbb{W}xe4$ I think there's no question I would win the game.

37... $\mathbb{Q}g8?$ 38. $\mathbb{W}g5+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 39. $\mathbb{W}d5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 40. $\mathbb{W}xc6$ $\mathbb{W}g4$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{W}f5$ 42. $\mathbb{W}xf7+$ $\mathbb{W}xf7$ 43. $\mathbb{W}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ 1-0

One or two different moves and my goose might have been cooked. But when my opponent did not put me away immediately, it became more and more likely that I would come back all the way.

Higher-rated players can pull off a kind of silent draw offer swindle when their opponents play carefully and don't try to exploit their advantages.

Game 116

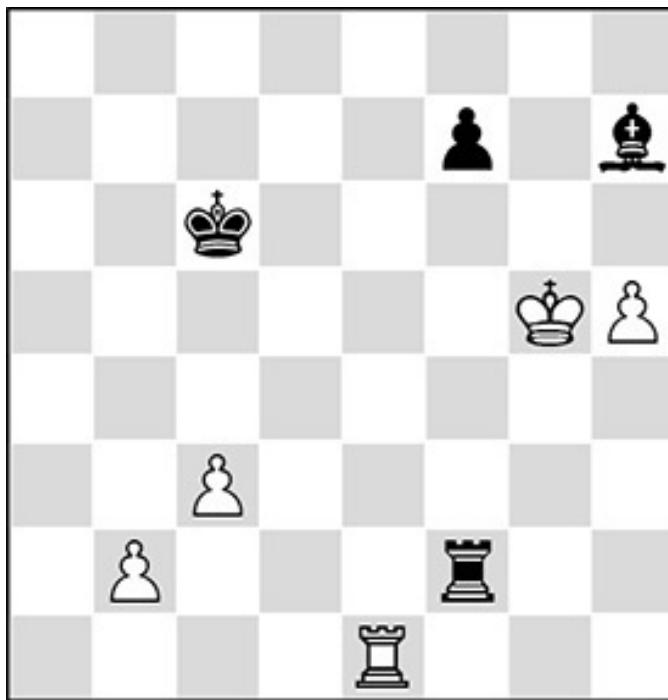
Sergey Erenburg 2647

Brandon 2371

Jacobson

Philadelphia 2016 (3)

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ a6 7. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ b5 8. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ dxc6 9.a4
 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 10.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 12. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 13.f4 e5 14.axb5 axb5 15.fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d5$
cxd5 17. $\mathbb{Q}xb5+$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 18.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{W}e5$ 20. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}ae1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{W}d6$
23. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 25. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 26. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{W}c5+$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 28. $\mathbb{W}g3+$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$
29. $\mathbb{W}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 30. $\mathbb{W}xh7$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 31.c3 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 32. $\mathbb{W}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 33. $\mathbb{W}h6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 34. $\mathbb{W}e3$ $\mathbb{W}xe3$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$
 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}xe5?$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2+$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}h3+!$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6+$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ 40.h4 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 41.h5 $\mathbb{Q}c6$
42. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}f2$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}g5$

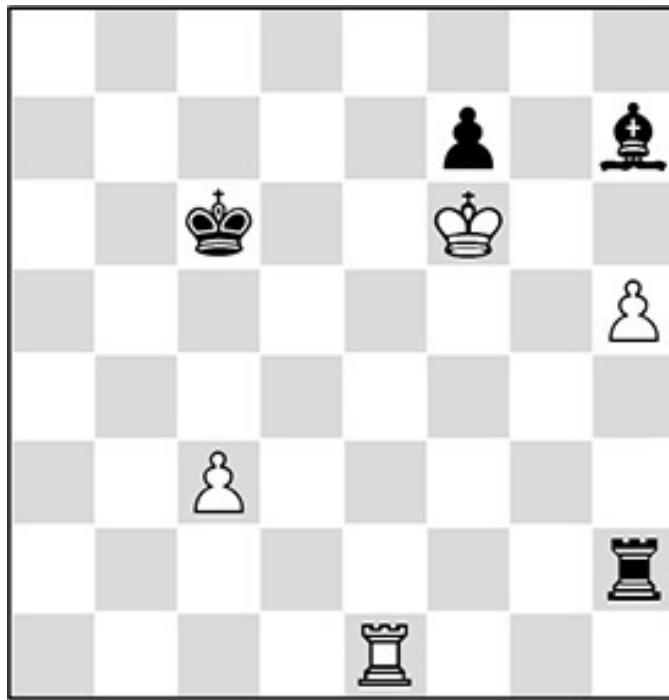


Brandon has played his grandmaster opponent tough and can justifiably think about winning the endgame.

44... $\mathbb{Q}xb2?$!

This eliminates any danger from the queenside pawns, but it's unlikely White will have time to do much with them anyway. I'm not sure about the best way to go here, but Black had good options in 44...f6+ 45. $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ and 44... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}e8$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 46.b4 $\mathbb{Q}e6$. In both cases, Black has potential to win with the passed f-pawn.

