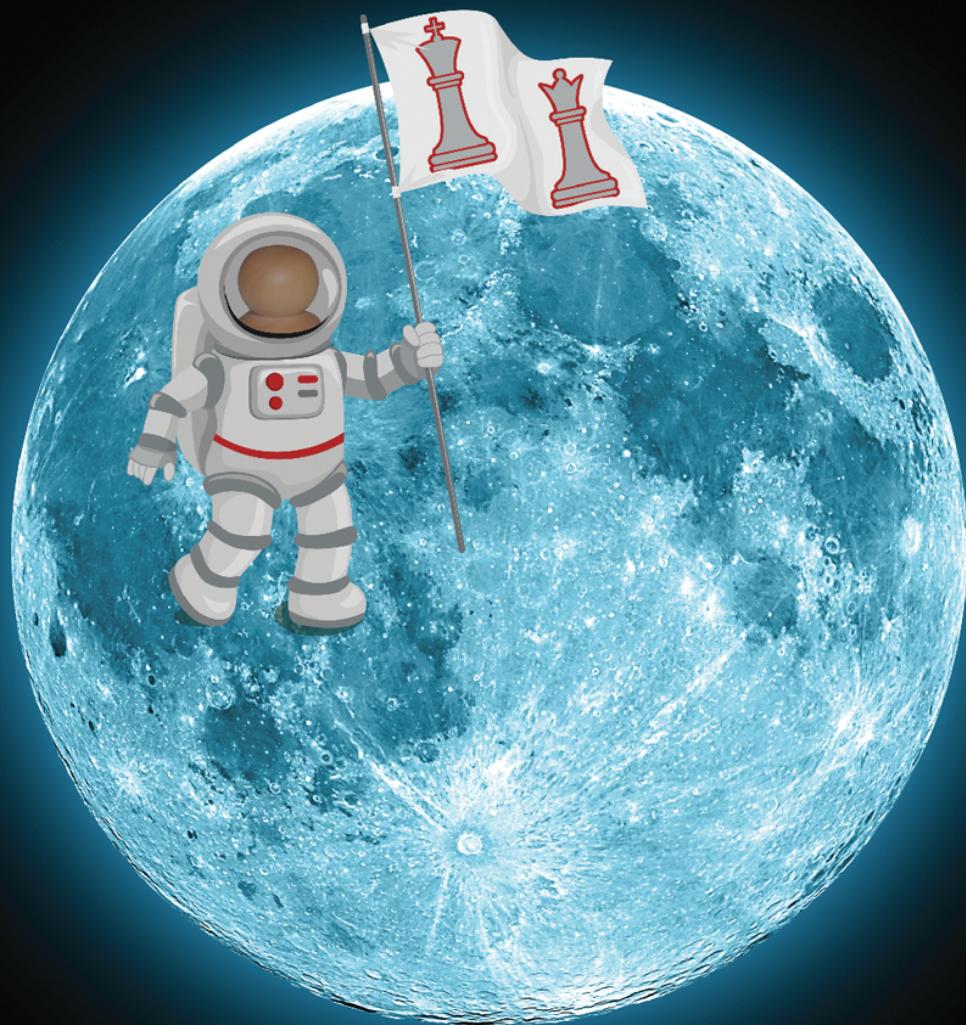


Small Steps to Giant Improvement

Master Pawn Play in Chess



by Sam Shankland

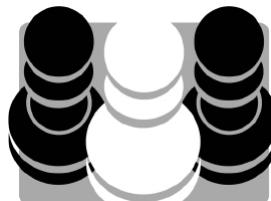
QUALITY CHESS



Small Steps to Giant Improvement

By

Sam Shankland



Quality Chess
www.qualitychess.co.uk

First edition 2018 by Quality Chess UK Ltd

Copyright © 2018 Sam Shankland

Small Steps to Giant Improvement

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

Hardcover ISBN 978-1-78483-051-9

All sales or enquiries should be directed to Quality Chess UK Ltd,
Suite 247, Central Chambers, 11 Bothwell Street,
Glasgow G2 6LY, United Kingdom
Phone +44 141 204 2073
e-mail: info@qualitychess.co.uk
website: www.qualitychess.co.uk

Distributed in North America by National Book Network

Distributed in Rest of the World by Quality Chess UK Ltd through
Sunrise Handicrafts, ul. Szarugi 59, 21-002 Marysin, Poland

Typeset by Jacob Aagaard
Proofreading by John Shaw & Andrew Greet
Edited by Jacob Aagaard, John Shaw and Andrew Greet

Cover design by www.adamsondesign.com
Cover Pictures: Moon © Choneschones/Dreamstime.com
Moon above trees © Robinstockphotos/Dreamstime.com
Astronaut © Lenm/Can Stock Photo Inc.

Author portrait on back cover and photo on page 82 by Maria Emelianova,
first published by American Chess Magazine

Printed in Estonia by Tallinna Raamatuträükikoja LLC

Contents

Key to symbols used	4
Preface	5
Part I – Pawns Can't Move Backwards	7
Introduction	9
1 Protecting Your Children	15
2 Avoiding Potholes	27
3 Driving on Open Roads	49
4 Safe Houses should not be Compromised	67
5 Keeping Your Door Locked	87
Part II – Compelling Enemy Pawns Forward	107
Introduction	109
6 Taking Out Lone Soldiers	111
7 Establishing Strongholds	129
8 Blocking Artillery	145
9 Invading the Castle	167
10 Breaking a Dam	191
Part III – Pawns Seldom Move Sideways	207
Introduction	209
11 Single-File Lines are Easily Blocked	211
12 Footsoldiers Must Coordinate	227
13 Avoiding Redundant Workers	245
Part IV – Compelling Enemy Pawns Sideways	263
Introduction	265
14 Winning 1 vs 2 Combat	267
15 Bumping Enemies into Each Other	289
16 Hiding in Plain Sight	307
Game Index	325
Name Index	329

Key to symbols used

±	White is slightly better
⊕	Black is slightly better
+	White is better
+	Black is better
+-	White has a decisive advantage
--	Black has a decisive advantage
=	equality
 	with compensation
↗	with counterplay
?	unclear
?	a weak move
??	a blunder
!	a good move
!!	an excellent move
!?	a move worth considering
?!	a move of doubtful value
#	mate

Preface

“Pawns are the soul of chess” – Philidor

The idea of writing a book for Quality Chess was not originally mine. After many years of working with Jacob Aagaard, I had become a much stronger chess player, as well as a more accomplished and famous one. Aiming to exploit my improved credentials for his own monetary gain, Jacob wanted me to write a book for Quality Chess.

Initially I was skeptical of the idea, and basically refused. But then Jacob made a bet with me, which he wrote about in *Thinking Inside the Box*. If he won his end of the bet, I would have to write a book.

Some time passed, and Jacob made great progress toward his end of the bet. But even now, at the time of this writing, he did not fully complete his goal. As such, I was not obliged to write this book. Yet, I chose to anyway!

I must confess that I originally chose to write *Small Steps to Giant Improvement* for largely selfish reasons. I failed to qualify for the 2017 World Cup, my only tournament planned for autumn and winter 2017. With time on my hands, I could take on a big project without being interrupted by tournaments.

Writing a book came to mind. Not because I was worried I would have to someday do this because of a bet. Or because of money. I simply thought writing a book would help me improve my own chess, by offering a chance to investigate in detail a subject that I felt I did not understand as well as I should. Selfish as my original purposes were, a successful book that helps a lot of people improve their chess would be a very pleasant side effect of my studies!

I chose the topic of pawn play because I have always struggled to explain the nature of good pawn play to my students, and struggled to make sense when it came up in interviews. I noticed that even when I would rate a pawn move as poor, or criticize someone for not making a pawn move they should have made, I had a hard time explaining why. Even when your evaluation is correct, telling someone “that move is wrong because I said so” offers very little instructional value.

It occurred to me that I did not consciously understand pawn play well, even if I had a good feel for how to play with pawns. So, I studied a lot of games where pawns were mismanaged, and have come up with some guidelines that explain both when a pawn move is good and when it is bad.

It is essential for players of all levels to study pawn play to become better. Pawns constitute half of the bits you are given at the beginning; and the way they are structured often dictates how the

pieces can interact with each other. Not surprisingly, the evaluation of the position can change massively with a bad pawn move.

I hope this book will help you understand this integral part of the game better and not least help you play better chess.

Sam Shankland
Walnut Creek, California
January 2018

Part I

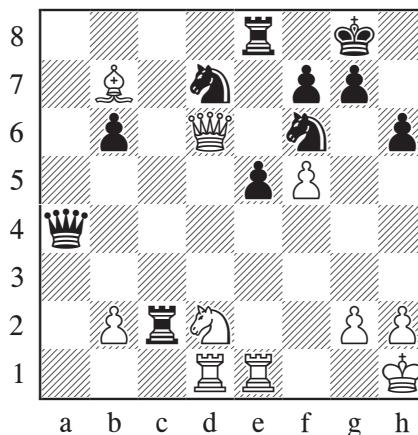
Pawns Can't Move Backwards

Introduction

Pawns are the most punishing chessmen on the board. When you move a piece to a bad square and realize your mistake, you can undo it later in the game. Like in the following famous example:

Judit Polgar – Garry Kasparov

Linares 1994



Kasparov had outplayed his young opponent and reached a winning position, but made a touch-move gaffe. He moved his knight from d7 to c5, blundering into a problematic fork with 37.♘c6. The arbiters and even Kasparov himself were not sure if he had released the piece at the time, and it was ruled that he had not released the piece. This made it possible for him to avoid blundering an exchange, although he did have to move the knight. (Later, video footage showed the knight did indeed leave his hand for a small fraction of a second.)

36...♞f8?!

Black is not happy to make such a move, but given that the knight had been touched, there was no better square. Here it at least does not block the rook's control of the c6-square.

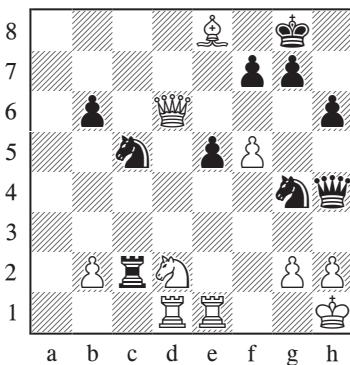
Following through with ...♞d7-c5 would have had bad consequences.

36...♞c5? 37.♘c6!

Black must now play accurately to make a draw. Reportedly, Kasparov thought ...♝g4 would hold. It does not.

37...♝g4?

With accurate play, Black holds following:
 37... $\mathbb{Q}h4!$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ $\mathbb{Q}g4!$



A few perpetuals are likely. For example
 39. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f2\#$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}h3\#$ and so on.

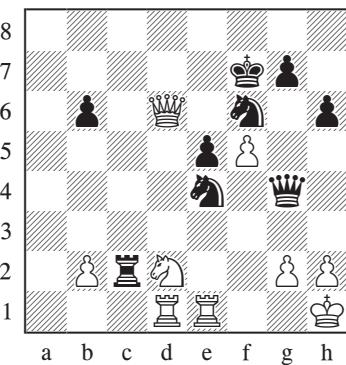
38. $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ $\mathbb{Q}ce4$

It looks like Black is forcing a draw with ... $\mathbb{Q}e4-f2-h3$ next, but all White has to do is cover the f2-square.

39. $\mathbb{Q}xf7\#!$

White was losing the bishop anyway. She might as well clip an important pawn for it. (It was also winning to stop ... $\mathbb{Q}e4-f2$ with 39. $\mathbb{W}xb6$ right away, but there was no reason to leave the f7-pawn live.)

39... $\mathbb{Q}xf7$



40. $\mathbb{W}xb6!$

White prevents ... $\mathbb{Q}f2\#$ and is winning.

40... $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 41. $\mathbb{W}e6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 42. $\mathbb{W}d6\#$

The human move is easy enough. A maximalist would notice White can actually give mate with 42. $\mathbb{R}a1!$.

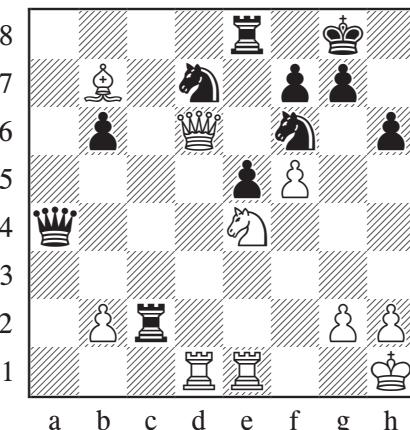
42... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 43. $\mathbb{R}xd2$

Of the many winning moves in the starting position, I would prefer simply grabbing another pawn with 36... $\mathbb{R}xb2!$. Black is two pawns up and should win easily.

37. $\mathbb{Q}e4$

The point I am trying to make is about to be revealed...

37... $\mathbb{Q}8d7$



Kasparov understood that ... $\mathbb{Q}d7-f8$ was deeply undesirable, but due to the touch-move rule, he had no choice. Now, he corrects the error! If you put a piece on a bad square, there is no rule saying that you cannot admit your mistake and bring the piece right back where it came from. The cost of two tempos is significant and Kasparov did lose a lot of his advantage, but he ultimately won the game.

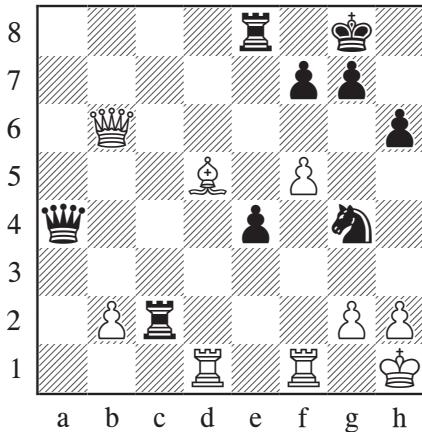
38. $\mathbb{Q}xf6\#?$

White releases the tension too soon. Both of Black's knights want to occupy the f6-square, so it is a bad idea to exchange one of them off.

Polgar could have offered a lot more resistance with 38.b3! $\mathbb{W}b5$ 39. $\mathbb{R}e3!$. It is not that easy for Black to coordinate his redundant knights.

38... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 39. $\mathbb{W}xb6$

Tempting as it may be to grab the menacing central pawn, White cannot get away with it: 39. $\mathbb{E}xe5?$ $\mathbb{E}xe5$ 40. $\mathbb{W}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}g4!$ 41. $\mathbb{W}b8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ and White's king will not be long for this world.

39... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 40. $\mathbb{E}f1$ e4 41. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ **41...e3!**

Kasparov has recovered from his misadventures and is winning once again.

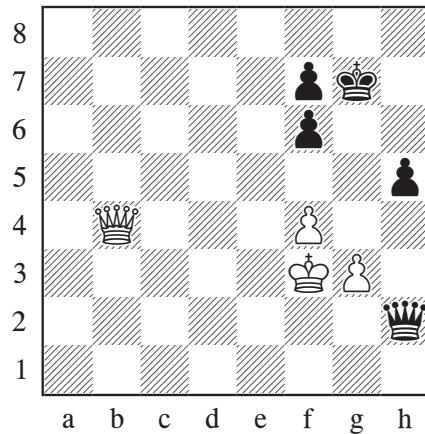
**42. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{W}e4$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ $\mathbb{W}xc2$ 44. $\mathbb{E}d8$ $\mathbb{E}xd8$
45. $\mathbb{W}xd8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 46. $\mathbb{W}e7$ $\mathbb{W}c4$
0–1**

It doesn't take a World Champion to realize that 36... $\mathbb{Q}f8?!$ was a mistake. Still, I would argue that an error like this one is much less punishing than pushing a pawn incorrectly, for the simple reason Kasparov demonstrated; the knight could return to where it just came from. In this case, the dark knight returned on the very next move! Undoubtedly burning two tempos was bad, but 36... $\mathbb{Q}f8?!$ did not saddle Black with long-term problems that could not be undone.

Let's see what happens when one makes a similar mistake with a pawn.

Sam Shankland – Georg Meier

Biel 2012



White is a pawn down, but Black's fractured structure and the presence of queens make the position holdable. Sadly, my next move was asking for trouble.

57.f5?

There was no reason to advance the f-pawn and make it vulnerable on f5. White could have sat tight and asked Black to construct a plan that would make progress. With no weak pawns in White's position and no way to make a passer, there simply wasn't one!

Any reasonably neutral move would have kept an easy draw. 57. $\mathbb{W}d4$ for example.

The position is still drawn but White's margin for error has shrunk significantly. He will have to calculate concrete variations every move for the rest of the game to make sure he does not lose the f5-pawn to a sequence of checks.

57... $\mathbb{W}g1!$

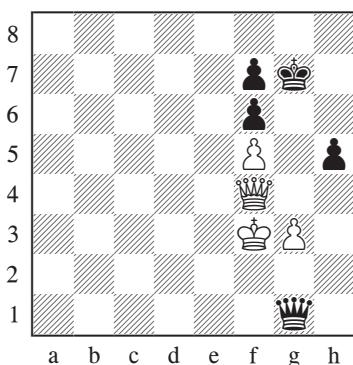
Black finds the way to apply the maximum amount of pressure. ... $\mathbb{W}g1-f1\#$ is a surprisingly difficult threat to deal with. In the game, I blundered the f5-pawn already on the very

next move! That the best defense frequently allows a queen exchange makes it an especially difficult position to defend.

58.♕d2?

Simply losing the f5-pawn. White had plenty of moves that would still hold, albeit with some effort:

The cleanest way to make a draw was to put the queen on f4, keeping all the pawns defended.
58.♕f4!



The pawns are secure, but White would have to correctly calculate the consequences of a pawn endgame. With a long string of accurate moves, he does hold, but with little time on the clock, I was not up to the challenge. There was no reason to subject myself to this kind of work; I could simply have left the pawn on f4 and then would not have had a care in the world.

58...♚f1†

If Black does not force the exchange of queens he will never make progress. After 58...♚h1† 59.♔f2 ♕d5 60.♔g1 ♕e5 61.♔h2 ♕f8 White can sit forever.

59.♔e3 ♕xf4†

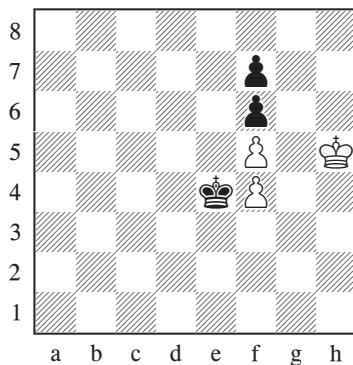
White now must make the right recapture.

60.gxf4!

60.♔xf4? ♔h6! and Black wins.

60...♚f8 61.♔f3 ♕e7 62.♔g3 ♕d6 63.♔h4 ♕d5 64.♔xh5 ♕e4

I had seen this far and thought White was lost; but he can still hold:

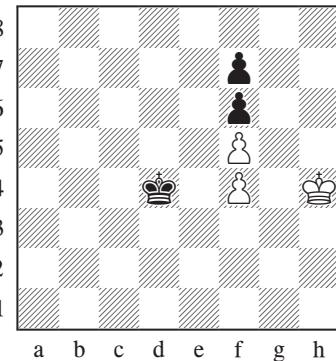


65.♔g4!

White keeps the opposition instead of going for the opponent's pawns and is able to prevent Black's king from invading.

65.♔h6? ♕xf4 66.♔g7 ♕xf5—+

65...♔d4 66.♔h4!



With a draw. But this is a hard line to calculate, especially with just a few minutes on the clock. White would have been much better off leaving his pawn on f4, sparing himself this kind of trouble.

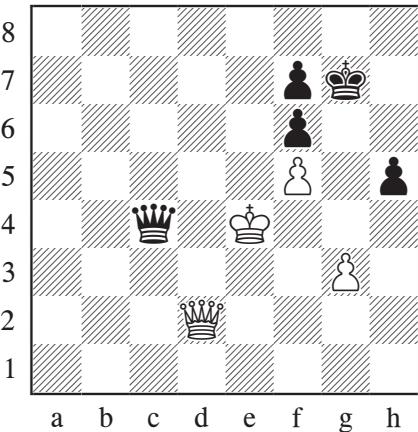
58.♕b5 ♔h6 59.♕c4 and 58.♕e4 ♕h1† 59.♔f4 also hold.

58...♚f1†! 59.♔e4

59.♕f2 ♕xf2† 60.♔xf2 ♔h6 wins for Black.

59...♕c4†!

One moment I moved the f5-pawn forward. I blinked and it was vanishing. I did not manage to put up much resistance thereafter, but the position is probably lost anyway.



60.♔e3?

I am not sure how I landed on this as my next move. The pawn is lost regardless, but White should get his king as close to the corner as possible.

Best was thus 60.♔f3. Moving the king to the corner will avoid the trickery in the game. After 60...♕c5† 61.♔g2 ♕xf5 62.♔h2 ♕g4 63.♕f2 it is not that easy for Black to make a passed pawn and I suppose White can still fight, but ultimately he should lose against good technique. Note the contrast with the game continuation where Black could force a pawn exchange immediately due to the poorly placed king on g2.

60...♕c5† 61.♔f3

Protecting the pawn will not help: 61.♔e4 ♕e5† and Black wins.

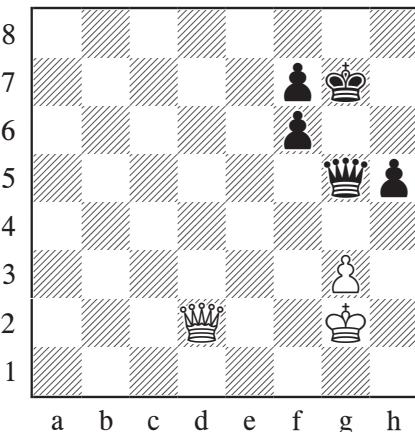
61...♕xf5† 62.♔g2

White would have drawing chances if he could consolidate and prevent pawn trades. But Black can use concrete tactics connected with White's misplaced king to push ...h5-h4 through.

62...♗g5

Right idea, wrong execution. Black gives White another chance to resist, although his outlook remains bleak.

The precise course of action was 62...♕g4!, at which point White cannot prevent the ...h4-push: 63.♔h2 h4! 64.gxh4 ♕xh4† 65.♔g2 and Black can transpose into a won pawn ending with 65...♗g5†.



63.♕d7?

White could have used a funny stalemate trick to continue the game with 63.♕f2!. This was far more stubborn. 63...h4 64.♔h1 hxg3 65.♕xg3 ♕g6 Resourceful as White's previous moves have been, my tablebase does claim a win for Black here. Still, I could make him prove it.

63...♗g4

White cannot prevent the queen exchange.

0–1

Like Kasparov, I put one of my chessmen on a worse square than the one it came from. The a key difference was that mine was a pawn! I immediately found myself wishing to slide the pawn back to f4, but the damage had been done and there was no reversing it. Given that a poor pawn move will generally cause more

problems than a poor piece move, I decided to use this book to discuss the art of pawn play.

Mistakes like 57.f5? are way too common in chess and should be, if not avoided, then at least minimized. But how does one know whether a pawn is being pushed too far? Evidently, at the start of the game, each player has eight pawns on their starting squares. You will not make it far by fighting only with your knights and occasionally flicking in $\mathbb{B}h1-g1-h1$ or $\mathbb{B}a1-b1-a1$, so some pawns must be pushed at some point. But striking the balance is tough!

In the first part of the book, I would like to discuss in some detail the concept of pushing pawns too far, and how it can be avoided. I believe there are five distinct reasons a pawn can find itself too far advanced. They are:

1. The pawn becomes more vulnerable as it is pushed farther up the board
2. A pawn is needed to defend a key square, and by advancing it further, control over the square is lost
3. The pawn blocks lines or squares needed for pieces
4. There is no longer a safe place for the king to hide
5. The pawn can become a hook to open lines

While it is impossible to come up with a definitive list of reasons a pawn may find itself wishing it could retreat, I cannot think of an example that could not be placed into one of these broad categories. For instance, the Shankland – Meier game fits into category 1. The pawn on f5 is far more vulnerable than it would have been on f4, as demonstrated in the game.

I will be examining each of these reasons, and suggesting guidelines along the way. It is important to note that the guidelines are exactly that. Guidelines. They should be remembered and considered, but not interpreted as forcing rules. If breaking a guideline that leads to a somewhat compromised pawn structure is part of a tactic that wins a queen for nothing, the guideline should obviously be overruled by the prospect of massive material gains. But in more positional encounters where simple tactics won't win the house, I am finding that more often than not, our guidelines are well worth listening to.

Chapters One through Five are dedicated to each of the respective reasons that you might want to move a pawn backwards, and how to avoid such problems. Then, we'll go back through all the same topics in Chapters Six through Ten, but instead with an emphasis on forcing your opponent's pawns forward for all the same detrimental reasons. Chapters Eleven through Sixteen will cover doubled pawns, both for yourself and your opponent.

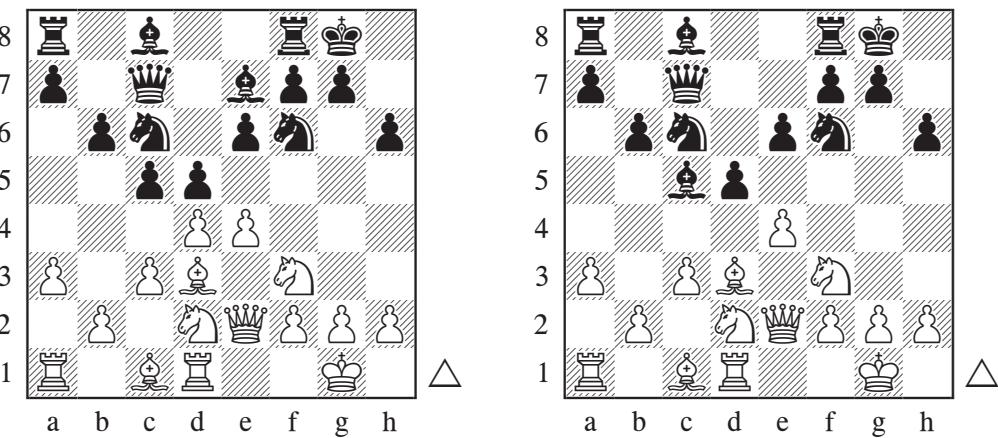
While this edition only covers pawns being too far advanced or doubled, there is a lot more to discuss about pawns. Isolated pawns, backward pawns, and passed pawns all come to mind. Some positions in *Small Steps to Giant Improvement* will surely contain these structures as well, but they are not the primary focus. Given the page limits I was assigned, I decided to go into more detail on the featured subjects instead of adding any of the other kinds of pawns. If *Small Steps to Giant Improvement* proves to be a successful book, I will write a second volume on some of the other pawn-related topics. So if you find you really enjoy this book and want to see a second one come out, be sure to convince your friends to buy a copy as well!

Chapter 1

Protecting Your Children

When contemplating if moving a pawn forward is advancing it too far, the first thing to consider is if the pawn will be vulnerable, or perhaps simply captured. One must evaluate before pushing the pawn if it is likely to perish on its new square. But how can we predict this?

Let's try to find out by examining some very similar positions with small, yet impactful, differences.



These positions are nearly identical. In fact the position on the left could turn into the position on the right if the game were to continue with 1.dxc5 ♜xc5. But the slightly different pawn structures make the character and evaluation of the resulting positions wildly different. The critical pawn advance for White is, of course, e4-e5.

Should he be able to achieve this move comfortably, he will gain space, force the f6-knight backward and lock in the light-squared bishop.

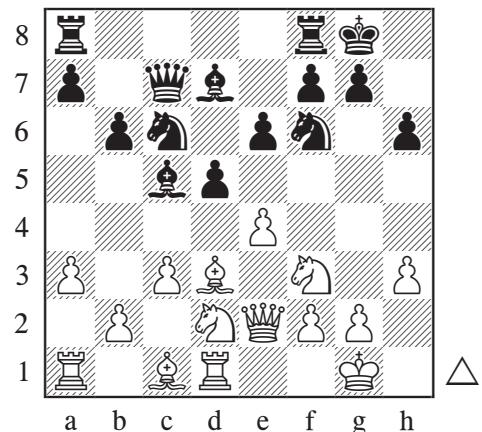
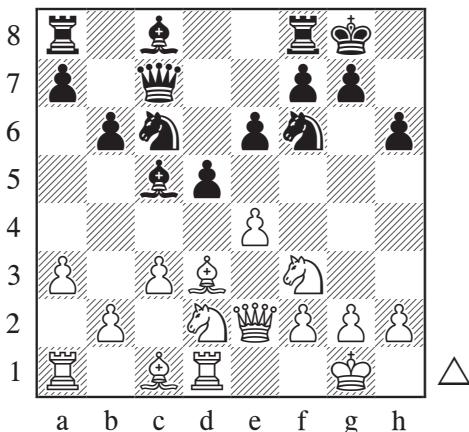
All basic positional chess, but the difference in the pawn structures makes 1.e5! an excellent move in the first example, but a poor one in the second. This can be confirmed by basic calculation: In the first position, 1.e5 pushes Black backwards, while in the second position, White loses the pawn after 1.e5? ♛g4.

This brings us to the first general guideline:

When deciding to advance a pawn beyond the fourth rank, you must decide if it is safe. The first part of this decision-making process is to ask if any other pawns can protect it.

In the above examples, we see that the e5-pawn is safe in the left-side example, but artificially isolated on the right. This becomes relevant for the second main rule of deciding on the safety of pawn advances: *Black has a lot of pieces capable of contesting the e5-square.*

Let's alter the position again:



You'll note that the position on the left is identical to the position on the right from the first pair, while the second position, while very similar, is new. White has also played dxc5, allowing ... $\mathbb{Q}xc5$, and thereby loosened his control over the e5-square. But there is another change; the inclusion of the moves h3 and ... $\mathbb{Q}d7$. We already know that 1.e5 is premature in the first position, but what about in the second one?

1.e5!

Now well justified and correct. The pawn is still artificially isolated on e5, but Black has no good way to target it. The knight on f6 is short on squares and has to go somewhere extremely sad.

1... $\mathbb{Q}e8$

Black is not happy to retreat his knight all the way to the back rank, from where it will be dominated by the e5-pawn and have no purpose. Still it is what most people would play.

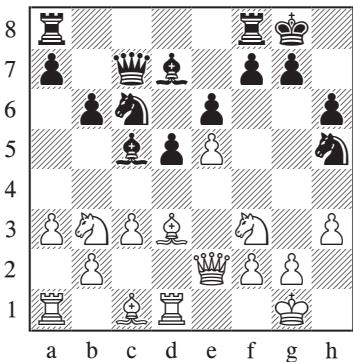
1... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ would be ideal if the square was not defended! 2.hxg4 is indeed a big difference.

The only move that remains is:

1... $\mathbb{Q}h5$

Moving the knight to the side of the board also leaves Black in a world of pain.

2. $\mathbb{Q}b3!$



Black's knight will be trapped on h5. His only chance is to bring it to f5 right now, before White gets $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ in.

2... $\mathbb{Q}g3$

Black does not have time to retreat his bishop with $2...\mathbb{Q}e7?$. With the pin on the f2-pawn gone, $3.g4!$ traps the knight. This is not even the best move according to the engine, (although the natural move for a human and enough to justify $1.e5$). $3.\mathbb{Q}bd4!?$ is very strong too. White can win the knight with g2-g4 anytime, and now need not worry about counterplay with ...f7-f6.

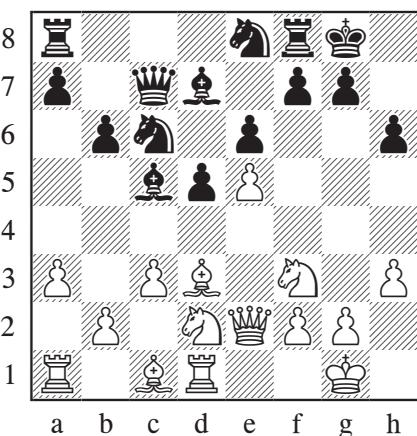
3. $\mathbb{W}c2 \mathbb{Q}f5$

White is much better. The simplest way to show this is:

4. $\mathbb{Q}xc5 bxc5 5.\mathbb{Q}xf5 exf5 6.\mathbb{W}xd5$

When he is a clean pawn up.

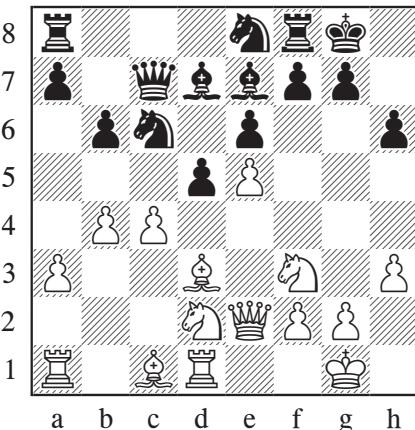
1... $\mathbb{Q}h7 2.b4 \mathbb{Q}e7 3.c4$ is similar to the mainline, and a disaster for Black.



2.b4

White gains space and continues to drive Black's pieces back.

2... $\mathbb{Q}e7 3.c4!$



Black is in horrible shape. ...dxc4 will always be met by $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ and then $\mathbb{W}e4$ will come. The position is strategically lost.

What a difference the quality of the pieces makes! White can carry out the strategically desirable e4-e5 advance despite the pawn being artificially isolated.

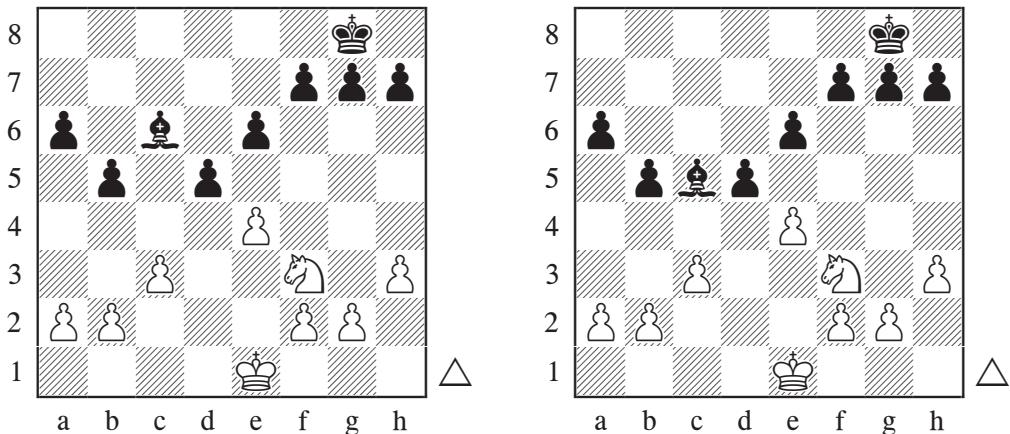
Why is this? Simple, Black's pieces are entirely unable to target the e5-square. The f6-knight is kicked into oblivion on e8, no longer able to go to g4 or d7. From e8 it has no scope to put pressure on e5.

The only black piece that could theoretically help attack the e5-pawn is the c5-bishop (via a7 and b8), but this will take a very long time and White can easily add defenders with moves such as $\mathbb{Q}b3$ and $\mathbb{Q}f4$. This brings me to the second guideline:

The second point of deciding if a pawn advance is safe, is to check how many of the opponent's pieces are in position to attack the pawn.

This is relatively self-explanatory. Why would a pawn need protection if nothing can attack it? Indeed, the pawn is totally content on e5 in the second example. It is artificially isolated, but sufficiently and effortlessly protected.

All of these examples are hopefully reasonably clear. This is largely because the e5 advance is pretty easy to grasp: White wants to achieve it if he can, and should do it unless something bad happens to him, as in the second example, where the pawn is surrounded and captured. This is reasonably direct chess, but the same principles can be applied to positions of a more strategic nature. Take the following two positions:



These are a different kind of positions. In the endgame, attacking chances will be negligible. With only a piece each, both sides will be aiming for king activity. Here we find that guidelines one and two (asking if the pawn can be defended by another pawn as it is advanced and whether the opposing pieces can attack it) do not help us much. In both cases the pawn can eventually (though not right away) be defended by another pawn if it advances to e5; and in both cases Black is not capable of attacking the pawn right away. This is where guideline number 3 comes into play.

When deciding how far to push a pawn, be sure to consider the assortment of pieces, and if the pawn can become a target long term, even when it is safe short term.

The positions are near identical once again, but strategically vastly different. The first position sees Black with a bad light-squared bishop and a deep desire to exchange the e4- and d5-pawns. This would free the d5-square for the bishop, leaving Black at least equal.

Instead, after 1.e5!, White has a classic good knight vs. bad bishop endgame, with excellent winning chances.

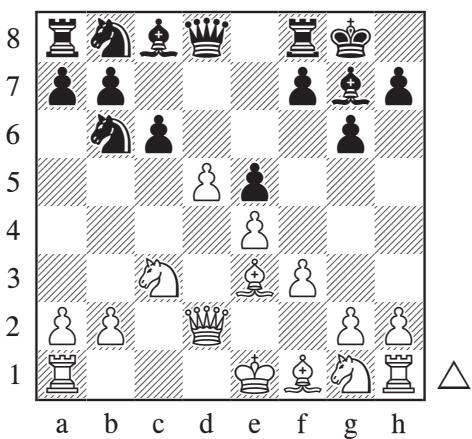
In the second position, Black's bishop is dark-squared and thus a much better piece. Should White advance the pawn to e5, Black would immediately play ... $\mathbb{Q}b6$, intending ... $\mathbb{Q}c7$, putting pressure on the e5-pawn, which will need constant defending. White is on the lesser side of equality, especially because the e5-pawn could be a long-term target.

Instead, the simple 1.exd5! gives White a pleasant ending with play against the isolated d5-pawn. The game is far from over, but White is in the driver's seat.

All these are positions composed to clearly explain the guidelines. Now we'll look at some real games where we can see the guidelines in action.

Hrant Melkumyan – Burak Fırat

Golden Sands 2012



The above position is topical. It was contested for the first time in 1933 and has stood the test of time, becoming popular at all levels of play after featuring in the 2012 Anand – Gelfand World Championship Match. Black is worse strategically. The g7-bishop is blocked by the e5-pawn and White has more space. But in return Black has a lead in development. He uses this to put pressure on White's center, fighting against the space advantage at the source. The first thing White needs to decide is what to do with his d-pawn.

10.d6?

A serious error. Melkumyan was certainly aware of this position, but he may have been unprepared for the sharp mainlines and decided to freestyle.

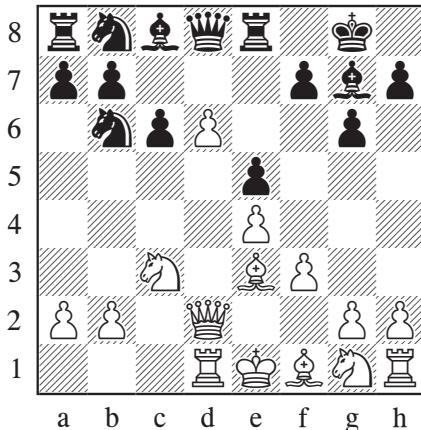
The principled approach is 10.h4!. White launches a kingside attack, using the pawn on g6 as a hook (a topic we will discuss later in the book). The main line continues with 10...cx d5 11.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}d8d7$ 12.h5 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 13.hxg6 fxg6 and so on. The position is messy and both sides have their chances.

Figuring out that 10.d6 was incorrect is not hard using our guidelines. First off, the d6-pawn cannot be supported by another pawn. Secondly, Black can easily attack it with his pieces. Finally, White has no good way to keep it defended, ensuring that it will be both a short- and long-term weakness.

10... $\mathbb{Q}e8!$

An excellent move. Black is preparing moves such as ... $\mathbb{Q}e8-e6$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}g7-f8$, after which it will be abundantly clear that the d6-pawn is in danger. Black has already started surrounding the pawn.

11. $\mathbb{Q}d1$



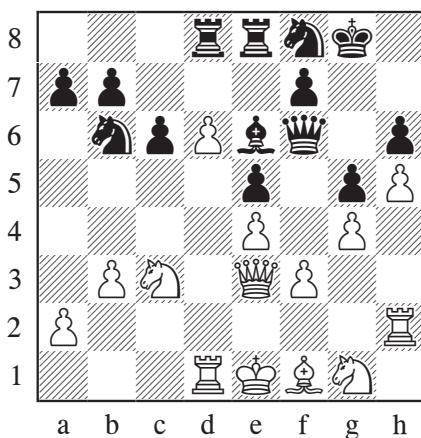
11... $\mathbb{Q}d7?$!

This move is not really bad, but I would have preferred the more direct approach of 11... $\mathbb{Q}f8!$. White is hard-pressed to stop ... $\mathbb{R}e8-e6xd6$.

12.h4 $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{W}xf6$

Black has not played in the most direct way, allowing the d-pawn to survive thus far. This is where our third guideline comes into play. While the pawn is not lost yet, what are the chances it will be so in the future? The answer is: very high. Black can easily pile up on the pawn by putting his rooks on d8 and d7, and White does not have any feasible defenders.

15.h5 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 16.g4 g5 17. $\mathbb{W}e3$ $\mathbb{R}ad8$ 18. $\mathbb{R}h2$ h6 19.b3



White is hoping to overprotect the d6-pawn by piling up his own rooks on the d-file. But Black can clog the file at a moment's notice.

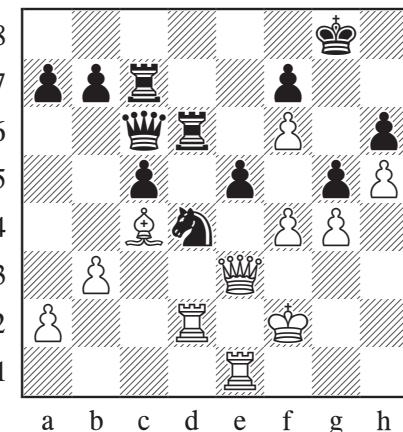
19... $\mathbb{Q}c8!$

Black intends to plant the passive f8-knight on d4.

20. $\mathbb{R}hd2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}ge2$ c5! 22. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 24.exf5 $\mathbb{W}xd6$

Eventually the pawn fell. Black could probably have taken it sooner, but it was a long-term weakness as well as a short-term one. The piece arrangement meant Black could easily add attackers, while White struggled to add defenders. Ultimately the game was drawn, even though White is lost here.

25. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{W}xd5$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{R}e7$ 28.f6 $\mathbb{R}c7$ 29. $\mathbb{R}e1$ $\mathbb{R}d6$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{W}c6$ 31.f4



31...gxsf4?

31... $\mathbb{R}xf6!$ would have kept all of the advantage.

32. $\mathbb{W}xe5$ $\mathbb{W}f3\#$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{W}g3\#$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{W}h3\#$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{W}h1\#$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{W}h4\#$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{W}h1\#$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{W}h4\#$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}f1$

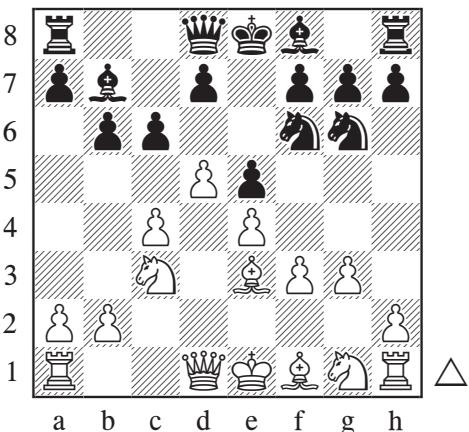
$\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$

White would have avoided the dubious d5-d6 advance, had he followed the above guidelines. My guess is: he knew h2-h4 was the critical move, but was unprepared and wanted to escape opening theory. This could have been done in a few ways that did not involve advancing a pawn too far. 10. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ and 10.a4 are playable options, leading to positions where both sides have their trumps and nothing terrible could happen right away.

The guidelines can also be used to justify a pawn advance. Take the following game:

Julio Granda Zuniga – Eduardo Iturriaga

Mexico City 2016



Black has played the opening dubiously and White can play 9.d6, locking in the f8-bishop, depriving Black of activity. While d5-d6 is a strategically favorable advance, White needs to be sure the pawn will not drop off. By following our guidelines, we can see that White can add defenders to the pawn with c4-c5 and $\mathbb{W}d2$ followed by $\mathbb{Q}d1$ if needed. Meanwhile, the black knights, rooks, and light-squared bishop are all unable to attack the d6-pawn.

9.d6!

White clamps down on Black's position.

There is no way for Black to capture the far-advanced pawn. Note that in the previous example, Black's queen on d8 was already looking at the pawn, and he could quickly organize ... $\mathbb{E}f8-e8-e6$. Neither of these are available to him now.

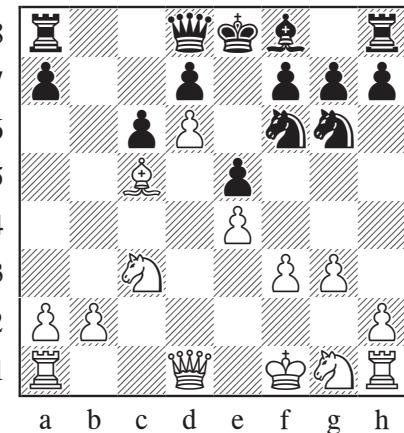
9... $\mathbb{Q}a6$

Trying to artificially isolate the d6-pawn, but unfortunately Black is unable to do so.

9...c5? 10. $\mathbb{Q}b5$! Black loses on the spot to a disaster on c7. White had to see this, as he would not want to lose out on playing c4-c5 himself. Having said that, coming to the correct conclusion about advancing the d-pawn had more to do with understanding when to push pawns than with direct calculation.

Black is not threatening to take the d6-pawn, but White overprotects it anyway.

10.c5! $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ bxc5 12. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$

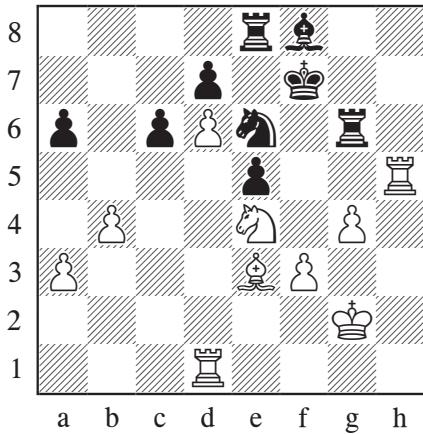


Black is strategically busted. The game lasted for a while, but the result was never in doubt.

12... $\mathbb{E}g8$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}ge2$ h6 14.b4 $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 15. $\mathbb{W}b3$ g5 16. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{E}g6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ a6 18. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{E}b8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{E}e6$ 21.h4 $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}dh1$ h5 24. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$

25. $\mathbb{E}4h3$ $\mathbb{W}g5$ 26. $\mathbb{H}e3$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 27. $\mathbb{H}c5$ $\mathbb{W}g5$ 28. $a3$
 $f5$ 29. $exf5$ $\mathbb{W}xf5$ 30. $\mathbb{W}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 31. $\mathbb{E}xh5$ $\mathbb{E}f6$
 32. $\mathbb{E}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 33. $\mathbb{E}h7\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 34. $g4$ $\mathbb{E}e8$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}g3$
 $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 36. $\mathbb{E}hh1$ $\mathbb{Q}f4\uparrow$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}e4$
 $\mathbb{E}g6$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$
 42. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 44. $\mathbb{H}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$
 45. $\mathbb{E}h5$

45... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 46. $\mathbb{E}dh1$ $\mathbb{E}a8$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 48. $\mathbb{E}h7$
 $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 49. $\mathbb{E}7h5$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 50.a4 $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}c5$
 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ d6 53. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ d5 54. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{E}b8$
 55. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 56. $\mathbb{E}h7$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 57. $\mathbb{E}1h5$ $\mathbb{E}xb4$
 58. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{E}b1$ 59. $\mathbb{E}f5\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 60. $\mathbb{Q}h5\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$
 61. $\mathbb{Q}h6$ e4 62. $\mathbb{Q}f8\uparrow$
 1-0



It is a bad sign if the first time your bishop leaves home is on move 45!

White made the exact same d6-advance in response to pressure on his center as in the previous example. The difference can be seen by looking at our guidelines.

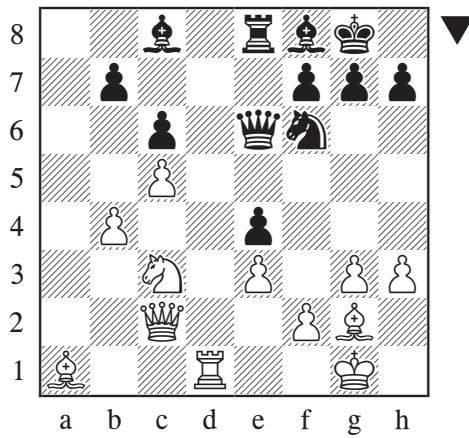
In the first example, the d6-pawn was going to be hard to defend, as a pawn could not come to its aid and because Black was well-positioned to attack it with his pieces.

The second example was dramatically different. White had c4-c5 at his disposal and could protect the pawn more than Black could attack it, thanks to Black's cramped pieces.

Exercises

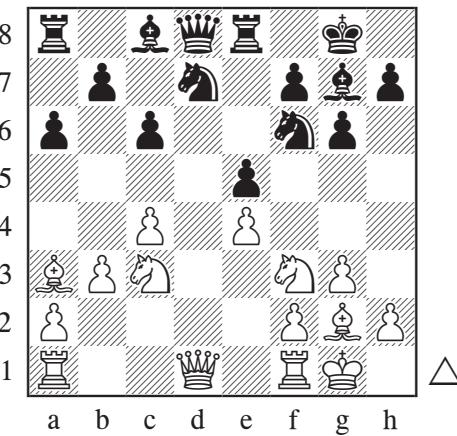
At the end of each segment, I will offer two problems to solve. The first couple should be basic, but have no fear – they will get more challenging as the book goes on.

Sam Shankland – Kacper Piorun, Havana 2017



How can Black try to save the e4-pawn? And how should White react?

Nguyen Ngoc Truong Son – Baskaran Adhiban, Tbilisi (1.5) 2017

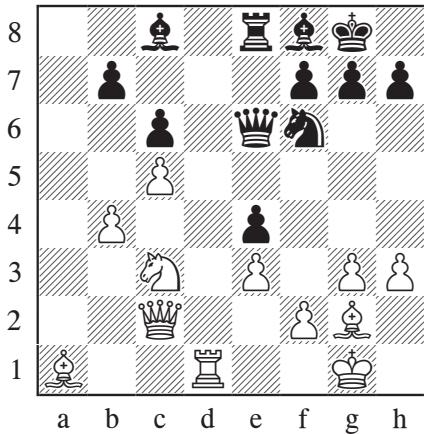


Should White make the space-gaining advance c4-c5?

Solutions

Sam Shankland – Kacper Piorun

Havana 2017



The pawn on e4 is severely overextended. Black is unable to save it from a direct assault! $\mathbb{E}d1-d4$ is coming, after which the pawn will simply fall.

21... $\mathbb{W}f5$

Black could try to defend the pawn with ... $\mathbb{Q}c8-f5$, starting with 21... $\mathbb{W}e7$. But White can prevent this with 22.g4!.

22. $\mathbb{E}d4$

Wouldn't Black just love to play ...e4-e5? But pawns don't move backwards...

22... $\mathbb{W}h5$ 23.g4! $\mathbb{W}h4$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$

White is up a clean pawn, but did not play the technical phase well.

24... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 25. $\mathbb{E}xe4$ $\mathbb{E}d8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ h5 27. $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{E}d7$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ hxg4 29.hxg4 $\mathbb{E}e7$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{W}g5$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{W}g6$ 32. $\mathbb{E}c4$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{E}e8$ 35. $\mathbb{W}e4$ $\mathbb{E}a8$ 36. $\mathbb{W}e5$

36. $\mathbb{E}d1$! was stronger.

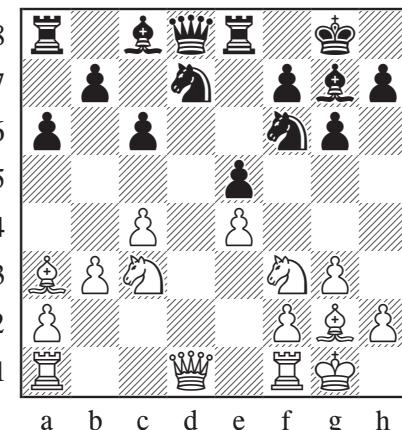
36... $\mathbb{W}xe5$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ f6 39. $\mathbb{Q}d6$

$\mathbb{Q}f7$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{E}a3$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ † 42. $\mathbb{E}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{E}b3$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{E}b1$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}g1$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}h1$ † 50. $\mathbb{Q}g6$ $\mathbb{Q}g1$ † 51. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}h1$ † 52. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{E}b1$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{E}e1$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{E}b1$ 55. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{E}b3$ 56. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 57. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 58. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{E}b1$ 59. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{E}b3$ † 60. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{E}b2$ † 61. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{E}b1$ 62. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{E}f1$ † 63. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{E}d1$ 64. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{E}d3$ 65. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{E}h3$ 66. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 67. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 68. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ g6 69. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ † $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 70. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 71. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 72. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 73. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ † $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 74. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 75. $\mathbb{Q}e8$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 76. $\mathbb{Q}f8$ † $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 77. $\mathbb{Q}b8$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 78. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 79. $\mathbb{Q}f8$ † $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 80. $\mathbb{Q}d8$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 81. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ † $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 82. $\mathbb{Q}d7$

½-½

Nguyen Ngoc Truong Son – Baskaran Adhiban

Tbilisi (1.5) 2017



Black has played well and has equalized, but nothing more than that. White needed to recognize this and make a neutral move instead of creating weaknesses in his own position.

12.c5?

White understandably wants to gain space, but he will have a hard time defending this pawn. Following our guidelines would have helped him out. The c5-pawn cannot be defended by a pawn for long, as b3-b4 would

always be met by ...a5. On top of this, all of Black's pieces are well positioned to attack the c-pawn.

A non-committal move would lead to a roughly balanced position: 12. $\mathbb{W}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ 14. $\mathbb{B}ad1$ $\mathbb{W}c7=$

12... $\mathbb{Q}f8!$

Black immediately targets the c5-pawn. Note that none of White's pieces can easily defend it.

13. $\mathbb{W}d2$

After 13.b4 a5! the pawn will fall.

Maybe White simply missed 13. $\mathbb{Q}a4?$ b5! and there is no en passant, as the bishop would be hanging on a3.

Now Black cashes in too soon, losing some of his advantage.

13... $\mathbb{Q}xc5?$

This allows White to get the e5-pawn in return for the c5-pawn.

I really like clamping down on the queenside. 13...b5!

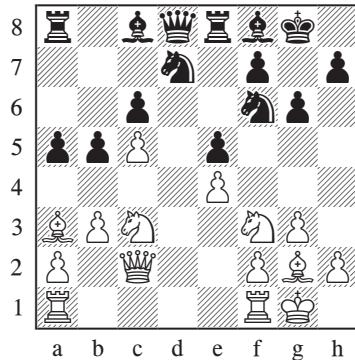
With this $\mathbb{Q}c3-a4$ would have been prevented. Next up Black will play ...a5, preparing ...b5-b4 to win the pawn rather than exchange it.

14. $\mathbb{W}c2$

The machine rates this sad move as best.

14.b4 a5! gives Black a big advantage.

14...a5!



White has no answer to ...b5-b4.

15. $\mathbb{Q}d1$

15.b4 axb4 16. $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5\#$

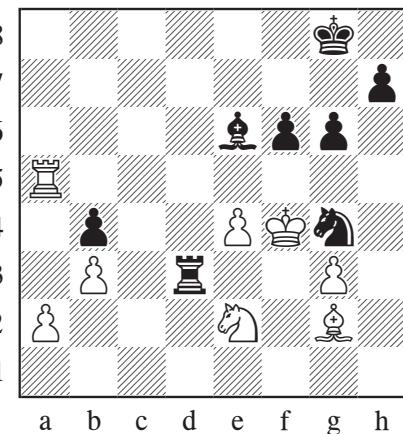
15...b4 16. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$

Black is a clean pawn up and can expect to win.

14. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 15. $\mathbb{W}xd8$ $\mathbb{B}xd8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$

Black eventually won anyway, but at this point he has spoiled his advantage.

16... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ 18. $f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 19. $\mathbb{B}fd1$
a5 20. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ b5 21. $\mathbb{B}ac1$ b4 22. $\mathbb{B}xd8\#$ $\mathbb{B}xd8$
23. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 24. $\mathbb{B}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 25. $\mathbb{B}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3\#$
26. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}xh2$ 27. $\mathbb{B}xa5$ $\mathbb{B}d1$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4\#$
29. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{B}d3\#$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ f6



0-1

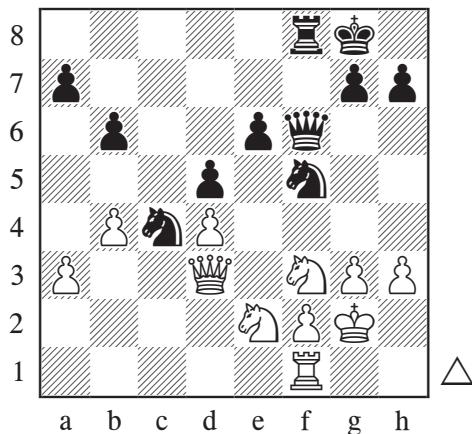
Chapter 2

Avoiding Potholes

The second reason a pawn may find itself wishing it could move backwards is that it would like to control an adjacent square. The pawn could be entirely safe, but no longer control key squares. Take the following classic:

Karl Gilg – Aron Nimzowitsch

Carlsbad 1929



Black has a beautiful outpost on c4 that White cannot easily deal with. It blocks the c-file, pressures the a3-pawn and controls a lot of key squares. The game ended abruptly when White blundered, but even with best play, the outlook is grim.

39.♘c1??

The blunder. I looked at what good play would look like:

39.a4

Removing the weakness from a3 was relatively best. White remains solid, but the knight on c4 is a major thorn in his side.

39...♗g6!

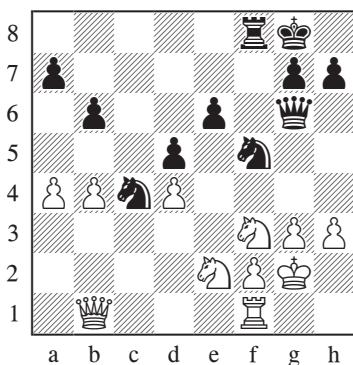
Black threatens ... $\mathbb{Q}fe3\#$ or ... $\mathbb{Q}h4\#$, winning the queen. As simple as the threat is, it turns out to be hard to stop! Note that the knight on c4 controls a lot of the squares the white queen would like to retreat to. Instead, she has to go to somewhere sad.

40. $\mathbb{W}b1$

The best move in a bad position. The more appealing squares are not available. For example, 40. $\mathbb{W}d1?$ loses the queen to 40... $\mathbb{Q}ce3\#$ 41. $fxe3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3\#$.

Another decent-looking move, from a strategic point of view, is 40. $\mathbb{W}d1$. It seems natural to defend the queen, but walks right into a nasty fork, courtesy once again of the knight on c4. After 40... $\mathbb{Q}b2!$ White loses material.

The most credible alternative is 40. $\mathbb{W}c3$, which will come back shortly in a similar position. Although not lost, here the queen is misplaced and will be harassed further. Black makes use of more weak squares with 40... $\mathbb{Q}fd6!$. The e4-square is beckoning for either the black queen or the d6-knight. White is in big trouble. But just think, how different would the position be if White's d-pawn could move back a step to d3? The critical e4- and c4-squares would be firmly under control, Black would have no threats to speak of. The c4-knight would even be trapped!



40... $\mathbb{Q}fe3\#!$

Anyway!

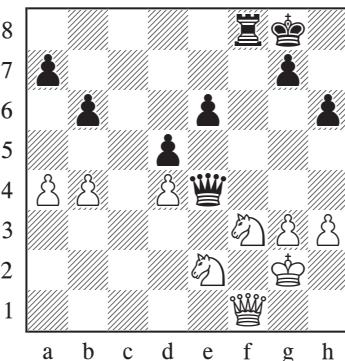
41. $fxe3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3\#$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ 43. $\mathbb{W}xf1$ $\mathbb{W}e4$

White finds himself in all kinds of pins and can barely move.

44. $\mathbb{Q}g2$

White looks to have consolidated.

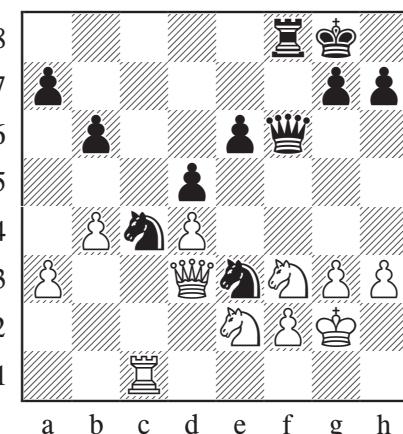
44... $h6!$



With this simple move Black creates "luft" for his king and stops any ideas with $\mathbb{Q}f3-g5$. White is powerless to stop the coming ... $\mathbb{W}c8-c2$ invasion and has a very difficult position.

Sad as all of this may sound, it was still better than the game.

39... $\mathbb{Q}fe3\#!$



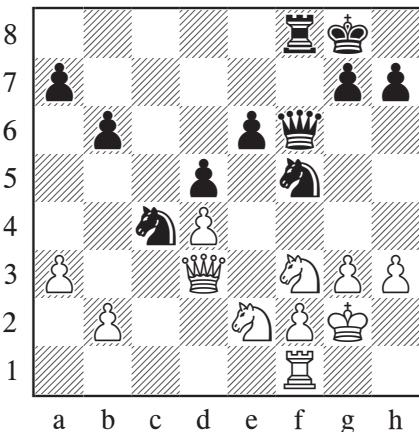
The white queen's defense of the f3-knight is interfered with. The game is immediately over.

40. $fxe3$ $\mathbb{W}xf3\#$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$

0-1

That knight on c4 sure caused White a lot of grief! Wouldn't it be nice if White was able to kick the pesky knight off its post?

Let's alter the position slightly to illustrate a point.



The position is near identical to the game, the one exception being that the b4-pawn has been pushed back to b2. This dramatically changes the prospects, as the octopus on c4 is no longer stable.

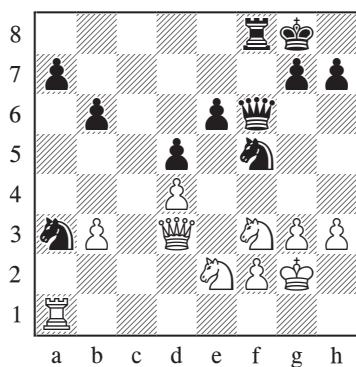
39.b3!

White immediately challenges the c4-knight.

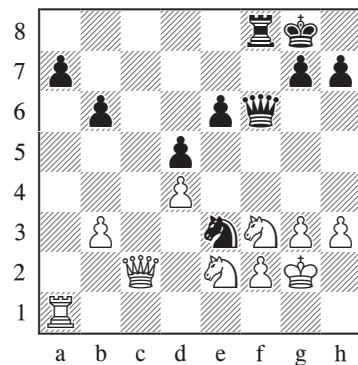
39... $\mathbb{W}g6$

The move that caused White difficulties in the game is less offensive here.

Since Black is unable to maintain his strong outpost, it makes sense to trade one advantage for another. 39... $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ grabs a pawn, but cannot hold onto it. 40. $\mathbb{E}a1$



The knight is trapped on a3. Black is lucky to escape with a draw. 40... $\mathbb{Q}c2!$ 41. $\mathbb{W}xc2$ $\mathbb{Q}e3\#$

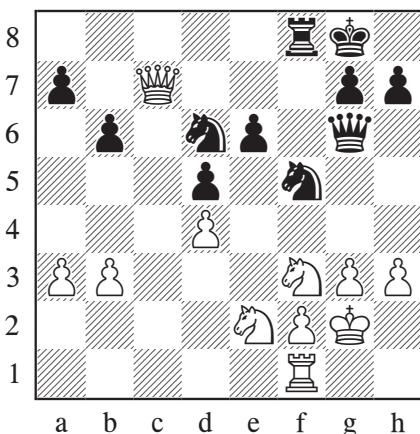


42.fxe3 $\mathbb{W}xf3\#$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{W}f2\#$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{W}f3\#$ with a perpetual check.

40. $\mathbb{W}c3!$

Forcing Black to retreat the knight on c4, rather than building up his position with ... $\mathbb{Q}f5-d6$. He is already in danger of being worse!

40... $\mathbb{Q}cd6$ 41. $\mathbb{W}c7$



I prefer White.

What a difference this pawn retreat made (In the game, had 39.b4-b3 been allowed, we would have reached our analysis)! An unpleasant position, that was lost in just 3 moves, suddenly became very acceptable.

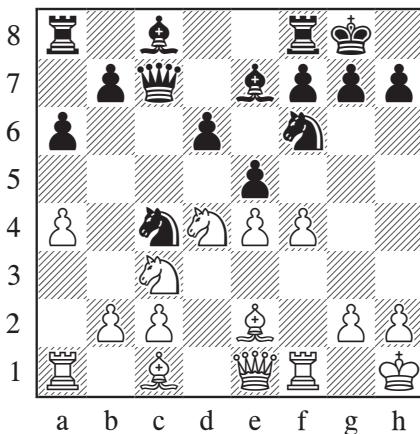
While objectively the position is equal with the pawn on b2, I would argue that Black is under more pressure than White to find his way and therefore in more danger of becoming strategically worse.

Moving forward to the 21st century, where I found myself deeply regretting a pawn push that weakened my position immeasurably.

Deep Sengupta – Sam Shankland

Dresden 2013

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘c3 ♘c7 6.♗e2 ♘f6 7.0–0 ♘e7 8.♗e3 0–0 9.f4 d6 10.♗h1 a6 11.a4 ♘a5 12.♗e1 ♘c4 13.♗c1 e5?



My play thus far had not been the best, but advancing the e-pawn is really asking for trouble. The pawn on e6 was doing an excellent job of keeping the c3- and d4-knights at bay. Now, the d5- and f5-squares are loose and beckoning.

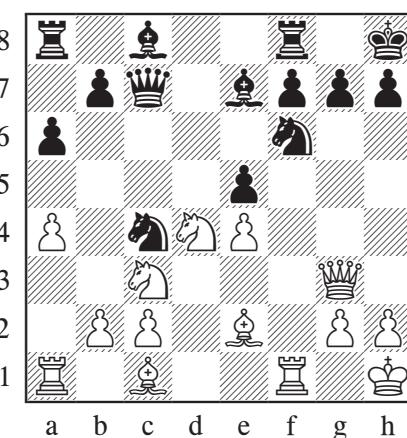
14.fxe5 dxe5

It looks like the knight on d4 is forced to move, but in fact White can simply continue his development and leave the hanging knight in its place with an accurate move.

15.♗g3!

White maintains the tension. The knight on d4 is immune from capture and ♘h6 a big threat.

15...♔h8

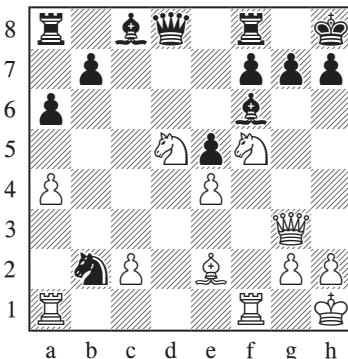


16.♗g5!

White continues his powerplay, eyeing the newly weakened d5-square; he dreams of landing his c3-knight there. This is not such a farfetched dream; removing the guard on f6 is the last step toward making it a reality.

16...♗e6

Going pawn grabbing with 16...♘xb2 allows White to execute his idea. The b2-pawn is of little significance, as can be seen after: 17.♗xf6 ♘xf6 18.♗d5 ♘d8 19.♗f5



Black is absolutely lost. The white knights on f5 and d5 dominate the position, while the black knight will soon be trapped on b2. Please think about how much nicer Black's position would be if he could have moved the pawn back to e6!

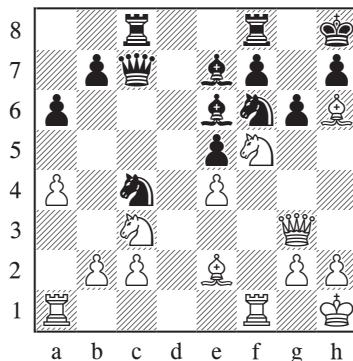
17.♘f5!

Deep Sengupta continues the energetic chess. The e6-bishop is overworked and cannot defend both the f5- and d5-squares. Unfortunately for Black, a knight on either of these squares will likely mean the end of the world.

17...♗xf5

It's sad to surrender the d5-square again, especially after burning a tempo with ...♗e6. But Black had nothing better. Threats like ♘xg7 or ♘h6 were going to end the game.

17...♝ac8, ignoring White's play, would be ill advised. White has a great many winning moves, with the simplest being: 18.♕h6 g6



19.♘xe6 ♜xe7 20.♗g5 Black will lose a piece for starters.

18.♗xf5

The success of White's strategy is complete. Black is unable to prevent White from exchanging the knight on f6 and then plonking his own on d5. Remember, this key square was

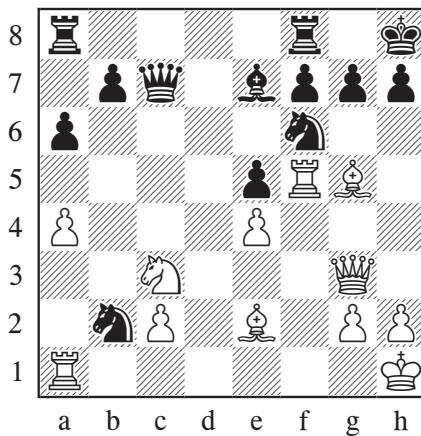
critically weakened by the foolish 13...e5?.

18...♘xb2

I grabbed the pawn just to have something for my suffering, but this should lose immediately. While Black has some resemblance of counterplay, the knight is precariously placed on b2 and could be trapped at a moment's notice.

My computer offers 18...♝ad8 as superior. Still, it should not change the evaluation. After 19.♘xf6 ♜xf6 20.♗d5 I can't imagine Black surviving very long.

18...♘b6, keeping the knight off d5 at all costs, may have been the best try, but Black is still in a bad way. White's best move is 19.♘xf6, continuing the assault, but the simple 19.♛xe5 is also good, netting a healthy extra pawn.

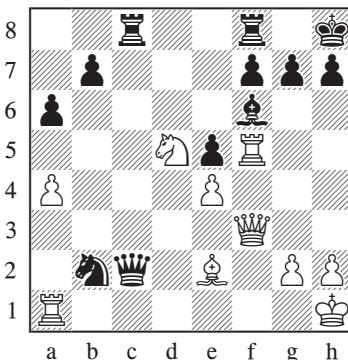


19.♘xf6?

Finally, my opponent falters and lets me a little off the hook. With one more accurate move, he could have produced a miniature.

19.♘xf6 is the most natural move, but less impressive here. Black's queen invades the position after: 19...♘xf6 20.♗d5 ♛xc2 Black has counterplay, although even here White is for choice.

But 19.♘f3! was silent and deadly. White has prepared a knockout blow with ♖xf6 and Black can do nothing about it. e.g. 19...♝ac8 20.♖xf6 ♜xf6 21.♗d5 ♜xc2



22.♖xf6! Black can only resign.

19...♜xf6

19...gxf6 20.♕c1! was one of my opponent's ideas.

20.♗d5 ♜c6 21.♖xf6 gxf6 22.♗b3

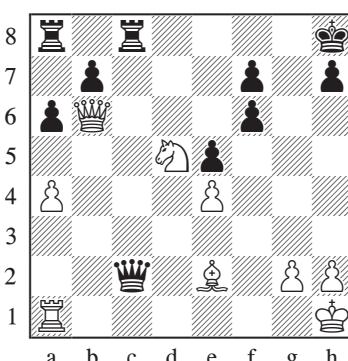
White wins the trapped knight on b2, but has allowed a bit too much counterplay.

22...♝fc8!

The right rook.

23.♗xb2 ♜xc2 24.♗xc2

24.♗b6 was another way to fight for an advantage.

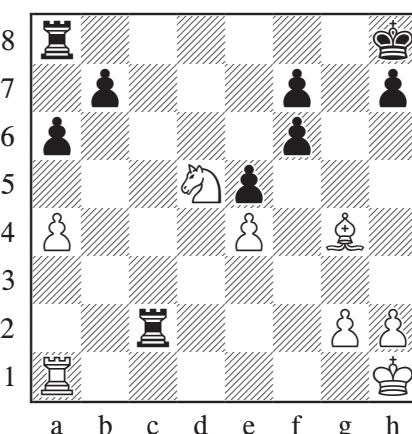


24...♝c1†! With Black's king being so open, he wants to trade as many pieces as possible. White now has two continuations.

After 25.♗f1 ♜xa1! 26.♗xf6† ♔g8 White has nothing more than a draw. Note that if I had played ...♝a8-c8 instead of ...♝f8-c8, 27.♔e7† would be mate.

White cannot avoid the exchange of queens, but he can avoid an exchange of rooks with 25.♗g1!. It is a well-known rule that when one is playing with minor pieces against a rook, it is wise to keep the other pair of rooks on the board, which is why this is better than 25.♖xc1.

24...♜xc2 25.♗g4†



I have managed to escape into a marginally worse ending, which I ultimately held after defending for over 100 additional moves. While the rest of the game is interesting, it is well outside the scope of what we are discussing here.

Advancing 13...e5 is a perfect example of the kind of mistake we should try to avoid. I did not achieve my aims by any stretch. The d4-knight was content to stay on its active post until it moved to an even better square. And all

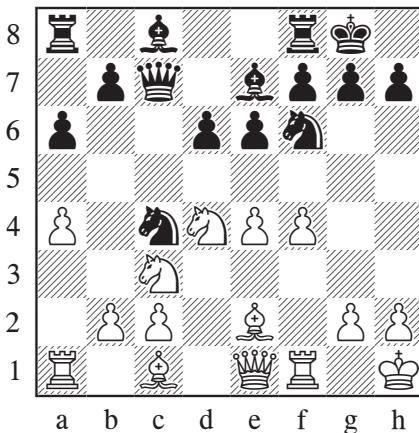
I did achieve was to critically weaken the key d5- and f5-squares.

The position I reached with Sengupta is not wildly common, but it has been contested by some strong players. When I studied it a bit more closely, I decided that Black is fine if he keeps his pawn on e6. Let's see how another strong player continued, keeping in context the disaster I found myself in after advancing ...e5.

Anatoly Karpov – Vladimir Tukmakov

Leningrad 1971

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6
 5.♗c3 a6 6.♗e2 e6 7.0–0 ♗e7 8.f4 0–0
 9.♗e3 ♗c6 10.a4 ♗c7 11.♗h1 ♗a5 12.♗e1
 ♗c4 13.♗c1



Through a different move order, the same position has been reached. Tukmakov was patient and avoided weakening his position with the horrible 13...e5?.

13...♗d7!

Simple and strong, Black completes his development. There is no need to lose control over the f5- and d5-squares.

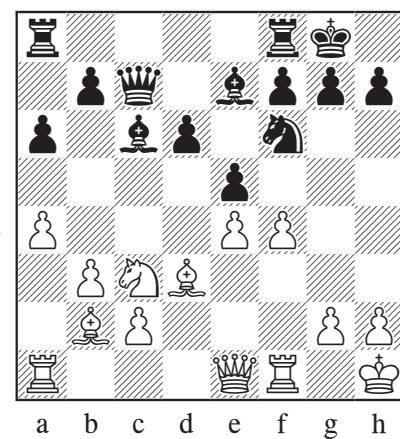
14.♗b3 ♗a5 15.♗d3 ♗c6 16.♗xc6 ♗xc6

If you compare this position to the one I had after move 16, the difference is staggering. Black has a solid position and no bad pieces. In contrast, I was close to lost!

17.♗b2 e5?

Tukmakov resisted this advance longer than I did, but not for long enough. With this the d5-square becomes weak. Karpov masterfully demonstrates why.

A patient move like 17...♗d7 should be preferred. Perhaps White is slightly better, but nothing more than that. Black is ready to blunt the long diagonal with ...♗e7-f6 and can look to the future with a reasonable degree of confidence.



18.♗e2!

I really like Karpov's play here. He is planning b2-b4-b5 to push the c6-bishop away from the defense of the d5-square. But first he makes sure Black cannot play ...b7-b6, preparing to retreat the bishop to b7.

Let's see what would have happened had Karpov jumped the gun on the advance of the b-pawn.

18.b4?! b5!

Black manages to keep the bishop on c6. Meanwhile the pawn on b5 cannot be captured comfortably.

19.axb5 axb5 20.♗e2

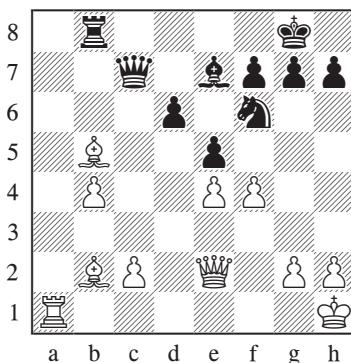
A solid move like this is to be preferred, though Black retains a solid position.

After 20.♗xb5? ♗xb5 21.♗xb5 ♗xc2 the tables are turning.

20...♝xa1 21.♝xa1 ♗b8

Again, White cannot easily take on b5. Black is fine.

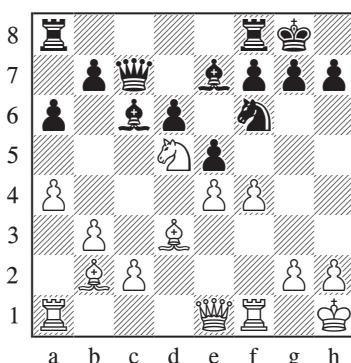
22.♗xb5 ♗xb5 23.♗xb5



23...♝xb5! 24.♗xb5 ♗xc2

Black has enough counterplay to maintain the balance.

The computer recommends immediately jumping in with 18.♗d5, but I think it is much less effective:



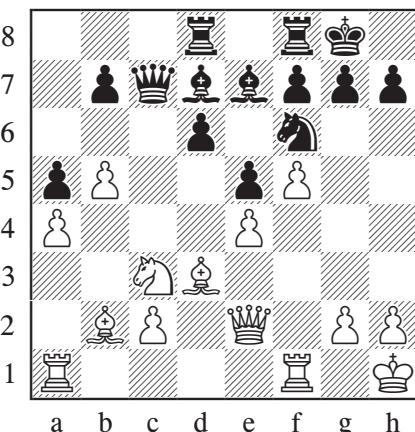
18...♝xd5! 19.exd5 ♗d7! Black should be fine.

He has decent play on the dark squares, though in the interest of full disclosure, Stockfish disagrees.

18...♝ad8 19.b4!

Strong play. White is going to push the c6-bishop away and clamp down on the d5-square.

19...a5 20.b5 ♗d7 21.f5!



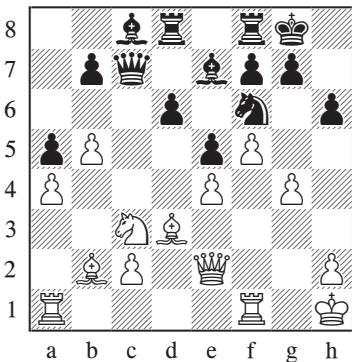
Karpovian chess at its finest. The bishop is denied access to e6 and Black is strategically busted. All that is left to do is remove the final defender of d5: the knight.

21...♞c8 22.♗d1?

Even after this White was better and won. But he had something more direct.

Stronger was: 22.g4! It was not really in Karpov's nature to launch attacks. He won the World Championship title mainly with the use of deep positional play and good endgame technique. But then the g4-thrust is not an attacking but a positional move. White wishes to play g4-g5, boot the f6-knight into oblivion and install his own knight on d5. It is surprising that Karpov did not play this way.

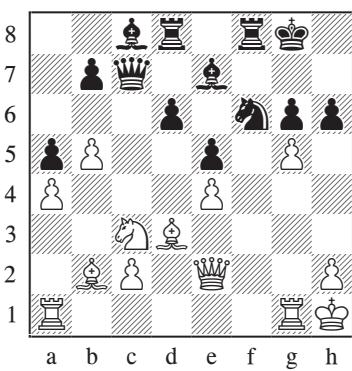
22...h6



White has a pleasant choice between winning the game positionally with h2-h4 followed by g4-g5, and winning violently with $\mathbb{W}f1-g1$ followed by g4-g5:

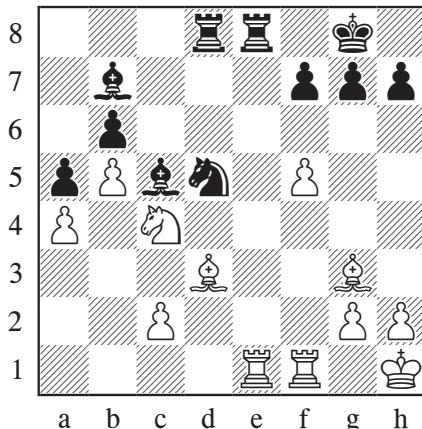
23.h4 $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 25. $\mathbb{W}f2$ Black has one of the saddest positions ever seen.

23. $\mathbb{W}g1!$? g5 24.fxg6 fxg6 25.g5



White's attack is decisive.

22...d5!? 23.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 24. $\mathbb{W}xe5$ $\mathbb{W}xe5$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{B}fe8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ b6 28. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 29. $\mathbb{B}ae1$



29... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 30. $\mathbb{B}xe8\#$ $\mathbb{B}xe8$ 31.h4 g6 32. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 34. $\mathbb{B}xf2$ $\mathbb{B}e1$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}d5\#$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 38. $\mathbb{B}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ 42.f6 h6 43. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{B}e8$ 44. $\mathbb{B}d6$

1–0

Tukmakov certainly played better than I did at the start, but before long he too fell victim to advancing a pawn he should not have. And the same one on top! I find it interesting that even very strong players can struggle with the concept of weak squares, and pushing pawns too far is usually the way squares become weak.

Identifying such mistakes is easy after the fact, especially if our opponents have punished us. During my game with Sengupta I knew what my mistake was and from where my problems originated. But how to avoid these mistakes in the first place? Just like with when a pawn is pushed so far it becomes vulnerable, we have some guidelines to avoid weakening squares by pushing pawns too far.

The first guideline is:

When pushing a pawn, consider:

1. Can my opponent exploit the squares I am weakening?
2. Can I control this/these square/s with another pawn?

If the answers are yes and no, be wary of advancing the pawn. In the previous two examples, these were indeed the answers.

The ...e5-advance

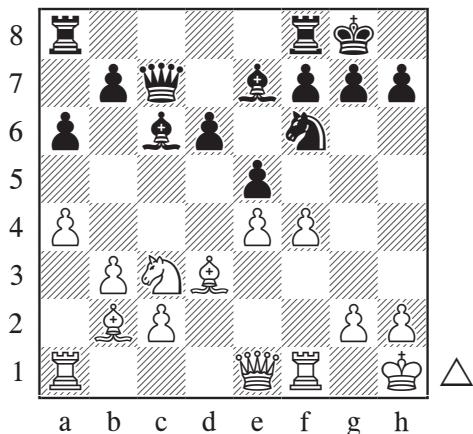
1. Weakened the d5-square, a juicy outpost for the c3-knight (and in my game also the f5-square for the other knight).
2. There was no other pawn that could keep the newly weakened square/s under control.

Had Tukmakov and I asked ourselves these questions, we would have hesitated to advance the e-pawn, avoiding a lot of pain in the process.

However, a balance must be struck. It's a rare game where one side barely moves or trades any pawns, or only makes perfectly positionally sound pawn advances. This is where our second guideline comes in.

If a pawn push weakens a square that could be a problem for you and you cannot control it with another pawn, you can still do it if your pieces are able to handle the problem.

This is where Tukmakov got caught up. If you take the position where he played 17...e5?.



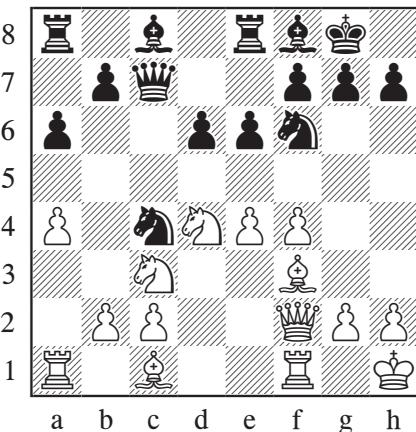
He probably did not think too much about weakening the d5-square, as both the knight and bishop kept a careful eye on it. But Karpov saw the potential weakness and expertly pushed the black pieces from their defensive posts. Tukmakov could have been spared a nasty defeat if he had considered this deep plan.

Let's look at a similar position where different piece placement dramatically changes the evaluation of the ...e6-e5 advance. This game is taken from a clock simul Kasparov played against the Israeli national team.

Emil Sutovsky – Garry Kasparov

Tel Aviv (2) 1998

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♘f6
 5.♗c3 a6 6.♗e2 e6 7.f4 ♗e7 8.0-0 0-0 9.a4
 ♘c6 10.♗e3 ♖c7 11.♗h1 ♖e8 12.♗f3 ♗f8
 13.♗d2 ♘a5 14.♗f2 ♘c4 15.♗c1



The position reached here is identical to the one seen in the previous games with two exceptions: The moves ...♖e8 and ...♗f8 have been included for Black, while White has played ♗f2 and ♘f3. The difference is striking.

15...e5!

I criticized the ...e5 advance as poor in the identical pawn structure in the last two games. Why is it so different this time? Simply put, Black's pieces are better positioned to fight for the f5- and d5-squares, while White's pieces are less ready for this battle.

16.♗de2

Sutovsky chose correctly not to take on e5. If the f4- and d6-pawns disappeared, the c8-bishop would find a gorgeous home on e6, where it cannot be booted away and can keep watch over d5, while enjoying active prospects.

In the game White elected not to take on e5, which kept the pawn structure fluid. But for a moment, let's pretend he did:

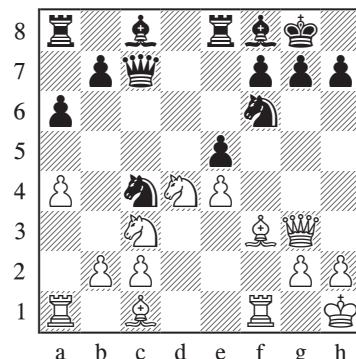
16.fxe5 dx5

Sengupta played ♖g3 in a similar position. It may still be the best move, but it is much less effective.

17.♗g3

17.♗b3 ♗e6+ is just bad.

17.♗f5 is met with 17...♗xf5!, when White is forced to worsen his structure with 18.exf5. Not only has White lost control of the d5-square, he also will have to deal with a strong passed e-pawn. 18...e4 19.♗e2 ♗c5 and Black is much better.



Compared to my game, White has played ♖e1-f2-g3, losing a critical tempo. Also, he

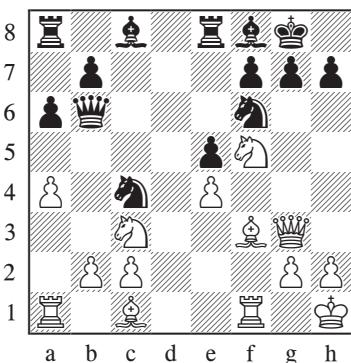
has put his bishop on f3. I would argue the bishop would be better placed on e2, where it would pressure the black knight and not block the rook on f1. This would make White three tempos down! One for stopping on f2 on the way to g3 with the queen, and two for playing ♜f3 and another for the later retreat to e2.

17...♝b6!

Black breaks the pin immediately and asks the white knight where it wants to go. Note that f5, Sengupta's star square, is less desirable.

18.♞f5

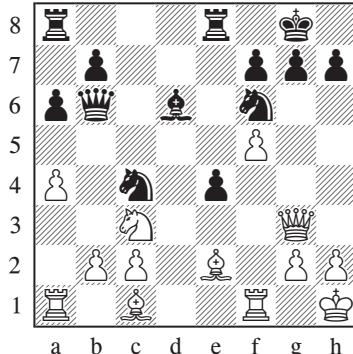
A quiet retreating move like 18.♞b3 might be prudent, but then White would be in no position to fight for the d5-square. 18...♝e6! Black has the d5-square firmly under control. The bishop on e6 is the best minor piece on the board; it does a great job covering d5 and pressuring the white queenside. Note that in Karpov – Tukmakov, Black's active c6-bishop was chased away by b4-b5. In this position, White has no pawn that can harass the black bishop. Black is clearly better.



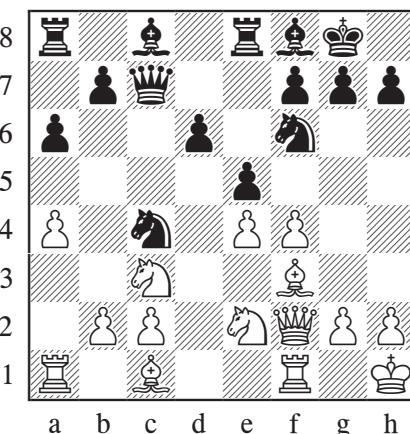
18...♝xf5!

The capture on f5 highlights how misplaced the bishop is on f3. White would love to recapture with the rook, but he cannot.

19.exf5 e4! 20.♝e2 ♜d6



The position has changed dramatically. All the outposts Black had to worry about are gone and his pieces are more active than their counterparts. Black is clearly better.



With the pawn still on f4, 16...♝e6? would be well met by 17.f5!. So, what did Kasparov have in mind? His pieces are not going to be able to cover the d5-square on a permanent basis.

16...d5!

Black takes his opportunity to liquidate the center. Exchanging his d-pawn for White's e-pawn will greatly lessen White's control over d5 – and the tactics all work out in Black's favor.

After 16...♝e6? 17.f5! Black is much worse.

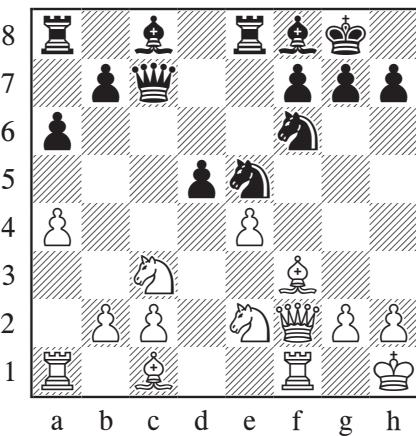
17.fxe5

Black had to be ready with a response if White grabbed the pawn with 17.exd5?. It's a straightforward one. 17...e4! and the bishop is trapped on f3.

And 17.Qxd5? meets a similar fate. After 17...Qxd5 18.exd5 e4 19.Qh5 g6 White's bishop is trapped.

17...Qxe5

Black has a lot of counterplay in the center. White cannot comfortably take on d5, so he decides to develop the bishop.

**18.Qf4**

Bringing out a new piece to its most active square is a better idea than going pawn grabbing. After 18.Qxd5? Qxd5 19.exd5 Qxc2 Black got his pawn back and is simply better.

We should also investigate the real pawn grab.
18.exd5

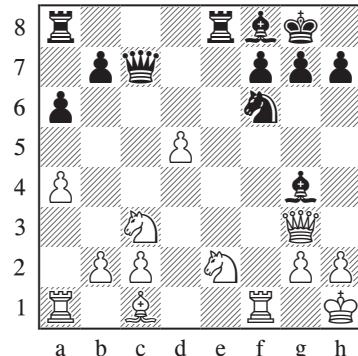
Kasparov had to ensure he is not simply losing a pawn, yet the variations are straightforward.

18...Qxf3 19.Qxf3

Not 19.gxf3? Qh3. White is clearly asking for trouble here.

19...Qg3 20.Qg3

20.Qf2? Qxe2 21.Qxe2 Qxc2 and Black wins back his pawn with interest.

**20...Rac8!**

So says the machine. Black is better.

20...Wxg3?! is the human move. After 21.Qxg3 Qb4 Black wins back the pawn and is at least equal. But he gets a much better version of the same ending with 20...Rac8.

21.Rxc7

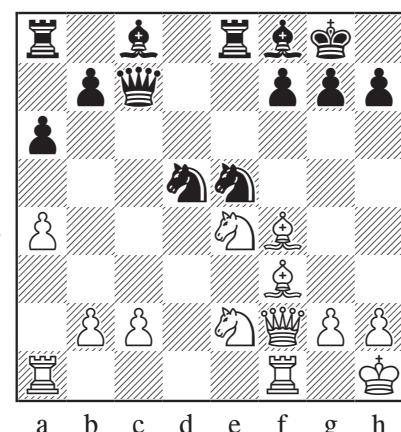
21.Qf4 Wd7 and White will lose the d5-pawn.

21...Rxc7 22.Qg3 Qb4

Black is comfortably better.

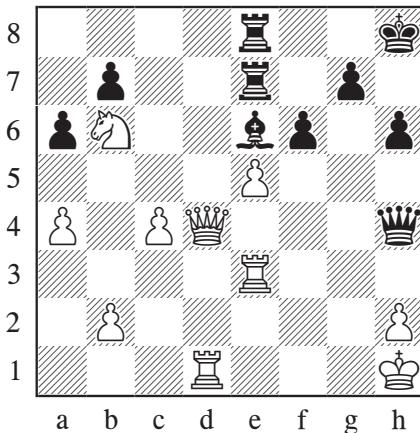
18...dxe4 19.Qxe4 Qd5

Black has a pleasant position. Kasparov later outplayed his opponent and won handily.



20.Qg3 We7 21.Rad1 Qxf3 22.gxf3 Qf6
23.Qc3 Qxe4 24.fxe4 Qh3 25.Rfe1 Rac8
26.Qd6 We6 27.Qxf8 Rxf8 28.Rd3 Wh6
29.Qd5 Wh8 30.Rg3 Re6 31.Reg1 Wh4

32.♗d4 f6 33.c4 ♘f7 34.♗b6 ♘e8 35.♗d1 h6 36.♗e3 ♘fe7 37.e5



37...♝g4! 38.♗g3 f5 39.♗d5 ♘xe5 40.♗f4 ♘f6 41.♗f1 ♘e1 42.♗xf6 ♘xf1† 43.♗g2 ♘xf4 44.♗c3 ♘e2† 45.♗g1 ♘fe4 46.h3 ♘e1† 47.♗h2 ♘e2† 48.♗g2 ♘e3 49.♗xe1 ♘xe1 50.hxg4 fxg4 51.a5 h5 52.♗g3 g5 53.♗h2 ♘e3†

0-1

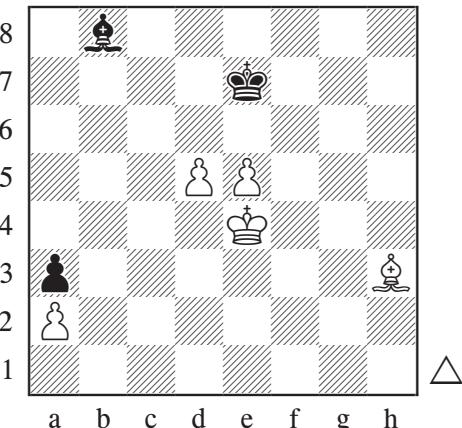
How did Kasparov correctly decide to make the ...e5-advance, which was so wrong in similar positions? Surely, he was aware of the strategic risks involved. What he did was understand that White's pieces were not in position to punish him, and that his pieces will fight better for d5 and f5 than his opponents. In addition, he calculated some lines accurately. They were not especially deep or demanding. He realized that if White did not exchange the pawns on e5, he would be able to play ...d5 and liquidate the center. He also realized that if White did exchange on e5, the d4-knight would be kicked backwards (since the f5-square was not desirable with the white bishop misplaced on f3), giving the black bishop a perfect post on e6, no longer in danger of being harassed by White's f-pawn.

While I'm sure Kasparov calculated the key

lines, it is important to remember that this took place in a clock simul. Kasparov did not have as much time to calculate as he normally would in his games, and would have been relying more on intuition. I am sure he landed on the correct decision to advance ...e5 more by strategic deliberations than calculation. The key strategic reason the advance worked was that Black's pieces were better placed to fight for the worrisome squares than their counterparts.

While we have been focusing on early Scheveningen middlegames in the previous three examples, the same principles apply in all phases of the game. To take it to an extreme, let's check out some opposite-colored bishop endgames.

Let's start with a straightforward example.



White is trivially winning, but should advance the right pawn.

Advancing the wrong pawn will squander half a point. 1.e6? would loosen the control over the d6- and f6-squares; squares that he cannot fight for with a light-squared bishop. 1...♝d6 Black has an easy fortress and White should agree to a draw immediately, as he will never be able to push either pawn.

1.d6†! is the correct move. White will have to weaken the control over some squares when a pawn moves forward, but here it is not a problem. Black can never fight for the “weakened” squares (c6 and e6) with his dark-squared bishop. **1...♝d8** **1...♝xd6** **2.exd6†** **♝xd6** loses. White queens his a-pawn. **2.♝d5** **♝a7** **3.e6** White wins.

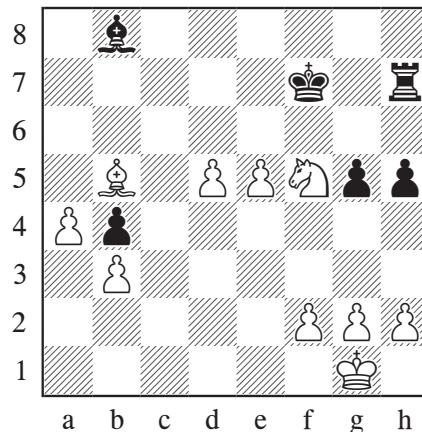
A well-known rule in opposite-colored bishop endings says that **the pressing side should place his pawns on the same color as his opponent's bishop**. Indeed, the simple d5-d6†, following that logic, wins routinely. But how did this rule come about in the first place? It comes down to pawns wanting to move backward. The fortress Black achieved after **1.e6?** came about because White pushed a pawn too far, reducing his ability to fight for the critical dark squares. By contrast, the d6-advance weakens White's control over squares that Black cannot fight him for anyway.

Much like in the Scheveningen middlegames, the guideline of not advancing pawns that weaken critical squares can be overruled if the player realizes that he is better equipped to fight for those squares.

Let's take another simple example, this one from one of the greats of the game.

Jose Raul Capablanca – Frederick Yates

Hastings 1919



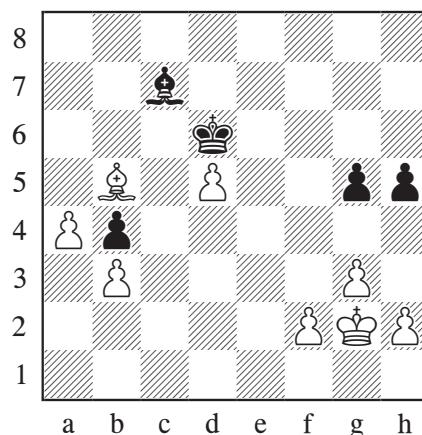
44.e6†

I am not going to award this move an exclamation mark, as it is far from the only winning move. But the point is simple: White is weakening the dark squares and Black would use this to blockade the pawns if he could. Only, this time around he cannot. There are too many passed pawns.

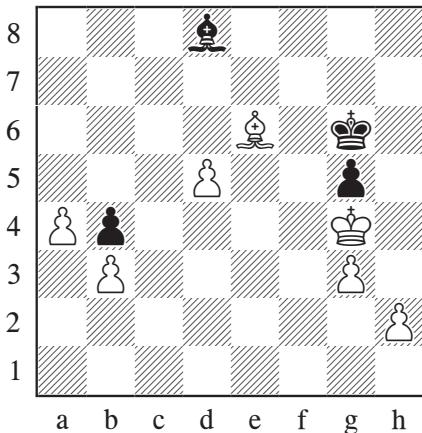
44...♝f6 45.e7 ♘xe7 46.♛xe7 ♚xe7

White won easily.

47.g3 ♘c7 48.♔g2 ♚d6



49.♗e8 h4 50.♗f7 ♔e5 51.♗h3 ♗d8
52.♗g4 hxg3 53.fxg3 ♔f6 54.♗e6 ♔g6

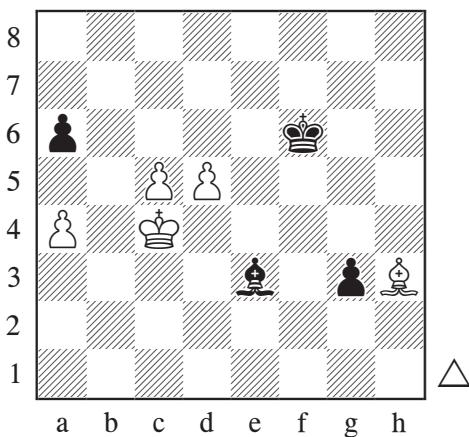


55.d6 ♔f6 56.♗f5 ♗b6 57.d7 ♗d8 58.h4
gxh4 59.gxh4 ♔c7 60.h5 ♗g7 61.♔e4
1–0

It is obvious that weakening a blockading square is justified if it is part of a 2-move tactic that wins the game on the spot. This is easy to grasp, and I doubt Capablanca deliberated long before advancing his e-pawn. But how about a more complex example, where long-term evaluation and planning is needed to decide whether to advance a pawn or not?

Boris Kostic – Saviely Tartakower

Bled 1931



White has two connected passed pawns, but Black's blockade chances are real, and the g3-pawn restricts the h3-bishop. How can White make progress? The obvious move is 50.d6, but it turns out not to work.

After 50.d6 ♔e5! Black reaches a slightly uncommon but relatively basic fortress. Even though the white pawns are on the same color as the black bishop, they cannot advance further without being blocked. 51.d7 ♗g5 and the bishop will be perfectly placed on d8.

Realizing that 50.d6 fails, one must consider other candidate moves.

50.c6!

The only winning move. White breaks the rule of keeping his pawns on the same color complex as his opponent's bishop, but he does so for very concrete reasons. By advancing his c-pawn, he loses control over the critical d6- and b6-squares, giving Black good chances for a blockade. But White has seen further and considered the second guideline. If he is better equipped to fight for the control of these critical squares than his opponent, he can make the advance anyway.

50...♗f4

Forced. Otherwise White would be queening directly. e.g. 50...♗b6 51.d6 and the c-pawn queens.

51.♗c5!

Another strong move. White now threatens 52.d6, again forcing Black's response.

51...♗e7

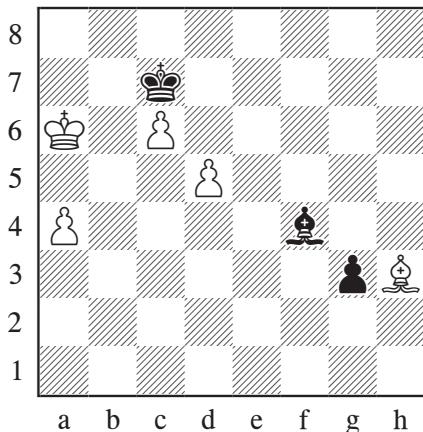
At first glance, it looks as if White has advanced the c-pawn too far. Wouldn't it just love to step backwards and help power d5-d6 through? White cannot possibly compete with Black's blockade on the d6- and c7-squares

since his bishop will prove useless in that battle. But there are other options.

52.♗b6!

Another forceful and energetic move. The threat of c7 once again compels Black's reply.

52...♝d8 53.♝xa6 ♚c7



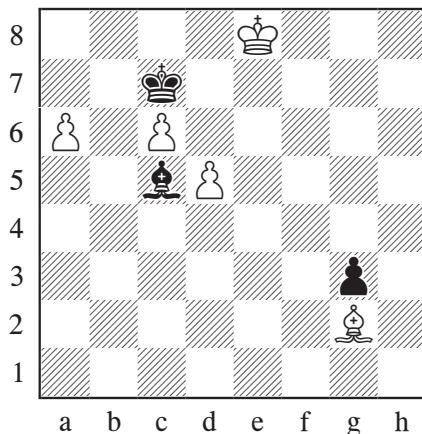
This is what White was going for. Undoubtedly the c-pawn has advanced too far, giving Black a solid blockade on the dark squares. But the only reason Black's blockade is stopping the pawns is that both king and bishop can fight for control of the d6-square. In contrast, White only has his king. But White's new asset, the a-pawn, will simply run up the board! One of Black's pieces will have to pay attention to it at a critical moment, and when that happens, White will win the battle for d6.

**54.♗b5 ♜e3 55.♗g2 ♜d6 56.a5 ♚c7
57.♗c4 ♜d2 58.a6 ♜e3 59.♗d3 ♜a7 60.♗e4
♗d6 61.♗f5 ♜c5 62.♗f6 ♜e3 63.♗f7 ♜c5
64.♗e8**

White's king has almost completed his journey. The threat is ♜e8-d8, at which point Black would be unable to prevent ♜d8-c8-b7.

64...♚c7

After 64...♜b6 65.♗f3 Black is also in zugzwang.



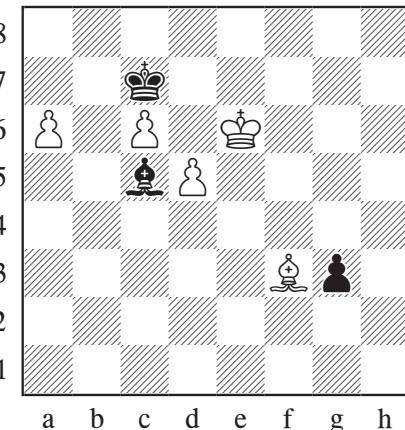
65.♗f3!

Zugzwang. Moving the king will allow 66.♗d8, while moving the bishop will allow 66.♗e7. Note how important the a-pawn is. If White did not have this pawn to distract one of the black pieces from the defense of the d6-square, Black would just hold.

65...♝a7

After 65...♝d6 White's king is successfully shut out, but Black's defenses stretched too far. 66.a7 wins.

66.♗e7 ♜c5† 67.♗e6



At long last! Black has to allow d5-d6. His blockade could not hold forever!

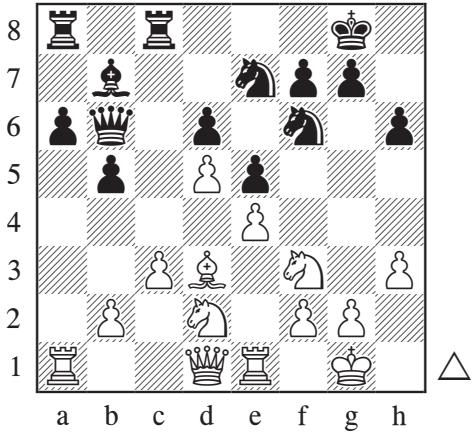
67...†b6 68.d6 †xa6 69.c7

1–0

Kostic had a completely different kind of position than Kasparov, but both used the same thought process and justification for deciding that the squares weakened by a pawn advance were not the only important aspect to the position. Kostic, a strong grandmaster from the past, understood the downsides to 50.c6 and that his opponent could use the dark squares for a blockade. But he realized that the fortress would not hold long term. Just like Kasparov, he had to calculate a key variation. Surely, he never would have played 50.c6 if he had not seen that he would win the a-pawn. But the lines were simple; Tartakower only had one move on the first three moves, after which the pawn dropped. What earned Kostic a victory over an illustrious opponent, was that he understood when a pawn is too far advanced due to weakened squares... and when it isn't.

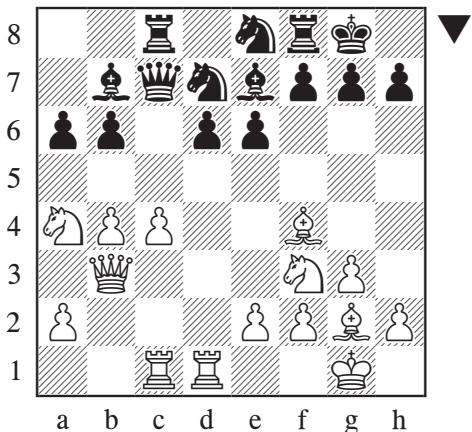
Exercises

Sam Shankland – Marc Esserman, Las Vegas 2013



White would love to advance his c-pawn and trade on b5, opening the queenside and fixing Black with a long-term weakness. But, if he advanced c3-c4 here, Black will play ...b5-b4, keeping the queenside closed and securing the c5-outpost for his knights. Should White play 19.c4 or not?

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave – Evgeniy Podolchenko, Plovdiv 2010

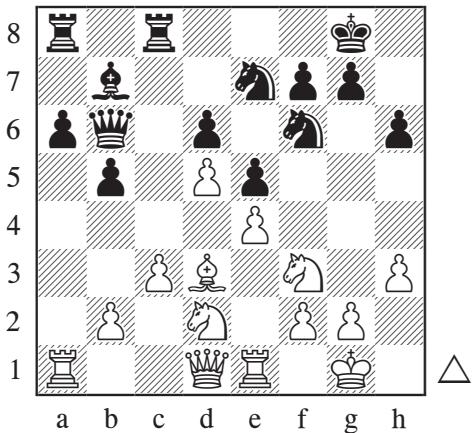


The threat of c4-c5 puts Black under concrete pressure. Should he play 16...e5 to break the pin on the d6-pawn?

Solutions

Sam Shankland – Marc Esserman

Las Vegas 2013



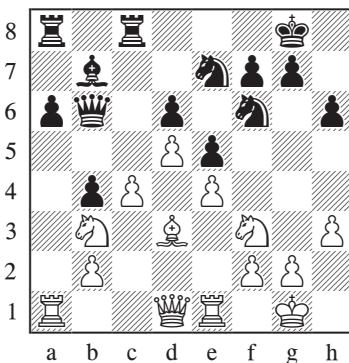
19.c4!

It is indeed correct to advance the pawn. White's point is that while this allows Black to prevent the b2-b4 advance by playing ...b4, it does not give Black the c5-square. White is simply better placed to fight for it.

19...b4 20.♗a4!

Not the only move, but the best one. Black must lose time defending d7 to reroute his knight to c5.

20.♗b3



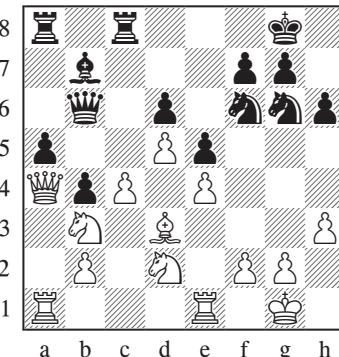
This fights for the c5-square in a more basic manner and preserves an edge. White's pieces are better equipped to fight for the c5-square. 20...♝d7 21.♕a4± for example.

20...♝c7

Preparing ...♝d7 is the critical line and our main line.

In the game Black did not even try to contest the c5-square, but we should look at it all the same:

20...a5 21.♗b3 ♘g6 22.♗fd2

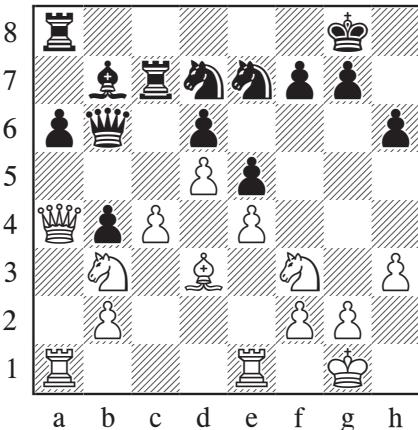


Black could not fight for c5 and could not stop ♜xa5. He could not even stop White from playing c4-c5. I had to be reasonably careful not to allow counterplay, but the game concluded swiftly.

22...♝h5 23.♝xa5 ♞cb8 24.c5 dxc5 25.♗b5 1–0

I believe Black's resignation was a bit premature, but also that he is lost. The queenside has been opened, Black's position is full of weaknesses, his structure is much inferior and he cannot avoid a bunch of trades coming up.

21.♗b3 ♘d7



22.♘a5!

I intended this move during the game, so I am keeping it as the mainline, although it is far from the only move leading to a large advantage. White has successfully prevented Black from getting a knight to c5, and defending the b4-pawn with the a-pawn.

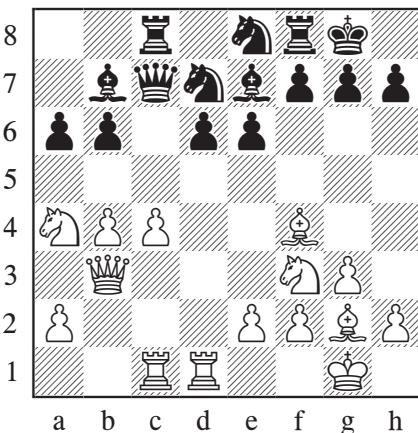
22.♗fd2 is the computer's choice and probably stronger. But I was more concerned about allowing ...a6-a5 than Stockfish.

22...♝xa5 23.♜xa5 ♜c8 24.♗fd2±

Black is much worse in the ending, as he cannot exploit the c5-square.

Maxime Vachier-Lagrange – Evgeniy Podolchenko

Plovdiv 2010



16...e5?

I dislike this move. The c4-c5 advance was annoying, but Black could deal with it without compromising his pawn structure.

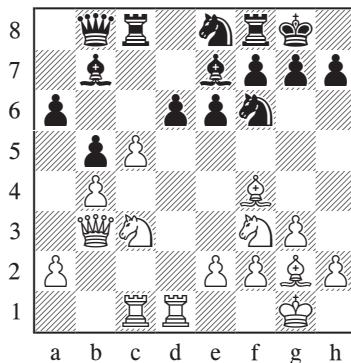
16...♝b8!

I believe this was the most natural solution to Black's problems. He continues along standard Hedgehog paths of bringing the queen to a8. At the same time it lessens the punch of c4-c5.

17.c5

White's only dangerous try. If Black's queen gets to a8, he will never have a worry.

17...b5 18.♗c3 ♜df6



Black looks fine. The c5-advance did not destroy him, and the position will liquidate when the c5- and d6-pawns are exchanged. At first, I thought White had no plan at all, but then the engine briefly flashed ♜h3. It does not amount to much, but I'll still discuss it briefly.

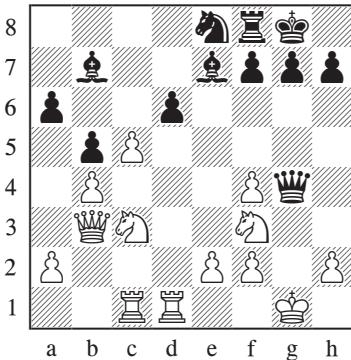
19.♗h3

The machine is initially excited about sacrificing on e6, but it's nothing for Black to be concerned about. No other move comes close to putting pressure on the black position.

19...♝h5!

Come at me!

20.♗xe6 ♜xf4 21.♗xc8 ♜xc8 22.gxf4 ♜g4†



Black has a lot of counterplay and a totally acceptable position.

17.♕e3!

Again this was not played in the game, but seems simplest.

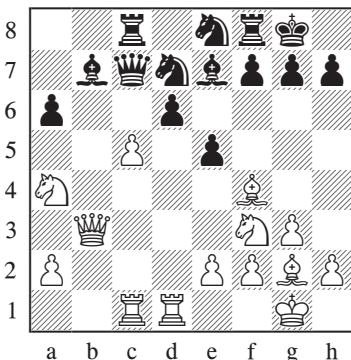
Black is significantly worse. The hedgehog structure has cracked, and he has lost control of the critical d5-square. White is much better after simple play.

But MVL is not into simple play and in the game, he went for a sharp sacrifice:

17.c5!?

I won't criticize White as his chosen approach does give an edge, but it was unnecessarily complicated.

17...bxc5 18.bxc5



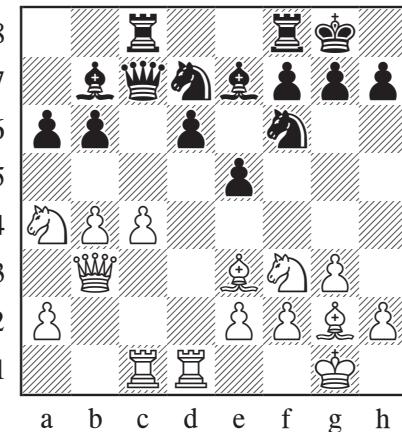
18...d5?

This just loses. After **18...exf4! 19.cxd6 ♕xc1!** Black could keep things messy.

**19.♘xe5 ♘xe5 20.♘xe5 ♖xe5 21.♗xb7 ♖f6
22.c6 ♖a3 23.♖c2 ♗g4 24.♗b3 ♖f5 25.♗f3
♘e5 26.♗b6 ♖b8 27.c7**

1–0 Vachier-Lagrave – Podolchenko, Plovdiv 2010.

17...♘ef6



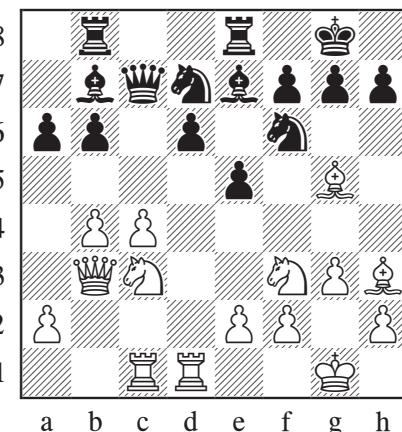
18.♗h3!

Activating the g2-bishop first...

18...♗fe8 19.♗g5!

Then the other bishop.

19...♗b8 20.♘c3



And finally, the knight. White will take possession of the d5-square, meaning Black is clearly worse.

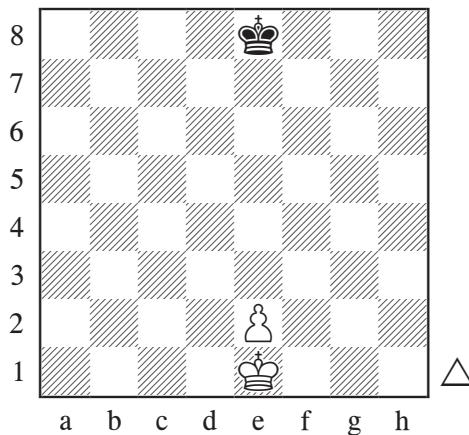
Chapter 3

Driving on Open Roads

The strength of a position is mostly a function of how effective the pieces are. Obviously, having more pieces is generally better than having fewer pieces; and higher value pieces are generally more effective than lower value pieces.

But keeping in mind the concept of compensation, we should always look at the important underlying quality: how active are the pieces on the board? Do they have good squares and open lines with which to work? A big part of the answer to these questions can be found by assessing the pawn structure.

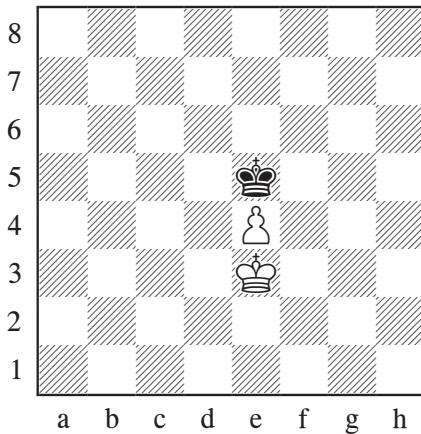
In the previous chapter we examined positions where pawns had advanced too far and left squares critically weak. The opponents' pieces quickly took advantage of this. Advancing a pawn too far is not only a problem because it can weaken squares, it can also cause grief for our own pieces. An example is a basic technical endgame.



White's winning method has been known for as long the pieces have moved as they do. His king needs to step in front of the pawn, gain the opposition and push Black's king aside. A rookie mistake would be to push the pawn too far and deprive White's king of these critical squares:

1.e4? ♕e7 2.♕e2 ♕e6 3.♕d3 ♕e5 4.♕e3

White has the opposition the same way he does if the pawn were behind the king, but the position is a technical draw. Why? Quite simple; the white pawn deprives the king of the e4-square.

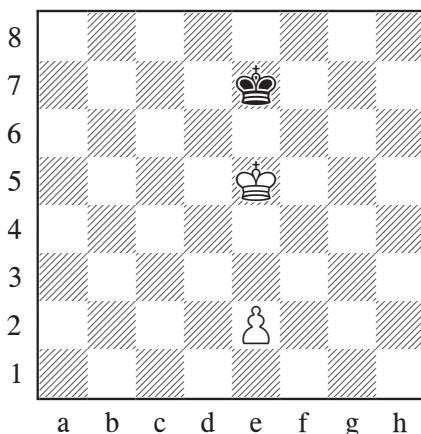


4... $\hat{Q}e6$

White would like to play 5. $\hat{Q}e4$ to force the black king back further, but as he is unable to do so, Black makes a draw.

White wins by bringing the king out first:

1. $\hat{Q}d2!$ $\hat{Q}e7$ 2. $\hat{Q}e3$ $\hat{Q}e6$ 3. $\hat{Q}e4$ $\hat{Q}d6$ 4. $\hat{Q}f5$ $\hat{Q}e7$ 5. $\hat{Q}e5$

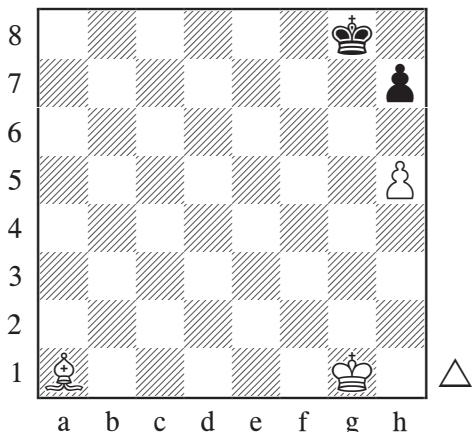


And so on...

There will be nothing new to the readers of this book here, but I find that many (I include myself before writing this book) have never thought deeply about why one approach wins and the other does not. We know not to advance the pawn too far, but what is the underlying reason for this? The pawn wishes to advance to e8 after all.

We know now it is because advancing the pawn too early deprives the king of the key e4-square, needed to maintain the opposition.

Many technical endgames feature this idea. The following ending is a bit more complicated, but still easy to grasp.



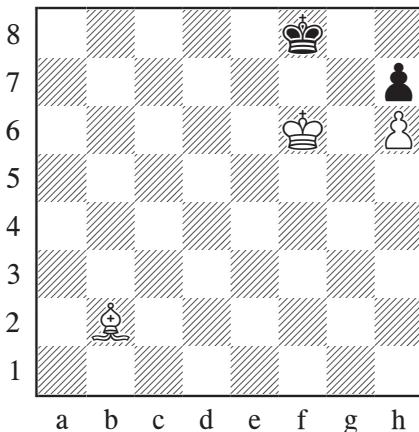
1.h6?

Advancing the pawn to h6 deprives White's king of the only avenue to attack the h7-pawn, giving White no way to remove the black king from the corner.

1... $\hat{Q}f7$ 2. $\hat{Q}g2$ $\hat{Q}g8$ 3. $\hat{Q}g3$ $\hat{Q}f7$ 4. $\hat{Q}g4$ $\hat{Q}g8$ 5. $\hat{Q}g5$ $\hat{Q}f7$ 6. $\hat{Q}b2$ $\hat{Q}g8$

We see the reason the pawn needed to stay on h5: the white king badly needs the h6-square. Try as he might, there is no way for White to get at the h7-pawn.

7. $\hat{Q}f6$ $\hat{Q}f8!$



Black does not blunder mate in one. White has no way to chase the king out of the corner or win the h7-pawn.

8.♖c3 ♖g8 9.♖b4 ♖h8 10.♖f7

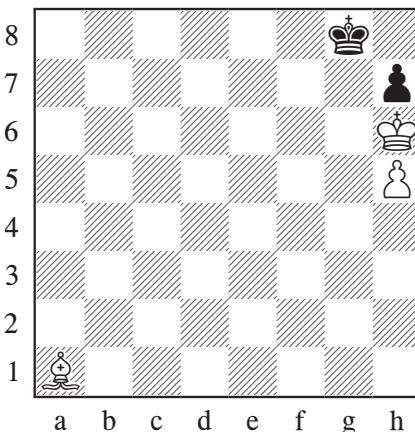
Stalemate. Note that White would be winning if the pieces were shifted one file to the left.

Let's look at what happens when White leaves the h6-square available to his king.

1.♔g2!

Or 1.♔f2/h2. White runs his king to the weak square in Black's camp instead of occupying it with a pawn.

**1...♗f7 2.♗g3 ♗g8 3.♗g4 ♗f7 4.♗g5 ♗g8
5.♗h6**



White wins.

A simple example of how advancing a pawn too far can deprive a piece access to an important square. It is worth noticing that in the endgame, this is often the king.

It is one thing to discuss technical positions where the winning plans are already known. But what about endgames that cannot be found in textbooks or more complicated technical endgames? Also then we see that it is all too easy to push a pawn too far. Almost everyone will have experienced gaining a half-point unexpectedly when an opponent carelessly pushed a pawn too far.

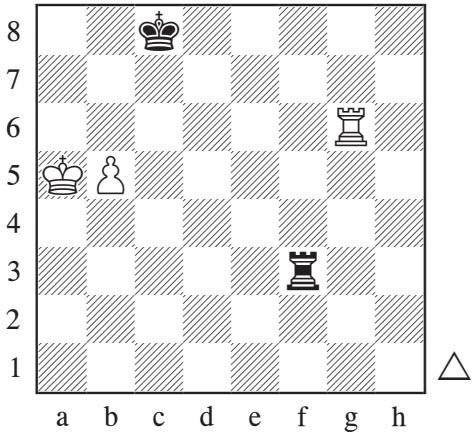
An error like 1.h6 in the previous example is common and hard to eliminate. As usual, there are some guidelines to consider when contemplating pushing a pawn. The first one is, as usual, a warning sign.

Winning plans in the endgame will predominantly involve promoting a pawn. But be cautious not to push your prime contender too far, as your king often will need to step in front of it to assist in clearing a path to the 8th rank.

Let's examine the rapid play-off game that decided the 2012 World Championship Match to see this principle in action.

Viswanathan Anand – Boris Gelfand

Moscow (14) 2012

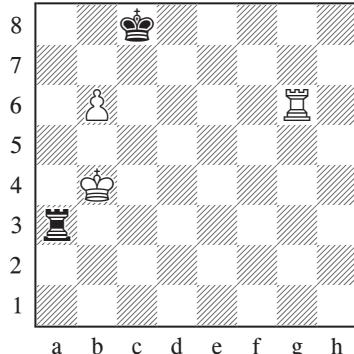


White is a pawn up, but it is not a great pawn – and rook endgames have a drawish tendency. Black to play holds easily by blocking the pawn with his king. Anand did not allow this.

75.♔b6!

Anand makes use of the square in front of his pawn. His king and rook will together be able to push the black king out of the way, clearing the path for the b-pawn. Note that the pawn provides an excellent shield for the white king. Black has no checks. Certainly, the Indian superstar did not consider advancing the b-pawn to the 6th rank. He knew he needed the square in front of it for his king.

By contrast, advancing the pawn leads to an immediate draw: 75.b6? White's king now has nowhere to hide from the checks and has no active role to play. 75...♜a3† 76.♔b4



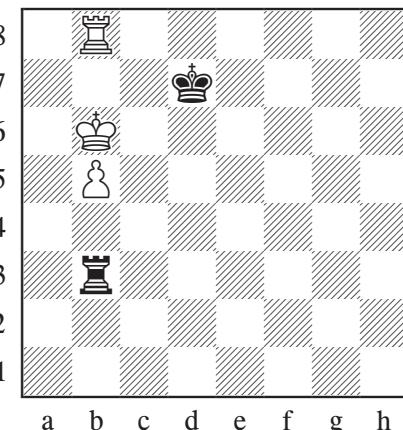
75...♜a1 Black will keep annoying the white king, forcing a draw.

After 75.♔b6! Black would love to give a check on the sixth rank, but unfortunately White has that under control. Now the threat of ♜g8† is very real.

75...♜b3

The natural square for the room, but with a simple sequence White achieves a winning position.

76.♜g8† ♜d7 77.♜b8!



Gelfand resigned without a second's hesitation.

1–0

The game could have continued with 77... $\mathbb{E}b1$, when White plays 78. $\mathbb{Q}a7!$. Black is unable to prevent White from reaching the Lucena position. 78... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 79.b6† $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 80. $\mathbb{E}c8†$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 81.b7 is a plausible end to all speculation.

Our guideline worked well in this case. But, as previously, the first guideline can be overruled by a second one.

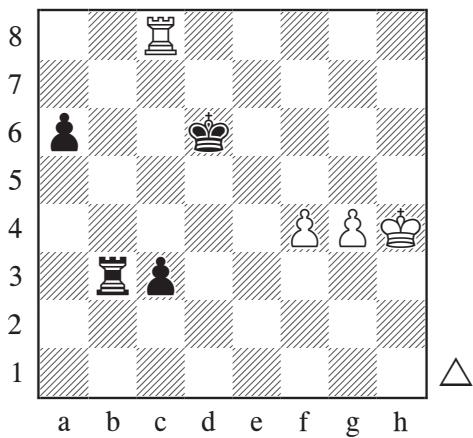
If you can queen a pawn without putting your king in front of the pawn, do it!

This is particularly important in a pawn race where every tempo is important. Also, we should remember that the king does not need to be in front of the pawn to control squares. If it can do this just as effectively from behind, this may also work.

Let's see this principle first in a simple setting.

Ricardo De Guzman – Sam Shankland

San Francisco 2008

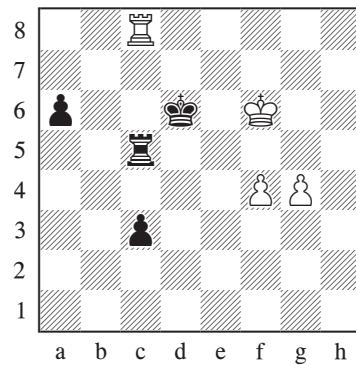


I vividly remember this game. I needed a draw to clinch my second IM-norm, and would have achieved it if my opponent had misjudged how to deal with the passed pawns.

54.g5!

As discussed, we should be careful about advancing the pawn we intend to queen ahead of our king. But, in this case, my opponent followed the second guideline effectively. The pawns do not need the king's help. Rather, time is of the essence.

54. $\mathbb{Q}g5?$ would have put the king in front of the pawns and would guarantee their promotion. But it also loses valuable time, allowing Black to generate counterplay with his own pawns, starting with a typical regrouping maneuver: 54... $\mathbb{E}b5†$! 55. $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{E}c5$!



In that case White would have to play precisely to make a draw.

54... $\mathbb{Q}e6$

Black is hoping to bring his king to f5 to slow down the pawns, but was stopped in his tracks.

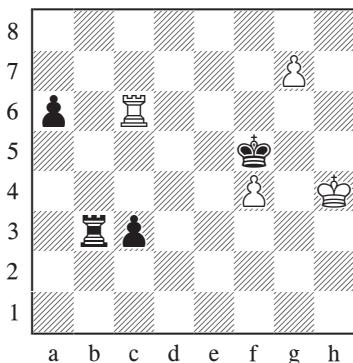
55.♔g4!

Black's king is not allowed to join the defense.

If White had continued to push the pawn instead of controlling the f5-square, the result would have been undesirable.

55.g6? ♔f6 56.♕c6† ♔f5! 57.g7

White is close to queening the pawn, but Black has a trick:



57...♜b1!

Black uses tactics to get the rook to its ideal position behind the advanced pawn. Black makes a draw, based on:

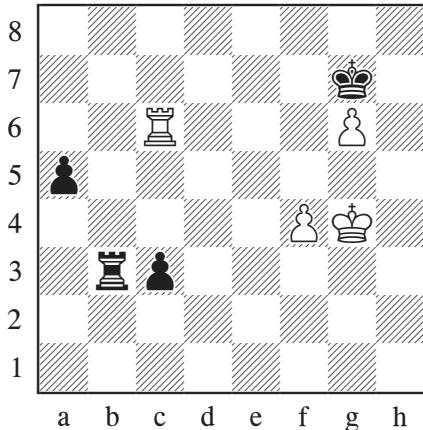
58.g8=♛ ♜h1† 59.♔g3 ♜g1†

55...a5 56.g6!

White does not worry about advancing the pawn beyond where his king can reach. The king will support the pawn from behind.

56.f5† was also winning.

56...♔f6 57.♕c6† ♔g7

**58.♔g5!**

The final finesse. White's king is perfectly placed on g5, safe from checks, with control of the key squares f6 and h6.

58...c2 59.♕c7†

Enough!

1–0

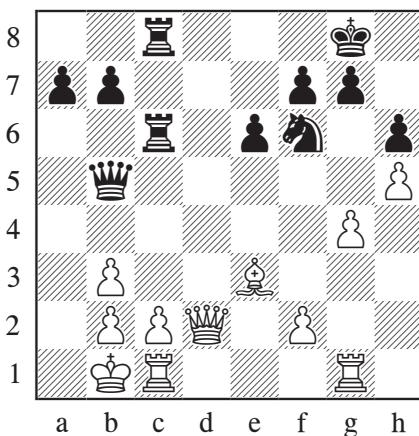
While blocking squares, lines or diagonals for the pieces by pushing a pawn too far is most common in the endgame, it happens in all types of positions. In the endgame, it is frequently the king which is displeased by a pawn's overreach, but in the middlegame we seldom see monarchs leading their armies from the front. Before all the pieces come off, advancing a pawn is much more likely to block a file or diagonal, than to occupy a square a piece needs, although this obviously does happen as well.

Let's examine a middlegame from my junior days.

John Bryant – Sam Shankland

St Louis 2010

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.Qc3 dxe4 4.Qxe4 Qf5
 5.Qg3 Qg6 6.h4 h6 7.Qf3 Qd7 8.h5 Qh7
 9.Qd3 Qxd3 10.Wxd3 e6 11.Qd2 Qgf6
 12.0-0-0 Qe7 13.Qb1 0-0 14.We2 c5
 15.dxc5 Wc7 16.Qf5 Qxc5 17.Q5d4 Rac8
 18.Qc1 Wb6 19.Whg1 Qxd4 20.Qxd4 Qc5
 21.Qb3 Qxb3 22.axb3 Qc6 23.g4 Qfc8
 24.Qe3 Wa5 25.Wd2 Wb5 26.Qc1



The position is extremely sharp: The players have castled opposite directions and now both sides are looking for a way to attack the king.

While White is planning an imminent opening of the kingside with g4-g5, Black has plenty of queenside counterplay, but also the burden of choice. I wanted to use the a-file to launch an attack, but chose a counterproductive way to do so.

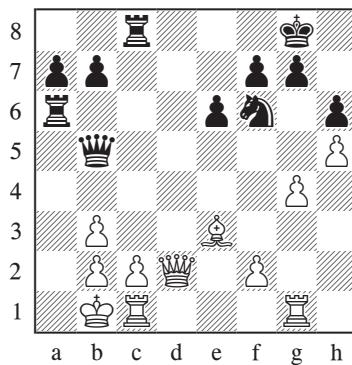
26...a5?

Wrong! It is natural to open lines for the pieces, but advancing the a-pawn closes more lines than it opens.

Black had a more effective way forward; he should prefer to pounce directly with an attempt at immediate checkmate:

26...Ra6!

The half-open a-file beckons and White is in trouble. I did not believe I had enough space on the a-file with which to operate, since ...Wa5 will result in an exchange of queens. But Black has tactical ideas that block White's control of the a5-square. Let's see what happens if White proceeds blindly with his plan.



27.g5?

A human move, but a bad one. (I am keeping it as the main line as illustration of the main point.)

27.f3? Stopping ...Qe4 does not work either. Black has 27...Qd5! and White is now unable to stop both ...Qb4 and ...Qc3†.

After a very long think the computer finds the bizarre 27.We1!, claiming Black is only slightly better. I find it inhuman and less than likely it would have happened in the game.

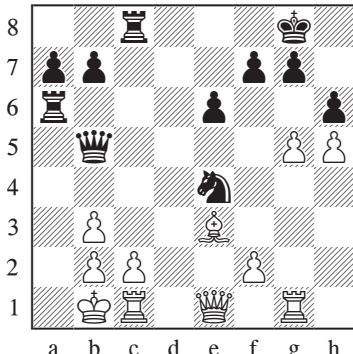
27...Qe4

Black's initiative is growing. White's queen must stay in touch with the a5-square.

28.We1?

Another bad move, with White continuing along a caveman plan. He keeps the a5-square under control and plans to continue his attack on the kingside.

After the more reasonable 28.Wd4 Wa5 the massive threats along the a-file force White into a dismal endgame. After 29.Wa4 Qxg5 30.Wxa5 Wxa5 Black is a clean pawn up.



28... $\mathbb{Q}c3\#!$

White is mated.

In the game, after 26...a5, White fell victim to the same mistake: playing too slowly.

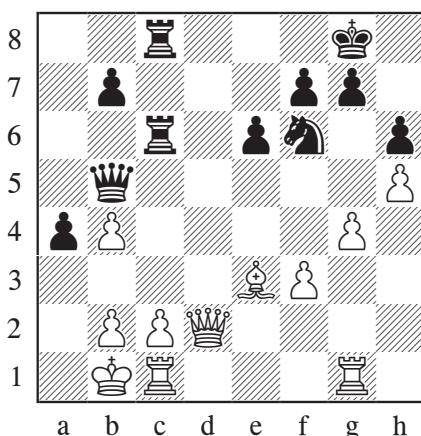
27.f3?

The direct way to punish Black for losing the momentum is to slam through on the kingside with 27.g5!.

27...a4

Black would love to open the queenside, but White does not allow it.

28.b4

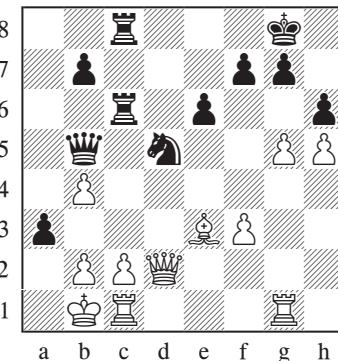


Black's attempt to use the a-file to deliver mate fell on its face. The idea was good, but the execution poor.

But since 27.f3 was not the most incisive, Black is not yet in such bad shape. Alas, the comedy of errors continued...

28... $\mathbb{Q}c4?$

Preferable was 28... $\mathbb{Q}d5!$, and Black does well in the arising complications. (Consider how different the position would be if Black's pawn was still on a7.) Critical is 29.g5 a3!, making use of the advanced a-pawn.



White's queenside is under serious fire.

Ignoring the attack to bust Black on the kingside fails: 30.gxh6? axb2 31. $\mathbb{Q}xg7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ and Black is faster.

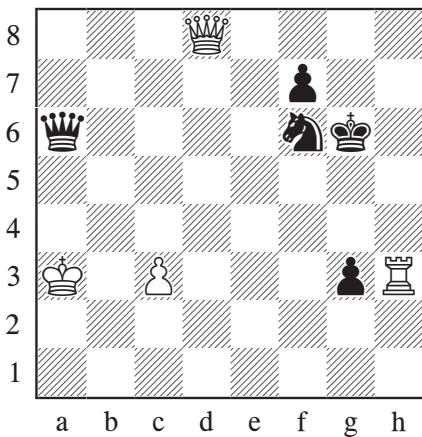
After the preferable 30. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ the game remains complex, but maybe Black is still better?

29.g5!

White needed to be asked only twice! The attack is very dangerous, but the rest of the game was equally riddled with childish fumbles by the young players; with a final blunder deciding the result.

29... $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ 30.gxh6 g6 31. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{W}xb4$ 32.c3 $\mathbb{W}f8$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 34.h7# $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}4c7$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ e5 37. $\mathbb{W}xa4$ $\mathbb{W}d6$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}xd8\#$ $\mathbb{W}xd8$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{W}d6$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ $\mathbb{W}xc7$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 44. $\mathbb{W}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 45. $\mathbb{W}b5$ e4 46.fxe4 $\mathbb{W}f4$ 47. $\mathbb{W}xb7$ $\mathbb{W}f3$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ g5 49. $\mathbb{W}a8$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 50.b4 g4 51. $\mathbb{W}h8$

$\mathbb{W}xe4\#$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{W}e3$ 53. $b5$ $g3$ 54. $\mathbb{B}h3$ $\mathbb{W}g5$
 55. $\mathbb{W}d8$ $\mathbb{W}xb5\#$ 56. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{W}a6\#$



57. $\mathbb{Q}b3??$ $\mathbb{W}e6\#$

0–1

Although the game was riddled with mistakes, the point about Black blocking his own attacking chances down the a-file with ...a7-a5 was clear. Whenever a pawn advances, it leaves a square and opens a line, but it also occupies a new square and closes another line. In this case, ...a7-a5 closed off the access to the a-file, which could have been used with devastating effect.

How can we avoid blocking off our own avenues and squares by pushing pawns too far? Undoubtedly a hard question to answer, and even very strong players fall victim to this mistake. But, as always, I have some guidelines to follow.

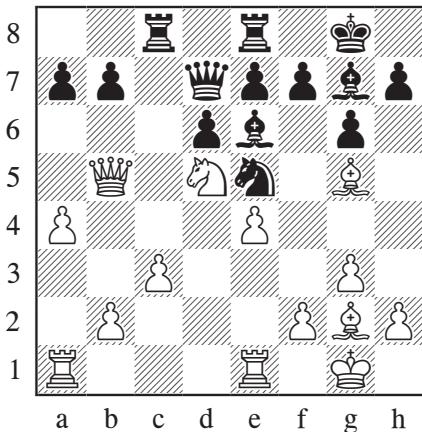
Before advancing a pawn, one should always consider what the best square for each of the pieces is. Be cautious of closing lines or filling squares needed for your pieces. Don't restrain your own forces without good reason.

Let's examine a case where a player did not follow this guideline and quickly saw his position deteriorate.

Sergei Tiviakov – Orlen Ruiz Sanchez

Villahermosa 2016

Black is under some concrete pressure here. White threatens $\mathbb{W}xd7$, removing a key defender of the e7-pawn. However, the threat is easy to parry. Black has many choices as to how to prevent this basic tactic from costing him a lot of material – but I really dislike the move he chose in the game.



16...f6?

If you consider the guideline above, this move cannot be recommended. Before making such an advance, Black should consider what the best squares for his pieces are. A lot of them are already well placed. In particular the g7-bishop is on an active square, the pride of Black's Dragon setup. The ...f6-advance blunts the bishop, and if Black were ever to break it out with ...f6-f5, he will saddle himself with hanging central pawns and open up for the

g7-bishop's counterpart on g2 as well. All in all, a dubious strategic decision!

I think performing an active role with the king was the easiest way for Black to solve his problems.

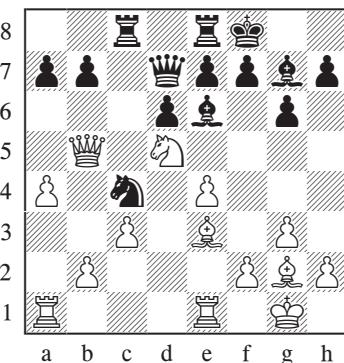
16... $\mathbb{Q}f8$

The king feels no less safe on f8 than g8, White's concrete threat has been prevented, and Black retains a harmonious position. The machine claims White is a little better after $\mathbb{Q}e3$, but I do not buy it.

17. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

Now I think Black's best route to equality is engaging in concrete variations starting with:

17... $\mathbb{Q}c4!$



Active pieces at their finest. Note that the pressure on White's queenside is largely due to the bishop on g7, which is quite happy that the f7-pawn remained at home.

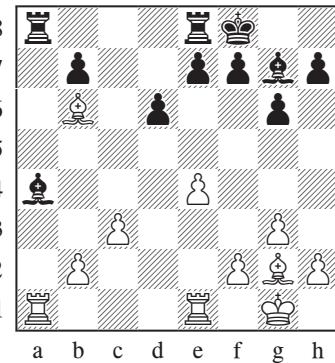
White must do something with his bishop. The most natural response is 18. $\mathbb{Q}d4$, which is analogous to a similar line in the game continuation. But the position is very different now, making $\mathbb{Q}e3-d4$ a mistake. Black is very glad to have his pawn on f7 instead of f6. As such, he is already challenging the d4-bishop, and in fact he can chop it off right away.

Now Black can highlight why the pawn is better on f7. 18... $\mathbb{Q}xd4!$ 19.cxd4 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 20.axb5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5!$ 21.exd5



Black is better in the endgame due to White's numerous weak pawns.

White should therefore prefer: 18. $\mathbb{W}xd7!$, after which he has some chances to press. Still, I believe the position should be drawn reasonably easily. 18... $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ The following sequence is completely forced. 19. $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}xa4$



After all the exchanges, I have a hard time imagining Black will lose.

My computer prefers 16... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ over 16... $\mathbb{Q}f8$. It may well be right, but the point remains the same. The f7-pawn should not have been touched.

17. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$

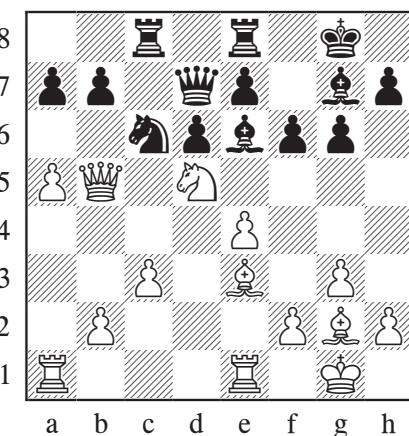
Not a happy move. Black relocates his knight from the active e5-square (where it could hope to jump to c4 in the future) and bring it back

to c6, admitting to the loss of two tempos. But it was hard to suggest anything else! The active tries with moves like ... $\mathbb{Q}c4$ were no longer working as the blunted g7-bishop was no longer a factor in the fight for the key central squares and pressure on White's queenside pawns.

17... $\mathbb{Q}c4$ Black would love to make an active move like this one work, but after a simple response he will find himself regretting the ...f7-f6 advance. 18. $\mathbb{Q}d4!$ White takes over the long diagonal and has a well posted bishop in the center. Black has no counterplay, no decent way to challenge the d4-bishop, and is clearly worse. A stark contrast to the same position had Black played ... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ and kept the long diagonal open.

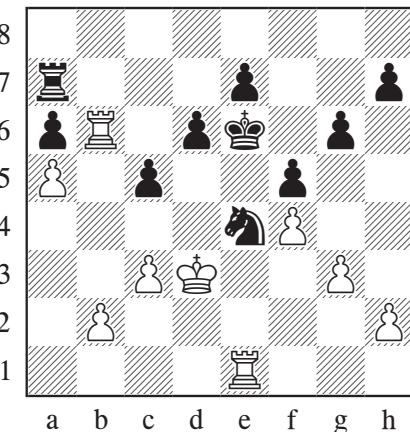
17...a6 It's possible Black could put up more resistance in this way, but now we are back in the previous section. Did Black really need to weaken the b6-square? 18. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d4\pm$ White is pleasantly better. Once again, he takes advantage of the availability of the d4-square, thanks to ...f7-f6 shutting down the g7-bishop.

18.a5



White is clearly better and went on to win a nice game.

18...a6 19. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 21.f4 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ f5 23. $\mathbb{W}e6\#$ $\mathbb{W}xe6$ 24. $\mathbb{W}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{B}xc6$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ c5 30. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$



34.g4 $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 35.g5 e5 36.fxe5 d5

36...dxe5 37. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ wins easily.

37.h4 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ d4 40.a6 $\mathbb{Q}f2\#$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}e4\#$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ d3# 43. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ c4# 44. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$

1–0

The ...f6-advance surely made the g7-bishop sad. By the time Black managed to open it up with ...f6-f5, his position had already been ruined beyond repair.

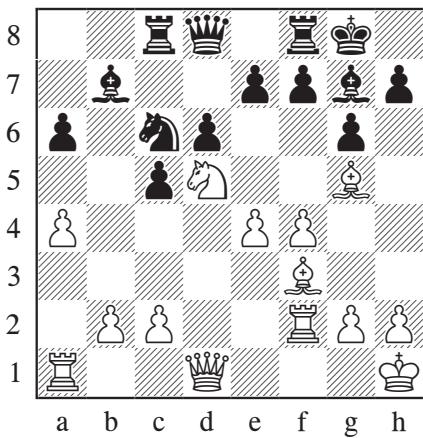
Like the previous two Parts, the first guideline should serve as a warning – a red flag. Advancing a pawn could have consequences. But like in the previous two cases, the guideline can be overruled by the second guideline.

If a pawn push deprives one of your pieces of a key open line or a critical square, you can go ahead and do it anyway if the pawn will be able to move ahead again shortly, if it fights for lines or squares for other pieces that are more important, or if you can find an alternative happy home for the piece you have just limited.

I like the next example, where Loek van Wely demonstrated every element of this guideline in the space of a few moves.

Robert Zelcic – Loek van Wely

Elista (ol) 1998



There are some changes in the pawn structure and piece placement, but Black is facing a similar dilemma as in the previous game. White has an active bishop on g5, lasering on the e7-pawn. While $\mathbb{Q}xe7\#$ is not a direct threat yet, Black does not want it hanging over his head.

The key difference is that the ...f6-advance gives Black dynamic possibilities.

16...f6!

Certainly, Van Wely understood the risk of shutting in the bishop. But also, that it was only temporary and that he will achieve the freeing ...f6-f5 soon. Sometimes he can even relocate the bishop to the active h6-square.

The ...f6-advance is freeing up Black's pieces. The e7-pawn can safely advance to e6, expelling the annoying knight, and the black knight is relieved of its defensive duties. Van Wely exploits this brilliantly.

17. ♔h4 e6!

Goodbye!

18. ♜e3

White is being pushed backward, and Black does not let up.

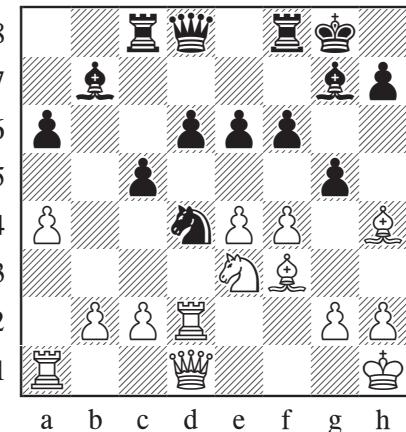
18...♞d4!

Energetic and strong. The knight is on a nice active square and Black is ready to snare the bishop pair. Note that the e4-pawn could become weak at the end of all of this.

19. ♜d2

Black's position uncoils like a spring.

19...g5!?



Black pushes White's pieces farther back and breaks the pin on the f-pawn.

20.♗g3

Black has achieved a great deal in the last few moves. He has gained space, pushed White's pieces far backward, seized the initiative, and installed a gorgeous knight on d4 that is ready to net him the bishop pair on a moment's notice. Now only one problem remains – he has the passive g7-bishop to deal with, made passive by his initial ...f7-f6 advance. Van Wely has two ways to dramatically improve the Dragon bishop, and he chose one of them in the game.

20.fxg5 fxg5 Black would be delighted to see the f-pawns exchanged. All his worries about a passive g7-bishop have been assuaged just three moves after playing ...f6 in the first place. Three very forcing moves that are not too hard to calculate. I am sure Van Wely had this position in mind when he chose to temporarily block his bishop.

Black now has two ways to improve the g7-bishop. He chose an effective one in the game.

20...gx_f4

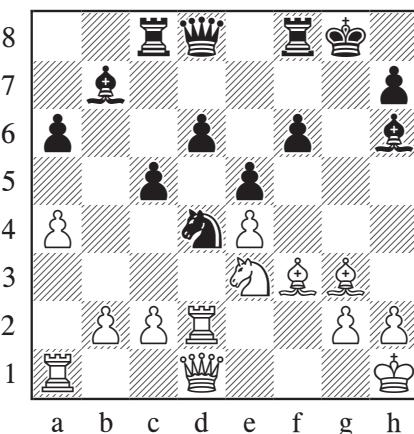
Black decides to bring the g7-bishop to the active h6-square. This is a strong move but not the only one.

20...f5!? It was also possible for Black to reopen the long diagonal directly. Van Wely really used every justification in our second guideline to play ...f6. He gained freedom and squares for his other pieces, he could advance ...f6-f5 quickly to activate his bishop again, and he could reroute the bishop to another active post (as he chose to in the game).

21.♗xf4 e5!

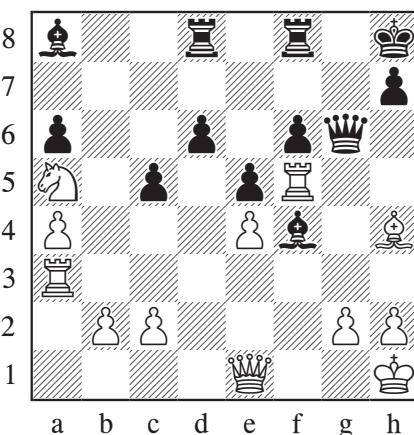
White's bishop is expelled from f4 and forced back into passivity.

22.♗g3 ♘h6!



At the end of the sequence, Black's proud long diagonal has been severely blunted – no doubt due to his initial ...f7-f6 advance. Normally a bishop would become passive on g7, but Van Wely has found a happy home for him. On h6 the bishop is active, putting a lot of pressure on White's position. He is not bothered by the f-pawn being on f6 instead of f7. Black's activity leaves him with a pleasant advantage, and he went on to win a nice game.

23.♗a3 ♗b6 24.♘c4 ♗c7 25.♗f2 ♘h8
26.♗g4 ♗cd8 27.♗e1 ♗f7 28.♘a5 ♗a8
29.♗h4 ♗g6 30.♗f5 ♘xf5 31.♗xf5 ♘f4



32.♗b3?

32.c4 was necessary to continue the game.

32...♝xe4 33.♝xe4 d5 34.♞f3 ♝xf5 35.g3

♝h3 36.♝b7 ♝g5 37.♝c6 ♝xh4 38.♝xd8

♝xd8

0–1

The same Dragon structure as the previous game was on display, with the bishop blocked by the f6-pawn. But in the first case ...f6 was a positional error, while in the second it was the best move, leading to a pleasant position.

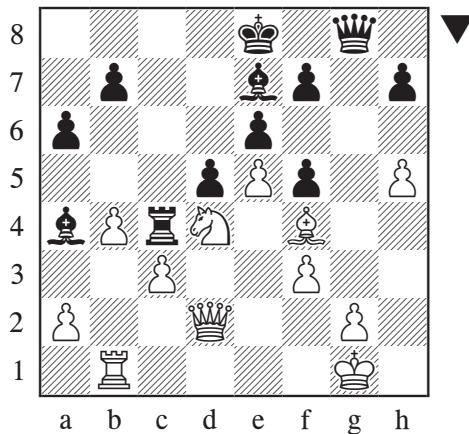
The difference is explained by guideline #2. Van Wely gained a lot by playing ...f6: he relieved the pressure on the e7-pawn, pushed the d5-knight backward, freed his own knight to join the fight in the center. All at the tiny cost of blunting the g7-bishop. When it transpired that his bishop could be moved to another promising diagonal, it was clear that ...f6 was justified.

By contrast, Ruiz Sanchez's ...f6-advance left his bishop passive on g7. He needed to concede the bishop pair and badly compromise his pawn structure to activate it later.

Exercises

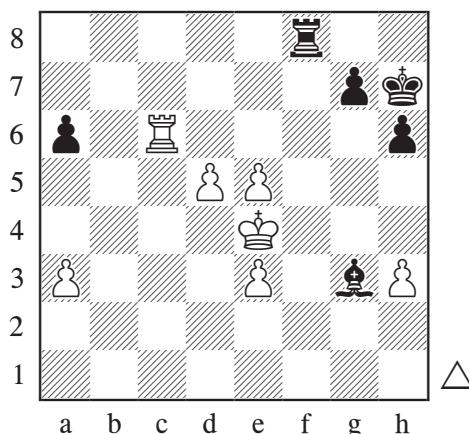
I will offer a couple of puzzles.

Xie Jun – Natalia Zhukova, New Delhi (4.1) 2000



Should Black keep her queenside pieces secure and defended by playing ...b7-b5?

Sam Shankland – Surya Ganguly, Edmonton 2016



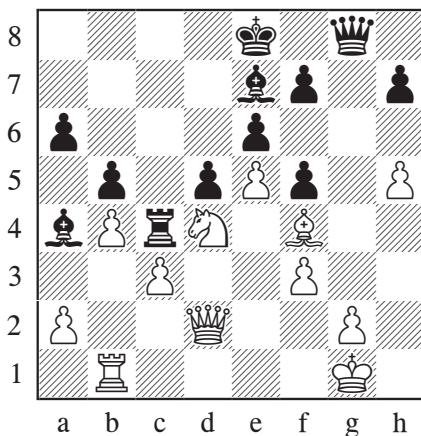
White has a pair of menacing passed pawns in the center as compensation for the missing piece. Should he advance them right away or try to bring the king in front first?

Solutions

Xie Jun – Natalia Zhukova

New Delhi (4.1) 2000

34...b5?



There is nothing to be gained by playing ...b5, but a great deal to lose. The rook and bishop are not in need of extra support as nothing can currently attack them. But once Black has marooned her own bishop on a4, White switches her attention to the kingside and center, almost playing with an extra piece.

34... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ or any other non-committal move would leave Black with a fine position, but I like immediately retreating the bishop to the defensive d7-square, where it holds the pawn chain together quite nicely. On a4 it was not accomplishing much.

35. $\mathbb{Q}h2$

White has all the time in the world to prepare for hostilities outside the a4-bishop's sphere of influence.

35... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}e1!$

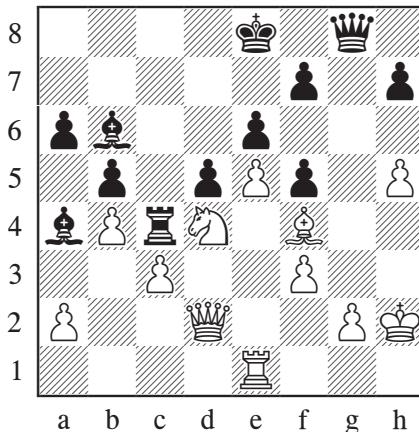
White prepares to strike with $\mathbb{Q}xf5$. While the move Black played was asking for trouble

in a big way, it is very hard to suggest an alternative! It seems that White will crash through with $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ followed by e6 no matter what. Imagine if the b-pawn was on b7. Black could then easily defend with ... $\mathbb{Q}d7$.

36... $\mathbb{Q}b6?$

Black loses without a fight, but her position was already difficult.

36... $\mathbb{W}f8$ is, according to the machine, Black's most serious defensive chance. Nonetheless, I do not envy her task after: 37. $\mathbb{Q}xf5!$ Anyway! 37...exf5 38.e6 f6 39. $\mathbb{W}xd5$ White has a vicious attack.



37. $\mathbb{Q}xf5!$ exf5 38.e6!

White's attack is decisive. Note how much better Black's defensive prospects would be if she did not have a bishop locked out of play on a4! If the bishop had instead been on d7, the sacrifice would not have worked at all.

38...d4

38...f6 Trying to keep the e-file closed is natural, but Black is promptly mated. 39. $\mathbb{W}xd5$

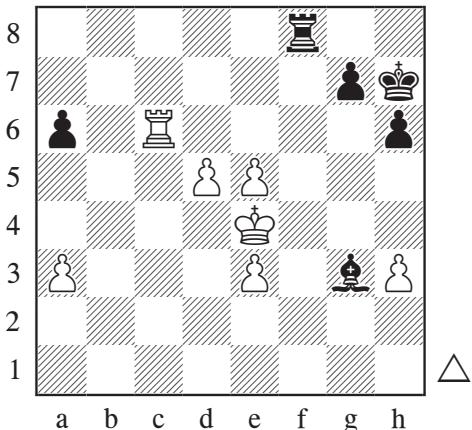
39.exf7† $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 40. $\mathbb{W}e2!$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$

Black resigned before White had a chance to play 41. $\mathbb{W}e7$ with mate.

1–0

Sam Shankland – Surya Ganguly

Edmonton 2016



34.d6!

White can and should start pushing his pawns. There was no feasible way to bring the king to e6, and Black is not well positioned to stop the pawns in any case.

34...♝e8

Black forces the pawns onto light squares, but this does not help matters.

35.d7!

A little tactic justifies losing the e5-pawn.

35...♝d8

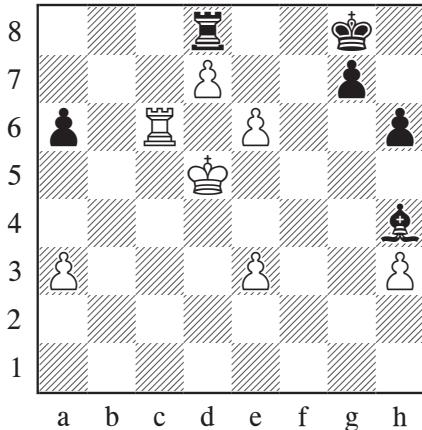
Black would like to take one of the pawns but after 35...♝xe5† 36.♗d4 he cannot stop the d-pawn from promoting.

36.e6 ♜h4 37.♗d5

White's king has no room in front of the pawns, but he does not need it! The pawns will go through easily with the king behind them.

37...♝g8

In time pressure, I missed the best way, but White is still winning.



38.♝xa6?!

Pushing the bishop from h4 wins immediately. After 38.♝c4! Black faces a dilemma as the bishop cannot yet leave the h4-d8 diagonal, but after 38...♝g5 39.♝c8! ♜f8 40.♝d6! the point of 38.♝c4 is revealed: Black no longer has ...♝g3† and cannot prevent ♜d6-c7.

By contrast, going to the eighth rank immediately does not work. After 38.♝c8? White cannot run the king to c7 just yet because the bishop can come to g3. 38...♜f8 39.♝d6 ♜g3†! Black makes a draw here.

38...♜f8 39.♝a4

With the clock ticking down, Black lost any hope of offering further resistance just before the time control.

39...♝f6?

If Black had found 39...♝g5 in the time scramble, he could have asked White to find a bunch of good moves to win the game.

40.♝c4 ♜e7 41.♝c8 ♜g5 42.a4 ♜xe3 43.a5 h5 44.♝c6

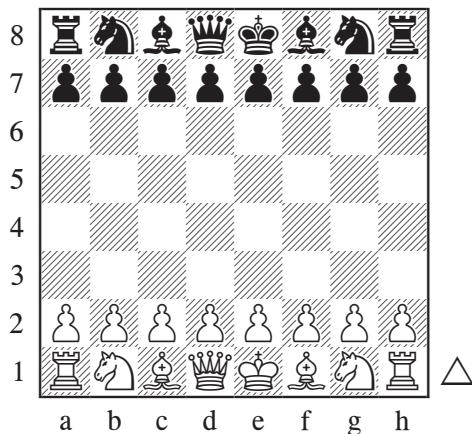
1–0

Chapter 4

Safe Houses should not be Compromised

In previous chapters, we have examined some positional reasons that pawns might wish to move backward. Chapter 1 was about the pawn becoming vulnerable, Chapter 2 about allowing the opponent's pieces to become too active, Chapter 3 about condemning our own pieces to passivity. The topic not yet addressed is king safety.

In this chapter I will talk only about positions where the king's location will remain reasonably constant. For instance, I can think of one position where advancing a pawn in front of the king can hardly be considered a mistake. Maybe you have seen it before?



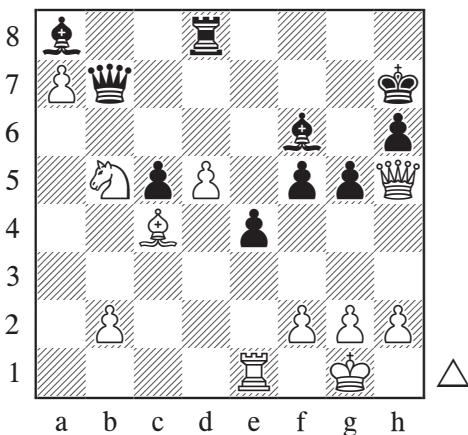
The pawns currently providing shelter for White's king are the d-, e- and f-pawns. I will however claim that 1.e4 and 1.d4 are not mistakes. Maybe they are even good moves! There is a reason for this. The king seldom remains on e1 for long. In most games he will be evacuated to g1 or c1. Health and safety...

Would 1.e4 and 1.d4 be the best moves if castling was no longer legal? Possibly, but who knows? The point is that we can happily ignore rules about pushing pawns in front of our king when there is a safe home the king can escape to with a moment's notice.

As beginners, we are told not to move the pawns in front of our king. A completed castle guarantees the king a safe home; and advancing the pawns in front of the king lead to dire outcomes. For instance, let's see a young Garry fall victim to opening his king against an ex-World Champion.

Garry Kasparov – Boris Spassky

Tilburg 1981



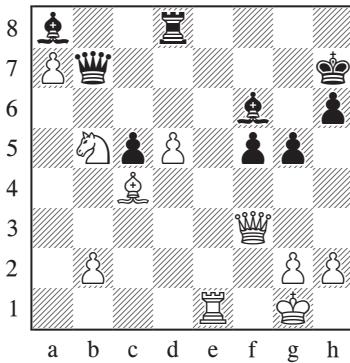
White is completely winning. The a7- and d5-pawns are extremely dangerous, both short and long term; plus Black's pieces are extremely passive. Simple play would lead White to victory, but Kasparov preferred a dynamic approach and took too many risks with his king's safety.

33.g4?!

It would not be right to award this move a full question mark. White is still winning. But it is still dubious! There was no reason at all to weaken the white king. Black's queen and bishop are menacingly placed on the long diagonal. Yes, this diagonal is closed for the moment, but it is not a guarantee that it will be so forever.

Of the many winning moves available for

White, 33.f3 is the one I like the most. It forces open the e-file to activate his last piece, will bring his queen back to the center, and should win routinely. 33...exf3 34.Qxf3



No counterplay. No questions asked. Game over.

33...f4!

Black gains space and maroons the white queen on h5. She is now unable to rejoin the defense along the d1-h5 diagonal, reminding me of the previous section. Pawns can be pushed too far for more reasons than one!

Kasparov now makes another decision I don't care for.

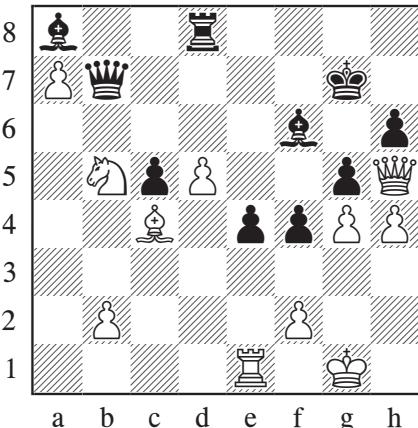
34.h4?!

I don't understand what Kasparov had in mind by pushing the kingside pawns. His position is still winning, but the margin for error is ever shrinking.

It's possible Kasparov was counting on being able to take on e4. 34.Qxe4 is still winning, but after 34...Qxd5! Black has real counterplay. White will have to be precise to bring in the full point.

34...Qg7

Sidestepping the threat of h4xg5.



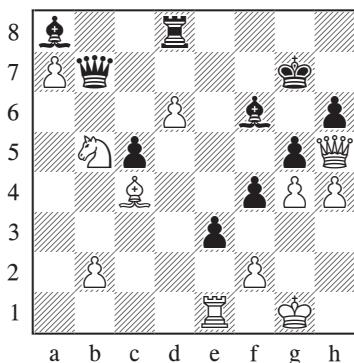
White is still winning here. In fact, my machine offers a +8 advantage! But the position has changed for the worse in the last two moves. Here, Black has dreams of counterplay that are not too hard to imagine becoming reality.

35.♘c3?

A human move, and a poor one. White overprotects the d5-pawn, keeping the long diagonal closed and is ready for ♘xe4 next, wreaking havoc on Black's king. But Black quickly sets his counterplay in motion. Even here, White is still winning, but he has greatly complicated his task.

The most forceful move is 35.d6!, but it looks insane to open the long diagonal. Concrete lines do show White is winning, as he will play ♘b5-c7, threatening both ♘h5-f7 and ♘c7-e6. But the practical risks are great:

35...e3



Suddenly, the long diagonal unveils its dangers. It takes accurate calculation to justify 35.d6, and carries risks of losing if White missteps.

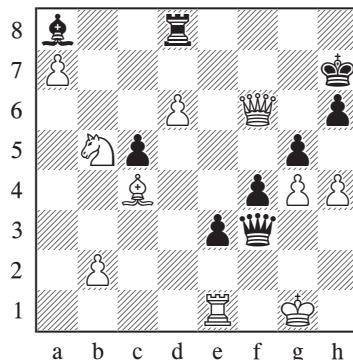
36.f3!

The only winning move.

36...♚xf3

36...♝f8, defending f7, is also an idea. Black is preparing ...♚xf3 next, but unfortunately White arrives a tempo earlier with his attack. 37.♗c7! ♚xf3 38.♔e6† and White wins. But this is a double-edged sequence where something easily could go wrong.

37.♚f7† ♚h8 38.♚xf6† ♚h7



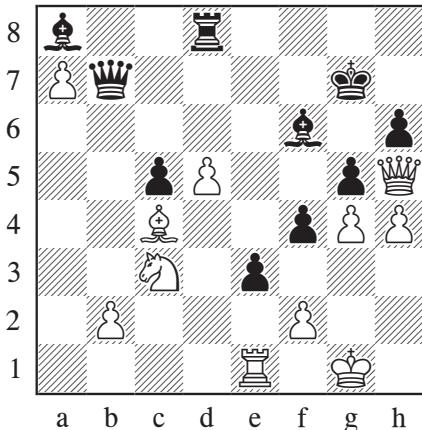
White will be mated on the next move if he lingers, but he has multiple ways to finish off the black king and now they are not hard to spot. But there was no reason for Kasparov to calculate tactics with his own king in the smasher, when simple chess would have won the game easily.

Black now takes his opportunity to complicate the game.

35...e3!

Black's attack is coming.

White must be precise in a complex position not to lose his winning advantage.

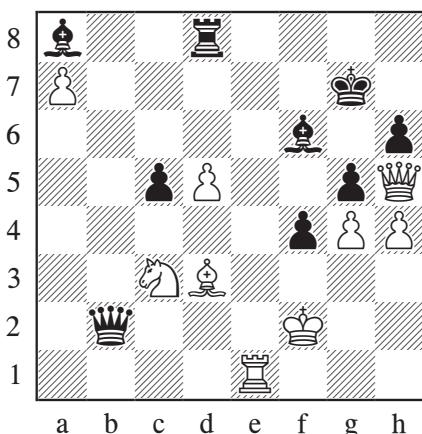


36.♘d3!

Kasparov finds the only winning move. But there was no reason to be in a position where only one move wins!

Things could have gone south remarkably fast. For instance, removing the invading e3-pawn cannot be recommended: 36.fxe3? ♜xb2! and the tables have turned.

36...exf2† 37.♗xf2 ♜xb2†



Once again, White needs to find an only move to win.

38.♗e2?

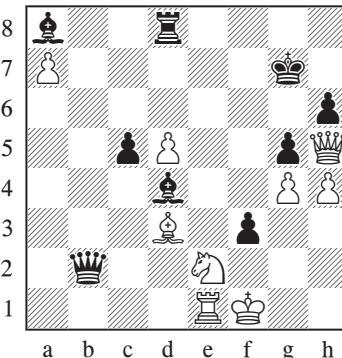
With the seconds presumably ticking down, Kasparov falters.

White needed to hold onto the extra piece:

38.♗e2!

The position is winning, but terrifying. Black makes a ton of threats right away.

38...♝d4† 39.♔f1 f3!



The game is messy. It is not hard to imagine White getting mated. The path to victory is narrow.

40.♗g6†!

Tempting as it may be to remove the black bishop, here it cannot be recommended!

40.♗xd4? is met with 40...♝g2#.

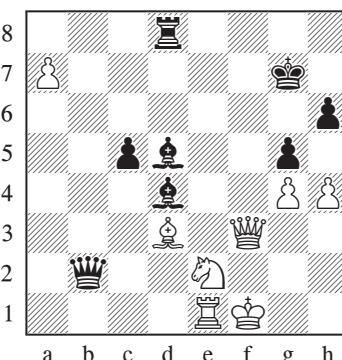
40...♝f8

With so much going on, the only way White could maintain a winning position would be to calmly capture the offensive pawn.

41.♗f5†! ♜g7 42.♗xf3!

White consolidates his king and remains material up by a pretty tactic:

42...♝xd5



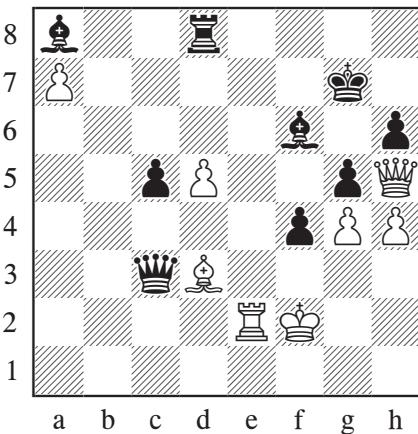
43. $\mathbb{W}xd5!$ $\mathbb{B}xd5$ 44. $a8=\mathbb{W}$

White wins.

What a crazy and convoluted variation! I would challenge any human to find this sequence with an hour on their clock, much less in time pressure. Even the great Kasparov faltered.

But 38. $\mathbb{B}e2?$ was not the move that lost the game. Kasparov lost because he put himself in a position where he had to find a sequence of only moves in a time scramble. Even the best players in the world make mistakes in such situations. And remember, he could have won without allowing any counterplay...

38... $\mathbb{W}xc3$

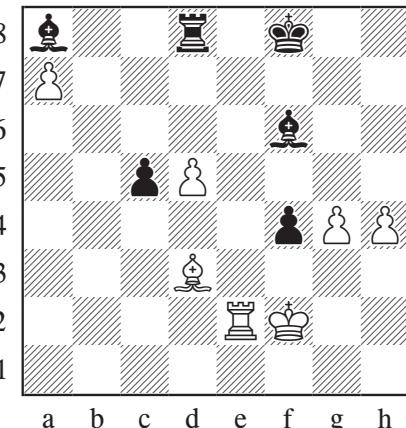


Black is a piece up, and when the d5-pawn inevitably falls, his pieces will jump to life. His king is a bit open, but White has no killer blow.

39. $\mathbb{W}g6\ddagger$ $\mathbb{B}f8$ 40. $\mathbb{W}xh6\ddagger$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 41. $\mathbb{W}xg5$ $\mathbb{W}f6$
42. $\mathbb{W}xf6\ddagger$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$

White need not necessarily lose this endgame, but he is on the defensive. It's

remarkable how quickly a winning position with no counterplay deteriorated. It is hard to play well thereafter.



43. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}xh4\ddagger$ 44. $\mathbb{B}f3$ $\mathbb{B}d7$ 45. $\mathbb{B}a2$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$
46. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{B}f7$ 47. $\mathbb{B}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 48. $\mathbb{B}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$
49. $\mathbb{B}c8$ $\mathbb{B}xa7$ 50. $\mathbb{B}f8\ddagger$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 51. $\mathbb{B}c8$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$
52. $\mathbb{B}f8\ddagger$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 53. $\mathbb{B}c8$ $\mathbb{B}b7$ 54. $\mathbb{B}c7\ddagger$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$
55. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 56. $d6$ $\mathbb{Q}f2\ddagger$ 57. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$
58. $\mathbb{B}e7$ $\mathbb{B}xe7$ 59. $g5\ddagger$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 60. $dxe7$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$
61. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{B}b6$ 62. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 63. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$
64. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $f3$ 65. $\mathbb{Q}d3\ddagger$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 66. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $f2$

0–1

Perhaps this game is a debatable example of the point being made. White was still winning after the risky g2-g4 and h2-h4 advances, but practically they were the moves that cost him the game. When pushing pawns in front of one's king, one must always consider the dangers accurately.

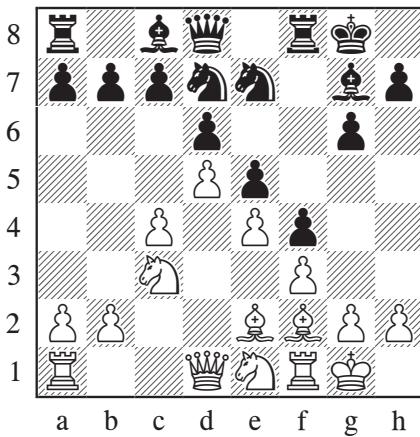
Such errors are made by everyone, even legends. But how can we minimize them? As usual, I have some guidelines. The first one is not new, but needs repeated.

In an open or semi-open position, always be careful about pushing the pawns in front of your king beyond the third rank.

The first part of this guideline is very important. The position must be open or semi-open for the warning to apply. Let's look at Kasparov in a different position.

Viktor Korchnoi – Garry Kasparov

Amsterdam 1991



In this closed position there are no open lines for White to exploit Black moving the pawns in front of this king. If we count the number of non-royal bits in the top right corner, we land on a whopping 6-0 in Black's favor with potential for more. Even if this was not opening theory, Kasparov would not burn a second worrying about his king before playing the next move.

12...g5!

In the King's Indian Black has to launch a kingside attack with ...g5-g4. Meanwhile White will use his space advantage to break through on the queenside, hopefully before he gets mated.

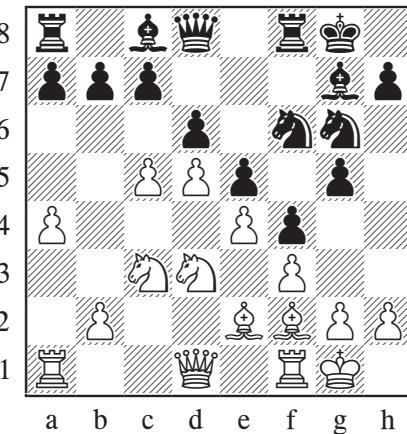
13.a4 ♜g6 14.♘d3

Modern theory frowns upon the way Korchnoi has arranged his pieces. He had an idea for the game, but it did not fully work out, as we shall see, once Kasparov has set his attack in motion.

14...♞f6!

Black is no longer able to prevent c4-c5, so it is time for the knight to move on, helping to break with ...g5-g4.

15.c5



Black's plan in this structure is to play ...g4, ...g3 and ...♘h4 with mate to come. But ...g4 is not yet possible.

15...h5!

Another strong move. Black does not worry at all about pushing the pawns in front of his king due to the closed nature of the position. There is no way White will ever get one piece even close to the king, much less launch an attack that would worry Black in the slightest.

15...g4? Black would love to play this move, but the pawn is not sufficiently defended. After 16.fxg4 he remains a pawn down.

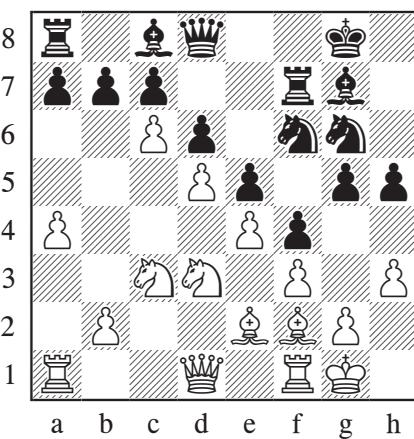
16.h3

For the moment, ...g5-g4 has been prevented. But Kasparov responds with the standard King's Indian way to increase the control of the g4-square.

16... $\mathbb{E}f7$!

Another good move. Black begins the regrouping maneuver of ... $\mathbb{E}f8-f7$, ... $\mathbb{Q}g7-f8$, and ... $\mathbb{E}f7-g7$. This keeps the key d6- and c7-squares well defended while putting more force behind the ...g5-g4 thrust.

17.c6



White plans $c \times b7$ followed by $\mathbb{Q}b4-c6$. Kasparov has not given up on his attacking dreams by any stretch, but he takes one move off to slow down White's queenside play.

17...a5! 18. $c \times b7$ $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ 19.b4

Black's bishop has been dislodged from c8, from where it was helping to push ...g5-g4 through. Just like in the Polgar game on page 9, Kasparov brings his bishop back to the best square. Bishops can move backwards, apparently.

19... $\mathbb{Q}c8!$

And just like that, Black comes back. ...g5-g4 will come sooner than White was hoping.

20.bxa5 $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ g4!

White can win a pawn by taking twice on g4, but it will not help much against the incoming assault.

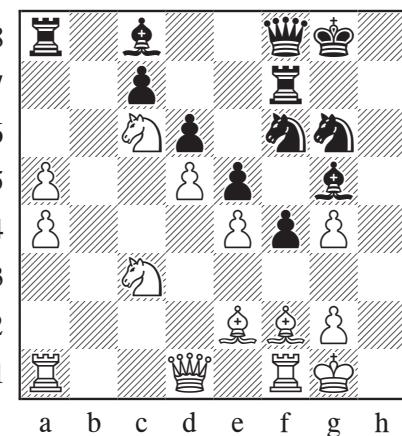
White ignored the kingside for a moment...

22. $\mathbb{Q}c6?$!

But he was soon regretting it.

It was more resilient to try 22.fxg4 hxg4 23.hxg4 $\mathbb{W}f8$, when White has better defensive chances, but his position remains extremely dangerous.

22... $\mathbb{W}f8$ 23.fxg4 hxg4 24.hxg4 $\mathbb{Q}g5!$



White is helpless to stop the devastation coming with ... $\mathbb{E}h7$ and ... $\mathbb{W}h6$.

25. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{W}h6$ 26. $\mathbb{E}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ $\mathbb{Q}xh4$
28.g5 $\mathbb{W}xg5$ 29. $\mathbb{E}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 30. $\mathbb{E}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}g3$
31. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{W}h4$

0-1

Kasparov played in the same manner in these games; advancing his g-pawn and h-pawn two squares in front of his king. But the merits of these advances were dramatically different, based on the dangers his king could face.

The first position was semi-open, and the black pieces were in prime position to strike along the a8-h1 diagonal.

The second position was closed, and White's play was on the queenside. Black certainly could lose, but not by getting checkmated on the kingside due to his pawn advances. In fact, he absolutely had to advance the pawns to generate counterplay not to lose on the queenside.

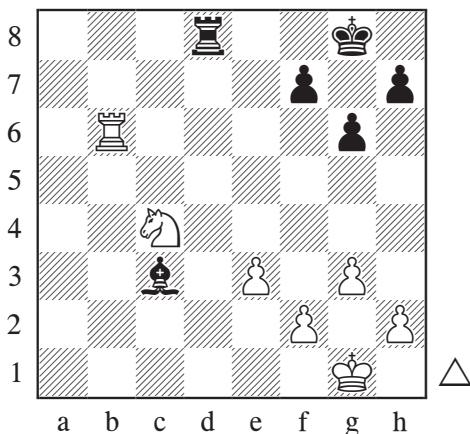
All of this seems simple. One need not worry as much about loosening the king's cover in a closed position. But what about when it is correct to loosen the kingside cover in open positions? I have a proposed guideline.

You can advance a pawn in front of your king in an open or semi-open position if it accomplishes a clear worthy goal, or when you are confident your opponent will not be able to generate meaningful threats.

The basic case where this guideline can be followed is when your opponent lacks the firepower to threaten your king. This becomes much more prevalent the more pieces are exchanged, especially the queens. Take the following position:

Yu Yangyi – Deep Sengupta

Gibraltar 2015



The position is open, and while advancing pawns too far could be a concern for other

reasons, I would be surprised if White could even manage to help-mate himself on the kingside. Clearly pushing his g- and h-pawns will not make the king feel at all insecure.

32.g4!

Yangyi gains space and prevents the standard ...h7-h5, erecting Black's best possible pawn formation. This would greatly improve Black's drawing chances. First off, the h-pawn would be well defended and not a weakness on h7. Secondly it is difficult for White to advance his pawns without exchanging them; g3-g4 will always be met by ...hxg4. When behind in material, one should aim to exchange pawns, not pieces! Of course, White could still press a bit, but his winning chances would be much lower than in the game.

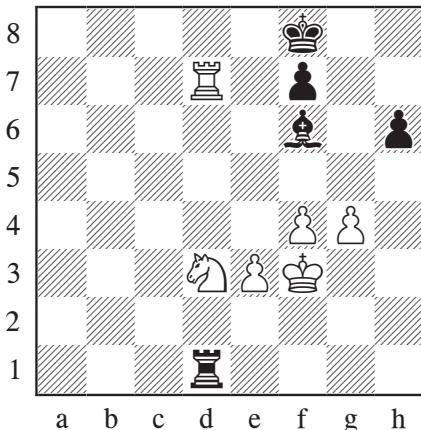
32...♝g7 33.h4!

More space!

33...h6 34.♜b5 ♜f6 35.h5 gxh5 36.♜xh5

Black is left with a fractured pawn structure on the kingside. White went on to win in a fine technical display.

36... $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{B}d1$ 38.f4 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 39. $\mathbb{B}b5$ $\mathbb{B}c1$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{B}d1$ 42. $\mathbb{B}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 43. $\mathbb{B}d7$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$



45. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{B}xd7$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}xd7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 52.f5
1–0

The reason that advancing the g-pawn is correct is twofold and follows the second guideline.

First off, preventing Black from setting up a solid pawn structure with ...h5 is a worthwhile accomplishment.

Secondly, and more importantly, there is no universe where the white king will find himself needing the cover of a pawn on g3. It is an endgame. Black only has a bishop and rook. The odds of him delivering checkmate are approximately zero.

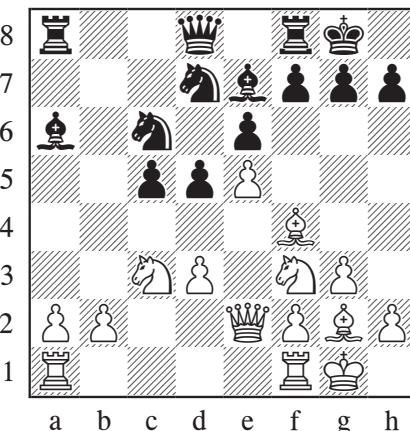
It should also be straightforward that if your opponent does not have enough material left on the board to deliver mate (ignoring bizarre circumstances), you should not worry about pushing the pawns in front of your king.

But what about another kind of position, when there are still queens and plenty of other pieces that could in theory have the firepower to deliver mate, but where advancing a pawn in front of the king is correct? These cases are

rare, but less so than one might expect. Because we know that such pushes are rare, there is a tendency to miss them when considering our opponents' candidate moves. Let's examine one such example.

Dmitry Svetushkin – Andrey Zhigalko

Eilat 2012



15. $\mathbb{Q}fd1?$

White is up a pawn, but Black has Benko-esque compensation, with open lines, active pieces and greater central control.

In addition, Black now has a nice shot.

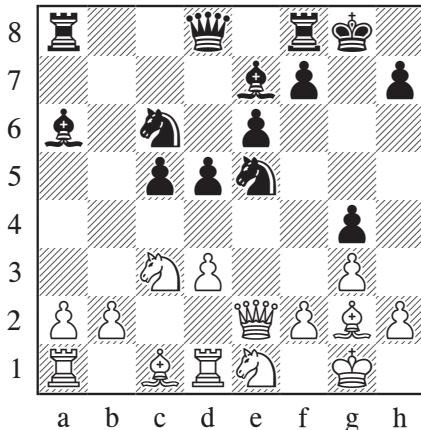
15.h4 was prudent. The position is complex and both sides have their chances.

15...g5!

Black loosens his king cover, but without paying a price. White cannot exploit it and the rest of the game is quite simple.

16. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ g4 17. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}dxe5$

Black has won a pawn and is much better strategically due to his active pieces and strong central presence. Note that though his kingside has been weakened, no white pieces are able to attack. White tried to make use of the weaknesses anyway, but failed.



18.♗h6

A natural move. White redevelops his bishop with a gain of tempo and points it toward the black king, but he will not be able to generate serious threats with only one piece participating in the attack.

18...♝e8 19.f4 gx f3!

Black does not wish to allow lines to be opened by the f4-f5 advance.

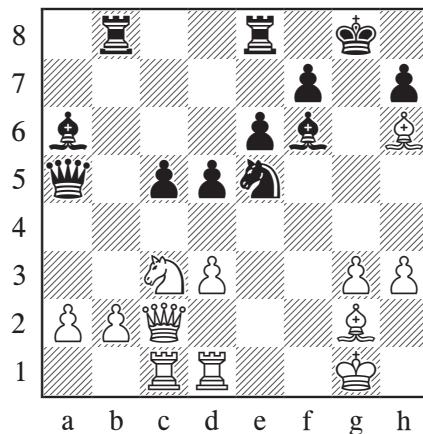
20.♘xf3 ♕f6

According to the computer 20...♘xf3† to trade knights right away was even stronger. But I do not object to Zhigalko's move. One always assumes a certain amount of risk when advancing pawns in front of our king in an open position, and Black understandably wanted to keep the possibility of ...♘g6 to shore up any holes.

21.♘xe5 ♘xe5 22.♗f4 ♘g6! 23.♗h6

Let's stop and take stock of the position. Black has all the strategic assets he held before: active pieces, a strong central pawn structure, a more harmonious position overall. Is his king unsafe? Not at all! Only White's bishop on h6 is anywhere near an attacking post. And there are no useable open lines for White's attack. Black won without much trouble.

23...♝b8 24.♗ac1 ♜a5 25.♗c2 ♘e5 26.h3



26...♝xd3 27.♗xd3 ♞xb2 28.♗d1 ♘xd3 29.♗xd3 ♜b4 30.♗h1 ♜d4 31.♗a6 ♜f2

I find it ironic that at the end of the game (not that many moves after Black played ...g7-g5-g4!), the only king who has to worry about his safety is White's.

0-1

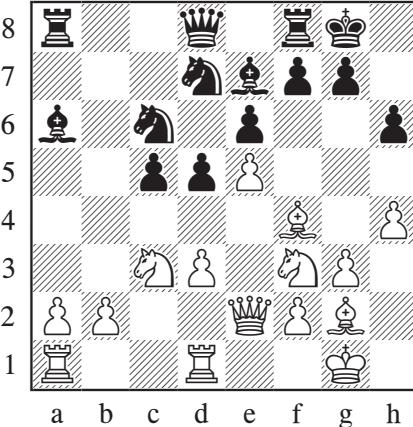
There are two reasons that throwing a kingside pawn forward in this game worked despite the position being open.

Firstly there was a concrete goal (and an important one!). Black's won a key pawn in the center, and this is obviously an asset.

Secondly, White was in no position to punish the opening of the kingside. His pieces were inactive and had no route to the kingside, while Black's bishop on f6 and knight on g6 repelled all credible threats to the monarch. As such, following the principles of our second guideline would correctly predict that ...g7-g5 was justified.

Let's alter the above example slightly.

to lose, and White will have at least perpetual check.



The position is identical to the previous one, except the moves h2-h4 and ...h7-h6 have been included. Let's imagine that Black continues in the same manner.

1...g5?!

Here this is risky – for more reasons than one. First, Black is not advancing one pawn in front of his king, he is advancing and exchanging one as well. This means his pawn cover is further depleted than the actual game. Secondly, going down the same path, this time White's pieces will be in much better position to attack.

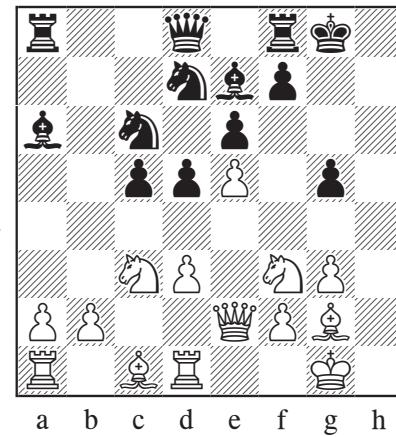
2.hxg5 hxg5

Now the simplest course of action is to retreat fully:

3.c1

White could also rock the boat with 3... $\mathbb{Q}xg5!?$, sacrificing a piece to gain attacking chances. Following 3... $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 4. $\mathbb{W}h5!$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 5. $gxf4$ it is clear that Black's king is in peril.

Note how different the position would be if pawns were inserted on h2 and h7! Black's king would have a happy home on h8. As is, he is in mortal danger. Black must play accurately now.



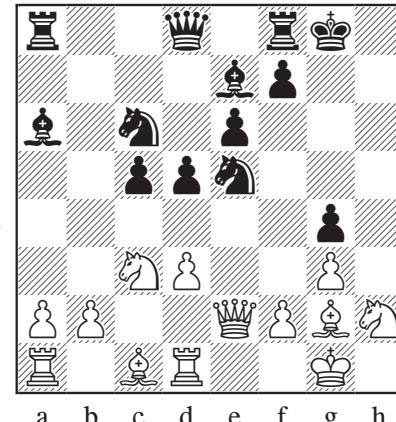
3...g4?

A mistake, but consistent with Black's previous play.

4. Qh2!

Another key difference. In the game, the pawns on h2 and h7 meant that the f3-knight was booted back to the unappealing e1-square. Instead, the knight is now ready to join the attack on g4.

4... ♟dxe5



5 Xg4

Black is in big trouble

The inclusion of h4 and ...h6 dramatically changed the evaluation. The reason can be explained by examining our second guideline.

In the game, Black achieved something very valuable by winning a pawn and did not have to worry much about his king.

Neither of these happened in the parallel universe position. White's pieces had much better squares available, Black had to say goodbye to another pawn in front of his king's position, opening it up further. And while he took the e5-pawn, it was not free.

When considering a pawn advance in front of your king, think about how many of your opponent's pieces could conceivably join in an attack, and how many of yours could come to the defense.

This guideline has been somewhat implied, but looking at things separately can be valuable. In a closed position, close to zero of the opponent's pieces can join an attack. In open positions, evaluating the safety of your king will largely be a function of how easy or difficult it will be for your opponent to assemble the necessary forces to launch an assault.

For instance, in Svetushkin – Zhigalko above, Black has two excellent defenders in the f6-bishop and g6-knight, in addition to the remaining pawns around the king. All White had was a lonely bishop on h6.

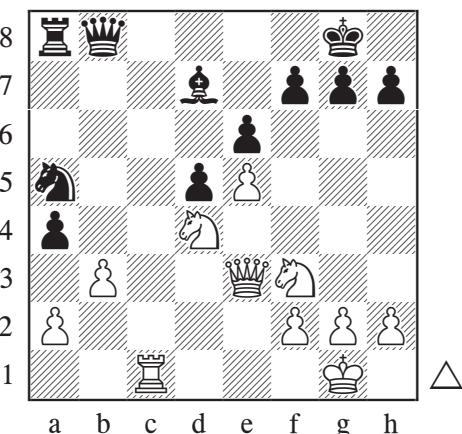
At times, when you have more pieces to fight for the squares in front of your king than your opponent, and he has castled to the same side, it may be worth considering pushing pawns to start an attack. I quite like the following example between two Russian legends.

So, ...g5 failed to reach the goal of winning a pawn, it opened the kingside twice as much by letting go of two pawns worth of cover. Finally, White had real attacking chances because his pieces had better routes to join in the kingside assault.

Evaluating whether your opponent's pieces have short- or long-term attacking chances can be tough. For this reason, here is a third guideline.

Anatoly Karpov – Mark Taimanov

Moscow 1972



White has a pleasant position: good knight against bad bishop, more active pieces, and the outside passed b-pawn, which is more likely to matter than the blocked d-pawn, which will have a very hard time ever advancing. But how can White increase his advantage further?

26.h4!

Karpov was not one to muddy the waters, preferring clarity and technical mastery to tactical melees. We even saw against Tukmakov (page 33) a moment where he failed to advance a kingside pawn to bring the game to a speedy conclusion.

But here, he is right. The semi-open queenside does not have any targets. White can stay solid on that side of the board, but unless he can really run the b-pawn successfully up the board (highly unlikely concept), he needs another plan.

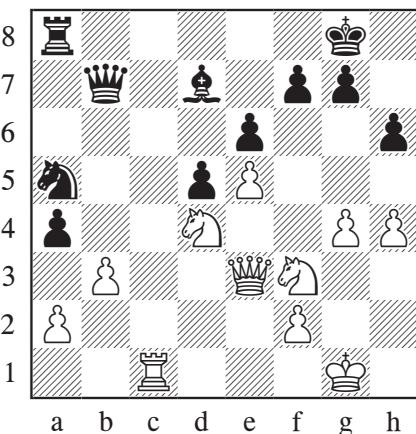
When counting the number of pieces that control kingside squares, Black gets a fat zero and White a two. The queen and knight have a well-deserved reputation for working well together when attacking the king.

26...h6

Certainly, Taimanov was not thrilled to play this, but he has to sooner or later. Black cannot allow White to play h4-h5-h6, critically weakening the dark squares.

27.g4!

Karpov continues the assault. I hope I do not have to point out that none of the black pieces are anywhere close to the white king.

27...Bg7**28.h5**

White patiently prepares g4-g5 by preventing Black from keeping the kingside closed with ...h5.

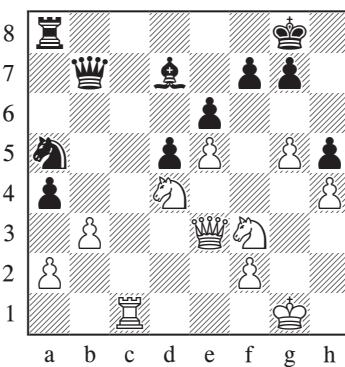
But White could have successfully initiated the hostilities right away.

28.g5!

It is hard to criticize Karpov for taking his time since Black has little to no counterplay, but this is the better move.

28...h5

If Black had a move to play ...g6, his kingside would be solid and there would be no way for White to open lines. Then advancing the pawns would be a longtime liability. But White can beat him to the punch.

**29.g6! fxg6**

Black has taken a pawn, but White has a strong follow-up.

30.Qd3!

An important move, and one Karpov may have missed. Black cannot defend the g6-pawn and will be crushed in short order.

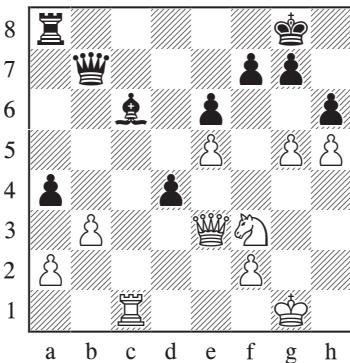
30...Qh7

Following 30...Qe8 31.Qg5! the e6-pawn will fall and the game end shortly.

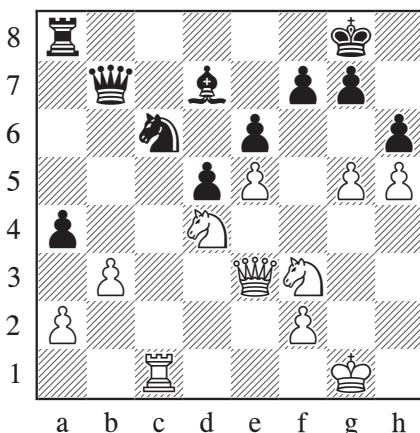
31.Qg5†**28...Qc6 29.g5**

The machine prefers to take on c6 before playing this, but I like Karpov's move more.

29. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 30. g5 allows Black to change the character of the position with: 30...d4!



Black pitches a pawn to open up the long diagonal. White will take the pawn and remain much better, but all of a sudden Black has pieces pointing toward White's king, whose cover he just loosened. 31. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 32. gxh6 f6! Things are getting messy. White is still much better, but mistakes can happen here, as in Kasparov against Spassky above.



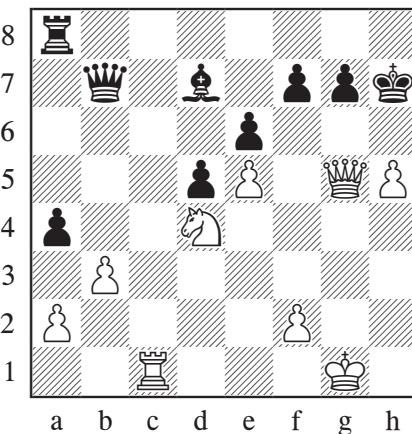
29... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ hxg5

It was better to try to maintain the pawn on h6 with 30... $\mathbb{Q}h7$. Nonetheless, White is clearly better after 31. $\mathbb{W}f4$.

31. $\mathbb{W}xg5$

White only has his queen in attacking position so far, but the other pieces will follow soon.

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



32. $\mathbb{E}c3$!