45. $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{Q}h2$



Brandon offered a draw, which Erenburg of course accepted. When I questioned the draw offer, Brandon pointed out that his opponent can even draw with 46. ♔xf7 ♕xh5. ♕ + ♙ vs ♕ is not an automatic draw (more on that later), and even if Erenburg defended it, Brandon could have got some potentially valuable experience from it. But I think that Erenburg would have played 46. ♕e5 (remember that he doesn't want to ruin his tournament to having to defend ♕ + ♙ vs ♕ for an hour or two). Now after 46... ♔d6 47. ♕g5, Komodo pegs 47... ♔e4 48. ♔xf7 ♕f2+ 49. ♔g7 ♔e6 as most advantageous; if you are not keen about playing on pawnless, you can try 47... ♕f2+ 48. ♔g7 ♔e4 49. h6 ♔e6, and now 50. h7? ♕xh7 51. ♕xh7 f5 is suddenly winning for Black. White can play better with 50. ♕g1 ♕h2 51. c4 and Black can't make progress. Still, there are some not trivial decisions to make there, and some chances for White to go wrong with zero losing chances for Black.

I do accept that in a tournament schedule there may be times when playing out a position may not fit the big picture. Your winning chances may not be worth the toll extra playing will have on your body and mind. Each player can gauge how much they are able to handle. One game a day certainly helps, and allowed me to pull off a miracle in the following game.

Game 117

Joel 2553
Benjamin

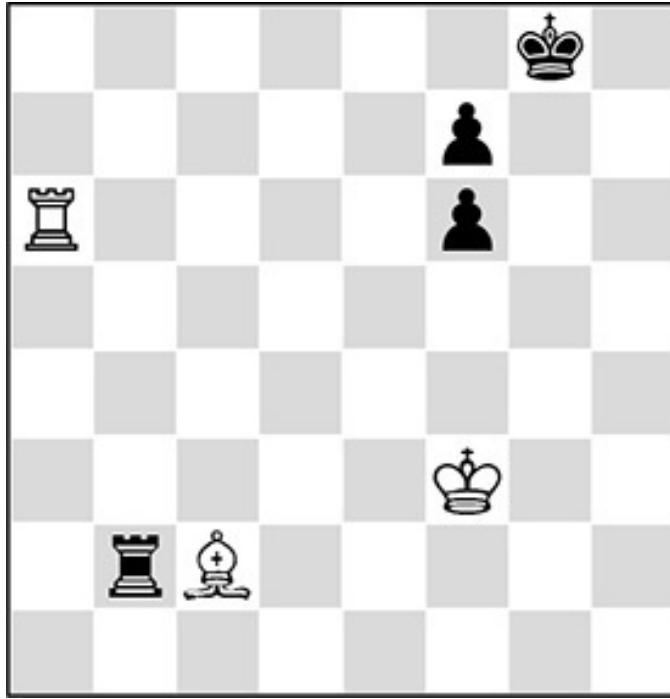
Irina Krush 2487

Toronto 2011 (7)

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.♗c3 ♘c6 4.d4 cxd4 5.♗xd4 ♗c7 6.g3 a6 7.♗g2 d6 8.0-0 ♕d7 9.♗b3 ♘f6 10.f4 h5



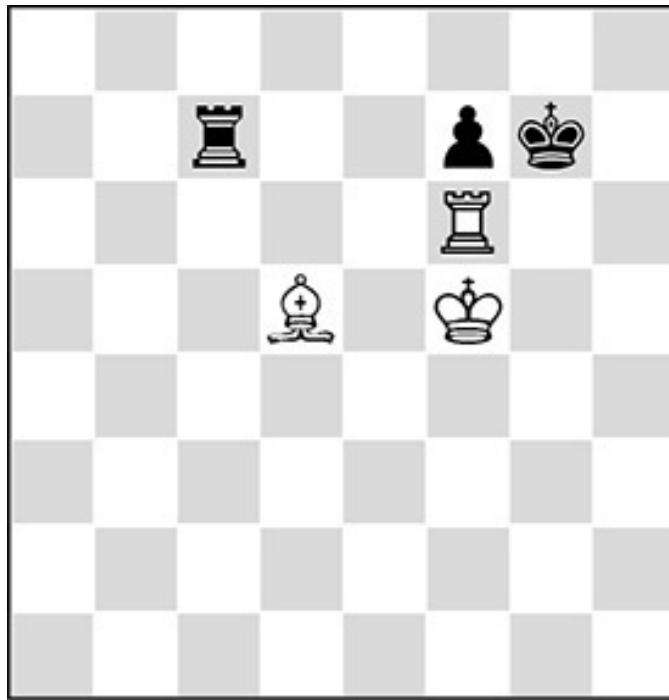
11.♗e2 b5 12.a3 ♔e7 13.h3 ♜c8 14.♔e3 b4 15.axb4 ♗xb4 16.♗f2 0-0 17.♗d4 e5 18.♗f5 ♔xf5 19.exf5 d5 20.♗b6 ♜d6 21.fxe5 ♗xe5 22.♗fe1 ♜d6 23.♗ad1 ♜fe8 24.♗d4 ♘c6 25.♗xf6 ♔xf6 26.♗e4 ♗e5 27.♗xf6+ ♗xf6 28.♗xe8+ ♗xe8 29.♗xd5 ♗e7 30.♗b3 ♗xf5 31.♗d7 ♜f8 32.g4 hxg4 33.hxg4 ♗h6 34.♗xf6 gxf6 35.♗a7 ♗xg4 36.♗g2 ♜b8 37.♗xa6 ♗e3+ 38.♗f3 ♗xc2 39.♗xc2 ♜xb2



One could very understandably give up the ghost here. Even if White wins both pawns Black will still draw with proper play. Maybe it's because I had thought I was going to win with connected passed pawns, or because I was better rested than usual, but I was feeling very stubborn.