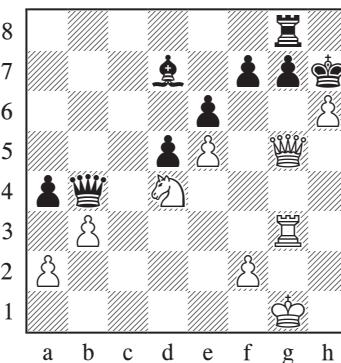
Bringing another piece into the attack.

32... $\mathbb{W}b4$ 33. $\mathbb{E}g3$ $\mathbb{E}g8$

White missed a chance to end the game here, but his position was still very good.

34. $\mathbb{Q}f3$

White could crash through with 34. h6!, when Black is unable to offer much resistance.



The only way to prevent mate is 34... $\mathbb{W}f8$ (After 34... $\mathbb{W}xd4$ 35. hxg7 White will deliver mate on the h-file). But it does not help matters as I believe White can simplify into a technically won ending with 35. hxg7 $\mathbb{E}xg7$ 36. $\mathbb{W}xg7\#$ $\mathbb{W}xg7$ 37. $\mathbb{E}xg7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 38. b4. Black should be lost here.

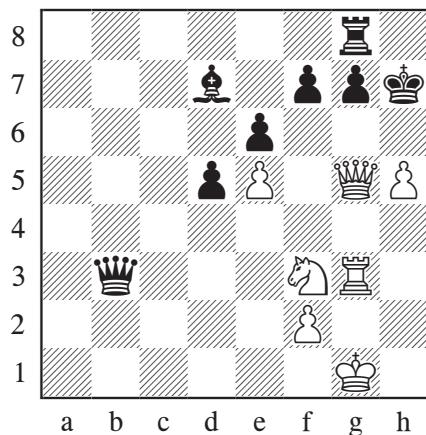
34...axb3 35.axb3

Black now blundered and lost on the spot, but I don't think there was much salvation to be had in any case.

35... $\mathbb{W}xb3?$

Black has no time to go pawn grabbing.

After 35... $\mathbb{Q}e8\pm$ Black is in full retreat and has a deeply unpleasant position, but retains some defensive chances. White is lacking a killer blow.

**36. $\mathbb{W}c1!$**

Very accurate. Karpov clears the g5-square for his knight while simultaneously preventing any checks. The game is over.

36... $\mathbb{W}a2$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}g5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}xf7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$

39. $\mathbb{W}g5$ $\mathbb{W}b1\#$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}h2$

41. $\mathbb{W}g6$ with mate to follow cannot be prevented, so Black resigned.

1–0

This game is a fine example of how advancing pawns in front of your king can be an effective strategy if you have more pieces in that zone. But if you find that your opponent has more pieces that can control the key squares in front of your king than you do, advancing the pawns is likely to be a terrible idea. Note how laughable moves such as ...g7-g5 or ...h7-h5 would have been if it were Black to move in the initial position. He is outnumbered 2-0 on the kingside, and should leave his pawns at home.

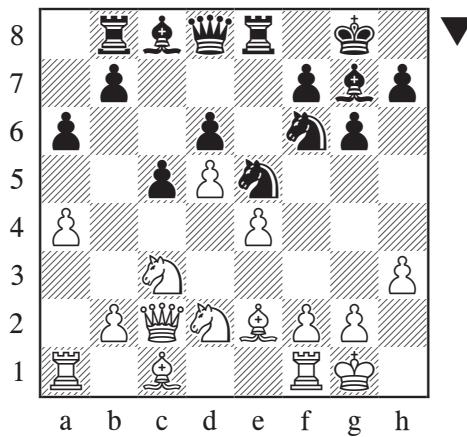


*Baku Olympiad 2016. I think the serenity of Hikaru Nakamura
is from relief after a nail-biting tiebreak finish.*

Exercises

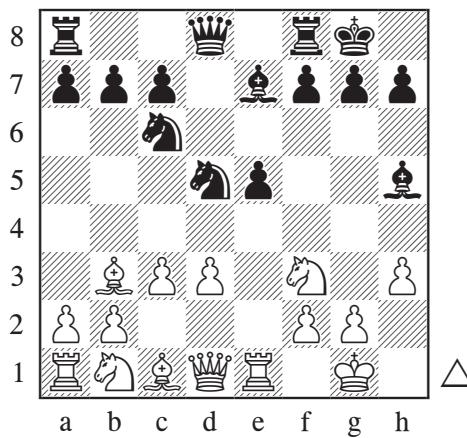
To conclude, once again we have two puzzles.

Roman Lovkov – Zhou Weiqi, St Petersburg 2009



White has just played h2-h3, securing the g4-square and planning f2-f4 to expel the active e5-knight. Should Black play ...g6-g5 to guard the outpost?

Georgios Souleidis – Markus Ragger, Germany 2007

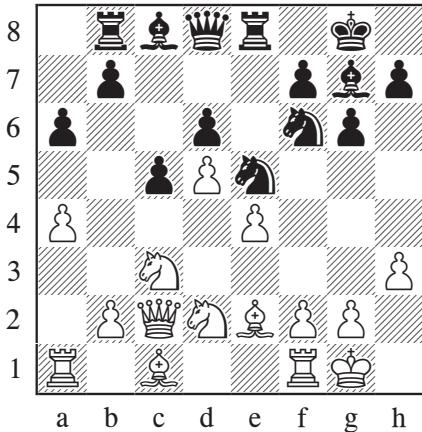


White can win a pawn here with g2-g4, loosening his kingside pawn cover but unpinning the knight on f3 and taking on e5. Should he do it?

Solutions

Roman Lovkov – Zhou Weiqi

St Petersburg 2009



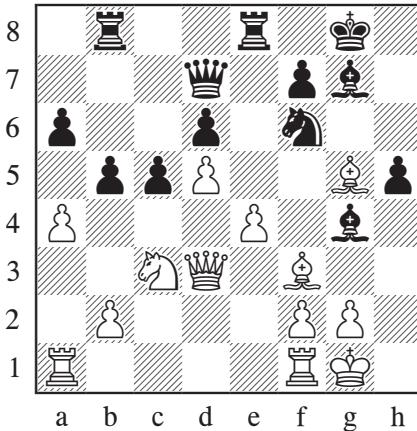
14...g5!

Black can and should play this. He gains a lot from this advance, securing the knight on e5 not only keeps it on a strong, active square. It also means he does not have to leave d7 available for its retreat, and the c8-bishop can find a happy home there. In addition, when evaluating White's chances of generating a kingside attack, we see that absolutely no white pieces can get anywhere near the black king, while Black's kingside has plenty of pieces to potentially defend him with.

15.♘f3 ♘xf3† 16.♗xf3 g4!?

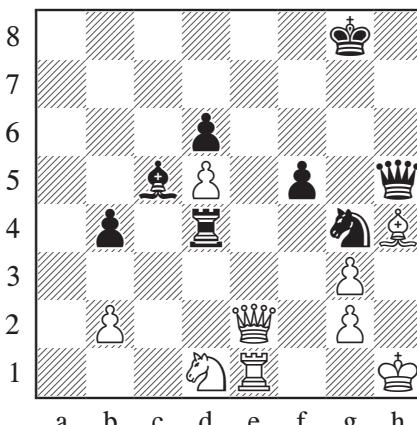
This aggressive lunge is not bad at all. Black is even fighting for an advantage, but could also play 16...d7. There is nothing wrong with simply bringing Black's other knight to the e5-outpost. Still I like the move in the game.

17.hxg4 ♘xg4 18.♗d1 h5 19.♗g5 ♗d7
20.♗d3 b5!



Black has active play on the queenside, in the center, and on the kingside, while it is very clear the king is sitting happily on g8 without a care in the world. Black went on to win a nice game.

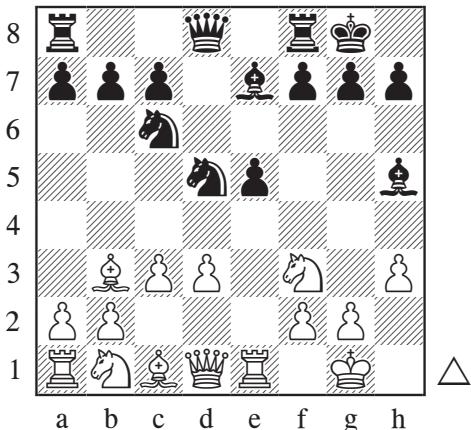
21.axb5 axb5 22.♗xg4 hxg4 23.♗ae1 c4
24.♗c2 g3 25.fxg3 ♘g4 26.♗d1 ♘d4†
27.♔h1 ♘e5 28.♗d2 ♘c5 29.♗f4 ♘be8
30.♗h4 b4 31.♗c1 f5 32.♗xc4 ♘xe4
33.♗xe4 ♘xe4 34.♗d3 ♘e8 35.♗d2 ♘h5
36.♗e1 ♘d4 37.♗e2



37...♗xd1 38.♗e6† ♘f7 39.♗c8† ♔h7
40.♗xd1 ♘f2† 41.♔h2 ♘xd1 42.g4 ♘e3
0–1

Georgios Souleidis – Markus Ragger

Germany 2007

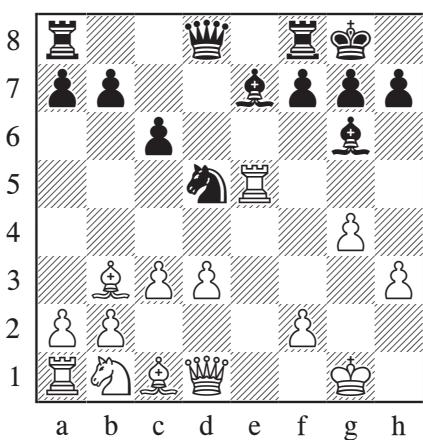


11.g4?

White is asking for trouble with this move.

A quiet move like 11.a4, gaining space and preparing to complete development with $\mathbb{Q}b1-a3$, was to be preferred. I somewhat prefer Black, but there is nothing much for White to worry about yet.

11... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ c6



Black enjoys standard Marshall-style compensation for the pawn, which is enough for equality when White's g-pawn is on g2.

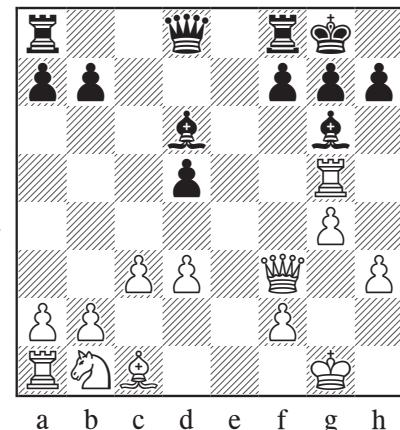
With the severely weakened kingside, White is badly underdeveloped, and Black's pieces will soon spring to life with moves like ... $\mathbb{Q}d6$, ... $\mathbb{W}h4$, and even ...f5 or ...h5 to loosen the pawn cover further and open more lines. Black has far more pieces ready to put pressure on the kingside than White has defenders.

14. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}d6!$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}g5$

Surely White was not happy about marooning his own rook, but he must have been worried about ... $\mathbb{W}d8-h4$ or hoping that winning the d5-pawn was both possible and desirable.

15. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ cxd5 16. $\mathbb{W}f3$ f5! gives Black a vicious attack.

15...cxd5 16. $\mathbb{W}f3$



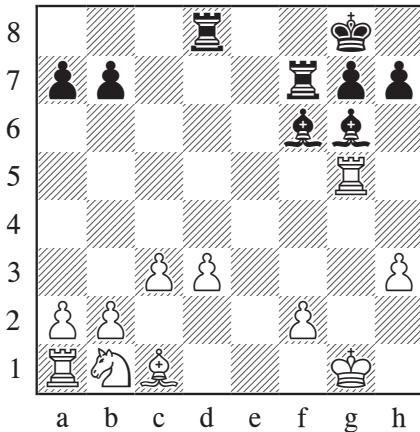
16...f5!

Well spotted. Black blows up the kingside.

17.gxf5 $\mathbb{Q}e7!$

If the pawn on f5 falls, White's king will be massacred. He had no choice but to trade into a miserable endgame.

18.f6 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 19. $\mathbb{W}xd5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f7!$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xd8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$



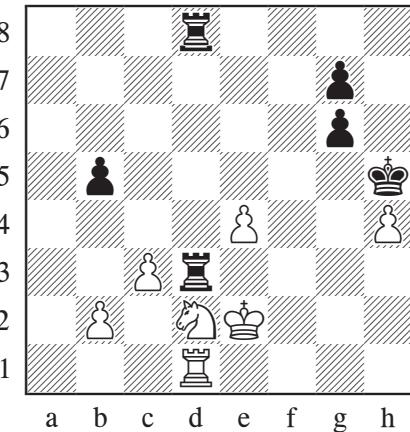
21. $\mathbb{E}xg6$

A sad move, but everything else was even worse.

21. $\mathbb{E}g3$ $\mathbb{A}h4!$ and 21. $\mathbb{E}g4$ $\mathbb{E}xd3!$ followed by ... $\mathbb{E}d1\#$ are cases in point.

Also after 21. d4 Black will react actively, with 21... $\mathbb{E}e8!$. Black does not even content himself with winning an exchange. The invasion on e1 will be decisive.

21... $\mathbb{h}xg6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{E}xd3$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{E}fd7$
 24. $\mathbb{E}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$
 27. $\mathbb{fxe}3$ $b5$ 28. $h4$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 29. $a4$ $a6$ 30. $axb5$
 $axb5$ 31. $e4$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{E}d8$



34. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{E}e3\#$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{E}xe4$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{E}xd1$
 37. $b3$ $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{E}b1$ 39. $b4$ $g5$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}d6$
 $g4$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}f5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}h3$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $g3$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $g2$
 44. $\mathbb{Q}f4\#$ $\mathbb{Q}g3$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{E}d1\#$
0–1

Chapter 5

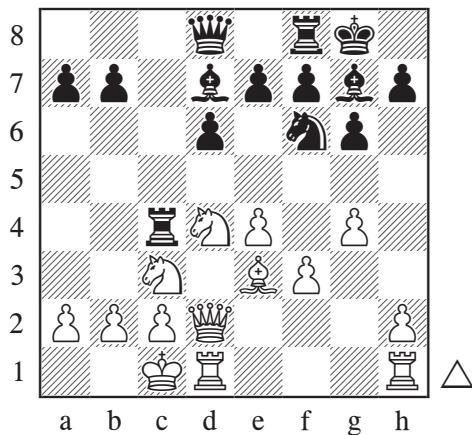
Keeping Your Door Locked

In the previous chapter we discussed how advancing pawns in front of our king can be hazardous. This chapter is quite similar in its nature, as many positions feature opposite-side castling middlegames, where attacking play and opening avenues to the king are relevant.

But there is one key difference. Here, we will discuss exclusively the concept of a hook.

A hook is an advanced pawn which can be exploited by the opponent to open lines. Often such a pawn will be challenged by a pawn break, when all reactions will be unpleasant. Also, as we shall see, a hook is frequently (but not always) frozen in place, with advancing being either illegal or simply bad.

Let's take a position from reasonably well-known opening theory as an example.



This is a standard position in the Sicilian Dragon, but one where Black has made an inaccuracy. Black's position may look excellent by a strategic metric. He has a healthy bishop pair, a compact pawn structure, good piece placement, and long-term weaknesses to attack. Yet, theory is gloomy regarding the position for the second player! The reason is that there is a pawn hook that White can use to good effect.

14.h4!

White points out the major defect in Black's position. The g6-pawn is a hook. White plays h2-h4-h5, Black has no way to prevent a file from being opened on the kingside, as the g-pawn has no future on the g5-square.

14... $\mathbb{Q}a5$

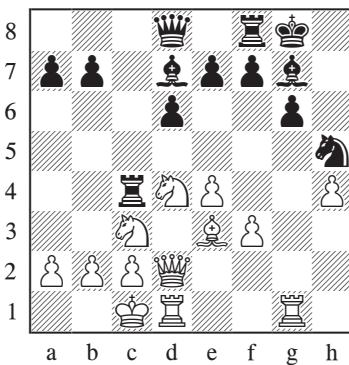
Simply ignoring the kingside allows White to illustrate how dangerous his attack really is.

I believe the best move is probably:

14...h5

Black voluntarily lets the g-file be opened, believing it will be less devastating than the h-file. But this position is hardly a bed of roses either. White has excellent attacking chances.

15.gxh5 $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}hg1!$



Black is under a lot of pressure. White has several mechanisms available to try to remove the h5-knight and crash through with h4-h5, making use of the hook on g6. The following variation is not forced, but very human.

16... $\mathbb{Q}a5$

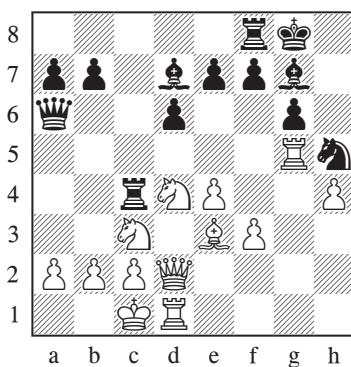
Black activates the queen and looks for counterplay on the other side of the board. It is probably a mistake, but feels very natural. White continues with his own play, looking to blast through the g-file.

17. $\mathbb{Q}g5!$

Energetic and strong. The queen is hit and White is ready to pitch an exchange sacrifice with $\mathbb{Q}xh5$, leading to an open line to Black's vulnerable monarch.

17... $\mathbb{Q}a6$

It makes sense for Black to contest the fifth rank, but it does not help his cause. 17... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ would allow White to end the game with tactics. 18. $\mathbb{Q}xc5!$ dxc5 19. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ Black loses the bishop on d7. And the 18... $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ recapture is no better. After 19. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ Black is in horrible shape.



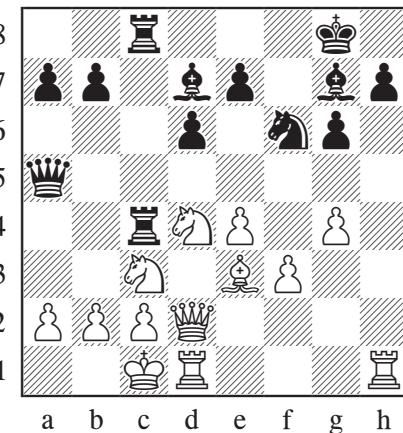
18. $\mathbb{Q}xh5!$

A simple way to break through.

18...gxh5 19. $\mathbb{Q}g1$

Unsurprisingly, Black will find himself mated in short order.

15.h5 $\mathbb{Q}fc8$ 16.hxg6 fxg6



Black has all the same strategic assets he had before, but it is getting clearer how dangerous the kingside attack is.

White continues forcefully:

17. $\mathbb{Q}b3!$

Black is under assault from all angles. Now his queen will have to abandon her best post and give White chances to break through in the center.

17... $\mathbb{Q}a6$

Among many good moves here, I like the next one the best.

18. $e5!$

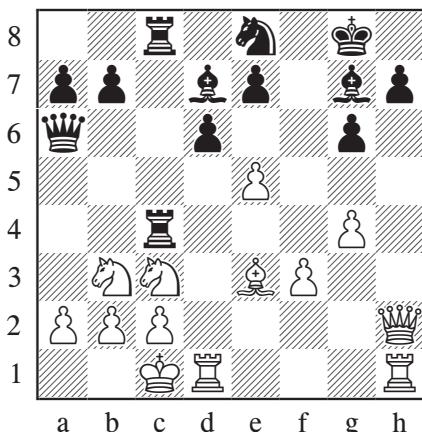
The knight is forced from f6, where it was performing the important task of defending the h7-pawn.

18... $\mathbb{Q}e8$

Black would like to play 18...dxe5 instead, but after 19.g5! he loses a piece.

White now makes use of the f6-knight being forced to abandon its post.

19. $\mathbb{Q}h2!$



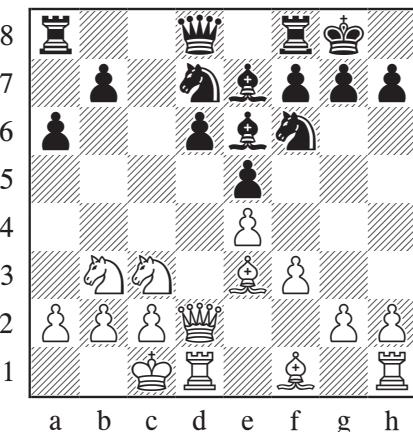
There are still some variations to consider before Black will be forced to resign, but let's

stop here, as the point has been made. Black is forced to play ...h7-h5 to prevent $\mathbb{Q}xh7\#$, exposing his king to major harassment. A strategically sound position went south fast, when the hook on g6 allowed White to start an attack on the kingside.

Playing 5...g6 was not the move that landed Black in a world of pain, but subsequent risky play. The reason is simple. Black was justified in creating this hook on g6, because it gave him active pieces. But it also made the position extremely sharp. This required accurate and speedy counterplay on the queenside. As this had not happened, White has time to blow the kingside open.

Let's now compare this with an English Attack setup against the Najdorf, where no pawns have been moved in front of the king (a possible reason this is a more popular opening).

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$
5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ a6 6. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ e5 7. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 8.f3 $\mathbb{Q}e7$
9. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 0-0 10.0-0-0 $\mathbb{Q}bd7$



Comparing this to the previous position, Black has fewer strategic assets. He has not netted the bishop pair for example. He also has a potentially weak square on d5 and a backward pawn on d6. All somewhat compensated by the poorly placed knight on b3. Hopefully no one

would suggest Black is better positionally. But, this position is entirely playable, while the previous one is dubious! Why? Partly because the king's position has not been compromised.

Let's see what happens if White approaches the position similarly to the previous one.

11.h4?

Wrong move, wrong plan. We shall see why.

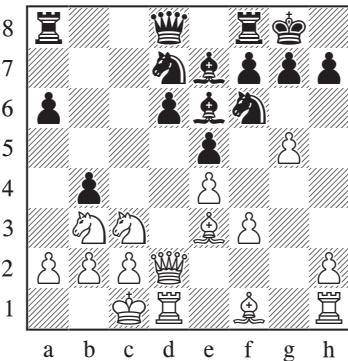
The main move is:

11.g4!

Planning g4-g5. White does not rule out aggressive intentions on the kingside, yet g2-g4 is positional in its nature. White wants to conquer the weak d5-square, and the best way to start is to kick away the defending f6-knight.

The position remains complex, and both sides have their chances.

11...b5 12.g5 b4!

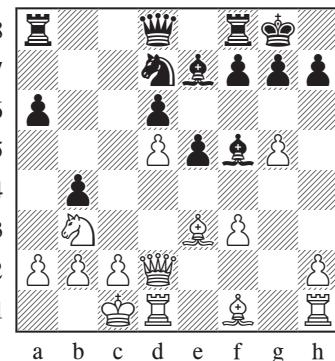


Black should not waste time. A common piece of advice for positions with opposite-castled kings.

13.♘d5?

This is not advisable, but I will make it my mainline to compare with the next example. Theory regards 13.♘ce2 and 13.gxf6 as better tries. In both cases, White can fight for an advantage, but Black usually fights back.

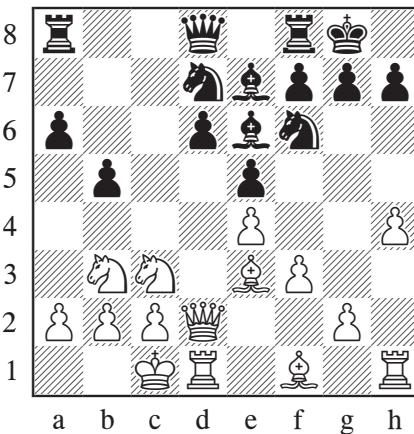
13...♗xd5 14.exd5 ♘f5=



Black is a bit better. White has no real chances of opening lines on the kingside, while Black can continue with queenside expansion with ...a6-a5-a4, ...♗d8-a5, and ...♗f8-c8.

Note that 15.♗xb4 and 15.♘d3 leave the g5-pawn unattended. It is hard to find a satisfying move for White.

11...b5



12.h5?

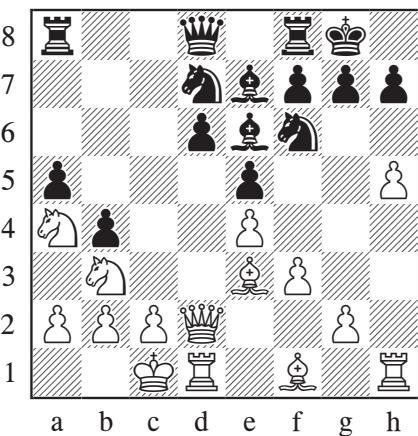
White proceeds down the mistaken path.

If White plays 12.g4 he would keep the game double-edged.

One reason 11.g4 was better is that after g4-g5 and ...♘h5, White might miss the h2-pawn

due to the weakness of the g3-square. We often see pawns pushed too far for more reasons than one. Here the h-pawn might like to move back for the reasons discussed in Chapter Two.

12...b4 13.♘a4 a5



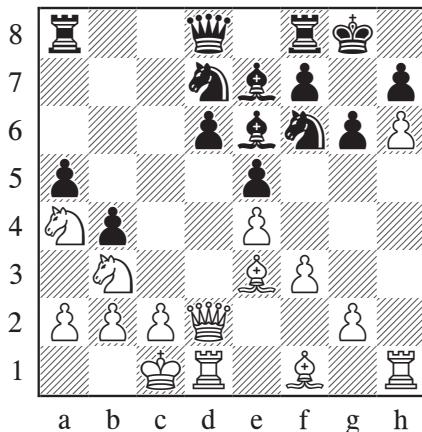
Black has an excellent position strategically. He has gained space on the queenside, both White's knights are dreadfully passive, and the a4-knight is vulnerable to harassment with ...♗d8-c7-c6. The backward d6-pawn is totally safe and can be liquidated with the central break ...d6-d5 anytime Black wants to. I believe Black's strategic assets outshine those in the Dragon example, although this is not what changes the evaluation so drastically.

White can try to open the h-file, but there is a key difference.

14.h6

White proceeds with the tried and true Fischer plan against the Dragon: Open the h-file, sac, sac and mate! But does it work against the Najdorf as well?

14...g6!

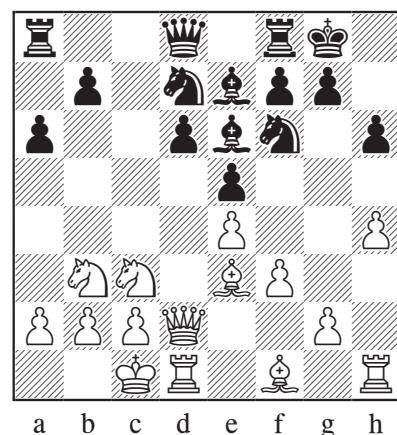


No! Black advances his pawn to g6, ending all dreams White has of generating attacking chances on the kingside. The difference is that the pawn on g7 was not a hook, since it could safely move forward.

So, White is unable to open the h-file and has wasted valuable time, while Black has made real progress on the other side of the board. A big contrast from the Dragon example, where Black was unable to prevent lines being opened in front of his monarch.

The lack of a hook in Black's position made it harder for White to open lines on the kingside. Everything else was similar. White's heavy pieces were keen to join the fight, but without open files Black's king remained entirely safe.

Let's alter the position slightly to make it clear.



The position has one key difference to before. h2-h4 and ...h7-h6 are included, which makes all the difference.

12.g4!

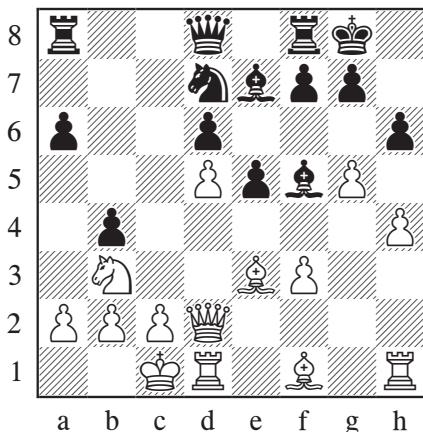
This time White's plan of g4-g5 is much more effective. The pawn on h6 is a hook that White can use to open lines on the kingside. Black can no longer guarantee the safety of his king, a big difference from the previous example. (There are those that will discover the similarities with the examples on pages 72 and 78 in the previous chapter).

12...b5

Let's keep the same ideas as the mainline.

Probably 12... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ is best, but it is sad and in defiance of all strategic Najdorf wisdom. Black does not want to block his b7-pawn. Without ...b7-b5-b4 his queenside play is going nowhere, while White will make quick progress on the kingside by booting away the f6-knight and opening lines.

13.g5! b4 14. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 15.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}f5$



This time Black's kingside gets blown apart.

16.gxh6! g6

Black cannot allow 17.hxg7, removing

another defensive pawn. But now the g6-pawn can be used as a hook.

17.h5!

White insists on opening the h-file. Black has to try to keep a fig leaf on his exposed files.

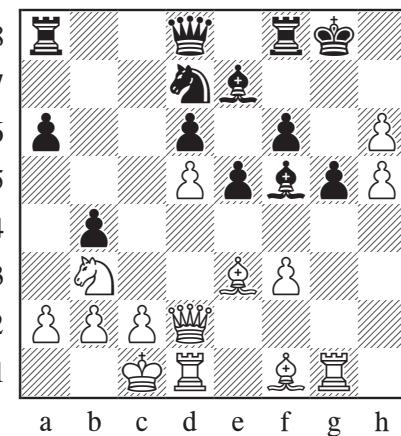
17...g5

Better than allowing h5xg6, but the punches keep coming.

18. $\mathbb{Q}g1!$

White threatens $\mathbb{Q}xg5$, blasting the kingside open. Black's reply is forced.

18...f6



For a moment, Black looks almost in control. The white pawns will drop eventually. But the attack keeps coming on strong, like Hawaiian waves.

19. $\mathbb{Q}d3!$

Eying the weak g6-square.

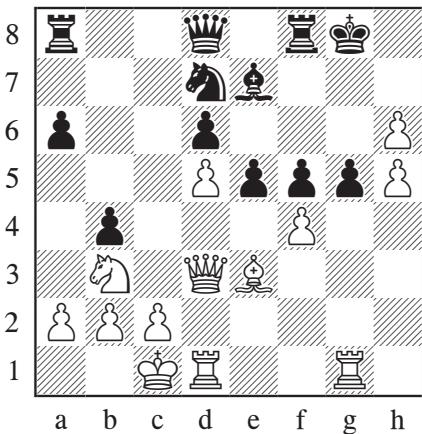
19... $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xd3$

The threat of $\mathbb{W}g6$ forces Black to advance another pawn in front of his king.

20...f5

For several moves Black has been parrying White's threats, making no progress of his own. Unfortunately, the next threat cannot be answered.

21.f4!



More lines are opening and squares are weakened. If Black takes on f4 with the e-pawn, White's only bad piece, the b3-knight, will find glorious pastures on c6/e6.

A position where White had no way to open lines on the kingside was transformed into floodgates opening at alarming speed; all due to one pawn having advanced one square and thus becoming a hook.

As usual, I have guidelines to help judge if pawns are pushed too far. The first is a well-known principle.

In open or semi-open positions with opposite-side castling, don't carelessly advance pawns in front of your king. Especially if they cannot move again when attacked.

This has been firmly explained above. Think of meeting 11.g4 with 11...h6, which an inexperienced player might consider. After 12.h4! we have our most recent example, where the seven plagues descend on Black to punish him for this one cardinal sin.

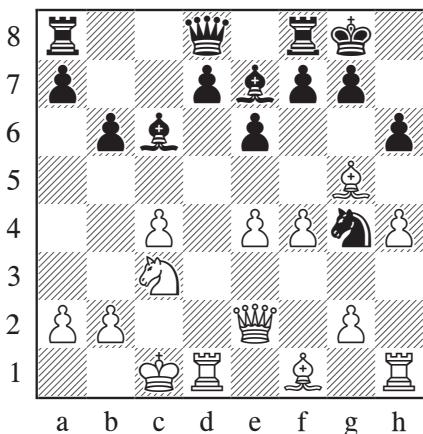
As usual, the first guideline is a warning, which should help you consider the consequences of a pawn advance. And the second guideline will help you to know when to ignore the first guideline completely.

You can advance a pawn in front of your king to a fixed square and make it a hook in an open position with opposite-side castling, if your opponent cannot feasibly make use of it, or is otherwise unable to launch an attack.

Let's see this principle in action.

Artur Kogan – Vladimir Tukmakov

Ljubljana 1997



In this sharp position, Black should decide what to do about the knight on g4.

13...h5!

I like this move a lot. Black anchors the knight on g4. The pawn on h5 is in theory a hook now, and cannot move again. But White is hardly able to open any lines. g2-g4 is clearly a pipe dream that will not become reality. The knight is quite happy and will not budge voluntarily. It will take a lot of time and resources for White to kick it away.

The computer claims Black is better after greedily grabbing the bishop.

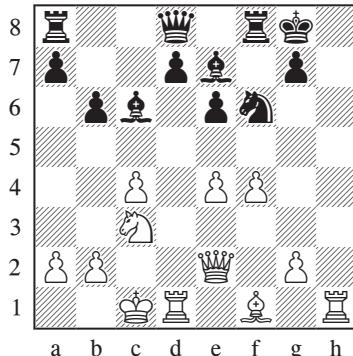
13...hxg5

Still I much prefer Tukmakov's move. He is simply better after 13...h5. But if he had opened the h-file, White would have had strong counterplay.

14.hxg5!

Black has to open more lines in front of his king to save the knight.

14...f5 15.gxf6 ♕xf6



White's play flows easily. All he has to do is to throw stuff at the kingside.

16.e5!

White kicks the knight again, preparing an invasion with ♘h5. The computer has nerves of copper and claims an edge with:

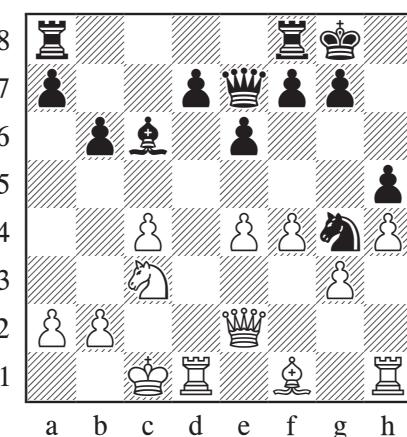
16...♗b4!

That may be so, but which human would feel certain of this, or that he would play the position well from here on? Better not to complicate the position and to refrain from opening lines on the kingside. Choose a gilded and stress-free life.

14.♘xe7

White can't have been happy making this exchange, but he may have been worried about losing the bishop to ...f6.

14...♕xe7 15.g3



A natural move. White bolsters his pawn formation and prepares for $\mathbb{Q}f1-h3$, challenging the knight. Black must strike urgently.

15... $\mathbb{N}c5!$

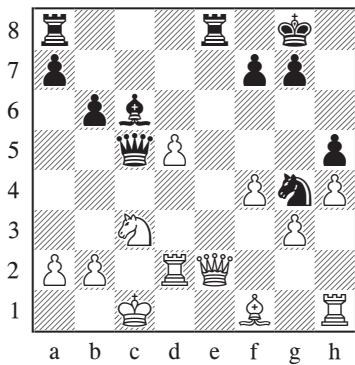
Natural, energetic, strong. There is no time for $\mathbb{Q}h3$. With ... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ coming, White has to prioritize defensive moves.

16. $\mathbb{E}d2$

Black can now proceed with his own play and pay no attention to dreams of kingside counterplay. They are far too slow to matter.

16... $\mathbb{E}ac8$

Another strong and natural move. I see no reason to object to it, although there was another strong option. Black could have blown up the center with 16... $d5!?$. The point is that after: 17.exd5 exd5 18.cxd5 $\mathbb{E}fe8!$



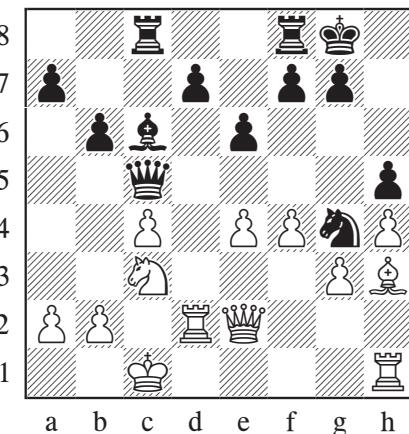
White will face dire consequences due to his numerous weaknesses and lagging development.

In the game White tried to try to get his own play going on the kingside.

17. $\mathbb{Q}h3$

White is hoping to make progress on the kingside, but unfortunately his play is far slower than Black's, who is ready to break open the queenside. Note that the only way to try to

challenge the black knight was with $\mathbb{Q}f1-h3$, weakening the c4-pawn.



17... $d5!$

Black now crashes through in the center. Not Black's only good move, but a very effective one.

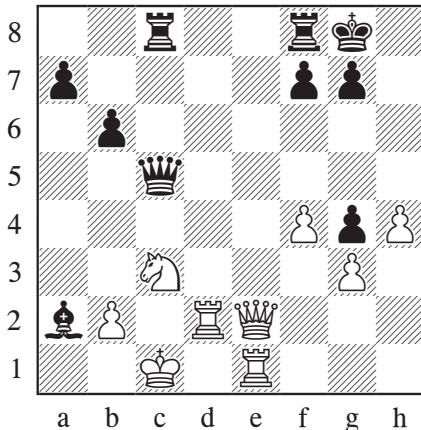
I would have been tempted to swing the knight over to c4. And Black is winning after 17... $\mathbb{Q}e3$, but it does allow White to make use of the hook on h5. Luckily an attack with $g3-g4$ is too slow by something like four or five tempos. An eternity in an open position! This observation is illustrative, as it shows how advancing the h-pawn has substantially delayed White's attack. Black is not relying on one break, but simply strategically winning.

18.cxd5 exd5 19. $\mathbb{Q}xg4$

Taking the knight on g4 ironically brings the black pawn to a square where it can no longer be considered a hook, as no white pawn can attack it.

19... $h \times g 4$ 20. $\mathbb{E}xd5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ $\mathbb{Q}xa2$

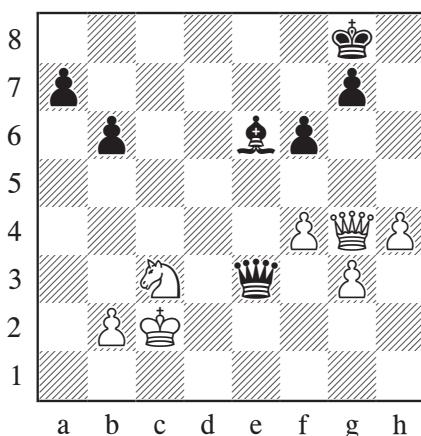
Black has won a pawn and it is White's king that is wide open. Tukmakov did not play perfectly hereafter, but well enough to win the game.



22. $\mathbb{W}xg4 \mathbb{B}e8?$

Black could have ended the game with the forceful 22...b5!. White has no way to stop ...b4. Black blasts through to the king along the c-file and wins a piece on the way.

23. $\mathbb{B}xe8\#$ $\mathbb{B}xe8$ 24. $\mathbb{W}g5$ $\mathbb{W}c6$ 25. $\mathbb{B}d8$ f6
26. $\mathbb{B}xe8\#$ $\mathbb{W}e8$ 27. $\mathbb{W}g4$ $\mathbb{W}e3\#$ 28. $\mathbb{B}c2$ $\mathbb{W}e6!$!



29. $\mathbb{W}g6?$

White missed the only chance to equalize with 29. $\mathbb{W}e2!$. The endgame still required a bit of accuracy to be held, which might have dissuaded Kogan from the necessity of entering it. Or did he miss the perpetual after ... $\mathbb{B}f5\#$ and ... $\mathbb{W}xg3\#$?

29... $\mathbb{B}f7$ 30. $\mathbb{W}g4$ $\mathbb{B}h7$ 31. h5 $\mathbb{B}h6$ 32. $\mathbb{W}c8$

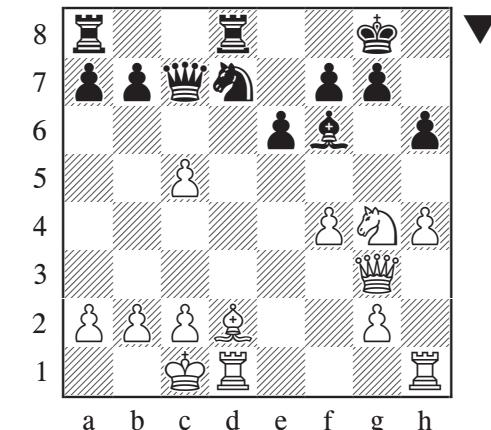
$\mathbb{W}e8$ 33. $\mathbb{W}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ 34. f5 $\mathbb{W}e3$ 35. $\mathbb{B}b1$
0-1

White never made any threats against the black king. There were two major reasons for this. None of his pieces was in a position to join a kingside assault, and Black had an unusual firm clamp on g4, making opening the kingside and exploiting the h5-hook a tiring business. Only after a few poor moves from Black did White have the chance to enter a slightly worse but drawable ending. But at this point he may have spent the majority of his time being frustrated by the blockade on the kingside.

While both of the exceptions presented in Guideline 2 were on display here, only one is sufficient, as we shall see in a similar example.

Daniel Hugo Campora – Vladimir Epishin

Seville 2000



Black faces the concrete threat of $\mathbb{Q}xh6\#$. I like his response.

18...h5!

Black accepts that the pawn will become a hook on h5. While White's pieces are positioned well to attack this time around,

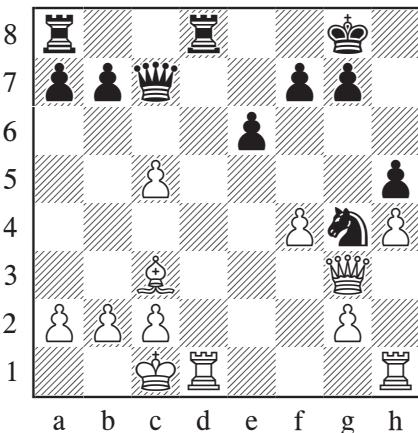
there is another exception that justifies advancing the h-pawn further: In a few moves we shall see that White is unable to make use of the weakening of the kingside.

I want to underline that these guidelines are guidelines and about understanding the positions better. They are not laws sent from above that have to be followed mindlessly. They are included to explain in words the complexities of chess strategy. There is still the other side of the coin, called calculation. I am trying to keep that out of the conversation, but in situations like this one, seeing what the position will look like three moves down the line is of key importance.

19.♘xf6†

Retreating the knight, hoping for better control of the g4-square with the intention of playing g2-g4 later, does not work. 19.♘e3? is slow and hit hard by 19...♞xc5. Simple and devastating. White is powerless to stop the monstrous knight jumps ...♞e4 and ...♞d3. It is easy to make a somewhat risky strategic decision if the only way your opponent can try to punish you for it loses the game rapidly.

19...♞xf6 20.♗c3 ♜g4



A quick look at the piece arrangement is enough to guarantee that White will never

play g2-g4. The knight is well placed, and no white piece can push it off its perch.

If Black is allowed to take on c5, he would be better. So White has to preserve his extra pawn.

21.♗d4

Black retains decent compensation, though he played too slowly in the game. I would have blasted the queenside open.

21...♝d5?!

Too nonchalant. This gets Black into trouble.

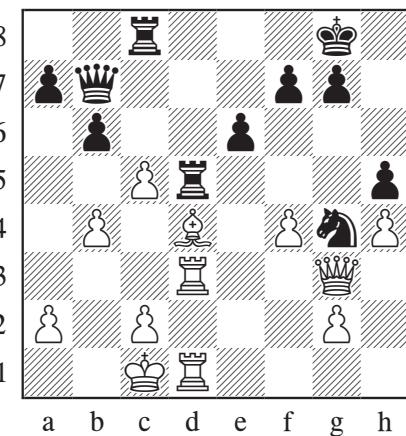
The principled course of action was 21...b6!. Note that the c5-pawn is used as a hook by Black! After 22.cxb6 axb6∞ Black has decent compensation. White's queenside is under a fair amount of pressure.

22.♗d3 ♜c8 23.♗hd1 b6 24.b4

White is on the verge of consolidating, so Black needs to play energetically.

24...♛b7?!

It was much better to crack the files open with 24...a5!, using the new hook in White's position. Anything could happen then. White would most likely end up with connected pawns on the queenside (and they would be extra!) but his king would also be in peril. I would take Black in a practical game.



25.♕e1 a5?

But this time this break does not work. It is important to work out the details.

After 25...bxc5! Black retains good play.

26.a3?

Too timid. There was nothing wrong with grabbing the pawn. After 26.cxb6! White should be winning. His king is safe enough, the queen defends b4, and the new passer on b6 is spooking Black by threatening to queen, something the pawns did not do in the game.

26...axb4 27.axb4

Black has good counterplay on the queenside and is fine once again.

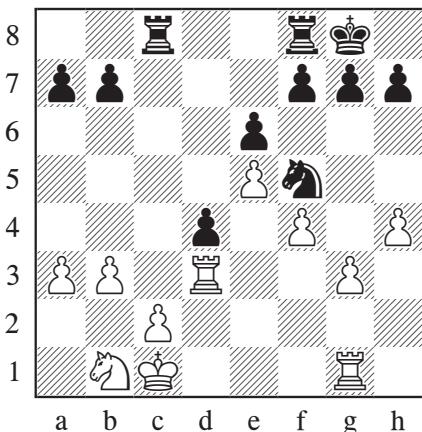
27...♛c7 28.g3 bxc5 29.♝xc5 ♜f6 30.♛e2 ♜c6 31.♜xd5 exd5 32.♜d3

I am not sure why a draw was agreed here, even if the machines insist on absolute equality.
½-½

White was unable to open lines with the hook Black took on in that game. In the next example, he is able to open lines, but lacks the firepower to play for mate.

Alexander Motylev – Rail Makhmutov

Bilbao 2014



White would like to play g3-g4, dislodging the powerful f5-knight and rounding up the d4-pawn.

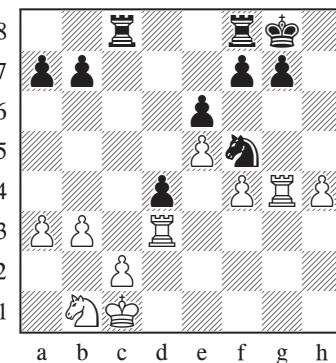
25...h5!?

I am not convinced that this move is best. But at least Black need not worry for half a second that making a hook for White to open the kingside with g3-g4 will leave his king vulnerable.

The computer prefers 25...f6 trying to entice White to capture e5xf6 and then set the central pawns in motion. The d4-pawn is not so easy to win straight away.

26.♞b2

White correctly chose not to open the kingside with 26.g4? hxg4 27.♝xg4. White obviously does not have the kind of material needed to deliver mate. The queens are off, the knight is in no man's land on b1, and the g7-pawn's defense cannot be compromised. The knight on f5 is there to stay. Oh yeah, White also loses material immediately...



27...♝e3! In the game White accepted that he was not playing for an advantage at this point and slowly solved his problems, starting with getting the knight on b1 into the game.

26...♝c7 27.a4 ♜fc8 28.c3 dxc3† 29.♝xc3 a6 30.♜g2 ♜f8 31.♝e4 ♜e8 32.♝d6†

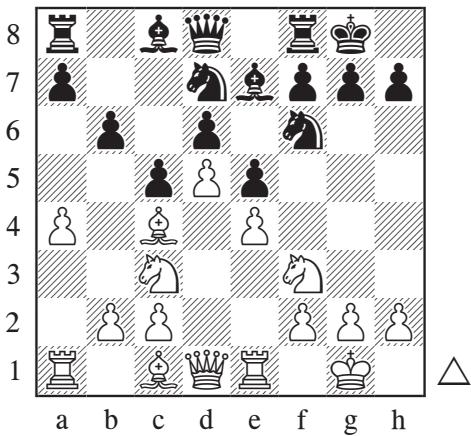
♗xd6 33.♗xd6 g6 34.♗gd2 ♘e7 35.♔a3
 ♘e8 36.♔b4 ♘c5 37.♗d8† ♘xd8 38.♗xd8†
 ♘xd8 39.♘xc5 ♘c7 40.b4 b6† 41.♔c4 ♘c6
 42.b5†
 ½-½

Black did not worry in either of these cases about creating a hook on h5, as the only possible drawback, allowing White to open the kingside with g4, was a non-issue. Either because it was impossible, or because it was harmless.

Hooks are often mentioned in the sphere of attacking chess, but they are every bit as present in more positional contests. Oftentimes, in closed or semi-open positions, the player who is better on one side of the board will look for hooks there to try to open files. Take the following position:

Anthony Miles – Tamaz Gelashvili

Saint Vincent 2000

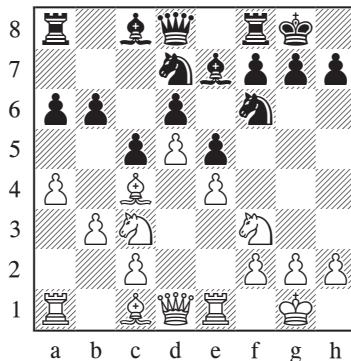


White enjoys a space advantage, but how can he make good use of it? The answer is: opening the queenside, where his pieces will be able to jump in with devastating effect. The key problem point is that the b6-pawn is a hook to be exploited.

10.a5!

It is best to push the pawn right away. The pawn on b6 is only temporarily a hook because if Black has time to play ...a6, he will be able to meet a4-a5 with ...b6-b5, keeping the queenside closed.

Actually, the computer prefers 10.b3, which makes absolutely no sense to me. 10...a6!



I do not see a great way for White to make progress on the queenside, while Black can plan hybrid King's Indian/Ruy Lopez counterplay with moves like ...♘f6-e8, ...g7-g6, ...♗e8-g7, ...f7-f5, and ...♗d7-f6. He looks okay to me with a clear plan of action.

Instead the game went in an entirely different direction.

10...bxa5

I am sure Gelashvili was unhappy making this move, but what choice did he have? The pawns would be exchanged anyway, potentially under worse circumstances. If the rules of chess allowed Black to play ...b6-b7, retreating the pawn, the Georgian Grandmaster would do it in a heartbeat.

Meanwhile the black pawn on a5 will not be long for this world. Miles finds the most effective way to take it.

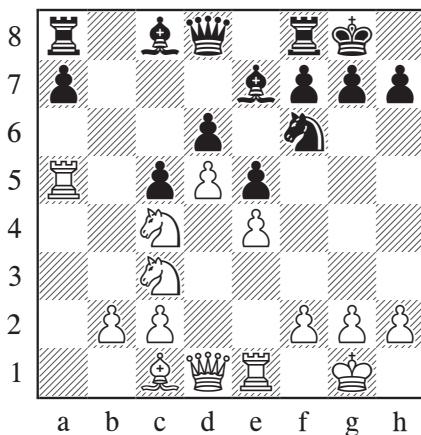
11.♗d2!

White's f3-knight begins the journey to a5, potentially even c6. The queenside is coming apart a lot faster than Black would like, so he tries to do something about it.

11...♝b6 12.♝xa5

It was not necessary to cede the bishop pair, but also it does not spoil the advantage. I should though mention that after 12.♝b5 White is much better.

12...♝xc4 13.♝xc4



In a tough position, Black makes matters even worse.

13...♞e8?!

I really dislike this move. The knight is very passive on e8. Perhaps Gelashvili was hoping for the kingside expansion I spoke about earlier. But with the queenside already opened and the center likely to follow soon, he should have been a bit less aggressive.

After 13...♞d7± I don't like Black's position, but he has better chances here than in the game.

Un-developing a piece to make a pawn break is sensible in a closed position, but usually too slow in an open one. To exploit this, Tony Miles pounced immediately in the center.

14.f4!

White finds another hook and opens the center while Black's pieces are poorly placed on the back rank. Black is forced to relate to this increase in the central pawn tension.

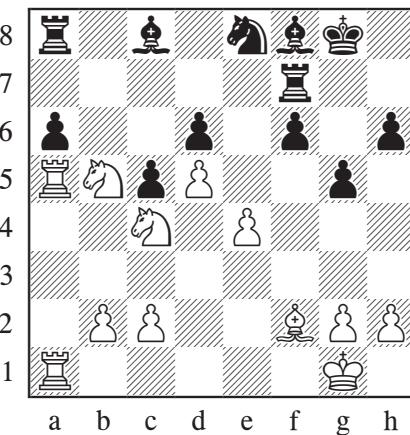
14...exf4

Trying to keep a solid hold over e5 will allow White to gain space and shut down any dream of kingside counterplay. After something like 14...f6 15.f5! Black is strategically lost.

15.♝xf4 f6 16.♛d2

Black has a dreadful passive position. All of his pieces on lousy squares, and it is hard to suggest anywhere for them to go! Unsurprisingly, White won easily.

16...♜f7 17.♜ea1 ♜f8 18.♜a2 g5 19.♜e3 h6 20.♜f2 ♜g7 21.♝b5 a6 22.♛a5 ♜xa5 23.♜xa5 ♜e8



24.♝g3 ♜b8 25.♝bxd6 ♜xd6 26.♝xd6 ♜xd6 27.♝xd6 ♜xb2 28.♝xc5 ♜b7 29.c4 ♜e2 30.♝b1 ♜g7 31.♝c7 ♜xc7 32.♝xc7 ♜c8 33.♝b8 ♜d7 34.♝a5 ♜a4 35.c5 ♜xe4 36.c6 ♜c4 37.c7 ♜d7 38.♝d8 ♜f5 39.d6

1–0

In this encounter, White correctly judged that he had to open the position right away to make

use of his space advantage. If Black had kept the position closed, it would have been tougher to prove an advantage.

To avoid suffering the same fate as Gelashvili did, I have another guideline ready.

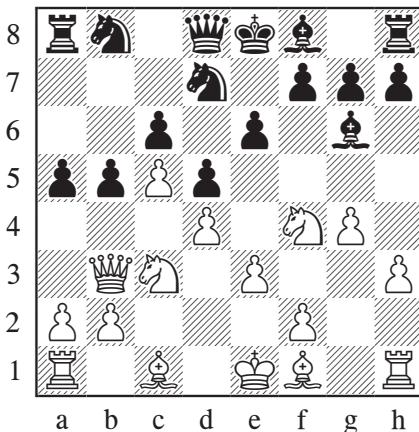
When you are better on one side of the board, do not create hooks for your opponent to exploit on the other side.

A simple guideline, but one good players occasionally violate. Not long ago I had a cheerless position, where my opponent unexpectedly allowed me to have a purpose in what was previously a plan-less position, by making a hook on the side of the board he should have been trying to keep closed.

Sam Shankland – Timur Gareyev

Las Vegas 2012

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 a6 5.e3
 ♘f5 6.♘h4 ♘g4 7.♗c2 e6 8.h3 ♘h5 9.g4
 ♘fd7 10.♘g2 ♘g6 11.♗b3 b5 12.c5 a5
 13.♘f4



Black has a very pleasant position. The machine calls it equal, but any human would hopefully prefer the second player. The pawn

structure is closed for the moment, but only Black can open it. He has plenty of good breaks at his disposal, most notably ...e6-e5 and, in some cases, ...h7-h5.

On the other hand, White has no ideas! His pawn chain points toward the queenside, suggesting this is the side of the board he is better on. This may be correct, but how can he ever open any lines?

The black pawns on a5 and b5 cannot be used as hooks since a2-a4 will be met by ...b5-b4, and if White prepares b2-b4 instead, ...a5-a4 will follow. There is simply no way to open the queenside – until Black made it possible.

13...b4?

Asking for trouble. Black is worse on the queenside and should play in the center and on the kingside. By advancing the b-pawn he gives White a hook with which he can open the a-file and other lines on the side of the board he wants to be fighting for.

This is also a violation of the old guideline that you should not move pawns without good reason on the side of the board where you are weaker. This reason could be to block the position there, but here it allows White to open the game. Bad moves can be explained in many ways...

Black had several good moves, of which I like 13...♘a6 best. The knight will head to c7, immunizing Black against a piece sacrifice

on b5. Once Black carries about the ...e5 advance, the knight will find a happy home on e6, pressuring the white center. I prefer Black.

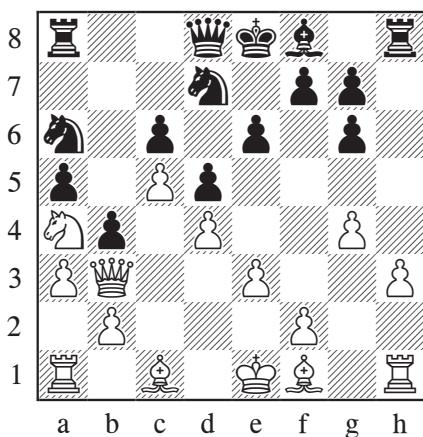
14.♘xg6!

White should not allow ...♗g6-e4.

14...hxg6 15.♘a4 ♘a6

The drawback of advancing ...b5-b4 now becomes clear.

16.a3



White did not need to rush with a2-a3, but I think it is fine anyway. Black still has clear counterplay on the kingside and in the center, but both sides have serious plans and trumps. If Black had not pushed the b-pawn, he would be in the driver's seat and White condemned to passive defense.

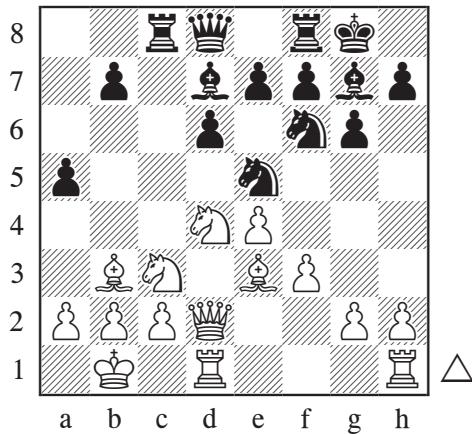
The rest of the game was interesting (drawn on move 60 and full of mistakes), but outside the scope of our topic. Please restrict yourself to thinking of how much nicer Black's position would be if he could play the pawn retreat ...b4-b5 here!

Curiously the computer did not mind his advance of the b-pawn much and Black had a very good position not much later. Nonetheless, I have a strong conviction that advancing the b-pawn was a strategic error.

To conclude this segment, I leave the reader with two puzzles.

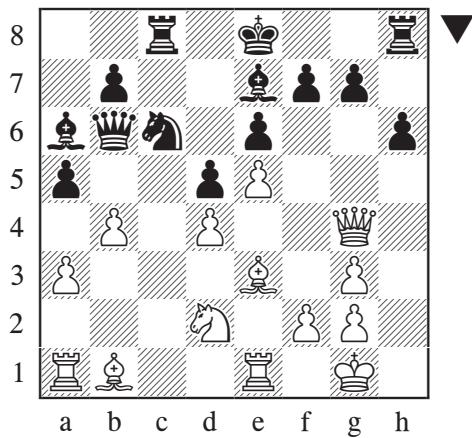
Exercises

Bator Sambuev – Jerry Xiong, Ottawa 2009



Black has just played 12...a5, possibly intending ...a5-a4 to loosen White's control over the c4-square. In the game, White played 13.a4. What do you think of this move?

Niclas Huschenbeth – Sam Shankland, Greensboro 2017

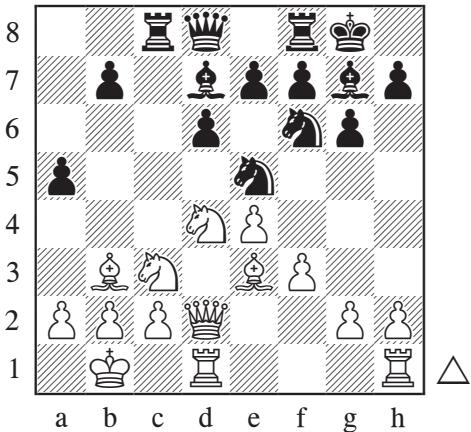


How should Black respond to the threat of $\mathbb{W}xg7$?

Solutions

Bator Sambuev – Jerry Xiong

Ottawa 2009



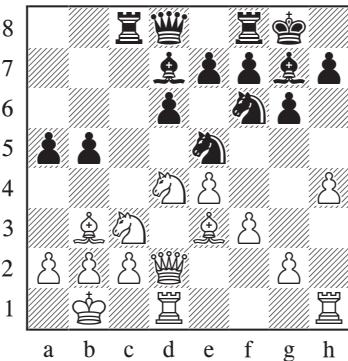
13.a4!

White is correct to play this. It creates a hook on the queenside, but how likely is it for Black to successfully achieve a ...b5-break? It simply won't happen. White has two knights and a pawn clamping down on the b5-square. Black has no convincing way to contest it.

If White instead had continued with his plans on the kingside, he would soon have found himself in trouble:

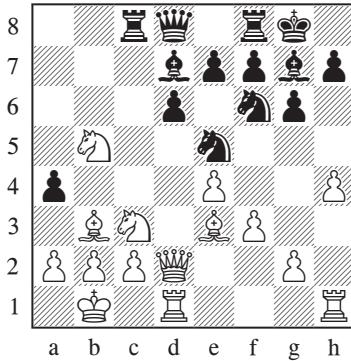
13.h4?

As if nothing happened, this gives Black exactly the kind of play he was hoping for. 13...b5!



Black's queenside pawns are in motion and will gain a lot of tempos threatening the white pieces.

14.♗dxb5 a4!



15.♗xa4

15.♗xa4? ♗xb5

15...♗c4!

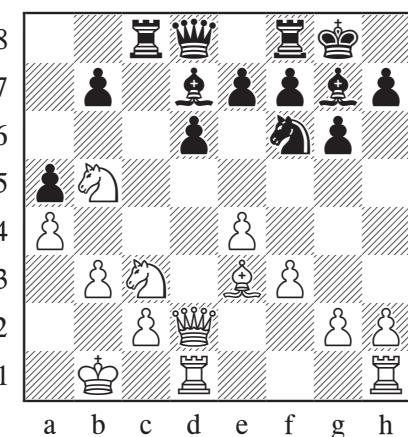
The initiative flows naturally and the black attack plays itself.

16.♔e1 ♗xe3 17.♔xe3 ♗a5!

Black has excellent compensation for the two pawns.

White can also play 13.a3, to secure a2 for his bishop. But there is no reason not to play a4 then. I would be more worried about Black playing ...b5 with a pawn on a3, when ...b5-b4 would become a serious idea.

13...♗c4 14.♗xc4 ♗xc4 15.b3 ♗c8 16.♗db5



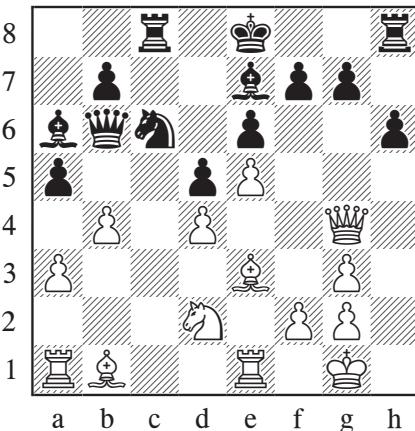
There is no way Black will ever get to play ...b5. All he has accomplished by advancing his a-pawn has been to weaken the b5-square, which White can use for an outpost. White cruised to victory on the kingside and in the center without Black ever having an ounce of counterplay on the queenside.

16...h5 17.Qd4 Qxb5 18.Qxb5 e6 19.We3
 Wc6 20.h4 We8 21.Qb2 Wb8 22.g4 hxg4
 23.h5 e5 24.fxg4 Qd8 25.h6 Qh8 26.h7†
 Qf8 27.Qa3 Qe8 28.Wf3 Wa6 29.Wdf1 d5
 30.exd5 e4 31.Wc3 Wc8 32.Wd4 g5 33.d6
 Qd7 34.Wxf6 Wf8 35.Wxe4 Wxf6 36.Wf5†
 Qc6 37.Wxf6

1–0

Niclas Huschenbeth – Sam Shankland

Greensboro 2017



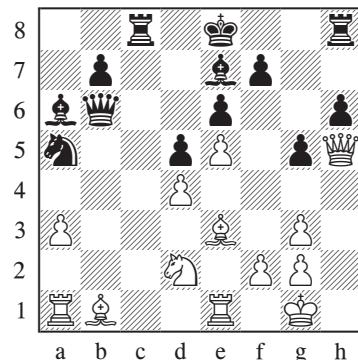
In the game, I conceded a hook with:

22...g5?

It was entirely unnecessary to do so. The best move to parry the threat of Wg4xg7 was the simple 22...Qf8!. White is better on the kingside, but cannot open any lines in the absence of hooks. Already on the next move Black will start opening up the position on the queenside, with great success.

23.bxa5! Qxa5 24.Qa2?

A mistake in a difficult position. White should have been more direct and exploited Black's weakening of the kingside with the immediate pounce 24.Wh5!.



The queen is very annoying on h5, preventing ...Qe8-d7. It is by no means easy to remove her from her perch. Sooner or later White will throw in f2-f4, making Black regret creating a hook on the kingside. The position is unclear and anything could happen.

24...Qd3?

Another error. I should have taken the chance to push the queen back with 24...h5!, when after 25.Wd1 Wb2 Black is much better. With the weakened queenside and with the queen back on d1, White would not have much counterplay. For example: 26.f4 Wc3!

25.Wac1 Qd7 26.Wxc8! Wxc8 27.Qb1!

Now White is fine. I really missed my chances in this game.

27...Qg6 28.Qxg6 fxg6 29.Wb1 Wa6 30.Wd1
 Wc3 31.a4 Wd3 32.Wb5 Qd8 33.Wf3 Wf5
 34.We2 Wd3 35.WB3 Wf5 36.We2 Wd3
 ½–½

Part II

Compelling Enemy Pawns Forward

Introduction

Chapters One through Five each touched on reasons why advancing pawns could be detrimental, with each chapter looking at a different reason why a pawn would wish to move backwards. But as we all know; **pawn moves are forever.**

The next five chapters we will go over the same topics, with one key difference. This time we will look at why and how we can entice our opponent's pawns to go forward. After all, the opponent's suffering should be by our hand.

Up to this point we have looked mainly at unforced errors. None of the players who advanced a pawn incorrectly in the previous five chapters were forced to do so.

When trying to cause damage to our opponents' positions, oftentimes energetic play is required. Of course, they might have made the grave error of not purchasing this book and be voluntarily pushing pawns ahead incorrectly, but when facing intelligent opposition, encouragement is often required. This is where you will come in.

To force an opponent's pawn forward, you will often have to make a threat of some kind, where the only reasonable response is to push a pawn that would rather have stayed back. Frequently the threat is to the pawn you want him to move. But there are plenty of other ways to provoke pawn weaknesses, such as attacking a piece that will need a pawn's protection, or attacking something down a diagonal that your opponent prefers to block with a pawn.

This is all more complex and therefore the next Part is also a bit more complex than the previous one. These are important basic positional skills. I hope you will get a lot out of the following pages.

Just as we can "move our pawns backwards" by realizing it would be wrong to move them forwards in the first place and leave them where they are, we can also break the laws of chess by "moving the opponent's pawns forward", by encouraging him strongly to do so.

Chapter 6

Taking Out Lone Soldiers

In chess it is a crucial skill to be able to walk in our opponent's shoes and sneak a peak in his mind. Grandmasters repeatedly ask themselves: "What is my opponent's next move?" "What is my opponent's idea/plan?" "What is the idiot doing?" And the classic: "What if I am the idiot?" And so on...

If a pawn in your opponent's position is well placed and would hate moving forward, it should inspire you to compel him to do just that.

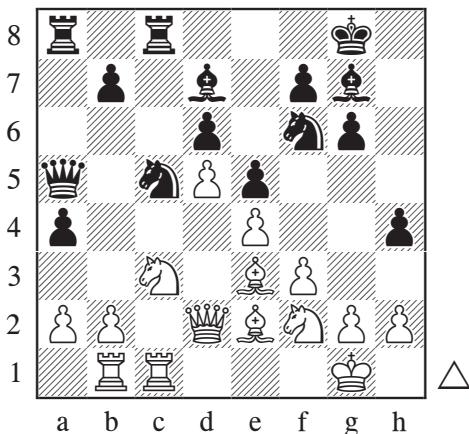
In Chapter 1 we discussed that a pawn might wish it could take a step backwards if it is more vulnerable farther up the board and/or harder to protect. Equally there are plenty of cases where we might wish to compel our opponents' pawns to advance for the same reason!

The basic case of wanting to draw an opponent's pawn forward, is when you think you can win the pawn.

There is not too much to discuss in the following position.

Vladislav Tkachiev – Eloi Relange

Bastia 1998



The pawn on h4 sticks out like a sore thumb. White can win it with a couple of good moves.

19.♕g5!

White compels the pawn to step forward, even farther away from the herd. 19.♕g5 is not the only good move, but I like its simplicity.

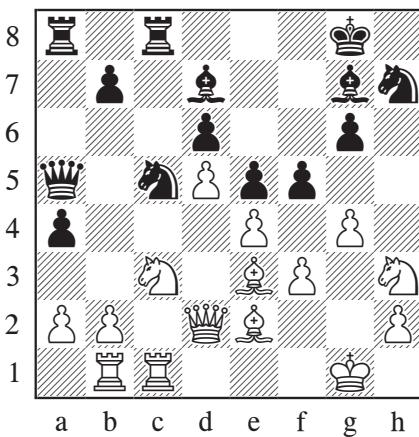
19...h3

Tkachiev could take the pawn right away, but wants to avoid giving Black compensation by crippling his kingside structure.

20.g4!?

There was nothing very wrong with 20.♕xh3 ♕xh3 21.gxh3, but the text is good too.

20...♗h7 21.♕e3 f5 22.♕xh3



Tkachiev scoops up the pawn and won easily.

22...fxg4 23.fxg4 b5 24.♗f2 b4 25.♗cd1 ♗f6 26.♗f3 a3 27.bxa3 ♘xa3 28.♘xb4 ♘xa2 29.♗c3

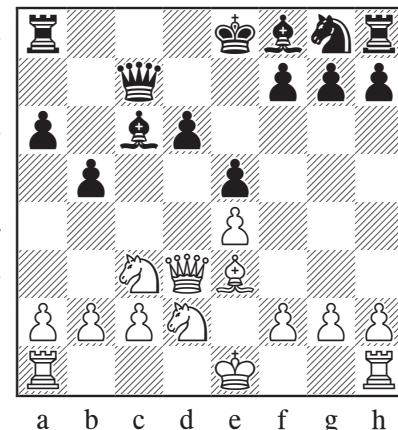
1–0

If you calculate a direct variation that ends in your favor, it overrules positional considerations. Tkachiev did not have to think for long before forcing his opponent's pawn to h3, as the pawn was simply lost there.

Chess is rarely that simple though. Even when forcing the opponent's pawn forward will cause urgent injury, some consideration must be taken. Like in this game:

Eric Lobron – Harald Keilhack

Altenkirchen 2001



White has a lead in development, but how should he increase his advantage? By combining the wisdom of the previous chapters!

The b5-pawn does not want to step to the fourth rank, where it would become a target and give up control of the c4-square. But he also cannot allow White to open the queenside using the b5-pawn as a hook. Which is worse? White's next move makes this an urgent question.

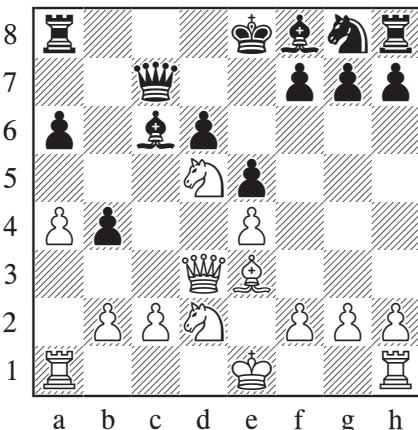
12.a4!

The b5-pawn is under attack and drawn forward. It is the lesser evil, but hurts all the same.

12...b4

It is inadvisable to play 12...bxa4. After 13.♗xa4 White is ready with ♗a4-b6 and the a1-rook is nicely active down the open a-file.

13.♗d5!



White leaps to the juicy outpost.

13... $\mathbb{W}b7?$

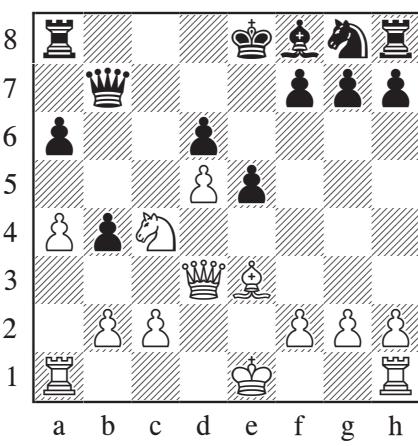
A mistake. On the next move Black had to take on d5 anyway, so better to do it now without losing time. After 13... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 14.exd5 White is pleasantly better, but not quite as devastatingly as in the game.

Now White brings in another piece with a gain of tempo.

14. $\mathbb{Q}c4!$

White menaces $\mathbb{Q}c4-a5$, exchanging Black's only good minor piece, the c6-bishop, and winning the pawn on b4.

14... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 15.exd5



15... $\mathbb{Q}f6$

White is much better, and all because the black pawn on b4 is overextended. Black would love to bring the pawn back to b5, where it would not only be safer but would also harass the well-placed c4-knight.

The best way for White to increase his advantage and make Black further regret the ...b5-b4 advance is to artificially isolate it from all potential defenders, then round it up. Because of this, and how the game turned out, Black might have considered playing ...a6-a5, while he could still prevent White from isolating the b4-pawn. But doing so would have led to a quick demolition.

15...a5?

Black keeps the b4-pawn safe, but at a heavy cost. While he is falling behind in development and has exposed his king, White can play energetic chess to punish him for not getting his pieces out of the starting blocks.

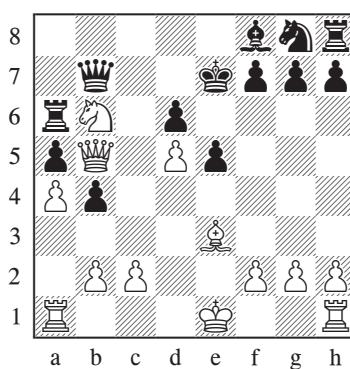
16. $\mathbb{Q}b6!$

The rook on a8 is hanging, and Black must keep it on the a-file to avoid losing the a5-pawn to $\mathbb{W}b5\uparrow$.

16... $\mathbb{Q}a6$

Black holds on to his pawns for now, but White's initiative keeps rolling forward.

17. $\mathbb{W}b5\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$



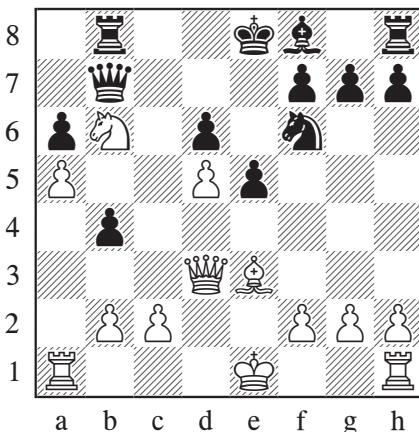
18. $\mathbb{Q}c4!$

Black can comfortably resign. White takes everything.

16. $\mathbb{Q}b6!$

White's knight manages to prevent Black's rook from occupying the c-file, gains a tempo on self-same rook and most importantly, cuts off the black queen's line of sight to the b4-pawn.

16... $\mathbb{R}b8$ 17. a5!



Clearing the a4-square while stopping any hope Black may have had of playing ...a5. The b4-pawn is artificially isolated and none of the black pieces can protect it.

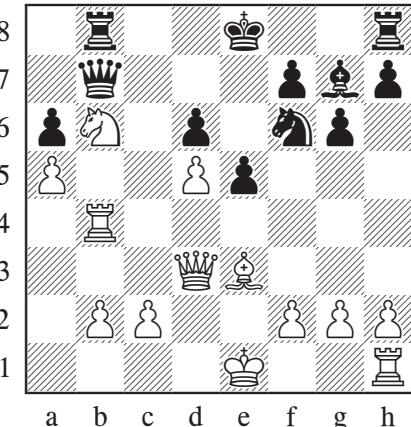
17... g6

The time is right for White to collect the loose pawn. No one will come to its aid, so simply attacking it is enough.

18. $\mathbb{Q}a4!$

Just a few moves after Black's pawn advanced to b4, it will be scooped up for absolutely nothing. Wouldn't Black love to scoop the pawn back to b5? It would be totally safe there and improve his position a lot.

18... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xb4$



19... 0-0 20. 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 21. c3 $f5$ 22. f3 $\mathbb{Q}f6$
 23. $\mathbb{E}c4$ e4 24. $\mathbb{W}d2$ exf3 25. gxf3 $\mathbb{E}f7$ 26. $\mathbb{E}c6$
 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 27. $\mathbb{E}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{W}b5$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}b6$
 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ dx5 31. c4 $\mathbb{W}b3$ 32. $\mathbb{E}e3$
 $\mathbb{W}a2$ 33. $\mathbb{E}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 34. $\mathbb{E}ee6$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 35. $\mathbb{E}e1$ f4
 36. $\mathbb{Q}d4$
 1-0

Black quickly felt the pain of advancing his b-pawn and his position became impossible to defend in short order. Symbolically his opponent gobbed up the b-pawn and claimed the game. Surely, Black should have read the previous chapters on not advancing his pawns too far, right?

Wrong! This would not have helped him, as his opponent offered him no choice in the matter. *Black was forced to push his pawn to a square where it would become vulnerable.* Black had made a few errors before we came in, but once he pushed his b-pawn, pushing it over the edge was not only the best, but also the only move. White simply played well.

The opponent's pawn structure is every bit as important to the evaluation of the position as our own. This goes without saying, but is probably not an emotional truth for everyone? Learning when and how to provoke the opponent's pawns forward is a harder skill to master than not overextending your own pawns voluntarily.

The first step towards being able to provoke a pawn forward and making it a weakness, is figuring out if it will actually be weak once advanced. This can be done by using similar guidelines to the ones in Chapter 1. As a reminder, here they are again:

When deciding to advance a pawn beyond the fourth rank, you must decide if it is safe. The first part of this decision-making process is to ask if any other pawns can protect it.

The second point of deciding if a pawn advance is safe, is to check how many of the opponent's pieces are in position to attack the pawn.

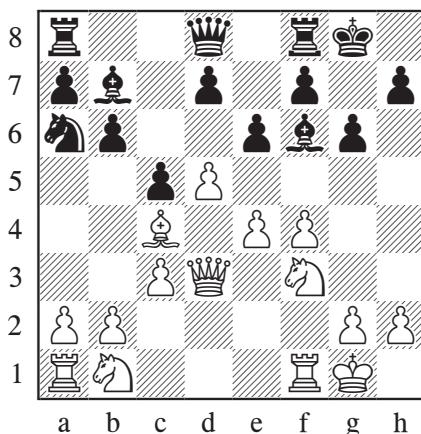
If you are considering forcing an opponent's pawn forward, the guidelines are similar, with roles reversed.

When deciding to force an opponent's pawn forward to make it a weakness, consider if his pawns can protect it.

If no pawns can protect their advanced colleague, consider if your pieces can attack it.

Applying these guidelines to the previous example, we can quickly surmise that compelling Black to play ...b4 is a worthwhile endeavor. The pawn quickly became artificially isolated, beyond the reach of the black pawns and pieces. White could simply take the pawn.

The same guidelines can dissuade one from forcing an opponent's pawn forward as well. Take the following example.



Black faces an important strategic decision. He only has a few options, since his knight on a6 is hanging, yet his next move will dramatically influence the character of the game.

One move to consider is 11... $\mathbb{Q}c7$!. The pressure on the d5-pawn will force it forward to d6. Black must evaluate whether this far-advanced foot soldier will be vulnerable to attack or an asset, giving White a space advantage.

11... $\mathbb{Q}c7$!?

More or less forcing White to advance the d-pawn. This is a mistake because there is no way Black can put pressure on it once it has arrived on the 6th rank. White will play e4-e5 and not have to worry much about the safety of the d-pawn.

Black is worse no matter how he plays, but I believe it is better to open the center than to allow White to clamp down with 12.d6.

12.d6

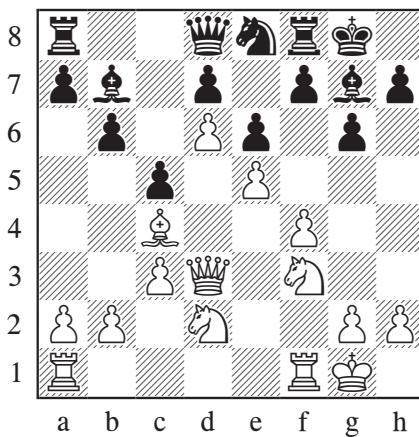
Securing a huge space advantage and badly restricting Black's pieces.

12... $\mathbb{Q}e8$

White's d-pawn is indeed far advanced, but it is not at all vulnerable since he can easily erect a strong central pawn chain to keep it protected. In the meantime, the pawn really makes a mockery of the e8-knight and leaves White with an advantage in space.

13.e5!

The pawn chain is erected. It will be nearly impossible for Black to undermine the defense of the d6-pawn.

13... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}bd2\pm$ 

For the mentioned reasons, Black is strategically lost.

Let's look at a preferable way to handle the position.

11...exd5!

Based on the tactic that 12. $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ is met with 12...c4.

12. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$

White should give up on the dream of clamping down with a strong pawn on d6. It was the presence of the e-pawns that made

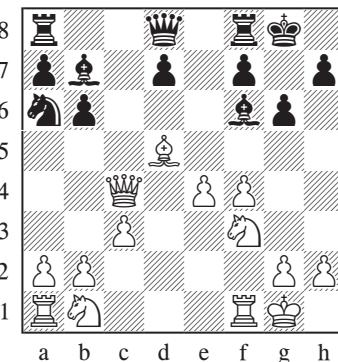
that attractive. But he still has a decent plan of playing against the backward d-pawn. But let's check 12.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}c7!$ for a moment anyway. The absence of the e-pawns dramatically changes the position. Once White advances the d-pawn, it will be comparatively harder for him to keep it secure since he no longer has e4-e5 at his disposal. After 13.d6 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ Black has good counterplay. If White continues with normal development, the d6-pawn will simply drop. 14. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ b5! Black clears the b6-square for the queen. 15. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ White cannot save the d-pawn and is verging on being worse. After 12. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ it looks as if Black has a strategic disaster on the light squares, but he has a surprising resource available to change the character of the position; to avoid falling into passivity, Black should pitch a pawn.

12...c4!

Black pitched the c-pawn for quick development and to damage his opponent's pawn structure.

13. $\mathbb{W}xc4$

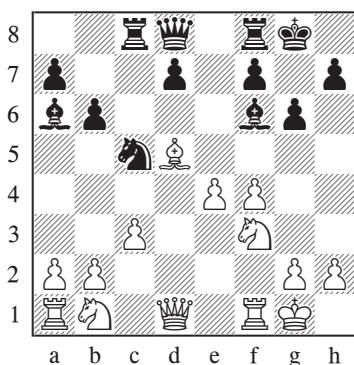
White could not take with the bishop. After 13. $\mathbb{Q}xc4?$ $\mathbb{Q}c5!$ Black is already winning back his pawn and will enjoy the better game due to his active pieces.

**13... $\mathbb{W}c8!$**

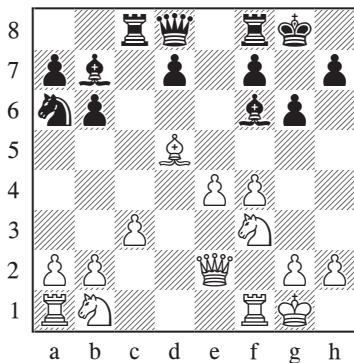
White's queen cannot lose a lot of time, so will have to leave the defense of the bishop. This means his structure will be greatly worsened.

14. $\mathbb{W}e2$

Trying to stay in touch with the d5-bishop makes sense from a strategic point of view, but only loses more time. After 14. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5!$ White's queen is harassed again. She would love to keep defending the bishop to avoid having to recapture with the e-pawn but has no way of doing so without suffering material losses. 15. $\mathbb{W}d1$ White has almost consolidated, but after Black's strong next move, White loses material. (15. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4!$ is also no good) 15... $\mathbb{Q}a6!$



16. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ It is even worse to try to save the rook, as it will only walk into ... $\mathbb{Q}c5-d3$. 16... $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ 17. $\mathbb{W}xf1$ The position is very interesting and analysis shows it is balanced. Black is not better, but he should be thrilled with his slight material advantage, decently-placed pieces, and that he has no major pawn weaknesses. Especially as the alternative was suffocating under a massive space advantage.



If White could maintain the pawn structure as is, he would be a pawn up for nothing. But Black changes it directly:

14... $\mathbb{Q}xd5!$

White is not at all happy to have his e4-pawn dragged to d5.

15. $exd5$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$

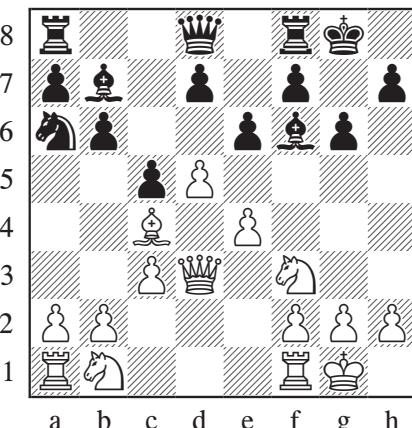
Black has definite compensation for his missing pawn. All his pieces are active, the f6-bishop is menacingly pointed at the tender white queenside, and Black is ahead in development. Probably he is still slightly worse, but the game goes on.

It transpired that forcing White's d-pawn to d6 was not the right way to play, because the pawn was not weak there. Guideline 1 indicates that if a far-advanced pawn can be comfortably protected by another pawn, forcing it to advance might be wrong. Here it was. Black had no way to target the pawn and was likely be squeezed to death with little to no counterplay.

The above position was an altered version of a contest between two very strong players. Let's examine what the real game looked like.

Jan Timman – Garry Kasparov

Amsterdam 1994



The position is identical except that White's f-pawn is back on f2. As a result, White's pawn chain in the center will be easier to break down, and thus the pawn on d6 more vulnerable.

11... $\mathbb{Q}c7!$

Black forces White's pawn forward. It will indeed be a weakness this time, with no solid central pawn chain to keep it safe.

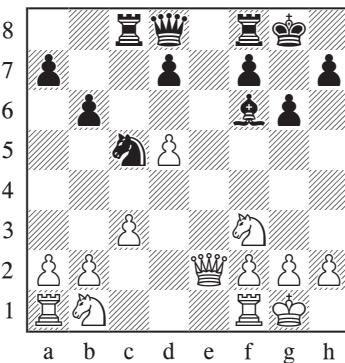
It is also less effective to continue in the manner that was best if White's pawn stood on f4:
11...exd5

When the position opens, White is happy to have his pawn on f2.

12. $\mathbb{Q}xd5 c4?$

Black should play 12... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$, when he is marginally worse: 13.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 14.d6 $\mathbb{Q}e6$
15. $\mathbb{Q}bd2\pm$

13. $\mathbb{W}xc4 \mathbb{E}c8$ 14. $\mathbb{W}e2 \mathbb{Q}xd5$ 15.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}c5\pm$



Black has far less compensation than in the previous example. The pawn on f2 is no longer a weakness and Black no longer has a strong outpost on e4.

White was not likely thrilled to push his d-pawn forwards but had little choice! Black was threatening both ...b5 and ...exd5, both giving him a big position.

12.d6

Simply developing allows Black to break down the central pawn chain. After 12. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$

the d5-pawn cannot be taken yet, but the option of removing the defender first improves things. 12...b5! 13. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ exd5 \mp White's space advantage in the center is gone. Black has the better game with his active bishop pair.

12... $\mathbb{Q}e8$

Comparing with the position with the pawn on f4, White cannot play 13.e5 due to 13... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$. And more importantly, even after preparing e4-e5, Black will simply break down the central pawn structure with ...f7-f6, when White will be missing the f4-pawn.

13. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$

White is ready to advance e4-e5 since ... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ can be met by $\mathbb{Q}xf3$, keeping the e5-pawn defended.

Tempting as it may be to try to keep d6 defended, it currently fails.

13.e5?

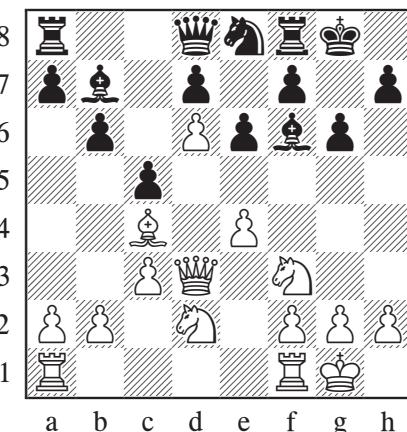
Black now does not bother retreating his bishop and instead removes the guard.

13... $\mathbb{Q}xf3!$ 14.exf6

14. $\mathbb{W}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5\mp$

14... $\mathbb{Q}c6\mp$

White is losing the f6-pawn right away and has no real compensation for it. The pawn might look nice on d6, but it does not prevent Black's pieces coming to good squares.



13...♝g7!

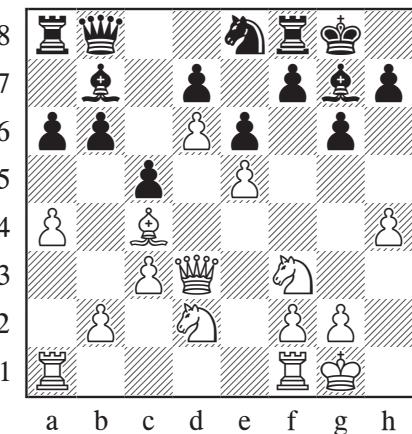
Black prepares to meet 14.e5 with 14...f6!.

14.h4 a6 15.a4

Black is ready to attack the d6-pawn, as Kasparov demonstrates.

15...♛b8! 16.e5

It looks like White managed to save the d-pawn, but the defense is only temporary as the e5-pawn can easily be exchanged.

**16...f6!**

Unfortunately for White, after the e5-pawn is gone, none of his pieces can contribute to the defense of the d6-pawn. A knight coming to e4 will be chopped off. The d-file is clogged, making a rook move to d1 ineffective.

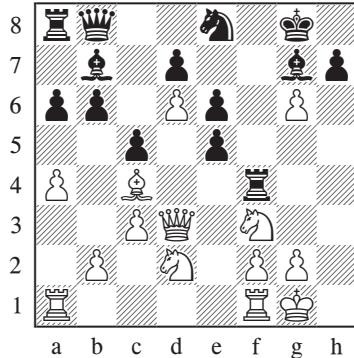
So the d6-pawn will fall. Note that if White's f-pawn were on f4, his pawn chain would be secure and Black in big trouble.

17.h5 fxe5 18.hxg6

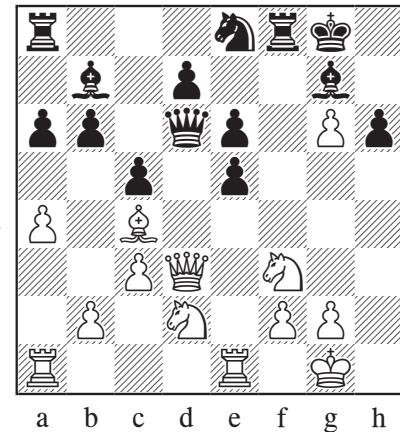
The position is messy, but I prefer Black.

18...h6

I don't love Kasparov's move. 18...♝f4!? looked more natural.



In open positions the initiative really matters. Black could play energetically, ignoring everything to do with the h7-pawn. 19.gxh7† ♜h8 The threat of ...e5-e4 puts White on the defensive. 20.♜fe1 ♜xd6 I would prefer Black in this unbalanced middlegame.

19.♜fe1 ♜xd6

Finally, the pawn was taken. The rest of the game was a back and forth affair, and outside the scope of what I am hoping to discuss.

As we have seen in many previous examples, one small tinker to the position can change the character of it a lot. Kasparov correctly forced White's pawn forward to d6, probably by a very similar thought process to our proposed guidelines.

First, consider if the far-advanced d6-pawn can be defended by another pawn. Technically, the answer was yes, but with the f-pawn back on f2, White will be unable to maintain a pawn on e5. So, a more realistic evaluation would be that the d6-pawn cannot rely on the protection of another pawn.

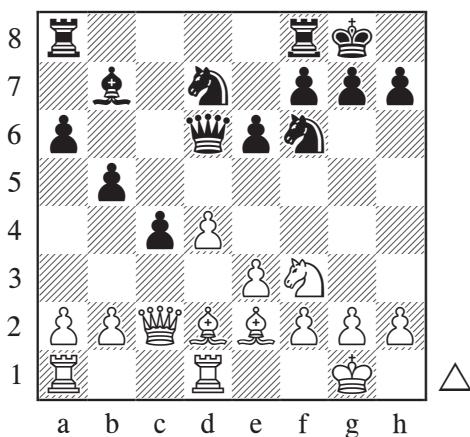
The next question is if Black's pieces are in position to attack the d6-pawn. The answer is yes. The knight on e8 and the queen on b8 were all that was needed. Once the e5-pawn was exchanged, none of White's pieces could fight for the d6-square.

Thus far, the examples have featured positions where the fate of the pawn was resolved quickly. Sometimes the pawn is lost, sometimes it is impossible to win it. But what about when clarity is elusive?

Such positions are by definition tough to evaluate. I remember being impressed with the deep understanding a friend of mine showed, with a new idea for White in the Anti-Meran. The following game may be the hardest one to understand in this book, but even so, it can be broken down with our guidelines.

Jon Ludvig Hammer – Wouter Spoelman

Wijk aan Zee 2011



I believe that at the time of the game, the position on the board was new. Thanks in no small part to Jon Ludvig's efforts, this is almost never played anymore, as everyone has realized White is better. Those who play this line with Black have found improvements earlier.

But why is this position dubious for Black? He has given up the bishop pair, but White's bishops are hardly intimidating. Black has no weaknesses and his pieces are well placed and coordinated. But watch the clinic "the Hammer" puts on.

16.b3!

You could argue that this game belongs in the chapter on hooks. But White never exchanges the pawn on c4. The threat is stronger than the execution! The pawn on c4 is hanging.

Black's strategic headache is that he does not want to take on b3, improving White's structure and opening lines for his bishop pair. But, he also does not want to allow the c-pawn to become isolated.

16...♝d5!

A good move. White cannot comfortably take on c4.

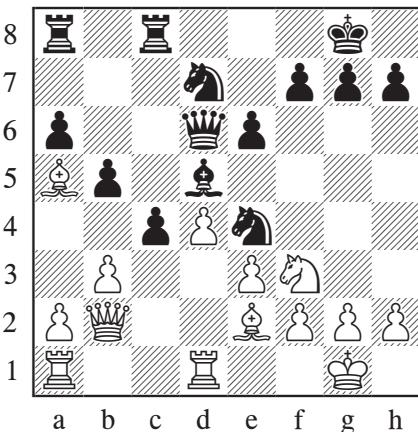
17.♗b2!

Patience. White does not rush things.

Taking on c4 does not achieve White's desired goals. Black will win the pawn back, keep his structure intact and exchange off half of White's bishop pair. After 17.bxc4 ♜xc4! 18.♗xc4 ♜fc8! Black will take with the rook on c4 and have a fine position.

17...♝e4 18.♗a5 ♜fc8

This is the critical moment I wanted to discuss deeply.



To find White's best move, we have to carefully consider what he desires for his opponent to do with the c-pawn. ... $\mathbb{R}f8-c8$ means Black can play ...c4-c3, but does he want to? A difficult question to answer. Guideline 1 suggests that the pawn will be secure on c3, because Black can support it with another pawn by playing ...b4; and he already has two pieces fighting for control of the c3-square. But, Jon Ludvig has seen further. He realizes that with a clever maneuver, he can kill three birds with one larvikite! Force the pawn forward to c3, prevent ...b4 and push back one of the defenders.

19. $\mathbb{Q}e1!!$

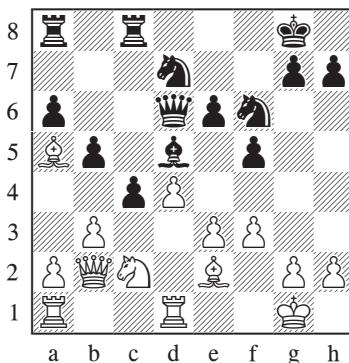
A brilliant move. Black is goaded into advancing his c-pawn. White threatens a central expansion with f2-f3 followed by e3-e4. Once this happens, the d5-bishop will be pushed back, and the c4-pawn becomes weak.

19...c3!?

The most principled move, and it was now or never. If White had been able to play f2-f3 next, then the e4-knight would have been expelled and ...c4-c3 unavailable.

It was also possible to avoid playing 19...c3 and instead try to contain White's central advance, but Black would be clearly worse.

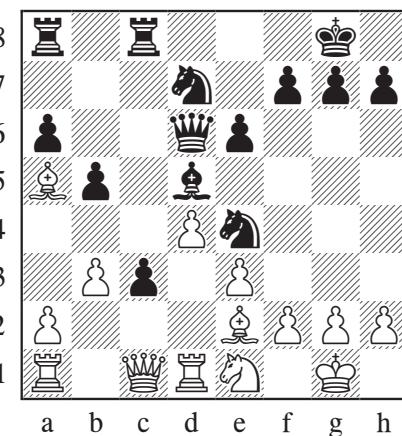
After 19...f5 White will not get e3-e4 in. Still, he is better. 20.f3 $\mathbb{Q}ef6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}c2\pm$



White will put pressure on the c4-pawn with moves like $\mathbb{R}a1-c1$ and $\mathbb{Q}c2-a3$. Once this happens, Black will be forced to play ...c4xb3 with a bad pawn structure and the position opening up for White's bishops. It makes more sense to try to push the c-pawn while he can avoid this unpleasant scenario.

A do-nothing move would be punished swiftly. After 19... $\mathbb{Q}h8$? 20.f3! $\mathbb{Q}ef6$ 21.e4! Black will lose material as White's center springs to life.

20. $\mathbb{W}c1!$



White only had to look one move ahead after 19. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ to see this position. As brilliant and difficult as the 19. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ and 20. $\mathbb{W}c1$ maneuver

is, when considering the two guidelines, White can surmise that it is well worth his while to compel the black pawn forward. It cannot be defended by another pawn, as ...b4 will simply see the b-pawn drop as well. And White is ready to kick the knight back with f2-f3, at which point the c-pawn is ripe for capture.

20... $\mathbb{Q}b7?$

Black capitulates right away and can no longer offer any further resistance. But his position was bad no matter what. Still, 20... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ is a good move for our purposes, as it lets Jon Ludvig illustrate his idea.

Of course, White should be sure that Black cannot defend the c3-pawn with another pawn before provoking its advance. Luckily, it is not hard to do, when you have seen the last two moves. 20...b4 21.f3! $\mathbb{Q}ef6$ 22.e4! Black's pieces are beaten backwards. After 22... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ the b-pawn falls, and the c-pawn soon will follow.

It was relatively best to push the pawn even farther, but Black should do it with the understanding that it will still be lost.

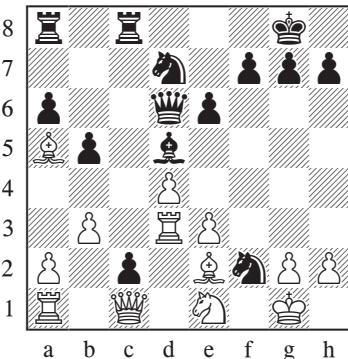
20...c2

White should not take the pawn right away, as it is not going anywhere.

21. $\mathbb{Q}d3!$

White prepares to shore up his kingside and expel the black knight with f2-f3. After this he will easily round up the c2-pawn. Black has to try to muddy the waters.

21... $\mathbb{Q}xf2?$

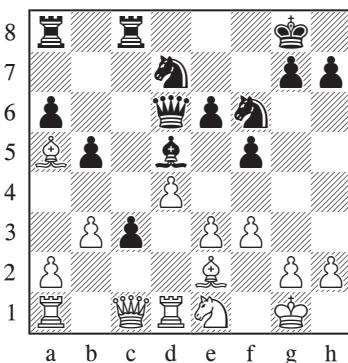


It is better than losing without a fight!

22. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{Q}xh2$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}g1\pm$

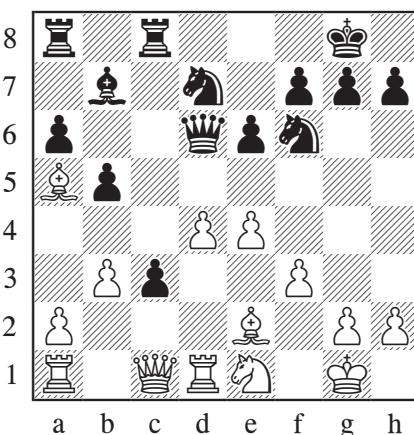
Black does not have enough for the piece, but the game is still complicated.

Stopping White's central expansion no longer works. 20...f5? allows White to expel one of the defenders of the c3-pawn. 21.f3! $\mathbb{Q}ef6$ And next up, White adds an attacker.



22. $\mathbb{Q}d3!$ The pawn on c3 will fall. Black's only attempt to defend it is 22...b4, but this can be met with 23.a3!. Once the c-pawn is lost, the game end is near.

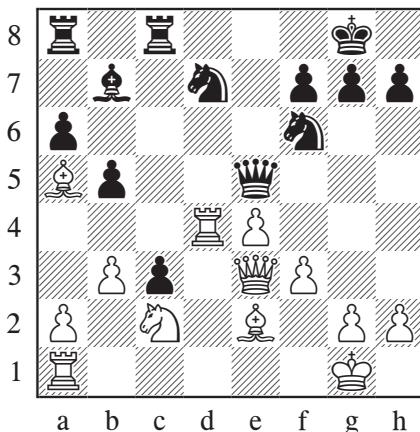
21.f3! $\mathbb{Q}ef6$ 22.e4!



White expands in the center. The c3-pawn is not yet hanging, but Black is unable to bring any reserves in to its aid. Soon enough, White

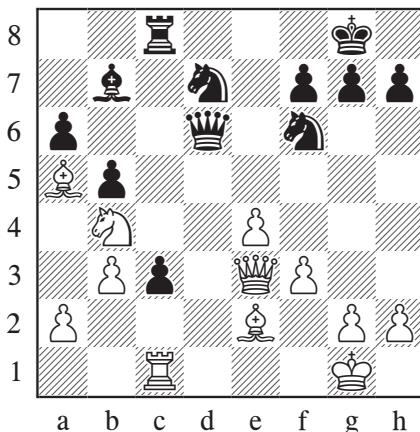
will add attackers with $\mathbb{W}c1-e3$ and $\mathbb{B}a1-c1$. Then the pawn will fall. And once again, the c3-pawn cannot be defended by another pawn. After 22...b4 23. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ White collects the b4-pawn.

22...e5 23. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ exd4 24. $\mathbb{B}xd4$ $\mathbb{W}e5$ 25. $\mathbb{W}e3$



It took quite a few moves, but finally we can draw a definite conclusion. The pawn on c3 is vulnerable and will fall. Black is unable to bring any pieces to the defense, so some combination of $\mathbb{B}a1-c1$ and $\mathbb{B}d4-d3$ will win the pawn.

25... $\mathbb{B}c6$ 26. $\mathbb{B}c1$ $\mathbb{B}ac8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{B}d6$ 28. $\mathbb{B}xd6$
 $\mathbb{W}xd6$



29. $\mathbb{B}xc3$

Finally, pawn up!

29... $\mathbb{B}xc3$ 30. $\mathbb{W}xc3$ g5 31. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ g4 32.e5 $\mathbb{W}e6$
33. $\mathbb{W}c7$ gxf3 34.gxf3 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 35.exf6 $\mathbb{W}xe2$
36. $\mathbb{W}g3\#$

1–0

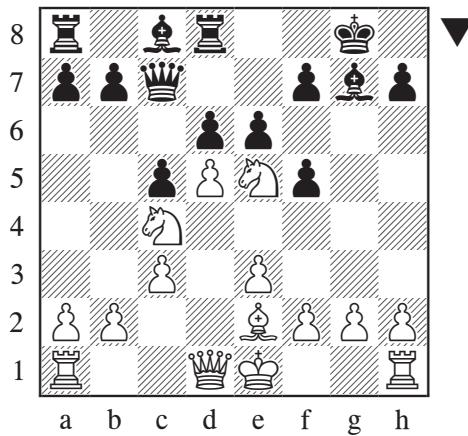
Black was not “forced” to play 19...c3, but he would have an unpleasant position if he did not. Allowing White to expel the e4-knight and take his share of the center would mean that eventually Black would have to exchange on b3. White would then have a small, but steady, advantage.

By playing in a principled manner, Spoelman allowed Hammer to demonstrate why he provoked the pawn to c3. The complexity of the middlegame did not change the value of our two principles. The pawn on c3 could not be defended by another pawn, and White’s pieces were better equipped to attack it than Black’s were to defend it. Once Hammer figured this out, I’m sure he did not struggle to find the brilliant 19. $\mathbb{Q}e1!!$.

Exercises

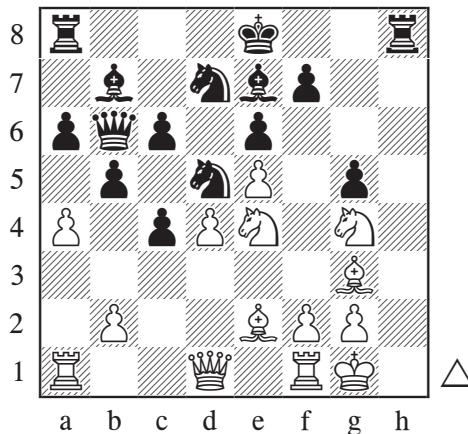
And now it is puzzle time.

Marco Ubezio – Christian Bauer, Saint Vincent 2000



Black must recapture on e5. If he plays ... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$, the structure will remain unchanged. But if he plays ... $dxe5$, he will force the d-pawn to d6. What should he do?

Based on **Leonid Yudasin – Vladimir Antoshin, Nikolaev 1983**

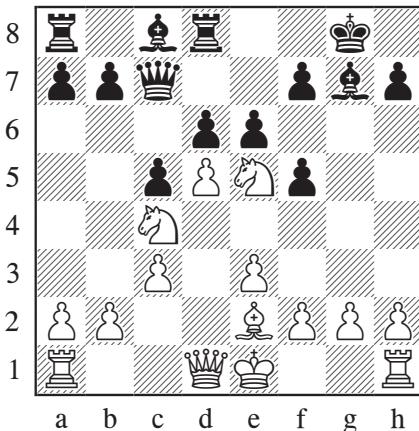


White is a pawn down, but enjoys the typical compensation he gets in the Moscow Gambit. Should he play b2-b3, encouraging Black to play ... $c4-c3$, or try to keep the position closed? (Let's assume Black has already moved his king and is thus unable to castle.)

Solutions

Marco Ubezio – Christian Bauer

Saint Vincent 2000



14...dxe5!

Black can and should force White's d-pawn to advance. The pawn will be very vulnerable on d6.

15.d6

When considering our guidelines, we realize that the d6-pawn cannot be supported by another pawn, and that Black's pieces are in very good position to attack it. Black can remove the knight with ...b7-b5 or ...b7-b6 followed by ...a6, and even add more pressure on the pawn with ...g7-f8.

15...♝c6

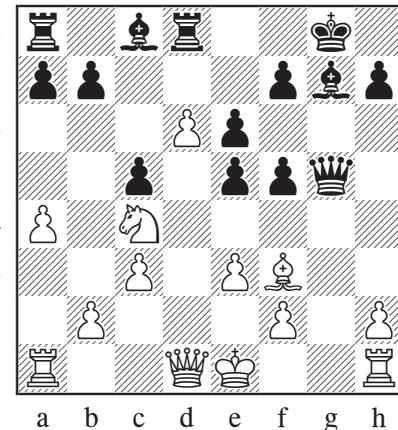
I wish that Black had played 15...♝d7 (see below), because it illustrates that the d6-pawn has gone too far and cannot be defended in the long term.

The game saw White sacrifice a pawn to have something in this position to be proud of. In the game White could hang on to the d6-pawn, at the cost of his kingside.

16.a4!?

White prevents ...b5, trying to save his most valuable asset, but now he suffers on the other side of the board.

16...♛xg2! 17.♚f3 ♛g5



Black is better here due to his kingside play, but he will have a hard time winning the d6-pawn. Bauer did eventually win. This type of messy position makes him feel comfortable, I guess.

18.♝b3 e4 19.h4 ♛f6 20.♚e2 b6 21.0–0–0 ♜b7 22.♜hg1 ♔h8 23.h5 ♜d5 24.♝b5 f4 25.♝g4 fxe3 26.fxe3 ♛f2 27.h6 ♜xh6 28.♞e5 ♛f5 29.♞c6 ♜xd6 30.♞xa7 ♔xe3† 31.♞b1 ♔f2 32.c4 e3† 33.♞a1 ♔f3 34.♝xf3 ♛xf3 35.♝xd6 ♛xg4 36.♝xb6 e2 37.♝d8† ♜xd8 38.♝xd8† ♔g7

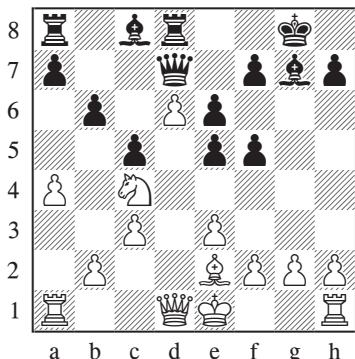
0–1

The cleaner and more illustrative way to play was:

15...♝d7 16.a4

16.0–0 b5! The pawn drops at once. But Black has another good way to remove the defender.

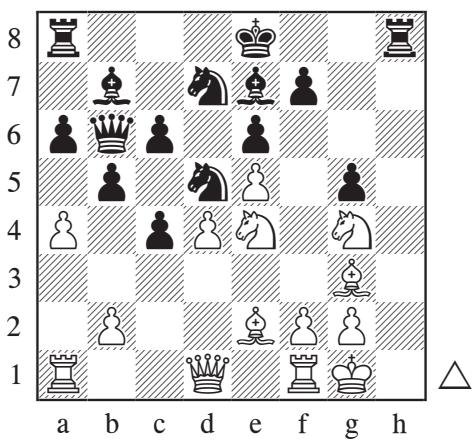
16...b6!



White is powerless to stop ... $\mathbb{Q}c8-a6xc4$, and the pawn on d6 will be captured. The opposite-colored bishops is not a drawing factor here.

Leonid Yudasin – Vladimir Antoshin

Nikolaev 1983



The b2-b3 advance is very tempting. White would like to open lines in the position, but Black can close them down with ...c4-c3. The question then becomes if the pawn is strong or a target. The answer will soon be clear.

18.b3?

A serious mistake.

If White did not commit the positional error of allowing Black a passer on c3, he would have been doing just fine.

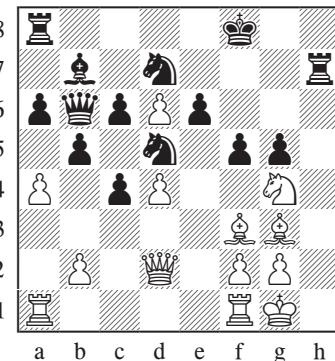
18.Qf3

A patient move, like this, would leave the game complicated. White is ready to jump in with $\mathbb{Q}e4-d6\#$ and enjoys good compensation. I even prefer his position. The following is not forced, but a good illustration of what might have happened.

18...Qf8

Black seeks a safe haven on g7.

19.Qd6 Qxd6 20.exd6 Qh7 21.Wd2 f5



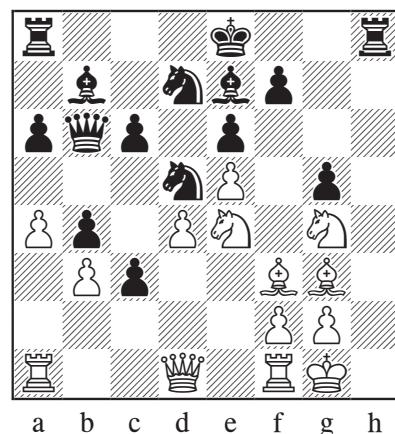
22.Qfe1!

White has good attacking chances for the pawn.

18...c3!

When looking at our guidelines, it is clear the c3-pawn is not vulnerable. Black will follow up with ...b4, defending his asset. White is in big trouble.

19.Qf3 b4



White has no means to open the position,
and Black can slowly but surely consolidate.
For example:

20.Qd6† ♖xd6 21.exd6 a5

And Black should win comfortably.

Chapter 7

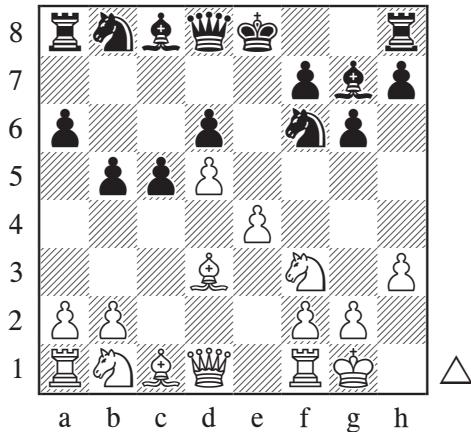
Establishing Strongholds

Let's talk about another scenario where we would like to provoke our opponent's pawns into moving forward. The basic situation is when doing so would gain strong control of a key square.

The following example is a straightforward illustration of this.

Stanislav Savchenko – Gabriel Battaglini

Le Touquet 2007



In a standard Benoni pawn structure, Black has played the ...b5 advance early, gaining space on the queenside and controlling a lot of key squares. Note that the side by side b5-pawn and c5-pawn control four squares, a4, b4, c4, and d4. Normally under such circumstances one would expect Black to be doing well, but in this case, White can compromise the pawn structure in one fell swoop.

10.a4!

Simple and strong. Black has no good way to maintain his pawn on b5 and must either exchange it or advance it. In either case, his grip on the queenside will be destroyed, and most importantly, White will gain the c4-square for the b1-knight.

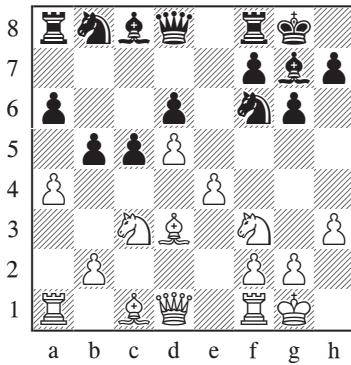
A standard developing move would be less effective.

10. $\mathbb{Q}c3?$ 0–0

Black has a fine position. His pawns on the queenside have taken a lot of space, and his counterplay is strong. Note that a2-a4 to weaken the c4-square is much less effective now, as the b1-knight is already committed to c3. It is not only farther away from reaching c4, it will also lose time if met with ...b4. Let's check it out:

11. a4?

White should prefer a simple developing move like 11. $\mathbb{Q}f4$, when he still has some strategic assets and should not be worse.



White now loses a lot of time to Black's queenside advancement.

11...c4! 12. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ b4!

White's pieces are beaten backwards. The black pawns are not vulnerable and they have not left any weak squares in their wake. The knight on c3 cannot return to b1 to try to reach d2 again. White is worse.

13. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

It would make sense to get the knight to d2, reaching a similar position to what we will see in the game. The two lost tempos matter. Black can consolidate with ...a5 and ... $\mathbb{Q}a6$, but he has a more forceful solution. After 13. $\mathbb{Q}b1?$ b3 the bishop is trapped.

13... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7\#$

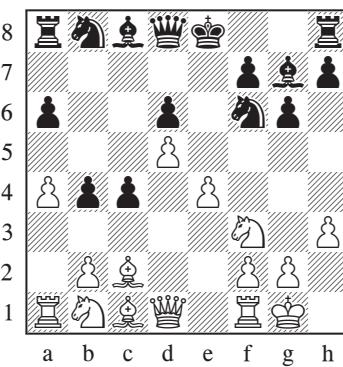
From heaven to hell for Black. He must now advance a pawn he really really would like to stay where it is.

10...b4

Strategic capitulation, but the alternatives were worse.

The threat of axb5 means he has to do something. Black's only feasible alternative is to fight for the c4-square by going forward:

10...c4 11. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ b4



The position is only slightly changed from the game. White will still attack the c4-square and is all the happier that conquering it will mean winning a pawn as well.

12. $\mathbb{Q}bd2!$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$

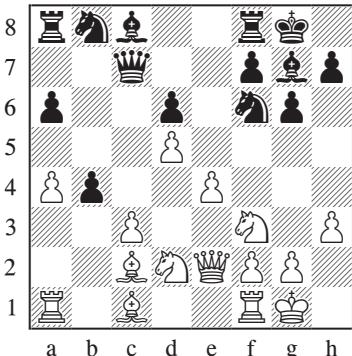
Black adds the only defender he can, but White can easily increase the pressure.

13. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

It is also very tempting to crash through in the center with 13. e5!?, but I prefer the text.

13...c3 14. bxc3 0–0

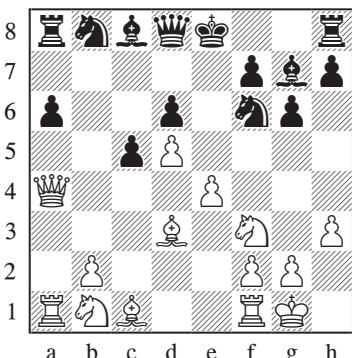
After 14...bxc3 15. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ Black is completely lost. The c3-pawn is overextended and will shortly fall. In addition, he has a strategic disaster on his hands with a move like $\mathbb{Q}c1-a3$ or $\mathbb{Q}c1-f4$ to soon put massive pressure on the d6-pawn.



15. $\mathbb{W}c4!$

White is a pawn up and easily winning.

Exchanging the b5-pawn does not create fewer problems than advancing it, but more! After 10...bxa4? 11. $\mathbb{W}xa4\#$! not only has the c4-square fallen under White's control, but the queenside is opened and Black must make further positional concessions. He would like to keep his Benoni coordination with ... $\mathbb{Q}bd7$, as all other moves are ugly, but it would mean the loss of a pawn:



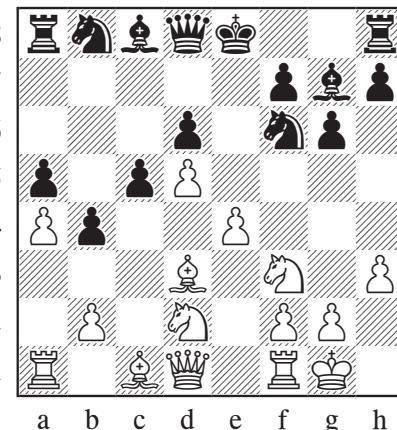
11... $\mathbb{Q}bd7?$ 12. $\mathbb{W}c6!$ $\mathbb{R}b8$ 13. $\mathbb{W}xd6$ White is winning. 99% of the time in the Benoni, if the d6-pawn is lost, so is the game!

After 11... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 12. $\mathbb{W}c2$ Black is strategically busted. He will probably need to play ... $\mathbb{Q}d7-c8$ to develop the knight, and meanwhile some combination of $\mathbb{Q}b1-a3-c4$ and $\mathbb{Q}c1-f4$ will be bone-crunching.

11. $\mathbb{Q}bd2!$

White is ready to swoop to c4.

11...a5

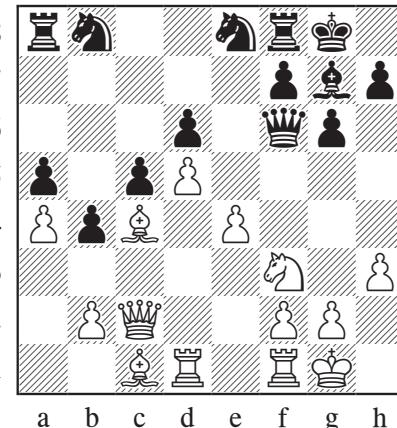


12. $\mathbb{Q}c4$

White was a little too hasty to jump into c4 here, but he is still obviously much better.

It was more accurate to first put the bishop on b5 to avoid ... $\mathbb{Q}a6xc4$. 12. $\mathbb{Q}b5\#$! $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 0–0 14. $\mathbb{Q}e1\pm$ Black is strategically lost. He has no way to get rid of the c4-knight. But 10...b4 was not a mistake! White offered him no choice in the matter and simply forced the c4-square to be weakened.

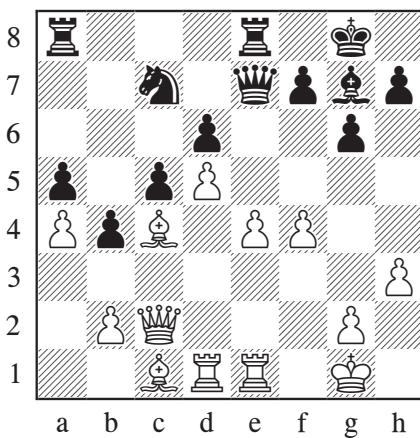
12...0–0 13. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 14. $\mathbb{W}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}c1$



Black has averted immediate disaster because White jumped to c4 a touch too soon but is still much worse. Note that his queenside pawn majority is firmly blockaded on the light squares and will never be a factor in the position. All because he was forced to play 10...b4.

11...♝d7 12.♝b5 ♝e5 13.♝xe5 ♜xe5 14.f4 ♜e7 15.♗fe1 ♛c7 16.♗c4 ♗fe8

White's play was not best, still he is much better due to his superior structure. And the c4-square is of use to his bishop as well.



23.e5!

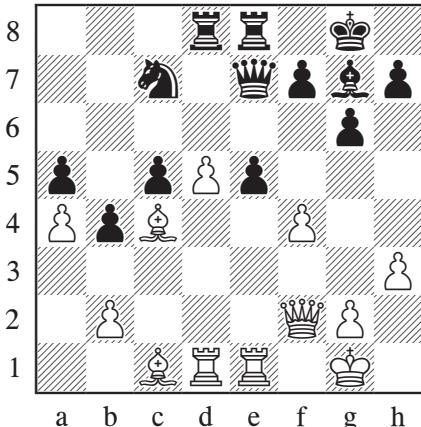
White sets his own majority in motion while Black's is firmly blockaded.

23...♝ad8 24.♛f2!

White is much better no matter how he continues, but this was best by far. I like that it also illustrates just how valuable the c4-square is. White improves his queen and prepares for kingside action. It may look like he is hanging a pawn, but he has a trick lined up.

24...dxe5?

Black allows White to show his idea. He did not need to walk into it, but what else was there to do? The position was simply miserable.



Now White uses the c4-bishop with devastating effect.

25.d6! ♜xd6 26.♗xd6 ♜xd6 27.♗xf7†+–
Winning a decisive amount of material.

27...♝h8

Taking the bishop is even worse. 27...♝xf7 28.fxe5† wins the queen.

28.♗xe8 ♜xe8 29.fxe5 ♜d5 30.e6 ♜d6 31.e7 ♜e8 32.♗h1 c4 33.♗f8† ♜g8 34.♗f1 b3 35.♗h6
1–0

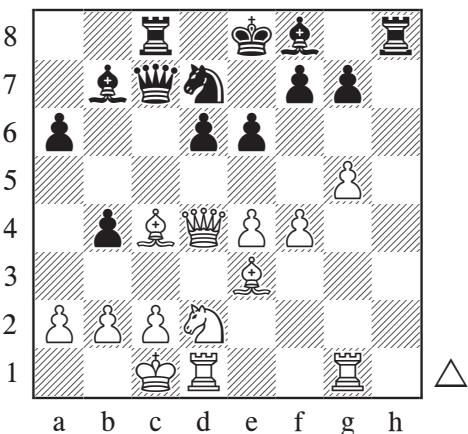
Black's queenside pawns looked impressive, but once the b5-pawn was forced forward, he lost control over key squares: c4 became an attractive outpost, ideally for the knight, but even the bishop enjoyed that square. Black had no counterplay on the queenside, despite his pawn majority.

One would normally condemn Black for making such a foolish advance as ...b5-b4, giving White a strategic fantasy. But he had no choice by that point. It was prior mistakes that landed Black in misfortune. And it was strong and forceful play from White that highlighted the weakness of Black's position.

White quickly established strategic dominance and built up his position. By the time he managed to play the e4-e5 break, the game was close to being over. The same concepts apply to all sorts of positions, including much more violent ones.

Levan Aroshidze – Handszar Odeev

Antalya 2009



This position is of a different character. The fight is not about control of key squares, but a sharp race to the king. Even in such a concrete position, the same principles apply. White can provoke a pawn forward, weakening critical squares.

20.g6!

An excellent move. Black does not wish to allow $gxf7\#$, opening the g-file and decimating his king's pawn cover. $20...\mathbb{Q}c5$ $21.gxf7\#$ for example.

20...f6

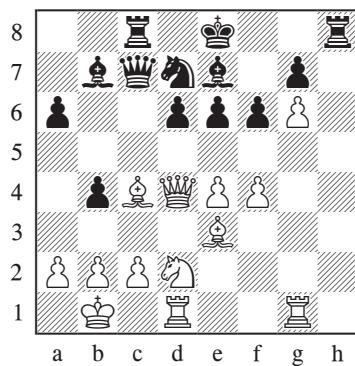
What has White accomplished by compelling Black's pawn to f6? He has really loosened Black's control of the e6-square. White cannot yet chop off the pawn due to the mate on c2, but it will be a serious threat soon enough.

21.♔b1!

In addition to just being a good prophylactic move in general, now that White has placed his king on b1, $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ is a threat. Black respects the threat, but his position is still lousy.

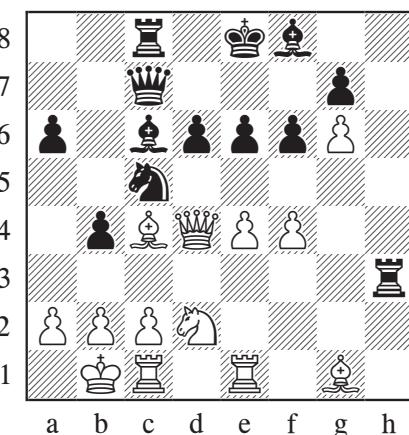
21...♘c5

Black cannot allow e6 to be taken. Allowing $... \mathbb{Q}xc2\#$ may look scary, but after thinking about it for a moment, the fear should vanish. $21...\mathbb{Q}e7?$ is met with:



$22.Qxe6!$ $\mathbb{Q}xc2\#$ $23.Qa1+-$ Black is strategically, and soon tactically, busted.

22.♖c1 ♖h3 23.♖ge1 ♖c6 24.♕g1



At this point, Black caved to the pressure against the e6-pawn and pushed it forward voluntarily, weakening even more key squares.

It was a bad move, but no real solution existed. White would be pushing f4-f5 to compel the pawn forward anyway soon enough.

24...e5?

Critically weakening the d5-square.

It was a little more resilient to wait with this advance, but also after 24...d7 25.f5!± Black is in big trouble. The e-pawn will once again be drawn forward, weakening the d5-square irreparably and opening the a2-g8 diagonal. Black would love to have a pawn on f7 to bolster the pawn chain, but pawns do not move backwards and even if they did, here they would get wacked.

25.Qf7† Qd8 26.Wf2 Eb8 27.Wg2 Eh4
28.Qxc5 dxc5 29.fxe5 Wxe5
29...fxe5 30.Qd5+–

In any given position, you should always consider which of your pieces are well placed. If one or more of your pieces are passive, think about why. If their best square is controlled by one of the opponent's pawns or their best line is blocked by a pawn, it is worth considering changes to the pawn structure.

This guideline would have served White well in the games above. In the first one, White's worst-placed piece was the b1-knight, which would not accomplish much on c3. In addition, the d3-bishop seemed blunted. White solved both issues by forcing Black to play ...b5-b4, weakening c4.

In the second game, White had a nice position, but the c4-bishop was not too hot. It could not go anywhere and seemed mainly to be in the line of fire on the half-open c-file. In addition, Black's position lacked weaknesses. By advancing the g-pawn, White was able to weaken the defense of the e6-pawn so much that Black later felt compelled to play ...e6-e5, weakening the light squares and improving

30.Qf3 Wf4 31.Qxh4 Wxh4 32.Qd5 Qd7
33.e5 fxe5 34.Qc6 Qe6 35.Qxe5 Wg4
1–0

While the character of the second position was very different to the first, the same principles applied. White won by loosening key squares and forcing the a2-g8 diagonal open. All this, because g5-g6 undermined the f7-pawn, and thereby the entire pawn chain.

Finding moves like a2-a4 or g5-g6 can be tough, but our guidelines will help you out. The first one is a diagnostic, to let you know if you should consider compelling an opponent's pawn forward to improve your pieces.

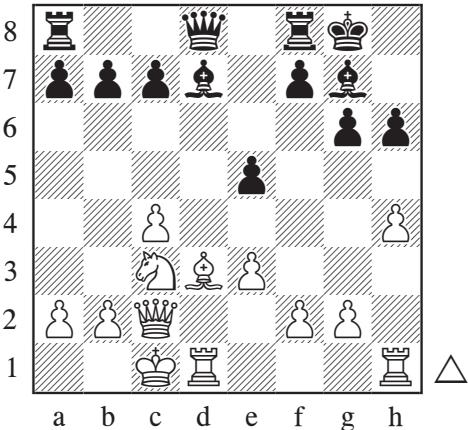
White's light-squared bishop immensely.

While the above examples were instructive, they were known themes for players used to these kinds of middlegame pawn structures. Most 1.d4 players would have little trouble finding a2-a4, since controlling the c4-square is such a common theme in the Benoni. And most 1.e4 players would dream about undermining the e6-pawn.

But the theme of forcing an opponent's pawn forward to gain you access to a square, or open a key diagonal, is not confined to textbook middlegame pawn structures. It happens in non-standard pawn structures and endgames as well – and the same guidelines apply.

Yannick Gozzoli – Romain Edouard

Internet 2017



We are early in the game, but the pawn structure is slightly non-standard. Straight pattern recognition, copy and paste style, is not enough to handle the pawn structure well. We need to understand the guidelines to find the best move.

Gozzoli noticed he could weaken his opponent's control of the light squares and played a model positional game.

14.h5!

The first step towards light-square domination is to force Black to advance the g-pawn.

14...g5

With the g-pawn out of the way, the f5-square can be exploited.

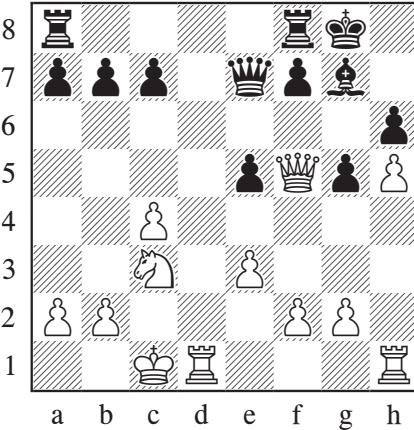
15.Qf5!

Sadly, this does not win a piece, but it wins the game.

15...Qxf5 16.Wxf5!

Keeping control of the light squares.

Weaker was 16.Qxd8 Qxc2±.

16...We7**17.Qe4±**

It was possible to crash in with 17.Qd7, but I take no issue with the move he chose in the game.

Black is in a bad way because of his weaknesses on the light squares. All possible because White forced him to play ...g5, weakening the f5-square and allowing White to exchange the light-squared bishops. The white queen will not be kicked off f5. The f-pawn will not make it to f5, so the white knight will stay on e4. Gozzoli masterfully prevents any hope of counterplay.

17...Wfd8 18.a3

...Wb4 would not achieve much for Black, but there is no reason to allow it anyway.

18...Qf8 19.g4 b6 20.Qxd8† Qxd8 21.Qd1 Qxd1† 22.Qxd1 Wd8† 23.Qc2 Qe7 24.Qg3 c6 25.Wh7 Qf8 26.Qf5† Qe8 27.Wh8

Black's position is a train wreck. Just think about how much more defendable it would be, if the g-pawn was on g6.

27...f6 28.Wg8 Wd7 29.f3 b5 30.Wg6† Wf7 31.Qc3 a5 32.b4 axb4† 33.axb4 bxc4 34.e4 Qe7 35.Wxf7† Qxf7 36.Qxh6† Qf8 37.Qxc4 Qd8 38.Qf5 Qb6 39.Qd6 Qg7 40.Qb7

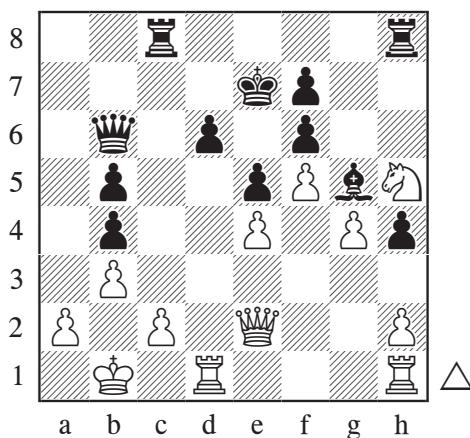
1–0

White could find 14.h5! using our guidelines. The d3-bishop was unimpressive and wanted more scope along the b1-h7-diagonal. The knight on c3 was equally limited. White achieved both goals by advancing the h-pawn and taking control of the light squares.

So far, we have seen examples where one side forces a pawn forward to gain access to critical squares. This does not always work. Weakening key squares could be wrong when they cannot be used. Look at the following position.

Ivan Morovic Fernandez – Zdenko Kozul

Solin 1999



The d5-square is a good outpost for the white knight. If it was there, White would be winning. But we should always evaluate how accomplishable a goal is? Here it is obvious the knight will never reach d5. In fact, it can never leave h5! No matter how weak the d5-square might look, White cannot use it, nor his knight, making him dead lost.

Most positions are less cut and dried, but a guideline will help.

When deciding to compel an opponent's pawn forward to exploit squares or lines, make sure you can exploit them.

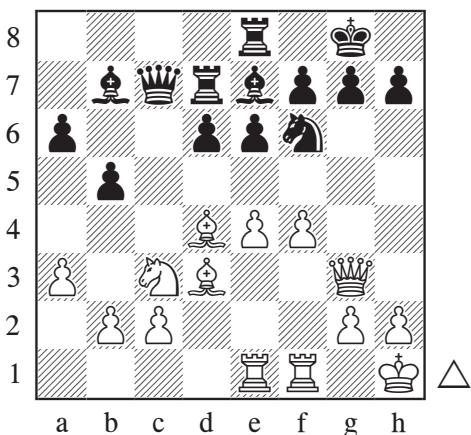
Keep in mind that when your opponent's pawns move forward, he gets more space. We should only do it when there is a good reason for it. If the goal is to weaken a square, make sure it is useable!

There are any number of reasons you may not be able to use a weak square in your opponent's position. The most common ones by far are, that you cannot get to the square in question, or that your opponent's pieces control it better than you do.

When we apply the second guideline to the first three positions, the result is unchanged. White could use the c4-square, the a2-g8 diagonal and the f5- and e4-squares. But this is not always the case. Let's look at a position where a strong player tried to gain access to a critical square, by forcing a pawn forward, but it failed to produce any dividends.

Viswanathan Anand – Vassily Ivanchuk

Leon (rapid) 2008



White's worst-placed piece is the knight on c3. It does nothing and cannot find a more active square. Anand tried to loosen Black's control over d5 to give it a brighter future, but it turned out badly.

17.f5?

White does indeed weaken the d5-square, but Black's pieces do a fine job and don't need the help of the e6-pawn. And the move has drawbacks. The fluid central pawn structure becomes fixed and the white rooks will not see the opening of the e-file or f-file. Finally, the pawn on e4 is fixed as a long-term weakness. When it transpires that White cannot use the d5-square, it is easy to condemn his move.

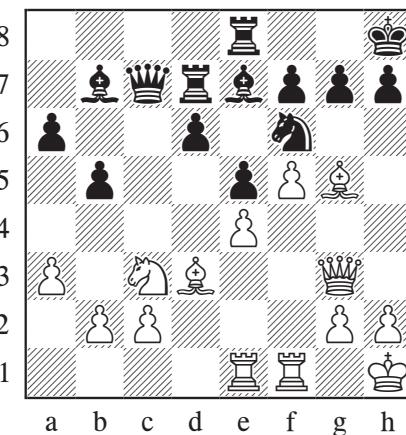
White had several decent moves at his disposal. I like the patient improvement of the knight with 17.♘d1!?. The knight will become relevant on e3 or f2 and White might even be a little better.

17...e5! 18.♗e3

The d5-square has been loosened, but White has no way to control it. Black's b7-bishop and knight are excellent defenders of the key square and not easily removed. Meantime, Black will consider the thematic ...d5-break.

18...♔h8 19.♗g5

White wants to remove a defender of the d5-square, but Ivanchuk will have none of it.



19...♘h5!

Black forces the exchange of his passive dark-squared bishop before returning the knight to f6.

20.♗h4 ♘xg5 21.♗xg5 ♘f6

Anand's strategy has failed. There is no way the knight will ever dominate the d5-square, e4 is a weakness, and his bishop unimpressive.

It is not clear what Anand overlooked. Positional mistakes from top players are most often some sort of blunder.

22.♗f3 ♗c5 23.♗g3 ♗g8 24.♗h3

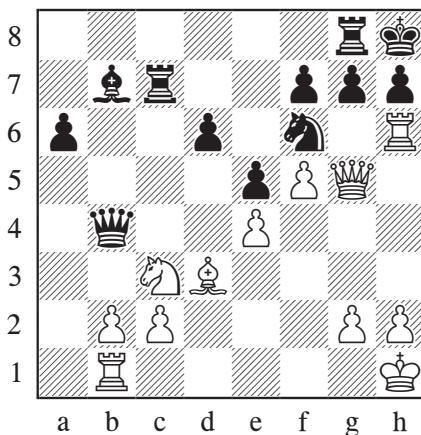
White is trying to look like he has a kingside attack, but it is an illusion. Black proceeds on the other side of the board.

24...b4

24...d5!? was also good.

25.axb4 ♜xb4 26.♖b1 ♜c7 27.♖h6

White puts pressure on the f6-knight, missing a strong tactical resource.



27...d5! 28.exd5

Black's point is that 28.♖xf6 would fail to 28...♜e7!.

28...♞b6!?

The knight is defended, the rook on h6 now hanging. Also the white knight is hanging, and the d5-pawn. White is going to lose something.

29.♘a4 ♜d6 30.♖h4 ♜xd5

30...e4!

31.♘c3 ♜b8 32.♘c1

White can still resist a bit, but after swinging his pieces to the kingside, this shows that things are going downhill fast.

32...e4 33.♘xe4 ♘xe4 34.♘xe4 ♜c6 35.♗e3 ♜xc2 36.♗g1 f6 37.♗d4 ♜d7 38.♗xf6 gxsf6

39.♗xf6† ♜g7 40.♗g4 ♜xb2

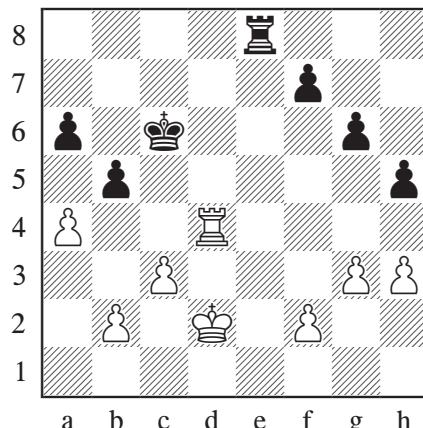
0–1

What made this example different from the previous three? Quite simply, White could not exploit the square he weakened. Precise play from Black kept it well defended.

While we have been looking at middlegames so far, the same principles can be applied to the endgame.

Sergey Fedorchuk – Dariusz Swiercz

Lublin 2012



White is a pawn up, but Black is solid. Tarrasch once claimed that all rook endgames are drawn, and indeed, an extra pawn is often not enough to win. I really like how Fedorchuk provoked a pawn forward to create weaknesses.

38.♗f4!

An excellent move. White threatens the pawn on f7 leaving Black two feasible responses. Defend passively with ...♜e7 or advance the pawn to f5.

38...f5

Black was unhappy making this move but had no choice. By provoking the ...f5 advance, White critically weakened the f4- and g5-squares, which he can use to penetrate with his king. While ♔e3-f4-g5 is currently illegal, the plan is not that hard to execute.

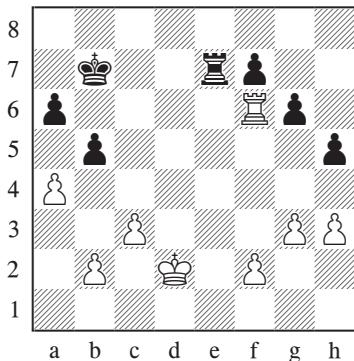
Black is worse off with a passive rook.

38... $\mathbb{E}e7?$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}f6\#!$

Black's king is also forced into passivity, unless he wants to lose a second pawn.

39... $\mathbb{Q}b7$

39... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 40. $\mathbb{E}xa6$



40.a5!+–

Black is totally tied up. In addition to being a pawn down, his king cannot leave the defense of the a-pawn, and his rook cannot leave the defense of the f-pawn! With such passive pieces, there is no hope of survival. White can bring his king to either the kingside or queenside to win the game, and Black cannot do a thing about it.

40... $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}d6$

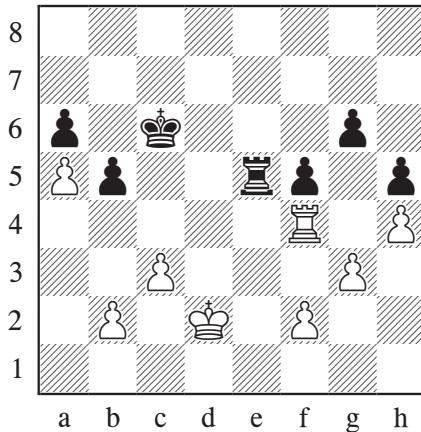
Game over.

39.h4!

There is no reason to allow Black to consider ...h5-h4 or ...g7-g5.

39... $\mathbb{E}e6$ 40.a5 $\mathbb{E}e5$

The rook on f4 looks silly. It has done its job, provoking ...f5, so it is time to activate it.



41. $\mathbb{E}d4$!

White has repeated moves with $\mathbb{E}d4-f4-d4$, but Black cannot follow suit with ...f5-f7. Pawns do not move backwards!

41... $\mathbb{E}e8$

The last step for White en route to victory is to bring the king to f4 and g5. To do this, he must cross the e-file.

42. $\mathbb{E}d3$!

White plans $\mathbb{E}d3-e3$. Black allows the king to cross the e-file immediately, as it could not be stopped.

42... $\mathbb{E}b8$

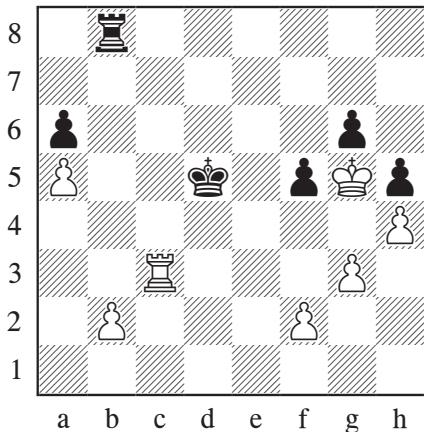
Black cannot allow White to invade the back rank. 42... $\mathbb{E}e6?$ 43. $\mathbb{E}d8\#$ is devastating.

Trying to prevent the king from going to the kingside was perhaps more resilient, but it cannot be stopped long term. 42... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 43. $\mathbb{E}e3!$ $\mathbb{E}d8\#$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ Black now has to worry about $\mathbb{E}e6$ as well. 44... $\mathbb{E}d6$ 45. $\mathbb{E}d3$ $\mathbb{E}e6\#$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ White's king got to his happy place. Soon he will reach g5.

43. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ b4 44. $\mathbb{Q}f4$

Wouldn't Black love to scoot the f5-pawn back a square to prevent $\mathbb{Q}f4-g5\#$?

44...bxc3 45.♗xc3† ♜d5 46.♗g5



The success of White's strategy is complete. He will lose the extra pawn he had at the beginning, but it is inconsequential. The active king on g5 is what matters. Black's kingside pawns will fall in short order.

**46...♗xb2 47.f4 ♘a2 48.♗xg6 ♘xa5 49.♗xh5
♗d4 50.♗b3 ♘b5 51.♗a3 a5 52.♗g5 ♗e4
53.h5 ♘b8 54.h6 ♘g8† 55.♗f6**

1–0

The character of the position was different from the middlegames we have previously examined, but the principles remained the same. Looking at the guidelines, it was clearly justified to compel Black to advance the f-pawn.

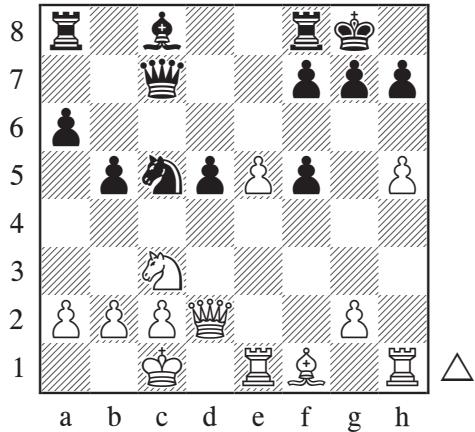
First, White's king was not doing much and had no great squares to go to. This could suggest considerations about forcing Black to advance a pawn and loosen his control of key squares.

The next step would be to consider guideline two and decide how feasible it is to get the king to g5 once the ...f7-f5 advance has been provoked. It was very easy, since Black could not allow the exchange of rooks.

Exercises

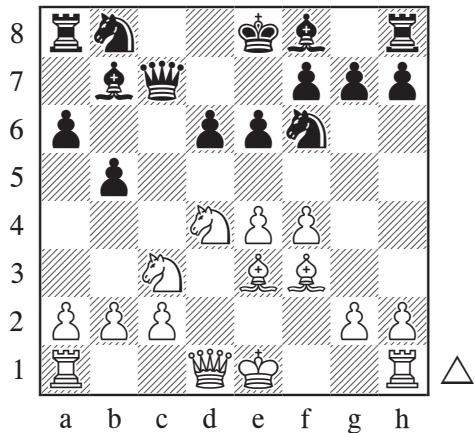
As usual, we will conclude with two puzzles. Happy solving!

Hikaru Nakamura – Varuzhan Akobian, St Louis 2009



What should White play?

Irina Sudakova – Sergey Fedorchuk, Llucmajor 2014

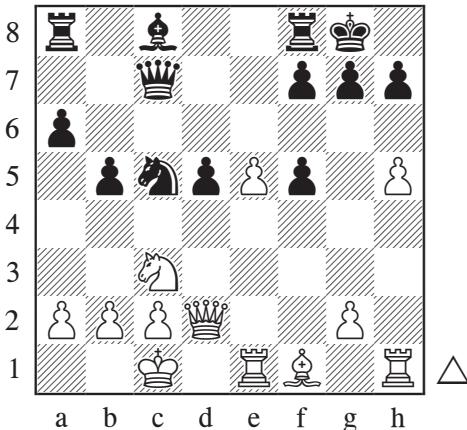


White played f4-f5 here, pressuring the e6-pawn and hoping to force it to go to e5, making the d5-square weak. What do you think of her decision?

Solutions

Hikaru Nakamura – Varuzhan Akobian

St Louis 2009



Black has a solid position and no noticeable weaknesses. Hikaru changes this right away.

17.h6!

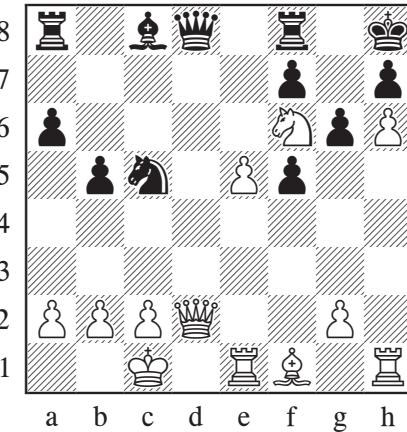
White compels the g-pawn forward, critically weakening the f6-square. Black has no choice in the matter as allowing hxg7 is a no go.

17...g6 18.♘xd5! ♕d8 19.♗f6†!

The point is revealed. White's knight is a beast on f6. The g6-pawn will never again be able to control f6, nor will any other black pawn.

19...♔h8

Naka erred here, but quickly his position was good again.



20.♕b4?!

The accurate 20.♕d6! would have put Black in a nasty bind. The queen is hard to tolerate, but what can Black do? Exchanging it brings the e1-rook into the game and gives White a strong passed pawn on d6. After 20...♜e6 21.♝h3! White activates his last piece and will soon play ♜h3-c3 or ♜h3-d3. Black is in big trouble.

Luckily for Hikaru, Black did not find the best way to offer resistance.

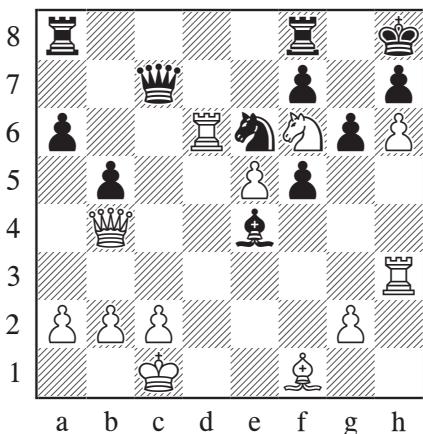
20...♜e6?

Black could have fought on more ferociously with 20...♛e7!.

21.♝h3! ♜b7 22.♝d1 ♛c7 23.♝d6

White's pieces are of higher quality than their counterparts, thanks in no small part to the knight on f6, which is so strong that Black was happy to throw away a pawn, in the hope of exchanging it.

23...♝e4



24.♘xe4!

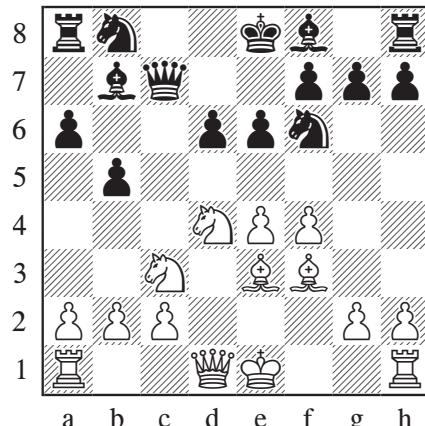
White exchanges one advantage for another. He no longer has the proud stallion on f6, but is a clean pawn up.

24...fxe4 25.♗xe4 ♜ad8 26.♗hd3 ♜e7
 27.♗e3 ♜g8 28.♗xa6 ♜xd3 29.♗xd3 ♜b7
 30.♗d6 ♜xg2 31.♗xb5 g5 32.♗d1 ♜h2
 33.a4 ♜xh6 34.a5 ♜h2 35.♗d7 ♘f4 36.b4
 ♜g7 37.a6 ♜g2 38.b5 ♜d8 39.♗b2 ♜a8
 40.♗c6

1–0

Irina Sudakova – Sergey Fedorchuk

Llucmajor 2014



Going back to the second guideline, we should remember that it is not worthwhile compelling a pawn forward if we cannot use the weaknesses. This could have helped Sudakova to play a better move than the one she played.

10.f5?

White understandably wants to weaken the d5-square. The e6-pawn cannot simply stay put. But Black can solve all his problems by expelling the c3-knight from its post before playing ...e6-e5.

White was best advised to play calmly with 10.a3!. Black does not have much counterplay, so I like White's position. She has an easy plan of ♜d1-e2 and g2-g4, with the option of castling to either side, before slamming through with the f- and g-pawns. A possible continuation could be: 10...♘bd7 11.♗e2 ♘c5 12.♗f2±

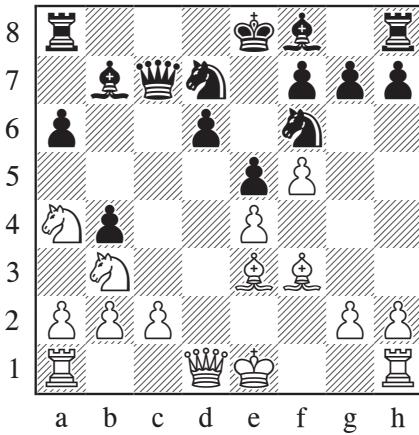
10...b4!

Black makes sure no white piece can reach the d5-square.

11.♘a4

Now Black has no choice regarding the e6-pawn, but fortunately advancing it is a good option.

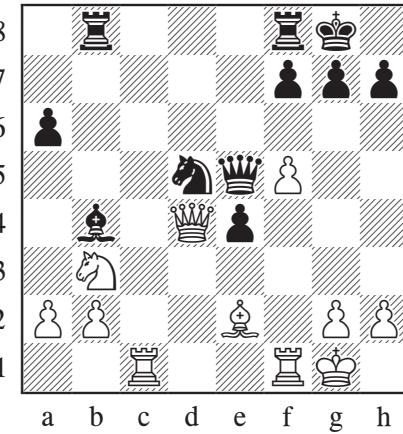
11...e5 12.♗b3 ♘bd7



The dust has settled, and we can evaluate the position. Yes, the d5-square has been weakened, but neither of White's knights (nor any other white piece) are within a light year of occupying it! All White has done is leave herself with a weak pawn on e4 and a knight on a4 in danger of being trapped.

Black is better and later won.

13.c3 d5 14.exd5 e4 15.♗e2 ♘xd5 16.♗d4 ♘xe3 17.♗xe3 ♘d6 18.cxb4 ♘xb4† 19.♘c3 0–0 20.0–0 ♘f6 21.♗ac1 ♗e5 22.♘a4 ♘d5 23.♘b6 ♗ab8 24.♘xd5 ♘xd5 25.♗d4



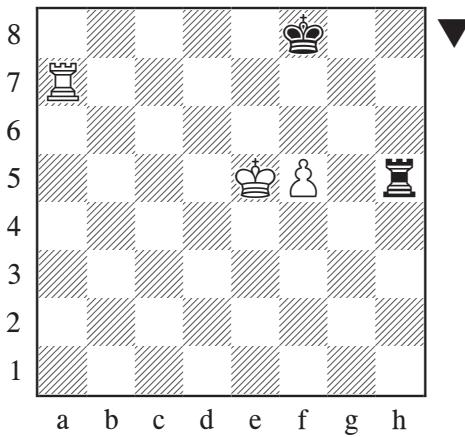
25...♗xd4† 26.♘xd4 ♘d2 27.♗cd1 ♗xb2 28.f6 g6 29.♘c6 ♘c3 30.♘e7† ♘h8 31.♗xd2 ♘xe2†
0–1

Chapter 8

Blocking Artillery

Let's move on from discussing forcing the opponent's pawns forward to provide good prospects for our pieces, to discussing forcing the opponent's pawns forward to deprive his pieces of opportunities.

There are many basic examples of this theme. Let's keep it clean and clear with a simple technical endgame.



This position has been known to be a draw for nearly 250 years. For a long time, our main line was thought to be the only drawing technique.

White's winning try is to get his king to the sixth rank at a moment when Black cannot give him a check. Next comes $\mathbb{Q}a8\#$ to force the black king away to end the blockade of the pawn. Simple prophylaxis can prevent this plan.

1... $\mathbb{Q}h6!$

The most accurate move. White can only bring the king to the sixth rank after he advances his f-pawn, but this deprives the white king of the all-important f6-square.

Black is not necessarily losing if he does not find this move, but his defense becomes much more difficult.

1... $\mathbb{Q}h1?$

Now White will get his king to the sixth rank.

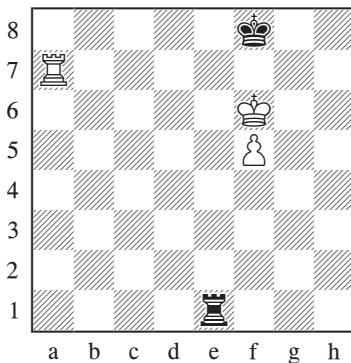
2. $\mathbb{Q}e6!$

Note that the position is the same as the mainline, except that White's pawn is on f5. This makes a stark difference, as the king can hide on f6 after ... $\mathbb{Q}e1\#$.

2... $\mathbb{Q}e1\#$

It is too late to try to cut the king off. 2... $\mathbb{Q}h6\#$? 3.f6 allows White to keep the king on e6 for just long enough to exploit it. $\mathbb{Q}a7-a8\#$ will be painful. 3... $\mathbb{Q}h1$ White only has one winning move. Black to move draws with annoying checks, giving the king nowhere to hide. Luckily, the winning move is a rather convincing one. 4. $\mathbb{Q}a8\#$

3. $\mathbb{Q}f6$



White threatens $\mathbb{Q}a8$ mate. Black must move his king and let White push it out of the way of the pawn's path. Only with very precise play will Black hold the draw.

3... $\mathbb{Q}g8!$

The right direction. Black will need distance between his rook and the white king in what follows.

After 3... $\mathbb{Q}g8?$ 4. $\mathbb{Q}a8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}f7$ White wins. The f-pawn will cruise straight through.

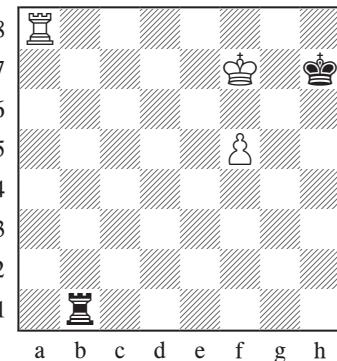
The defensive technique when putting the king on h7, is to harass the king with side checks. With the king on d7 Black would draw if he could play something like

... $\mathbb{Q}e1-j1$. But as it is, that would be going over the edge.

4. $\mathbb{Q}a8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}f7$

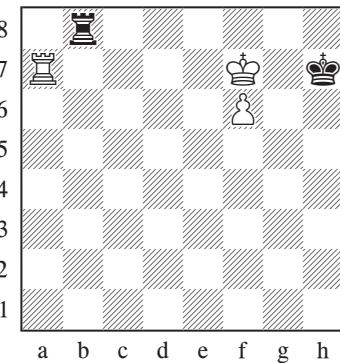
White looks ready for f5-f6, but Black is in time.

5... $\mathbb{Q}b1!$



This (along with 5... $\mathbb{Q}c1$, using the same idea) is the only way to draw. White can try to avoid the checks, but it will not allow him to make progress.

6. $\mathbb{Q}a7$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 7.f6 $\mathbb{Q}b8$



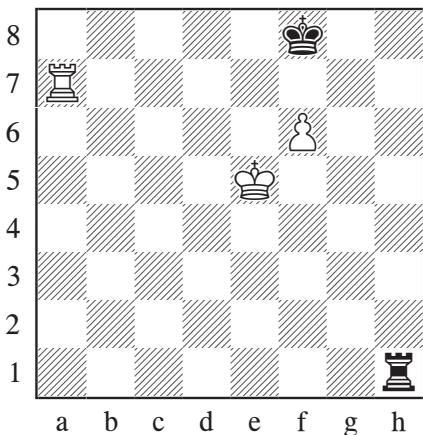
White cannot make progress. Ultimately Black does achieve a draw, but the main line is simpler.

2.f6

Now that White has advanced his f-pawn, his king has nowhere to hide from the checks along the first rank.

2... $\mathbb{E}h1!$

Preparing a barrage of checks.

**3. $\mathbb{Q}e6 \mathbb{E}e1\#$**

White would love to slide his pawn back to f5 and play 4. $\mathbb{Q}f6$ here, although Black could still, with accurate moves, save the game. But now a draw can be agreed immediately.

Hopefully you already knew of the Philidor position and could bang out the correct 1... $\mathbb{E}h6$ in a fraction of a second. But when you consider, not whether 1... $\mathbb{E}h6$ is correct, but *why* it is so, it all comes down to compelling your opponent's pawn forward to deprive one of his pieces of a key square.

This brings us to the first guideline. Again, it's reciprocal of another guideline – the one on page 51.

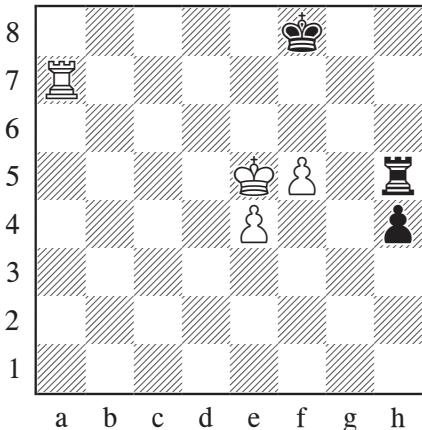
If you are defending an endgame, consider which pawn your opponent intends to promote, and consider if you can force the pawn to move forward and deprive its king of key squares in front of it.

The Philidor position is a perfect example of this guideline. White only has one pawn left, simplifying everything.

However, we always need to remember that in chess, time is of the essence. When you are forcing your opponent's pawns forward, you are likely not doing much for your own position, focusing entirely on prophylaxis. As usual, the first guideline can be overruled by a second guideline.

If you conclude that the pawn your opponent intends to promote can reach its destination without the king's help, or that the king can aid its advance without being directly in front of it – forget about the first guideline.

Let's look at a slightly altered version of the first example.



The difference is the addition of the e- and h-pawns. While the end result should be the same, Black's defensive strategy is different.

1...h3!

Active counterplay. Black's pawn is very fast.

It might be tempting to play as in the previous position:

1...g6?

This is wrong for two reasons. First off, the reason for compelling the f6-pawn forward was to deprive White's king of a place to hide. Here White's king will hide on e6. There are no checks along the first rank. Secondly, the two connected passers are going to be tough for Black to handle, so his only chance is direct counterplay.

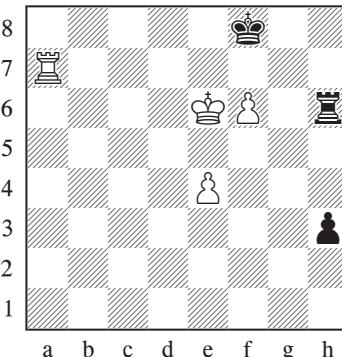
2.f6

The white king will hide on the sixth rank and any attempt to prevent it will be feeble. The black rook cannot even reach the first rank, and even if it could, there would be no checks.

2...h3

Black should aim for active counterplay, but the lost tempo means a lot. He is still holding, but will have to find some only moves.

3.♔e6



The first only move is easy to find, as otherwise Black is simply mated.

3...♕g8! 4.♖a1 h2 5.♖h1

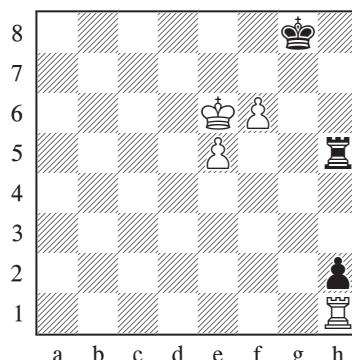
Black must walk a tightrope to hang on. The threat is ♔e6-e7, and the obvious responses do not work.

5...♗h4!

Black cannot forcibly prevent ♔e7, so instead he must make it ineffective.

After 5...♗f8? 6.e5 White is winning. ♖h1-b1 will come next.

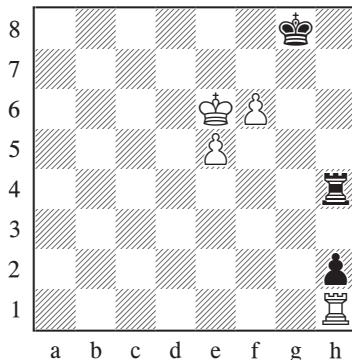
5...♗h7? stops the ♔e7 idea and is the right concept, but Black finds himself on the wrong side of a reciprocal zugzwang after: 6.e5! The rook cannot leave the h-file on pain of ♖h1xh2, and it cannot leave the seventh rank on pain of ♔e6-e7. 6...♗h5 The most resilient, but Black still loses. (6...♗h3 allows 7.♔e7 ♗h7† 8.♔e8 and the pawn promotes, while 6...♗f8 fails to 7.♗b1! with mate)



White cannot play $\mathbb{Q}e6-e7$, but he can prepare e5-e6. 7. $\mathbb{Q}d6!$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 8. e6†! $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 9. e7 $\mathbb{Q}h8$ (9... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}f1†+$) It may look as if Black has held it together, but White has a nice trick: 10. $\mathbb{Q}xh2!$ and wins.

6.e5

It is never too late to blunder. White cannot carry out the same plan just yet: 6. $\mathbb{Q}e7??$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4†$ and Black even wins.

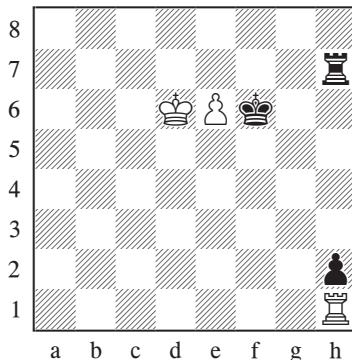


6... $\mathbb{Q}h7!$

This position with Black to move would be lost, but as is White must give ground as he is on the wrong side of a reciprocal zugzwang.

7. $\mathbb{Q}f5$

With the rook on h5, White would win with 7. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 8. e6†. But after 8... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ we see the point:



9. e7 $\mathbb{Q}xe7!$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}f1†$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}g4!$ and the pawn draws.

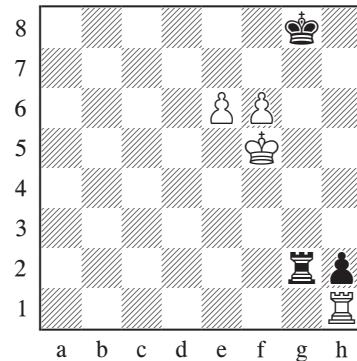
7... $\mathbb{Q}h5†!$

The only move.

8. $\mathbb{Q}g6$ $\mathbb{Q}h3!$ 9. e6 $\mathbb{Q}g3†!$

Another only move.

10. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}g2!$

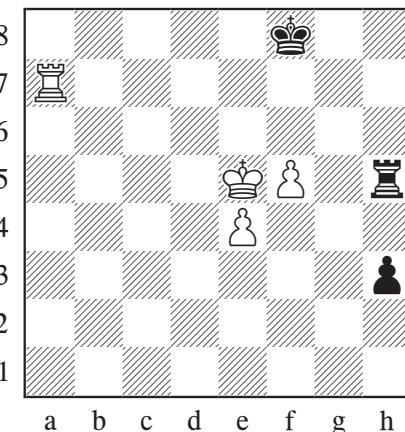


And another!

11. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}d2!$

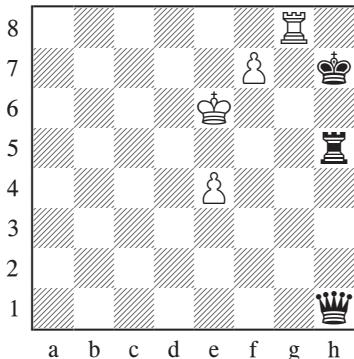
Finally, Black holds, though I could still see some kind of accident happening. Even strong players would be likely to mess up somewhere along the way and lose.

The variation is interesting and instructive, but obviously far from best play...



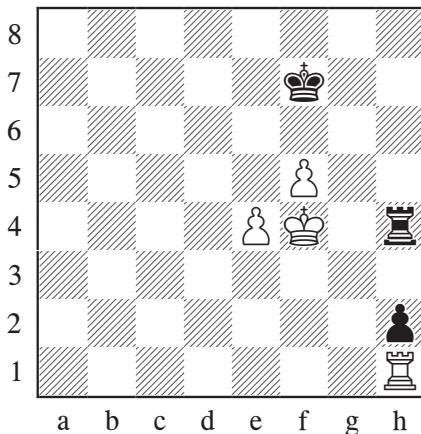
2. $\mathbb{Q}a1$

White can ignore Black's counterplay at his own peril: 2. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ h2 3. $\mathbb{Q}a8†$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 4. f6† $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}g8†$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 6. f7 h1=Q



White is lucky not to lose. 7. $\mathbb{R}h8\#!$ $\mathbb{Q}xh8$
8. $f8=\mathbb{Q}\#$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 9. $\mathbb{W}f7\#$ with perpetual.

2... $h2$ 3. $\mathbb{E}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 4. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{E}h4\#$



Black holds easily. The white pawns cannot move forward without help from the rook.

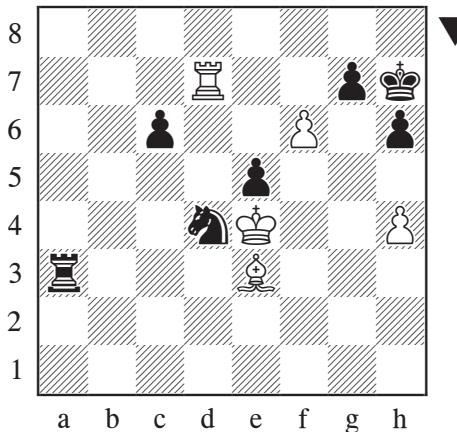
These are of course basic examples, but they are a clear illustration of the theme without the interference of deep calculation or alternative positional themes.

In this case, following the guidelines would nudge Black in the right direction. The f-pawn is the prime candidate, but forcing it to go forward would not help, as White's king can use the e-pawn as a shield and help the f-pawn promote. Realizing that the pawns cannot be stopped, we look for other options and see that they can be raced, and no time should be wasted.

The guidelines can be applied to more complex positions as well.

Ivan Saric – Jonas Lampert

Biel 2013



Black is two pawns up, but that is not the major factor in the position. White will win back a pawn on g7 and his f-pawn is a great danger. Black is on the defensive, but following the guidelines, he could have found a few accurate moves to save the game.

The first guideline suggests that we should be looking at the f6-pawn. Then we should consider if the pawn can queen without the king's help. And if it cannot, it may be worth compelling the pawn a bit further forward.

Black did not manage to find his way, perhaps because of time trouble, or because he did not think in that way.

39... $\mathbb{Q}e6?$

Black attempts to defend the g7-pawn, but it turns out feeble.

The holding move was:

39... $\mathbb{Q}g6!$

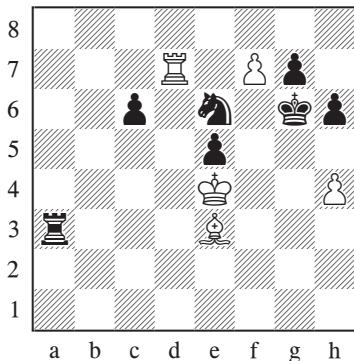
Black does not allow $\mathbb{R}d7xg7\#$ with keeping the pawn on f6, where it can easily be

supported by the king. Instead it must move forward.

40.f7

Taking on g7 does not help either. After 40.fxg7 $\mathbb{E}a8!$ the pawn is stopped in its tracks.

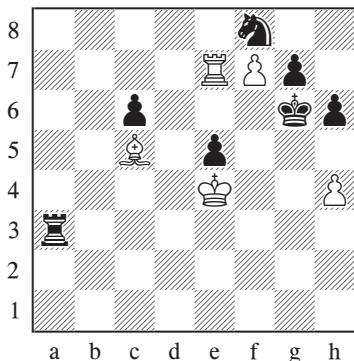
40... $\mathbb{Q}e6!$



The pawn is stopped on the seventh rank. White has no way to include the king. Soon, Black will scoop the pawn up. Often it can be worth it to force an opponent's pawn forward for more reasons than one. Guidelines may be useful in chess, but the map is not the territory.

Now White must be precise not to be worse!

41. $\mathbb{E}e7!$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}c5!$

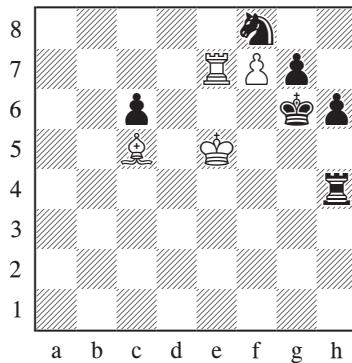


White is fine, but so is Black. For instance:

42... $\mathbb{E}a4\#$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{E}xh4\#!$

Far from the only drawing move, but I find it remarkable that Black can ignore the f7-

pawn. It looks so close to queening! But we see that it is too far advanced, as the king cannot come to its aid. This is the point of the second guideline. We realize the pawn needs extra help, and as far as it has advanced, the help cannot come.



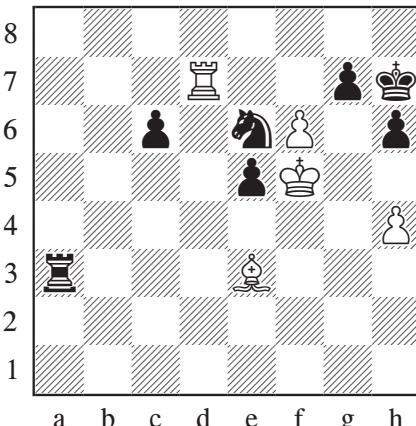
44. $\mathbb{E}e8!$

White needs to force a draw.

44... $\mathbb{E}h5\#$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{E}d5\#$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{E}xc5\#$
47. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 48. $\mathbb{E}e1$

The position is drawn, but White can still lose. He should be careful.

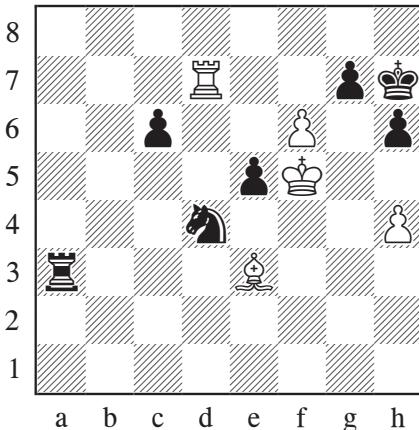
40. $\mathbb{Q}f5!$



Black's knight is dislodged from its defensive post.

40... $\mathbb{Q}d4\#$

The alternative was no better. 40... $\mathbb{B}xe3$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}xe6+$ — White's king camps out perfectly on e6. Black has nothing to say about f6-f7 followed by $\mathbb{B}d7-d8$.

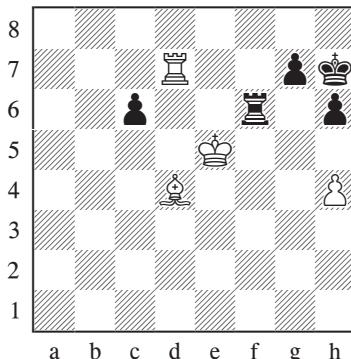


41. $\mathbb{Q}xd4!$

The time control has been reached and White is winning, as he has maintained his pawn on f6, supported by the king.

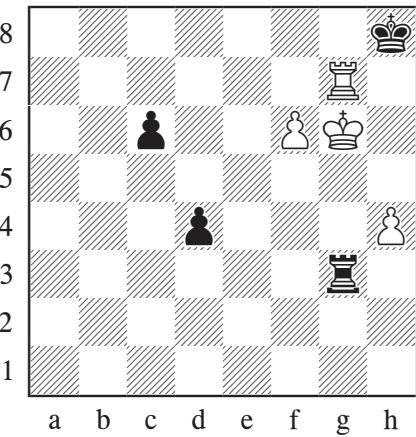
41... $\mathbb{exd}4$

The f6-pawn is so dangerous it was better to get rid of it, even at the expense of a piece! After 41... $\mathbb{B}f3\#$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{B}xf6$



White should eventually win. He has the right bishop promoting the pawn to the corner, should the rooks be exchanged. But Black can try to set up a fortress and can offer more resistance than in the game.

42. $\mathbb{B}xg7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}g6!$ $\mathbb{B}g3\#$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ $\mathbb{B}f3$
45. $\mathbb{Q}g6$ $\mathbb{B}g3\#$



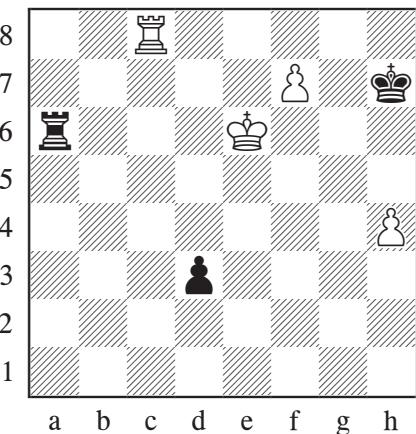
46. $\mathbb{Q}f7!$

White uses the square directly in front of the crown princess as an outpost for his king. White is clearly enjoying the fact that the f6-pawn survived.

46... $\mathbb{B}a3$ 47. $\mathbb{B}g5!$

Mate in one threatened!

47... $\mathbb{B}a7\#$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ c5 49. $\mathbb{B}xc5$ d3 50. $\mathbb{B}c8\#$
 $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 51.f7 $\mathbb{B}a6\#$

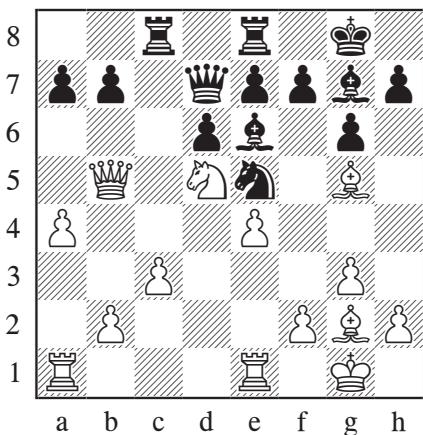


52. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{B}a5\#$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{B}a4\#$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{B}a3\#$
55. $\mathbb{Q}c2$

It was worth Black's while to push the f-pawn closer to the edge. In part to entrap it, and even in the lines where it survives, it was no threat of queening. All because the white king was unable to help the pawn.

In the game White put his king in front of the f-pawn and won. Highly instructive play!

The same reasoning applies to middlegames. Let's look at a position we discussed in Chapter 3, where Black made an unfortunate pawn advance.



The e7-pawn is hanging. Black did not deal with the problem in the right way.

16...f6?

Blocking the bishop in. As was pointed out in Chapter 3, best was 16...♝f8 or 16...♝c6.

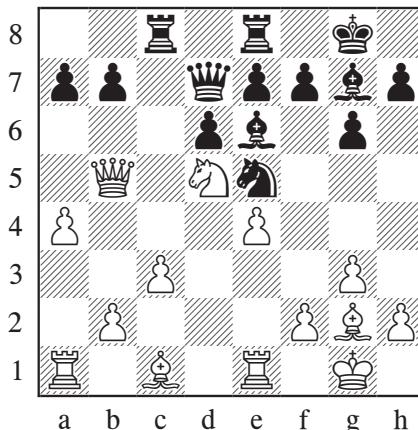
17.♝e3†

Black is worse due to his inferior pieces, particularly the bishop on g7. To revisit this position in complete detail, please refer to page 57.

This is a nice reminder about not blocking squares or lines for our own pieces with ill-advised pawn advances, but when we look at the position from White's side, we notice that Tiviakov provoked Black into playing 16...f6?.

Sergey Tiviakov – Orlen Ruiz Sanchez

Villahermosa 2016



16. Kg5!

Tiviakov's move is a clever one. He is giving Black a reason to advance with ...f7-f6, dramatically worsening his own position. It is always nice when our opponents voluntarily make foolish pawn advances, but sometimes a little encouragement is all that is needed.

It also makes a lot of sense to kick away Black's knight on e5:

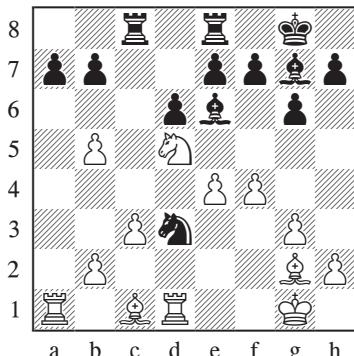
16.f4

This in fact is the recommendation of my trusty silicon friend. But, in this case, I must disagree, and disagree strongly. I believe Black is fine in both cases, but advancing f2-f4 does not really entice Black into making a mistake. Any reasonable move that does not lose material directly keeps Black's position healthy enough, and he even has some active possibilities. My favorite of several good options for him is:

16...♝xb5!?

After which mass exchanges are to be expected.

17.axb5 ♛d3 18.♝d1



18... $\mathbb{Q}xd5!$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$

19. $\mathbb{Q}xd3 \mathbb{Q}c4=$

19... $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}dxc1 \mathbb{Q}c5!$

Black is fine. More importantly, along the way none of his moves were particularly hard to find. He moved pieces that were attacked, traded sensibly, and landed in an opposite bishop ending with equal pawns and no real problems. Tiviakov's choice probably does not lead to anything special against best play, but it at least provoked Black into making a mistake, and his opponent obliged him.

16...f6?

The rest of this game can be found on pages 57-59.

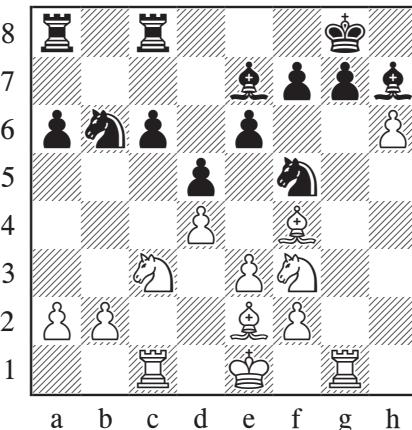
This is easy to understand. In any kind of position, when choosing between moves of objectively equal merit, choose the one that will create practical difficulties for your opponent. Tiviakov provoked his opponent's pawn to f6. We know that ...f7-f6 was not best, but he was under pressure, so these things happen.

But there are not always better moves available. In the technical endgame we saw first in this chapter, White had no choice in the matter. There was no way for the king to reach the sixth rank without advancing his f-pawn.

A strong opponent will not be provoked into making pawn advances that deprive his own pieces of key squares or lines, but force is more effective than provocation.

Boris Gelfand – Kiril Georgiev

France 2000



Strategically Black is not in such terrible shape. White can open the kingside with $h4xg7$, but without queens, he is unlikely to deliver mate.

Meantime all of Black's pieces have found reasonable squares, and White is not going to prevent the freeing break ...c6-c5, which will not only exchange a weak backward pawn, but also activate Black's pieces and open lines on the queenside for counterplay.

Gelfand now shows his class...

22. $\mathbb{Q}d3!$

Forceful and accurate. Gelfand threatens to remove the defender of g7. If his rook lands on g7, Black will finally care about White's kingside action.

I doubt Georgiev was concerned about 22. $h4xg7$ c5. White is better, but not by much, and Black has obvious counterplay on the other side of the board. The g7-pawn is pretty, but it will live at the most one move as a queen, before being eliminated.

22...g6

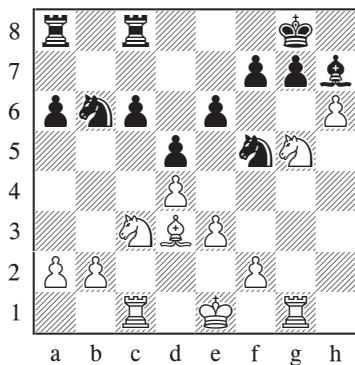
One can only imagine the look on Black's face when he made this revolting move. But he had no choice and now his bishop has been buried alive.

Defending g7 would not offer hope of salvation.

22... $\mathbb{Q}f6$

White proceeds with his plan of removing defenders of the g7-pawn.

23. $\mathbb{Q}g5!$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$

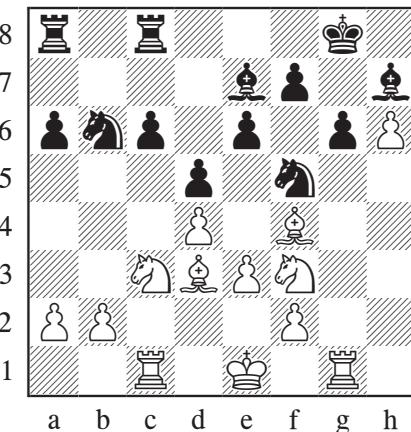


Again, Black is forced to play ...g7-g6. The threats are too strong.

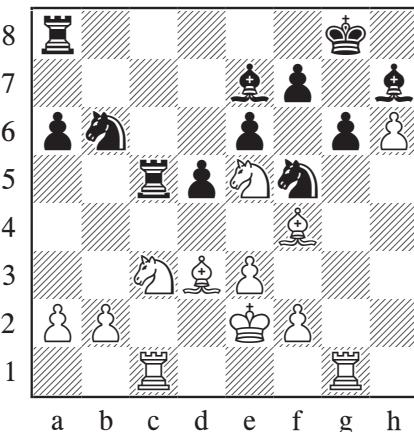
24... $g6$

The only other way Black can avoid losing the g7-pawn is to take on h6, but after 24...gxh6?! 25. $\mathbb{Q}xe6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}c5+$ —keeping the h7-bishop unblocked has come at a heavy price. Black is facing a positional catastrophe on the queenside.

25. $\mathbb{Q}e2\pm$



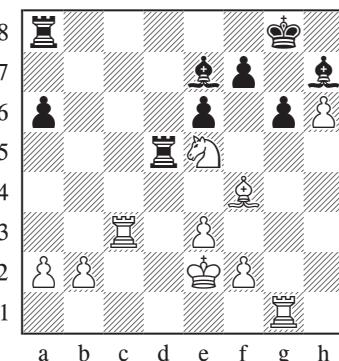
23. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ c5 24.dxc5 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}e2$



Gelfand condemned Black's next move as poor. He is correct, but a better one would not have changed the result.

25...a5

Black needed counterplay at all costs. If you have a bad position, often it is best to introduce some chaos. If nothing else, then to confuse your opponent. The best chance was therefore 25...d4!, but White is still much better: 26. $\mathbb{Q}xf5!$ dxc3 (26...exf5 27.exd4+) 27. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$



White is a solid pawn up, but Black has the bishop pair and it is not too far-fetched to hope he can one day play ...g6-g5 to revitalise the h7-guy.

White now simplifies the position.

26.♗xf5!

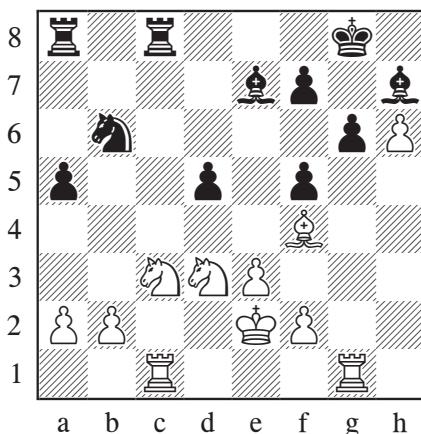
Imagine how much happier Black would be if he could play ...♗h7xf5! Unfortunately, the rules do not permit him to. Instead the bishop is marooned behind his own pawns.

26...exf5 27.♘d3!

The rook on c5 is perilously short on squares.

27...♝cc8

It would be ideal to double on the c-file, but Black cannot play 27...♝c4 because of 28.♘xd5!, and White will win material.

**28.♗e5!**

White had other winning moves but I like Gelfand's choice the best.

28...♝f8 29.♗d4 ♜cb8

The bishop on h7 is one of the most pathetic chess pieces ever seen. It is so short on squares that when White brings in a piece to attack it, there is nowhere to go!

30.♘f4!

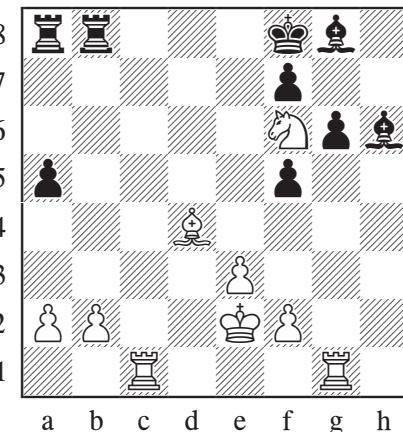
White's knight begins its journey to the f6-square.

30...♝xh6 31.♘h5

Black tries to defend f6, but it only delays his problems for one move.

31...♝d7 32.♘xd5!

The other knight comes to help.

32...♝f8 33.♘hf6 ♜xf6 34.♘xf6 ♜g8

Every so often in life, we come across a situation where we should ask ourselves "How the heck did that get there?" We have all seen funny photos online depicting such situations. This position should be among them!

If I had seen it for the first time, not knowing the preceding moves, I would have assumed it arose from a Fischer Random game, or a poorly played bughouse.

35.♝h1 ♜g5

It is almost sad to remove the g8-bishop, but Black gets absolutely nothing for it.

36.♘xg8 ♜d8 37.♘f6 ♜e7 38.♝c7† ♜e6**39.♝c6† ♜d6 40.♝xd6† ♜xd6 41.f4**

1–0

While I see the humor in Black's light-squared bishop being boxed in, the chess point is serious. We can learn a lot from Gelfand's approach to the position. Georgiev knew that advancing the g-pawn was extremely undesirable, but Gelfand gave him no choice. A stark contrast to Tiviakov – Ruiz Sanchez, where Black was merely tempted into making a poor pawn advance.

As we progress in chess we can rely less and less on opponents making unforced positional errors. Simultaneously we will face players who are masters in compelling us to make moves that are detrimental to our position.

Forcing an opponent's pawn forward to worsen his piece activity is a useful skill to have. As usual, we have guidelines that will help us add this to our skillset.

The first one is rather simple, and again reciprocal of what we have seen earlier, in Chapter 3.

Always consider which of your opponent's pieces are active, and if their activity would be reduced if one of their pawns were to advance.

This guideline can easily be applied to the Tiviakov and Gelfand decisions. In both games, their opponents had a decent bishop in the corner area. There was only one diagonal available for those bishops, but quite a good one. In both games Black was quickly in bad shape, once that diagonal was blocked, and their bishops no longer contributing.

By now I hope the readers realize that there will generally be a second guideline in place that can overrule the first. Once again, it looks like the exact reverse of another guideline in Chapter 3.

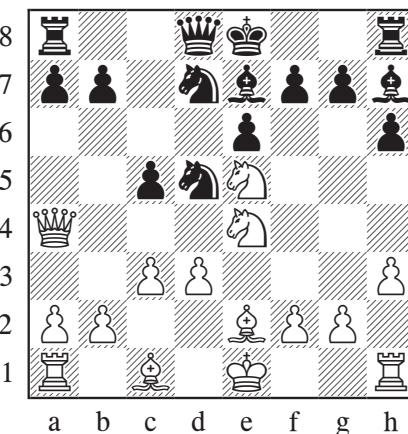
Though compelling a pawn forward will blunt an open line or occupy an important square for your opponent, you should only do it if you really can provoke it to move, and if it cannot move forward again afterwards.

When applying the second guideline to Gelfand – Georgiev, we see that it would not have dissuaded White from playing 22.♗d3!. Gelfand forced the pawn to g6 and could be confident Black would not be advancing it further anytime soon. With a rook on g1, a bishop on f4 and a knight on f3, all gearing down on the g5-square, it seemed unlikely to happen.

While Guideline Two was not a party pooper there, it can be at times. Let's examine a position where trying to maroon a black bishop on h7 was unwise.

Simon Ansell – Radoslaw Wojtaszek

Birmingham 2005



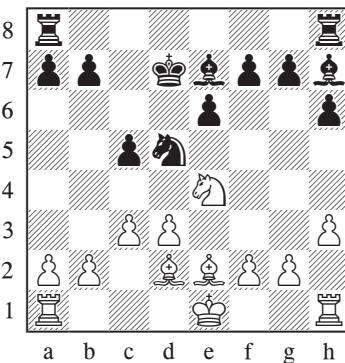
White's play thus far has been lackluster, and he is already marginally worse. Here he should have done himself a favor and developed his pieces instead of trying to provoke the g-pawn forward. He could have reached this decision by following the second guideline.

14.♕h5??

Simple play was to be preferred. Black was threatening ...♗d5-b6, winning the e5-knight by breaking the pin, so White needed to bow his head, make some exchanges and finish his development.

To illustrate the above point, after 14.0–0?? ♗b6! 15.♗b5 a6! White's queen is forced off the a4-e8 diagonal and the e5-knight will be lost.

14.♗xd7 ♘xd7 15.♗xd7† ♔xd7 16.♗d2

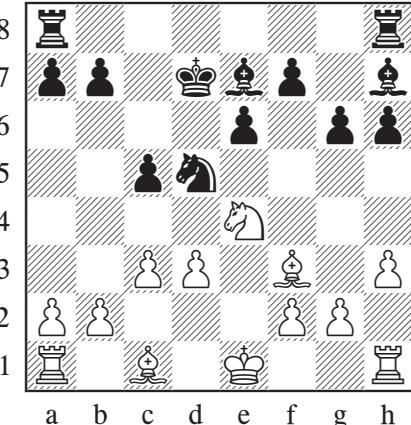


White is a bit worse but not more than that. Soon he will castle long and play ♜h1-e1, activating his pieces and keeping his only weakness on d3 well defended.

14...g6

It seems like White's mission has been accomplished. He has provoked Black into advancing the g-pawn, much like Gelfand did in the previous game. But there is a difference:

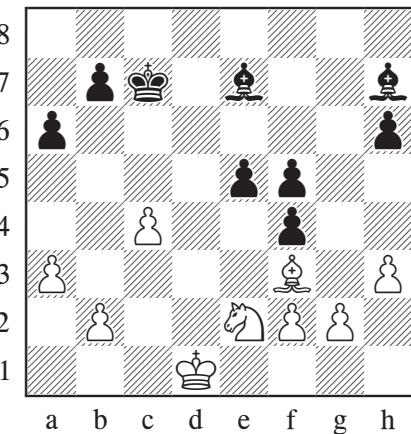
15.♗xd7 ♘xd7 16.♗xd7† ♔xd7 17.♗f3



17...g5!

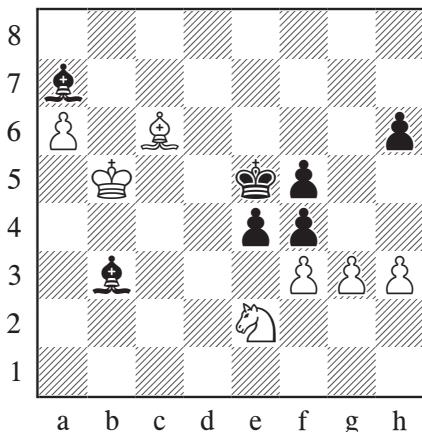
Black opens the diagonal for the bishop, and on the very next move when he is not busy recapturing, ♜e2-h5 cost White valuable time, and ...g5 was a likely idea anyway. Black wants to gain space on the kingside and potentially land his knight on f4. White's position would not have been exciting if he had dug in, but it is noticeably worse like this.

18.a3 ♕ac8 19.c4 ♜f4 20.♗xf4 gxf4
21.0-0-0 ♜c7 22.d4 cxd4 23.♗xd4 ♕cd8
24.♗xd8 ♕xd8 25.♗d1 ♕xd1† 26.♗xd1 f5
27.♗c3 a6 28.♗e2 e5



29.♗d5 ♜c5 30.f3 a5 31.♗c1 b6 32.♗d3
♗d4 33.b4 ♜d6 34.♗c2 ♜g6 35.♗b3

♘e3 36.♗b2 e4 37.♗d1 ♘d2 38.♗c3
 ♘e5 39.♗e2 ♘e8 40.♗c2 ♘e1 41.♗b3
 ♘d7 42.♗b7 ♘e6 43.♗a6 ♘d7 44.♗b7 b5
 45.bxa5 ♘xa5 46.♗d5 bxc4† 47.♗xc4 ♘c8
 48.♗b5 ♘e1 49.♗c6 ♘e6 50.a4 ♘b3 51.a5
 ♘f2 52.a6 ♘a7 53.g3



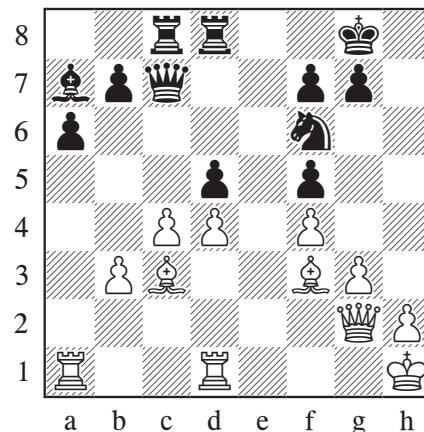
53...♘d1 54.gxf4† ♘e6 55.♗c3 e3 56.♗d5†
 ♘d6 57.♗c4 ♘xf3 58.♗e2 ♘xe2† 59.♗xe2
 ♘d5 60.♗b4 ♘e4 61.♗c3 h5 62.h4 ♘f3
 63.♗d3 ♘g4 64.♗c3 ♘xf4 65.♗e2 ♘g3
 66.♗b5 f4
 0–1

The reason 14.♗h5 was incorrect is clear when applying the second guideline. The pawn could move forward to open the diagonal again, making it not worth the time to provoke the advance.

Whenever we are thinking about forcing an opponent's pawn forward, no matter the strategic justification, the most obvious reason not to do so is if you conclude that it will not work! The following game shows this scenario.

Matthias Wahls – Mikhail Gurevich

Germany 1994



White has a pleasant position, due to a healthy bishop pair and a somewhat better pawn structure. But mainly because the a7-bishop can be blocked in. White found this strategic idea, but the wrong execution.

28.♗a5?

The idea behind this move is obvious. White skewers the rook on d8, hoping to force Black into blunting his bishop with ...b7-b6. But Black can avoid material losses without weakening his pawn structure

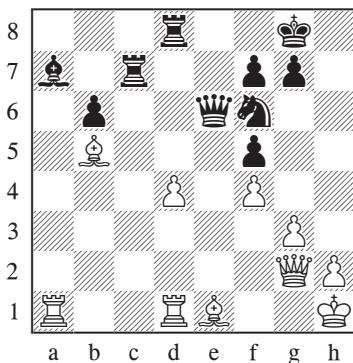
It is rare to see a position where instead of provoking a pawn forward, we should push our own pawn forward. The a7-bishop should indeed be blunted, but by a white pawn, not a black one.

After 28.c5! Black is clearly worse. His passive bishop will take a long time to rejoin the game. There are no downsides to pushing the pawn forward.

28...♗b6!

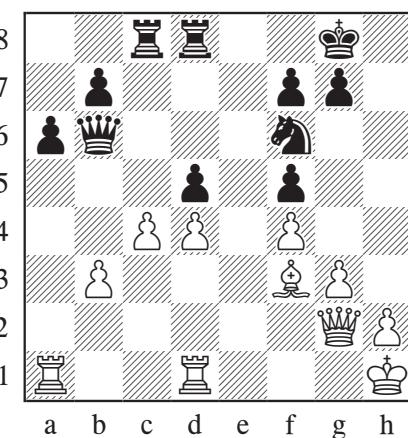
Black of course does not need to allow his bishop to be blocked. In fact, he will be able to exchange it!

28...b6?! makes little sense. It is true that after 29.♗e1 White is losing a center pawn, but I still prefer his position. Black will have a hard time activating the bishop after: 29...dxc4 30.bxc4 ♜xc4 31.♗e2 ♜e6 32.♗xa6 ♜c7 33.♗b5



My computer swears this position is equal. It might be right, objectively, but from a human perspective I hope you would take White. Black's bishop on a7 is badly lacking mobility, and may even be in danger of being captured on the open file.

29.♗xb6 ♜xb6



Just a couple moves after concluding that White's main assets are the bishop pair and Black's bishop potentially being passive on a7, both have evaporated. Black

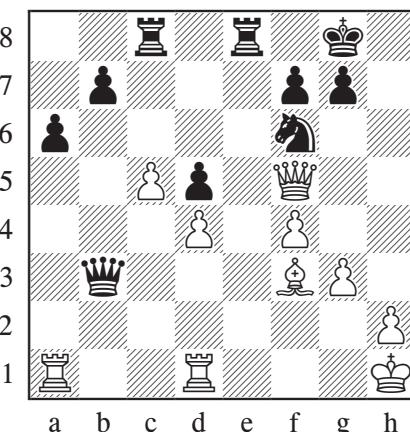
is now for choice due to the beckoning outpost on e4.

30.c5 ♜b4

It was also possible to grab the pawn. Following 30...♜xb3 31.♗ab1 ♜c3 32.♗xb7 a5 Black's a-pawn looks more dangerous than White's c-pawn. Still, the text is fine too.

31.♗c2 ♜e8 32.♗xf5 ♜xb3

White is under serious pressure. The knight will soon land on e4. Accurate play is needed to maintain the balance.



33.♗g2?

The bishop was hanging, but White also realized that ...♝f6-e4-f2† is a serious idea. He could have solved both problems with 33.♗f1! ♜e4 34.♗d7!, and White has some counterplay.