Let me take it one step at a time and see how far I get. It's a lot of work, but it's always worse for the defender.

40. ♕e4 ♔g7 41. ♕d5 ♜d2 42. ♕a2 ♜d7 43. ♔f4 ♜b7 44. ♜c6 ♜a7 45. ♕c4 ♔g6 46. ♕d5 ♜d7
 47. ♕e4+ ♔g7 48. ♜c1 ♜e7 49. ♜d1 ♔f8 50. ♜c1 ♔g7 51. ♜g1+ ♔f8 52. ♕h7 ♜e5 53. ♜g8+
 ♔e7 54. ♜a8 ♜b5 55. ♕e4 ♜e5 56. ♜b8 ♜a5 57. ♜b7+ ♔f8 58. ♜d3 ♜e5 59. ♕c4 ♜e7
 60. ♜b2 ♜c7 61. ♕a2 ♔g7 62. ♜g2+ ♔f8 63. ♔f5 ♜c6 64. ♜b2 ♜a6 65. ♕c4 ♜c6 66. ♕d5 ♜d6
 67. ♜b5 ♔g7 68. ♕b3 ♜d7 69. ♜b6 ♜c7 70. ♜d6 ♜b7 71. ♕d5 ♜c7 72. ♜xf6

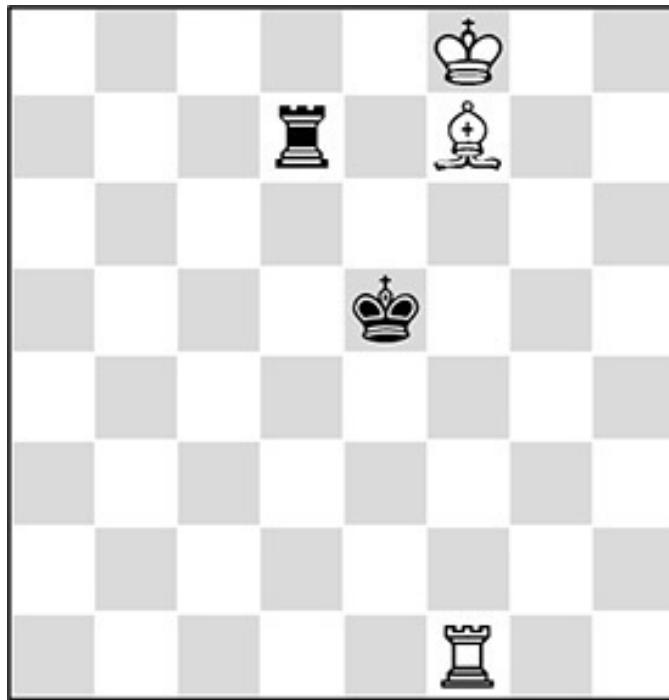


Step one achieved. The fact that it took me 33 moves to get here is no solace for my opponent. But it became increasingly clear to me that I cannot win the f7-pawn.

72... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 73. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 74. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 75. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 76. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 77. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 78. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$
 79. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}f2$ 80. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}a2$ 81. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 82. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 83. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 84. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 85. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}a6+$
 86. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{Q}a2$ 87. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 88. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 89. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 90. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 91. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 92. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$
 93. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 94. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 95. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}a1$ 96. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}b1$ 97. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 98. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 99. $\mathbb{Q}g4+$
 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 100. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}a6+?$

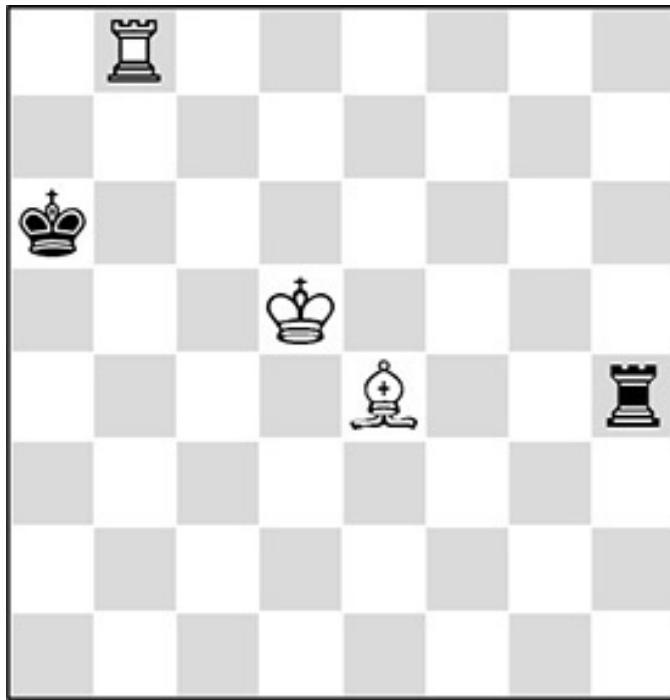
I think it's this move that gives me a real chance. 100... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ seems to maintain the fortress.

101. $\mathbb{Q}d7$ $\mathbb{Q}a7+$ 102. $\mathbb{Q}e8$ $\mathbb{Q}e7+$ 103. $\mathbb{Q}f8$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 104. $\mathbb{Q}f1+$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 105. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$



By now I felt like a tennis player who'd forced a tiebreaker after being down five sets to love. Suffering through 66 moves and still having to defend this position is so depressing! I thought that Irina could only hold under the circumstances (and remember we are practically playing on the increment by now) if she had perfect knowledge of this endgame.

105... ♜a7 106. ♛g7 ♜a6 107. ♜g6 ♜a7+ 108. ♛h6 ♜a2 109. ♜f5 ♜g2 110. ♛h5 ♜g8
111. ♜g6 ♜h8+ 112. ♜g5 ♜h2 113. ♜e1+ ♛d6 114. ♜f6 ♜h6 115. ♜d1+ ♜c5 116. ♜g5 ♜h2
117. ♜f4 ♜f2+ 118. ♜e5 ♜h2 119. ♜c1+ ♜b5 120. ♜e4 ♜h5+ 121. ♜d4 ♜h4 122. ♜b1+ ♜a5
123. ♜b8 ♜a6 124. ♜d5



124... ♜f4?

One misstep is all it takes. 124... ♜h3 and 124... ♛a7 stay in the drawing zone.

125. ♔c6 ♛a5 126. ♔c5 ♛a4 127. ♕d5 ♛a3 128. ♜b3+ ♛a4 129. ♜g3

I don't claim to be an expert myself on this ending. 129. ♜e3 ♛a5 130. ♜e4! is the way to finish. Now after 129... ♛a5 I would have just enough moves left to win if I played correctly.

129... ♜f5? 130. ♜g2 1-0

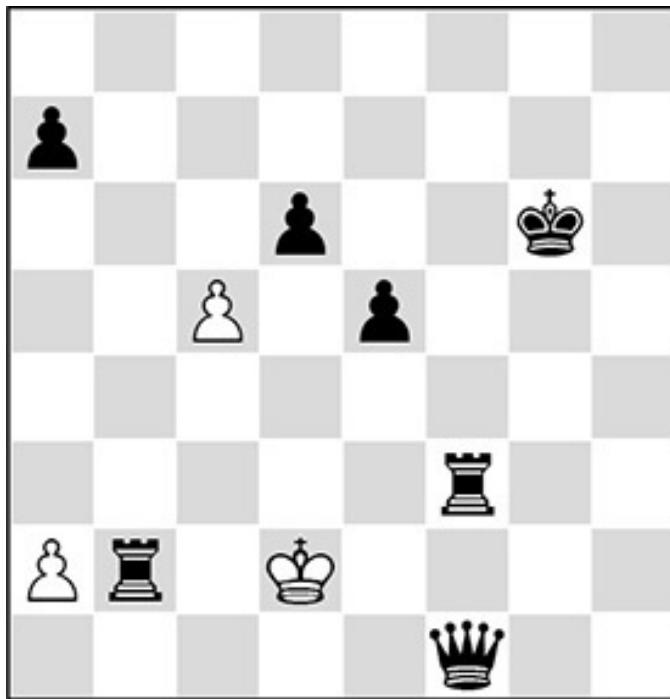
There were so many obstacles to overcome that it seemed impossible to win that game. But you never know. Let your opponent prove they can hold, even if they are a grandmaster.

Never give up, never surrender

It has been often said that you cannot win by resigning. You can't draw either. If you are in an early stage of development, say 1200 and below, you can safely play *every* game to checkmate. You might even learn something by watching how your opponents finish you off. And your opponents should never be upset that you kept on going as long as you could.

But there comes a level when players are expected to resign in hopeless situations. If you are, say an A-player or expert, and you are still playing on with a bare king against masters (and the clock is not a factor), you could be asking for trouble. Years ago a 2000-level player forced me to execute a ladder mate with three (extra) major pieces on a day when I was in a hurry to leave to get to a

family gathering. I was not in the mood to pose for a picture after the game!



In a recent tournament I had two young masters play on several moves down an exchange and a few pawns. Players who started at a very young age got used to playing everything out and haven't learned about chess etiquette. Many masters and grandmasters have worked with children and understand this phenomenon. So I get it, but I still don't like it. It's more beneficial to resign on time and ask me where you went wrong. You don't want to annoy players who are in a position to help you, if they are favorably disposed.

That being said, concerns of etiquette *do not* outweigh your efforts to win or draw a game. It's better to resign a little too late than too early. If you think you have a chance, keep going. When my opponents resign after losing an exchange or a pawn or two, I think they have done so too early. At the very least they could have learned from my technique (and hopefully I would give them a good lesson). Here's a good rule of thumb when playing higher-rated players: if you think you would win 100% of the time if you switched positions, it is probably time to resign.