33...♝e4 34.♗xe4

The knight cannot be tolerated on e4, but a pawn there will be almost as problematic.

34...dxe4 35.♗h5 ♜b2 36.♗ab1 ♜f2 37.♗h3 ♜cd8 38.♗g2 ♜e3

With just two moves to go, White lost on time. But the position is difficult to defend, with no route to full equality.

0-1

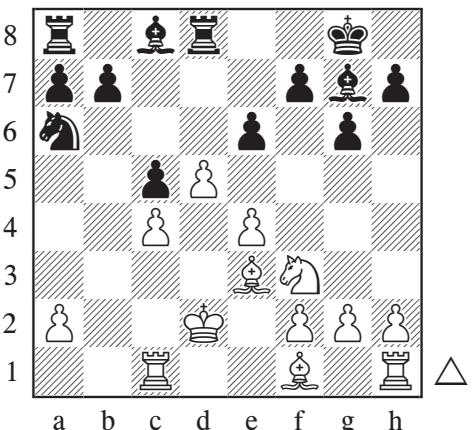
Having the right goal is seldom sufficient to win a chess game. Figuring out the way to achieve the goal is an important next step. In this encounter, White somehow believed Black would have to make the ...b7-b6 advance, and instead found himself exchanging the passive bishop. The game quickly went south from there.

Following the second guideline would not have helped White find the correct move, but it would have served as a caution against the one he chose. If you cannot force a pawn forward, there is no point in trying to do so. This may sound very basic, but most of our mistakes are basic mistakes. If White had second guessed himself, he would have rejected 28.♗a5 and played something else. He may even have landed on the correct one.

To conclude the chapter, here are a couple of problems.

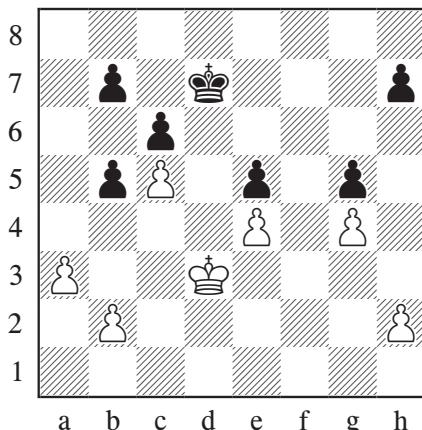
Exercises

Tigran L. Petrosian – Boris Avrukh, Kemer 2007 Sam Collins – Jonathan Rogers, England 2012



A standard Grünfeld structure is on the board, but the precise position is largely unexplored, and was at the time of the game. White played ♜e3-g5, attacking the d8-rook, hoping to encourage Black to blunt his own bishop by playing ...f7-f6.

What do you think of White's decision?

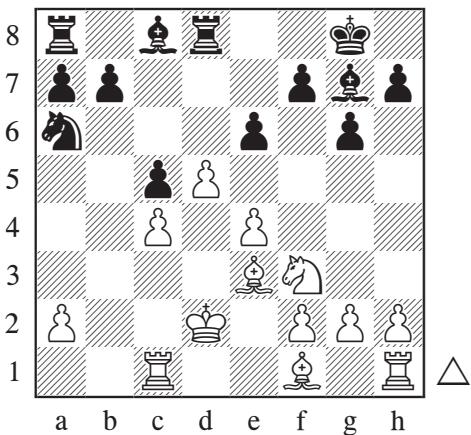


Black is under a lot of pressure in this pawn ending, but he can hold with accurate play. How should he proceed?

Solutions

Tigran L. Petrosian – Boris Avrukh

Kemer 2007



14.♗g5?

Avrukh refers to this move as dubious in his annotations. I will go a step further and call it flat out wrong. ♗g5 fails to achieve its desired goal for more reasons than one and could have been eliminated by minding the second guideline.

Better was 14.♗d3 b6 15.♗b1, although Black has a good game after: 15...♗b7 16.♗e2 exd5 17.exd5= (One of Black's main ideas in this line is to force White to capture on d5 with the e-pawn. After 17.cxd5 f5↑ Black has a good game.)

If White is in an ambitious mood, he can even consider 14.h4?!, where the game will become messy with both sides having their chances.

14...f6!

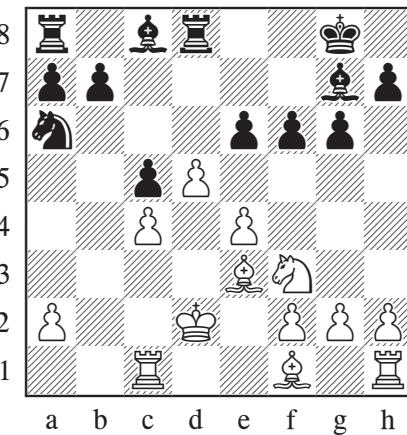
This is fully justified, as he will quickly be able to get ...f5 in, opening the long diagonal again, while simultaneously blowing up the enemy center.

While Black can and should play this, it turns out he is not forced to by any stretch. After the simple 14...♝e8 he is also fine, probably on the more comfortable side of equality. The rook is fine on e8 and will be on a pleasant open file once ...exd5 has been played. The g5-bishop is unstable and can be kicked away on a moment's notice with ...h6.

15.♗e3

15.♗h4? ♗h6† is bad news.

White has burned two tempos on forcing Black to play ...f7-f6. But ...f7-f5 was a likely part of Black's plan anyway! He certainly will carry out the advance soon, which means that White cannot possibly justify losing time on provoking ...f7-f6.



15...b6

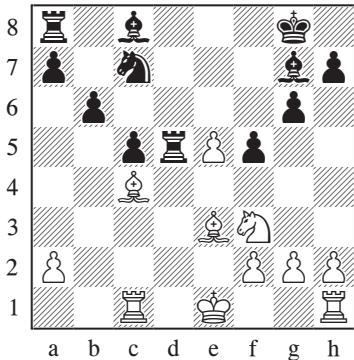
There is nothing wrong with this move, but Black could have been more direct.

Why not open up for the bishop and break open the center in one swoop?

15...f5! 16.e5 exd5 17.cxd5 ♞xd5† 18.♔e1

In his notes, Avrukh suggested 18...♝e6, claiming the position is unclear. An improvement is:

18...b6! 19.♗c4 ♛c7!



Black is much better after something like:
20.♕xd5† ♜xd5 21.♗d2 ♜b7

Black has fantastic compensation for the exchange. I would argue that the white rooks do not have the potential to be more useful than the b7-bishop and d5-knight.

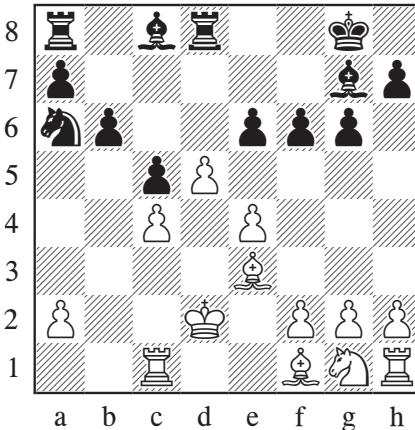
White's next move was rather sad, but also a good illustration of why ♜e3-g5 was a mistake.

16.♘g1?

White retreats the knight to hold his center together by meeting ...f5 with f2-f3. But wasn't the point of ♜e3-g5-e3 to provoke the pawn to f6 to shut in the g7-bishop? On White's very next move, he admitted that ...f6-f5 was coming. He cannot stop it and can only resort to damage control. If he had considered our second guideline, he may well have avoided ♜e3-g5 upon realizing that ...f6-f5 was inevitable.

Unfortunately, ♘f3-g1 only makes matters worse, as Black now has a large lead in development, making it impossible for White to consolidate.

White is a bit worse after a solid move like 16.♗e1†, but nothing too bad is happening to him just yet.



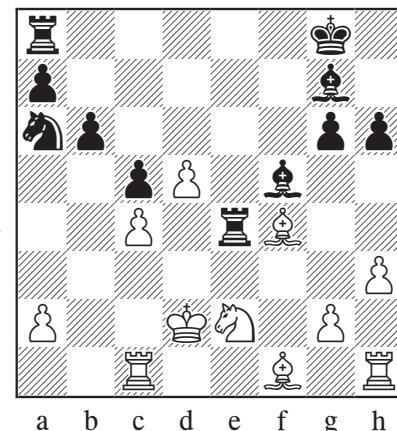
16...f5!†

Blowing up the center with great force. Only Black is ready for open lines. Black went on to win. He allowed his opponent one chance to fight back, but only one. Once it was missed, it was game over.

17.f3 ♜e8 18.♗g5 fxe4 19.fxe4 exd5 20.exd5 ♜f5

Black's piece activity is impressive.

21.♘e2 ♜e4 22.h3 h6 23.♗f4



Avrukh made his only major error at this moment. Evidently, he was worried about g2-g4 followed by ♘f1-g2, but he chose the wrong way of dealing with it.

23...h5?

Allowing White a chance for counterplay.

Continuing simply was more than enough. 23... $\mathbb{R}ae8$ 24.g4 $\mathbb{Q}d7+$ With the rook active on e8, White cannot play $\mathbb{Q}g2$, so how will he activate his pieces?

24.g3?

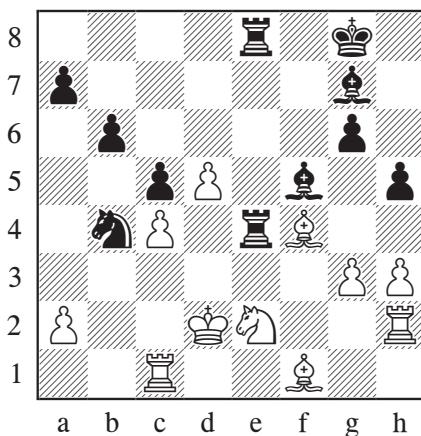
White understandably wanted to develop the bishop, but this is too slow.

White had this one chance only to activate his pieces. There was no time to waste. With 24.g4! $hxg4$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}g2!$ $\mathbb{R}ee8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ White would have managed to complicate the game, with decent play. His pieces would finally be useful!

24... $\mathbb{R}ae8-$ +

No $\mathbb{Q}g2$ for you! Black is winning again.

25. $\mathbb{R}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$



... $\mathbb{Q}d3$ incoming!

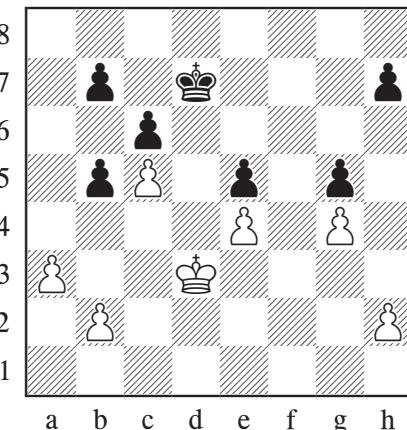
26.g4 $hxg4$ 27. $hxg4$ $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ 28. $\mathbb{R}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe2$

29. $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ $\mathbb{R}d4\#$

0–1

Sam Collins – Jonathan Rogers

England 2012



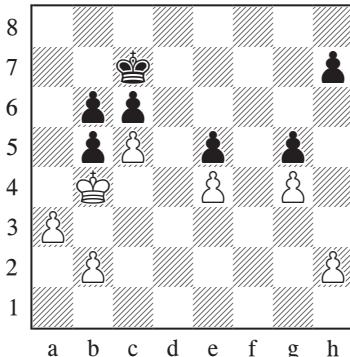
White is planning to invade with $\mathbb{R}d3-c3$ -b4-a5. Unfortunately, the natural defense ... $\mathbb{Q}d7-c7$ followed by ...b7-b6 fails. But Black can secure a draw by forcing the pawns White intends to win with too far forward so that the king cannot come to their aid.

29...b6!

Now and only now, when White cannot put his king on b4.

It is tempting to first prepare ...b7-b6, but Black does not have time for this, since White can get his king to b4.

29... $\mathbb{Q}c7$? 30. $\mathbb{Q}c3!$ b6 31. $\mathbb{Q}b4!$



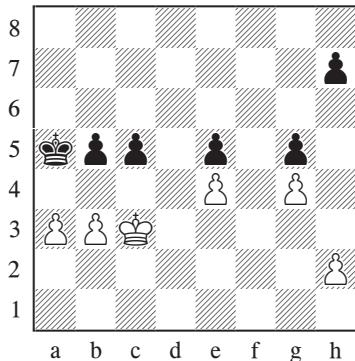
Black is powerless to stop the simple plan of b2-b3 followed by a3-a4, giving White an outside passed pawn.

31... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 32.b3 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 33.a4 bxa4 34.bxa4 $\mathbb{Q}b7$
35.cxb6 $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 36.a5† $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}c5+$

30.cxb6 $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 31.a4!

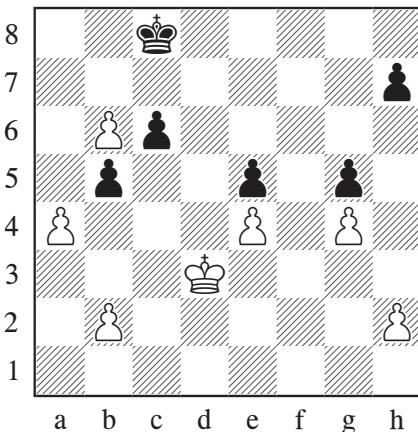
The most testing attempt. White wants to defend the b-pawn with a4-a5.

In the game, White tried 31. $\mathbb{Q}c3$, but if Black is allowed to take the b6-pawn without allowing an outside passer, it is an easy draw. 31... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 33.b3 c5† 34. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$



35. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ (35.a4 $\mathbb{Q}b6!=$) 35... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 41.b4 $\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$

It turns out that Black can allow the b6-pawn to be defended and exploit that White's pawns are too far up the board for the king to be able help them advance.



31... $\mathbb{Q}b7!!$

Equalizing material cannot be recommended. After 31...bxa4? 32. $\mathbb{Q}c4$! White is winning. ... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ will always be met with $\mathbb{Q}c5$, and if Black doesn't put the king on b7, $\mathbb{Q}c4$ -b4xa4 will win. For example: 32... $\mathbb{Q}b8$ (32... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}c5$) 33. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ (33... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}a5$) 34. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ and wins.

32.a5 c5!

Black has a fortress since White's pawns are so far advanced his king cannot join the action.

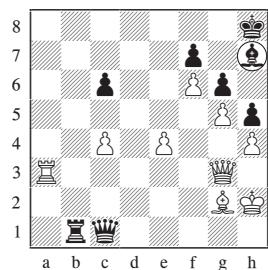
33. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 34.b4 c4=

Nothing to be done. White would be better off with his pawns farther back, so he would have a mechanism like a2-a4 at his disposal, to bring his king in.

Ever just sit and wonder
how things got there?



Sasikiran – Anand, Hyderabad 2002



Chapter 9

Invading the Castle

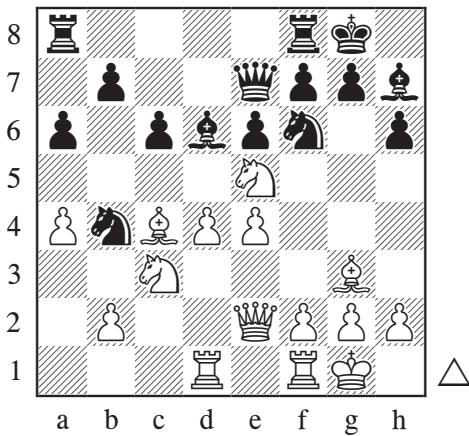
In this chapter we will examine the concept of forcing an opponent's pawns forward to loosen the king's cover. When speaking about king safety and pawn pushes, a loosened king cover goes hand in hand with some of the other themes we have covered.

The primary reason loosened king cover is a strategic liability, is that the king can be attacked. But attacks don't happen out of nowhere, attacking pieces will need to be able to get to the king.

There are two main ways this can happen. First off, loosening the king's cover with a pawn advance can also create a hook to attack (see also the next chapter). Here is an example from a recent game of mine.

Sam Shankland – Jonny Hector

Helsingør 2015

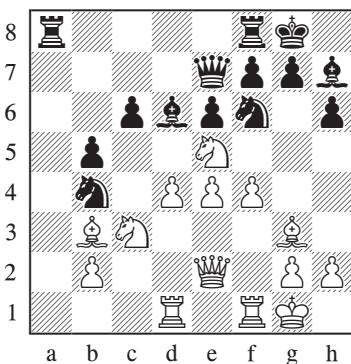


White has a big center and a pleasant position, but Black is solid with no major weaknesses, and can eventually hope for counterplay with the ...c6-c5 break. It looks like he should be okay, but a strong move provoked him into making major weaknesses around his king. It's hard to believe, but the black kingside will be on the verge of collapse in just five more moves!

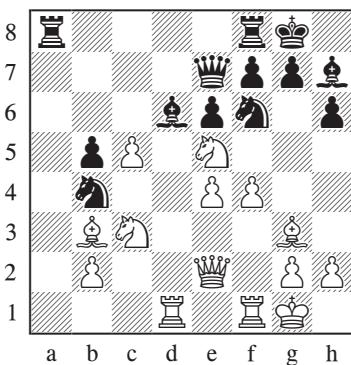
15.♘h4!

Forceful and effective. The pin on the h4-d8 diagonal is debilitating. Should White be allowed to play $\mathbb{Q}g4$, he will win in short order, so Black must break the pin.

White would like to take more space in the center, but he must look out for potential counterplay. Following 15.f4?! Black gets good play: 15...b5! 16.axb5 axb5 17. $\mathbb{Q}b3$



If White had a tempo to play $\mathbb{Q}h4$ (as in the game), without Black having ...g7-g5, it would be crushing. Unfortunately, Black's counterplay is too fast. 17...c5! White's center is falling apart. 18.dxc5 (Grabbing the other pawn also fails to promise anything tangible. 18. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 19.dxe5 $\mathbb{Q}xe4=$)



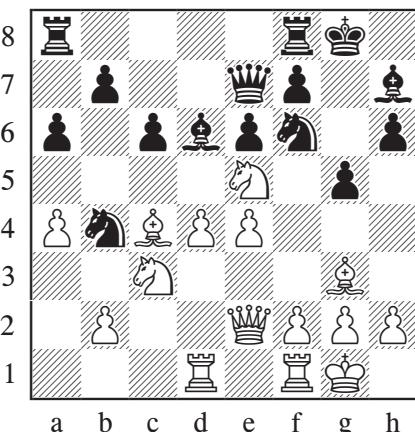
18... $\mathbb{Q}xe5!$ 19.fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}d7!$ \Rightarrow The position has changed dramatically, and in Black's favor. His kingside is intact and he has reasonable counterplay.

15...g5

My opponent was visibly unhappy about making this move. Advancing a pawn two squares in front of your king is not fun, but the alternatives were even worse.

For instance, after 15... $\mathbb{Q}fd8?$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}g4!$ Black has no defense against e4-e5.

16. $\mathbb{Q}g3$



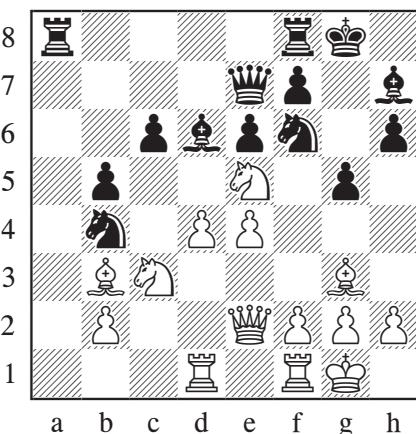
White has burned two tempos on $\mathbb{Q}g3-h4-g3$, but in return he has provoked Black's g7-pawn up to g5. Black would love to slide the pawn back to g7, offering a repetition, but the rules of chess do not allow this. The pawn on g5 is there to stay. Sooner than you would expect, Black's king ran into major problems.

16...b5?

This does not accomplish much. Black needed to open the center with ...c6-c5, and now he will struggle to do so due to the weak pawn on b5.

Black's last chance to offer resistance was 16...c5!, opening the center. After 17.dxc5 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}h1!$ White is still better as f2-f4 is coming, but Black can hope to use the open d-file to trade pieces and make counterplay.

17.axb5 axb5 18.♗b3



In a higher chess sense, Black should be lost. White will launch an attack with f2-f4, with Black unable to make counterplay with ...c6-c5, due to the hanging pawn on b5. Note how useless the open a-file is. There are no squares for the a8-rook to occupy and nothing to attack.

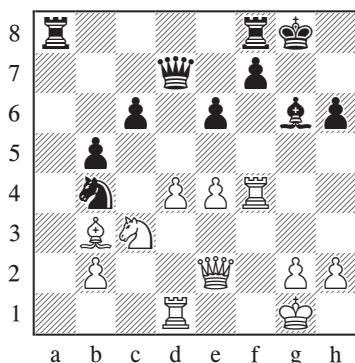
18...♝d7 19.♝xd7 ♜xd7 20.f4!

The attack begins. Imagine how much better Black's life would be if his g-pawn was back on g7!

20...♝e7?

It was more resilient not to allow the white bishop to stay unopposed on e5:

20...gxsf4 21.♝xf4 ♜xf4 22.♜xf4 ♜g6



I was expecting to reach this position when I played 20.f4. I thought Black's defensive chances were semi-reasonable; still, with energetic play, White should win.

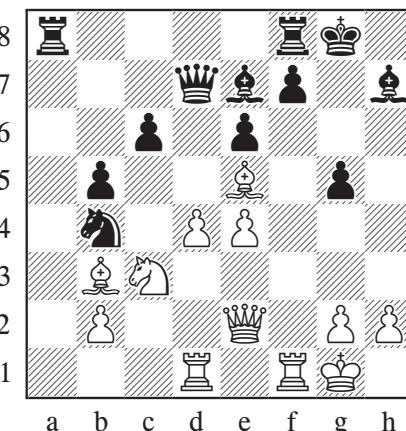
23.♜f6 ♜g7 24.e5 ♜d5 25.♝xd5 cxd5

Black's king looks solid for the moment, but simply removing the only defender strips the emperor of his clothes.

26.♝c2!+–

Black will not survive long.

21.fxg5 hxg5 22.♝e5



Black is busted. The kingside play is too strong, with ♜h5-h6 difficult to stop. You could argue that this game was just as much about hooks as about provoking pawn moves in front of the enemy king. I disagree. White's rook on f1 will not give mate. The reason Black's king is in a bad way is that the h-pawn has been exchanged and the g-pawn pushed forward, leaving him with barely any pawn cover. The open f-file is useful, but White would still win with the f1-rook on, say, b1.

22...f6

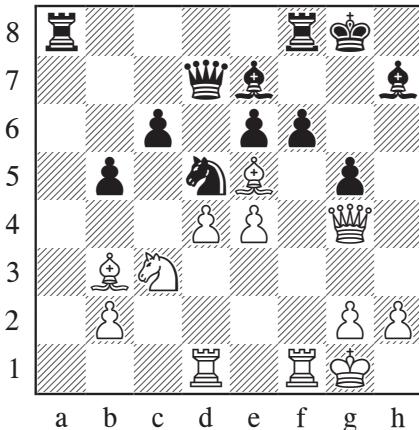
Black tries to push the e5-bishop back but is only losing further control of the position. Now the b3-g8 diagonal has been weakened as well.

23.♕g4!+–

The e6-pawn cannot be defended. Black tried one last desperate attempt to complicate matters, but it was not enough to offer serious resistance.

23...♝d5

23...♚f7 24.♕xg5! is also over.



I had to calculate a bit, but it only took a few forcing moves to demonstrate that Black is dead lost.

24.exd5! fxe5 25.dxc6!

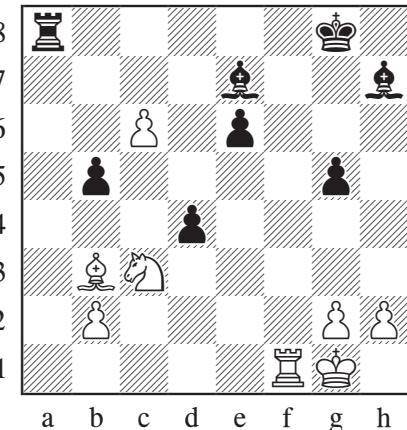
Black now ceded the f-file, which he was surely unhappy about, but there was nothing better.

25...♝xf1†

After 25...♛xc6 26.♜xe6† ♚h8 27.♝d5 Black loses a lot of material.

26.♝xf1 ♛xd4† 27.♛xd4 exd4

Black managed to exchange queens and avoid a mating attack, but at a heavy price. The c-pawn decided the game with no further discussion.



28.♜xe6† ♚h8 29.♝d5 ♜d3 30.♝xe7
1–0

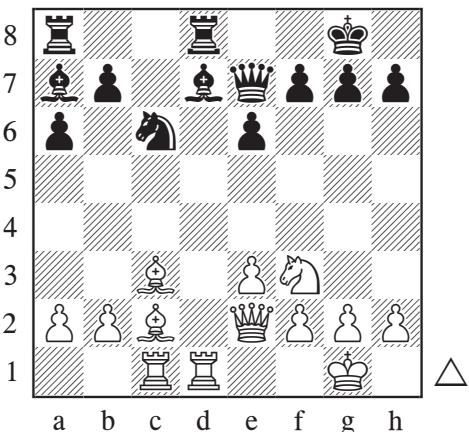
It was at least somewhat helpful I could break with f2-f4, making use of the hook on g5, but what really spelled Black's doom was that he had few pawns fighting for the squares in front of his king. White's rook on f1 was well placed and instrumental in achieving the f2-f4 break, but there were no bone-crunching rook sacrifices on f7 or similar. The core problems were on the g- and h-files.

Most attacks need at least the support of one or two pawns to succeed, but some can be carried by pieces alone. Those attacks almost always involve holes in the pawn cover around the opponent's king. This allows us to occupy attacking outposts or exploit open lines.

Provoking a kingside pawn forward can also be a throwback to Chapter 7, where we discussed how forcing an opponent's pawn forward can be good for our pieces. Let's look at a game that melded kingside attacking chances with loosening key squares.

Konstantin Sakaev – Maxim Sorokin

Sochi 2006



White has a slight lead in development, but Black is solid. The pawn structure is symmetrical, and he has an easy plan of playing ... $\mathbb{Q}d7-e8$ and trading all the rooks on the d-file. Should Black get time to make this happen, White's advantage would be symbolic at best.

I like how Sakaev approached the position, turning the lead in development into permanent weaknesses on the black kingside.

18. $\mathbb{W}d3!$

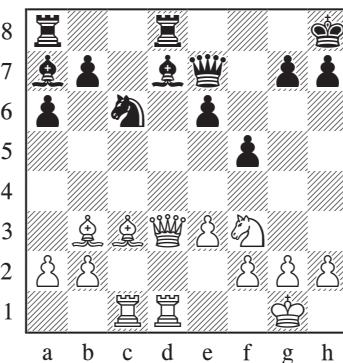
White makes the primitive threat of $\mathbb{W}xh7$, winning immediately. It is easy to parry, but Black will have to loosen his kingside pawn cover.

A quiet move would not be enough. My computer thinks White is better after 18.a3, giving a similar evaluation to the game continuation, but it is wrong. After 18... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ I can't see anything for White to do. Black is ready to start trades down the d-file. Sakaev's play was stronger, striking while the iron was hot.

18...g6

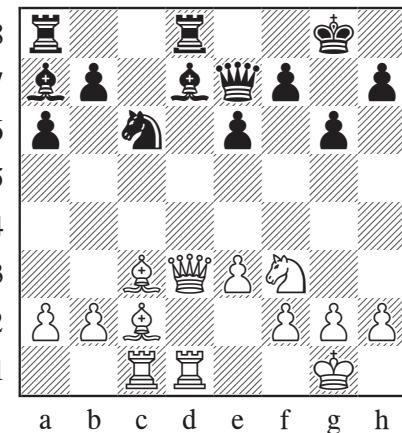
Black was probably not thrilled about opening the a1-h8 diagonal, but this weakness does not appear to be too devastating just yet.

The alternative was even worse. After 18...f5 19. $\mathbb{Q}b3!$ Black is in big trouble. $\mathbb{W}xf5$ is a very serious threat, and after 19... $\mathbb{Q}h8$:



White can exchange one advantage for another with 20. $\mathbb{W}d6!$ $\mathbb{W}xd6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$. Black will not be mated but will lose because the e6-pawn will fall. It is already under threat and $\mathbb{Q}f3-g5$ can increase the pressure at a moment's notice.

After 18...g6 Black's position looks solid. He can hope to play ... $\mathbb{Q}e8$, ...f7-f6, and ... $\mathbb{Q}f7$, defending weaknesses. But White found another excellent move, pouncing on the dark squares before they could be defended.



19.♕e4!

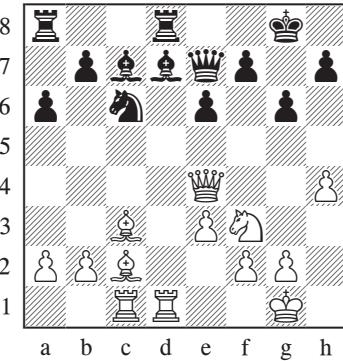
White is ready for ♕e4-f4, when ♕f6 and ♘h6 must be taken seriously. Black needed to stop this plan at all costs. One minor error was all it took for the position to become hopeless.

19...♝e8?

Black continues with the discussed plan of mass exchanges on the d-file. It would be a fine choice, but he did not have time to make it happen due to his kingside being weakened.

It was of the utmost importance to stop ♕e4-f4. Therefore Black should have played 19...♜b8!, which is not a happy move at all. His rook will be stuck on a8 for some time, but he can hope to follow up with ...♜b8-c7 and ...♜a8-c8. It is the most resilient defense, though the position still looks unpleasant.

20.h4 ♜c7



After 21.♘g5 White retains good attacking chances, but Black can hope to defend successfully.

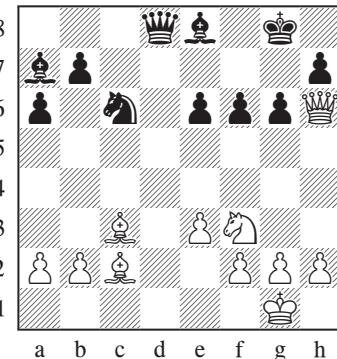
20.♕f4! ♜xd1† 21.♖xd1 ♜b8

Black certainly was unhappy about blocking in his own rook (maybe this is why he did not play 19...♜b8), but there was no choice:

21...♜d8? 22.♖xd8! ♜xd8

Black loses material after 22...♜xd8 23.♘f6 ♜f8 (23...♜d7 24.♘h6) 24.♘xd8.

White now highlights the weaknesses of the kingside squares.

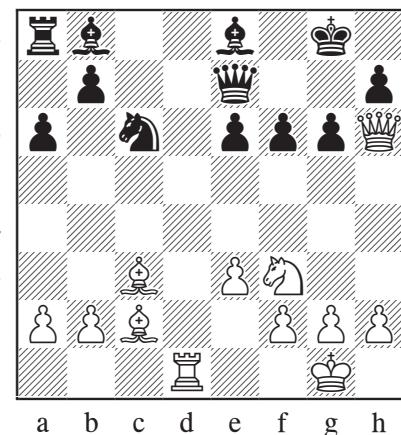
23.♘h6 f6

Black is almost fully stabilized. Almost...

24.♗g5!

That will be that. There is no stopping a disaster happening on e6.

24...♕e7 25.♗b3!+–

22.♘h6 f6**23.♗b3!**

Black is facing the simple threat of ♗f3-g5.

23...♝e5

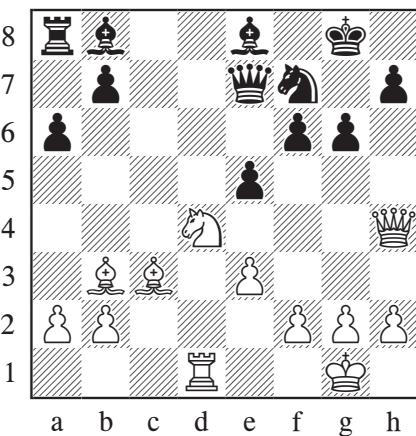
Transferring a defender to the kingside.

23...♝c7 is met strongly with: 24.♗g5! fxg5 25.♗xe6† and mate.

24.♗d4!

Wouldn't Black love to put his pawns back on f7 and g7?

24...d7 25.Wh4 e5



In an open position, if you have pieces pointed in the direction of the opposing king, it is beneficial to weaken the king's pawn cover.

Applying this guideline to the previous two examples is straightforward. Almost any time a pawn tasked with covering the king is pushed to the fourth rank or further, in an open position, it makes the king vulnerable to attack.

In the case of Sakaev – Sorokin, one does not have to be a grandmaster to realize that advancing the pawn to g6, opening the a1-h8 diagonal where the c3-bishop was pointing menacingly, was extremely dangerous.

As romantic as such attacks are, for every bone-crunching assault that happens because of an ill-fated pawn advance in front of the king, there is a positional encounter with the same kind of success. The following example is quieter, but still an excellent demonstration of how a weakened kingside can be a major problem.

White is much better almost no matter what, but I like the aesthetically pleasing finish.

26.Qf5! gxf5 27.Qb4! Wc7 28.Wh6

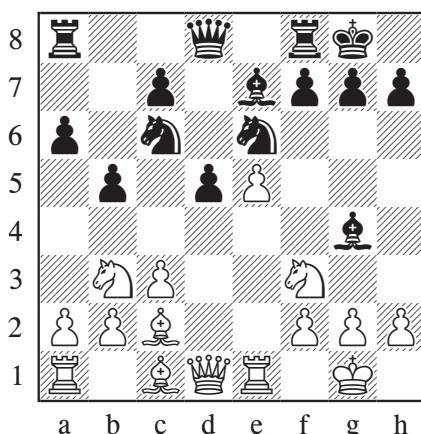
Nothing can be done about Wh8 mate.

1–0

Both examples demonstrated the power of compelling pawns that serve as the king's cover to advance. There were diverging details, but the primary theme was the same. By forcing the pawns in front of the king forward, White could generate serious attacks against otherwise solid-looking positions. This is because White's pieces were in a position to attack, which brings us to the first guideline.

Emil Sutovsky – Dmitry Svetushkin

Subotica 2008



The above position used to be a somewhat serious line of the Open Ruy Lopez, but in recent years Black has looked in other directions.

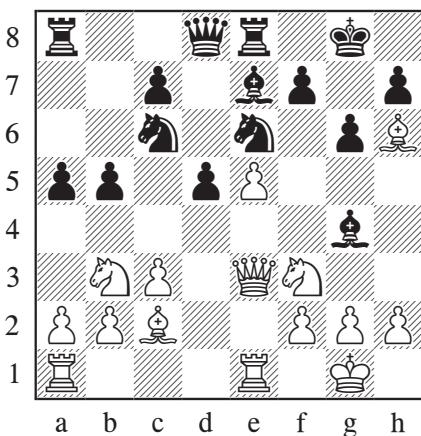
White's convincing win in this game had something to do with that.

Before anything else, White loosens up the kingside.

14.♗d3!

Black has no choice but to advance the g-pawn.

14...g6 15.♕h6 ♔e8 16.♗e3 a5



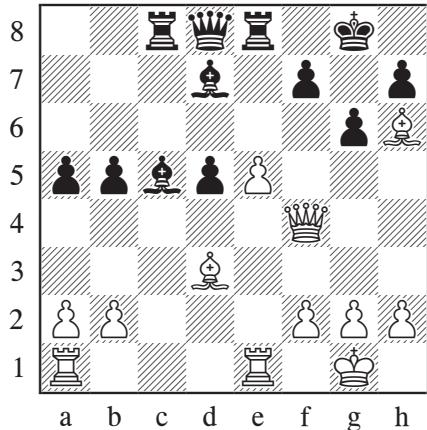
Black's control over the key squares in front of his king has been loosened a bit, but White is not able to launch a mating attack. The h6-bishop is the only piece in any kind of attacking position. Instead, with slow play Sutovsky expertly exploited the compromised black kingside as a positional defect.

17.♘fd4 ♘cxd4 18.♘xd4 ♘xd4 19.cxd4

Black is left with a backward pawn on c7, which he chose to liquidate immediately.

19...c5 20.dxc5 ♕c8 21.♗d3 ♕xc5 22.♗f4 ♕d7

Black's position does not look that bad. His king is not under any serious pressure, the passed d-pawn gives him counterplay and he controls the open c-file. But watch what happens next.



23.h4!

Sutovsky knew he would not be delivering mate anytime soon. He did not play h4-h5 to open lines to the king for another 14 more moves, but he was permanently ready for a kingside attack, restricting Black's mobility. Black's next move was a testament to his problems.

23...♗e6

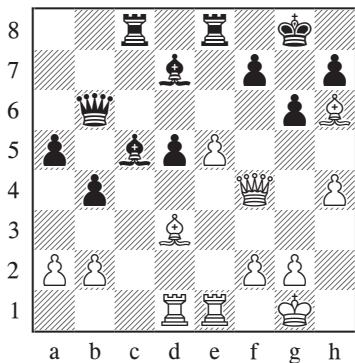
This ugly move is the best one. Black covers the key f6-square, but his pieces are not coordinating well for advancing his own play. He would much rather have the bishop on e6.

From e6 a bishop can exert pressure on the abandoned white queenside once he advances ...d5-d4. Unfortunately, the open position of Black's king makes that a hard setup to justify.
23...b4

Of course, Black should not play ...♗e6 right away due to the loose pawn on b5.

24.♗ad1 ♕b6

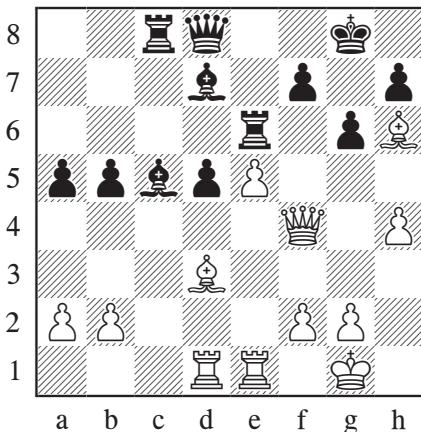
Black wants ...♗e6 next. He had to bring his queen to the defense to prepare it. The immediate 24...♗e6? allows 25.♗b5!+– and Black loses material.



25.h5!

White proceeds with his own play, and once again ... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ is impossible. Even here, after something like ... $\mathbb{W}b6-e6$, Black is not really in any danger of being mated, but the attack is preventing him from achieving optimal coordination.

24. $\mathbb{E}ad1$



Now we will see exactly what I mean. Black makes a normal-looking move that seems active, but the weakened kingside makes it dubious.

24... $\mathbb{W}b6?$

The queen leaves the kingside.

It was better to retreat the dark-squared bishop to cover the key squares. But White would

still be better after 24... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 25.g3±. Black has certainly averted immediate disaster and is unlikely to find himself mated. But note how unpleasant it must be to make a move like ... $\mathbb{Q}e7$. The bishop had to retreat from an active square to a passive one, and Black had to loosen his grip on the d4-square, which will be important for his passed pawn to get moving. All of this because of his loosened kingside pawn cover.

Sutovsky blends positional and attacking chess with a fine move.

25. $\mathbb{Q}g5!$

I like this move a lot. White would like to play $\mathbb{Q}g5-f6$ and $h4-h5$, launching a mating attack. Black can easily parry this idea with ... $\mathbb{Q}e7$, but exchanging dark-squared bishops would be strategically undesirable, as White is putting most of his pawns on the dark squares and the black pawns are mainly on the light squares.

In addition, the ...d5-d4 advance will be much harder to carry out. Black should have played it anyway, but was understandably unwilling.

25... $\mathbb{E}ce8$

After 25... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{E}xe7$ 27.h5± Black is not in much danger of being mated. He is just worse. He will always have to worry about $h5-h6$ and $\mathbb{W}f4-f6$, meaning that his pieces will be tied down to defensive roles.

26. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{W}b7$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}f6$

White has installed a powerful bishop on f6, but an exchange of dark-squared bishops is not in Black's favor strategically, since his pawns are mostly on light squares, while his opponent's pawns are on dark squares.

Sometimes, if your opponent establishes a strong piece, it can be best to ignore it and improve your own pieces. But in this case,

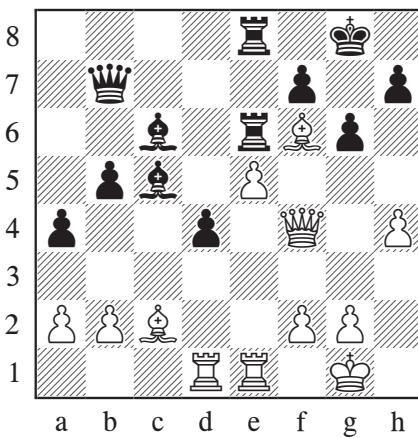
Black does not have this luxury, as the strong bishop on f6 will always demand attention to threats like $\mathbb{W}f4-h6$, which could end the game immediately.

28...a4 29. $\mathbb{B}c2$

White has a nasty threat, made possible by Black's kingside being loosened and the bishop allowed to stand on f6. Black either missed it or decided not to care. Soon he was just material down.

29...d4?

The easiest way to prevent $\mathbb{B}c2-f5$ was to pin the e5-pawn. But after 29... $\mathbb{W}b8$ 30. $\mathbb{W}d2$ White is still clearly better. Black might have to give up an exchange on e5 sooner or later.



30. $\mathbb{B}f5!$

White traps the rook on e6. The bishop cannot be taken, highlighting the uselessness of the g6-pawn in the position. It allowed the white bishop to stand menacingly on f6 and did nothing to keep its light-squared colleague off the f5-square.

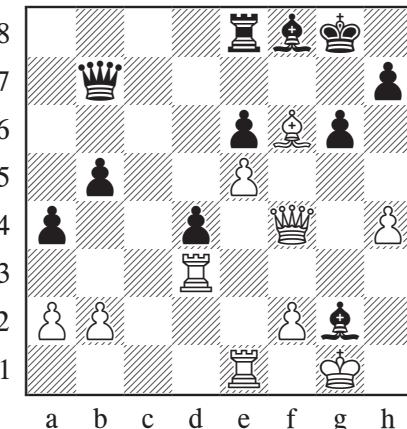
30... $\mathbb{B}xg2$ 31. $\mathbb{B}xe6$ $f \times e6$

White has won an exchange for a pawn. Black has a bit of counterplay, but with a very strong multi-purpose move, White consolidated his advantage.

32. $\mathbb{B}d3!$

This really does it all. It stops ... $\mathbb{B}h3$ and the rook could come to g3 to support the king further. And from g3, it would be an effective attacker, with h4-h5 coming soon.

32... $\mathbb{B}b4$ 33. $\mathbb{B}c1$ $\mathbb{B}f8$ 34. $\mathbb{B}e1$



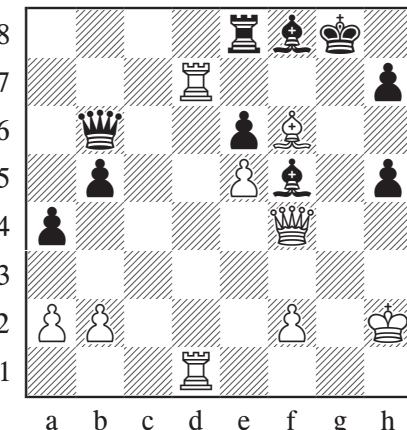
White surely only repeated moves to reach the time control, as is evidenced by his obvious and correct decision to continue the game the next time the same position was reached.

34... $\mathbb{B}b4$ 35. $\mathbb{B}c1$ $\mathbb{B}f8$ 36. $\mathbb{B}h2$

No draw for you!

36... $\mathbb{B}d5$ 37. $h5$ $\mathbb{B}e4$ 38. $\mathbb{B}xd4$ $\mathbb{B}f5$ 39. $\mathbb{B}cd1$ $gxh5$ 40. $\mathbb{B}d7$ $\mathbb{W}b6$

White is winning every which way, but I like the final touch.



41. ♔xf5!

1-0

I like how Sutovsky used the weak squares generated by the ...g7-g6 advance as well as the hook on g6 to great effect. The game did end with a mating attack, but for a long time, the looseness around his king was not enough for Black to fear for his life. It did prevent him from reaching optimal coordination and encouraged him to make the strategically painful exchange of dark-squared bishops to help with the king's safety. Such concessions were necessary because the open king had become a key positional element, even though a brute-force attack would not have succeeded in the early middlegame.

In general, in open positions, you do not want to have your king's position opened, even if there is no immediate threat to the monarch. This brings us to the second guideline.

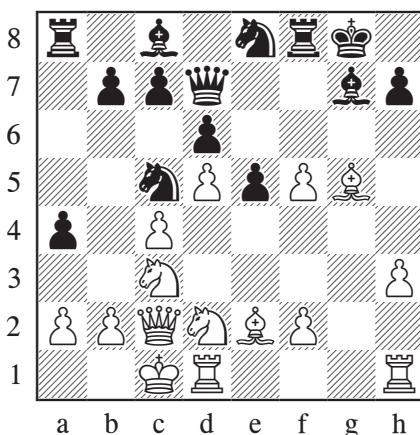
If you are not able to launch an attack on the king, it may still be worth compelling a pawn in front of the king forward for positional reasons – especially if it takes little effort. In the long run, an open king in an open position is a liability.

Sutovsky showed this guideline in action, when he played 14.♗d3. After 14...g6 he knew he would not be delivering mate anytime soon but made excellent use of the weakened kingside squares to keep Black under constant pressure. In the end, the winning 30.♕f5! tactic exploited that Black's kingside pawn cover was compromised.

While compelling your opponent to loosen his pawn cover in an open position is seldom wrong, semi-open positions are a different story. Take the following game as a cautionary tale.

Vitaly Kunin – Manuel Bosboom

Amsterdam 2016



Black can be satisfied with the result of the opening and early middlegame in this typical King's Indian. He can now loosen the pawn cover in front of White's king. This turns out to be a plainly incorrect decision.

15...a3?

Advancing the a-pawn is strategically dubious because it allows White to play b2-b4, a luxury he did not have previously. This is a little bit of a throwback to Chapter 2, where we spoke about pawns wishing they could move backwards to control key squares.

Black was best advised to recapture the pawn. He should be fine.

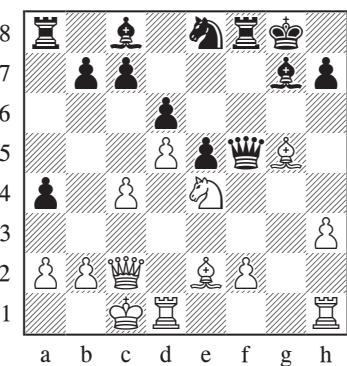
15... $\mathbb{W}xf5!$

In addition to recapturing the pawn, Black now has the idea to play ... $\mathbb{W}xc2\ddagger$ followed by ... $\mathbb{Q}f5\ddagger$, developing his pieces fearsomely. He also wins a tempo on the g5-bishop, forcing White's reply.

16. $\mathbb{Q}de4$

16. $\mathbb{Q}e3?!$ $\mathbb{W}xc2\ddagger$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5\ddagger$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}d3\ddagger$

16... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$



It looks like White has consolidated his position in the center, but it can still be challenged. The knight on e4 must be removed.

17... $\mathbb{Q}f6!$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$

Or 18. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}h5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$

$\mathbb{Q}h8!$ with ... $\mathbb{Q}g7-h6$ to come next. Black is fine.

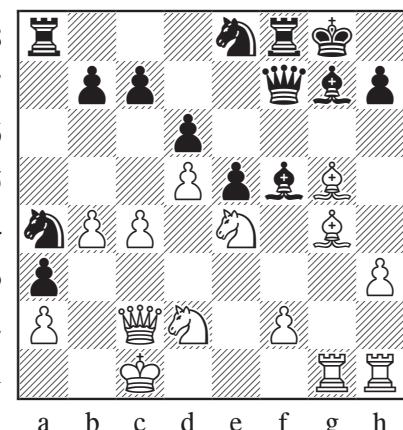
18... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$

With ... $\mathbb{W}f4\ddagger$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ to follow, Black has nothing to complain about.

16.b4!

The c5-knight is booted off its perch, forced to the side of the board. In addition, White conquers the e4-square for his knights.

16... $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}ce4$ $\mathbb{W}f7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}dg1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}g4$



Black is in big trouble. The knight on a4 is badly misplaced and White has control of the key central squares. The ...e5-e4 advance to open up the long diagonal will not happen, making it impossible for Black to exploit the weakened squares around the white king.

19... $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ c6 21.dxc6 bxc6 22. $\mathbb{Q}xa3$

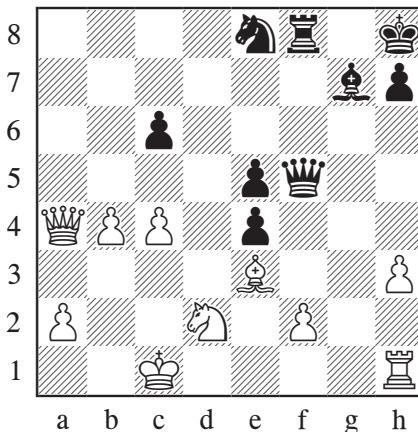
There goes a pawn...

22... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{W}xf5$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xa4$

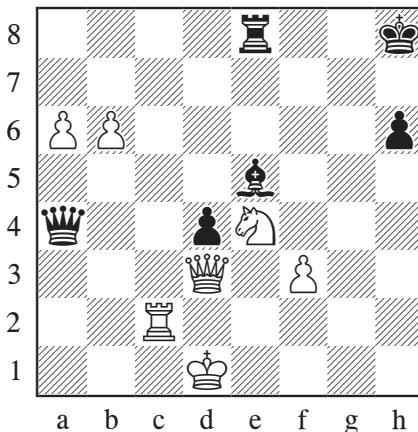
And a knight!

24... $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ 25. $\mathbb{W}xa4$ dxe4 26. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

Black is strategically busted. The rest requires no comment.



26... $\mathbb{W}g6$ 27. $\mathbb{E}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 28. $\mathbb{W}c2$ $\mathbb{E}a8$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $exd4$ 32. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{E}f8$ 33.b5 $cxb5$ 34.cxb5 $\mathbb{E}a8$ 35. $\mathbb{E}c1$ h6 36.a4 $\mathbb{E}e8$ 37.f3 $\mathbb{E}f8$ 38.a5 $\mathbb{W}g2\uparrow$ 39. $\mathbb{E}c2$ $\mathbb{W}xh3$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{E}e8$ 41.a6 $\mathbb{W}e6$ 42. $\mathbb{E}c6$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{W}d5$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{W}a2$ 46.b6 $\mathbb{W}a4\uparrow$ 47. $\mathbb{E}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$



48.b7 $\mathbb{E}g8$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{E}g2\uparrow$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{E}g1$ 51. $\mathbb{E}c8\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 52. $\mathbb{W}c4$ d3 \uparrow 53. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{W}d1\uparrow$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{E}e1\uparrow$ 55. $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ $\mathbb{W}xe1\uparrow$ 56. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{W}b1\uparrow$ 57. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{W}b2\uparrow$ 58. $\mathbb{Q}e3$
1–0

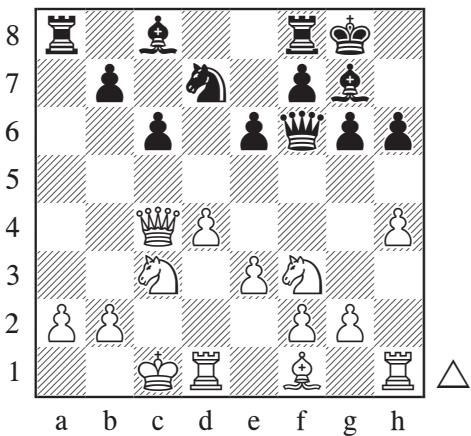
Be very wary of provoking the opposing king's pawn cover forward, if it involves strategic concessions on your part and you don't see a way to get to the king.

Why was it wrong to try to loosen the pawn cover in front of White's king? The weakness of the white king was far less important than the strategic concession of letting White play 16.b4, kicking the c5-knight away from the action in the center.

The previous example was clear cut, though it must be said that it was an International Master who went wrong. Let's look at another game where a strong player would have done well to avoid temptation.

Ivan Ivanisevic – Levon Aronian

Dresden 2008



The above position is unusual. I prefer White, as I don't think Black has much attacking potential in return for his pawn. But after White's next move, everything changes.

14.h5?

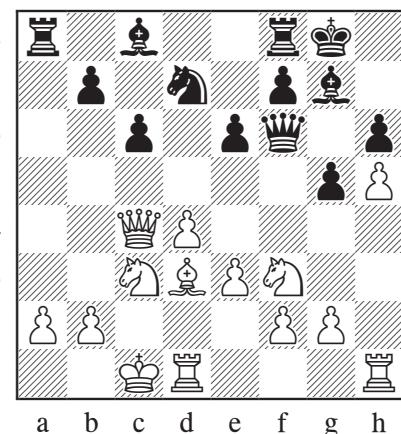
White pries open the b1-h7 diagonal. It might look like a normal move but is entirely incorrect. Once Black can play ...g6-g5, the knight on f3 will be much less secure. ...g5-g4 will hang over White's head. If the knight is booted away, White's center will lose support. Ironically the h5-pawn could become a weakness.

But most importantly, as we will see in the game, the weakening of b1-h7 diagonal is of meagre significance.

Simple play was prudent. With 14.Qd3 White would develop and continue to fight for control of the center. Black has practical chances, but just looks worse. I like extra pawns!

Of course, Black cannot allow h5xg6...

14...g5! 15.Qd3



15...Qb6

Not a bad move, but there was a stronger one, highlighting the drawback of the h-pawn advance.

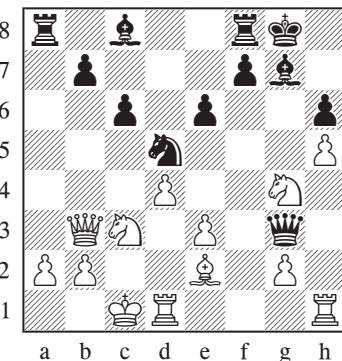
15...g4!

The game becomes more complicated, with the f2-pawn getting kicked.

16.Qh2 Qxf2 17.Qxg4 Qg3

White's position is under a lot of pressure and he needs weird computer moves to keep things under control. His advantage is long gone.

18.Qe2! Qb6 19.Qb3 Qd5!



The threats are very real.

20.Qh3!

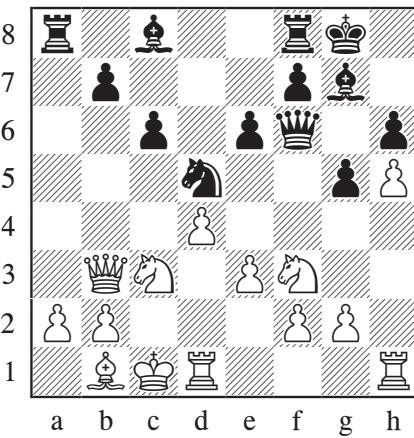
After 20.♘xd5? exd5 White loses material. The g4-knight is the glue that held the position together.

20...♝xg2 21.♝h2! ♝g3 22.♝hh1!

At the end of the line, White is okay. But it's "tough" for a human to find ♘h1-h3-h2-h1!

16.♝b3 ♘d5 17.♝b1

White prepares for ♝c2-h7. But how strong is this? Aronian is unfazed.



17...♝d8!

Black could not care less about the queen coming to h7. The king will step to f8 and that will be that. Black's attack is just getting started.

Now White allowed the center to be broken up, but his position was difficult no matter what he played.

18.♘e5

After 18.♝c2 ♘xc3 19.bxc3 ♝e7 Black has obvious counterplay, with ♝h7† being entirely toothless.

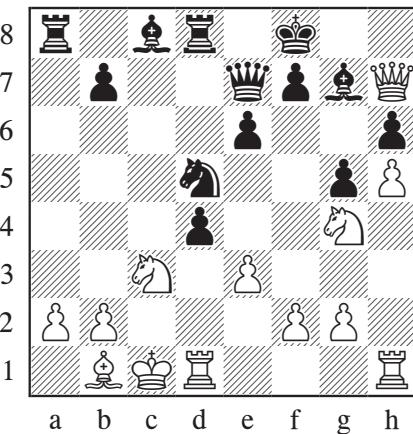
18...c5! 19.♝c2 cxd4! 20.♝h7†

Aronian lost no sleep over this invasion. The queen could just as easily be said to be misplaced here.

20...♚f8 21.♝g4

It looks like ♘xh6 could be a problem, but it only takes a little calculation to realize this is not the case.

21...♛e7



22.♘xd5?

White is not ready for 22.♘xh6? on account of 22...♞f6!–+ so he tries to exchange the d5-knight first. But this only opens more lines for the black pieces.

The only way to keep fighting was to take on d4 with the rook, as Black should not give up the g7-bishop. Still, after 22.♝xd4! ♘xc3! 23.bxc3 ♞xd4 24.cxd4 ♛a3† Black has at least a draw. His attack looks more dangerous than White's.

22...exd5 23.♝xh6

♛g8 mate is a major threat, but easy to deal with.

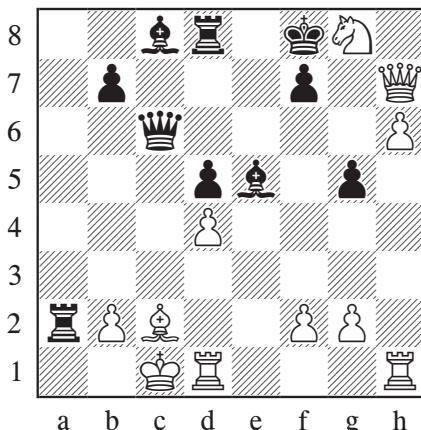
23...♞f6!

The knight cannot return to g4, and ♛g8† leads nowhere. So what then?

24.♝g8 ♛c6† 25.♝c2 ♞xa2

Around here, it should be clear whose attack is more dangerous. Aronian won in short order.

26.h6 ♜e5 27.exd4



27...♜a1† 28.♔d2 ♜f4† 29.♔e1 ♜e8†
30.♔f1 ♜xd1†

0–1

Grandmaster Ivanisevic would have done well to heed the warning of the third guideline. Often a queen landing on h7 against a kingside castled king is the end of the world. But in this case, it was just a check. But allowing the black pawn to come to g5 gave him additional resources connected with the ...g5-g4 advance. He did not use them, but it was at least one more thing for White to worry about and had an important strategic influence on the game's direction.

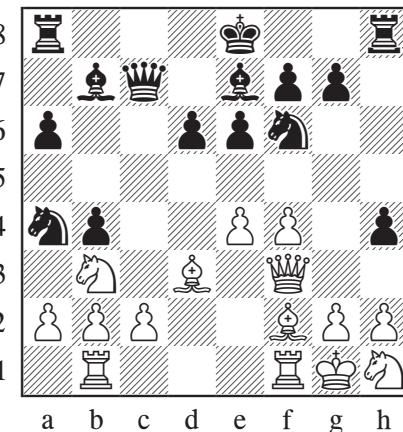
The third guideline suggests that h4-h5 could be incorrect for such reasons. White would have been better off with simple play.

Several games in this chapter feature critical moments when compelling an opponent's pawn forward demands that we advance one of our own. Such instances see the intersection of multiple themes which we have discussed in earlier chapters. The previous two games both featured moments where the guidelines from earlier chapters could have been used to avoid making an ill-fated pawn move. Of course, there are certain situations when

we have the option of advancing a pawn to achieve an objective, such as opening up the enemy king position, while making some sort of concession in return. These are the hardest cases to judge. One must be able to weigh up the benefits and costs.

Christopher Debray – Levan Aroshidze

Barcelona 2012



Black has a pleasant Sicilian middlegame, but it's not obvious how to continue. Castling short is not possible if the h4-pawn is hanging; castling long is the wrong direction. Black's pieces are on good squares. He has the ...h4-h3 advance at his disposal, threatening ...hxg2, forcing the g-pawn to move. This will loosen White's king cover, but also gain kingside space for him. He can try to boot the f6-knight away with g2-g4-g5, without opening files. Plus, it frees the g3-square for the stranded knight. So, the drawbacks of advancing the h-pawn are clear, but if it leads to checkmate, it should be played.

17...h3!

Black plays the most energetic option. White had only one response.

18.g4

But this allowed Black to show his idea.

18...d5!

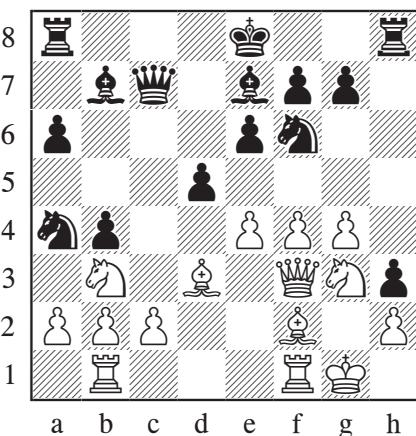
Suddenly, the long diagonal is blasted open, seemingly out of nowhere. White is in for a rough ride.

19.♕g3

The best move in a difficult position.

White would love to keep the center closed with 19.e5, but after 19...d4! 20.♗e2 ♗c6! he cannot prevent a catastrophe on the long diagonal.

It looks like White is defending his weaknesses, but Black introduces new problems:

**19...♝h4!**

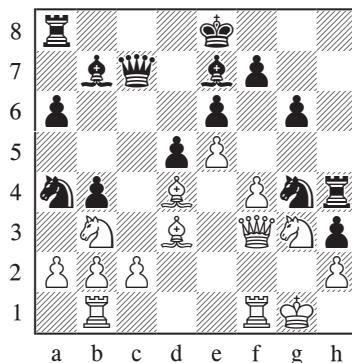
Taking advantage of the knight blocking the f2-bishop's access to the h4-square. The pawn on g4 is hanging and cannot advance due to ...♝xf4.

20.♕d4?

White errs, although his position was difficult in any case.

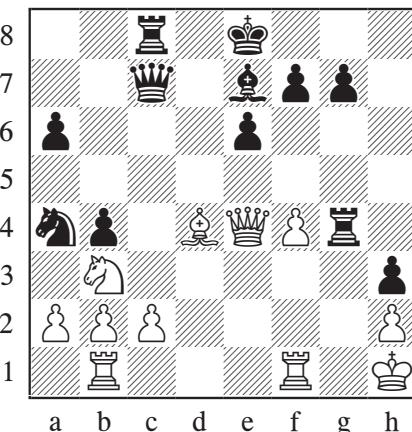
White should have taken his one and only opportunity to keep the position closed with 20.e5! after which the ...d5-d4 push will no longer dominate the long diagonal, due to ♘g3-e4, after which the d-pawn becomes

soft. Still, Black can grab the g4-pawn with a pleasant position: 20...♝xg4 21.♕d4 g6+



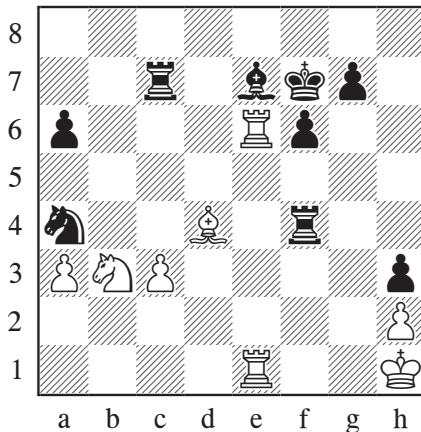
Black is a solid pawn up and White has no notable counterplay. But this was better than getting mauled on the kingside without a fight.

20...dxe4 21.♕xe4 ♜xg4† 22.♔h1 ♜xe4 23.♔xe4 ♜xe4 24.♗xe4 ♜c8



The dust settles and there is nothing to discuss. White is a pawn down, has a wretched structure, passive pieces and a hopeless king position. Aroshidze removed any randomness and easily won the endgame.

25.c3 ♜c6 26.♗xc6† ♜xc6 27.♗f3 f6 28.a3 bxa3 29.bxa3 ♜c7 30.♗e1 ♔f7 31.♗fe3 ♜xf4 32.♗xe6



32... $\mathbb{Q}f1\#$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ $\mathbb{Q}b2$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}e3\#$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}a2$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}d2\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}xa4\#$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}a2$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}a1$

0–1

Certainly Aroshidze understood that 17...h3 had strategic drawbacks, allowing White to advance the g-pawn without fear of opening the h-file and so on. But he concluded that his attack was strong enough to justify the strategic concessions, and indeed, the white king immediately came under fire. One must calculate some key lines to justify a move like 17...h3, but they were not especially deep or demanding. Once you notice that 18.g4 is well met by 18...d5, and that 19. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ is met with 19... $\mathbb{Q}h4$, you already have enough to justify advancing the h-pawn. This brings us to the final guideline on the subject.

If you can loosen your opponent's king position, but it involves strategically dubious pawn advances, you should evaluate your immediate attacking chances and calculate accurately to see if the pawn advance is justified. If you find no clarity, leave the pawns as they stand.

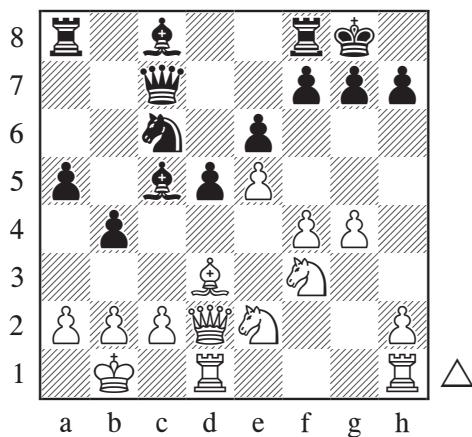
It's a shame to let go of an opportunity to open lines to your opponent's king, but this guideline can help you avoid mistakes. When applied to the game above, we see that 17...h3 was justified due to the attacking chances. Against the best defense, Black netted a pawn by force.

But in Ivanisevic – Aronian, the h4-h5 advance did not give White any serious attacking chances. But it did have the unfortunate drawback of allowing ...g6-g5.

Exercises

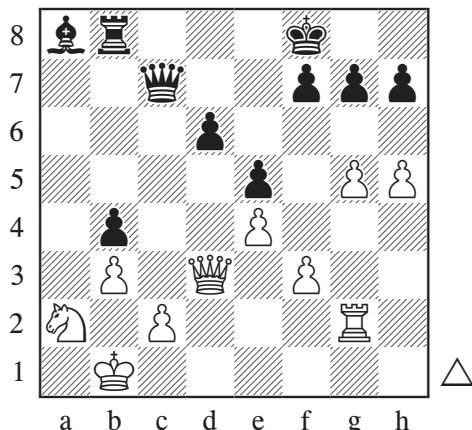
As usual, we will conclude with two puzzles.

Alexander Areshchenko – Rasmus Svane, Gjakova 2016



Both sides must be prepared for an all-out attacking race. How should White proceed?

Veselin Topalov – Garry Kasparov, Novgorod 1995

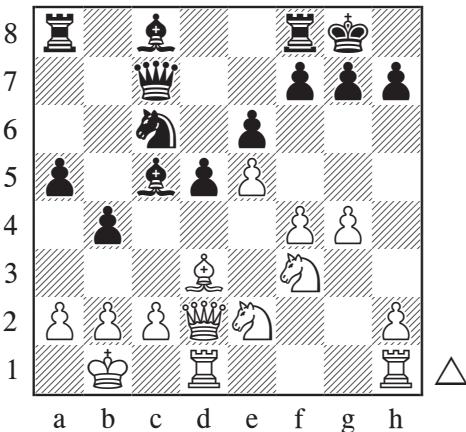


White played 29.g6, loosening the cover around Black's king, but also allowing Black to create a passed pawn with 29...fxg6 30.hxg6 h6. Do you approve of his choice, or do you have a different idea?

Solutions

Alexander Areshchenko – Rasmus Svane

Gjakova 2016



Black's kingside is not full of targets or useful squares for White to attack. His pawn cover is solid. But Areshchenko finds an excellent way to loosen the cover and open lines.

16.♗g5!

A simple threat; White wants to take on h7. It cannot be ignored, but Black is also unhappy about moving a kingside pawn.

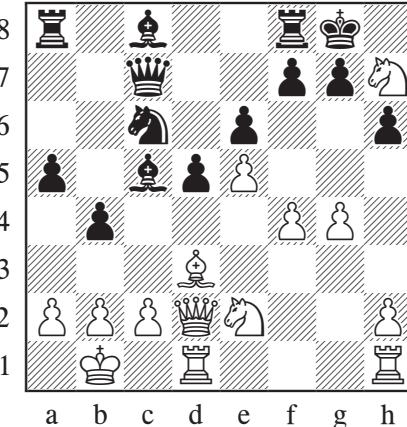
16...h6

A sad necessity.

It is worse to block the bishop. After 16...g6 17.h4! White will follow up with h4-h5, when the attack plays itself.

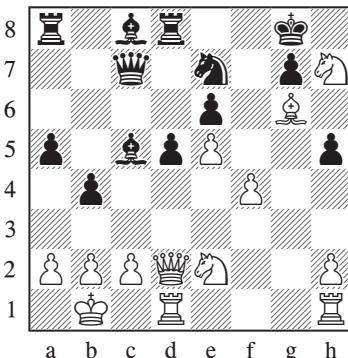
17.♗h7!

In such positions, retreating is not an option! White gains a tempo on the f8-rook. Next up the files will open.



17...♝d8 18.g5! hxg5

Black should have tried to keep lines closed with 18...h5, but this also weakens the kingside even further. After 19.g6! White has a strong attack. Black would like to have his h-pawn back on h6! For example: 19...fxg6 20.♗xg6 ♜e7

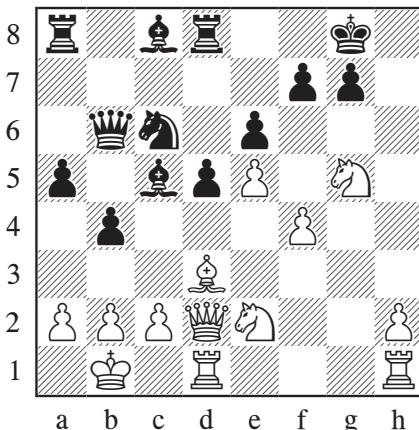


21.♗d3 White is much better.

19.♗xg5

One of the pawns covering the black king has been exchanged. The g-file has been opened, but this is a less important factor, as White cannot use it effectively with the black bishop still on c5. But the disappearance of the h-pawn is a very big deal, as Areshchenko expertly demonstrates.

19...♚b6



20.♕e1!

Time to bring in the heavy pieces...

20...b3 21.cxb3 ♕f2 22.♕f1 ♔b4 23.♔c3?!

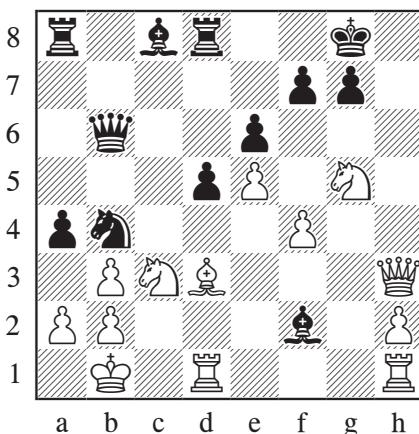
A little slow, but Black is still in poor shape.

There was no need to wait around. 23.♕h3! wins quite quickly.

23...a4?

Black missed his only chance to prevent the white queen from reaching the h-file with 23...♕e3!. Black is much worse, but the game goes on. At least White does not have ♘h3 just yet. Strongest is probably 24.♔h7† ♔h8 25.♗d3! ♗xd3 26.♗xd3±, when the twin threats of ♗g5xf7 and ♗c3-d1 are hard to meet.

24.♕h3

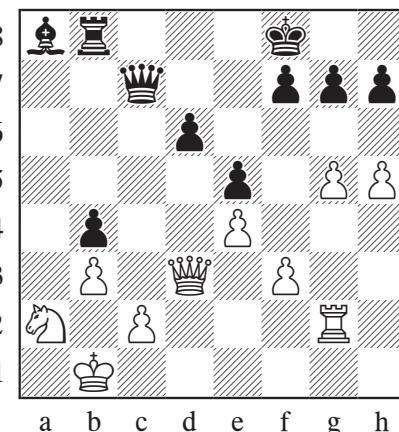


The black king is not long for this world.

24...axb3 25.a3 ♗a2 26.♗b5 ♕a6 27.♗h5 ♘b7 28.♗d6 ♘c7 29.♗h7† ♔f8 30.♗xe6† 1–0

Veselin Topalov – Garry Kasparov

Novgorod 1995



29.g6?

Allowing Black to get an outside protected passed pawn while fixing the pawn on the light square is a poor strategic decision. White should only play like this if he has a direct way to get to the king. As it happens, no such way exists.

White should indeed have been loosening the pawn cover around Black's king, but he had a better way to do so, without allowing strategic defects.

29.h6!

White forces Black's pawns onto light squares, critically weakening the dark squares, which the bishop cannot defend. In addition, there are no strategic defects connected to this advance, as Black gets no protected passer and no white pawns will be fixed on the black bishop's squares.

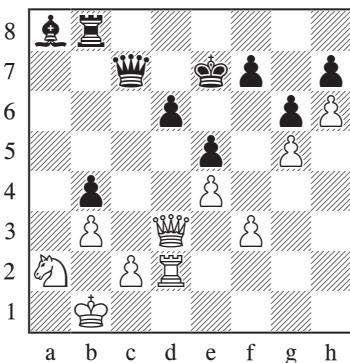
29...g6

Black tries to keep the kingside closed, but White has mechanisms to open lines.

30.♗d2!

White invites the king to the center...

30...♔e7

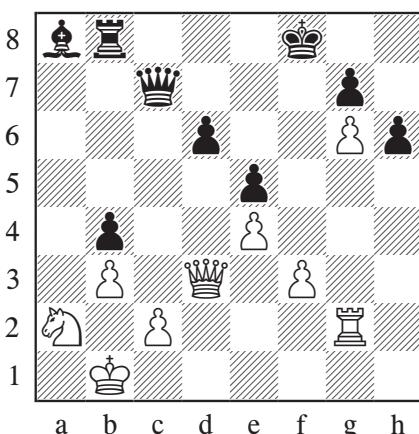


And then blows up the position!

31.f4!±

Black is under a lot of pressure. His pieces are restricted because the b4-pawn will require constant protection and he has weak dark squares to worry about.

29...fxg6 30.hxg6 h6†



31.f4

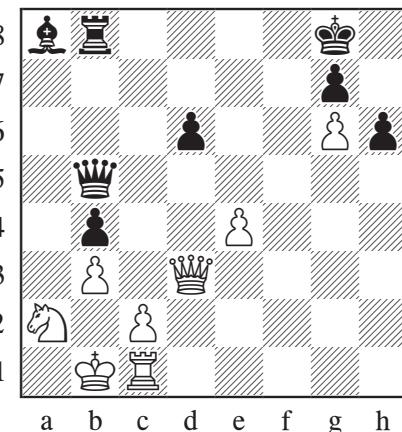
White tries opening the position, but the situation is very different from the lines above. Black is not weak on the dark squares and

can comfortably hide the king on g8 without worrying about the white queen invading via d4 to g7 or h8.

31...exf4 32.♗f2 ♔g8 33.♗xf4

The bishop on a8 lives: the e-pawn is a target, and potentially the g-pawn as well.

33...♚c5 34.♗f1 ♚b5 35.♗c1



White has made strategically dubious decisions, leaving him with a tough defense. A tactical oversight caused even more problems that proved impossible for Topalov to solve.

35...♚e5!

Black wins the e4-pawn as 36.♗e1 is well met by 36...d5.

36.♗c4† ♔h8 37.♗h1 ♕xe4!

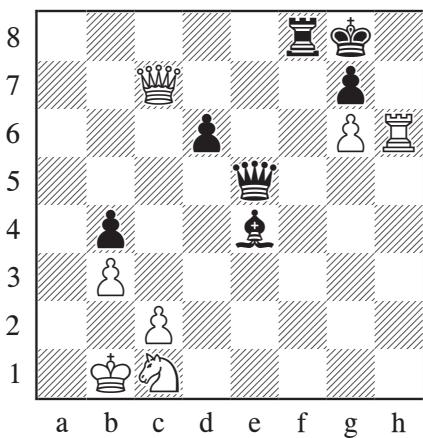
Well calculated, and brave.

38.♗c7

It looks like the tables have turned. White is threatening both ♜c7xd8† and ♗h1xh6†, but Kasparov was ready for it.

38...♗f8 39.♗xh6† ♔g8!

No checks, no discussion. Black's king is safe as houses. It is White who will soon be mated.

40.♕c1

The final touch was exquisite.

40...♝xc2†!

White resigned. He will be mated after 41.♕xc2 ♜f2† and if he captures with the queen on c2, there is no mate and Black can grab the rook on h6.

0–1

Chapter 10

Breaking a Dam

At long last, we have reached the final chapter discussing pawns not moving backwards. As has been the case with the previous four chapters, we will be discussing the reciprocal of an earlier topic. This time, it will be forcing an opponent's pawn to step forward in order to create a hook for our own purposes.

We already saw a couple of cases of this in the previous chapter, where Black was compelled to push pawns in front of his king in a way that made a hook as well as loosened the king's cover. Indeed, when speaking about hooks, they are most commonly used to open lines towards the opposing king. But they are also prevalent in more positional struggles as well, particularly in closed positions when each side is trying to make progress on one side of the board before their opponent can do so on the opposite side.

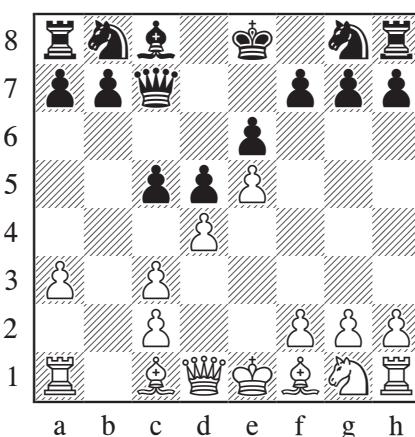
To introduce the topic of provoking pawn hooks, we will start by discussing the development of opening theory in a variation which was topical a few decades ago.

French Winawer

The past

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Qc3 ♜b4 4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♜xc3† 6.bxc3 ♜c7?!

6...Qe7 is the main line and the best move.



The text move used to be a reasonably common sideline of the Winawer French back in the 90s, but Black suffered some brutal defeats and it has almost completely fallen out of Grandmaster practice. Let's look at one of the lines which has caused problems for Black.

7. $\mathbb{W}g4$

White continues with his standard plan against the Winawer. The queen sortie to g4 creates the primitive threat of $\mathbb{W}g4xg7$ which can be easily parried, but each way of doing so requires Black to make a concession of some kind. Black's next move reveals the point of his previous move.

7...f5

What could be more natural? The queen on c7 now defends the g7-pawn, and Black even gains a tempo as White's queen is forced to move. But we will soon see the weaknesses that start popping up in Black's camp.

Black should probably take the opportunity to transpose to the Winawer Poisoned Pawn with 7... $\mathbb{Q}e7$, leading to extremely complicated positions which lie outside of our topic.

8. $\mathbb{W}h5\#!$

It should be noted that 8. $\mathbb{W}g3$ is the recommendation of my friend and fellow Quality Chess author, Parimarjan Negi, in his excellent repertoire series on 1.e4 for White. I don't disagree with his claim that White is better, but I find the text move even more appealing.

Just like $\mathbb{W}d1-g4$, $\mathbb{W}g4-h5$ creates a simple threat which turns out to be annoying to deal with. Black is in check, and he certainly does not want to move his king and give up on castling this early in the game. He could block with his queen on f7, but this would involve

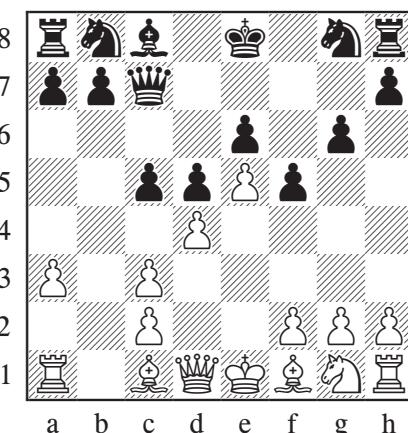
moving her away from the excellent c7-square, where she pressures the white queenside along the soon to be opened c-file.

For the above reasons, by far Black's most common move has been:

8...g6

But now the point of White's play will be revealed.

9. $\mathbb{W}d1$!



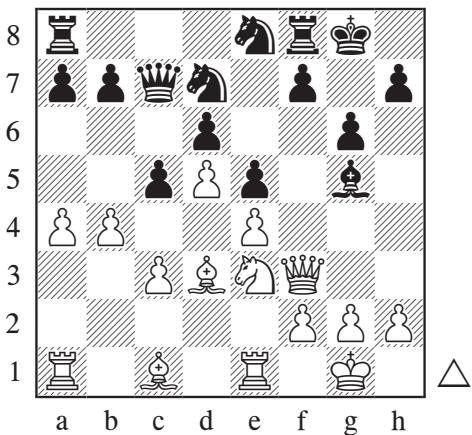
We have reached the same position as the initial one after 6... $\mathbb{W}c7$, except instead of moving one of his own pieces, White has effectively chosen to play the moves ...f7-f5 and ...g7-g6 for his opponent. These pawn advances are extremely undesirable for Black from a strategic point of view. Even though we are still early in the game and neither side even has a minor piece developed, the position will clearly be closed or semi-closed and the pawn structure is already defined. White's central pawn chain points towards the kingside, which is undoubtedly where he should be trying to play, and Black has now given him two hooks to use on f5 and g6. Both g2-g4 and h2-h4-h5 are credible short and long-term plans, while Black will struggle to make anything real happen on the queenside. In practice, his

results have been abysmal, and the line has been almost completely abandoned.

Of course, we seldom get the chance to create such hooks in favorable circumstances by simply reciting opening theory – if the idea has become known as theory, then a well-schooled opponent will know about it and avoid it. Still, we can use the same principles in all kinds of middlegame situations. For instance, I like the following clinic that Eugenio Torre put on against Krasenkow in the mid-90s.

Eugenio Torre – Michal Krasenkow

Manila 1995



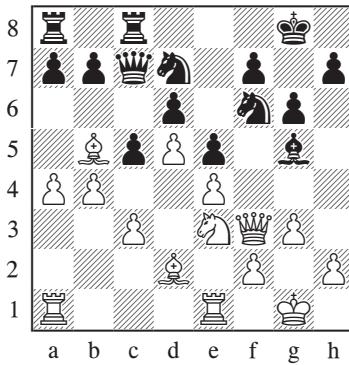
White has played well in the opening and early middlegame. He enjoys a pleasant position due to his bishop pair and space advantage, but it is not at all trivial to come up with a way to make further progress. The position is still largely closed as all the pawns remain on the board, and the only hook White currently can use to try to open lines is the c5-pawn. For the moment though, taking on c5 would be a clear positional error, gifting Black an excellent outpost for his knight and leaving White with a weak, backward c3-pawn. Instead, Torre finds a way of provoking Black into opening the position in a more fruitful way.

16.♗b5!

Now White can consider something like ♗b5xd7, removing a key defender of the c5-pawn, and then meeting ...♘c7xd7 with b4xc5, ending up with a protected passer. Krasenkow obviously didn't like the look of this, but his next move is a concession.

16...cx_b4

I would have preferred to try and remain solid with 16...♝e6, although Black's position remains unpleasant here too. The last move blocks any counterplay with ...f5, and the bishop on b5 remains annoying. Play might continue: 17.♗d2 ♜fc8 18.g3!

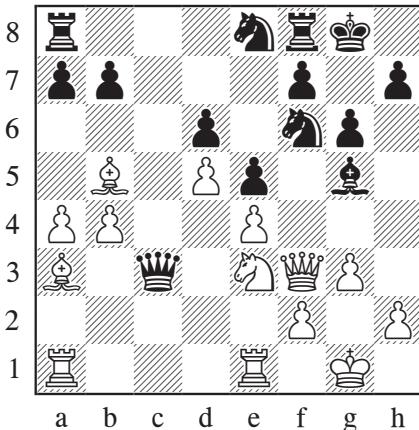


White is ready to expand on the kingside with h2-h4. Once the g5-bishop is booted away, Black's knights on f6 and d7 will be clumsily placed, and the b5-bishop will continue to exert pressure on them. Even my computer wants to play ...a7-a6 at virtually every moment possible, suggesting that Torre's move served its purpose of provoking the second hook.

17.cxb4 ♜c3

Black tries to make something of the newly opened c-file, but to no avail.

18.♗a3 ♛df6 19.g3



19...a6?!

Tempting as it may be to kick the bishop away, I believe Black should have avoided making a fresh hook on the queenside. Now White has a simple plan of playing a4-a5 to fix the a6-pawn as a hook, and then opening more lines on the queenside by means of b4-b5.

A waiting move such as 19...h5 would have been better, although 20.a5! saddles Black with a difficult decision. If he plays ...a6, he creates a hook just like in the game. And if he does nothing, he will have to worry about a5-a6, which will force the b6-pawn to advance and critically weaken the c6-square. An unfortunate lose-lose situation for the second player!

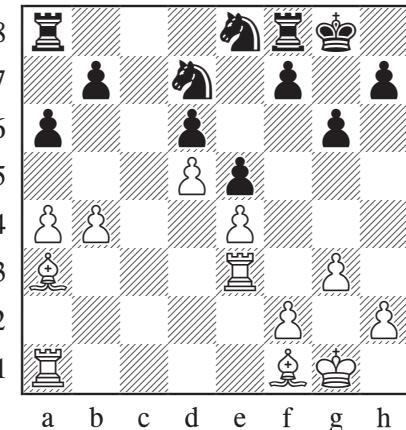
20.♗f1

White simply retreats, and suddenly he has an easy plan to blast open the queenside with a4-a5 followed by b4-b5. Black's position looks reasonably solid at first glance, but in reality it is nearing collapse, as there is not much he can do to prevent White's plan.

20...♗xe3

I don't love trading off another bishop unprovoked, but I can hardly suggest a better move.

21.♕xe3 ♕xe3 22.♗xe3 ♔d7



Black tries to engineer some counterplay with ...f7-f5, but it is too late and far too little. White's kingside and center is plenty solid; and without queens, the chances of Black's counterplay threatening the king are close to zero.

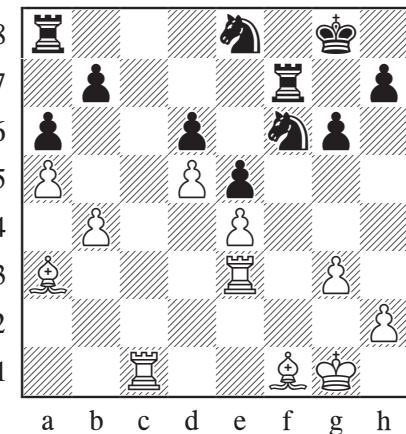
23.♗c1 f5 24.f3 ♔f7

White has no invasion squares along the c-file, so he loosens Black's defenses and opens more lines with the simple plan outlined earlier.

25.a5!

The hook on a6 will be Black's undoing, as he cannot prevent b4-b5.

25...fxe4 26.fxe4 ♔df6



27.♕h3!!

White switches direction and targets the e6-square. It was not necessary, but still a fine move and enough to bring in the full point.

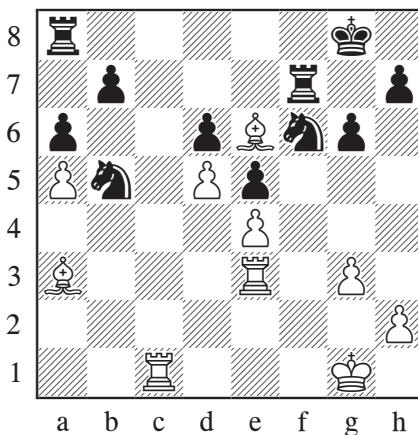
27.b5 axb5 28.♕b4± was most consistent with White's earlier strategy.

27...♝c7

Black focuses his energy on preventing b4-b5 by controlling the square further... and White simply does not care.

28.b5! ♕xb5

White's last move uncovered an attack on the d6-pawn, so Black had to capture this way.

29.♕e6

Black's rook is pinned and he actually resigned here, presumably disgusted with his position. I would have expected him to play a bit longer, but there is no doubt that his position is objectively losing.

1–0

When considering the initial position at move 16 of the above game, it was hard to imagine that Black's passive but solid-looking position could be broken down so quickly. A lot of his problems came from two pawn hooks: first the c5-pawn, which took on b4 and opened the c-file; and later the a6-pawn, which enabled the final breakthrough.

Although the two previous examples featured totally different positions – one with White wanting to play on the kingside, the other on the queenside, and with completely different pawn structures – the key principles are largely the same. In closed or semi-closed positions, it is a serious detriment to have a pawn hook on the side in which you are worse. As such, our first guideline is a basic one, and a direct reciprocal of the same guideline found on page 101.

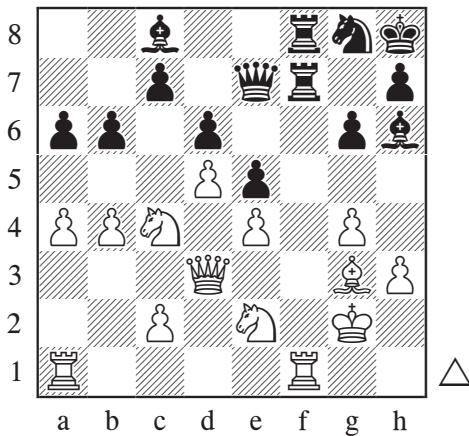
In a closed (or semi-closed) position where you are stronger on one side of the board and weaker on the other, it is often a good idea to try to provoke your opponent to make a hook on your stronger side.

In the above two examples, even though both the queen and bishop ended up retreating to their respective home squares after $\mathbb{W}d1-g4-h5-d1$ and $\mathbb{Q}d3-b5-f1$, the role they served on their sorties was clearly highlighted by the pawn hooks they provoked.

In closed positions, usually there is not so much going on that you will need to pass up an opportunity to force a hook on your opponent's weaker side. However, such cases do exist. For instance, take the following example:

Didier Leuba – Tony Miles

Lugano 1989

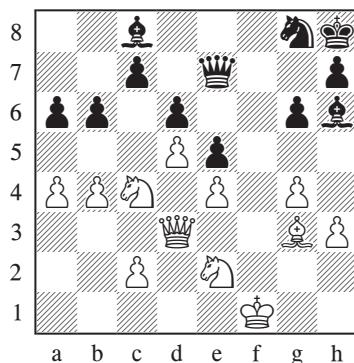


Black has abandoned his queenside and White can easily create a hook by advancing with a4-a5, compelling ...b6-b5, after which he can retreat the knight and look to open things up with c2-c4. Strategically this is a fine plan, but we also need to consider our opponent's ideas.

25.a5?

White plays on the side of the board where he is better, but underestimates his opponent's attacking chances.

White is actually a little worse no matter how he plays, but he could have minimized his problems by exchanging off some attackers: 25... $\mathbb{E}xf7$ $\mathbb{E}xf7$ (25... $\mathbb{W}xf7$ only delays White's plan by a single move: 26. $\mathbb{Q}g1!$ and the rook comes to f1 next, trading more pieces) 26. $\mathbb{E}f1$ $\mathbb{E}xf1$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xf1$



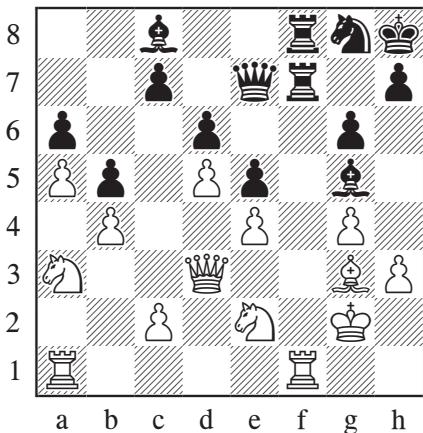
I would take Black here, but the game is far from over. Even if he manages to prepare ...h7-h5 to break open the kingside, he has nowhere near as much attacking power as in the game.

25...b5! 26. $\mathbb{Q}a3$

White has made a hook on the queenside, but he is still a few tempos away from creating meaningful threats there. In the meantime, Black will run rampant on the other side of the board.

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

White has a hook of his own on g4, so Black prepares to launch an attack with ...h5.



27.c4

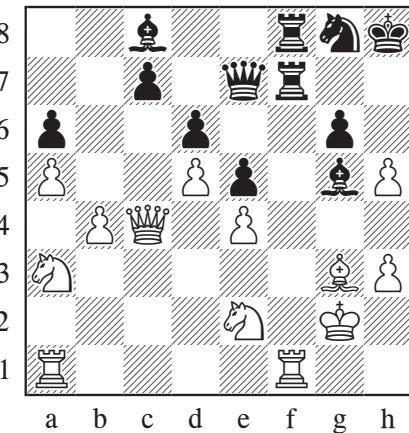
White continues on his merry way...

27...bxc4 28.♘xc4

Black cannot stop the b4-b5 advance, which will leave him with an abysmal structure on the queenside and White with a dangerous passed a-pawn. However, none of that matters if White's king perishes while his house burns to the ground.

28...h5! 29.gxh5?

This allows a tactical refutation but the game was beyond saving anyway. Black now has a plethora of winning moves, but I like the energetic way in which Miles continued.



**29...♕xh3†! 30.♔xh3 ♕xf1 31.♕xf1 ♕xf1
32.hxg6 ♕f6 33.b5 ♕f3**

With mate imminent, one can only imagine how little Miles cared about his compromised queenside pawn structure and White's potential passed a-pawn.

0–1

This was a clear case of White becoming too preoccupied with his own play to realize that there were much more important things going on. As such, he should have prioritized defending against his opponent's threats, and only resorted to the a4-a5 mechanism later. This is a reasonably common error, and we have another guideline to try to avoid it.

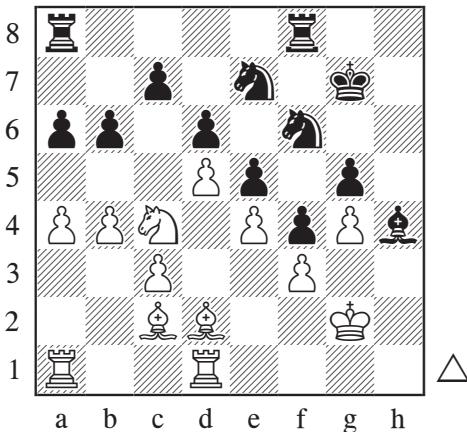
Before pursuing your own attacking plans in a closed (or semi-closed) position, think about what your opponent is trying to achieve. If he is ready to break through your defenses, then look for a way to nullify his play before returning to your own attack.

You only want an all-out race if you are confident you will win the race. If you are set to lose the race, it is better to try to stop an opponent in his tracks, neutralize his play, and only later proceed with your own plan. In closed positions, it is unlikely that the character of the game will change on the other side of the board, so once you have everything under control you can proceed as planned.

Let's see another example of the same a4-a5 thrust, compelling ...b6-b5, but where White handled the position more patiently.

Magnus Carlsen – Oluwafemi Balogun

Tbilisi (1.1) 2017



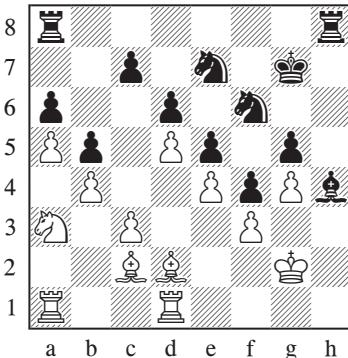
Much like the previous example, White has the same plan of playing a4-a5 to force ...b6-b5, followed by using the hook on b5 to open the queenside with c3-c4. Rather than rushing with his own plans though, Carlsen realizes that this idea will always be there in reserve, and he is aware that there are still some dangers lying on the kingside.

28.♘h1!

I really like this move. White's only kingside problems are the potentially weak f3-pawn and the possibility of his king being harassed by a knight check on h4, or (if things get really bad) by invading enemy rooks. By regrouping with ♘d1-h1, White is already contesting the only open file. Next he will bring his king to e2, where it cannot be kicked by ...♞e7-g6-h4†, and everything will remain defended.

Pushing on with the queenside plan immediately would have led to much more double-edged play. For instance:

28.a5 b5 29.♗a3 ♘h8!



White needs to be careful. If he ignores his opponent's play any longer, he will soon regret it.

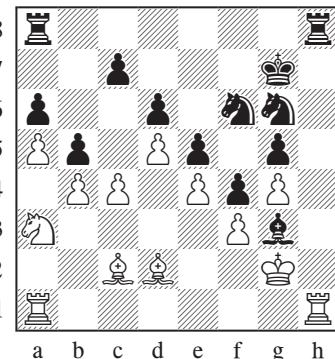
30.c4?

It is not too late to play 30.♖h1!, leading to something similar to the game.

30...♝g3! 31.♖h1

It is essential to guard against the rook invasion. If 31.cxb5? ♖h2† 32.♔f1 ♖ah8 White will be annihilated on the kingside long before the soon-to-be-passed a-pawn matters.

31...♝g6!



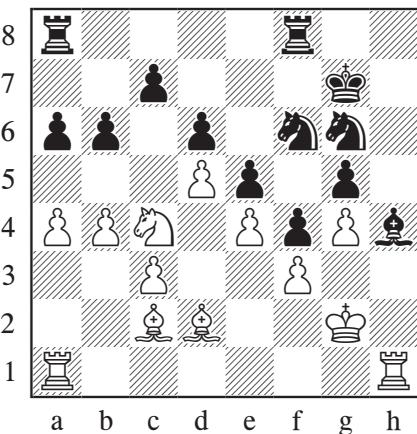
Black threatens to win material with ...♝h4†, and White has no good answer. He would love to consolidate his kingside by playing ♔g2-e2, but this is not a legal move, and of course White cannot take two steps to get there since ♔g2-f1 is not to be recommended. As such, Black's counterplay cannot be contained, and the game remains messy.

32.cxb5 ♖h4† 33.♖xh4 ♕xh4 34.♕h1 ♕xh1
35.♕xh1 ♕h8† 36.♔g1 ♕h2 37.♔c3

Anything could happen here. My computer screams equal, but any result would be possible in a human game.

28...♗g6

Black proceeds with his kingside play, hoping to play ...♕h4-g3 followed by ...♗g6-h4†, winning the f3-pawn. But White can parry this threat before it even becomes a threat!



29.♔f1!

White's king simply shuffles to e2, where it will keep the f3-pawn defended while avoiding a potential check on h4.

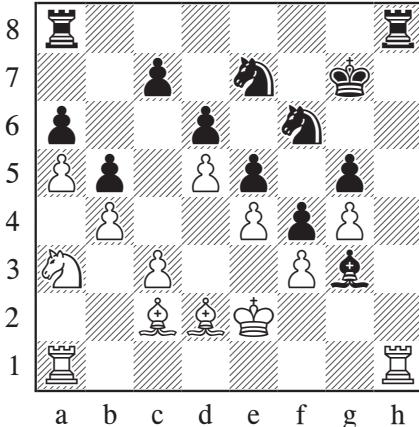
29...♕h8 30.♔e2 ♗g3

Now that White has solidified the kingside and does not have to worry about any threats there, he proceeds with his own queenside play.

31.a5! b5

A pawn hook has now been created.

32.♗a3 ♗e7



33.c4

Like clockwork, White uses the hook to open the queenside. Black is positionally busted and he failed to offer much resistance.

33...c6 34.dxc6 ♗xc6 35.♔c3 ♕xh1 36.♕xh1 bxc4 37.♗xc4 ♕b8 38.♗xd6 ♗g6 39.♗f5
1–0

Carlsen's approach fits perfectly with the recommendations of the second guideline. He correctly identified that his long-term plan should be to blow up the queenside with a4-a5 followed by an eventual c3-c4, but when considering the most direct continuations, he found that his opponent's counterplay contained real poison. With just a few prophylactic moves, he was able to neutralize all kingside counterplay. Once that was done, he turned his attention to the side of the board where he was better, and broke through alarmingly quickly.

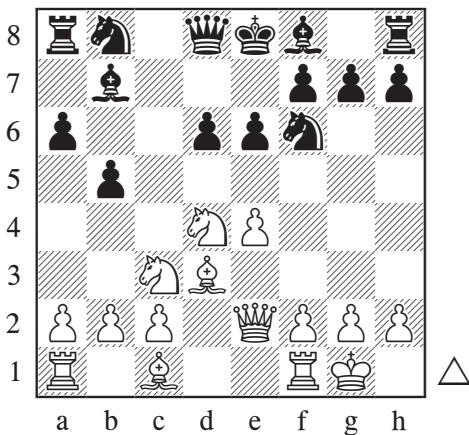
The difference between Carlsen's play and Leuba's is striking. The structure was quite similar and the exact same mechanism was available to open the queenside, but in both cases Black had counter-chances on the kingside. Had Leuba followed our second guideline, his chances would have improved considerably. As for Magnus, he knew to

follow the guideline. I promise you, during the game, all he was thinking about when playing $\mathbb{E}d1-h1$ and $\mathbb{Q}g2-f1-e2$ was my voice in his head explaining the proper way to handle closed positions. I take full credit for his victory.

Although provoking a hook is often the correct course of action in a closed or semi-closed position, it can also be a useful tool in positions with fluid pawn structures. Take the following example.

Ilya Smirin – Tomasz Markowski

Plovdiv 2003



Black has a strategically harmonious position. He can develop his pieces to strong squares with ... $\mathbb{Q}f8-e7$ and ... $0-0$, with the b8-knight coming to either d7 or c6. Should this be accomplished, he may even be better coordinated going into the middlegame.

The pawn structure is fluid and I don't think either side can really claim to be better or worse on either the kingside or queenside, but it is still in White's interest to make a pawn hook in the position because he has a lead in development. A lead in development is a temporary advantage which will evaporate if not used, and the best way to make use of it is to open lines.

9.a4!

White had other decent moves but I like this one the most. Black is compelled to advance his pawn to b4, where it will require protection and become a hook that White can use to open lines with c2-c3.

9...b4

Of course Black would not want his pawn structure to become crippled after 9... $bxa4?$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}xa4\pm$. Not only has Black given himself an isolated a6-pawn, but the queenside has also been opened while he is still behind in development.

10. $\mathbb{Q}a2$

Already Black faces a minor dilemma. The pawn is hanging on b4 and, while it can be easily defended, Black must lose more time instead of developing.

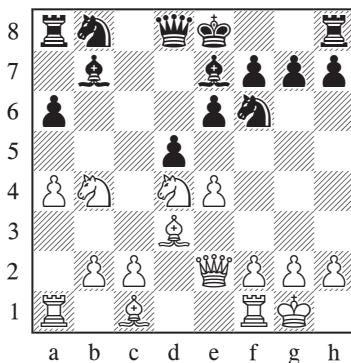
10...d5

I am sure Black was not thrilled about blocking in his own bishop, but each of his options comes with a drawback of some kind.

It is worth noting that Black could not ignore the threat to the b4-pawn.

10... $\mathbb{Q}e7?$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ d5

If Black does not play this immediately, he will simply be a pawn down. Unfortunately for him, White has a powerful reply.



12.e5! $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}g5!$

Material will soon be equal but White has a promising attack, for instance:

13... $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$

Black is just one move away from castling, but it will not happen.

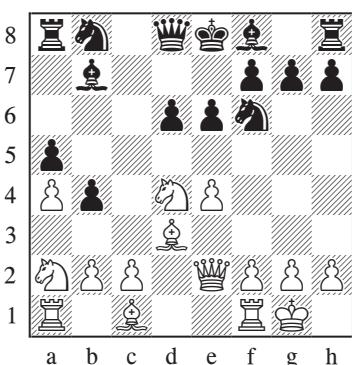
15. $\mathbb{Q}b5!$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d3$

Black is still in the game, but he is under some pressure due to his king position.

Another option was:

10...a5

This is more solid than the line above but Black still has problems after:



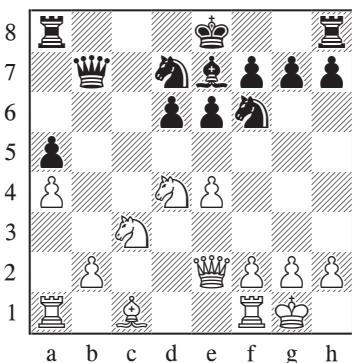
11.c3!

Black is ill-equipped to deal with the queenside opening, since he is behind in development. Strategically he is fine, but concretely he is running into trouble.

11... $\mathbb{b}xc3$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$

Black is one tempo away from castling to freedom, but it will not be allowed without a concession.

13. $\mathbb{Q}b5!$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}c6!$ $\mathbb{W}c8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{W}xb7$

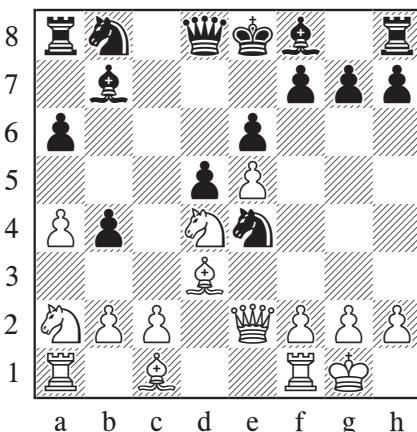


16. $\mathbb{W}b5\pm$

Black's position would be fine if he could play ... $\mathbb{W}b7-c7$, ...0-0 and ... $\mathbb{E}f8-c8$. In fact, I might even prefer his position. As things stand though, because the position opened up while he was still behind on development, he is unable to stop the d4-knight from landing on c6.

11.e5 $\mathbb{Q}e4$

Black is not doing badly from a strategic point of view. His bishop is blunted on b7, but he has taken some space in the center, the e4-knight is active, and White also has a bad piece on a2. Unfortunately for Black, he is still behind in development, and White uses the newly-made hook to open the position.



12.c3!

Here too, White had other good moves, but I like the direct approach best. White throws positional considerations out of the window and uses Black's overextended pawn to open the position.

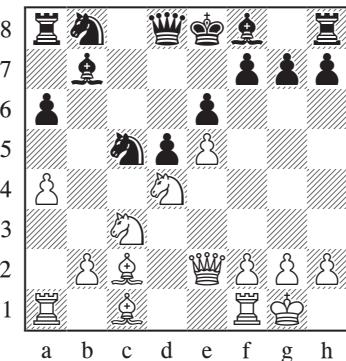
12... $\mathbb{Q}d7?$

It is understandable to want to complete development, but this move simply loses the b4-pawn.

Black had to bite the bullet with:
12... $\mathbb{b}xc3$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5!$

Black would love to exchange off some pieces, then complete development and castle, but he doesn't have time for it. If 13... $\mathbb{Q}xc3?$ 14.bxc3± the b-file is opened, so $\mathbb{Q}a1-b1$ will come next, and then f4-f5 will be extremely dangerous.

14. $\mathbb{Q}c2$



Now Black must once again eschew developing the kingside and try to exchange off the powerful d4-knight.

14... $\mathbb{Q}c6!$

Black really wants to get castled, but once again he is unable to find time. 14... $\mathbb{Q}e7?$ 15. $\mathbb{W}g4!$ The punches start coming and they won't stop. 15... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ (or 15...0–0 16. $\mathbb{Q}h6$ and White wins an exchange) 16.f4! White will crash through with f4-f5, and I doubt that Black will make it to move 25.

15. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 16.b4±

Black is still a bit worse, but he is certainly in the game.

13.f3!

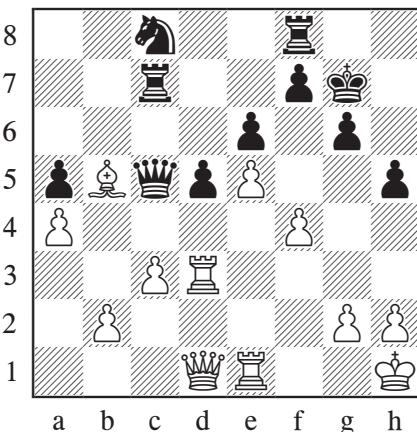
Before taking on b4, White pushes away the enemy knight, ensuring that the queen on e2 will be guarding the previously hanging pawn on e5.

13. $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 14.cxb4 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ is somewhat better for White, but I see no reason to keep the material count even.

13... $\mathbb{Q}ec5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xb4\#$

White is a pawn up and went on to win.

14... $a5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}bc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{W}b6$
17. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}b3\#$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}ae1$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$
20. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{W}xc5\#$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 22. $\mathbb{W}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$
23. $\mathbb{W}xb3$ 0–0 24. $\mathbb{W}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 25.f4 g6 26. $\mathbb{Q}f3$
 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ h5 28. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$



29.f5! $exf5$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{W}f2$ 31.e6 $\mathbb{W}xb2$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}d7$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 33.e7 $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 34. $\mathbb{W}d4\#$
1–0

Playing a2-a4 to compel ...b5-b4 was hardly a positional decision. The position was not closed, it had plenty of pawn tension, and there was no locked pawn structure to indicate which side of the board each side should be playing on. Instead, it was correct to create a hook because Black was not fully prepared for the opening of the position. While most cases of provoking a pawn advance are done for strategic reasons, it is dynamic reasons that bring us to our final guideline on pawns not moving backwards.

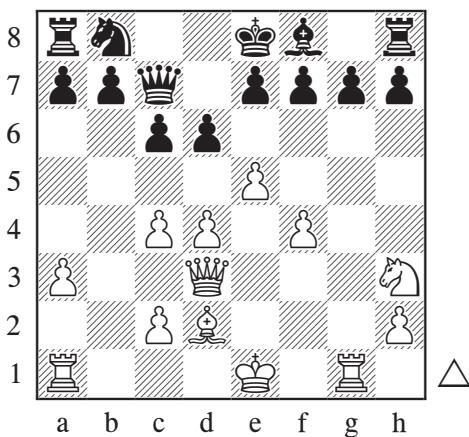
When applied retroactively, it is easy to see this guideline in action in Smirin's play. By using the b4-pawn as a hook, White presented his opponent with an unpleasant choice between giving up a pawn (as in the game) or giving White a strong initiative and attacking chances (as shown in the notes).

If you are ahead in development but you lack the open lines needed to generate concrete play, it is often worthwhile to try to open the position by provoking a hook.

Exercises

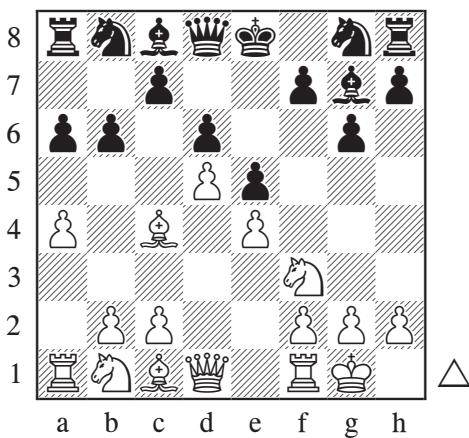
As usual, I will offer two test positions to conclude the chapter.

Daniil Dubov – Daniil Yuffa, Kolomna 2016



White is a pawn down but has an impressive lead in development. How can he best make use of it?

David Howell – Danny Gormally, Birmingham 2016

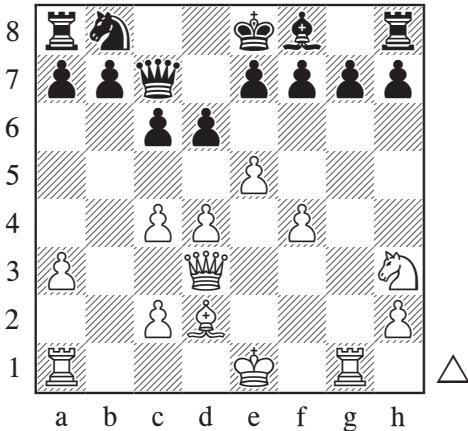


How should White proceed?

Solutions

Daniil Dubov – Daniil Yuffa

Kolomna 2016



White would like to open lines for his pieces to start wreaking havoc on Black's position before he can catch up on development, and the best way to do that is to force Black to advance a pawn to make a hook.

14.♘g5!

White threatens to win directly with e5-e6, so Black's reply is forced.

14...e6

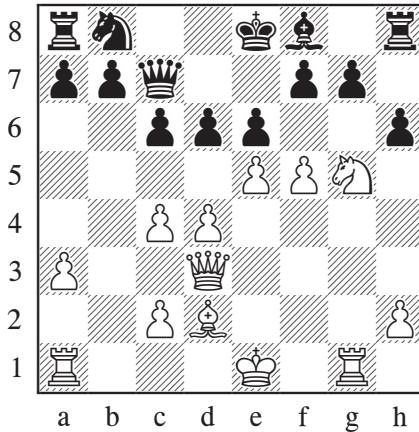
Black has prevented e5-e6, but his last move creates a hook which White expertly exploits.

15.f5!

The position is opening much faster than Black would like.

15...h6

15...exf5 16.♗xf5 gives White a winning attack.



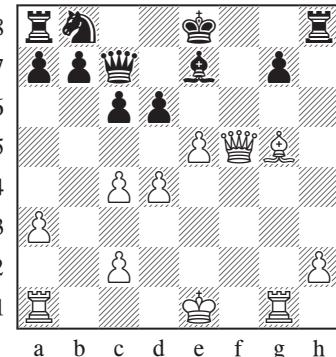
16.exd6

This is not bad and White remains clearly better, but he had a stronger option.

White could have sacrificed a piece with:
16.fxe6! hxg5 17.♗xg5!

The attack is far too strong to contain. Black cannot prevent the opening of additional central files, while all of his pieces remain undeveloped. The following line is not forced, but it gives a good illustration of White's attacking potential.

17...♝e7 18.exf7† ♚xf7 19.♗f5† ♚e8
19...♚g8? 20.♗e6† ♚f8 21.♗f1† ♚e8
22.♗f7+–

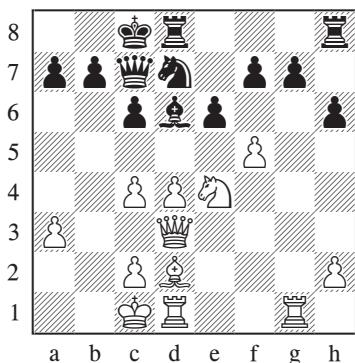


20.0–0–0!

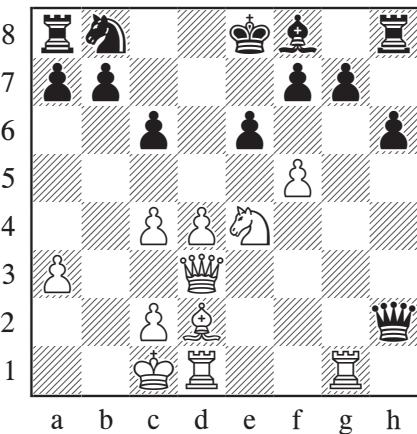
It should not take more than a glance at Black's position to realize he will not survive the coming onslaught.

16... $\mathbb{W}xd6?$

Black should have prioritized developing his pieces. After 16... $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ he is ready to castle queenside and find a safe haven for his king. Play continues: 18.0–0–0 0–0–0



19.fxe6 fxe6 20. $\mathbb{B}xg7\pm$ White has equalized the material and keeps the better chances due to his extra space and more active pieces. But unlike the game, Black avoids being mated on the spot!

17. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{W}xh2$ 18.0–0–0!

The attack rages on. Having your king in the center and no developed pieces apart from a queen deep inside your opponent's territory in a wide-open position is seldom a recipe for success.

18... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 19.fxe6 fxe6 20. $\mathbb{B}h1$ $\mathbb{W}c7$

Black is almost ready to consolidate by castling long, but one more forceful move ends that dream.

21. $\mathbb{Q}g5!$

The knight is immune from capture, and e6 is a point of conquest. Black was unable to offer serious resistance.

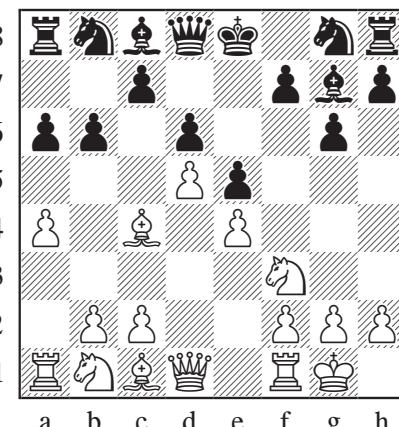
21...0–0–0

21... $\mathbb{W}d6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xe6!$ $\mathbb{W}xe6$ 23. $\mathbb{B}de1$ wins easily.

22. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{W}d6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{W}xa3\ddagger$ 24. $\mathbb{W}xa3$ $\mathbb{Q}xa3\ddagger$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{B}xd8$ 26.c5 b5 27. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{E}e8$ 28. $\mathbb{B}he1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 29. $\mathbb{B}xe8\ddagger$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}a2$
1–0

David Howell – Danny Gormally

Birmingham 2016



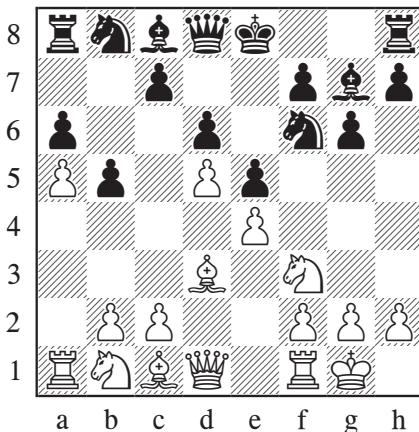
The position has a closed nature and White's central pawn chain is pointing toward the queenside, suggesting this is the part of the board he should be trying to open. Howell did exactly that by compelling a pawn to move forward and become a hook.

8.a5!

White had other ways of playing but I think this is the most direct and strongest. Of course, Black does not want to allow a5xb6.

8...b5 9.Qd3 Qf6

There is no time to waste and Howell opens the queenside right away, making use of the hook in Black's position.



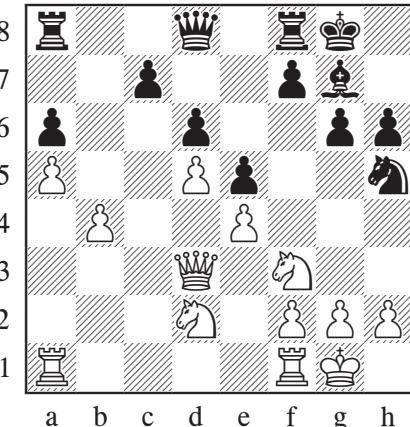
10.c4! bxc4 11.Qa4† Qd7

11...c6 was more resilient, although Black is still struggling after 12.Qxc4 Qd7 13.Qa3 cxd5 14.exd5, when it is not easy to develop the b8-knight.

12.Qxc4±

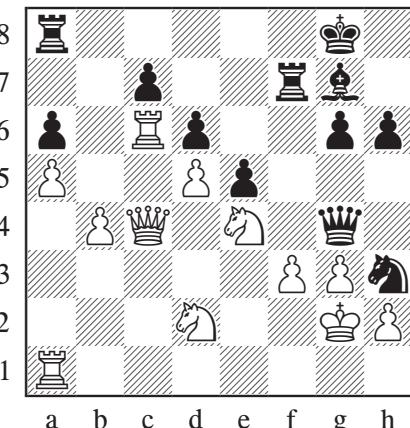
White has successfully opened the queenside, where he stands better, and can look to the future with confidence. Black never got any kingside counterplay going, and lost without much of a fight.

12...Qb5 13.Qc2 Qxd3 14.Qxd3 0-0
15.Qg5 Qbd7 16.b4 h6 17.Qxf6 Qxf6
18.Qbd2 Qh5



While Black fumbles around trying to open lines on the other side of the board, White is ready to bite down on the juicy queenside targets.

19.g3 f5 20.Qfc1 Qd7 21.Qc6 fxe4 22.Qxe4 Qg4 23.Qfd2 Qf4 24.Qc4 Qf7 25.f3 Qh3†
26.Qg2



26...Qxf3

After playing this move, Black resigned, having noticed that 27.Qf6† would win his queen. Obviously the last move was a blunder, but Black was positionally busted in any case.

1-0

Part III

Pawns Seldom
Move Sideways

Introduction

So far we have discussed in detail the five major reasons a pawn may find itself wishing it could move backwards, both with respect to keeping our own pawns on good squares and compelling our opponent's pawns forward. It's now time to move on to the next concept. Pawns seldom move sideways!

As we all know, doubled pawns come about when a pawn has made a capture and then sits in front of another pawn of the same color on the same file. They are not always a big deal and can sometimes even be an asset, just like a far-advanced pawn can also be an asset. But there are many times when doubled pawns can be a real hindrance. While it is possible for doubled pawns to be straightened out by making another capture (and this obviously does happen in chess) it takes a special circumstance of a trade and a recapture for that to happen. So, more often than not, doubled pawns are there to stay.

There are three major reasons doubled pawns can be problematic.

1. They can be ineffective at making a passed pawn
2. They can be vulnerable to attack
3. They can be rendered incapable of closing a line or fighting for a key square

The third reason is quite similar to some of the reasons we saw in the previous sections on pawns that advanced too far, but it definitely has its own unique qualities. We will be looking into each of the three reasons *twice*. First, we will look at how to avoid detrimental doubled pawns in our own position with respect to each reason, and then we will go back and look at how to double our opponent's pawns to make them feel the pain. Just like the contrast between Parts 1 and 2, Part 3 will be about avoiding unforced errors, while Part 4 is about forcing positional disadvantages on your opponent.

Chapter 11

Single-File Lines are Easily Blocked

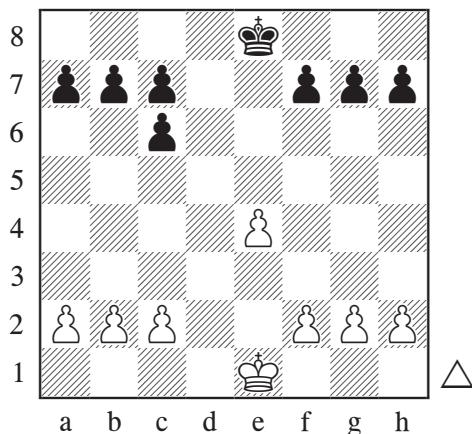
We have covered a lot of ground so far, talking all about pawns and their inability to move backwards. Based on what we have seen, an alien who picked up this book might think pawns can only move forward. But this is not the case. They can move sideways as well!

Sure, the pawn must be moving forward as well as sideways, but more importantly it will jump to a new file, which will change the nature of the structure and the ensuing battle, and it can only come back to its old file by making another capture. Much like choosing how far to advance your pawns, you must pay the same consideration to choosing which files they occupy.

The most basic case of pawns moving sideways to create an imbalance is doubled pawns, which we will discuss in the next part of the book. The only way a pair of pawns can become doubled is if at least one of them has moved sideways.

There is some stigma against doubled pawns, and they can undoubtedly be a liability for more reasons than one. The first one, which we will discuss in this chapter, is that they may be unable to make a passed pawn.

Let's examine the classic Exchange Spanish pawn endgame to see this in action.



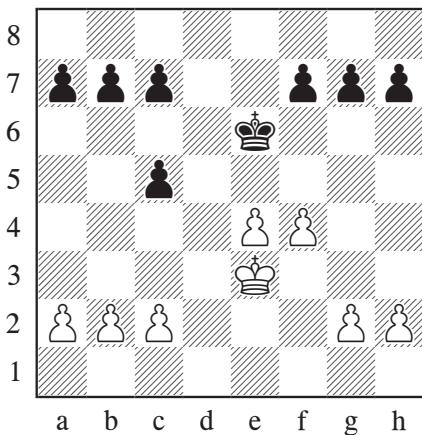
All the pieces have been removed from the board, and White has a winning king and pawn endgame due to Black's doubled pawns on the queenside. They will prove to be incapable of making a passed pawn, while White has a healthy kingside majority.

1.♔e2 ♔e7 2.♔e3 ♔e6

Both sides have brought their kings closer to the center. Now that they occupy their ideal posts, it is time for each side to set their pawns in motion.

3.f4 c5

White has more than one winning move here, and probably has more moves that win than moves that don't, but I will choose a direct one to illustrate the point.



4.c4!

Preventing Black's pawn majority from advancing any further.

4...c6 5.g4 b5

Black threatens the pawn on c4. White does not want to let it be captured, and has to make a choice about whether to exchange on b5 or defend the pawn with b2-b3.

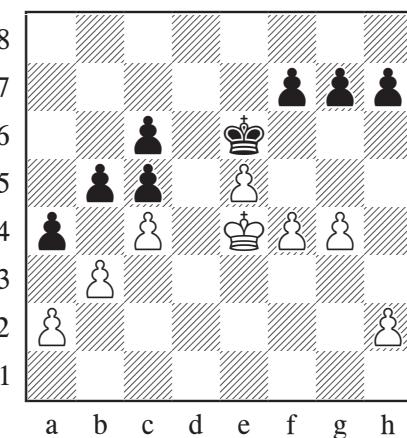
6.b3!

It should be clear that the c6-pawn and the c5-pawn do not really function as two pawns.

They are held back by one pawn on c4, and the c4-pawn cannot be removed.

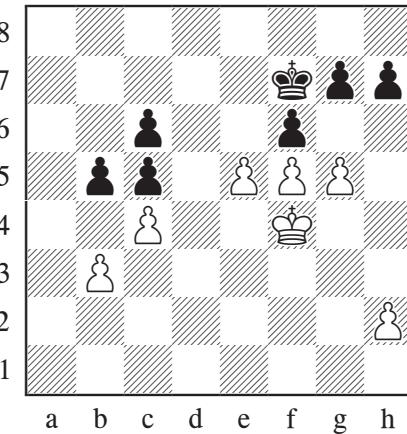
It would be a big mistake to accept the pawn exchange on Black's terms, as after 6.cxb5 cxb5 Black's pawns have been undoubled, and are now capable of making a passer.

6...a5 7.e5 a4 8.♔e4



Black is helpless. His queenside play accomplishes nothing, and White is breaking through in the center with his healthy majority.

8...axb3 9.f5† ♔e7 10.axb3 f6 11.♔f4 ♔f7 12.g5

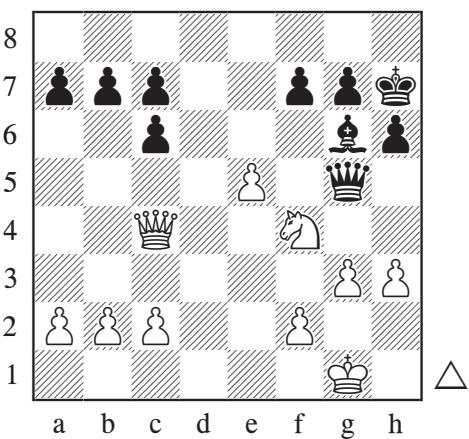


White wins.

This was a basic example, but it clearly demonstrates a potential drawback of having doubled pawns. Let's look at a real game where my future Olympiad teammate Ray Robson exploited the long-term drawbacks of a nearly identical pawn structure by forcing trades down to a pawn endgame.

Ray Robson – Alexander Ivanov

St Louis 2011



White has the standard Exchange Spanish pawn structure, and knew that a pawn endgame would be winning for him. So he began to try to exchange pieces.

24. $\mathbb{Q}xg6!$

Black obviously must recapture the knight, but he cannot do so in a good way.

24... $\mathbb{W}xg6$

Taking with the king would not change the evaluation, since Black would still be forced into a pawn ending.

24... $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ 25. $\mathbb{W}d3\ddagger$

Black would love to simply hide his king with a move like ... $\mathbb{Q}g6-e7$, but this is obviously against the rules. He must acquiesce to a queen trade, since running with the king would lead to mate.

25... $\mathbb{W}f5$

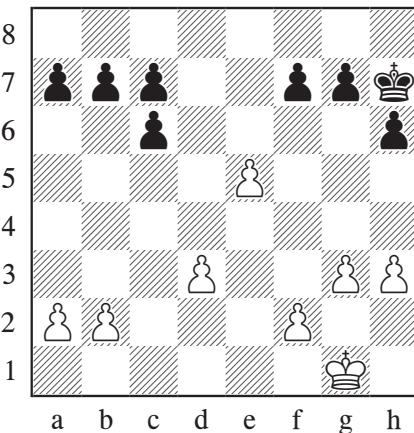
25... $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 26. $g4\ddagger$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 27. $\mathbb{W}g3\#$
26. $f4$ $\mathbb{W}xd3$ 27. $cxd3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$

We have transposed to the game.

Perhaps the most resilient option was to avoid a pawn endgame at all costs with 24... $fxg6$, but one look at the menacing e5-pawn should be enough to understand that Black is in big trouble. 25. $e6\pm$ I believe White should be winning, but at least with queens on the board there are some swindling chances.

Now all White has to do is trade the last set of pieces.

25. $\mathbb{W}d3!$ $\mathbb{W}xd3$ 26. $cxd3$

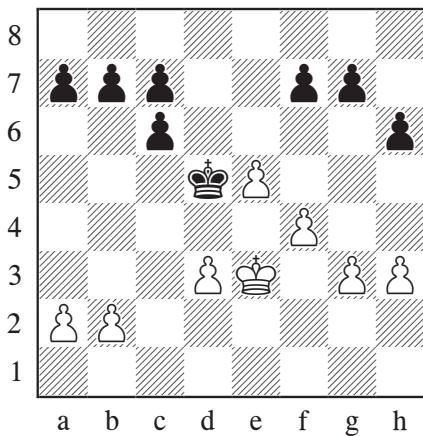


White has a healthy kingside pawn majority, but Black's queenside pawn majority is doubled and unable to make a passed pawn. Still, Black's king is more active and can take up a strong central role, which will force White to play accurately to win the game.

26... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 27. $f4$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$

It is not too easy for White to make progress here, since advancing with $f4-f5$ will always fail to ... $\mathbb{Q}d5xe5$, but the only way to defend the e5-pawn a second time is to play $d3-d4$, allowing Black to trade off his doubled pawn

with ...c6-c5. Positional rules and guidelines are helpful for chess development, but they need to be supplemented by concrete calculation. Robson now demonstrates the two tools side by side.



30.d4!

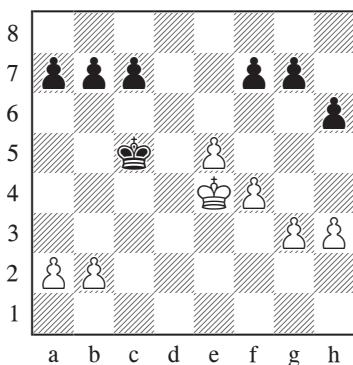
Didn't we just say that advancing d3-d4 will allow Black to exchange his doubled pawn with ...c6-c5? True, but concrete calculation justifies White's play. Black now has a dilemma – if he advances ...c6-c5, he will allow White's king to become incredibly powerful, but if he doesn't, he will still have doubled pawns that are unable to make a passer.

30...g6

The critical test of White's play must be:
30...c5

But after:

31.dxc5 ♜xc5 32.♗e4!



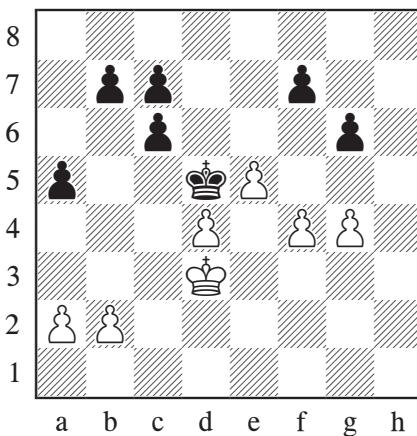
White has traded one advantage for another. Black no longer has doubled pawns, but he is terribly uncoordinated and White's king is the boss of the center. Black will have to retreat his king even further backward to even hope to set his majority in motion.

32...♝c6 33.f5 ♜d7 34.h4

Black's c-pawn no longer has another c-pawn in front of it, but it is still unable to advance because as soon as it hits the c5-square, ♜e4-d5 will come. The overwhelming difference in king activity means Black's majority is still unable to advance. White is winning.

31.♗d3 h5 32.g4 hxg4 33.hxg4 a5

Enough prep work has been done and White sets his pawns in motion.



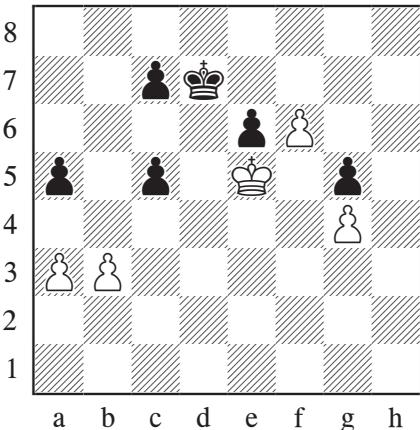
34.f5! g5

Trading the pawns instead would not have changed the character of the position: 34...gxh5 35.gxf5 c5 36.e6 fxe6 37.f6 ♜d6 38.dxc5† ♜d7 39.♗e4+–

35.b3 b6 36.a3 c5 37.e6!

The last finesse.

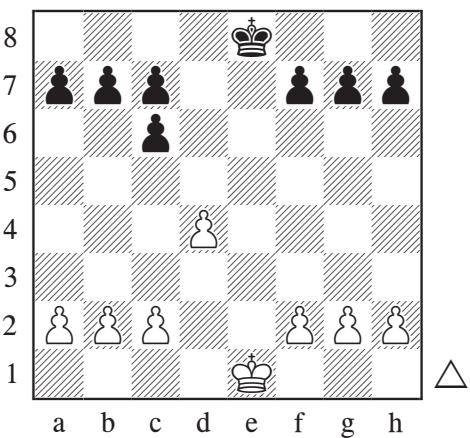
37...fxe6 38.f6 ♜d6 39.dxc5† bxc5 40.♗e4
♜d7 41.♗e5



Black is up a pawn, but he resigned. His extra pawn on the queenside will never be able to promote, and in the meantime, he is in a deadly zugzwang.

1–0

The main reason the doubled pawns were so problematic was that they were also on the side of the board where Black had his pawn majority. Let's alter the initial situation slightly.

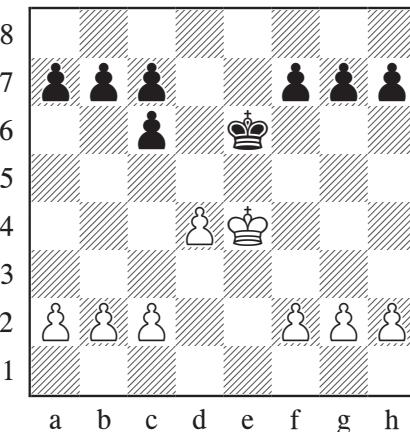


Black has the same pawn structure as in the previous example, but in this case, he is absolutely fine. The reason is that his doubled pawns are not fighting to make a passer. The queenside sees four pawns on four pawns, and the kingside sees three on three. Without any pawn majorities, there is no need to

be concerned about doubled pawns for the purposes of making a passer.

1.♔e2 ♔e7 2.♔e3 ♔e6 3.♔e4

White no longer has a plan of making a kingside passer, and nothing can be done.

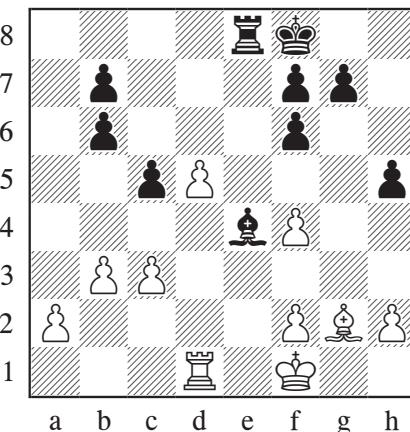


The game is drawn.

Clearly, the doubled pawns being on a part of the board where they were not supposed to form a majority changed the character of the position. Let's look at a real game that highlights the difference between doubled pawns on the weaker side and on the stronger side.

Sam Shankland – Oliver Barbosa

New York 2009



There are three sets of doubled pawns, but when I found my next move, I realized that only one set mattered. Should all the pieces come off the board, Black will have a kingside pawn majority that will be unable to make a passed pawn. White's doubled pawns are irrelevant because they are on his minority side, and Black's doubled b-pawns are irrelevant for the same reason. But the doubled f-pawns prove to be Black's undoing.

24.♕xe4!

Once I realized that a pawn endgame would be winning for White, it was not hard to find this move.

24...♝xe4

It looks like White is losing his f4-pawn and is in trouble, but some brief calculation shows a strong response.

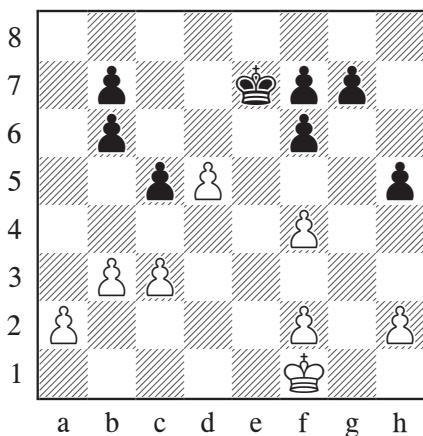
25.♜e1!

White threatens to exchange rooks, and Black can do nothing about it since leaving the e-file would allow White to queen the d-pawn.

25...♝e7

Black does not want a pawn ending, but there was no choice. If 25...♝xf4 26.d6 the d-pawn goes through.

26.♜xe7 ♕xe7

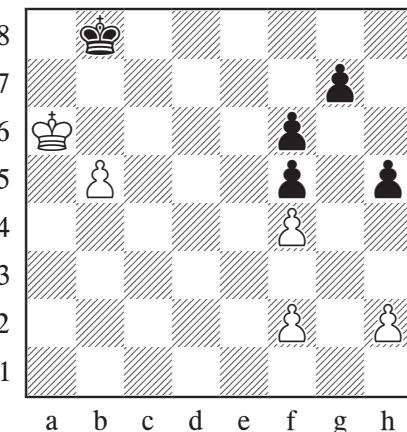


The rest of the game was straightforward. I ignored the kingside and proceeded with my own play on the queenside – this luxury was afforded to me by Black's doubled pawns being unable to make a passer.

27.c4 b5 28.cxb5 ♕d6 29.a4 b6 30.♕e2 ♕xd5 31.♕d3 f5

If Black had tried to set his pawn majority in motion, even allowing ...gxf4 would not help his cause. Following 31...g5 32.♕c3 gxf4 33.b4 the tripled f-pawns are no more useful than doubled f-pawns would be, or even a single f-pawn. Black is unable to make a passed pawn on the kingside, his four on two majority is worthless, and he can comfortably resign in view of the coming disaster on the other side of the board.

32.♕c3 f6 33.b4 ♕d6 34.a5 cxb4† 35.♕xb4 bxa5† 36.♕xa5 ♕c7 37.♕a6 ♕b8



Here I allowed Black to make a passed pawn, but I had calculated it all the way to the end of the game. My move compelled immediate resignation but it was not the only way.

38.h4

Black resigned in view of 38...g5 39.hxg5 fxg5 40.fxg5 h4 41.g6 h3 42.g7 h2 Black got his passer, but White queens first. 43.g8=♛†

White could also play in the same manner as a standard king and pawn ending, ignoring the kingside. 38.♗b6 g5 39.♗c6+– I could allow Black to make as many moves in a row here as he wished, as long as I am allowed to play f2xg3 once the g-pawn reaches that square. There is nothing he can do to make a passed pawn.

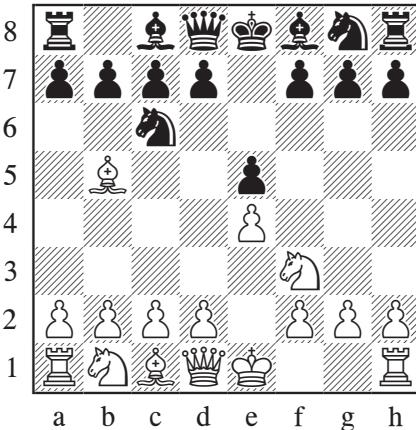
1–0

The striking difference between the above positions brings us to our first guideline about moving pawns sideways.

When choosing to double your own pawns, always consider if those doubled pawns are on the side of the board where you have a majority and can hope to make a passer. If they are, consider your decision carefully.

The closer the position is to a king and pawn ending, the more this guideline should be followed. While the long-term effects of doubled pawns on a side with a pawn majority do matter, when a bunch of pieces are on the board, they can generally be discarded in favor of more immediate priorities. For instance, if we were only concerning ourselves with the ability of doubled pawns to make a passed pawn, I could comfortably refute one of the most common openings in chess.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5

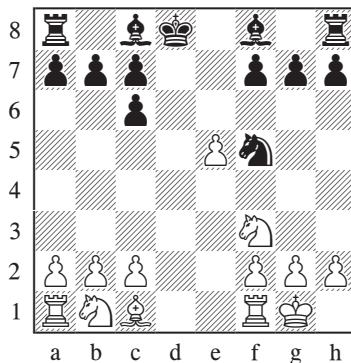


At this point, Black's two main moves are 3...♗f6 and 3...a6. Both allow White to achieve

the desired Exchange Spanish pawn structure almost by force. The most common move for Black is to challenge the bishop directly, and even invite White to take on c6.

3...a6

3...♗f6 4.0–0 ♗xe4 is known as the Berlin Wall, and it has remained the toughest nut for 1.e4 players to crack for several years. 5.d4 ♗d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♗f5 8.♗xd8† ♗xd8



At this point, White has a healthy four on three majority on the kingside while Black has an ineffective four on three on the queenside. A pure pawn endgame would be winning for White, but we are a long way from that. In the meantime, the pawn structure being changed to its current form has left Black with a healthy

bishop pair, and his unopposed light-squared bishop can cause a lot of problems.

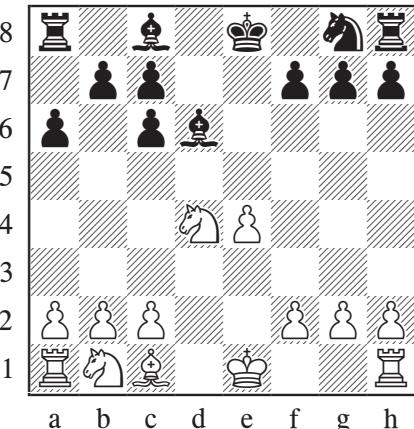
By contrast, White's e5-pawn is overextended because it could become a weakness and it blocks the c1-bishop's best diagonals (a1-h8 and h2-c7). There are long-term strategic risks for Black here and White has won his fair share of games, but practice has shown that the advantages Black has received by allowing the doubled pawns are sufficient to claim equal chances.

4. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $dxc6$ 5. d4

White is already forcing the Exchange Spanish pawn structure. But much like the Berlin Endgame, there is a lot that can happen between now and a pawn endgame.

5...exd4 6. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ $\mathbb{W}xd4$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$

Black is absolutely fine, and I might even prefer his position. His active bishop pair on a reasonably open board appeals to me more than the risk of White being able to exchange all the pieces.



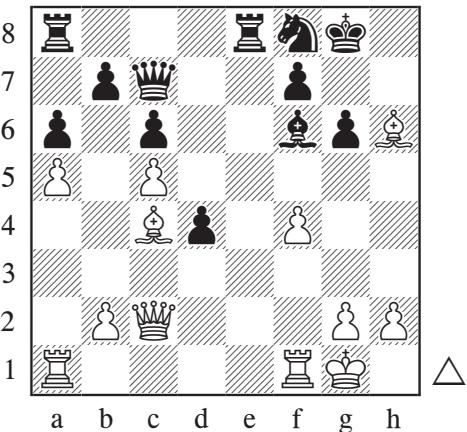
Of course, the Open games with 1.e4 e5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ cannot be busted by White prioritizing above all else his ability to make a passed pawn in a pawn ending – I consider move 5 to be a little too early to be so focused on queening pawns. This brings us to our second guideline.

The earlier you are in the game, the less likely the previous guideline is to matter. In the opening and early middlegame, it can often be ignored entirely in favor of paying attention to more immediate challenges.

It stands to reason that one should not worry about liabilities deep into the endgame when the middlegame battle suggests accepting a liability is the best course of action. The game can end before it becomes relevant, or the position can transform. Pawns can be won and lost, structures can change, and worrying about a pawn endgame from miles away when it seems unlikely to happen can be a recipe for avoiding correct continuations. For instance, I really like the following demolition executed by Wang Hao.

Wang Hao – Oliver Dimakiling

Abu Dhabi 2014



Black is in a bad way. He has a passed d-pawn, but that is his only asset, and it is hardly in a position to promote. White, on the other hand, has a healthy bishop pair, much more active pieces, and a menacing setup aimed at the black king. For the moment, his pawn majority on the kingside is healthy, but that changed on the next move.

23.♗g5!

White chooses the most direct continuation, and the only one that should guarantee a win. He challenges the f6-bishop and is ready to blast open the f-file with f4-f5, using the g6-pawn as a hook – a subject we already know about!.

23...♝xg5

By taking on g5, Black is forcing White to double his pawns on the side where he has a majority. But Wang Hao was unconcerned as there will be no pawn ending, or ending of any kind.

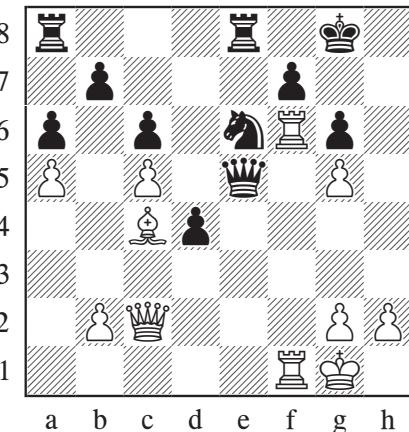
Attempting to avoid the bishop trade will not prevent the f-file from opening. 23...♝g7? 24.f5 Black is demolished.

Attempting to defend the bishop makes sense strategically, but it gets hit hard. 23...♝d8 24.♗b3! Simple and strong: f7 comes under direct fire, and in the meantime White can pick off the b7-pawn. 24...♝e6 25.♗xb7 White should win.

24.fxg5

White has opened the f-file and Black's kingside comes under siege. This is of far greater importance than some faraway vision of doubled pawns on the kingside struggling to make a passer.

24...♝e6 25.♗f6 ♛e5 26.♗af1



Black is getting crushed. His next move did not help matters, but he was likely to get mated in any case.

26...♝e7

A few moves after giving himself doubled pawns as a minor strategic concession, Wang Hao drops a hammer blow that ends the game on the spot. Black did not need to allow it, but other moves would not have saved him either.

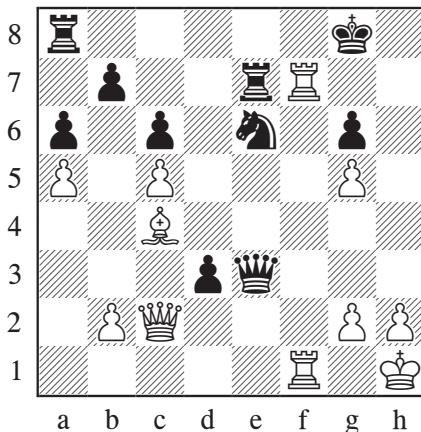
27.♗xf7!

White crashes through and the rook is immune.

27... $\mathbb{W}e3\#$

Taking the rook gets mated by force, with no side variations along the way. 27... $\mathbb{W}xf7$ 28. $\mathbb{W}xg6\#$ $\mathbb{E}g7$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xe6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 30. $\mathbb{W}h6\#$ $\mathbb{E}h7$ 31. $\mathbb{E}f8\#$ $\mathbb{E}xf8$ 32. $\mathbb{W}xf8\#$

28. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ d3

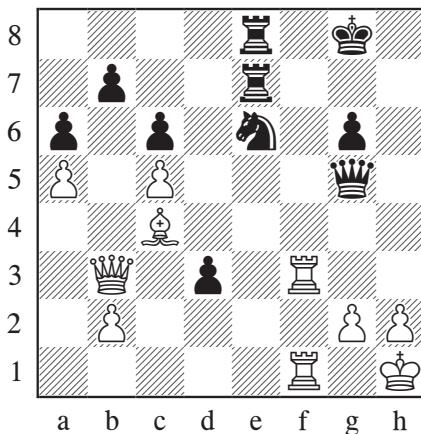


29. $\mathbb{W}b3!$ $\mathbb{E}ae8$

Once again, Black cannot take the rook. 29... $\mathbb{E}xf7$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xe6+$ —White will win the rook on f7 and remain a piece ahead, with a roaring attack to boot. I don't like to give engine evaluations, but +59 is pretty convincing!

30. $\mathbb{E}7f3$ $\mathbb{W}xg5$

Wang Hao's choice was easily good enough, but he missed a pretty checkmate.



31. $\mathbb{E}f6$

He could have made his win more aesthetically pleasing by finding the nasty idea: 31. $\mathbb{Q}xe6\#$! $\mathbb{E}xe6$ 32. $\mathbb{W}xe6\#$! $\mathbb{E}xe6$ 33. $\mathbb{E}f8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 34. $\mathbb{E}f7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 35. $\mathbb{E}h8\#$

31... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 32. $\mathbb{E}xe6$ $\mathbb{E}xe6$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$

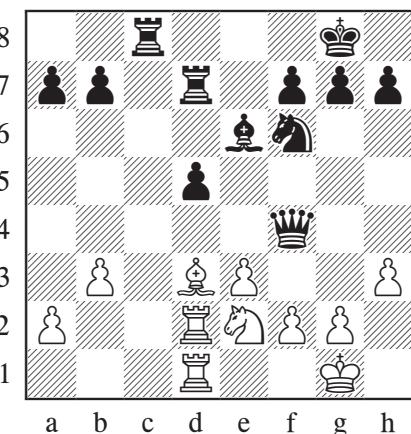
White is a piece up, and that is that.

33... $\mathbb{W}xc5$ 34. $\mathbb{W}xb7\#$ $\mathbb{E}e7$ 35. $\mathbb{W}c8$ d2
36. $\mathbb{W}f8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}g8\#$
1–0

It is easy to grasp that if you intend to decide the game in your favor within a few moves by a direct attack, pawn structures of any kind should not be a concern. But there also can be times when more long-term positional considerations can take precedence, even in positions with somewhat reduced material. I remember playing next board to a clear example of this principle in action, and I was surprised by White's decision.

Giorgi Kacheishvili – Michael Roiz

Las Vegas 2013



White obviously must recapture the queen. While watching the game, I was expecting him to immediately play $\mathbb{Q}e2xf4$. What could be

more natural? He would get a pleasant position where he could play against an isolated queen's pawn forever. But Kacheishvili landed on the stronger recapture after some deliberation.

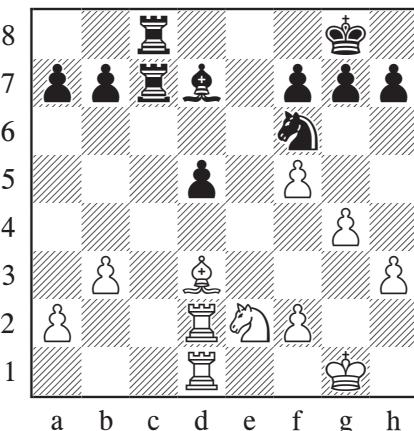
22.exf4!

White doubles his pawns in such a way that he will be unable to make a passed pawn in a pawn endgame. But he has clear positional reasons to somewhat compromise his own structure. First, Black's majority is now a one on zero; he simply has a passed pawn on d5. White can easily evaluate, based on piece placement, that the pawn will not be advancing far for a long time. In the meantime, he is already threatening to win a piece with f4-f5, forcing Black to lose time. He can then use his kingside pawn majority to great effect, rushing it down the board to push the black pieces backward. He won't make a passed pawn, but he will gain a lot of space.

22... $\mathbb{E}dc7$

Let the pawns be set in motion!

23.f5! $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 24.g4!



24...h6

It may be best to try to contest White's kingside pawn mass with 24...g6. But after the simple 25.fxg6 fxg6 26.Qf4 White has

undoubtedly his kingside pawns and kept a much superior structure. Not only is the d5-pawn weak, but Black's kingside could become vulnerable too.

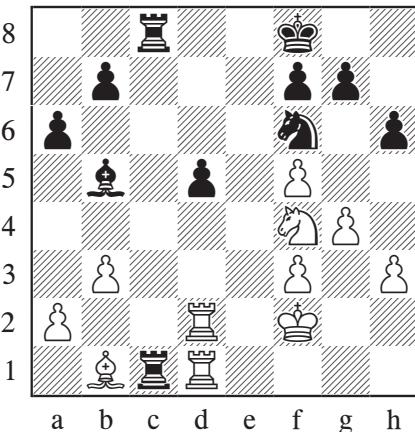
25.f3!

White proceeds with another strong move, both limiting the f6-knight's scope and preparing for h3-h4 followed by g4-g5.

25... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ a6 27. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}f4$

Already the d5-pawn seems doomed to fall... if White even cares enough to take it!

28... $\mathbb{E}c1$



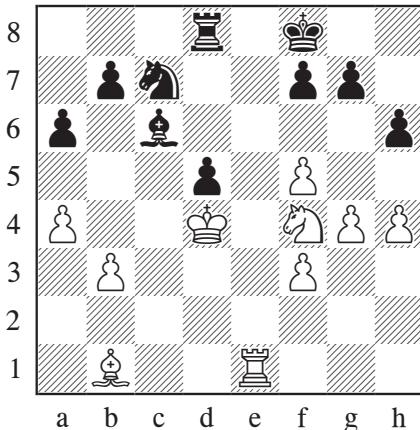
29.h4!?

White does not rush, but he also did not need to be so patient.

There was nothing wrong with taking the pawn right away. 29.Qxd5±

29... $\mathbb{E}xd1$ 30. $\mathbb{E}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{E}d8$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 34.a4

I find the above position picturesque. White achieved absolutely everything he wanted. His kingside pawns have taken a vast amount of space, and his pieces are incredibly strong compared to their black counterparts.



34... $\mathbb{R}e8$ 35. $\mathbb{R}xe8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$
37. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}d4$

I can hardly conceive of a playable move for Black. He is basically in some combination of stalemate and zugzwang. Black desperately tried to stop White from fixing the a6-pawn as a weakness with:

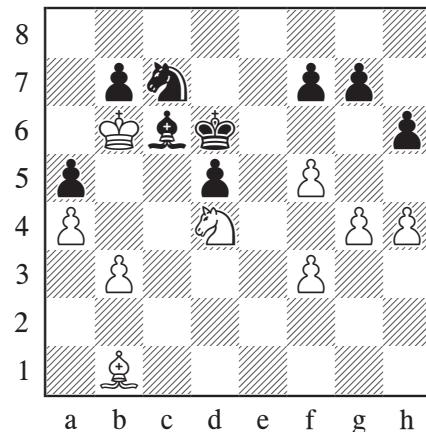
38...a5

But the pawn simply fell once the king came in.

Trying to wait would not have helped. 38... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 40.a5!+– Black is in a deadly zugzwang. He cannot avoid the loss of

a pawn, as the knight moving will lose the a6-pawn and the king moving will allow $\mathbb{Q}d4xc6$.

39. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$



40.f6

1–0

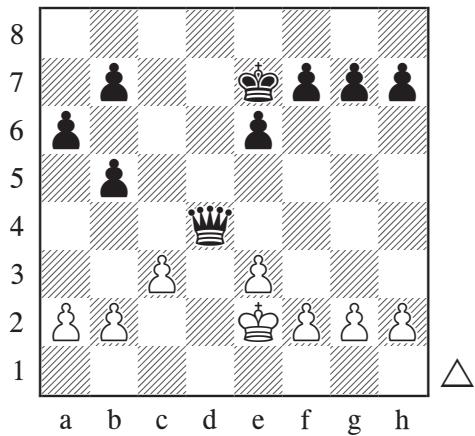
The strategic dominance White achieved far outweighed Black's passed pawn on d5, compared to White's inability to make a kingside passer. There were good reasons for White to take on f4 with the pawn, and he made a convincing case for the merits of $e3xf4$ in the game. This brings us to our final guideline.

In an endgame, if there are clear and good reasons to double your pawns in a way that they cannot make a passer, it is worth considering and may well be correct. But do not do it for no reason.

Exercises

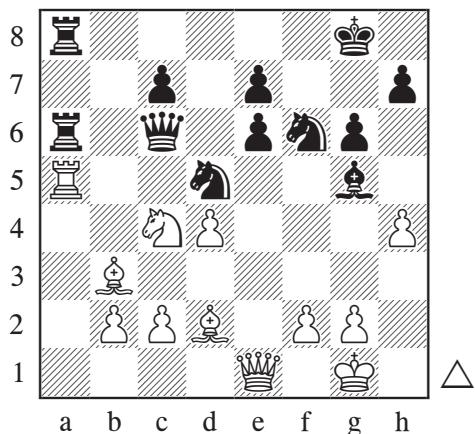
As usual, we will conclude this chapter with two puzzles.

Training Position



How should White capture the queen?

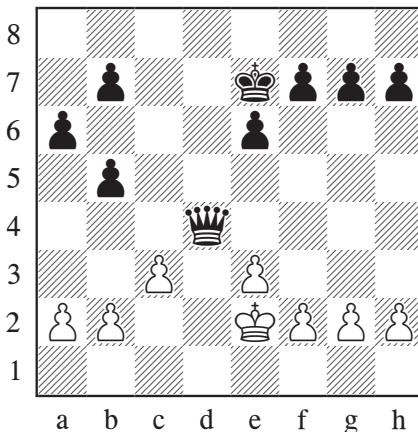
Alexander Grischuk – Alexander Riazantsev, Moscow 2009



In the game, White recaptured on g5 with his h-pawn, potentially worsening his ability to make a passed pawn on the kingside. What do you think of his decision?

Solutions

Training Position



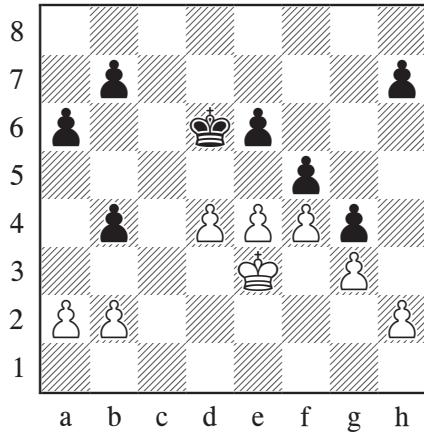
Black has doubled pawns on the queenside, so it is in White's best interest to leave him with a pawn majority on that side and give himself a kingside/center majority.

1.cxd4!

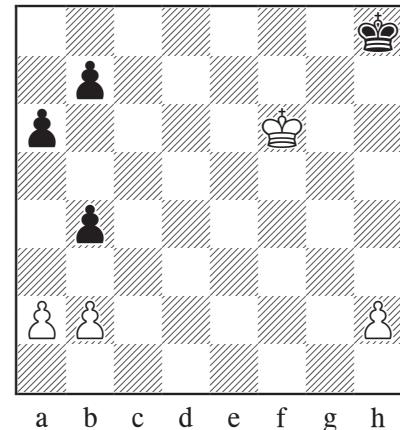
White now has a healthy majority that can eventually make a passed pawn, while Black is unable to. I played a sparring match with White against my computer, and even with my imperfect play, it was unable to hold the draw. The position is lost.

1.exd4? is just a draw. Neither side can make a passed pawn.

1...f5 2.Qd3 g5 3.f3 Qd7 4.e4 Qe7 5.g3 Qd6 6.Qe3 b4 7.f4 g4



8.d5 e5 9.exf5 ♖xd5 10.f6 exf4† 11.♖xf4
♖e6 12.♖xg4 ♖xf6 13.♖h5 ♖f7 14.♖h6
♖g8 15.g4 ♖h8 16.g5 ♖g8 17.g6 hxg6
18.♖xg6 ♖h8 19.♖f6

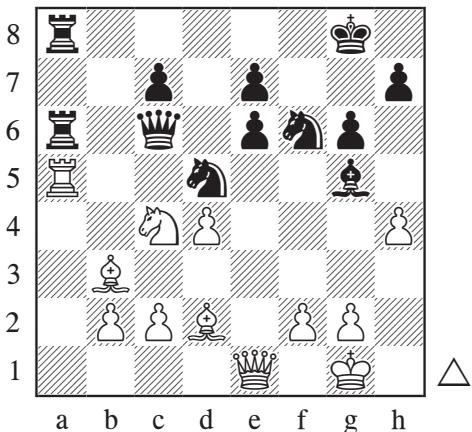


At the end, I got a position where I could ransack the queenside, and Black had to leave his king on the kingside due to the danger of the h2-pawn. I stopped playing here and forced the machine to resign.

Alexander Grischuk – Alexander Riazantsev

22... $\mathbb{W}xa6$

Moscow 2009



The position is far from a pawn endgame. In fact, White is down an exchange and is playing for compensation! As the side with less brute force, he is not interested in trading pieces anyway, as it would help Black survive the assault. Instead, White should be prioritizing his kingside attack and booting Black's defensive pieces away from their posts.

21.hxg5!

The f6-knight is on a fine defensive post, and now it will be relegated to somewhere less effective. Black is under enormous pressure.

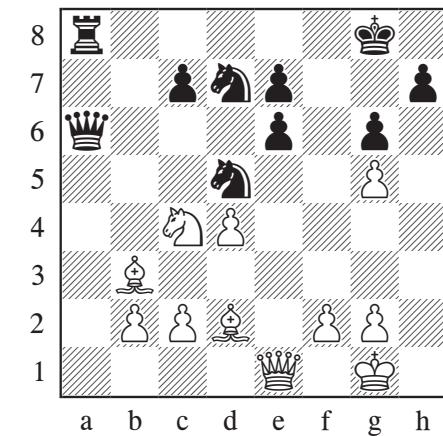
21... $\mathbb{Q}d7$

It was better to put the knight on the rim, though White obviously has fine compensation for the exchange. After 21... $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}c5!$ Black is in big trouble.

White's next move was not best, but it did not spoil anything.

22. $\mathbb{E}xa6$

The most natural move was 22. $\mathbb{W}e4$. White centralizes the queen and is ready for her to join the fight. He is completely winning.

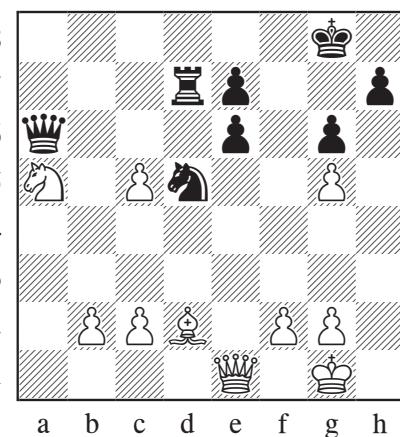
23. $\mathbb{Q}a5!$

White is ready to throw in c2-c4 to push the other knight away. Note how ineffective Black's rook on a8 is when compared to White's raging minor pieces. Black blundered next, but the position was probably beyond saving.

23...c5?

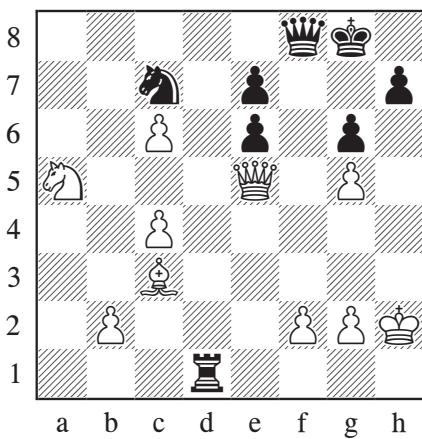
23... $\mathbb{W}b6$ 24. $\mathbb{W}e4\pm$

A simple case of removing the guard does the job here.

24. $\mathbb{Q}a4!$ $\mathbb{E}a7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{E}xd7$ 26.dxc5+-

Material is now approximately even, but Black's king is wide open and White has three connected passed pawns that will rush down the board. Black's only asset is his rook against a bishop, but after White kicks the knight with c2-c4 and lands his bishop on c3, the question then becomes if the rook is even the better piece. Black is dead lost.

26... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 27.c4 $\mathbb{W}a8$ 28.c6 $\mathbb{E}d3$ 29. $\mathbb{B}c3$ $\mathbb{W}f8$
 30. $\mathbb{W}e5$ $\mathbb{E}d1\#$ 31. $\mathbb{B}h2$



When looking at a position like this one, it would be silly to consider White's ability to make a passed pawn on the kingside diminished by the h4-pawn moving to g5.

1–0

Chapter 12

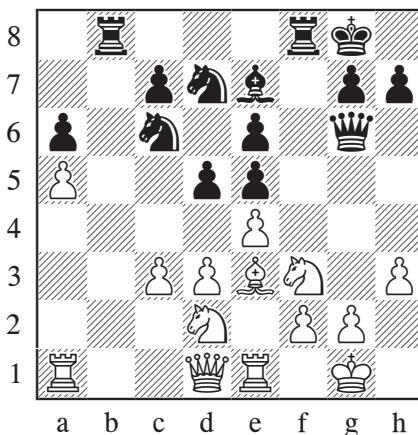
Footsoldiers Must Coordinate

Much like pawns being too far advanced, doubled pawns are often an unchangeable element of the position that can be a long-term or short-term detriment. We've just examined cases where a doubled pawn is a positional detriment due to its inability to make a passer, but there can be other important reasons to avoid doubled pawns.

The reason we will discuss in this chapter is that the pawns can become vulnerable. It is an easy concept to grasp, but it can be a hard one to apply over the board. For instance, let's take a look at an encounter where a highly accomplished player found himself in trouble due to the difficulty of defending the doubled pawns in his position.

Magnus Carlsen – Levon Aronian

St Louis 2017



Black, at first glance, seems to have a reasonable position. His pieces are all active and nothing too terrible seems to be happening, but in fact he is already facing unpleasant problems. The problem is that the e-pawns are doubled, and in particular the e5-pawn is hard to defend. Even

though it is part of a 4-pawn island and not isolated, it cannot be defended by a pawn, and the e6-pawn prevents a rook from coming to its aid. Aronian chose a natural-looking move, but it landed him in even more trouble.

18...♞c5?!

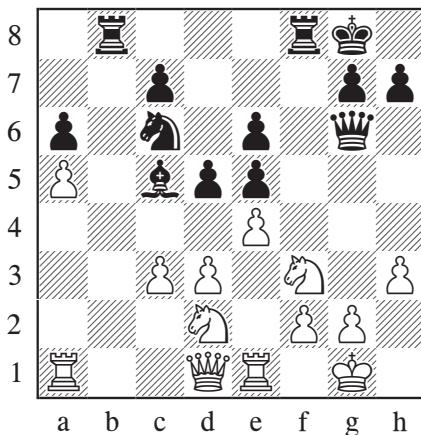
As Carlsen demonstrates, Black will soon miss the knight on d7 as a defender.

It was preferable to lessen the punch of ♘d1-a4 while simultaneously targeting the a5-pawn with 18...♝b5, when White is better, but it is not nearly as convincing as the game continuation.

Carlsen now makes an excellent strategic decision, eliminating any hope of counterplay against the d3-pawn and making the a4-square available for his queen.

19.♘xc5! ♘xc5

The e5-pawn now only has one defender, and it can soon be chased away.



20.♗a4!

To offer a comparison, it is quite clear that if Black could undouble his pawns, he would face no problems at all.

Following 20.exd5? exd5 Black's pieces coordinate much better, the pawn can be

defended by ...♝b8-e8, the knight on c6 will not be hanging after ♘d1-a4, and Black can even dream of advancing with ...e5-e4 at some point. The tables would have turned, and White would need to be precise to maintain equality.

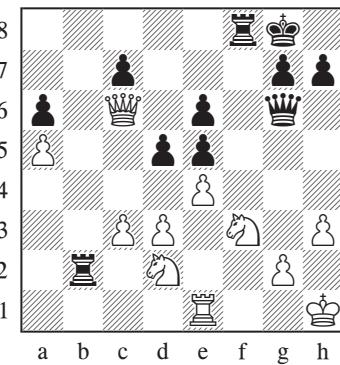
Black now organizes some impressive-looking activity.

20...♝b2

This is justified as White cannot get away with taking on c6, but a calm response dispels any attacking hopes.

21.♘f1!

Taking the knight would be asking for trouble. 21.♘xc6? The tactics now start flying. 21...♝xf2†! 22.♔h1 (Taking the bishop is even worse. 22.♗xf2 ♜xd2† 23.♕e2 ♜xe2† 24.♗xe2 ♜xg2†+) 22...♝xe1 23.♝xe1



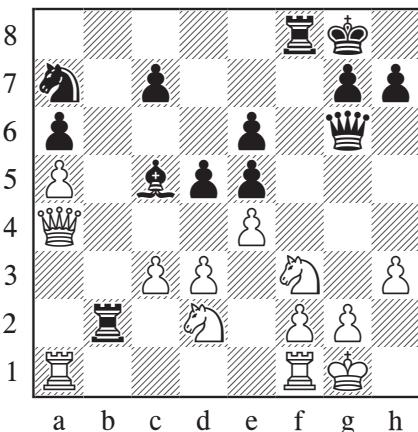
White almost looks like he is consolidating, but one more forceful move ends the game. 23...♝xf3! 24.gxf3 (24.♗xf3 ♜xg2#) 24...♜xd2+

Taking stock of the position, one can clearly see how problematic the doubled e-pawns are. Black's pieces are much more active than their white counterparts (the difference in the rooks is staggering) and the structure looks nearly symmetrical. But despite that, Black is unable to save the e5-pawn without making massive concessions.

21... $\mathbb{Q}a7?$!

It was more resilient to try to hold onto the e5-pawn at all costs, but nobody would be happy to make such a sad retreating move as 21... $\mathbb{W}e8$. White is pleasantly better. 22. $\mathbb{E}ab1$ $\mathbb{E}xb1$ 23. $\mathbb{E}xb1\pm$ Any activity Black had is long gone, he still has a problematic set of doubled pawns, and now it is White who can look to invade on the b-file.

Carlsen did not even have to take on e5 here, but there is nothing wrong with his decision.



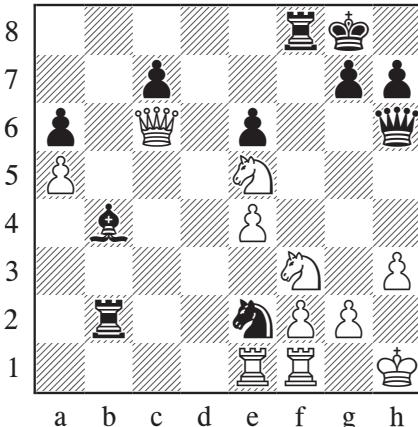
22. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$

White could also take over the b-file and eliminate all counterplay with: 22. $\mathbb{E}ab1!?$ $\mathbb{E}xb1$ 23. $\mathbb{E}xb1\pm$

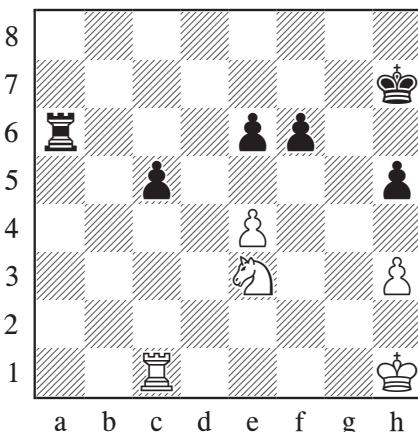
22... $\mathbb{W}h6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}df3$

In just a few moves, the position has changed enormously. White has won a key central pawn, both of his knights have advanced to more active posts, and Black's previously central knight has relocated to the edge of the board. White is simply a pawn up, and Carlsen won without much trouble.

23... $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 24. $\mathbb{E}ae1$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 25. $\mathbb{W}c6$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $dxe4$ 27. $dxe4$ $\mathbb{Q}e2$



28. $\mathbb{E}b1$ $\mathbb{E}xb1$ 29. $\mathbb{E}xb1$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 30. $\mathbb{W}xa6$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$
 31. $\mathbb{W}b5$ c5 32.a6 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{W}g5$
 34. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ h5 35. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $\mathbb{E}xf2$
 37. $\mathbb{E}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 38. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{W}e5$ 39. $\mathbb{W}e3$ $\mathbb{E}a2$
 40. $\mathbb{W}f4$ $\mathbb{W}c3$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 42. $\mathbb{W}xf6$ $gxf6$
 43. $\mathbb{E}c1$ $\mathbb{E}xa6$



44. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{E}a2\ddagger$ 45. $\mathbb{E}c2$ $\mathbb{E}a5$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$
 47.h4 $\mathbb{E}b5$ 48. $\mathbb{E}a2$ $\mathbb{E}b1$ 49. $\mathbb{E}c2$ $\mathbb{E}b5$ 50. $\mathbb{E}c3$
 f5 51.exf5† $exf5$ 52. $\mathbb{E}d3$

1–0

Aronian had a nightmarish experience with his doubled pawns. They were not deficient in terms of their ability to make a passed pawn, nor did they fail to control important squares; they simply were easy to target because they

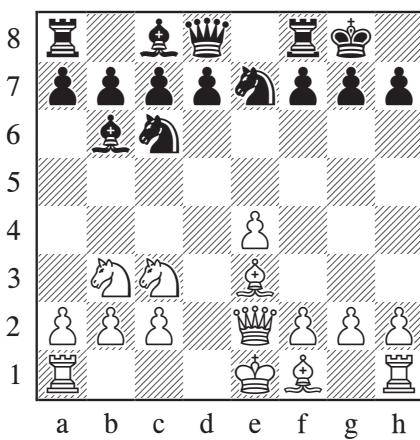
could not defend each other, and the less-advanced pawn blocked any hope of defending the e5-pawn along the e-file.

The idea of the further-advanced pawn being unable to be defended by another pawn is vital. It essentially turns a doubled pawn into an artificially-isolated pawn. But this is not a concern when the further-advanced pawn can be defended. Let's see another example.

Vassilios Kotronias – Gata Kamsky

Moscow 2011

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 exd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c5
5.♗b3 ♘b6 6.♔e2 ♗ge7 7.♘c3 0–0 8.♗e3



The bishops staring at each other from e3 and b6 are likely to be exchanged. Black is to move and can choose if he wants to place a high priority on avoiding doubled pawns by taking on e3.

8...f5!

This is a dramatically different situation compared to the previous example. Black correctly chooses not to care about getting doubled pawns and places a higher priority on destroying White's central space advantage.

It would be much less effective to continue with 8...♗xe3?! since after 9.♗xe3 White's queen has been brought to a much better square and the f1-bishop has been unblocked. Black is only slightly worse, but it is clearly an inferior continuation to the game. Note that now continuing in the same manner with 9...f5 would allow White to gain even more time for his development with 10.♗c4†.

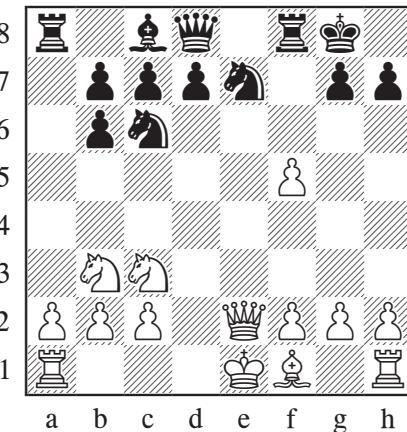
White now tried to punish Black's decision by giving him doubled pawns, but after:

9.♗xb6 axb6

The b6-pawn is defended by another pawn, and White will have a hard time attacking the doubled pawns. On the other hand, Black has captured toward the center to fight for control of key squares, and the open a-file for his rook will be highly relevant when White castles long.

10.exf5

Kamsky continues playing extremely energetically.



10...d5!

Black wants to develop a piece when he takes on f5, not use an already developed one.

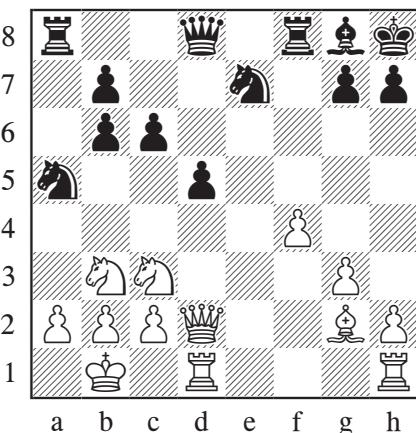
11.0–0–0

Trying to save the pawn with 11.g4 is well met by 11... $\mathbb{Q}xf5!$ when the knight cannot be captured due to the threat of ... $\mathbb{E}f8-e8$.

11... $\mathbb{Q}xf5$

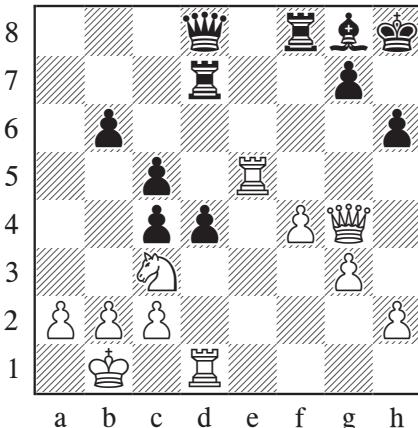
Black has a healthy position. The rest of the game saw mistakes from both sides, but ultimately Kamsky was victorious.

**12. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 13. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 14.f4 $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 15.g3
 $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ c6**



Black's b6-pawn now is no longer defended by another pawn, but it is no concern as it can advance to b5 whenever needed.

**17. $\mathbb{E}he1$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 18. $\mathbb{W}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ b5
 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ bxc4 21. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 22. $\mathbb{W}xd4$
 b6 23. $\mathbb{W}e3$ $\mathbb{E}a7$ 24. $\mathbb{W}e5$ $\mathbb{E}d7$ 25. $\mathbb{W}h5$ d4
 26. $\mathbb{W}g4$ h6 27. $\mathbb{E}e5$ c5**



Those doubled pawns now look mighty fine! White did not last long.

**28.a3 $\mathbb{E}e7$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{E}fe8$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{E}xe5$
 31.fxe5 c3 32. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{W}d5$ 33.b3 $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}c1$
 d3 35. $\mathbb{W}a4$ d2†
 0–1**

There was quite a difference when the further-advanced pawn could be protected! Black never once had to worry about the safety of his pawns. Instead, he placed a higher priority on developing and breaking down the center. Ultimately, the closer his pawns came to the center, the deadlier they became. But the real point is that it was not worth investing a tempo early in the game to keep the pawns in a more natural formation. The difference between doubled pawns where the front one can be defended by another pawn, and when it can't, brings us to our first proposed guideline when it comes to choosing whether to double your pawns or not.

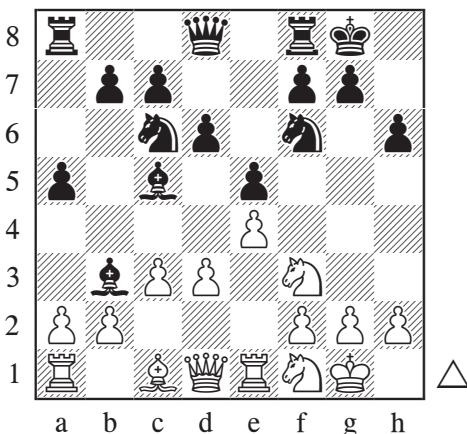
If making doubled pawns results in a structure where the further-advanced doubled pawn cannot be defended by another pawn, be wary about doubling the pawns.

This guideline only half applies to Aronian's misfortunes, because when he doubled his e-pawns, his d-pawn still stood on d6, meaning the further-advanced e-pawn was defended. But it might have served as a warning for him before advancing ...d6-d5, which was indeed a mistake when he played it.

Let's examine a case where a player incorrectly chose to double her pawns, where the first guideline could have helped.

Tatev Abrahamyan – Sergey Erenburg

Berkeley 2011



Sergey was staying at my home during the tournament, and he mentioned in the car ride home after the round that he was worried about the lack of imbalances in the position early in the game. But he was happy that White's next move helped him play for a win. White must choose which way to capture on b3, and which pawn structure she wants.

11.axb3?

Normally it is fine to capture toward the center and open a file for a previously undeveloped rook. But this middlegame is notably different from a standard Italian for one vital reason – Black has advanced ...a7-

a5, so White will not be able to play b3-b4. As such, White is condemned to have a pair of doubled pawns where the further-advanced one cannot be protected by another pawn.

It was prudent to maintain rough symmetry with 11.♗xb3 when the position is about equal, but with plenty of play remaining.

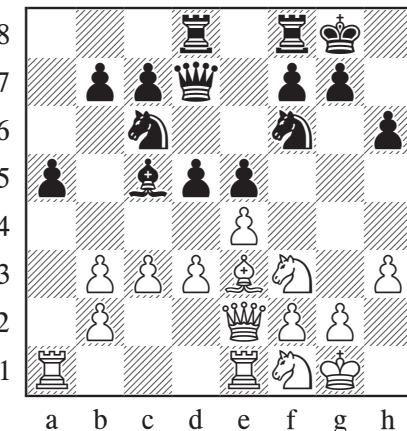
Black now makes a standard central pawn break.

11...d5! 12.♗e2 ♗d7 13.h3 ♖ad8

Things have gone wrong for White in the last few moves, and her next choice makes things even worse.

14.♕e3?!

White would remain reasonably solid after the standard 14.♕g3, though Black is still a little better.



Black now opened the position further and created more weaknesses.

14...dxe4! 15.♕xc5

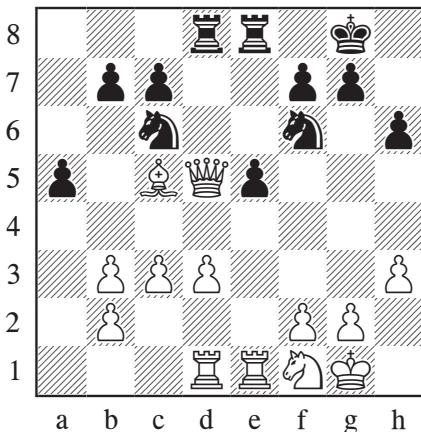
15.dxe4 ♗xe4†

15...exf3 16.♗xf3 ♖fe8

Now on top of the weak b3-pawn, d3 is also hanging and Black has more space.

17.♘ad1 ♖d5

Black's choice in the game was fine, but I prefer 17...♖e6 when it is obvious how problematic the b3-pawn is. Just imagine how much happier White would be if one of her b-pawns could slide sideways one square!

18.♗xd5

Black did a fine job in the early middlegame, but here he blundered.

18...♗xd5?

If Black had prevented any hope of liquidation with 18...♗xd5, White would be left with a miserable position.

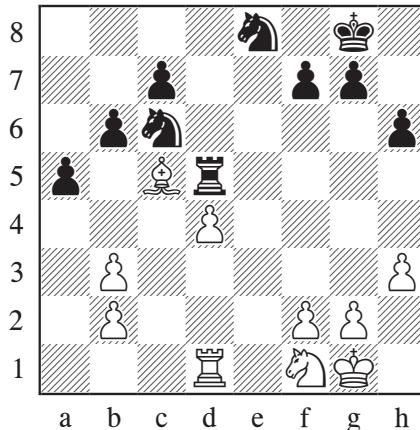
White now took her chance to liquidate some weaknesses with:

19.d4! exd4 20.♗xe8† ♗xe8 21.cxd4

Sergey told me after the game that when he took on d5 with his rook, he thought he was winning on the spot here.

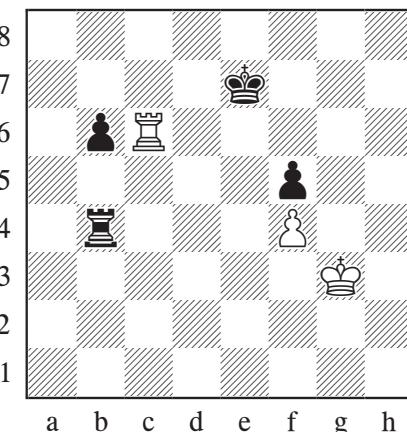
21...b6

But he had overlooked White's reply:

**22.♗e3! ♗d7 23.d5!**

Black has lost some of his advantage. Nonetheless, he was still slightly better and went on to win a nice game.

23...♗a7 24.♗d4 f6 25.♗c3 ♗b5 26.b4 a4 27.♗a1 a3 28.♗c1 axb2 29.♗xb2 ♗ed6 30.♗f1 ♗e7 31.♗e2 ♗e4 32.♗c3 ♗xc3† 33.♗xc3 ♗b5 34.♗c1 ♗xb4 35.♗a1 h5 36.g4 hxg4 37.hxg4 ♗f7 38.♗a8 ♗g6 39.♗d8 ♗g5 40.♗f3 g6 41.♗g8 ♗d4† 42.♗g3 ♗e2† 43.♗f3 ♗c3 44.♗c8 ♗f4† 45.♗g2 ♗b5 46.♗g8 ♗c3 47.♗g7 ♗d4 48.♗xc7 ♗xd5 49.♗xd5 ♗xd5 50.♗g3 ♗d4 51.f3 ♗b4 52.♗f7 f5 53.gxf5 gxf5 54.f4† ♗g6 55.♗c7 ♗f6 56.♗c6† ♗e7 57.♗h6 ♗b1 58.♗c6 ♗b4



White has been defending for a long time and has reached a drawn ending. Now she needed just to wait, but this is psychologically taxing to do, so she tried to go for active counterplay. Unfortunately, this leads straight to a theoretical win for Black, after a clever king walk.

59.♔h4? ♔d7 60.♕h6 ♕xf4† 61.♔g5 ♕b4 62.♔xf5 ♔c7! 63.♔e5 ♕b7 64.♔d5 ♕a6 65.♕g6 ♕b5 66.♕h6 ♕a5 67.♕h8 ♕g4 68.♕b8 b5 69.♕c5 ♕c4† 70.♔d5 ♕b4 71.♕b7 ♕h4 72.♕b8 ♕a4 73.♕c5 b4 74.♕g8 ♕a3 75.♕a8† ♕b2 76.♕a4 ♕c3
0–1

The pawn on b3 quickly turned out to be a sore point in White's side. The second guideline sends a clear warning that such doubled pawns could become an issue, and White should have preferred to keep a more fluid pawn structure with ♕d1xb3.

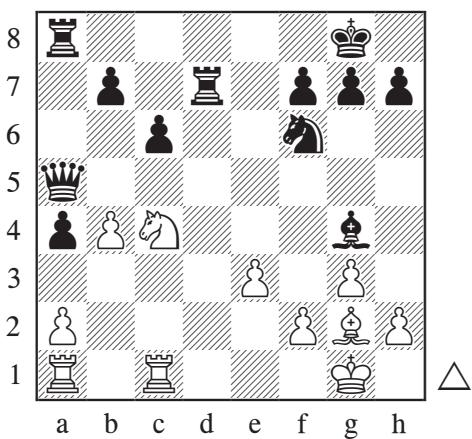
As usual, the first guideline is a red flag – you should be careful when choosing to double your own pawns in a situation where the further-advanced pawn cannot be supported by another pawn. Also as usual, there is a second guideline that can overrule the first one.

You can double your pawns so that the further-advanced one is not defended by another pawn if it accomplishes a goal you deem to be more important than a pawn weakness, if you can exchange off one of the doubled pawns, or if your opponent cannot possibly target the pawns.

I had the opportunity to demonstrate the second guideline in action just two days later at the same event.

Sam Shankland – Dmitry Zilberstein

Berkeley 2011



White has a choice of how to recapture on a5. Taking with the pawn might seem suspicious because it creates doubled pawns where the further-advanced one on a5 is going to be hard to protect, but it proves to be the correct choice.

25.bxa5!

White threatens ♜c4-b6, winning the game on the spot, opens the b-file to put pressure on the b7-pawn, and finally can hope to liquidate the further-advanced a-pawn with a5-a6, leaving Black with pawn weaknesses.

Black is absolutely fine after 25.♗xa5 ♕ad8.

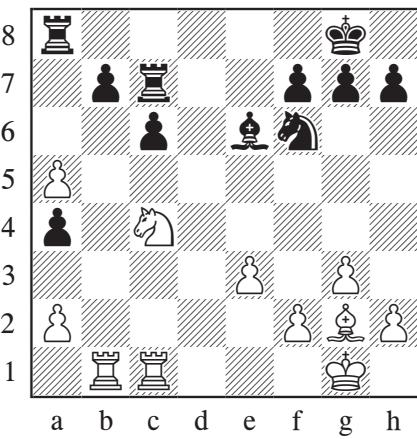
I suspect my opponent's next move was based on a miscalculation.

25...♝c7?

It looks natural to overprotect the c6-pawn and step out of the fork on b6. Black also seems ready to play ... $\mathbb{Q}g4-e6$ to remove the guard and then simply take on a5. But he is a tempo too slow. White grabs the semi-open b-file.

26. $\mathbb{B}ab1! \mathbb{Q}e6$

White's point is revealed.



27. $\mathbb{B}b4!$

Black also has a weak a-pawn, and White will take on a4 before Black can take on a5.

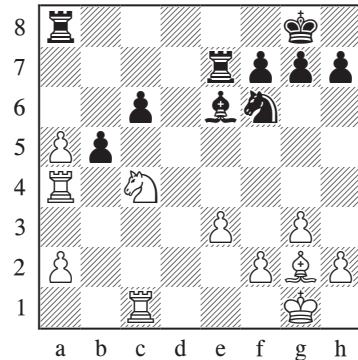
27... $\mathbb{B}e7$

The tactical point is that 27... $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 28. $\mathbb{B}xc4$ $\mathbb{B}xa5$ fails to 29. $\mathbb{B}xc6! \pm$ due to Black's weak back rank. White will win at least a pawn.

I had to calculate a little to justify grabbing the pawn on a4 since it does allow a fork with ...b7-b5, but the variations are straightforward.

28. $\mathbb{B}xa4 g6$

Attempting to win a piece would backfire.
28...b5?



29. $\mathbb{B}xc6!$

The tactics favor White.

29... $\mathbb{B}xa4$

29... $\mathbb{B}b8$ 30. $\mathbb{B}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 31. $\mathbb{B}cxc4! \pm$

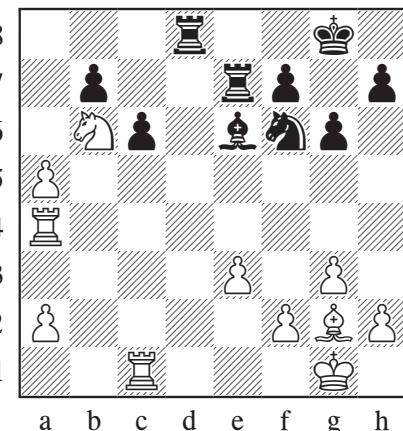
30. $\mathbb{B}xa8 \mathbb{B}c7$

Black is still trying to win a piece, but the simplest of many winning moves is:

31. $\mathbb{B}d1!$

The back rank once again becomes an issue. White breaks the pin with a gain of tempo, and next he will save the knight and remain material up.

29. $\mathbb{B}b6 \mathbb{B}d8$



White gained a lot by playing $b4xa5$. He has an outpost on b6, his a1-rook was activated, and has won the pawn on a4. Now he can even trade off one of his a-pawns by advancing a5-a6 whenever he pleases.

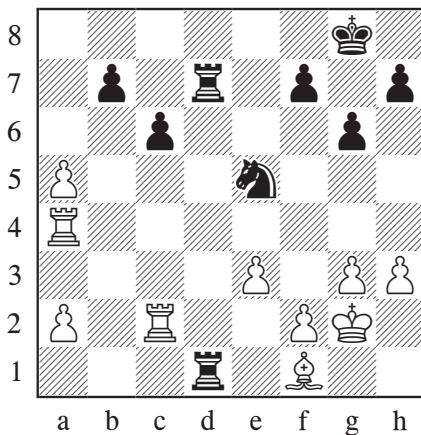
30.h3

There was also nothing wrong with 30.a6±.

30... $\mathbb{E}d2$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 32. $\mathbb{E}xcx4$ $\mathbb{E}d1\uparrow$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 34. $\mathbb{E}c2$

Once again, 34.a6 was playable and strong. Still, the text did not spoil anything.

34... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{E}ed7$

**36.a3**

Or 36.a6!?... You get the point!

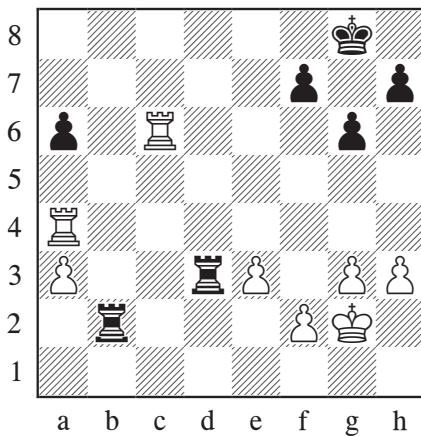
36... $\mathbb{E}b1$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{E}xd3$ 39.a6

Finally.

39... $\mathbb{E}xa6$ 40. $\mathbb{E}xc6$

I went on to win.

40... $\mathbb{E}b2$



41. $\mathbb{E}f4!+–$ $f5$ 42. $\mathbb{E}c7$ $\mathbb{E}dd2$ 43. $\mathbb{g}4$ $\mathbb{E}d5$ 44. $\mathbb{gxf5}$ $\mathbb{gxf5}$ 45. $\mathbb{E}a7$ $\mathbb{E}b6$ 46. $\mathbb{E}c4$ $\mathbb{E}d8$ 47. $\mathbb{E}cc7$ $\mathbb{E}h6$ 48. $\mathbb{E}g7\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 49. $\mathbb{E}gf7$ $\mathbb{E}g8\uparrow$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{E}xh3$ 51. $\mathbb{E}xf5$ $\mathbb{E}h6$ 52. $\mathbb{E}ff7$ $\mathbb{E}b8$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 54. $\mathbb{E}g7\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 55. $\mathbb{E}gb7$ $\mathbb{E}e8$ 56. $\mathbb{E}e7$ $\mathbb{E}f8$ 57.f4 $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 58. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{E}h1$ 59. $\mathbb{E}xa6$ $\mathbb{E}b8$ 60. $\mathbb{E}aa7$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ 61.a4 $\mathbb{E}b8$ 62.a5 $\mathbb{E}h6$ 63.a6 $\mathbb{E}g6$ 64. $\mathbb{E}ab7$ $\mathbb{E}f8$ 65.a7

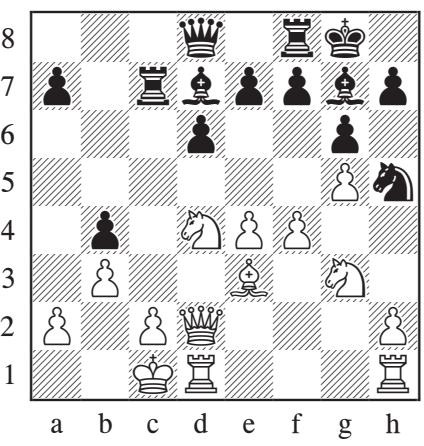
1–0

This game is a challenging example, since some key lines needed to be calculated to justify switching the b4-pawn to a5, but it was not wildly difficult calculation. The real point was that doubling the pawns gained White time and opened up lines for his pieces. The a1-rook coming to b4 in two moves showed just how important it was. And eventually, one of the pawns was exchanged anyway. As such, following Guideline 2 clearly demonstrates that my decision was justified.

While this game saw more than one of the principles of the second guideline in action, often just a single part of it is enough to justify doubling your pawns. For instance, in sharp positions, pawn structure is often unimportant. Take the following example.

Judit Polgar – Magnus Carlsen

Mainz (rapid) 2008



Black has a dream Dragon, and he has several strong options. Still, it is important to be precise in such sharp positions, because counterplay can show up quickly and unexpectedly. White has just played $\mathbb{Q}e2-g3$, which is not an especially subtle move. She clearly wants to take the knight on h5 to compromise Black's kingside pawn structure. Black could avoid this by taking on g3, but this would not address what is truly important in the position.

18... $\mathbb{E}c3!$?

Black correctly allows his pawns to be doubled, in a way where the h5-pawn can never be defended by another pawn and can be scooped up without much resistance should White choose to spend her time doing so. I'm sure Magnus was not thrilled by the concept and would have preferred his pawn remained on g6, but he correctly assessed that in a situation involving a race between mutual attacks, it was more important to get his own play going. I don't believe 18... $\mathbb{E}c3$ was the best move, but the idea of not caring about $\mathbb{Q}g3xh5$ was correct.

Black could insist on his pawns remaining undoubled with 18... $\mathbb{Q}xg3$, but after 19.hxg3 maintaining a healthier pawn structure comes at a heavy price. The h-file has opened, and White has easy attacking chances with $\mathbb{W}d2-h2$ coming. Black is still winning here, but his margin for error is much smaller and I much prefer the game continuation.

The move that appeals to me most is 18... $\mathbb{Q}xf4$! with the point that after 19. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ e5 Black will get his material back, and either be left with a monstrous g7-bishop or an extra pawn. The only way to avoid ...e5xf4 is 20. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ but after 20...exd4 21. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 22. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ Black is in time to clip a pawn with: 22... $\mathbb{W}xg5\#$

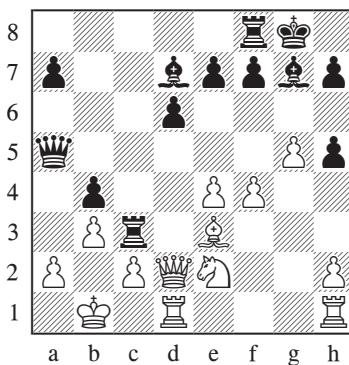
19. $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ gxh5

The doubled pawns are far from being the

most important element in the position. Black's pieces are ready to jump into action with ... $\mathbb{W}d8-a5$, ... $\mathbb{E}f8-c8$, etc. when the attack will be vicious.

20. $\mathbb{Q}b1$

Most resilient was:
20. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}b1$



But after:

21... $\mathbb{E}c6!$

Black is ready to take the a-file: ... $\mathbb{W}a5xa2\#$! is a big threat, and White is hard pressed to keep his position together.

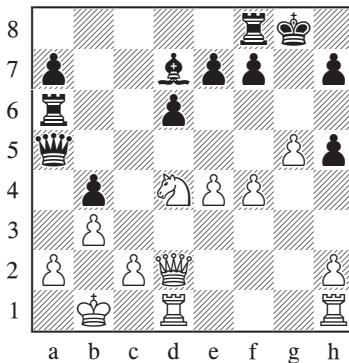
22. $\mathbb{Q}d4$

Trying to shut the a-file also fails: 22.a4 $\mathbb{E}fc8$ 23. $\mathbb{E}c1$ $\mathbb{E}a6$! Sacrifices are incoming. The only way to avert immediate mate is 24. $\mathbb{W}d5$ but after 24... $\mathbb{Q}c6$! 25. $\mathbb{W}xa5$ $\mathbb{E}xa5$ White is losing the e4-pawn.

22... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$

23. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ $\mathbb{E}xc2$! wins.

23... $\mathbb{E}a6!$



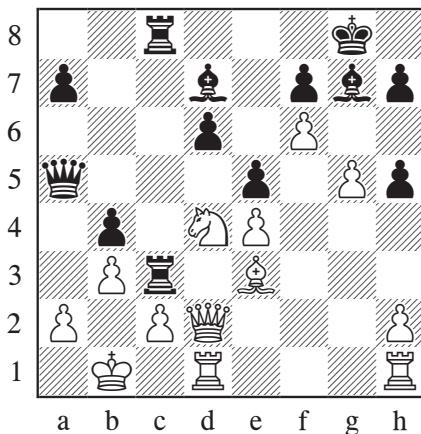
White is clearly in bad shape.

20... $\mathbb{W}a5$ 21.f5 $\mathbb{B}fc8$

Black's position plays itself; White clearly will not have enough time to grab the pawn on h5.

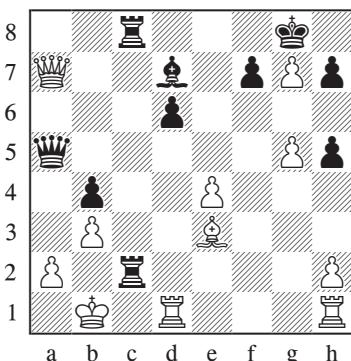
22.f6 e5!