Grandmasters are not always the best role models in this matter. They lose infrequently and don't like it one bit. Sometimes they fear looking foolish if they keep on playing, and occasionally do resign in positions they could still draw, or at least have a reasonable chance of doing so. Let's have a look at one of the most famous bad resignations.

Game 118

Deep Blue

Garry 2794

Kasparov

New York m 1997 (2)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♔e7 6.♕e1 b5 7.♗b3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 h6
10.d4 ♜e8 11.♗bd2 ♜f8 12.♗f1 ♔d7 13.♗g3 ♘a5 14.♗c2 c5 15.b3 ♘c6 16.d5 ♘e7 17.♗e3
♗g6 18.♗d2



18...♗h7 19.a4 ♘h4 20.♗xh4 ♜xh4 21.♔e2 ♜d8 22.b4 ♜c7 23.♕ec1 c4 24.♕a3 ♜ec8
25.♕ca1 ♜d8



26.f4

Unsurprisingly, Karpov suggested 26.axb5 axb5 27.♕a7!? *a la* his classic game with Unzicker.

26...♝f6 27.fxe5 dxe5 28.♔f1 ♝e8 29.♔f2 ♞d6 30.♗b6 ♔e8 31.♖3a2 ♕e7 32.♗c5 ♔f8
33.♗f5! ♕xf5 34.exf5 f6 35.♕xd6 ♕xd6



36.axb5

Everyone expected Deep Blue to go pawn grabbing, but it was not impressed by 36. $\mathbb{W}b6$!? $\mathbb{W}e7$! 37. axb5 $\mathbb{Q}ab8$ 38. $\mathbb{W}xa6$ e4 39. $\mathbb{W}a7$ (39. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{W}e5$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{W}h2+$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}g3+$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}f2=$; 39. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{W}e5$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 41. $\mathbb{W}a3$ $\mathbb{W}xf5$) 39... $\mathbb{W}e5$ 40. $\mathbb{W}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$. In the last two cases Black has good compensation for the material.

36...axb5 37. $\mathbb{Q}e4$!

37. $\mathbb{W}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$! 39. $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ $\mathbb{W}xa8$ 40. $\mathbb{W}xd6$ $\mathbb{W}a1+$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{W}c1=$ (Deep Blue).

37... $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ 38. $\mathbb{W}xa2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 39. $\mathbb{W}a7$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 40. $\mathbb{W}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}a8+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 42. $\mathbb{W}a6$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 43. $\mathbb{W}c6$ $\mathbb{W}b6+$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}f1?$!

Humans would sense that it is more important to keep the king completely safe than to bring it closer for a possible queen trade. 44. $\mathbb{Q}h1!$ would have avoided Black's missed resource, e.g. 44... $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}a6$ $\mathbb{W}e3$ 46. $\mathbb{W}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}a1$! $\mathbb{W}xe4$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}a7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 49. $\mathbb{W}d7+-$.

44... $\mathbb{Q}b8$



45. $\mathbb{Q}a6$?

Deep Blue has played a wonderful game, filled with elements inspired by my laboratory testing (doubling on the unopened a-file, 26.f4). When the time came for tactics I was happy the machine was doing the work. DB has done a fine job, particularly in avoiding grabbing pawns with 36. $\mathbb{W}b6$ or 37. $\mathbb{W}b6$ (much to Kasparov's eternal consternation). Computers do not avoid unnecessary complications because they 'trust' all their present and future calculations

equally, and simply strive for the highest score. Nowadays they calculate nearly perfectly so we can rarely take advantage of their brazenness. But it turns out 44.♔f1 was sloppy, and this apparent death blow is not objectively winning. [Simply 45.♕xb6 ♜xb6 46.♔e2 was good enough to win.] It's true that 45.♖a6 ♕xc6 46.dxc6 is not worth playing out. If Black can stop the c-pawn, he will still drop b5 and c4.

So the only move to consider is the desperate 45...♔e3.



analysis diagram

It's a move that has to be played, even if you think it doesn't work. When all else fails, it's time for desperation. But instead Kasparov resigned, a blunder that psychologically crippled him for the rest of the match.

Before we get into the analysis, keep in mind that losing was a rare experience for Kasparov that always made him uncomfortable. And this game was played in front of a packed auditorium with live commentary and loads more people following around the world. So he really wanted to get out of there!

Black's salvation is based on a number of quiet moves which are surprisingly effective. For instance, if 46.♔d7+ ♔g8 47.♕xd6 ♜f8! seems to hold. The only way to avoid a perpetual is 48.♔c5 ♕xe4 49.d6, but this seems insufficient for victory.

So that leaves 46.♕xd6 ♜e8! and now:



analysis diagram

A) 47.h4 h5!! was celebrated as a miracle defense. White cannot escape a perpetual, e.g. 48. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{W}c1+$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{W}d2+$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ (50. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{W}f4+$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{W}xf5+=$) 50... $\mathbb{W}f4+$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{W}c1+$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{W}xc3+$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{W}c1!$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{W}b2+$ etc. It is likely a variation like this that tripped up Deep Blue, who was not reliable in extended variations involving perpetual check.