Polgar has been playing as resourcefully as she could in the last few moves, but difficult positions can often become even worse – since in addition to being objectively bad, finding the right moves can be tough.



23. $\mathbb{Q}f5?$

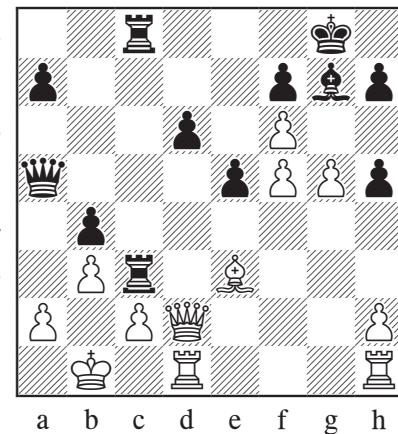
The only chance was 23.fxg7 with the point that White has a surprising defense in: 23...exd4 24. $\mathbb{W}xd4!$ $\mathbb{B}xc2$ 25. $\mathbb{W}xa7!$



Somehow Black is not delivering mate, and

is only slightly better. But good luck finding this line in a rapid game.

23... $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 24.exf5



24... $\mathbb{B}xc2!$ 25. $\mathbb{W}xc2$ $\mathbb{B}xc2$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ $\mathbb{W}xa2\#$

I hope we all agree that Black's g6-pawn having gone to h5 is not the most important factor in the position.

27. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 28. $\mathbb{B}c1$ d5 29. $\mathbb{B}hd1$ $\mathbb{W}b2$
 30. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}xb3\#$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ e4 32. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}b2\#$
 33. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{W}xh2$ 34. $\mathbb{B}xd5$ $\mathbb{W}b8$ 35. $\mathbb{B}cd1$ b3
 36. $\mathbb{B}d8$ $\mathbb{W}b4\#$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ b2 38. $\mathbb{B}b1$ $\mathbb{W}a5$
 39. $\mathbb{B}a8$ $\mathbb{W}xf5\#$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{W}a5\#$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{W}c7$
 42. $\mathbb{B}d1$ $\mathbb{W}h2\#$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{W}h1\#$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{W}xd1\#$
 0–1

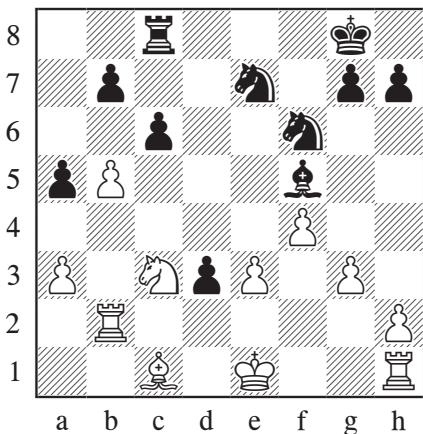
Carlsen did not need to let his pawns be doubled, and in fact he had better moves at his disposal. Even taking on g3 was enough to win. But the point is that the doubled pawns, despite being weak and targetable and not accomplishing anything useful, were unimportant compared to what actually mattered in the position.

Finally, if it is clear that a set of doubled pawns cannot be attacked, they cannot be considered a weakness even if the front one cannot be defended by another pawn. Not so long ago,

I was the victim of a nasty case of complete paralysis when my opponent correctly gave himself doubled pawns.

Sam Shankland – Krishnan Sasikiran

Matanzas 2017



Please note that White is unable to castle. I had managed to grab an exchange, but Black has obvious compensation due to the strong passer on d3, excellent control over the light squares, and far superior pieces. I had only reckoned on facing ...c6-c5 or ...c6xb5, but my opponent found a much nastier idea.

23...Qed5!

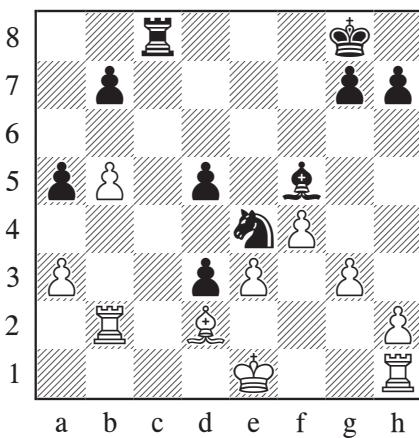
Instead trying to take a pawn would fail. After 23...cxb5 24.Qd2± White has kept control and can hope to take on b5 next, when he will gain an open line for his rooks.

Setting the connected passed pawns in motion with 23...c5 was advantageous for Black, but I much prefer the game continuation.

24.Qxd5 cxd5!

The first point of Black's play is obvious: there is no way the pawn on d3 will ever be in danger, despite it being doubled, advanced, and unable to be protected by a pawn.

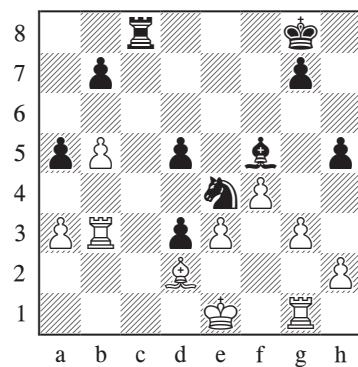
25.Qd2 Qe4+



White is paralyzed, and dead lost. I have no way to bring my king or h1-rook into the game, my pawn majority is frozen, and Black can simply bring his king to the queenside and play as if he is a piece up instead of an exchange down. It is important for Black to understand that his d-pawn will stay alive as there is no way for White to attack it. If the pawn were to be captured, the evaluation would change.

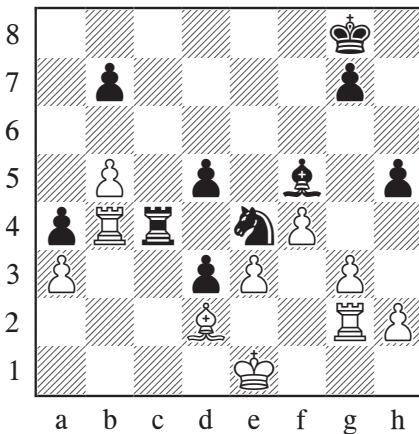
26.Qg1 h5 27.Qg2

White would love to take his one and only chance to attack the pawn on d3 before Black can play ...a5-a4 to shut down the b3-square, but 27.Qb3? enables Black to win easily with forcing moves:



27... $\mathbb{Q}xd2!$ Breaking the bind is fine if it wins on the spot. 28. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{Q}c2\#$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}c1\#$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}xg1$ Checks and captures... 31. $\mathbb{Q}xg1$ Until a pawn promotes. 31...d2–+

27...a4 28. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}c4!$



White can never take on c4 since the connected passers would cruise straight through. The rest was agony, and I could never find a useful move to make.

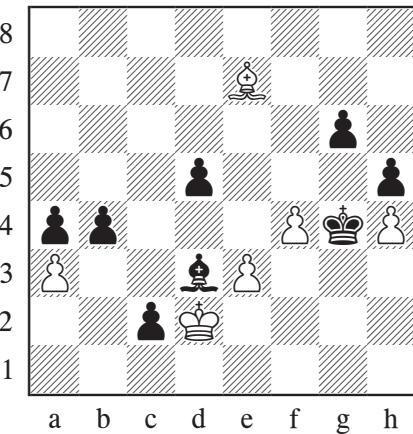
29.b6 $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ g6 31. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}c1$

Black now finally took my rook which was hanging for so long. It is enough to win but also unnecessary.

38... $\mathbb{Q}xf2$

I would have preferred to let White wallow in his own misery with 38... $\mathbb{Q}xb6$.

39. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}xc2\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xc2$
42. $\mathbb{Q}b4\#$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}b3$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ b6
45. $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}d8$ b5 47. $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}c5$
 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ 49.h4 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$
52. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}e7$ b4



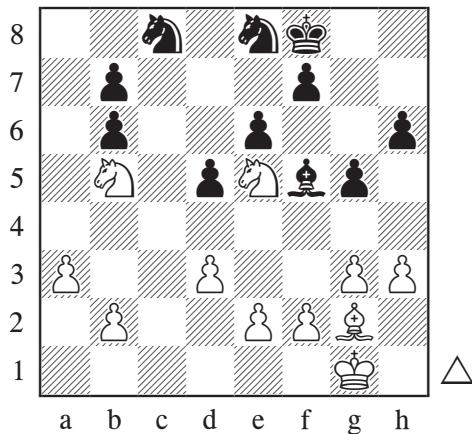
55.axb4 a3 56.b5 a2 57. $\mathbb{Q}f6$ d4 58. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$
 $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 59.b6 $\mathbb{Q}e4$
0–1

Black's win was convincing. But finding a move like ... $\mathbb{Q}e7-d5$ is tough! I think a huge part of appreciating how deadly the bind would be, was realizing that the all-important d3-pawn could never be captured. Once Black's pawn came to a4, no white piece could get to it. If instead the pawn on d3 had been captured, White would likely win with $\mathbb{Q}e1-e2$ and $\mathbb{Q}h1-c1$, activating his pieces.

As usual, we will conclude the chapter with two puzzles.

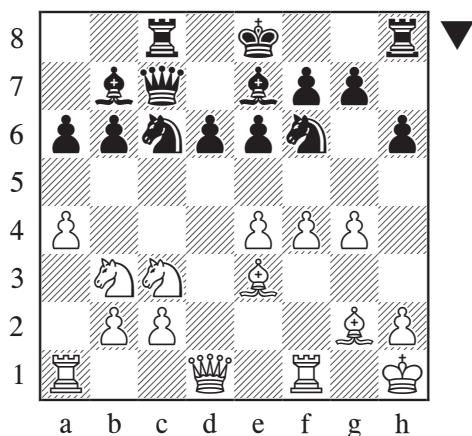
Exercises

Richard Rapport – Rakesh Kulkarni, Abu Dhabi 2015



Black has left himself with doubled isolated pawns on the queenside, but for the moment they seem safe. How can White play against them effectively?

Jorden van Foreest – Sandro Mareco, Hasselbacken 2016

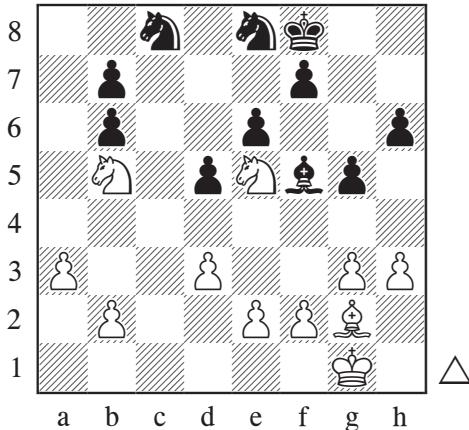


Black played ... $\mathbb{Q}c6-a5$ here, inviting White to double his pawns on the a-file where neither can be defended by another pawn. What do you think of his decision?

Solutions

Richard Rapport – Rakesh Kulkarni

Abu Dhabi 2015



Black's pawns were doubled several moves ago. White was not able to take advantage of them at the time, but as the game progressed, it became clear that they were vulnerable in the long run. White now blew open the long diagonal to target the key weaknesses.

21.e4! dx e 4 22.dxe4 $\mathbb{Q}h$ 7

Black's bishop has been pushed offside. All White has to do is open the long diagonal to target the b7-pawn.

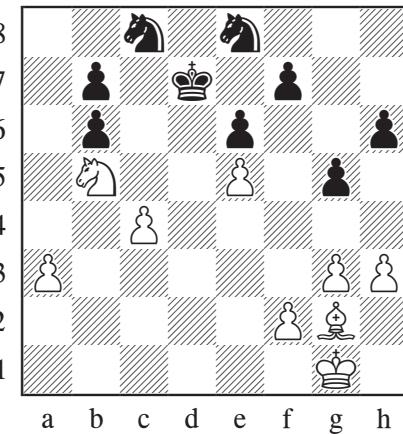
23. $\mathbb{Q}c$ 4!

The b6-pawn is not hanging yet, but it is clearly under pressure.

23... $\mathbb{Q}e$ 7

It was more resilient to play prophylactically against e4-e5 with 23...f6. But White is still clearly better after 24.f4 when he will get e4-e5 in soon enough. Still, Black should be happy to trade as many pawns as he can, since he will likely end up down material.

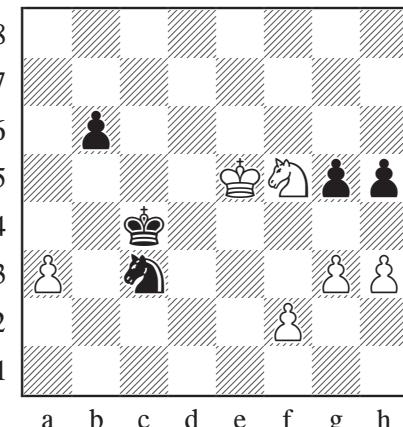
24.e5 $\mathbb{Q}d$ 3 25.b3 $\mathbb{Q}xc$ 4 26.bxc4 $\mathbb{Q}d$ 7



27. $\mathbb{Q}xb$ 7

A weak doubled pawn fell off, and White won easily.

27... $\mathbb{Q}e$ 7 28. $\mathbb{Q}d$ 4 f6 29.exf6 $\mathbb{Q}xf$ 6 30. $\mathbb{Q}f$ 1 $\mathbb{Q}g$ 6 31. $\mathbb{Q}f$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}d$ 6 32. $\mathbb{Q}e$ 2 $\mathbb{Q}c$ 5 33. $\mathbb{Q}c$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}xc$ 4 34. $\mathbb{Q}xe$ 6† $\mathbb{Q}c$ 3 35. $\mathbb{Q}e$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}e$ 7 36. $\mathbb{Q}d$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}ed$ 5† 37. $\mathbb{Q}xd$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}xd$ 5† 38. $\mathbb{Q}e$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}c$ 4 39. $\mathbb{Q}e$ 5 h5 40. $\mathbb{Q}f$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}c$ 3

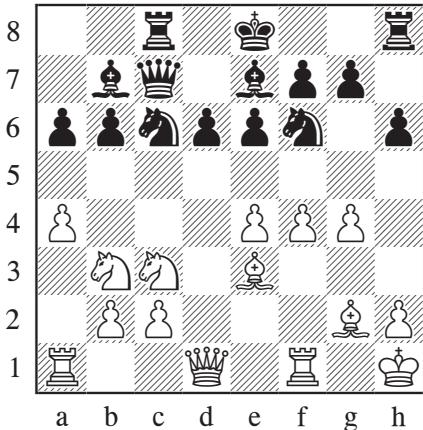


41.f4 gxf4 42.gxf4 b5 43. $\mathbb{Q}d$ 6† $\mathbb{Q}c$ 5 44. $\mathbb{Q}e$ 4† $\mathbb{Q}xe$ 4 45. $\mathbb{Q}xe$ 4

1–0

Jorden van Foreest – Sandro Mareco

Hasselbacken 2016



Pawn structure is often of little significance in sharp positions. Black needs to open lines on the queenside.

14... $\mathbb{Q}a5!$

Black is ready to jump in with ... $\mathbb{Q}a5$ -c4, which all but forces White's reply.

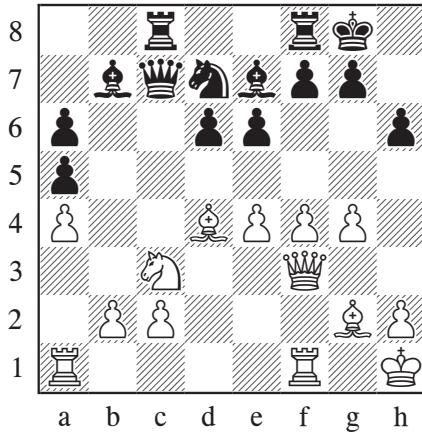
15. $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ bxa5

Black has achieved a lot by doubling his pawns. He now has an open b-file to use, excellent control of the b4-square, and most importantly there is no way the pawns will ever come under fire. In addition, his queen and rook are no longer blocked, and White has had to exchange off one of his queenside defenders in the knight on b3.

16. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$

Black could already consider breaking open the center with 16...d5!? 17.e5 $\mathbb{Q}e4$.

17. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 0–0



White is clearly worse. His kingside play has gone nowhere and Black's counterplay on the other side will come fast. In the game, White lashed out too soon and lost on the side where he was better, but if he had been more patient, Black's queenside play would have become obvious.

18.g5?!

Van Foreest must have missed something here. Black will take the pawn and get away with it.

My attempt to improve on White's play is:

18. $\mathbb{W}g3$

When he can hope to follow up with h2-h4 and g4-g5 later. But Black is much too fast.

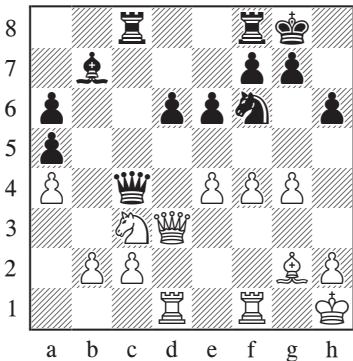
18... $\mathbb{W}c4!$ 19. $\mathbb{E}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6!$

White is coming under a lot of pressure in the center.

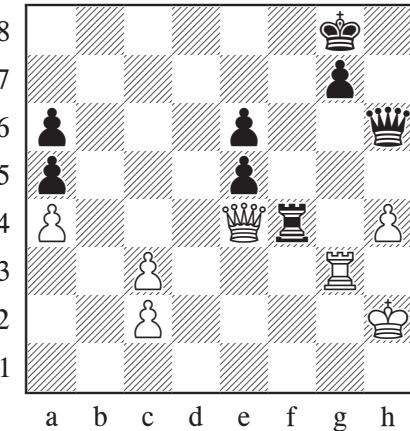
20. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$

Allowing ... $\mathbb{Q}f6xe4$ cannot be recommended, but after a simple move like:

21. $\mathbb{W}d3$



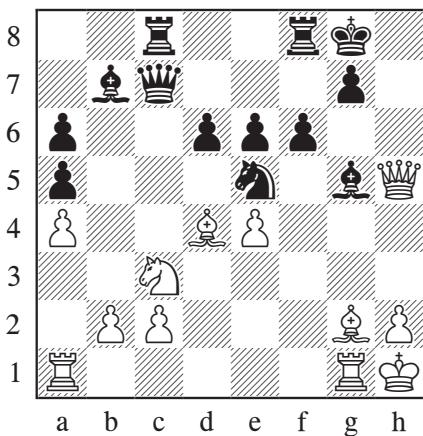
22. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $dxe5$ 23. $h4$ $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 24. $\mathbb{E}gd1$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$
 25. $\mathbb{E}d3$ $\mathbb{W}f7$ 26. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $f5$ 27. $\mathbb{E}f1$ $\mathbb{W}g6$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}h2$
 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 29. $bxc3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $fxe4$ 31. $\mathbb{E}g3$
 $\mathbb{W}h6$ 32. $\mathbb{E}xf8\#$ 33. $\mathbb{W}xe4$ $\mathbb{E}f4$



We see just how annoying the newly opened b-file is, and how effective Black's pieces are once they were able to jump into the game.
 21... $\mathbb{W}b4\#$

White is losing material.

18... $hxg5$ 19. $fxg5$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 20. $\mathbb{E}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$
 21. $\mathbb{W}h5$ $f6$



34. $\mathbb{W}xe5$ $\mathbb{E}xh4\#$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{W}d2\#$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}f3$
 $\mathbb{W}d1\#$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{W}h1\#$

0–1

Black is winning.

Chapter 13

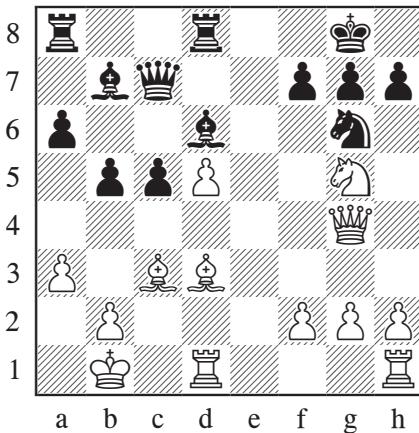
Avoiding Redundant Workers

Often when doubled pawns are a positional liability, it can be for the same reasons that a too-far-advanced pawn can be a liability. In Chapter 1 on advancing pawns, we saw that they could become vulnerable by advancing too far forwards. Evidently, the same can be said for advancing too far sideways!

Not all the chapters in Part I have themes that will be relevant with doubled pawns as well, but many of them do. For example, doubled pawns can be an enormous positional detriment when they are no longer able to fight for a key square or block a key line. I like the following example, where a strong player underestimated just how problematic a set of doubled pawns could be.

Alexey Dreev – Dmitry Jakovenko

Togliatti 2003



The position is extremely double-edged, but I prefer Black. He is more prepared to open lines on the queenside with ...b5-b4 (a little throwback to the section on hooks!) than White is to make anything happen on the kingside, plus White's d5-pawn could be a target. But Jakovenko clearly

underestimated the danger to his position, and let White show just how troublesome doubled pawns can be.

20...b4?

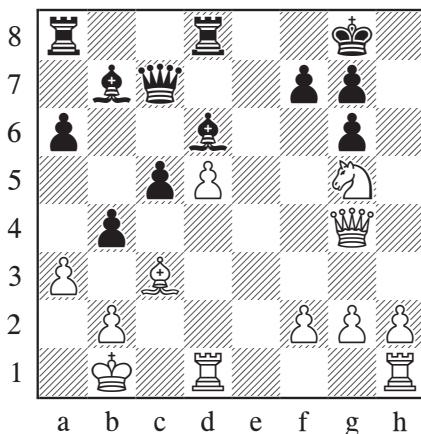
This overlooks White's threat and loses on the spot.

21.♗xg6!

It looks a paradoxical decision to give up such a strong bishop, but Dreev is right to do so. Black is crushed right away.

21...hxg6

It was no better to try to retain the possibility of ...h7-h6 since 21...fxg6 would have promptly lost to 22.♕e6†.



22.♗h4!

The deficiency of Black's doubled pawns is on display. If he had a healthier structure with his pawn back on h7, he could simply advance ...h7-h6. By doing so, he would expel the knight and clog up the h-file. As is, Black's lack of an h-pawn means he will promptly be mated on h7. Dreev finished the game in style.

22...bxc3

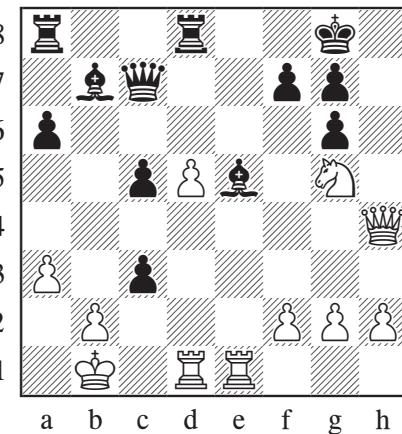
Black still cannot prevent ♗h4-h7, but before jumping in, Dreev cuts off any hope Black has of leaving the kill zone.

23.♗he1!

Now the only way for Black to prevent mate is to block the e-file with:

23...♔e5

But after the simple:

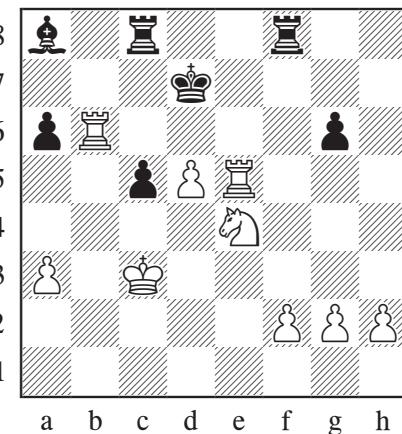


24.♗h7† ♔f8 25.♗h8† ♔e7 26.♗xg7

Black was losing the bishop on e5 for nothing, remaining at least a couple pawns down and still facing a fierce attack. The rest of the game was straightforward for Dreev.

26...♔d7 27.♗xf7† ♔c8 28.♗e6† ♔d7
29.♗e8† ♕d8 30.♗xe5 ♕xe5 31.♗xe5 cxb2
32.♗xb2 ♔d7 33.♗e4 ♕f8 34.♗c3 ♕ac8
35.♗b1 ♔a8 36.♗b6

1–0

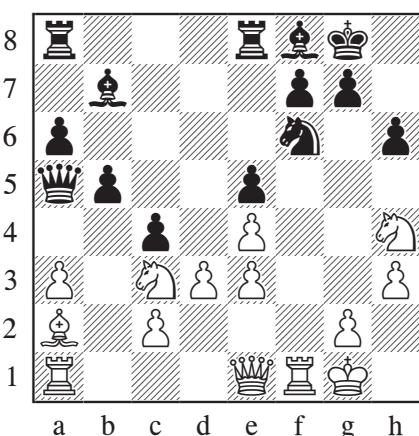


The parallels between this game and the ones featured in Chapter 2 are easy to see. Whenever a pawn moves, it gives up control of one square and gains control of another one, as well as closing one line and opening another. It does not particularly matter if the pawn is moving straight forward or stepping sideways as well, it still no longer occupies the square it was just on, and it could be creating weaknesses. Dreev demonstrated this superbly. Seemingly out of nowhere, Black was mated, and it was all because he did not appreciate the potential danger of his h-pawn being dragged to g6. Had he realized how problematic the resulting structure would be when the queen and knight could sit on h4 and g5 uncontested, I am sure he would have landed on the correct move, which we shall see later in this chapter on page 249.

Often, creating an ugly case of doubled pawns can prompt a player to make a sacrifice, forcing the recapturing pawn to make a poor structure. Most commonly, this is in the form of an exchange sacrifice. For instance, any Sicilian player knows to look out for ... $\mathbb{E}xc3$ on every move! But related ideas can also be present in other positions.

Nikola Djukic – Dimitar Mogilarov

Plovdiv 2012

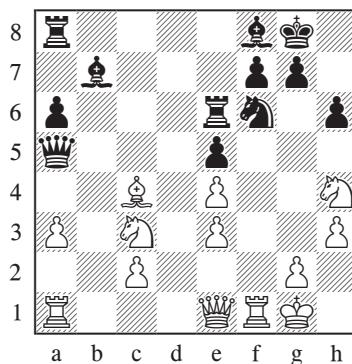


Black has convincingly outplayed his higher-rated opponent and stands clearly better. He has a healthy bishop pair, a better structure, and White's bishop on a2 is extremely passive. But now Black failed to address a key idea of his opponent, and squandered his chance to score an upset.

19... $\mathbb{Q}xa3$?

Grabbing such a pawn clearly underestimates the danger after White cripples Black's kingside structure. Black would have done much better to keep his position solid.

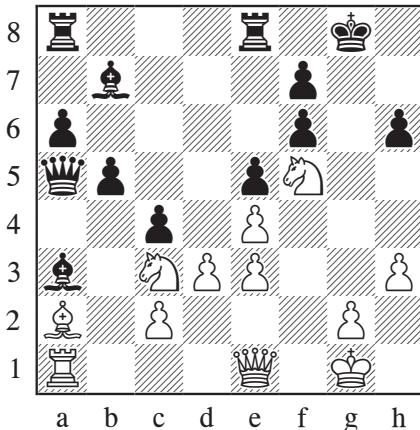
The simplest route to a large advantage was the prophylactic move 19... $\mathbb{E}e6!$ which forever dispels any hope of White sacrificing on f6. White is hard pressed to show any meaningful compensation for his positional shortcomings. For instance, if he tries to break his a2-bishop out of jail with: 20.dxc4 bxc4 21. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$



He ends up in a miserable endgame after: 21... $\mathbb{E}c6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{W}xc3$ 23. $\mathbb{W}xc3$ $\mathbb{E}xc3$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{E}a7\#$ Black will follow up with ... $\mathbb{Q}f8xa3$ and then ... $\mathbb{Q}a3-c5$, when he is close to winning.

In the game, Black probably thought his kingside was secure and White should not be able to launch a serious attack, but an energetic exchange sacrifice changed all of that.

20. $\mathbb{E}xf6!$ $\mathbb{G}xf6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}f5$



The position has changed dramatically, and not in ways that Black enjoyed. Suddenly, White has a huge attack. $\mathbb{W}e1-g3\#$ is already a mating threat, and the knight on f5 sits on a gorgeous outpost. Both problems are due to the g7-pawn having been dragged a file to the left. Wouldn't Black love to slide that pawn over to g6?

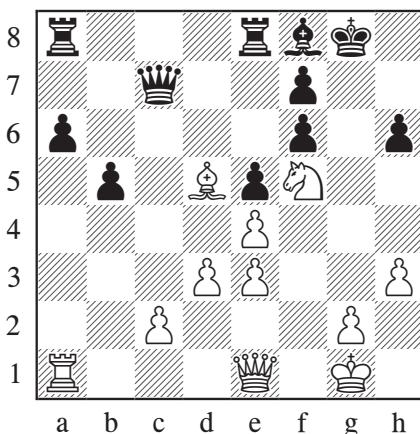
21... $\mathbb{B}f8$

Black retreats his bishop to try to shore up the kingside, but now White uses a neat tactic to include another piece in the attack.

22. $\mathbb{Q}xc4!$

The bishop is immune since Black's queen is hanging.

22... $\mathbb{W}c7$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$



A picturesque position. Black is an exchange up and not falling apart right away, yet he is completely lost. The strategic dominance White is demonstrating on the light squares is all due to the g7-pawn being forced to come to f6. If that pawn stood on g6 here, Black would probably be winning!

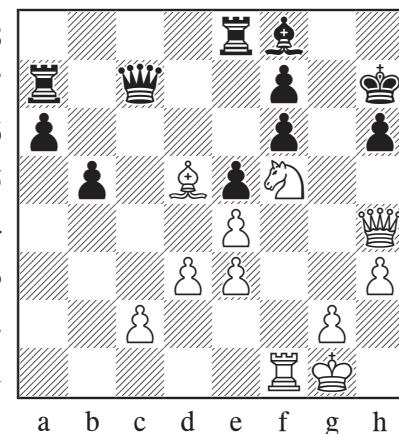
24... $\mathbb{B}a7$ 25. $\mathbb{W}h4$

Simple and deadly. Black has nothing to say about the massive incoming threats.

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

Black's pieces are so poor that he has essentially no counterplay. White found a slow but effective winning plan by activating his last piece.

26. $\mathbb{E}f1!$



White brings his rook to g3, and even three tempos are not enough for Black to mount any kind of defense.

26... $\mathbb{W}d8$ 27. $\mathbb{E}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 28. $\mathbb{E}g3$ $\mathbb{E}g8$ 29. $\mathbb{E}xg7\#$

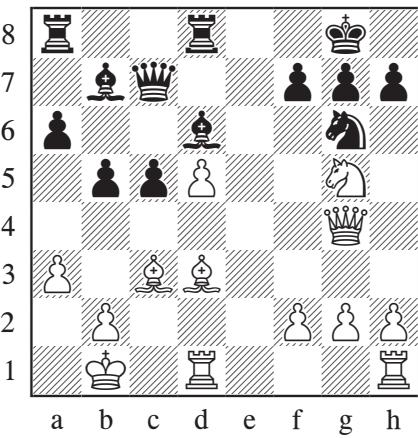
Perhaps this game could have been placed in a later chapter on forcing your opponents to double their pawns for the same strategic reasons, but I put it here because it was really

Black's decision to allow the thematic $\mathbb{Q}f1xf6$ sacrifice. If he had been more cautious about allowing his pawns to be doubled, which critically weakened a key square and opened an important line to his king, he could have maintained a strong position.

The above examples saw the same thing happen. A pawn being dragged to a square where it no longer blocked an important line and was no longer able to fight for control of the square directly in front of its new location. This turned an otherwise excellent position into a disastrous one. This brings us to our first guideline.

Always be cautious about allowing your pawns to be doubled if the square directly in front of the newly doubled pawn can be put to good use by your opponent, or if the pawn no longer blocks a key line.

Applying this guideline retroactively to the previous two positions would show that Black should have been more concerned about his pawn structure than he was. In the second case, he should have avoided the doubled pawns completely. However, while this is often desirable, it is sometimes not achievable. Let's go back to the Dreev – Jakovenko encounter, and see how Black should have played.



We have already seen that the threat of $\mathbb{Q}d3xg6$ is real. Ignoring it led to a quick demise, but how should Black play instead? There is no way to defend the knight, and moving it away would lead to an even worse disaster on g7. The way to play this position

is to realize that $\mathbb{Q}d3xg6$ is coming, it cannot be stopped, and prepare accordingly. Indeed, if Black makes a strong prophylactic move, he remains on top.

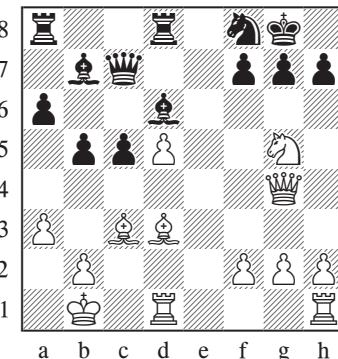
20... $\mathbb{Q}f4!$

The point is that the knight on g5 cannot be tolerated, if White wants to take on g6 and place his queen on h4. By removing one of the key attacking pieces, the doubled pawns will be much less of a big deal. Black is better in all lines.

It would be far too simplistic to try to avoid the doubled pawns at all costs.

20... $\mathbb{Q}f8?$

This sad retreat does avoid $\mathbb{Q}xg6$, but in addition to taking the knight off an active square and moving it to the back rank, it also opens the g-file.



White has several winning moves, with the most violent being:

21. $\mathbb{Q}xh7\#!$ $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xh7$

Black faces a catastrophe on g7 that cannot be avoided. For instance, blocking the diagonal with

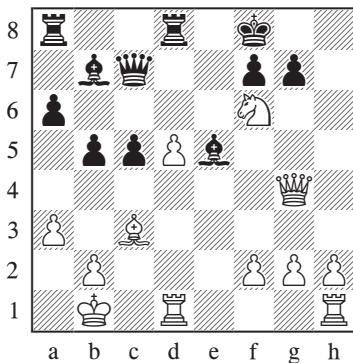
22... $\mathbb{Q}e5$

is brutally refuted by a series of forcing moves.

23. $\mathbb{Q}f6\#!$

Black has no choice now...

23... $\mathbb{Q}f8$



Another forcing move allows White to retake control of the long diagonal.

24. $d6!$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$

The alternative capture 24... $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ loses a boatload of material after: 25. $\mathbb{Q}xe5!$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1\#$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}d7\#!$ The only winning move, but a convincing one.

25. $\mathbb{Q}h7\#$

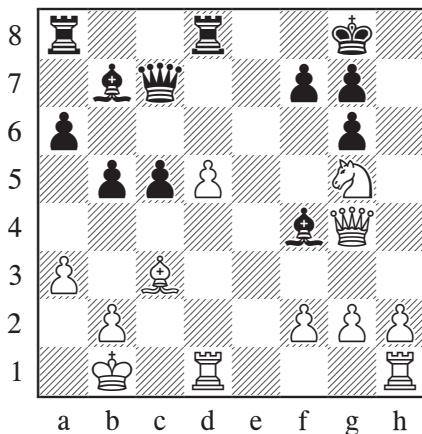
White's reacquired control of the c3-g7 diagonal means that ... $\mathbb{Q}f8-g8$ would be met by mate in one, so Black must step into the center.

25... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}he1\#$

I have seen worse positions for Black than this one, but not many! The game is over.

Let's see what would happen if White tried to proceed as he did in the game:

21. $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ $hxg6$



22. $\mathbb{Q}h4?$

It is a mistake to continue with the same caveman-style attacking plan now that Black has played a strong defensive move, but the alternatives are not great.

White's best try is the surprising sacrifice 22. $d6!$ when White can jump on some open lines. He is only slightly worse after 22... $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}d1$.

22... $\mathbb{Q}xg5$

Black simply parries the mating threats by taking the offending knight.

23. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $b4!$

Black has a strong attack.

The proper treatment of the position was indeed to allow the doubled pawns, but Black had to first make sure that he had control of the weaknesses that the doubled pawns could no longer protect. Taking one move off from his attack with ... $\mathbb{Q}d6-f4$ would have put White in a difficult situation. This brings us to our second guideline.

You can allow your pawns to be doubled in a way that allows your opponent access to a newly weakened square or a newly opened line, as long as your pieces can pick up the slack and prevent your opponent from making good use of it.

While the doubled pawns in the Dreev – Jakovenko game could not be avoided, Black should have been happy to allow them if he was able to challenge the knight on g5. Without that knight, White's mating chances on the h-file would be gone. Clearly, a black pawn could no longer fight for the g5-square, so, Black should have brought in a piece to do the job.

The Djukic – Mogilarov game was different. Once the g7-pawn had to come to f6, there clearly was no way for Black to either challenge the f5-knight with one of his pieces or try to plug the open g-file. He tried to do so with ... $\mathbb{Q}f8-g7$, but was quickly mated anyway. If he had followed our guideline and realized he would be in no position to prevent White from using the newly opened lines or f5-outpost, he may have landed on a better move than ... $\mathbb{Q}f8xa3$.

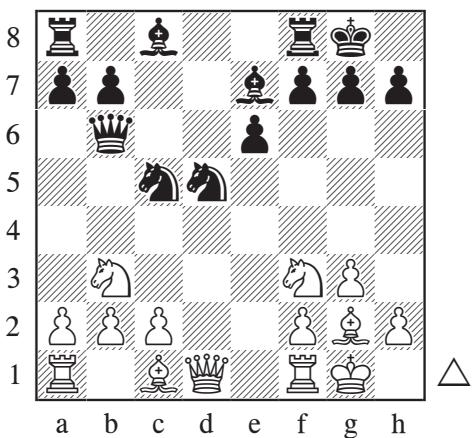
While doubling pawns in a way that weakens your control of an important square is often a positional concession, another reason it can be done is that the assets it generates for you are greater than the liabilities. This brings us to the final guideline, which is seen in some form in almost every chapter.

You can allow your pawns to be doubled in a way that allows your opponent access to a newly weakened square or a newly opened line if it does something else that is good for your position that you deem to be of higher priority.

Let's see this third guideline in action.

David Navara – Ruslan Ponomariov

Wijk aan Zee 2007

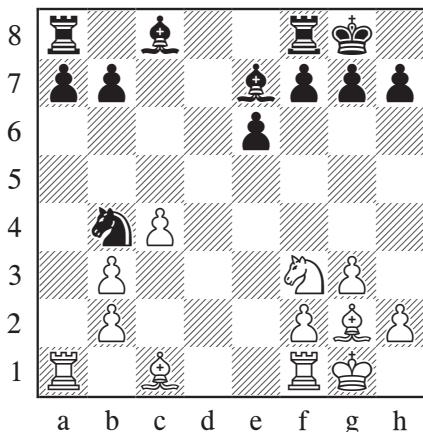


White has reached a pleasant position from a funny French Tarrasch that now more resembles a Catalan. He has a small lead in development and a nice bishop on g2, but if Black can get his pieces out and consolidate, there is no reason he should remain worse. I really like how Navara approached the position.

11.c4!

White gains more control of some key central squares and sets his pawn majority in motion. He allows Black to land a knight on a shiny new outpost, but it is much more important that Black should not be allowed to develop his queenside.

11...♝xb3 12.♛xb3 ♜xb3 13.axb3 ♝b4



The knight certainly is well placed on b4, and White does not have a great way to get rid of it. But he can simply play around it and fight to accomplish his own goals. The first one should be to prevent ...♝c8-d7.

14.♝e3!

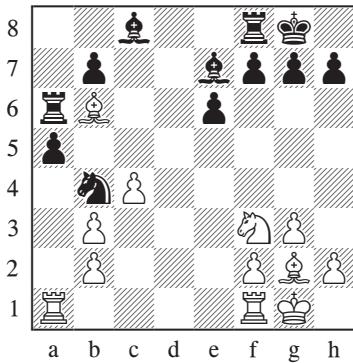
White develops another piece with a gain of tempo.

14...a6

It was more resilient for Black to play:
14...a5

So that White cannot install his bishop on b6 as comfortably, since it can now be kicked by ...♜a8-a6, though White is still better after:

15.♝b6 ♜a6



16.♝c7!

The threat of ♜a1xa5 is for real. If Black tries to defend it with:

16...b6

After:

17.♝fd1±

Black's knight on b4 is indeed excellent – but this is not nearly enough to justify all his other pieces being miserable!

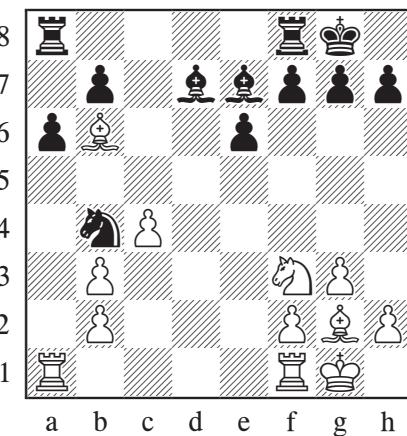
15.♝b6

White occupies a fine outpost and will be ready for ♜f1-d1 next without having to worry about the fork with ...♝b4-c2. Should White get ♜f1-d1 in, it will be hard to imagine how Black will activate his queenside. He tried developing the bishop to d7 right away while he still could, but this did not solve his problems.

15...♝d7

White now jumps in with energetic play.

It was probably better to play 15...f6, hoping to get in ...e6-e5, but after something like 16.♞d4! e5 17.♞b5! Black is still in a nasty bind. The pressure along the long diagonal prevents him from developing his queenside. While the knight on b4 is pretty, it cannot possibly be enough compensation for two lousy pieces on c8 and a8.

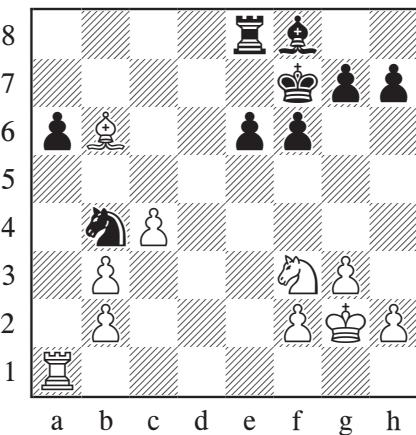


16.♕e5! ♜c6 17.♖fd1!

Simple and strong. The rook is ready to invade on d7 after some exchanges.

17...♜xg2 18.♝xg2 f6 19.♖d7!

Incoming!

**19...♜ae8 20.♝f3 ♜f7 21.♜xb7 ♜f8 22.♜xf7
♝xf7±**

At the end of all of that, Black still has a nice knight on b4. But he is a pawn down, and one well-placed piece is not nearly enough compensation. White chopped the knight off right away and went on to win.

**23.♕a5 ♜b8 24.♕xb4 ♜xb4 25.♕xa6 ♜xb3
26.♕a7† ♜g6 27.♗d4 ♜b6 28.♗b5 ♜b8
29.♗d7 f5 30.f4 ♜f6 31.b3 h6 32.♗d4 ♜a8
33.♗c6 ♜a2† 34.♗f1 ♜g6 35.b4 ♜c2 36.c5
♗h5 37.♗d4 ♜c1† 38.♗f2 ♜xc5 39.bxc5
♜xc5 40.♜xg7 ♜d5 41.♗e3 e5 42.♗xf5
exf4† 43.♗e4**

1–0

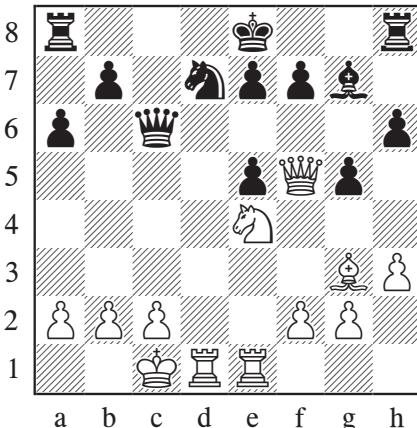
There is a well-known maxim in chess that one bad piece often makes a bad position. It is much less common that one good piece makes a good position! I admire how Navara demonstrated that allowing Black to sink a knight into b4 was not a big deal, since

there were more important fish to fry. He could exert Catalan-style pressure along the h1-a8 diagonal, and that pressure prevented Black from developing his queenside without material losses. As such, it was a fully justified strategic decision.

While pawns becoming doubled can open squares or lines for our opponent's pieces, they can also block in our own pieces. Doubled pawns are often even worse than a normal pawn blocking us, because it is even less likely the pawn can advance. The following example should serve as a clear caution of what might happen if your pieces end up stuck behind doubled pawns.

Emil Sutovsky – Ju Wenjun

Gibraltar 2013



White has obvious compensation for his sacrificed pawn, and I somewhat prefer his position. Black's bishop on g7 is firmly blunted by the pawn on e5, and White's well-centralized pieces are active and preventing Black from castling. Nonetheless, the position would have been playable for Black if she had proceeded with normal development instead of saddling herself with a deeply unpleasant pawn structure.

20... $\mathbb{W}e6?$

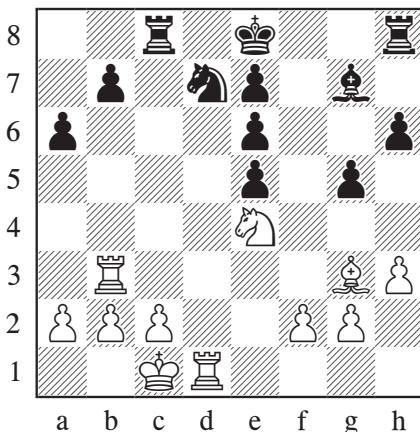
I am sure Ju Wenjun was sensing danger in the position and wanted to get the queens off at all costs. But this move causes a strategic catastrophe.

The best move was to calmly develop with 20... $\mathbb{B}c8$, gaining a tempo on the c2-pawn. Following 21.c3 e6! Black is ready to castle to safety and should be alright.

21. $\mathbb{W}xe6$ fxe6±

Every possible detriment one can attribute to doubled pawns can also be said of tripled pawns! Black is in big trouble, mostly because her pawns are seriously restricting her g7-bishop. It simply has no route into the game! If the e6-pawn were moved back to f7, Black would have the plan of playing ...f7-f5 to get ...e5-e4 through, or potentially ...e7-e6 to make the f8-a3 diagonal available. As is, Black is almost playing a piece down. In fact, she would love to simply take her e5-pawn off the board!

22. $\mathbb{B}e3$ $\mathbb{B}c8$ 23. $\mathbb{B}b3$



Sutovsky initiates hostilities on the other side of the board.

23... $\mathbb{B}c7$ 24. $\mathbb{B}dd3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6?$

I am not sure what Black was hoping to accomplish. Perhaps she wanted to play ...h6-h5, but there were more pressing issues to deal with.

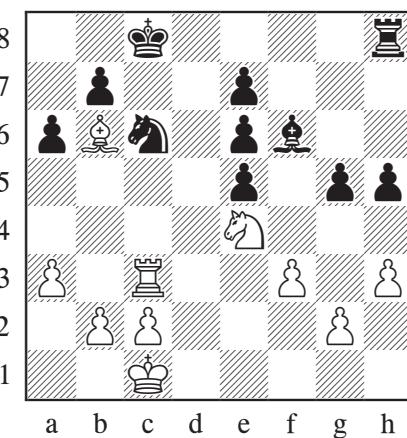
It was more resilient to play 24... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 25. $\mathbb{B}dc3$ $\mathbb{B}xc3$ 26. $\mathbb{B}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ when Black retains some defensive chances.

25.f3 $\mathbb{Q}d8$

White now regroups more of his pieces toward the queenside.

26. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{B}c6$ 28. $\mathbb{B}bc3$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{B}xc3$ 30. $\mathbb{B}xc3\#$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 31.a3 h5

Black was probably hoping to pitch a pawn with ...g5-g4, just to open some squares for the bishop. But...

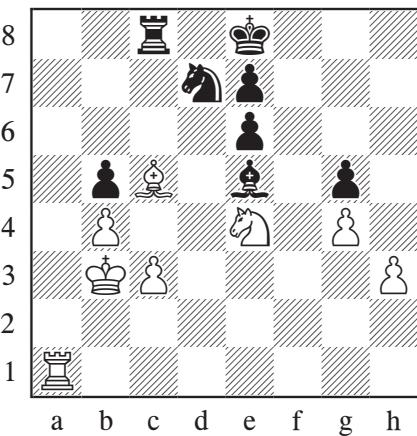
**32.g4!**

No such luck.

32...hxg4 33.fxg4 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}c5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 36.b4 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 38.c3 $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{B}c8$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 41.a4 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ b5 43. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{B}d8$ 44.axb5 axb5 45. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{B}c8$ 46. $\mathbb{B}d1$ $\mathbb{B}c4$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}d2$

At long last the blockading knight has moved out of the way, and Black promptly gave up a pawn with ...e5-e4 to open up her bishop. But the damage had been done.

47... $\mathbb{E}c8$ 48. $\mathbb{E}a1$ e4 49. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}c5$



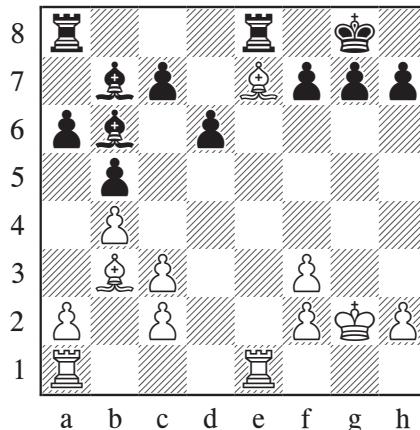
White has a much better endgame and went on to win.

50... $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 51. $\mathbb{E}a6$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 52. $\mathbb{E}a7$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5\#$
 53.bxc5 $\mathbb{E}h8$ 54.c6 $\mathbb{E}c8$ 55. $\mathbb{E}a6$ e5 56. $\mathbb{Q}b4$
 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 57.c4 bxc4 58. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 59. $\mathbb{Q}c3$
 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ 60. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 61. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}g1$ 62. $\mathbb{Q}d3$
 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ 63.c7# $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 64. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}g1$ 65. $\mathbb{E}g6$ e6
 66. $\mathbb{E}g7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 67. $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 68. $\mathbb{Q}e4\#$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$
 69. $\mathbb{E}d7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 70. $\mathbb{E}d6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ 71. $\mathbb{E}xe6$ $\mathbb{E}d8\#$
 72. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 73. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 74. $\mathbb{E}g6$ $\mathbb{E}a8$
 75. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 76. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}b2$
 1-0

The bishop on f6 was a sad sight to behold. Though it eventually escaped, Black had to pitch a pawn for nothing and remain in a deeply unpleasant position to break it out. Bishops are often the pieces most negatively affected by restrictive doubled pawns. For example, I really like the following game by Vladimir Kramnik.

Nigel Short – Vladimir Kramnik

London 2011

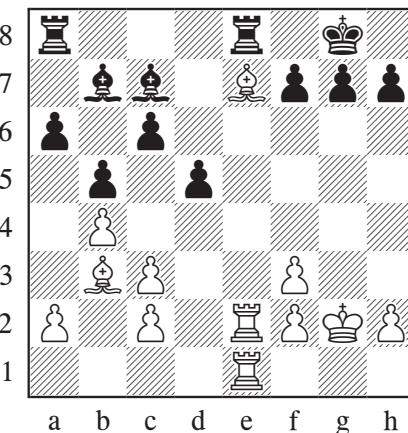


The position may look close to symmetrical, but White is undoubtedly worse due to his two sets of doubled pawns, but only one of them will ensure his demise. After the strong move:

19...d5!

It becomes clear that the bishop on b3 will never again see the light of day. Material is nominally equal, but in effect White is a piece down.

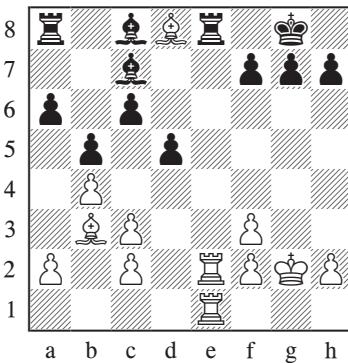
20. $\mathbb{E}e5$ c6 21. $\mathbb{E}ae1$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 22. $\mathbb{E}5e2$



All Black has to do to win the game is trade the other pieces off. The first step is contesting the e-file.

22...♝c8 23.a4

Kramnik noted a funny trick White had with:
23.♝d8!?



Trying to use tactics to cause some problems for Black. But he was ready for it. The simplest solution is:

23...♝h3†!

Clearing the back rank. Black will take his piece back on d8 and all that has happened is White has helped Black exchange more pieces.

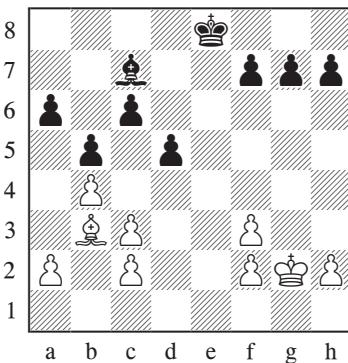
24.♝xh3 ♜xe2 25.♜xe2 ♜xd8

Kramnik now gives the following line:

“26.♝e7 ♜c8! 27.♝g2

27.♝d7 ♜f8 followed by ...♝e8.

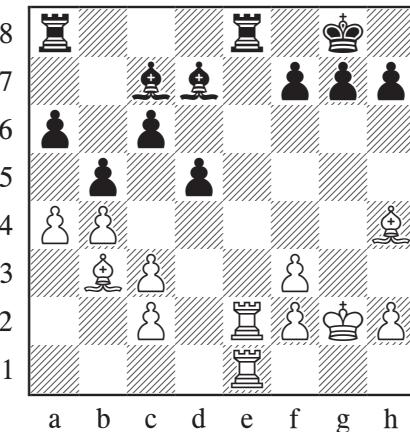
27...♝f8 28.♜e1 ♜e8 29.♜xe8† ♜xe8



Despite material equilibrium (temporarily) and opposite-colored bishops White can resign already.”

Black can simply walk his king to a square such as f4 or h4 and proceed as he would in a king and pawn endgame, except a piece up. If this is not to his liking, he can also start plucking pawns with ...♝c7-e5 at a moment’s notice.

23...♝d7 24.♝h4



24...♜xe2!

Just keep on trading. White could have resigned here, but I like that he played on, as it helps illustrate the point.

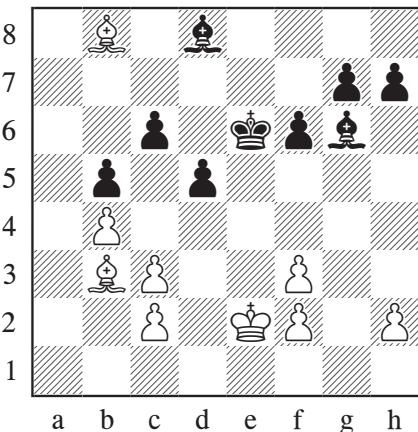
25.♜xe2 ♜e8 26.♜xe8† ♜xe8

Now all that is left to do is bring in the king and win with a de facto extra piece.

27.♝g3 ♜d8

Thank you, not now, maybe later :)

28.♝e5 f6 29.♝b8 ♜g6 30.AXB5 axb5 31.♝f1 ♜f7 32.♝e2 ♜e6

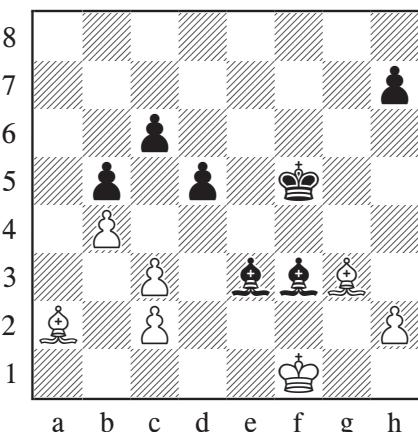


Black must open the position on the kingside and penetrate with his king. Not a difficult task, since all White can do is wait.

33.♗e3 ♕b6† 34.♗e2 ♕h5 35.♔a2

Black now opens the kingside, where he will be playing a piece up.

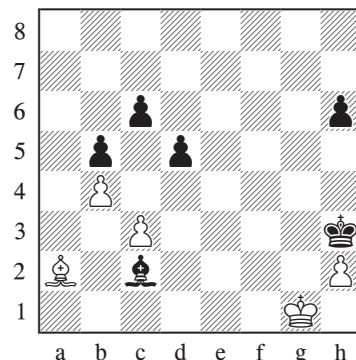
**35...g5! 36.♕b3 f5! 37.♔a2 f4 38.♕b3 ♔f5
39.♕d6 g4 40.♔f1 g3 41.fxg3 fxg3 42.♔xg3
♕xf3 43.♔a2 ♔e3**



0–1

Short resigned here, but Kramnik showed a possible way the game might have continued:

**44.♗f2 ♕xf2 45.♔xf2 ♔f4 46.♗b3 ♔e4
47.♗e2 ♔g4 48.♗f2 ♔h3 49.♗g1** White can simply be put in zugzwang as if it were a pure pawn ending with a piece up; in fact it's remarkably similar to one we saw on page 51.
49...h6 50.♗a2 ♔xc2



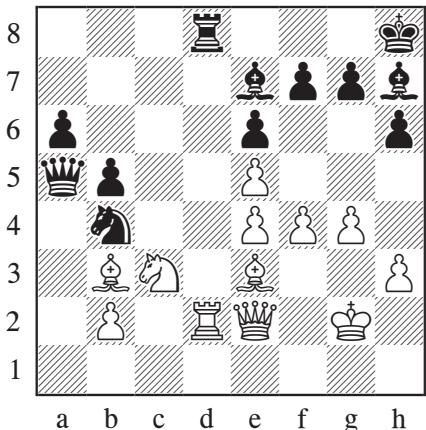
Further resistance is futile.

This was an even more devastating case of a buried bishop than the previous one. There was simply no way for the tall pawn on b3 to rejoin the fight, and this was due to the pawn structure. The doubled pawns on c2 and c3 kept White from finding a way to get the bishop back into the game, and the c3-pawn could never advance.

The same kind of idea tends not to work nearly as well when the pawns are not doubled. Let's take another game, coincidentally contested between the same two players.

Vladimir Kramnik – Nigel Short

Moscow 1996



White tried to bury Black's bishop on h7 with a tempting but incorrect advance.

24.f5?

When one considers what we discussed in Chapter 2, it becomes clear this move is highly risky. The pawn on f4 was serving an important purpose defending the e5-pawn, and the bishop on h7 does have a route back into the game.

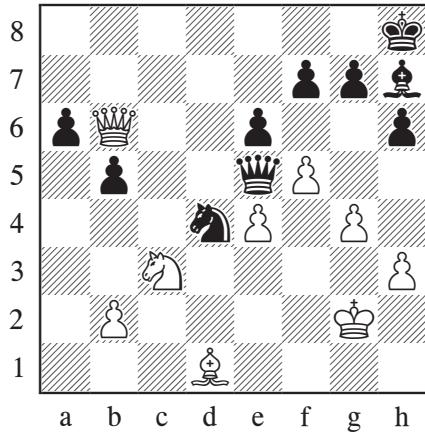
White is slightly worse after a quiet move like 24.♗c2. But nothing too horrible is happening to him just yet.

Black now immediately targets the new weakness on e5.

24...♝c6! 25.♜xd8† ♜xd8 26.♝f4

After some maneuvering, the pawn fell.

26...♝c5 27.♝e3 ♜b6 28.♝xc5 ♜xc5 29.♞f2 ♜xe5 30.♞b6 ♜d4 31.♞d1



Black has won a pawn. But imagine if the g7-pawn moved to f6, the bishop would be marooned on h7 permanently.

31...♝g8–+

The bishop sneaks back into the game. White is dead lost.

32.♝f3 f6 33.♛e2 ♜xe2 34.♝xe2 ♜xe4† 35.♝f3 ♜c2† 36.♞f2 ♜xf2† 37.♝xf2 a5 38.fxe6 ♜xe6 39.♝e3 b4 40.♞d1 f5 41.♝f4 fxg4 42.hxg4 ♜g8 43.♝e5 ♜f7 44.♝d6 ♜f6 45.b3 g5 46.♝c5 ♜e5 47.♝b5 ♜d4 48.♝xa5 ♜c3 49.♝a4 ♜d5

0–1

The reason that the h7-bishop being stuck out of play was not worth losing the e5-pawn over was that it had a route back into the game since, unlike the previous examples, Black's pawns were not doubled. They were healthy, and could be moved to open up pleasant diagonals.

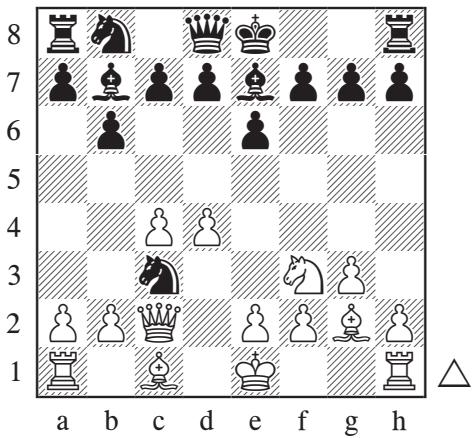
The above games help clarify our final guideline for the chapter.

Be careful when choosing to double your pawns if they will occupy a square or block a line one of your pieces needs to use. Even more so than in the advancing-pawns-too-far section, when the pawn is also doubled, it often will be unable to move again.

Exercises

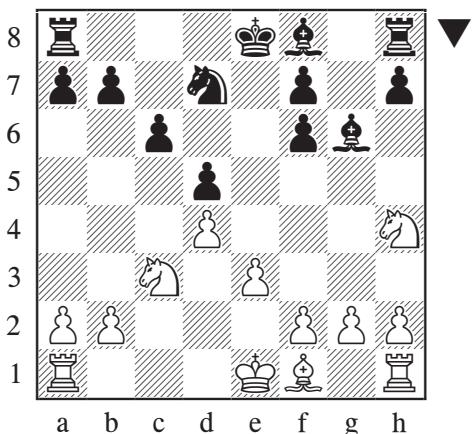
As ever, we finish with two puzzles.

Kateryna Lagno – Vassily Ivanchuk, Cap d'Agde 2010



White took on c3 with the pawn. What do you think of her decision?

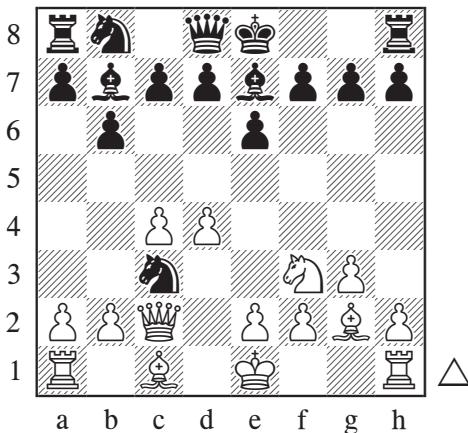
Matthias Bluebaum – Arkadij Naiditsch, Minsk 2017



Black made an error here with 11... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ that White can punish severely. How should White reply?

Kateryna Lagno – Vassily Ivanchuk

Cap d'Agde 2010



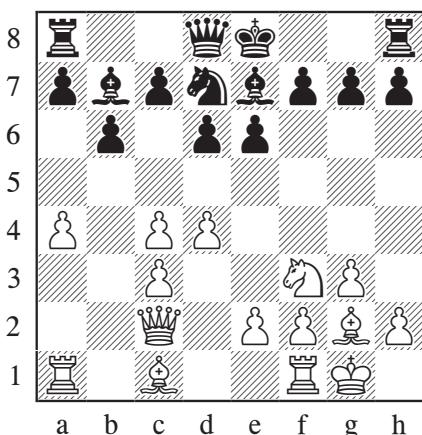
White should not accept doubled pawns. There is more than one reason this is incorrect, but the biggest one is that it severely lessens White's ability to fight for control of the c5-square. We will soon see that become relevant.

8.bxc3?

The normal move would be 8.♗xc3 when the game is still in charted territory. White can fight for an edge.

Now Black has several decent setups at his disposal, but I like the way Ivanchuk played.

8...d6 9.0-0 ♜d7 10.a4



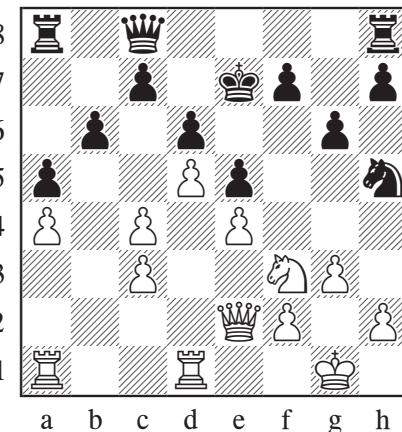
10...a5!

Black shuts down the queenside, and he will look for play on the kingside. White will have a hard time achieving c4-c5, since she has lost the ability to fight for the square with her b-pawn. She has also lost the possibility of a b2-b4 break.

11.♗d1 ♜c8 12.d5 e5!

Black has a dream King's Indian. He will never have to worry about queenside play since White cannot open lines, while he can slowly but surely expand on the kingside.

**13.♕h3 ♜d8 14.e4 ♜c8 15.♕e3 ♜f6
16.♕xc8 ♜xc8 17.♕g5 ♜h5 18.♕xe7 ♜xe7
19.♕e2 g6**



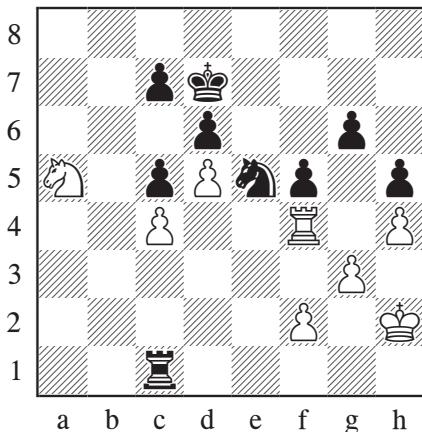
Lagno has a tough position, and she understandably lashed out, trying to open the queenside at all costs.

20.c5

I think this was the correct decision since the alternative was to wait for Black to eventually crush her with his kingside pawns, but White does not have enough for a pawn.

20.♗d2 ♜f8± Eventually ...f5-f4 will come, and White can't stop it, or create meaningful counterplay.

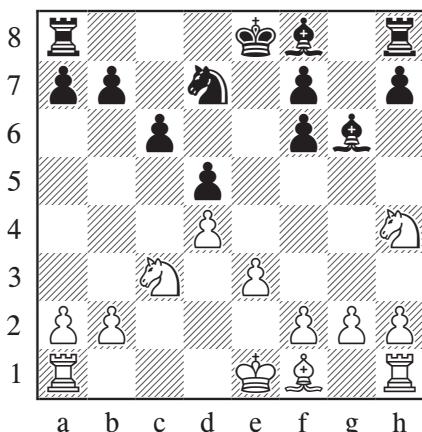
20... bxc5 21. Qd2 Qf6 22. Qc4 Wa6 23. Wd3
 Qd7 24. Eab1 Ehb8 25. Exb8 Exb8 26. Qxe5
 Wxd3 27. Qc6\# Qe8 28. Exd3 Eb1\# 29. Qg2
 Ba1 30. Qxa5 Bxa4 31. Qc6 Bxe4 32. Qf3
 Qf6 33. h3 h5 34. h4 Qd7 35. Qb8\# Qc8
36. Qc6 Ba4 37. Qg2 Qd7 38. Qb8\# Qe8
39. Qc6 Ba2 40. c4 Qg4 41. Ef3 f5 42. Qg1
 Ec2 43. Ef4 Qe5 44. Qa5 Ec1\# 45. Qh2 Qd7



46.g4 hxg4 47.h5 Qf3\# 48. Exf3 gxf3
49.hxg6 Qe7 50. Qg3 Qf6
0–1

Matthias Bluebaum – Arkadij Naiditsch

Minsk 2017



11... Qb6?

Black should have preferred 11... Qe7! with the point that 12.f4 can now be met with 12... f5 . And White does not have time to play Qf1-d3 , winning a pawn, due to the knight hanging on h4. Black should be fine.

White now buried Black's bishop with a strong move.

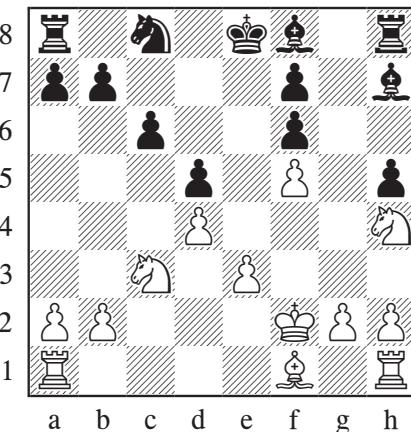
12.f4!

White threatens f4-f5, when Black's bishop will soon be lost. Black's problem is that if he plays ... f6-f5 himself, he will have to reckon with Qf1-d3 and the pawn cannot be easily defended.

12...h5

In hindsight I would prefer 12... f5 , even though after 13. Qd3! Black will probably lose a pawn. Still, he can hope to resist with something like: 13... Qd7 14. Qxf5\# Qxf5 15. Qxf5 Qb4\pm White is better with his extra pawn, but Black has some activity, and the e3-pawn is backward. There will be some work to do for White to bring in the full point.

13. Qf2 Qc8 14.f5 Qh7



The machine calls this position equal, but I am confident that Black is dead lost. His bishop on h7 will simply never rejoin the

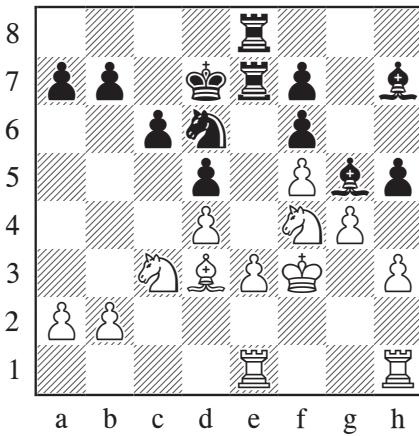
game. I really like how Bluebaum played the rest of the game.

15.h3!

White's top priority is not to let the bishop out under any circumstance; g2-g4 is coming next.

**15...♝d6 16.g4 ♕d7 17.♝d3 ♔h6 18.♝g2
♝ae8 19.♝f3 ♘e7 20.♝f4 ♔g5 21.♝ae1
♝he8**

White now opens the position, and much like the Short – Kramnik game, wins by simply playing as if he is a piece up.



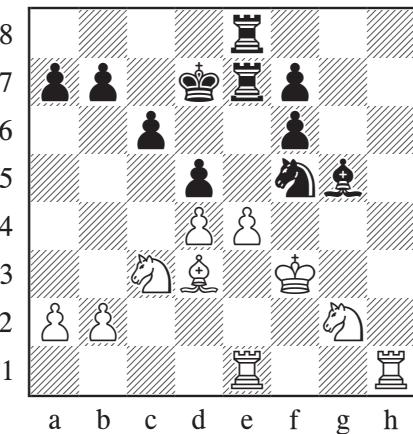
22.e4

It may have been cleaner to play 22.♝cxd5!? cxd5 23.♝xd5+– when White will end up with a rook and two pawns for two pieces, but one of those pieces is the bishop on h7...

22...hxg4† 23.hxg4

Black now correctly gave up his useless bishop for two pawns, but it was not enough to save him.

23...♝xf5 24.gxf5 ♘xf5 25.♝g2



White's virtual extra piece has become a real one. He went on to win.

**25...♝d2 26.exf5 ♘xe1 27.♝xe1 ♘xe1
28.♝xe1 ♘xe1 29.♝e3 a5 30.♝a4 ♔d6
31.♝e2 ♔g3 32.♝c5 b6 33.♝a4 b5 34.♝c5
♔e7 35.a4 b4 36.♝b3 ♔c7 37.♝f3
1–0**

Part IV

Compelling Enemy

Pawns Sideways

Introduction

In Chapters 11-13 we examined the three major reasons that doubled pawns can be problematic in your position, as well as when and how to avoid them. In Chapters 14-16, we will go over the same topics once more, but the focus will shift. Instead of trying to avoid doubled pawns of our own, we will be trying to double our opponent's pawns to cause them positional headaches. Remember, a detriment to your opponent's position is always an asset to yours!

When it comes to not doubling our own pawns in foolish ways, we were usually looking at unforced errors. But when it comes to doubling your opponent's pawns, it is usually something you must force him to do. While an opponent will often voluntarily advance a pawn incorrectly, it is much harder for them to double a pawn incorrectly because a pawn can only be doubled when it is making a capture, i.e. when you put a pawn or piece on a square where it can be taken. In general, you (hopefully!) will not be doing this for no reason. Usually it will come about by you taking one of your opponent's pieces in such a way that they must recapture with a pawn to make doubled pawns. When this happens, you are the one forcing your opponents to double their pawns. It is seldom their choice.

As such, the following three chapters are much more forcing in their nature than the previous three were. I believe they are a little more difficult, because in addition to spotting what kind of doubled pawns will be problematic for your opponent, you must also look for candidate moves and calculate some variations to force a change in the pawn structure. Still, the concepts are largely positional, and the calculation necessary is seldom too deep or demanding. Without further ado, let's get to the final phase of the book!

Chapter 14

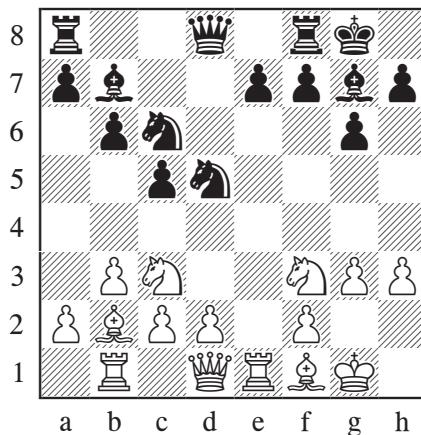
Winning 1 vs 2 Combat

Much like the transition from Part I to Part II, Part IV will go back over the same themes from Part III, but with more focus on creating and exploiting shortcomings in our opponents' positions than avoiding shortcomings in our own positions. Chapter 11 introduced the discussion of doubled pawns and their inability to make a passed pawn, when you should try to avoid them, and when they are relatively inconsequential. On the flipside, the exact same points should be discussed when choosing whether to double our opponent's pawns.

If you can give your opponent a poor pawn structure for nothing, it is generally a good idea to do so. For instance, the following game was a straightforward clinic from Black on damaging his opponent's structure, then exploiting it.

Laurence Matheson – Bobby Sky Cheng

Canberra 2014



White's play had been lackluster so far and Black has a pleasant position. He has several routes to an edge, but I prefer the one he chose for its simplicity.

13... ♞xc3!

Black makes some exchanges and White will be left with a pair of doubled pawns on the queenside that will not be able to make a passed pawn. Note that Black is making identical piece trades – first knight for knight, then bishop for bishop, meaning the only imbalance left will be White's compromised queenside structure.

Black would also be better by grabbing a larger stake in the center with 13...e5, but it is less convincing than the game continuation. Then White at least has a plan of trading off a bunch of pieces to alleviate his problems connected to his lack of space.

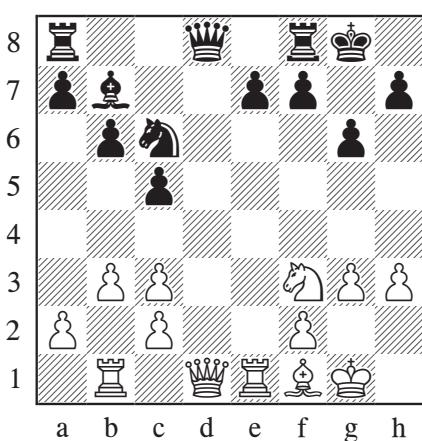
14.♗xc3 ♗xc3!

My computer does not care for this move, but I think it is the best choice. Black now has an important long-term asset in that he can eventually make a kingside/central passed pawn, while White cannot effectively use his majority. And with the open d-file to exchange a lot of pieces, a king-and-pawn endgame is not as far away as it might seem.

The machine's choice is 14...♗c7 when Black will follow up with ...e7-e5 and he should be a bit better.

15.dxc3

The more pieces are exchanged, the happier Black will be.



15...♗xd1! 16.♗bx d1 ♘ad8! 17.♗g2 f6
18.♗d2 ♘f7 19.♗c4

Black now takes the opportunity to trade even more.

19...♗xd1! 20.♗xd1 ♘d8!

White finds a nice idea here, but he is still clearly worse.

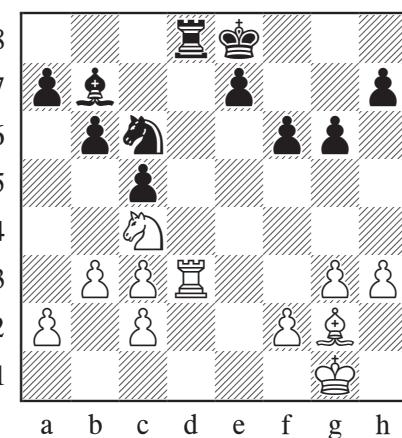
21.♗d3

White could consider ♘g2xc6 on the next move, when the rook on d8 lacks defenders; Cheng's next move avoids this idea.

In the event of 21.♗xd8 ♘xd8 22.♗xb7 ♘xb7† the mass exchanges bring Black closer to his dream endgame.

21...♔e8

White's next move was a sign of capitulation.



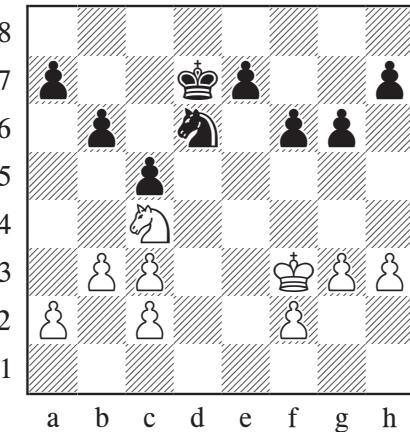
22.♗xd8†?

Now all the pieces really are coming off.

It was better to wait patiently with 22.♗f1 even though the position still looks dangerous for White. Black could try something like 22...♗d7, with the plan of ...♘c6-d8, encouraging more exchanges, and White still has a lot of problems to solve.

22... $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$

White now made his final mistake, but I believe his position was losing anyway.



26. $\mathbb{Q}xd6?$

Black gets the textbook case of a pawn ending with a healthy majority against a doubled majority. Structurally, the game is very similar to examples we saw in Chapter 11, but with reversed colors.

It was better to try 26. $\mathbb{Q}e3\#$ to avoid a pawn endgame, but I don't think the position can be saved. Botvinnik once said that if a pawn endgame is lost, the same endgame with knights is also lost. It's a good rule of thumb, and while there are obviously exceptions, I do not think this is one of them.

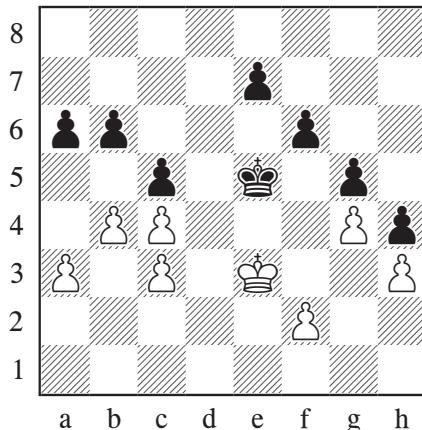
Black now chooses the correct capture on d6.

26... $\mathbb{Q}xd6!-+$

It would be a big mistake to play 26... $exd6=$ because then there are no pawn majorities, and the doubled c-pawns' inability to make a passed pawn no longer matters. Black's pawn is much better placed on the e-file than on the d-file because Black gets to keep his healthy majority intact.

27.c4 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 28.c3 h5 29. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ g5 30.g4 h4 31.a3 a6 32.b4

White would love for Black to take on b4 to straighten his pawns out, but his opponent does not oblige him.



32...a5!

If Black took with 32... $cxb4?$ then after 33. $cxb4$ White's pawns on the queenside can make a passer again, and Black actually is in some trouble.

33.bxa5 bxa5 34.a4 f5 35.f3 e6 36.gxf5 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$

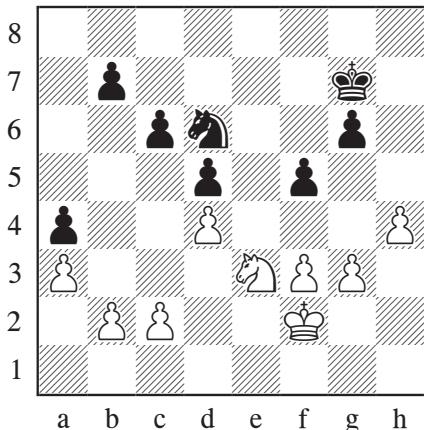
White resigned. He is forced to retreat his king, and then Black wins with ... $\mathbb{Q}f5-f4$ followed by ...e6-e5-e4.

0–1

This game was straightforward because saddling White with the long-term liability of an ineffective queenside majority came at no cost to Black. Unfortunately, it will often take a concession to compromise your opponent's pawn structure. It then follows logically that the closer you are to a king and pawn ending, the more likely such a move is to be strong. For instance, I was very impressed by the resourcefulness my friend Daniel Naroditsky demonstrated, without much time on his clock, in a recent rapid tournament.

Parimarjan Negi – Daniel Naroditsky

San Francisco (rapid) 2017



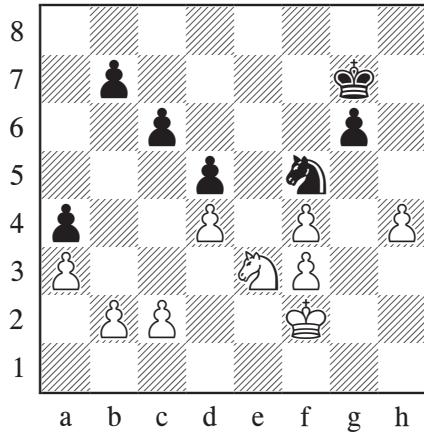
Black is a pawn down, and according to Botvinnik's rule, he should probably lose if the character of the position does not change dramatically. Previously we have seen a lot of cases where a healthy majority rolls down the board while an unhealthy one cannot create any problems, but inflicting doubled pawns on your opponent can also be used defensively. Daniel found an excellent idea that should have saved the game.

34...f4!

Black uses concrete measures to dramatically change the position. He is losing a second pawn, but White's kingside majority will be totally ineffective.

If Black had proceeded as if nothing happened, he would miss his chance. After 34... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 35.c3 the thrust is much less effective because after: 35...f4 36.gxf4 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ White is no longer losing the pawn on d4. Following 37. $\mathbb{Q}g4\#$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}d7$ White should win. $\mathbb{Q}d7$ -b6 is threatening to win a pawn, and 39...b5 40. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ is also no bed of roses.

35.gxf4 $\mathbb{Q}f5!$

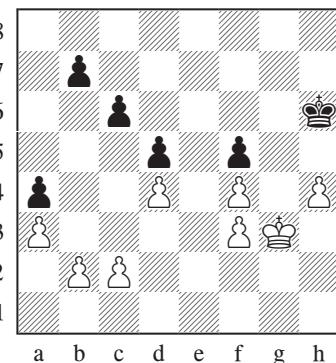


Black's point is revealed. The king and pawn endgame following $\mathbb{Q}e3xf5$ is a draw, and otherwise there is no way for White to save both the d4- and h4-pawns.

36.c3

White saves the d4-pawn.

The ineffectiveness of doubled pawns is clearly shown after: 36. $\mathbb{Q}xf5\#$ gxf5 37. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$



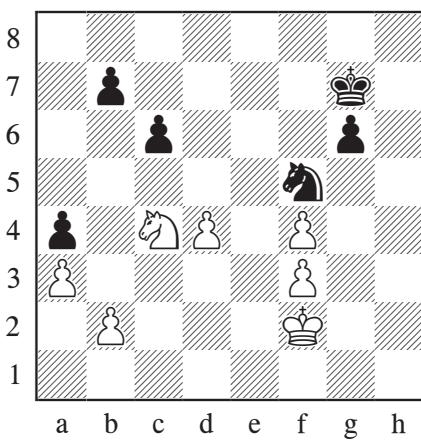
White's h-pawn is going nowhere, and he has no other plan, since running the king to the queenside would even lose to ... $\mathbb{Q}h6$ -h5xh4-g3, and Black wins the race. White's second extra pawn is the doubled one on f3, and it is useless. If his pawn were still on g2, White would win easily by means of g2-g4 to make a second passed pawn.

White could have tried 36.h5, but after 36... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 37.hxg6 $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ Black looks fine to me. White's doubled f-pawns only function as one passed pawn, and Black now has a majority on the other side; he should hold quite easily.

36... $\mathbb{Q}xh4$

The position has changed enormously. Black has managed to exchange a pair of pawns, which is generally a good idea when defending. But much more importantly, White has been left with doubled pawns on the kingside that will not be able to make a passed pawn. Black should hold a draw.

37.c4 dxc4 38. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$



39. $\mathbb{Q}a5?$!

White would have done better to try 39. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ when he can still push, but the position should be defensible for Black.

39... $\mathbb{Q}d6!$

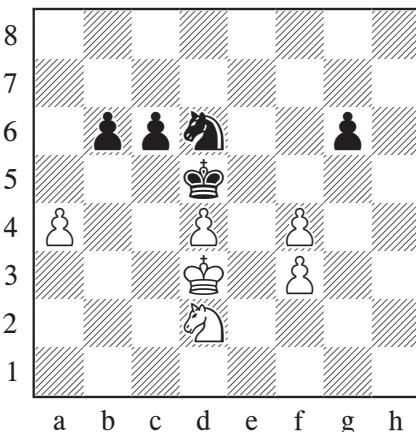
Now White's knight is trapped. While watching the game, I was even naive enough to hope Daniel might win!

40. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$

At this point, both players had well under a minute with just a ten-second increment. The position is a draw objectively, but accidents can happen, and Daniel blinked first.

41.b3 axb3 42. $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 43.a4 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ b6 45. $\mathbb{Q}d2$

Black now erred badly.



45...c5?

Now White should be winning again. He starts by making an outside passed pawn.

There was no need to rush to change the position. The simple 45... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ would draw easily.

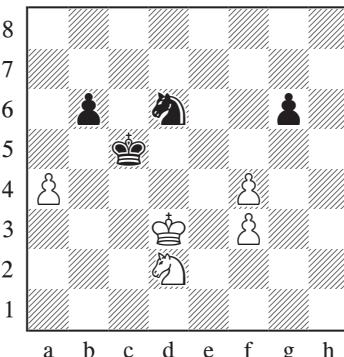
46.dxc5!

When Daniel advanced the c-pawn, he must have missed that he could not take back with the king.

46...bxc5

Black would love to avoid giving White the outside passed pawn with:

46... $\mathbb{Q}xc5$

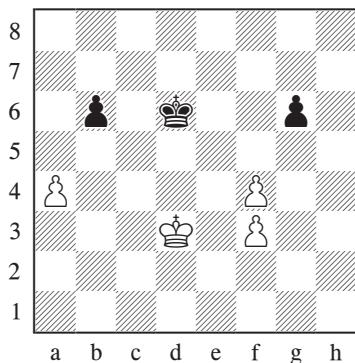


But he would then lose to:

47. $\mathbb{Q}e4\#!$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$

After 47... $\mathbb{Q}xe4?$ White would jump at his opportunity to straighten out his pawns with 48. $fxe4!+-$.

48. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$



49. $\mathbb{Q}d4!$

Black has a lost pawn ending. The point is that after:

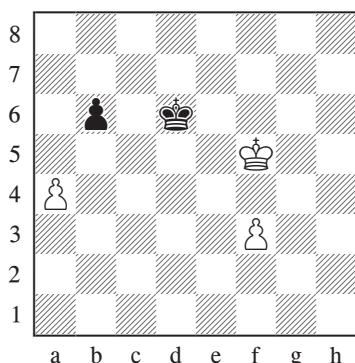
49... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$

White can exchange off one of his doubled pawns for a healthy one.

51. $f5!$ $gxf5\#$

51... $g5$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}d4+-$

52. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$



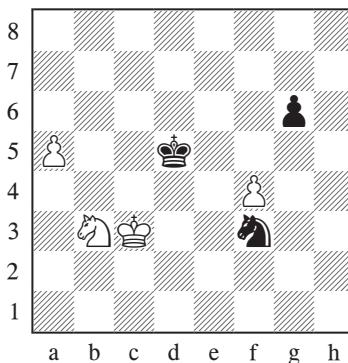
Finally, White is left with a passed f-pawn for nothing, and he wins easily.

47. $a5$ $c4\#?$

The pawn is more vulnerable here, but Black's position was difficult (if not impossible) to defend anyway.

48. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}b5\#$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $c3$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$
51. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$

Negi found the final touch.



52. $a6!$

Black resigned since the only way to stop the pawn is 52... $\mathbb{Q}c6$, but it allows: 53. $\mathbb{Q}d4\#!$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 55. $\mathbb{Q}e5+-$

1-0

I remember this game vividly. I had already finished my last-round game and was half a point ahead of Pari in the standings. In addition to always enjoying watching him lose, the result of his game would dictate my prize. So I was really hoping he would not win and pass me. I almost managed a share of first, thanks to Daniel's excellent judgment about giving his opponent doubled pawns to lessen their effectiveness in making a passer, but alas mistakes always happen...

The above two examples lead to our first guideline about giving your opponents doubled pawns. It is quite like the first guideline in Chapter 11, but in reverse.

The closer you are to a king and pawn endgame, the more you should consider moves that will lessen your opponent's ability to make a passed pawn by doubling his pawn majority. Early in the game, it is often completely irrelevant.

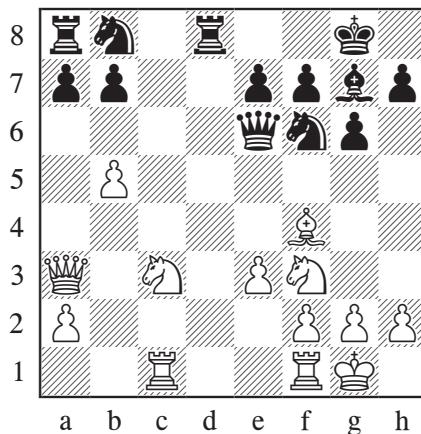
Applying the first guideline to the previous two games clearly shows that Black's decisions were justified. In the first case, not only was there no drawback to giving White doubled c-pawns, but there were a lot of open lines that could be used to exchange pieces, most notably the d-file and the h1-a8 diagonal. White could have defended better, but it is telling that it only took 13 moves for all 7 pairs of pieces to be exchanged.

The second example was a little different because Black was not trying to win, but the same principle from the first guideline clearly supports his decision to play ...f5-f4. There was only one set of pieces still on the board, and just one move after crippling White's kingside pawn mass, Black offered his opponent the chance to go into a pure king and pawn ending, where Black would be happy about the doubled f-pawns.

Let's look at a case where an immensely strong player could have followed our first guideline to find a better move.

Vassily Ivanchuk – Magnus Carlsen

London 2013



Black is under unpleasant pressure. He is a little behind on development and there are a couple of weak pawns in his position. The pawn on e7 is only defended by the queen, who is not secure on her post. In the game, Carlsen decided to pitch the e7-pawn to complete his development, no doubt relying for compensation on his ability to double White's kingside pawns to make the majority ineffective. But I do not believe it was best.

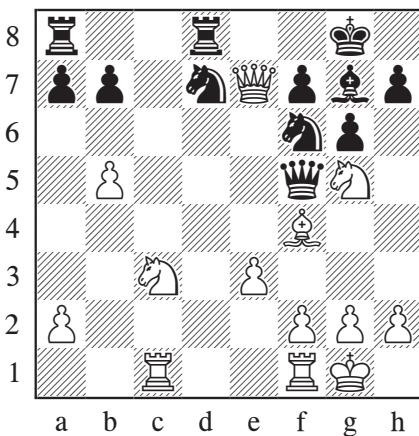
15...♝bd7?!

It's hard to criticize a natural developing move, but a pawn is a pawn.

The most prudent course of action was to play the modest retreat 15...♝f8! when overprotecting e7 means that White is unable to win a pawn. Black is still trying to equalize but, with a solid structure, it is a reasonable hope to do so. He can play ...♝b8-d7 next, when he will be almost fully developed, and I cannot see anything great for White to do. 16.♝g5 (16.♝d4 ♜g4!=) 16...♜f5! 17.♝b3 e6 Black is solid enough, so he should be fine.

Ivanchuk did not miss his chance to go pawn grabbing.

16.♝g5! ♜f5 17.♝xe7!



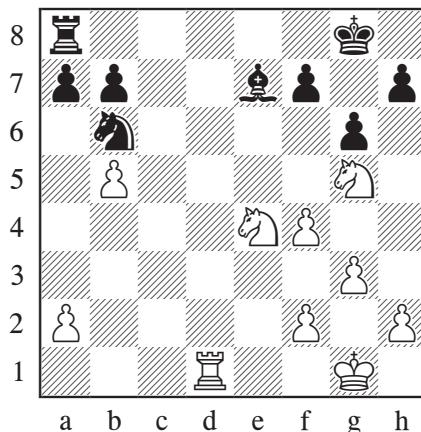
White now is a pawn up, and Carlsen reveals his point.

17...♝h5

White cannot prevent his e-pawn from being dragged to f4. But just look at all the pieces on the board! We are far from a pawn endgame, and a lot can happen between now and then. It looks like a pretty decent extra pawn to me.

18.♜fd1 ♜xf4 19.exf4 ♜f8 20.♝e4 ♜xe4

21.♝cxe4 ♜b6 22.g3 ♜xd1† 23.♜xd1 ♜e7



Magnus did hold this endgame, and while the rest of the game is interesting, it is outside the scope of what we are discussing. I do not believe Black has quite enough for a pawn. Furthermore, White can hope to exchange off his doubled pawn by advancing f4-f5 after proper preparation. So I think it was a better decision to accept temporary passivity to maintain a solid structure and keep the pawn count equal.

The doubled pawns on the kingside were undoubtedly a hindrance to White's position, but a king and pawn endgame was far enough away that Black could not justify losing the e7-pawn just to gain one tempo of development and drag the e3-pawn to f4. Carlsen does not need advice from me about how to be a better chess player, but I do think his decision was incorrect, and closer consideration of the first guideline could have helped him out.

Thus far we have focused our attention on dynamic choices where the pawn structure changes in one side's favor after a critical move, but just as frequently we will find ourselves with a static or mostly static structure that we should leverage to our advantage. A key example of this is if you have an unhealthy

pawn majority due to a doubled pawn. One of the best things you can do is to simply exchange that pawn off! This brings us to our second guideline.

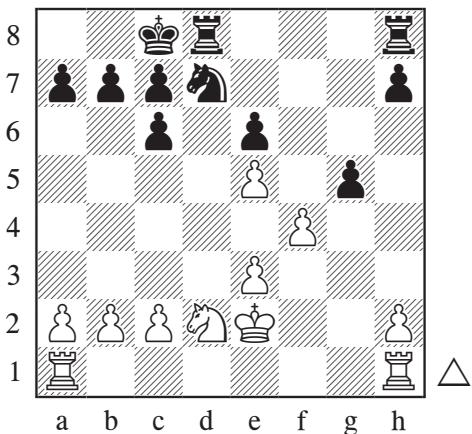
If you have an ineffective pawn majority due to a doubled pawn, it is often in your best interest to exchange off the doubled pawn to make your majority healthy again. The later you are in the game, the more you should prioritize your ability to make a passed pawn.

Let's take a relatively basic example.

16...Qxe5 17.h4 h6 18.Qag1

Li Chao – Xu Xiangyu

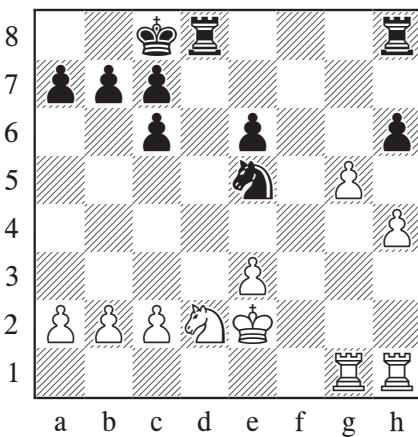
Graz 2016



Both sides have a pawn majority with doubled pawns. White has doubled e-pawns, while Black has doubled c-pawns. Normally neither side should be able to make a passed pawn if the structure were to remain the same. But, unfortunately for Black, the structure will change.

16.fxg5!

White abandons the defense of his doubled e5-pawn to win another pawn. Now he has a healthy 2 vs 1 majority on the kingside, both players have an e-pawn, and most importantly, Black's pawns on the queenside are still ineffective.



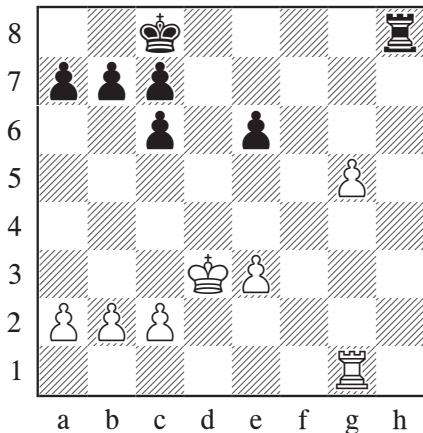
White is clearly better but Black can still try to defend. White's plan will be to trade as many pieces as possible, since the closer he can get to a pawn endgame, the better off he will be. Black could offer some resistance, but in the game he did White's work for him.

18...Rxd2†?

All this move does is exchange two sets of pieces. Black's goal should have been to avoid that scenario, not force it! When you are ahead in material, trade pieces. When you are behind, trade pawns. Simple principles can go a long way...

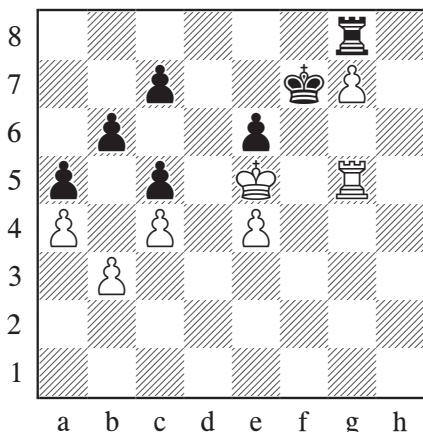
Black would have been better advised to keep more pieces on the board with 18...Rdg8± after which he is still suffering, but can offer a lot of resistance.

19.†xd2 ♜f3† 20.†d3 ♜xg1 21.‡xg1 hxg5
22.hxg5



The dust has settled, a lot of pieces have left the board, and White has a strong passed g-pawn. Black's queenside is ineffective, and White won easily.

22...†d7 23.g6 ‡g8 24.†e4 †e7 25.†e5 c5 26.a4 a5 27.c4 ‡g7 28.e4 ‡g8 29.‡g3 ‡h8 30.‡g5 ‡g8 31.†f4 b6 32.†e5 ‡g7 33.b3 ‡g8 34.g7 †f7



35.‡g3 †e7 36.‡g6 †f7 37.‡f6† †xg7 38.†xe6 ‡e8† 39.†d7 ‡xe4 40.‡f3 †g6 41.†xc7 ‡e6 42.†d7 ‡e1 43.‡d3 †f5 44.‡d6 ‡b1 45.‡xb6 †e5 46.†c6 †d4

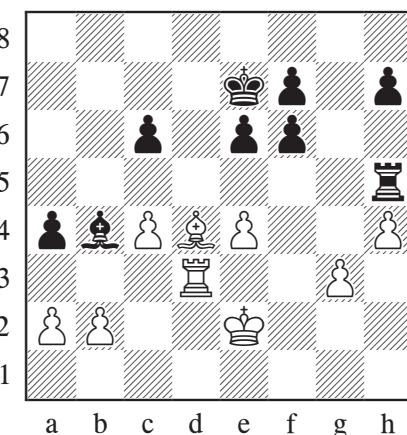
47.‡b5 ‡b2 48.†b6
1–0

Li Chao's play was strong and convincing, but not particularly difficult. Once one considers the second guideline, it is easy to figure out that the doubled e-pawns are not an effective pawn majority, and White should exchange his e5-pawn for Black's g5-pawn to create a healthy majority. All White needed to do after considering this guideline was calculate a single move ahead and take on g5.

Often a bit more work is needed. In a recent game, I was happy when my opponent failed to find his way in time pressure.

Sam Shankland – Mikhail Antipov

Biel 2017



Black is under pressure due to his crippled kingside majority. White's queenside pawns are not amazing, but they can in theory make a passed pawn. Black could have equalized by forcing off one of his f-pawns.