It turns out that 47... $\mathbb{W}xe4$ is good enough as well, after the amazing variation 48. $\mathbb{Q}a7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 49. $\mathbb{W}d7$ $\mathbb{W}f4+$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{W}e3+$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{W}f4+$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7!$ (52... $\mathbb{W}e3+$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}g3+-$) 53. $\mathbb{W}c8+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ h5!!.



analysis diagram

Perpetual check cannot be avoided;

B) 47. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c1+$ (47... $\mathbb{Q}d3+?$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}e2+-$) 48. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}d2+$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ (49. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}c1+$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}f4+=$) 49... $\mathbb{Q}f4+$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ (50. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}e3+=$) 50... $\mathbb{Q}c1+$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3+$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}c1!$, again drawing;

C) 47. $\mathbb{Q}d7+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 49. $d6$ maintains winning chances for White.

It's hard to say for sure what would have happened if Kasparov had tried 45... $\mathbb{Q}e3$. But even if White had a forced win, it had to be tried. Don't resign out of frustration and disappointment with your situation, and don't assume your opponent has calculated everything correctly.

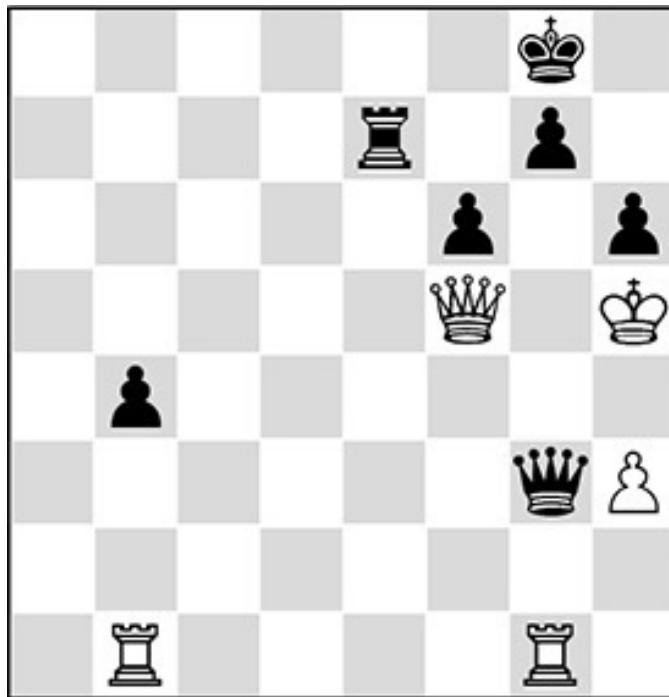
As long as there is any hope, don't just go through the motions with your moves; work to put up the best resistance you can.

We return to a position we saw earlier to illustrate the point.

The position is from Portisch-Benjamin, Szirak Interzonal 1987, just before the end.

Portisch has just played

52. $\mathbb{Q}g1$



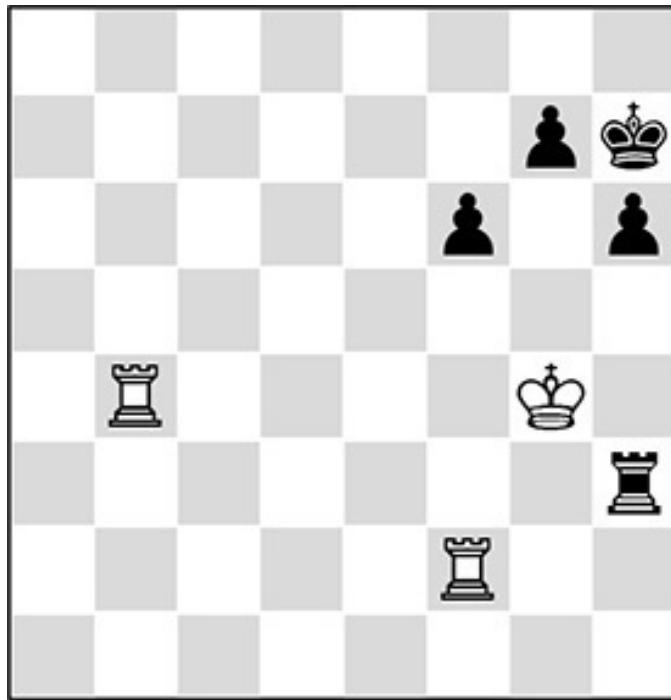
CHALLENGE 76

How can Black continue resistance?

As we saw before, I played into the cutesy finish with
52... \mathbb{Q} c3?

and resigned three moves later.

It was thirty years ago, but I think I even saw the move 52... \mathbb{Q} b8!, with the trap
53. \mathbb{Q} be1?? \mathbb{Q} e8+ 54. \mathbb{Q} g6 \mathbb{Q} xe1 and Black has turned the tables. It seemed that
a rook down I shouldn't have any real chances, especially against the legendary
Lajos Portisch. But resigning gets you nowhere, and playing 52... \mathbb{Q} c3?
essentially did that. It turns out that White still has great difficulty finishing the
job. I squeezed the following line out of Komodo: 52... \mathbb{Q} b8 53. \mathbb{Q} h4 \mathbb{Q} e5
54. \mathbb{Q} d7 \mathbb{Q} e7 55. \mathbb{Q} d3 \mathbb{Q} f4+ 56. \mathbb{Q} g4 \mathbb{Q} f2+ 57. \mathbb{Q} h5 \mathbb{Q} e3 58. \mathbb{Q} f1 \mathbb{Q} xd3
59. \mathbb{Q} xf2 \mathbb{Q} h7 60. \mathbb{Q} xb4 \mathbb{Q} xh3+ 61. \mathbb{Q} g4.



analysis diagram

The position is evaluated as winning for White, though I don't know how easy that would be. Black will certainly resist a rook trade if he can.

Along the way to this position, there are many wrong paths for White to go down, and not many good alternatives. You can almost make a case that the position after 52... $\mathbb{Q}b8$ is closer to a draw than a win. I didn't have to know that at the time, of course. I just needed to ignore any stern looks from my opponent imploring my resignation.

CHAPTER 9

Words of wisdom: tips for better chess thinking

1. Don't play the first move that pops into your head, even if you consider it for a while. Consider candidate moves and choose the best one.
2. If you see a strong move, it won't disappear if you don't play it right away.
3. Don't blitz out opening moves unless you know the exact position. Decisions made early in the game can be important.
4. Always try to identify the purpose of your opponent's move. Remember, there may be more than one idea to it. Look for a threat. Look more carefully if there are circumstances like a lot of pieces around your king, or a lot of possible captures.
5. Be careful about assuming your opponent's reply, even if it is a recapture.
6. At the beginning of thinking about your candidates, consider high-reward moves (checks, captures, attacks, saving pieces, etc.). Be careful of rejecting them too quickly. Aim high and scale down as necessary.
7. When calculating a variation with a lot of forcing moves, go at least one move beyond the last capture or check before stopping and evaluating.
8. Unless there is no other option, don't play 'hope chess'. If you will not be happy with your move if your opponent does not answer with a mistake, find a better move.
9. Don't stop working when you have a winning position.
10. It is advisable to be even more careful when you are winning, because you may just need to avoid a blunder to win the game.
11. Even if you think you are going to lose, don't mentally check out; keep

fighting to find the best moves.

12. Spend extra time to work your way out of a difficult situation. Extend your candidate search if nothing seems to work. Don't accept your fate without a fight!
13. You may also extend your candidate search if no moves look good enough to maintain your advantage.
14. If you have made a blunder or been hit with a surprise move, take some time before moving, if you have it, to mentally regroup.
15. Look zealously for your opponent's possibilities, as well as your own. You do not want to overlook a move you would have found if you had your opponent's position.
16. If a variation looks important, try not to avoid calculating it because it looks too hard or you don't feel like doing it. You would have to have a very good reason to bypass, e.g. not enough clock time or finding another clear way to win.
17. When calculating long variations, it may not be necessary to determine your best moves down the line. If you have enough to conclude you have found the best move, you should play it and can make later decisions when you get there.
18. Be careful about playing a series of planned-out moves. It will usually be wise to re-check your planned move when you get to the position on the board, to make sure you haven't overlooked something, or a better opportunity has not arisen.
19. Don't take unnecessary risks in a winning position. Choose the move you are more certain will win the game.
20. Complicating the position is often a good idea in a bad position. Give your opponent more chances to make a mistake.
21. If you have an easier time finding good moves or avoiding mistakes in a

position, you are likely to get your desired result.

22. It tends to be more difficult to defend than attack. Hesitate to take material if your opponent's initiative will be very hard for you to deal with.
23. Be extra sure in your calculation if your move goes contrary to your instincts.
24. You don't have to be positive to make a sacrifice. If the burden will be greater on the defender than on you, feel free to speculate.
25. When attacking, you need to consider what defensive or counterattacking moves you need to prevent as well as what moves you are trying to get in.
26. If you can create a strong concrete threat like mate or win of the queen, you limit your opponent's options and can make calculation easier.
27. Be aware of the activity of all your pieces. Think about ways to improve the ones that aren't working.
28. Be aware of the ideal squares for your pieces in any position.
29. Be aware of the good and bad pieces in a position, and look to make favorable trades.
30. Don't make trading captures mindlessly. Avoid the trade, or let your opponent initiate the exchange if it helps your position.
31. Unless there is no choice in the position, try to play moves in time pressure that do not require calculation. Keep your plans modest.
32. If you have just survived time pressure, try to take some time to get your bearings and assess the new situation.
33. Mutual time pressure is a randomizing factor. If you are clearly winning it is wise to delay making big decisions or entering complications until after the time control.

34. If you are losing, you may want to complicate during a time scramble. The same is true if the position is drawish and you need a win.
35. Respect your opponent even if he is lower rated. Do not assume your opponent will make a bad move; don't play for tricks, unless there is no alternative.
36. Respect higher-rated opponents, but not too much. Don't assume they have everything worked out, or won't make mistakes.
37. Don't let your opponent dictate the play. Pose problems when you can, rather than being satisfied with defending against his ideas.
38. Don't relax too much in a drawish position, or when your opponent seemingly is not trying to win or seems incapable of winning.
39. Be especially careful about pawn moves in an endgame. You may lose potential waiting moves, create a fatal weakness, or give up an important possibility forever.
40. Don't let extraneous thoughts – the blunder you made yesterday, the tactic you missed a few moves ago, how you're going to spend your prize money – intrude on your thought process during a game.

CHAPTER 10

Challenges

1. OPENINGS

1. Bonin-Medina, New York 2017
2. Kopiecki-Jacobson, New York 2015
3. Benjamin-Sheppard, USA training blitz 2017
4. Hamilton-Benjamin, Albany 2010
5. Rosen-Benjamin, Washington 2012
6. I. Ivanov-Benjamin, Jacksonville ch-USA 1990
7. A. London-Benjamin, Las Vegas 1993
8. Benjamin-Miladinovic, Yerevan ol 1996
9. Benjamin-Paunovic, New York 1987
10. Grabliauskas-Benjamin, New York 2000

2. ENDGAMES

11. Kaufman-Benjamin, Philadelphia 1999
12. Azmaiparashvili-Benjamin, Reykjavik m 1990
13. Belous-Abdumalik, St Louis 2017
14. Benjamin-Zaichik, Philadelphia 2001
15. Benjamin-Silman, Lone Pine 1979
16. De Firmian-Benjamin, Denver ch-USA 1998
17. Shapiro-Palachev, Samara 2002
18. Vitiugov-Svidler, St. Petersburg ch-RUS 2017
19. Gledura-Anand, Gibraltar 2016

3. TACTICS

20. Benjamin-Gufeld, Kona 1998
21. Benjamin-Hellsten, Stockholm 1996/97
22. Benjamin-Friedman, St. Martin 1993
23. Benjamin-Browne, Philadelphia 1999
24. Marovic-Benjamin, Toronto 1990
25. Benjamin-Silman, Lone Pine 1979
26. A. Ivanov-Benjamin, Durango ch-USA 1992

27. Benjamin-Lputian, Moscow 1987
28. Brudno-Benjamin, Framingham 2001
29. Benjamin-Yudasin, New York 1990
30. Benjamin-Arnold, Philadelphia 2009
31. Benjamin-I. Sokolov, Amsterdam 1994
32. Gupta-Ivanchuk, Gibraltar 2018
33. Benjamin-Douven, Wijk aan Zee 1989
34. Benjamin-Liang Chong, Qingdao 2002

4. GRANDMASTER CALCULATION AND ANALYSIS

35. Benjamin-Seirawan, Seattle ch-USA 2000
36. Schroer-Benjamin, USA tt 2009
37. Benjamin-Shabalov, Seattle ch-USA 2003
38. Benjamin-Döttling, Framingham 2001
39. Benjamin-Gufeld, Honolulu 1996
40. Benjamin-Shulman, San Diego ch-USA 2004
41. Benjamin-Shulman, San Diego ch-USA 2004
42. Benjamin-Xu Jun, Seattle US-China Summit 2001
43. Benjamin-Tate, Philadelphia 2001
44. Nikolayev-Benjamin, Kerhonkson 2002
45. Benjamin-Akopian, St Louis ch-USA 2013

5. PROBLEMS IN CALCULATION AND COGNITIVE APPROACH

46. Lee-Medina, New York 2017
47. Tan Nguyen-Rodriguez, Morristown jr 2017
48. Trung Nguyen-Jacobson, Morristown jr 2017
49. Forney-Morris-Suzuki, Philadelphia 2017
50. Zhang-Jacobson, Chessanity Masters 2017
51. Kramnik-Matlakov, Wijk aan Zee 2018
52. Laxman-Jacobson, Philadelphia 2017
53. Medina-Yoo, New York 2017
54. Kwartler-Sheppard, Albany 2017
55. Yip-Trung Nguyen, Manchester jr 2017
56. Flaum-Morris-Suzuki, Philadelphia 2017

6. MATERIAL AND INITIATIVE

- 57. Benjamin-Remlinger, Honolulu 1996
- 58. Gruchacz-Benjamin, New York 1980
- 59. Gruchacz-Benjamin, New York 1980
- 60. Benjamin-Seirawan, Los Angeles ch-USA jr 1979
- 61. Benjamin-Zapata, St Martin 1992
- 62. Portisch-Benjamin, Szirak izt 1987
- 63. Valvo-Benjamin, Philadelphia 1990
- 64. Zagrebelny-Benjamin, Lucerne Wch tt 1993

7. WINNING THE WON GAME

- 65. Benjamin-Popovic, Moscow ol 1994
- 66. Abramovic-Benjamin, New York 1984
- 67. Trung Nguyen-Samuelson, Washington 2017
- 68. Jacobson-Hevia Alejano, Washington 2017
- 69. Flaum-Morris-Suzuki, Philadelphia 2017
- 70. Poteat-Weiss, New York 2013

8. SWINDLING

- 71. Benjamin-Dlugy, Norwalk 2017
- 72. Sarkar-Benjamin, Albany 2010
- 73. Medina-NN, New York 2017
- 74. Bonin-Jacobson, New York 2016
- 75. Poteat-Pillai, New York 2013
- 76. Portisch-Benjamin, Szirak izt 1987

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