26...c5?

Black missed his chance.

The best move was the immediate 26...f5! when Black's f5-pawn will be exchanged one

way or another. It is possible that my opponent was worried about 27.e5 when I have avoided the exchange of pawns, and furthermore the rook on h5 is marooned and will be a spectator for the rest of the game if I am allowed to play $\mathbb{Q}d4-e3$ next. But, with one more accurate move, Black solves all his problems. 27...f4! The pawn will be exchanged after all, and White does not get his bishop to e3. Black is fine.

27. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

Now Black is clearly worse. He can no longer play ...f6-f5, and he must worry about $\mathbb{Q}e3-f4$, when the rook on h5 would be stuck forever.

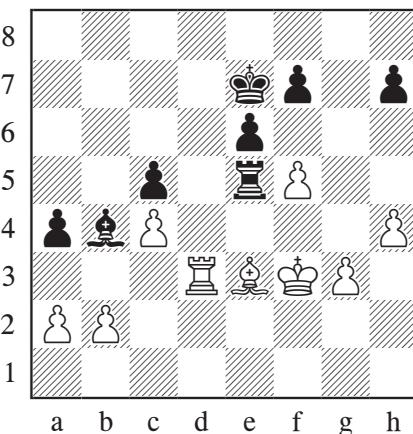
27... $\mathbb{E}e5$

It is too late for 27...f5? because after 28.e5 Black is not in time to get in ...f5-f4, and now his rook is jailed on h5, plus he is facing devastating threats such as $\mathbb{Q}e3-g5\#$ or a2-a3 followed by $\mathbb{Q}e3xc5\#$.

28. $\mathbb{Q}f3$

Black now does manage to trade off his doubled f-pawn, but at a high price: White's king will become active.

28...f5 29. exf5



29... exf5?

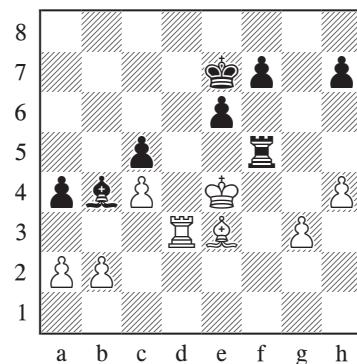
Black should have kept his pawn structure healthy with:

29... $\mathbb{E}xf5\#$

But after:

30. $\mathbb{Q}e4$

Black still has a lot of problems to solve. I am threatening $\mathbb{Q}e3-f4$, jailing the rook on f5. As such, Black must play:



30... $\mathbb{E}f1$

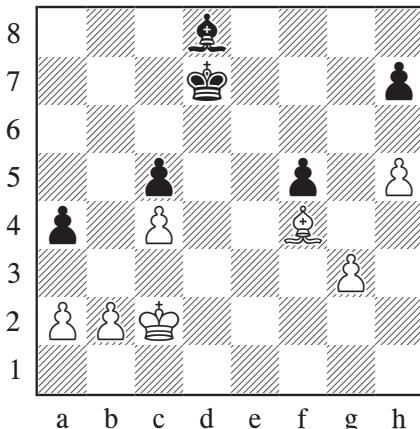
A passing move would fail, for instance after 30... $\mathbb{E}e8$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}f4!$ the threat of $g3-g4$ compels 31...h5 and Black's rook will never perform an active role again. White can simply play as if he is an exchange up, and win routinely with 32. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ followed by $\mathbb{Q}a6$. But now White wins a pawn with:

31. a3 $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}xc5\#$

Still, the queenside pawns are not the best coordinated and Black can hope to get his f-pawn and e-pawn moving. Objectively he should lose, but he can offer some resistance.

The game continuation leaves Black with permanently bad pawns. Time pressure produced some silly moves, but White did go on to win.

30. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{E}e4$ 31. $\mathbb{E}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}xe4\#$ $fxe4\#$
33. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ f5# 34. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$
36. h5 $\mathbb{Q}d8$



37.b3 axb3† 38.♔xb3 ♔c6 39.♔c2 ♔b6
 40.♔d2 ♔c7 41.♔e1 ♔a6 42.♔d3 ♔a5
 43.♔f2 ♔b4 44.♔e3 ♔a5 45.♔f4 ♔d2†
 46.♔e5

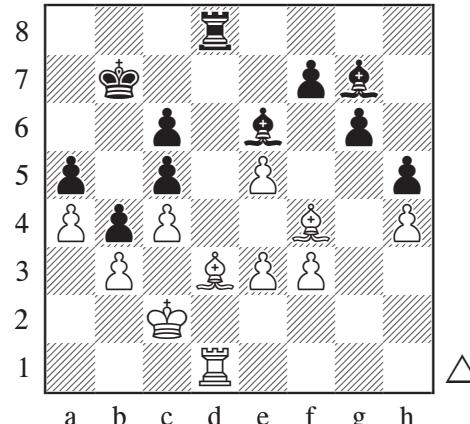
1–0

This time a little bit more work was needed to calculate a way to force an exchange of a doubled pawn. It was difficult enough that, with the seconds ticking down, even a pretty strong grandmaster was unable to find his way. Still, the calculation was not that deep, and it is rare that we can achieve positional goals without having to look some number of moves ahead to justify our choices.

Exchanging pawns in the short term is mostly an exercise in calculating a couple of moves ahead. First you must understand which pawns you want to exchange of course, but for the most part, basic calculation and Guidelines One and Two will be enough to help you navigate the kind of situations we saw in the previous two games. But sometimes there is a much more long-term element to exchanging off an ineffective doubled pawn. I really like the clinic put on by Levon Aronian in the following encounter.

Levon Aronian – Maxime Vachier-Lagrave

Karlsruhe 2017



Both sides have a pawn majority with a doubled pawn that in theory should render them incapable of making a passed pawn. But there is a key difference. Black's queenside pawn majority is completely locked and immobile. Unless a pawn is captured on the queenside (not a likely scenario) there will be no legal pawn moves on that side. Conversely, White's pawn majority on the kingside is damaged but much more fluid. He can hope to exchange off one of his doubled pawns to make a passer, and Aronian played extremely well to illustrate the idea in action.

30.♗g5!

An excellent first move. White activates his bishop with tempo, while making way for f3-f4 next.

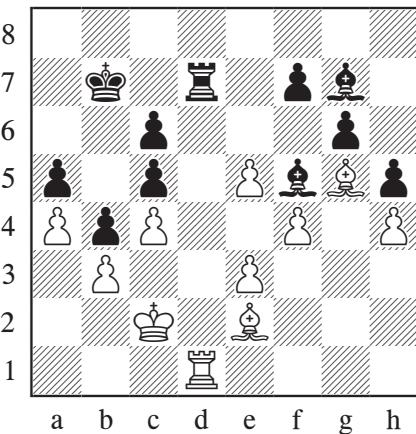
30...♝d7 31.f4 ♘g4 32.♗e2!

Aronian is resourceful and tactically aware; White did not want to let the bishop sit on g4.

32...♜f5†

Trading the rooks is even worse. 32...♜xd1 33.♔xd1 Among other problems, Black now

cannot prevent White's bishop from coming to d8 or e7, which will restrict his king's mobility. 33... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ White should win. We will see a similar position in the game where Black has more defensive chances, but still will eventually lose.



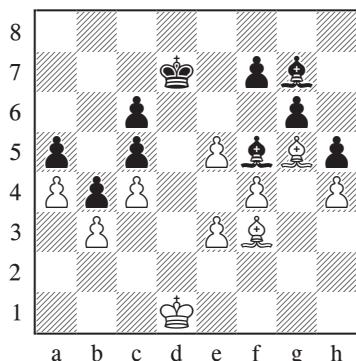
33. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$

White's plan now is to first advance e3-e4, then f4-f5, and in some cases e5-e6. When this is achieved, Black will have a hard time avoiding pawn exchanges.

34. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$

It was a little more resilient to take the rook, but White should win. He has a clear way to set his kingside majority in motion.

34... $\mathbb{R}xd1\#$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$

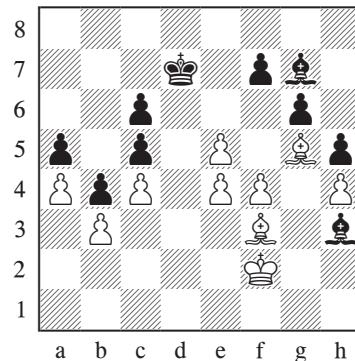


36.e4! $\mathbb{Q}h3$

White cannot play f4-f5 yet due to the hanging e5-pawn, but Black has no counterplay and White has all the time in the world to build up his position. The first step is bringing the king closer to the action and expelling the h3-bishop from White's territory.

37. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$

White is now ready to strike.



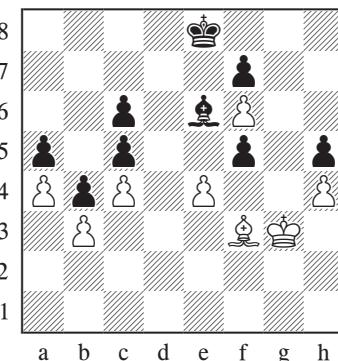
39. $\mathbb{Q}f6!$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 40.exf6

White will win easily because he has the plan of playing e4-e5 and then f4-f5 to exchange off his doubled pawn. For instance:

40... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 42.f5!

White exchanges off his doubled pawn.

42...gxsf5

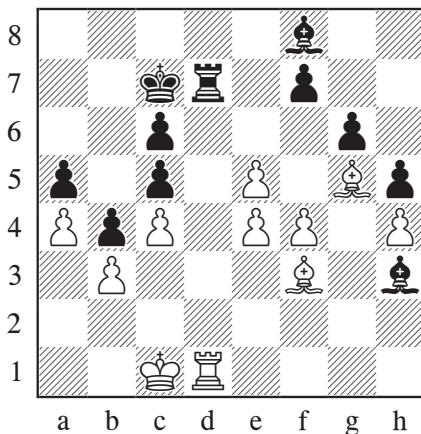


43.e5!

White will follow up with $\mathbb{Q}g3-f4$ and $\mathbb{Q}f3xh5$, winning.

Now White can set his pawn majority in motion and make a favorable exchange.

35.e4! ♖h3



36.f5!

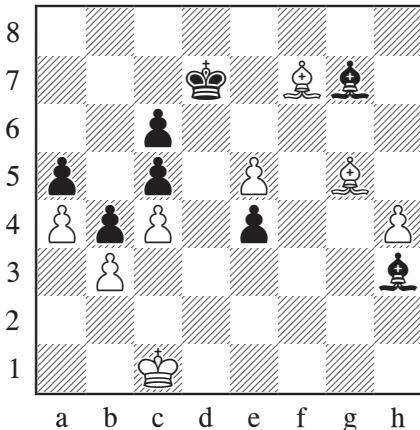
White is ready for e5-e6. Black tried taking on f5, but it hardly helped matters.

36...gxsf5 37.♖xh5! fxe4 38.♗xd7† ♔xd7 39.♕xf7

At the end of all the exchanges, Black still has a useless extra pawn on the queenside. In contrast, White put his majority to good use, and has two passed pawns against one. Black was not able to offer much further resistance.

39...♗g7

Black attacks the e5-pawn, but it turns out to be unimportant. White will gladly give it up if it leads to pieces being exchanged, because he has the outside passed pawn.



40.e6†! ♖xe6 41.♖xe6† ♔xe6 42.♔d2

White's kingside pawn mass was set in motion, he was able to make favorable exchanges, and at the end he even gave up a pawn to get a simple endgame with an outside passer. Black is unable to stop the h-pawn while also keeping an eye on the ♗g5-d8 resource, winning the house. A fine display by Aronian, who showed the difference between doubled but mobile pawns versus doubled and stuck pawns.

1–0

While the above game is easy to grasp because Black's pawns were obviously stuck, this is not always the case. Our third and final guideline is much like a reciprocal of the previous one, only with respect to your opponent's pawns.

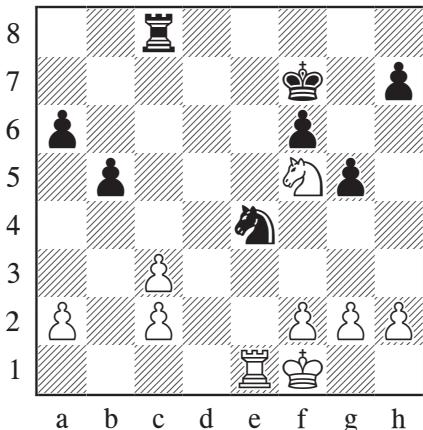
When your opponent has doubled pawns that render him incapable of making a passer, it is usually in your best interest to avoid letting him exchange one of the doubled pawns. As usual, the fewer pieces there are on the board, the more relevant the guideline is.

When applied retroactively to the previous game, it's clear the guideline is correct, but not too relevant. White would not want to allow Black to exchange one of the c-pawns, but such an exchange seemed impossible anyway.

Let's examine a game with a more fluid structure.

Ian Nepomniachtchi – Daniel Fridman

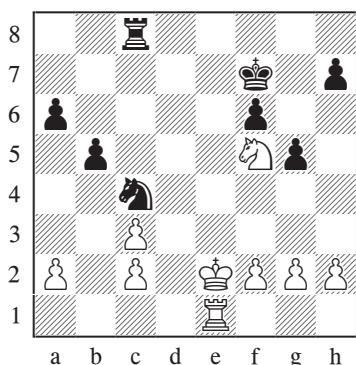
Aix-les-Bains 2011



White has an extra pawn, but it is a sad doubled pawn on the queenside that is incapable of making a passed pawn. Still, Black is under some pressure. Concretely, the knight is hanging on e4 and he must figure out what to do with it. Fridman made the wrong decision, and it all came down to White's ability to exchange off one of his doubled pawns.

33...Qc5?

The best way for Black to solve his problems was to keep the knights on the board. After 33...Qd2†! White is forced to bring his king up, since the c3-pawn is hanging. 34.Qe2 (After 34.Qg1? Qxc3† Black has won his pawn back and White has a dismal structure.) 34...Qc4!

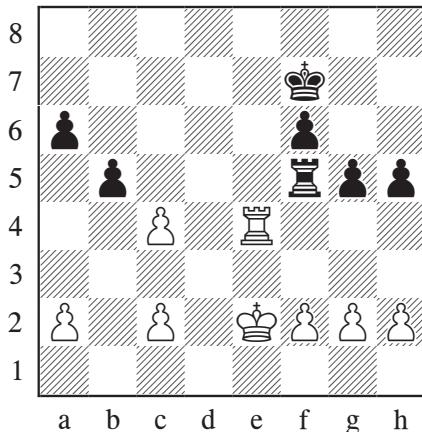


Fridman may have missed this move. Qf5-d6† has been prevented, and Black has a firm grip on the c4-square. It is impossible that White will ever play c3-c4, and Black should draw easily.

34.Qxe4! Qxf5 35.Qe2!

The difference is that now White is much better positioned to make the c3-c4 advance, compared to the position where Black rerouted his knight to c4. Already c3-c4 is a serious idea, and White can defend the square further with Qe2-d3 if needed.

35...h5 36.c4!



White aims to exchange one of his doubled pawns. Black tried to avoid it, but this was probably an error.

36...b4?!

Black did avoid the exchange of pawns, but at a heavy price: the c4-pawn is now a passed pawn.

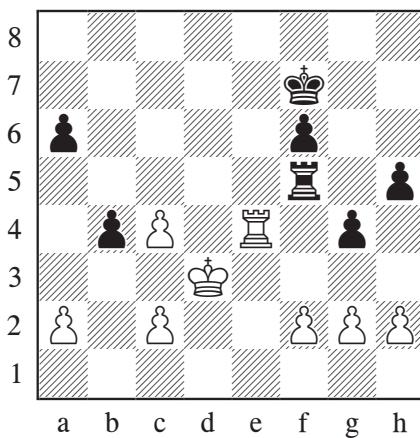
I would have preferred to let the pawns be exchanged with a move such as 36...h4 when Black can still hope that the rooks will show their drawish tendencies. He is still under a lot of pressure after a line such as 37.cxb5 axb5 38.g3, but he can fight for a half point.

37.♔d3!

White prepares for c2-c3, exchanging the other c-pawn. We will see below that the f2-pawn is immune.

37...g4

Black would love to go snacking on pawns with 37...♜xf2? but after the simple 38.c5! he clearly is unable to stop the runaway pawn. 38...♝f5 39.♔c4+–

**38.c3!**

Black now cannot avoid one of the c-pawns being exchanged. He tried to complicate the game and almost saved it, but objectively the position should be lost.

38...♜xf2

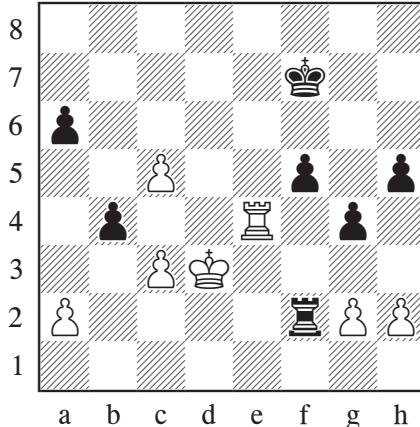
I'm sure White had already spotted that 38...bxcc3 is well met by 39.♝e2! keeping all the pawns defended. ♔d3xc3 will come next and White is a healthy pawn up.

39.c5

The pawn is set in motion and cannot be stopped.

39...f5

White should of course bring his rook to the back rank, where it cannot be harassed by the enemy king and will not be hit for gains of tempo by the black pawns.

**40.♝e5?**

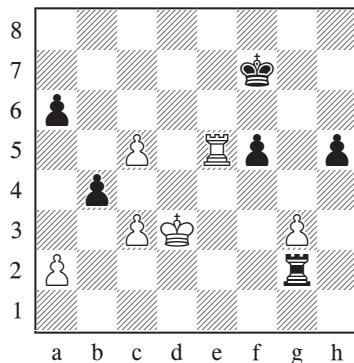
Wrong square.

Best was 40.♝e1! when Black can resign. The c-pawn is way too fast.

Black now managed to complicate the game a little, and White faltered more.

40...g3! 41.h4?

White could still win with: 41.hxg3! ♜xg2



42.cxb4! ♜xg3† 43.♔d4+–

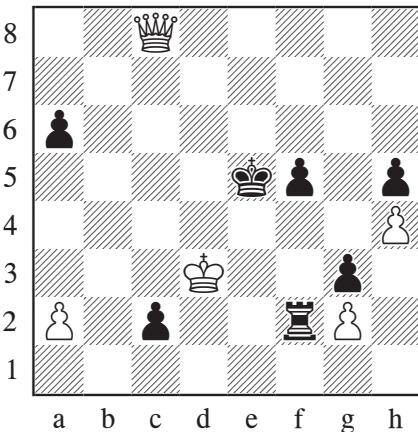
41...♚f6!

Moves like this one show why the rook should be on e1.

42.c6 ♔xe5 43.c7 bxc3

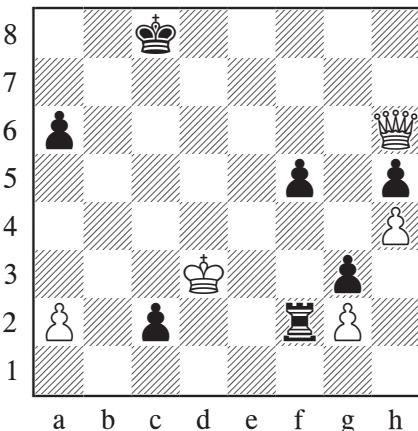
Black would also get some drawing chances with: 43...♝f3†?! 44.gxf3 g2 45.c8=♛ g1=♛±

44.c8=♕ c2



Black's pawn on c2 is extremely annoying, and promises him decent drawing chances. White eventually won after many further errors from both sides, but the real point I wish to drive home with this game is that Black should not have put himself in a position where he could not stop White from exchanging off one of his doubled c-pawns. Clamping down on the c4-square was essential.

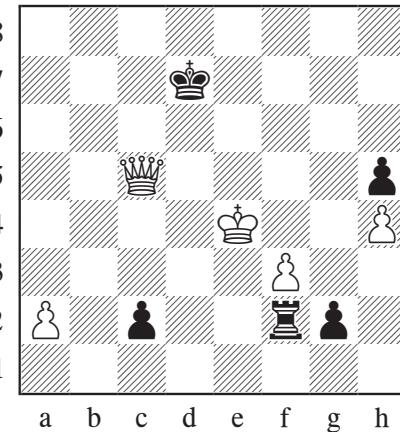
45.♕c5† ♕f6 46.♕f8† ♕e6 47.♕g8† ♕d7
48.♕g7† ♕c8± 49.♕h6?!



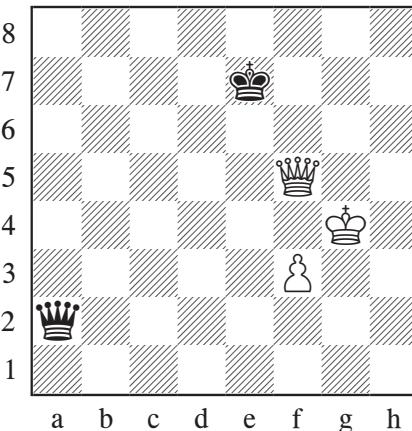
49...f4?!

Taking on g2 would have led to a draw quite quickly.

50.♕xa6† ♕d7 51.♕b5† ♕d6 52.♕b4†
♕d7 53.♕d4† ♕e8 54.♕e5† ♕d7 55.♕d5†
♕e7 56.♕c5† ♕d7 57.♕e4 f3 58.gxf3
g2



59.♕xf2± c1=♕ 60.♕xg2 ♕c4† 61.♕f5
♕f7† 62.♕e5 ♕e7† 63.♕f4 ♕xh4† 64.♕f5
♕d4 65.♕h3 ♕e7 66.♕xh5 ♕d5† 67.♕g6
♕g8† 68.♕h6 ♕h8† 69.♕g5 ♕f6† 70.♕g4
♕e6† 71.♕f5 ♕xa2



This endgame is of course a draw, but there are still practical chances.

72.f4 ♕a1 73.♕g5 ♕g7† 74.♕g6 ♕a1
75.♕e4† ♕f8 76.♕f5† ♕e7 77.♕g6 ♕a6†
78.♕h7 ♕e2?

The decisive mistake. Putting the queen on b7, a7 or a4 all held the draw. But with little time, this is not so easy to determine.

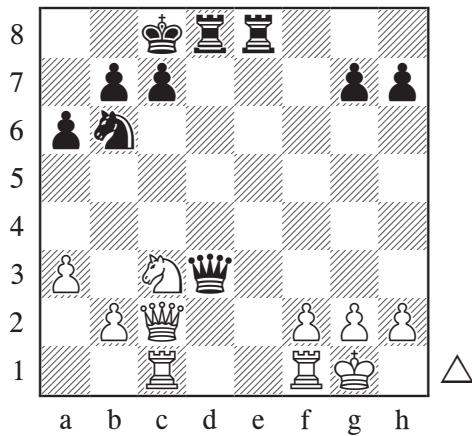
79. $\mathbb{W}g5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 80. $\mathbb{W}g7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 81. $\mathbb{W}g6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$
82. $\mathbb{W}f6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 83. $\mathbb{Q}g7$ $\mathbb{W}c4$ 84. $\mathbb{W}f8\#$
1–0

Fridman would have done well to consider the third guideline. Making sure the c3-pawn stayed where it was turned out to be of crucial importance, since once it advanced to c4, problems began to arise. If he had clamped down on the c4-square, he would have held easily.

Exercises

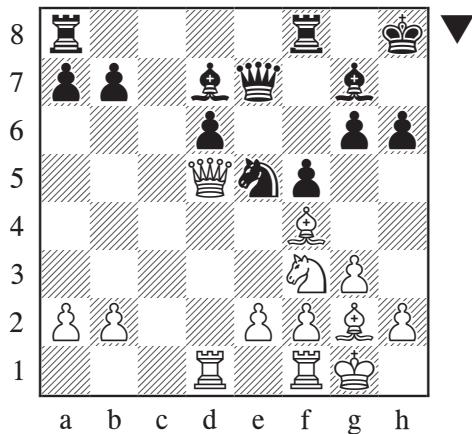
Once again, we will finish with two puzzles. Good luck!

Gata Kamsky – Jordi Magem Badals, Madrid 1994



How should White proceed?

Tin Jingyao – Viktor Laznicka, Ho Chi Minh City 2016

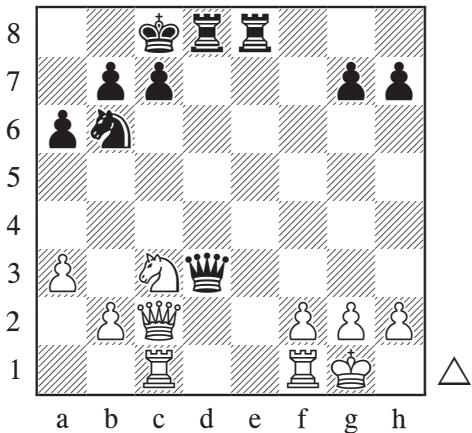


Black is under unpleasant pressure. How should he continue to maximize his drawing chances?

Solutions

Gata Kamsky – Jordi Magem Badals

Madrid 1994



Kamsky found an unexpected tactical resource to double Black's pawns, thus making his queenside majority unable to produce a passer.

22...Qd5!

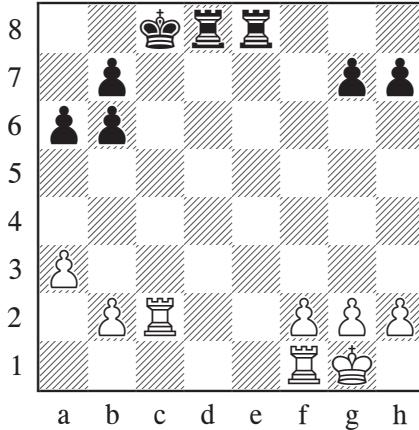
The knight cannot be captured, since it would leave either c7 or d3 hanging.

22...Qxc2

Of course, White does not take the queen back right away, but instead includes a strong in-between move.

23.Qxb6†! cxb6 24.Rxc2†

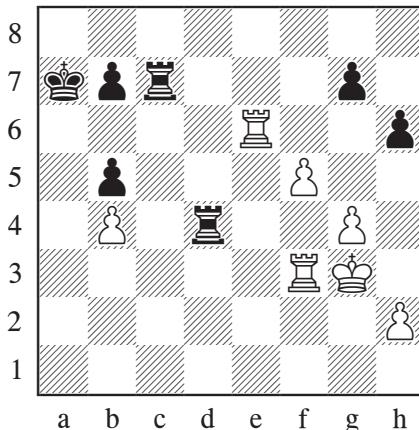
The point of Kamsky's play is revealed: Black's queenside pawn majority is now crippled. Converting White's advantage still requires good technique and Kamsky won after a fine display.



**24...Rb8 25.f4 b5 26.Rc3!± Rd4 27.Rh3 h6
28.b4 Rf8 29.f5 Rd6 30.Re3 Rf7 31.g4**

This position is a textbook example of what White was hoping to achieve at the start of the ending. Black's queenside pawns are firmly blocked, they will not make a passer, and White's kingside pawns are on the move.

**31...Ra7 32.Qg2 a5 33.Qg3 axb4 34.axb4
Rc7 35.Re6! Rd3† 36.Rf3 Rd4**

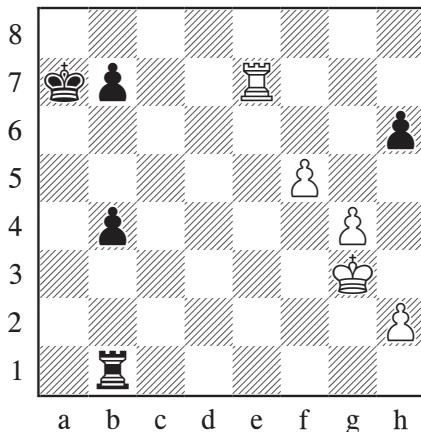


Kamsky has played an excellent technical game up to this point, and now uses some concrete calculation to finish it off.

**37.Ra3†! Qb8 38.Re8†! Rc8 39.Ra8†! Qxa8
40.Rxc8† Ra7 41.Rc7!**

At the end of all of that, the g7-pawn falls. Black does end up with a passed pawn on the queenside, but it is far too slow – doubled isolated passed pawns can seldom compete with connected passed pawns...

41... $\mathbb{E}xb4$ 42. $\mathbb{E}xg7$ $\mathbb{E}b1$ 43. $\mathbb{E}e7$ b4

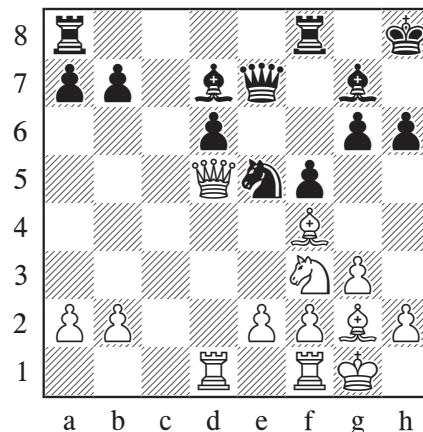


44. $\mathbb{E}e3!$ b3 45. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{E}h1$ 46. $\mathbb{E}xb3$ $\mathbb{E}xh2\#$
47. $\mathbb{E}h3$ $\mathbb{E}f2$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{E}f4$ 49. $\mathbb{E}g3$ b5
50. $\mathbb{Q}xh6$

1–0

Tin Jingyao – Viktor Laznicka

Ho Chi Minh City 2016

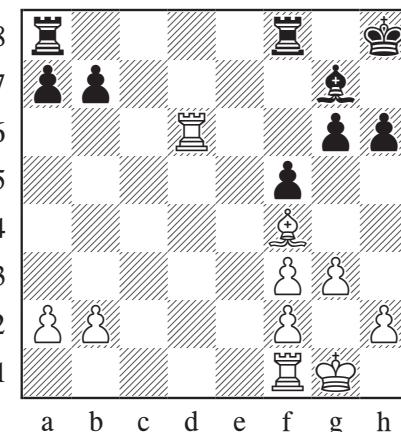


Black cannot avoid the loss of a pawn, but he found the best way to maximize his drawing chances.

17... $\mathbb{Q}c6!$

Following mass exchanges, White will have an extra pawn, but it will be a doubled extra pawn on his majority side, making it difficult to make a passed pawn.

18. $\mathbb{W}xd6$ $\mathbb{W}xd6$ 19. $\mathbb{E}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3\#$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$
 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 21.exf3



Black's next point of order is to make sure White cannot exchange off one of the doubled f-pawns. The best way to do that is to clamp down on the f4-square.

21...g5! 22.♗e3 f4! 23.♗d4

More winning chances were promised by 23.gxf4 gxf4 24.♗d2, but it is still not easy to find a plan for White. After something like 24...♝f7 25.♗e1 ♜c8 it will be difficult to make the extra f-pawn count.

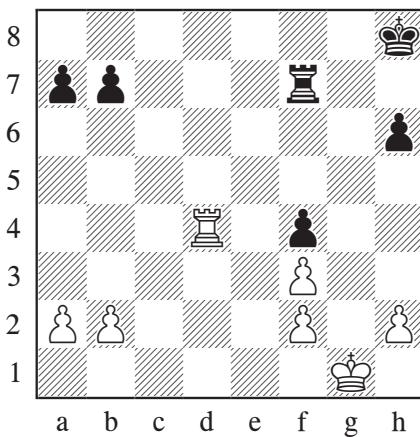
Black now starts exchanging pieces. The fewer pieces there are, the less likely White will be able to make trouble for the f4-pawn.

**23...♝xd4 24.♝xd4 ♜ad8 25.♝fd1 ♜xd4
26.♝xd4 ♜f7 27.gxf4 gxf4**

Black has a solid structure. He is still defending and White has chances to play for a win, but it's clear that it will not be easy to set the extra f-pawn in motion. Black did go on to hold the draw.

**28.♔f1 ♔g7 29.♔e2 ♔g6 30.♔d3 ♔g5
31.♔d5† ♔h4 32.♔e4 h5 33.♔f5 ♔e7†
34.♔e5 ♔f7 35.a4 ♜c7 36.♔xf4 ♜c2 37.♔b5
♜xf2 38.♔xb7 a5 39.♔b5 ♜xh2 40.♔xa5
♜xb2 41.♔b5 ♜a2 42.a5 ♜a4† 43.♔e3 ♜a3†
44.♔e4 ♜a4† 45.♔e3**

½-½



Chapter 15

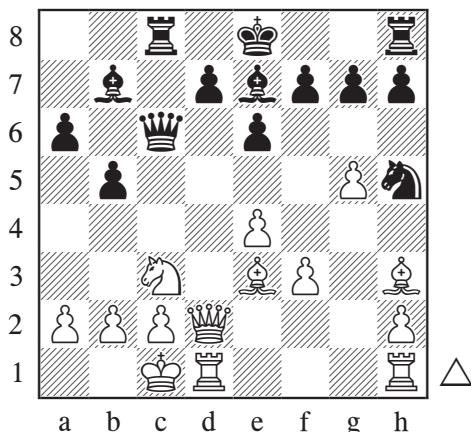
Bumping Enemies into Each Other

Back in Chapter 12, we looked at some positions where doubled pawns were a detriment not because of their inability to make a passed pawn, but rather because they could become targets for the opponent. It is in our best interest to avoid such pawn structures; conversely, inflicting such weaknesses on the enemy position can work to our advantage.

As is usually the case in Parts II and IV, the guidelines are similar to those in the preceding part, only in reverse. Before introducing our first guideline, I'd like to show an illustrative example.

Alexei Shirov – Daniil Dubov

Moscow 2013



Black's play in the opening and early middlegame has left a lot to be desired, and he has a difficult position. Shirov finds the best way to increase the advantage.

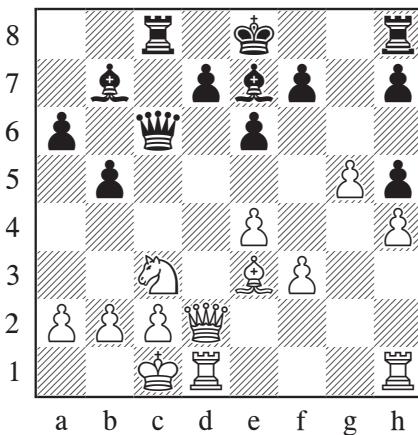
14. $\mathbb{Q}g4!$ g6

Black has no real choice, as the knight had no safe squares.

15.♘xh5!

White is also much better after a simple move like 15.♗b1, but I prefer Shirov's choice, which is more direct.

15...gxh5 16.h4+



Black is saddled with doubled pawns on the kingside. Neither h-pawn can count on the support of another pawn, and the one on h5 is especially vulnerable. Shirov simply hops across the board and captures it.

16...a5?!

This was not the best attempt to create counterplay, although I believe Black's position is beyond saving no matter what.

A better try was:

16...b4 17.♕e2 d5

An attempt to open the center and gain some activity on the light squares.

18.♘d4!

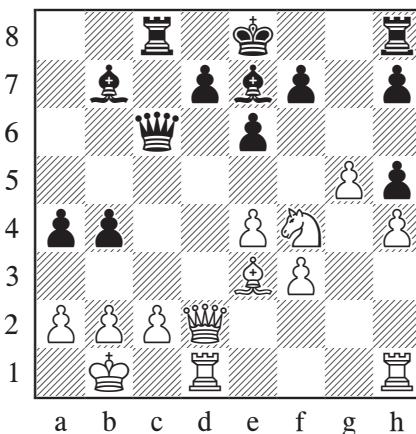
White should keep the center closed and then round up the h5-pawn. However, before advancing with e4-e5, he should ensure that the d-pawn is firmly blockaded.

18.e5? would be a mistake, allowing 18...d4! when Black has a lot more counterplay.

18...♝g8 19.e5!

The center is locked and Black has no defense to the simple threat of ♜e2-f4xh5. White should be winning.

17.♗b1 b4 18.♕e2 a4 19.♕f4



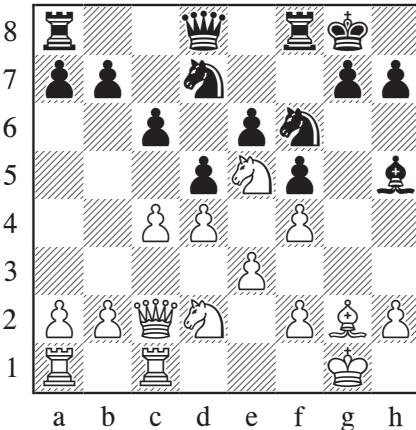
By now it should be obvious how weak the doubled h-pawns are. Shirov won a pawn and crashed through easily.

19...b3 20.cxb3 axb3 21.axb3 ♜b4 22.♗f2
♝a8 23.♘xh5 ♜e7 24.♗f6 ♘hc8 25.♘xd7†
♘xd7 26.♗xd7 ♜xd7 27.♘a7 ♜a6 28.♘d1†
♘e8 29.h5 ♜e7 30.g6 fxg6 31.hxg6 hxg6
32.♗b6 ♜f7 33.♗d7 ♜e2 34.♗d6
1–0

This game was a relatively basic case because the doubled h-pawns (especially the more advanced h5-pawn) were easy for White to attack and impossible for Black to defend. Unfortunately, most cases are not nearly so cut and dried. To show the opposite extreme, the following game sees one side accepting two sets of doubled pawns, gaining a big advantage in the process.

Viktor Gavrikov – Olli Salmensuu

Hallsberg 1996



White looks a little better to me. His extra space in the center and active prospects on the queenside should count for more than his slightly deficient kingside pawn structure. Still, Black does not stand that badly – that is, until his next move.

13... $\mathbb{Q}xe5?$

Black should have preferred the standard Stonewall resource of 13... $\mathbb{Q}e4$, making use of the square which his opening setup is designed to control. In that case, his position would have been essentially okay.

14.dxe5!

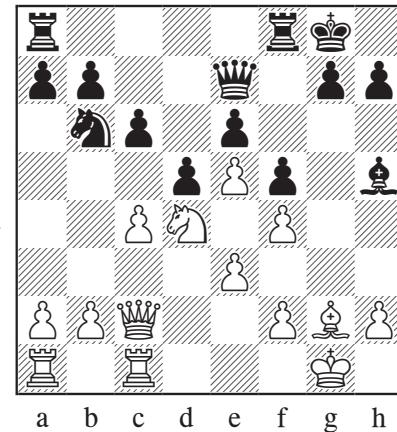
White accepts a second set of doubled pawns. Note that none of the doubled f-pawns or e-pawns can be considered weak. On the contrary: they form an impressive pawn chain with a base on f2, which is very close to home and nearly impossible for Black to pressure. White's last move also frees the d4-square for the use of his pieces, especially the knight.

14... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}b3$

White immediately targets the newly available outpost.

Although there is nothing wrong with the game continuation, I would have preferred the direct 15.cxd5 cxd5 16. $\mathbb{W}c7$, aiming to invade along the c-file. This opportunity has partly come about because Black had to burn a tempo on ... $\mathbb{Q}f6-d7$ – another drawback of the ill-fated decision to exchange on e5.

15... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{W}e7$



17.cxd5!

An obvious move, but still deserving an exclamation mark for the benefits it brings. White secures the d4-outpost while simultaneously opening the queenside. Note that Black cannot recapture with the e6-pawn, as then f5 would hang.

17...cxd5?!

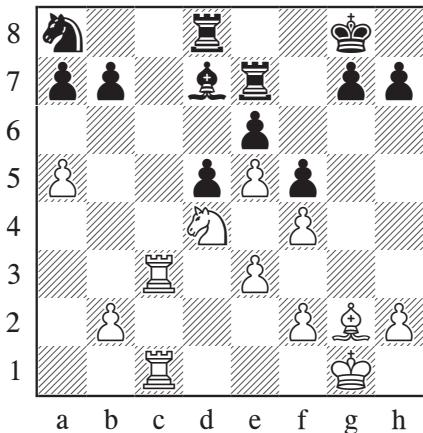
I really dislike opening the c-file.

17... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ was the lesser evil, although Black is still in big trouble after 18. $\mathbb{W}c5\pm$.

18. $\mathbb{W}c7!$

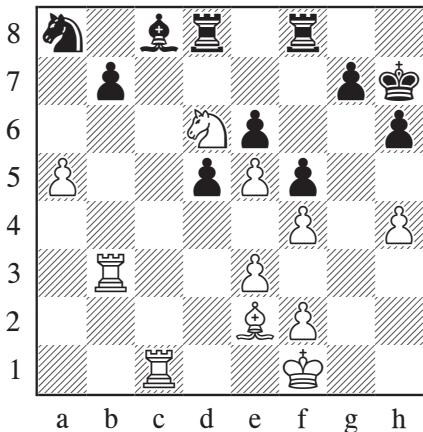
Black's position is a train wreck. His knight on b6 is pathetic and the e6-pawn is a permanent weakness. White dominates the c-file and has a gorgeous outpost on d4 for his knight, and his doubled pawns are not weak at all.

18... $\mathbb{E}fe8$ 19.a4 $\mathbb{E}ad8$ 20.a5 $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 21. $\mathbb{W}xe7$
 $\mathbb{E}xe7$ 22. $\mathbb{E}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 23. $\mathbb{E}ac1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$



24. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ a6 25.b4 h6 26.b5 axb5 27. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$
 $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 28.h4 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}e2\#$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$
31. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{E}ee8$ 32. $\mathbb{E}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$
34. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{E}f8$

These moves require little explanation; White has simply improved his pieces and will soon pick up material.



35. $\mathbb{E}bc3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{E}b8$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$
38. $\mathbb{E}b3$ $\mathbb{E}xb3$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$
41. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{E}xd7$ 42. $\mathbb{E}c6$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$
44. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 45. $\mathbb{E}xe6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 46. $\mathbb{E}d6$ $\mathbb{E}c7$
47. $\mathbb{E}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 48.e6 $\mathbb{E}e7$ 49. $\mathbb{E}e5$ g5 50.a6
gxg4 51.exf4 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 52.a7 $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 53. $\mathbb{E}e1$ $\mathbb{E}e8$
54.e7
1–0

The difference between these two games is quite staggering, and the reasons have already been covered in Chapter 12. In the first game, White doubled Black's pawns in such a way that the forward one could not be defended by another pawn (or anything else for that matter) and he was promptly able to scoop it up. By contrast, the second game saw White with two sets of doubled pawns, which together formed a cohesive unit. As such, the f2-e3-f4-e5 chain controlled several important squares while being virtually impossible to attack. Moreover, the dx5 move vacated a fantastic outpost on d4 which, combined with the dynamic advantage of a lead in development, enabled White to seize the initiative and activate all his pieces.

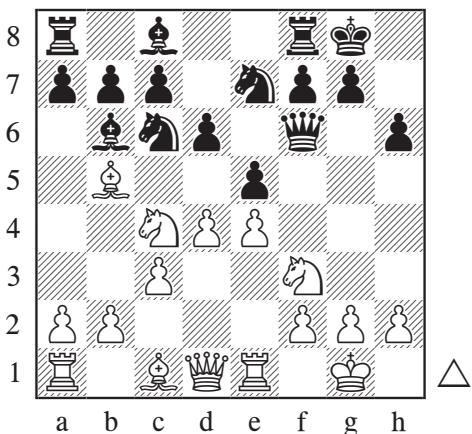
With that being said, I would like to introduce our first guideline, which is similar to the first guideline in Chapter 12.

When choosing whether to double your opponent's pawns to try to make them vulnerable to attack, always consider if the front pawn can be defended by another pawn. If it can, then the pawn likely will not be weak after all.

Let's see an example of this principle in action.

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave – Zoran Stojcevski

Plovdiv 2010



White has a pleasant edge due to his strong center, and he can clip the bishop pair with $\mathbb{Q}c4xb6$. While this would not be a bad move here, Black would then retain a compact pawn structure and his doubled b-pawns could hardly be considered a weakness. MVL found the best way forward, forcing the doubled pawns in a more favorable situation.

10.a4!

Threatening to trap the b6-bishop by means of a4-a5.

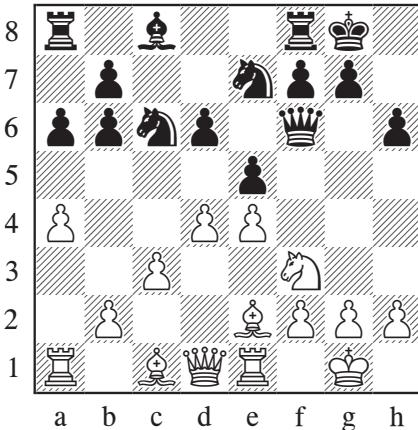
10...a6

Black has no choice but to move this pawn to create an escape square on a7.

11. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$!

Now and only now. This sequence could also have been included in other chapters, but it often happens in chess that a move or idea can be correct or incorrect for more reasons than one!

11... $cxb6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

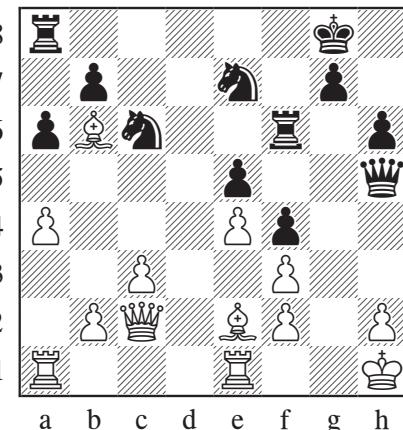


The dust has settled and we can see the point of Vachier-Lagrave's play. Unfortunately for Black, due to having been forced to play ...a7-a6, he had to recapture on b6 with the c-pawn. Not only does this reduce his central control by capturing toward the side of the board, it also renders the b6-pawn a long-term weakness.

12... $\mathbb{W}g6$ 13. $dxe5$ $dxe5$ 14. $\mathbb{W}c2$ $f5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

Just like that, the b6-pawn is already falling. MVL gobbles it up and converts his advantage with ease.

15... $f4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}h3$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 19. $gxf3$ $\mathbb{W}h5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{E}f6$



21. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{W}h3$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{E}e8$ 23. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$
24. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}ec6$ 26. $\mathbb{W}c4$ $g5$

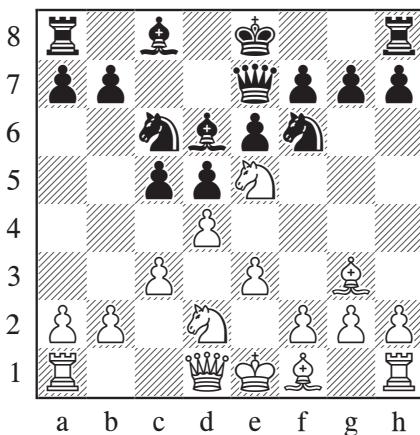
27.♗d6 ♔g6 28.♗d5 ♘xd6 29.♘xd6† ♔g7
 30.♗b6 ♕e7 31.♗d8 ♕f7 32.♗xg5 hxg5
 33.♗xg5† ♔h8 34.♗g6 ♕h7 35.♗h5 ♕xh5
 36.♗xh5† ♔g7 37.♗g5† ♔f8 38.♗c4 ♘d7
 39.♗d5

1–0

Vachier-Lagrave obtained a decisive advantage soon after the opening in this game, and it was all because he could saddle his opponent with doubled pawns where the front pawn could not be defended by another pawn. Unfortunately, doubled pawns will not always be this easy to exploit. Let's look at another game where the first guideline could have helped a participant in the US Championship make a better decision.

Roy Robson – Alexander Onischuk

St Louis 2016



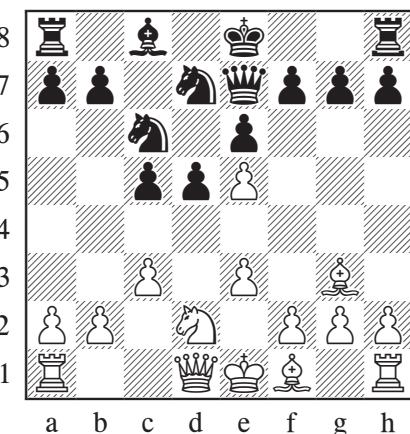
Black has not played against the London System in the most accurate way, but his position is still more or less fine. Unfortunately, his next move put him in a bad way.

8...♗xe5?

Black gives up what should have been his most valuable minor piece in order to double White's pawns. But can this change in the structure really benefit him?

9.dxe5 ♘d7

The pawn is momentarily hanging on e5 but White can defend it routinely with any number of moves, while Black cannot easily add more pressure. Unless something peculiar were to happen, the doubled pawns are unlikely to ever become seriously weak.



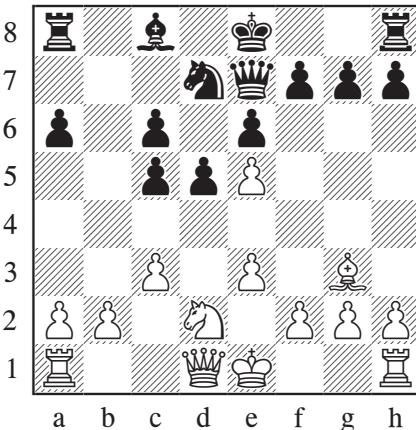
10.♗b5!

The simplest move is 10.f4!± with a considerable advantage to White. His pawn center is perfectly secure, he has an active bishop pair, and he can consider moves like e3-e4 or c3-c4 soon.

Instead of this, Robson develops a new piece and makes some pins on the a4-e8 diagonal, indirectly defending his pawn on e5. He is clearly ready and willing to take on c6, as the game shows.

10...a6 11.♗xc6 bxc6

I actually don't love the way Robson proceeded (as I mentioned above, the simple 10.f4! would have been objectively stronger), but it's still good enough to keep some advantage for White. More importantly, for our purposes, it makes a great example for our theme, as the ensuing position highlights the clear difference in value between the respective doubled pawns.



White has doubled e-pawns and Black has doubled c-pawns; but not all doubled pawns are created equal! One key difference is that Black's c5-pawn cannot be defended by another pawn. (True, it could advance to c4 and enjoy the protection of the d5-pawn, but this would cost time and potentially create other weaknesses.) By contrast, the e5-pawn is in no danger and can be protected in many different ways.

Even more important is the way the e5-pawn improves White's prospects on the kingside. In moving from d4 to e5, the pawn took control over d6 and f6, emphasizing the overall weakness of Black on the dark squares. By contrast, the movement of the black pawn from b7 to c6 did not really gain space or enhance Black's control over an important part of the board. True, it opened the b-file, but this is unlikely to lead to anything special.

12. $\mathbb{Q}a4!$

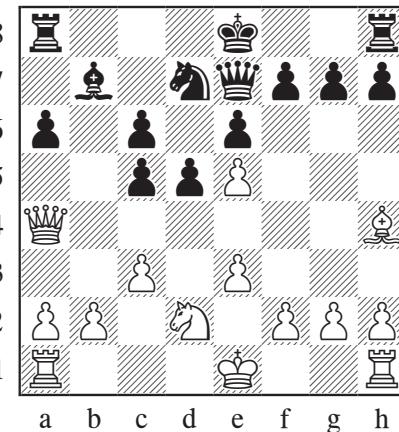
I really like the way Robson handles the next phase of the game. First he develops his queen while threatening the c6-pawn.

12... $\mathbb{Q}b7$

And now for the second idea behind the queen move...

13. $\mathbb{Q}h4!$

Black's queen is attacked and every possible reply involves a concession of some sort.



13... f6

The best way to avoid a strategic shortcoming connected to a doubled pawn is to trade it off – and Black's last move enables White to do exactly that.

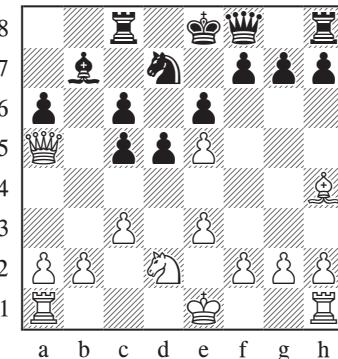
An even worse choice is:

13... $\mathbb{Q}f8?!$

This is too passive and puts the queen on an incredibly sad-looking square. Nevertheless, it is instructive to see how White should proceed. Before anything else, he gains a critical tempo with:

14. $\mathbb{W}a5$

The threat of $\mathbb{W}a5-c7$ compels Black to play:
14... $\mathbb{B}c8$



And now, White freezes the weak c5-pawn in place with:

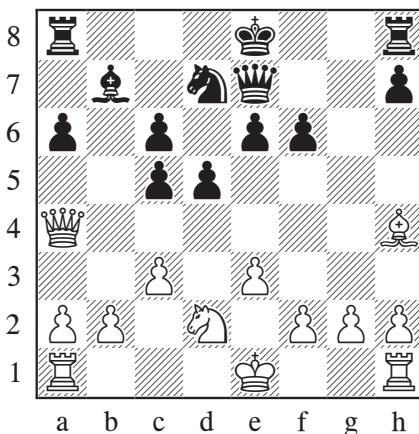
15.c4!±

He can then add pressure to the pawn very easily with $\mathbb{E}a1-c1$ and $\mathbb{Q}d2-b3$, when Black really will be wishing he had a pawn capable of defending c5. Note that 15... $\mathbb{Q}xe5?$ would allow 16. $\mathbb{W}b6!$.

13...g5 may have been Black's best bet although it severely weakens his kingside. White simply plays 14. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ and, with h2-h4 coming soon, White enjoys a strong initiative while Black's king will never have a safe home.

14.exf6 gxf6

If Black had kept his kingside structure intact with 14... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$, he would not have been crushed as he was in the game. However, moving the knight away from d7 would have left Black with problems connected with the defense of the c5-pawn. For instance, after 15.0–0 0–0 16. $\mathbb{W}a3!$ Black can do nothing about an incoming $\mathbb{Q}d2-b3$, when the pawn will inevitably fall. This is all due to there being no way for the more advanced doubled pawn to be defended by another pawn.



15.c4!

Another strong, multi-purpose move. The main point is to freeze the c5-pawn in place,

making it a clear target. In addition, White gives himself the option of opening the position with $cxd5$ at a suitable moment. This is especially important given that Black has no particularly safe options for where to put his king.

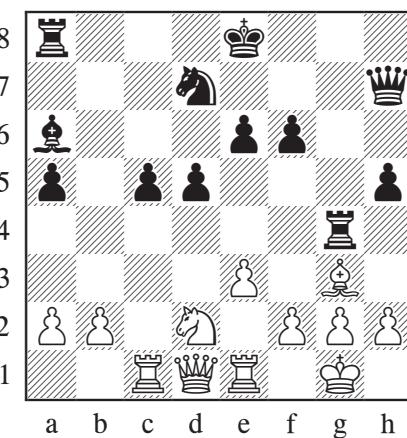
15... $\mathbb{E}g8$ 16.0–0 h5 17. $\mathbb{W}d1$ $\mathbb{E}g4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{W}h7$ 19. $\mathbb{E}c1$ a5 20. $\mathbb{E}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$

White is winning every which way, but I really like how Robson proceeded.

21.cxd5!

White finally allows his opponent to undouble the pawns, as he has seen a way to open lines and break through to Black's exposed king.

21... $\mathbb{E}xd5$



22.e4!

Of course! Black must keep the central files closed.

22... $\mathbb{d}4$ 23. $\mathbb{W}a4!$

Threatening both $\mathbb{W}a4xa5$ and $\mathbb{E}c1xc5$.

23... $\mathbb{Q}b7$

Black finds a way to defend against the first threat, but he allows something else.

24. $\mathbb{W}b3$

Faced with a catastrophic double attack on e6 and b7, Black resigned.

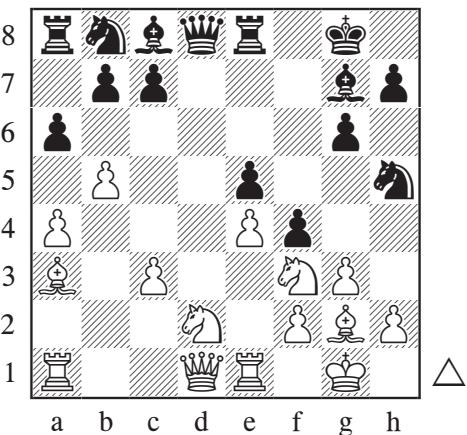
1-0

Unlike some of our other examples, White didn't win this game by isolating and capturing any weak doubled pawns. However, the pawn weaknesses were still a key factor in the outcome. Along the way, Black found himself in such a situation that he felt compelled to change the character of the position with the ...f7-f6 advance, because the passive ... $\mathbb{W}e7-f8$ retreat would have been a strategic disaster, thanks in no small part to the weak c5-pawn that White would easily add pressure to. In other words, Black weakened his position in order to cope with the doubled pawns, and White was able to take advantage of the new situation and break through towards the exposed king.

Sometimes, it can even be worth investing material to give your opponent weak doubled pawns. I really like the following example.

Kiril Georgiev – Artur Jakubiec

Panormo 2001



White has a nice lead in development, but Black still has a reasonably solid position

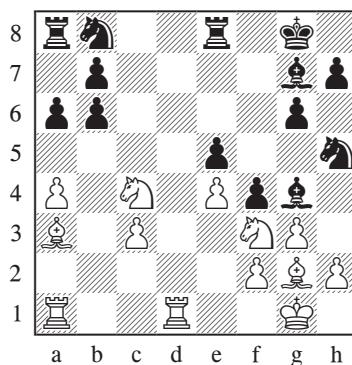
with the makings of some counterplay on the kingside. However, White's next move creates serious problems for him.

15.b6!

White kicks the c7-pawn off its perch, where it was defending the key d6-square. Black did not even take on b6, but if he had, White's point would be revealed.

15... $\text{Nc}6$

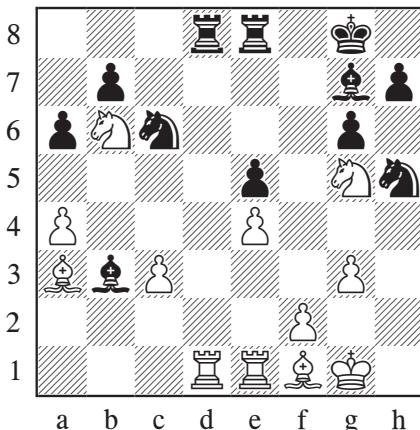
Of course it is tempting to grab the pawn with 15...cxb6, but 16. \mathbb{N} c4 leaves Black facing a catastrophe: the pawn on b6 is vulnerable and the d6-square is an inviting outpost for the knight. A possible continuation is: 16... \mathbb{W} xd1 17. \mathbb{N} exd1 \mathbb{N} g4



Now ♜c4-d6 is not much of an issue, but the weak doubled pawn on b6 can simply be picked off. 18. ♜xb6! Material is equal but Black is dead lost, as his rook will be hopelessly misplaced on a7.

16. ♔c4 ♕xd1 17. ♜axd1 ♕e6 18. ♜f1 fxe3
19. hxe3 cxb6 20. ♔xb6 ♕ad8 21. ♔g5 ♕b3

For the moment Black is still alive, but he is simply reacting to threats rather than undertaking any active plan of his own. The rest of the game is not so relevant to our theme, but Georgiev soon breaks the defense and wins material.



22. $\mathbb{R}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}a2$ 23. $\mathbb{R}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$
 25. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{R}d7$ 26. $\mathbb{R}eb1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}fxe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$
 28. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{R}dd8$ 29. $\mathbb{R}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{R}d7$
 31. $\mathbb{R}b8$

1–0

Things went pretty smoothly here, but matters are not always so simple. One must always consider the second guideline, which can, as usual, overrule the first one.

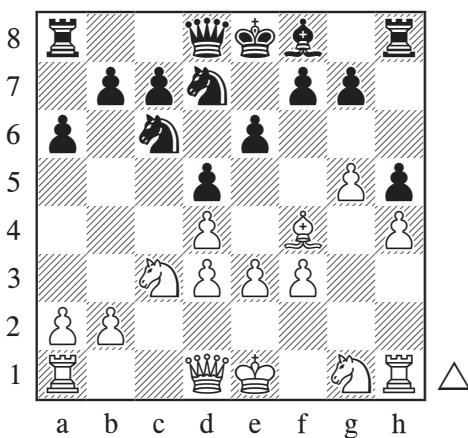
If you have no good way to attack your opponent's doubled pawns in the short or long term, they cannot be considered a weakness, even if the forward pawn cannot be defended by another pawn.

Especially if you must make a material or positional concession, be sure to consider the second guideline before trying to play against potentially weak doubled pawns. I remember being surprised by a strong player's decision in the Grand Prix a few years ago.

White has played the opening in an unusual manner (for the rest of us at least!) but he certainly is not worse here. A calm developing move would lead to a balanced middlegame, but Jobava clearly overestimated his ability to attack a pair of doubled pawns.

Baadur Jobava – Hikaru Nakamura

Khanty-Mansiysk 2015



11. $\mathbb{g}6?$

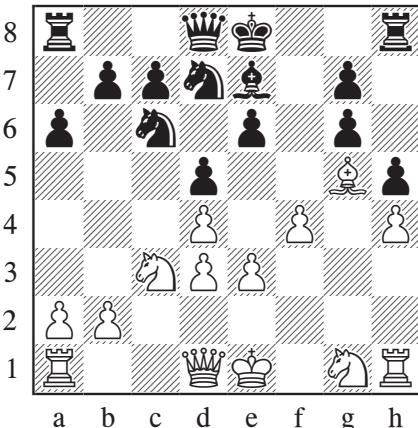
A normal move like 11. $\mathbb{Q}ge2$ would lead to a roughly equal position, where each side would have chances to outplay the other.

11... $\mathbb{f}xg6$

Black goes ahead and grabs the pawn. He does have a pair of doubled pawns on the g-file and the g6-pawn cannot be defended by another pawn, but it turns out that White will have no good way to attack it.

12. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 13. $f4$

The white knights have no available routes to target g6, and the b1-h7 diagonal is permanently closed due to the d3-pawn. White could in theory try to use the g-file to attack g6, but Hikaru has a plan for that too.



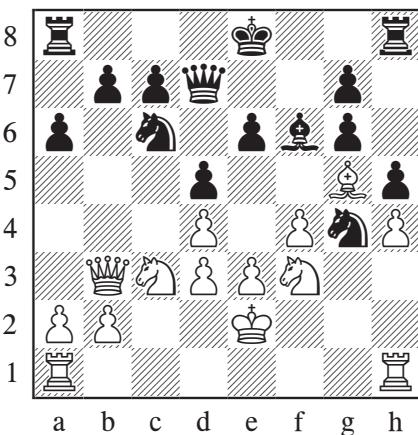
13... ♘f6!

The knight runs to g4. Not only will it clog the g-file to keep the g6-pawn safe, but it will also occupy a splendid outpost in its own right.

14.♗b3 ♗d7 15.♗f3 ♘g4 16.♔e2

Hikaru now shows the final touch of his perfect coordination.

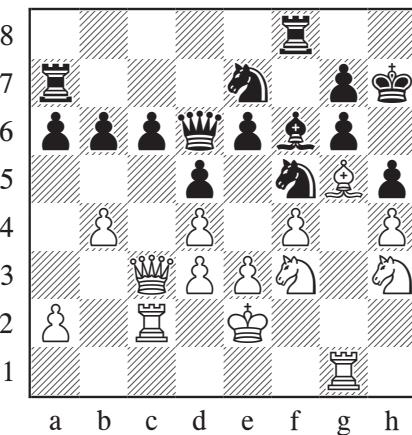
16... ♘f6!



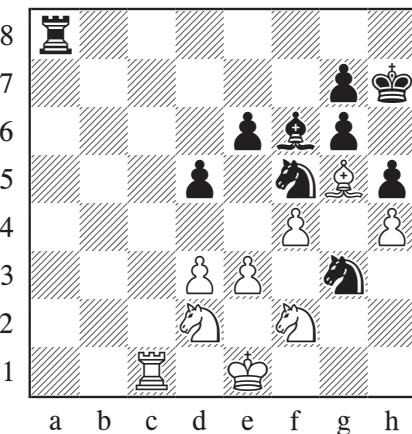
White certainly has no interest in taking the bishop on f6 and straightening out Black's pawns, so the bishop can stay there more or less forever. In addition, the bishop keeps an eye on the e5-square in case White ever wants to plant a knight there. Moreover, the c6-knight can come to e7 and keep g6 secure forever.

The extra pawn is doubled, but it is still a solid extra pawn that White has no means to attack. Mutual errors allowed White some saving chances at various moments, but he never fully got back into the game and Hikaru went on to win.

**17.♗ac1 b6 18.♗c2 ♘e7 19.♗hc1 0–0
20.♗a4 ♗d8 21.♗d1 ♗a7 22.♗f2 ♘h6
23.♗g1 ♘f7 24.♗a3 ♘h7 25.♗h3 ♘d6
26.♗e5 ♘df5 27.b4 ♗d6 28.♗c3 c6 29.♗f3**



**29...a5 30.bxa5 ♗xa5 31.♗d2 ♗a3 32.♗gc1
♗fa8 33.♗f2 c5 34.dxc5 bxc5 35.♗xc5 ♗xa2
36.♗c2 ♗xc2 37.♗xc2 ♘g3† 38.♔e1 ♗b4†
39.♗d2 ♗xd2† 40.♗xd2 ♘ef5**



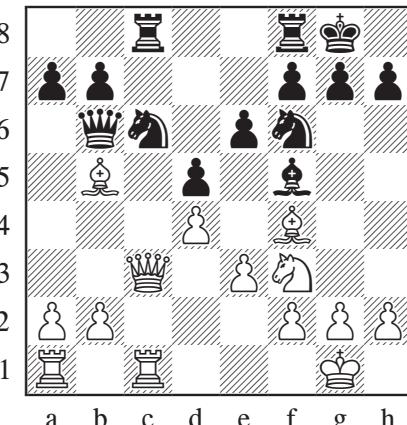
41.e4 ♜xg5 42.hxg5 ♜d4 43.♗h3 ♜a3 44.f5
 exf5 45.exd5 ♜ge2 46.♗c8 ♜xd3 47.♗c4
 ♜xh3 48.♗e5 ♜f3† 49.♗xf3 ♜f4 50.♗f2
 ♜xd5 51.♗e5 ♜c3 52.♗d8 ♜e7 53.♗d7
 ♜c2† 54.♗g3 f4† 55.♗xf4 ♜f5 56.♗d8
 ♜f2† 57.♗e4 ♜g3† 58.♗d3 h4 59.♗d4
 ♜f5 60.♗d8 ♜g3 61.♗d4 ♜f5 62.♗xh4†
 ♜h5 63.♗e4 ♜xg5 64.♗d5 ♜gl 65.♗e6
 ♜f1 66.♗h2 ♜f6† 67.♗e7 ♜g8 68.♗xg6
 ♜xg6 69.♗xh5 ♜a6 70.♗f5 g6 71.♗f6 ♜a7†
 72.♗e6 ♜g7 73.♗f3 ♜a5 74.♗f7† ♜h6
 75.♗f1 g5 76.♗f6 ♜a4 77.♗h1† ♜h4 78.♗g1
 ♜f4† 79.♗e5 ♜g6 80.♗h1 ♜a4
 0-1

Had Jobava considered the second guideline, he may have avoided g5-g6. It gave up a pawn, and he was never able to target the doubled g-pawns because his pieces did not have the lines or squares with which to do so.

When you have the option of weakening your opponent's position at the cost of making a concession of your own, you will have to weigh up the opposing factors to determine which are more important. If you are giving up a pawn in order to give your opponent a set of doubled pawns that you can target, you should be confident in your ability to win one of them. A weak extra pawn is still an extra pawn. The following game saw some mistakes, most likely due to the faster time control, but I think it still illustrates this point in action.

Valery Salov – Artur Yusupov

Paris (rapid) 1992



White's bishop pair is a long-term asset, but he faces some concrete challenges. There are numerous discoveries on the c-file, ...♗f6-e4 could be annoying, and the bishop on b5 is hanging. White would love to trade queens. Should he be able to, he will simply be better. As such, his next move is understandable.

13.♗c5!?

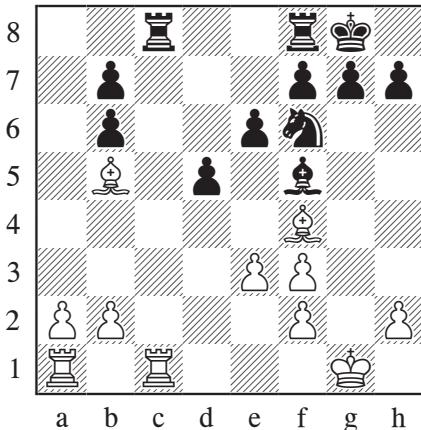
I believe this is the best move, but I am attaching a question mark to accompany the exclamation mark since I believe Salov overlooked Black's response.

White's only playable alternative was to bail out with 13.♗xc6 ♜xc6 14.♗a3, but he obviously has no trace of an advantage.

13...♗xd4!?

This surprising tactical shot wins a pawn. However, that is not the end of the story, as White can exchange queens and, more importantly, lure the a7-pawn to b6, creating a vulnerable set of doubled pawns.

14.♗xb6 ♜xf3† 15.gxf3 axb6



The reasons why I suspect White blundered into the ... $\mathbb{Q}c6xd4$ tactic are twofold. First off, it was a rapid game, and such things can happen. And secondly, he did not follow up in the best way.

16. $\mathbb{Q}c7?$!

White wins his pawn back on the spot because the weak b6-pawn cannot be defended, but Black now can get some activity.

Much stronger is:

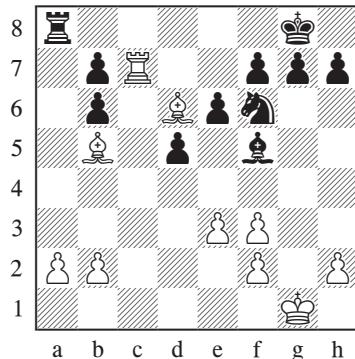
16. $\mathbb{Q}d6!$

By attacking the rook on f8, White forces a concession from his opponent.

16... $\mathbb{R}xc1\ddagger$

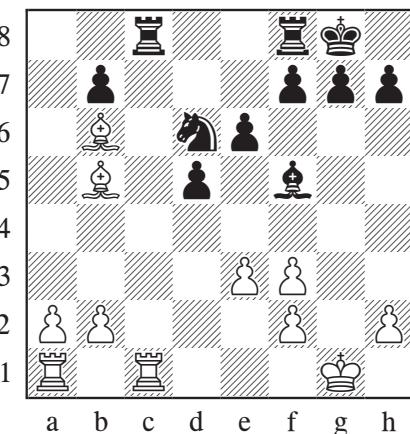
16... $\mathbb{R}fd8?$ does not work, as 17. $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{R}f8$ reaches the same position as in the game, but with White to move instead of Black. The difference is staggering, because here White can play 18. $\mathbb{Q}xb6\pm$ and Black is not in time to generate counterplay with ... $\mathbb{Q}f6-e8-d6$. The bishop pair and White's potential to make an outside passed pawn should be enough to win.

17. $\mathbb{R}xc1$ $\mathbb{R}a8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}c7!\pm$



White invades Black's position, and it is clear that Black's doubled b-pawns will not both survive. In fact, it is quite possible that neither will survive! In any event, Black is clearly under pressure and White's earlier investment of a pawn proves to be more than justified.

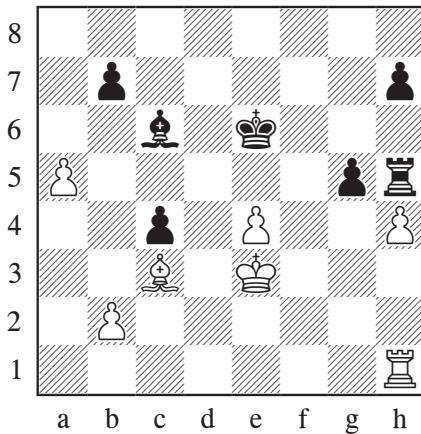
16... $\mathbb{Q}e8!$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}d6!$



Black has decent counterplay, as White cannot stop the knight from coming to c4. Black even went on to win, though he is not better at this stage.

18. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{R}fd8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $dxc4$
 21. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $f6$ 22. $a4$ $e5$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $e4$ 24. $fxe4$
 $\mathbb{Q}xe4\ddagger$ 25. $f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 26. $a5$ $\mathbb{R}c5$ 27. $h4$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$
 28. $e4$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{R}h5$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{R}d6$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}e3$
 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 32. $\mathbb{R}ac1$ $\mathbb{R}d3\ddagger$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}g4$
 $\mathbb{Q}6$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $f5$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $fxe4$ 37. $fxe4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$

38. $\mathbb{E}ce1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 39. $\mathbb{E}e3$ $\mathbb{E}xe3$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ g5



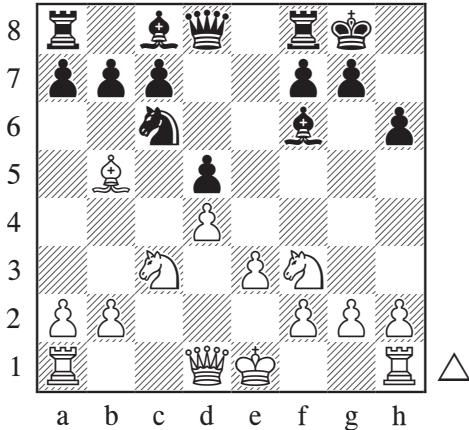
41. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ g4 42. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{E}e5$ 43. $\mathbb{E}g1$ h5 44. $\mathbb{Q}c3$
 $\mathbb{E}xe4\#$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 46. $\mathbb{E}e1$ $\mathbb{E}xe1$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}xe1$
 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}c5$
g3 51. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ g2 52. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}e2$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}f1$
54. $\mathbb{Q}c7$ g1= \mathbb{Q} 55. $\mathbb{Q}xg1$ $\mathbb{Q}xg1$ 56. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}g2$
57. a6 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ 58. a7 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 59. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 60. $\mathbb{Q}c5$
 $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 61. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}g3$ 62. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 63. $\mathbb{Q}c5$
h4 64. b4 h3 65. b5 h2 66. b6 h1= \mathbb{Q}

0–1

Exercises

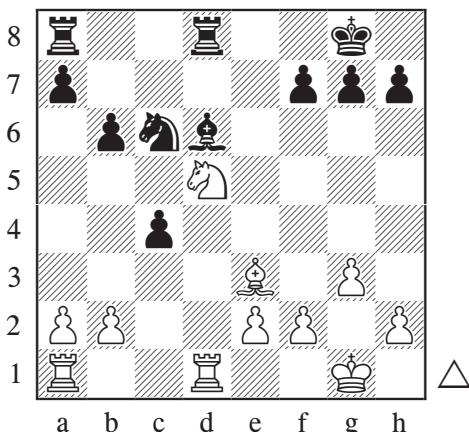
As usual, we will conclude the chapter with two puzzles.

Jose Raul Capablanca – Christoph Wolff, New York (casual) 1915



Capablanca has already given up a bishop for a knight and here he did it again with $\mathbb{B}b5xc6$, leaving Black with two bishops against two knights but doubled c-pawns. What do you think of his decision?

Markus Ragger – Dorsa Derakhshani, Munich 2016

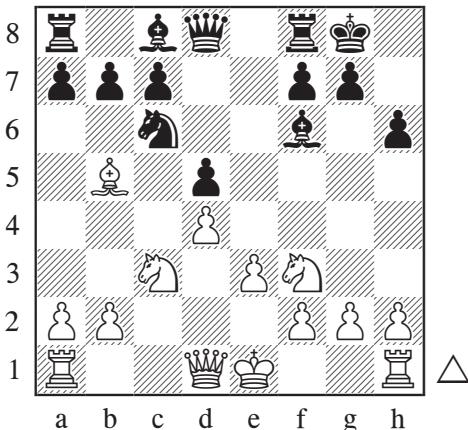


How should White proceed?

Solutions

Jose Raul Capablanca – Christoph Wolff

New York (casual) 1915



10. $\mathbb{Q}xc6!$

When considering the first and second guidelines, it becomes clear that this decision is fully justified. Black's pawn will be dragged to c6 where it cannot be defended by another pawn, and it will be easy for White to develop pressure along the open c-file.

10... $bxc6$ 11.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

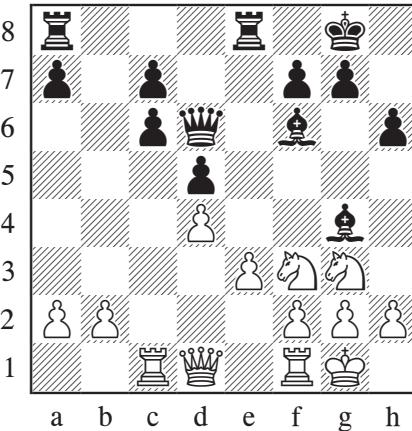
White does not mind letting his kingside pawns become doubled. If Black exchanges off his light-squared bishop, the c6-pawn will fall easily, as it will not have enough defenders.

13... $\mathbb{Q}d6$

13... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 14. $gxf3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}f4\pm$ The knight will keep everything secure from d3, and White can easily pick off the c6-pawn by means of $\mathbb{Q}d1-a4$, $\mathbb{Q}c1-c2$ and $\mathbb{Q}f1-c1$.

14. $\mathbb{Q}g3$

Black has a bad position, but his next move did not make matters any better.

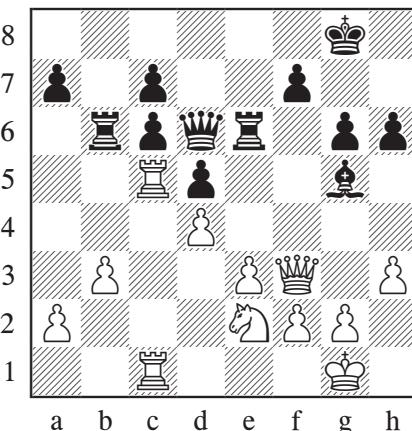


14... $\mathbb{Q}e6?$

This allows White to force the exchange of the light-squared bishop.

15. $h3!$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $g6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 18. $b3$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}fc1$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$

The c6-pawn is a glaring target. For the time being Black can defend it, but he must dedicate all of his resources to defending it. For this reason, Black is strategically lost.



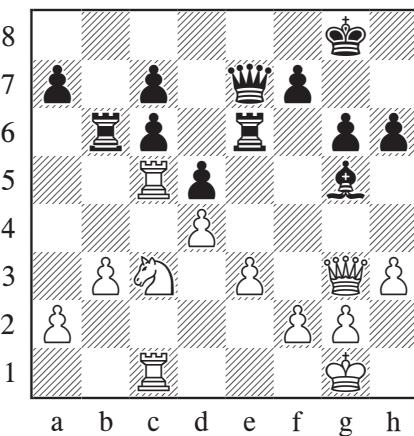
21. $\mathbb{Q}g3?!$

This is inaccurate. White should immediately bring the knight towards a4 with 21. $\mathbb{Q}c3\pm$.

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

White now found the right idea, but a move too late.

22.♘c3??



22...♝xe3!

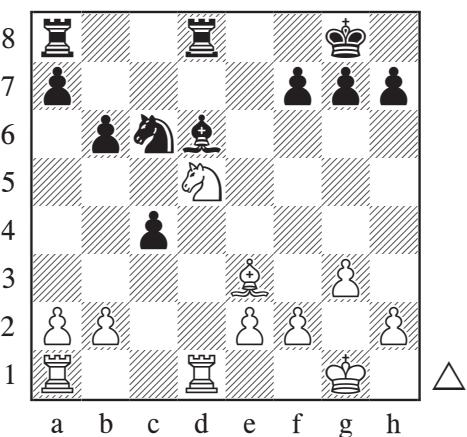
Oops. Even when you are positionally winning, you must remain tactically vigilant.

23.fxe3 ♜xe3† 24.♔h1 ♜xc1 25.♘a4 ♜a3
26.♗c3 ♜d6 27.♗f2 ♜a6 28.♘c5 ♜xa2
29.♗f1 ♜e2

0–1

Markus Ragger – Dorsa Derakhshani

Münich 2016



White can force Black to accept a deeply unpleasant set of doubled pawns.

19.♖ac1!

The first move is easy enough. White brings his last piece into the game.

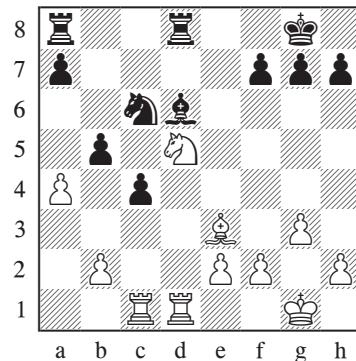
19...♞a5

Defending the pawn from the other side is no better, because 19...♝e5 is well met by 20.f4 ♜g4 21.♖xc4±.

Black could have tried:

19...b5

However, White has a powerful reply.
20.a4!



20...a6

Or 20...bxa4 21.♖xc4 ♜ac8 22.♖xa4± with a safe extra pawn.

21.axb5 axb5 22.♘c3!

The queenside cannot be held. For instance:
22...b4 23.♘d5±

The c4-pawn is falling.

After the text move Black is almost okay and, if given a move or two to consolidate, she would have been fine. But it's White to play, and his next move increases the pressure.

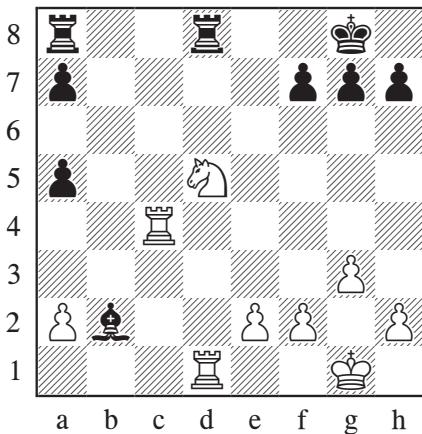
20.♘d2!

The knight on a5 is hit, and it cannot move due to the hanging pawn on c4.

20...♝e5

Black could try saving the c4-pawn with 20...♜ac8, but after 21.♝xa5 bxa5 22.♞e3 it will soon be lost anyway.

21.♝xa5 bxa5 22.♜xc4 ♜xb2



The dust has somewhat settled and Black is left with doubled a-pawns. Neither one can be defended by another pawn, and the front a-pawn cannot be defended at all.

23.♜a4!

Simply picking off the pawn. Black was not able to offer much further resistance.

23...♝f8 24.♜xa5 ♜d6 25.♜b1 ♜b8 26.♞e3

♞d2 27.♜xa7 ♜xe2 28.♜d7 ♜e8 29.♞d5

1–0

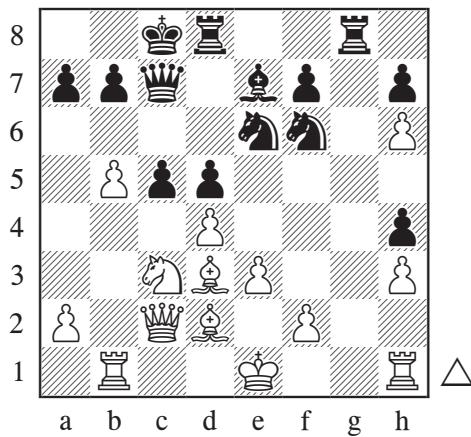
Chapter 16

Hiding in Plain Sight

The final topic to discuss in this book is that of doubling your opponents' pawns to loosen their control of important squares or blunt their pieces. Much like Chapters 14 and 15, this one is a mirror image of what we saw in a previous chapter. Let's start with an example to illustrate the theme.

Jon Ludvig Hammer – Erik Blomqvist

Malmo 2014



The position is rather sharp. Neither king feels especially safe: White is trying to pry open the queenside while Black strives to open the floodgates in the center. Jon Ludvig correctly decides to pull the trigger.

19.b6!

A lovely multi-purpose move, which could be categorized under numerous themes discussed in this book. First, White is using the pawn on a7 as a hook to open lines on the queenside. Secondly, the doubled b-pawns will be easy to attack. Most importantly of all, dragging the a7-pawn to b6 secures the c3-knight an excellent outpost on b5, which it will use to devastating effect.

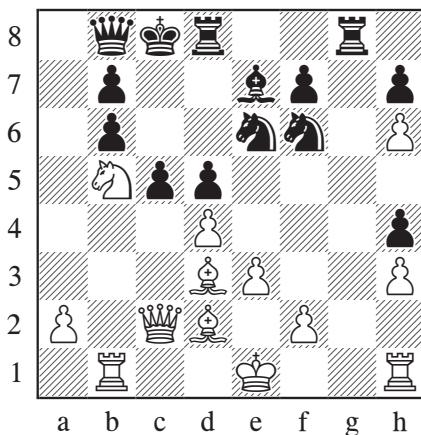
It is hard for me to even conceive of an alternative move to the text, but one such try might be 19. $\mathbb{Q}a4?$, aiming to keep d4 protected while threatening the a7-pawn. But after the strong response 19... $b6!$, White has forever lost his chance to carry out the b5-b6 advance. In the ensuing position, White is in big trouble, as his queenside attack has stalled, while Black's central play will soon open avenues toward White's king.

19...axb6 20. $\mathbb{Q}b5!$

White wastes no time in occupying the newly created outpost on b5. He is not concerned about blocking the open b-file, or the fact that the b5-knight is not attacking Black's doubled pawns (as it would after a move like $\mathbb{Q}c3-a4$ instead). The knight on b5 wreaks havoc on Black's position and cannot be pushed away due to the doubled b-pawns.

20. $\mathbb{Q}a4?$ is not nearly as effective, since Black can calmly defend with 20... $\mathbb{Q}d6!$. In that case, his queenside is fully secure and he can look forward to his central counterplay.

20... $\mathbb{Q}b8$



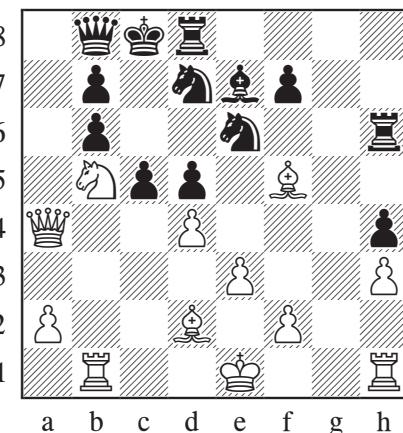
21. $\mathbb{Q}a4$

This is a decent move, but not the best.

A stronger idea was to blast open the queenside

directly with 21. $dxc5!$, intending to meet the natural 21... $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ with 22. $\mathbb{Q}c3!$ when Black is in serious trouble.

21... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}xh6$



Despite the slight inaccuracy noted above, White is still much better. However, in the next phase of the game he starts to go astray.

24. $\mathbb{Q}c3?$!

The b5-knight was the pride and power of White's position, and the biggest part of justifying the b5-b6 advance. White is still doing well but I really don't like retreating like this.

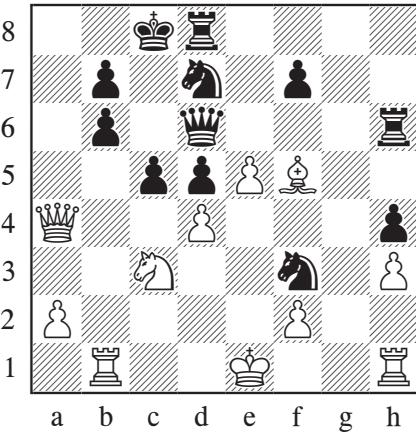
Of White's several alternatives to the text, my favorite is 24. $\mathbb{Q}c3\pm$, simply activating another piece. Even though White has no immediate way to break through, just examining the quality of his pieces compared to their black counterparts is enough to understand that he is much better. The queen on b8 is a particularly pitiful sight.

24... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 25. $e4$

Blowing up the position. Objectively, White is still close to winning, but the game has become messy and the margin for error is small. It reminds me of the Kasparov – Spassky game from Chapter 4. There was no need for

White to put himself in a situation where he needed to find only moves.

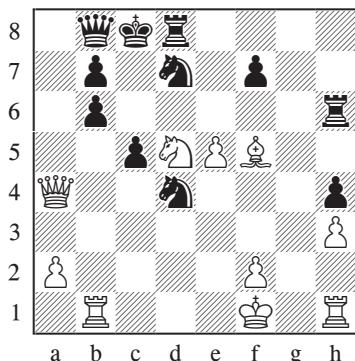
25...♝g5 26.♝xg5 ♛xg5 27.e5 ♜f3†



Such positions are difficult to play, and I would not be surprised if both players were already in time pressure. White was the first to falter.

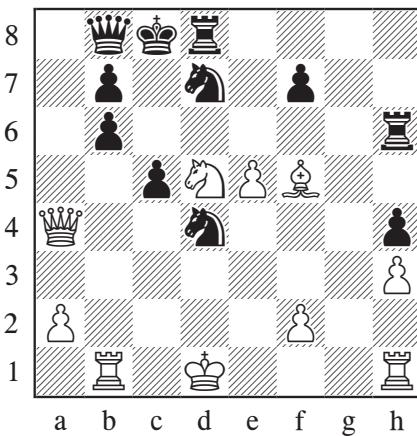
28.♔d1?

28.♔f1! would have placed the king on a much safer square. After 28...♝b8 29.♛xd5 ♛xd4 White can win material by means of:



30.♛xd7† ♜xd7 31.♜xb6† ♜xb6 32.♜xb6± White is the exchange up and his king is no less safe than Black's. Play may continue 32...♝xe5 33.♝a8† ♜b8 34.♝xb8† ♜xb8 35.♝g2 and I would expect White to win.

28...♝b8 29.♛xd5 ♛xd4

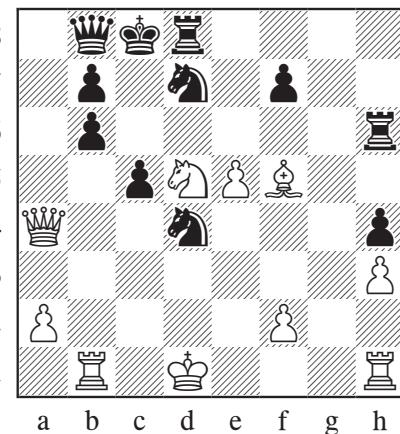


30.♛e7†

The poor placement of the king on d1 is well highlighted after 30.♛xd7† ♜xd7 31.♜xb6† ♜xb6 32.♜xb6. In the above note with the king on f1, we saw that White was close to winning. As things stand, 32...♝c6† 33.♝c2 ♜xe5 leaves White with no advantage, and his king will face serious harassment in the coming moves.

30...♝c7 31.♛d5† ♜c8

Undoubtedly upset with himself for letting such a strong position deteriorate into a balanced one, Jon Ludvig did not want to make a draw here. It was the prudent course of action though.



32.♗g4?

This winning attempt enables Black to take over with a strong sacrifice.

32...♕xe5! 33.♗xd7†

Jon Ludvig was probably banking on this move and I imagine he automatically recaptured on d7 for Black when he was calculating the line. Unfortunately for him, that is not what happened.

33...♗b8!

White's play would be justified after 33...♗xd7?: 34.♔a8† ♕b8 35.♗xb6† ♕xb6 36.♕xb8† ♘xb8 37.♗xb6±.

After the text move there is no more mate on a8, and no white attack of any kind for that matter. Meanwhile his own king is soon to be gunned down in the center.

34.♗xb6 ♕xb6 35.♗xb6 ♕xd7 36.♗b2 b5

37.♗c1 ♕f4† 38.♗b1 ♕e4†

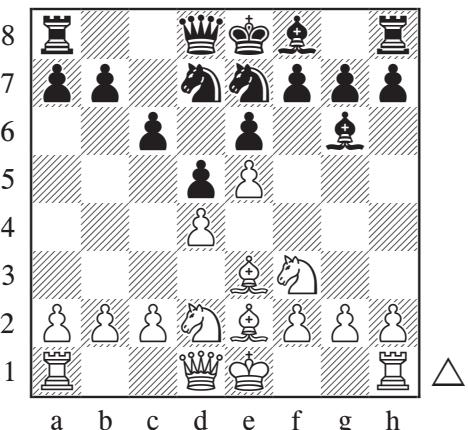
0–1

Many learning points can be taken from this game, but the most relevant for our topic was the power of the b5-b6 pawn sacrifice. It had several justifications, but I believe the biggest one was securing the b5-outpost. When the knight landed there, it dominated the game; and when it retreated, White's task became more difficult.

Doubling your opponent's pawns can often produce an excellent outpost directly in front of the further advanced pawn. That was certainly true in the last game, and here we will see another example where the same principle (in a radically different pawn structure) brought better rewards.

Magnus Carlsen – Wang Hao

Wijk aan Zee 2011



Black has not played the opening in the most accurate way, and Carlsen now takes advantage of an extra resource which would not have been there if Black had put his g8-knight on h6 instead of e7.

8.♘h4!

If White were to continue developing normally, Black would be fine after 8.0–0 ♘f5.

With the text move, White anticipates ...♘e7-f5 and is ready to take it. A secondary option is to eliminate the bishop on g6, as we shall see.

8...c5 9.c3!

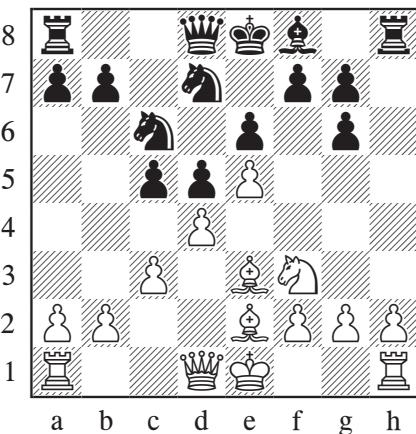
It would be a mistake to play 9.♘xg6?! too soon. After 9...hxg6 the e7-knight can go to f5 and Black will be able to remove the e3-bishop. As we will see later, this bishop is an essential component in White's plans.

9...♘c6

I think Black should have preferred 9...♘f5, although he remains worse after 10.♘xf5 ♘xf5 11.0–0±.

Now that the e7-knight has moved away from f5, Carlsen takes the opportunity to give Black a set of doubled pawns on the kingside.

10.♘xg6 hxg6 11.♗f3



White is clearly better, but not for the obvious reasons. I do not believe his bishop pair matters much, since the position is mostly closed and Black is rid of his light-squared bishop, which is often a target of attack and restricted by the many pawns on light squares. The doubled pawns on g7 and g6 are not vulnerable to attack, nor are they deficient in their ability to make a passed pawn. The reason White stands better is that the g5-square has been severely compromised, and once a knight gets there, it will be incredibly annoying. In addition, the pawn on g6 is now a hook, enabling White to open lines with h4-h5 after suitable preparation.

11...♝c8

I believe Black should have gone pawn-grabbing with 11...♝b6!? and hoped for the best. White could defend the b2-pawn here, but somehow I doubt Carlsen would have shied away from 12.0–0!? ♜xb2 13.♖b1 ♜xa2 14.♖xb7, when White has extremely dangerous compensation for his missing pawn. I would not envy Black's upcoming task, but at least he has a pawn for his troubles.

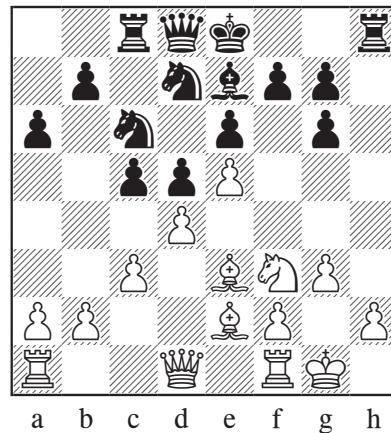
12.0–0 a6

White would like to slam his knight down on g5, but he must first secure the square.

13.g3!

The direct 13.♘g5 would be premature since after 13...♝e7 White cannot bolster it with h2-h4.

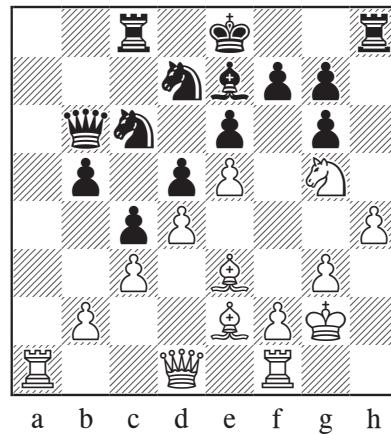
13...♝e7



14.h4!

Carlsen's play is simple, natural and incredibly effective. He takes control over the weakened g5-square and will soon be ready to land his knight there.

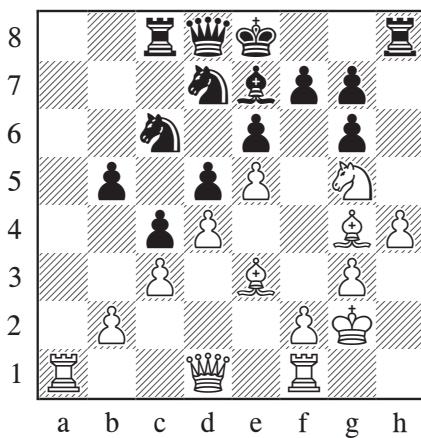
**14...b5 15.a4 ♜b6 16.axb5 axb5 17.♘g2 c4
18.♘g5!**



I have no doubt that this is exactly the kind of strategic domination Carlsen envisaged ten moves earlier, when he initially went for $\mathbb{Q}f3-h4$. The knight on g5 is incredibly annoying and h4-h5 is coming far sooner than Black would like. There is no meaningful counterplay on the queenside and, in an absolute sense, Black already has a losing position.

18... $\mathbb{W}d8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}g4!$

White prepares for $\mathbb{W}d1-f3$, when sooner or later Black will have to take on g5. He chose to do so right away.



19... $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 21. $\mathbb{R}h1!$

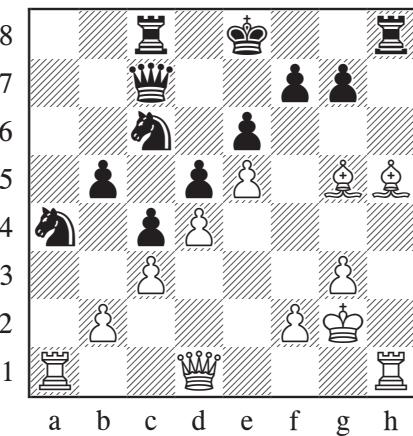
Black has no way to stop h4-h5.

If making a set of doubled pawns in your opponent's position weakens an important square directly in front of the further advanced doubled pawn, it is often a good idea to make that exchange.

When applied retroactively to the previous examples, this guideline would have smiled upon the decisions taken by the Norwegians. The respective knights on b5 and g5 caused their opponents a great deal of trouble.

Doubling an opponent's pawns can do just as much damage to their pieces as it does credit to our own. I was impressed by the following clinic put on by India's top rising star.

21... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 22. $\mathbb{H}h5$ $\mathbb{G}xh5$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ $\mathbb{Q}a4$



24. $\mathbb{Q}xf7!$

White could win with slower play, but Carlsen spots a way to end the game by force.

24... $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 25. $\mathbb{W}f3\#$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 26. $\mathbb{E}xh8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xh8$ 27. $\mathbb{E}h1\#$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 28. $\mathbb{W}h5$ $\mathbb{E}f8$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}f6$

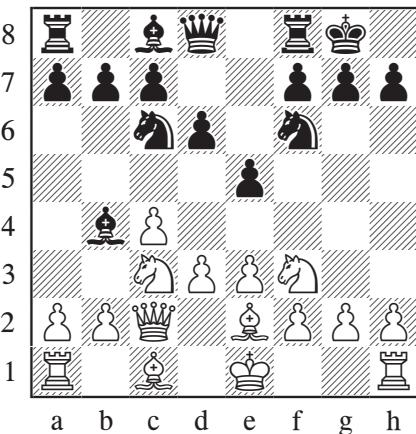
1-0

Both preceding games showed the power of a knight sitting on a square directly in front of a doubled pawn. This brings us to our first guideline.

Bharathakoti Harsha – Vidit Gujrathi

Douglas 2017

1.c4 e5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.♘f3 ♘c6 4.e3 ♘b4
5.♗c2 d6 6.d3 0–0 7.♗e2



We pick up this example early in the game. At first glance, the position appears normal, but Vidit finds an excellent way to make use of his slight lead in development.

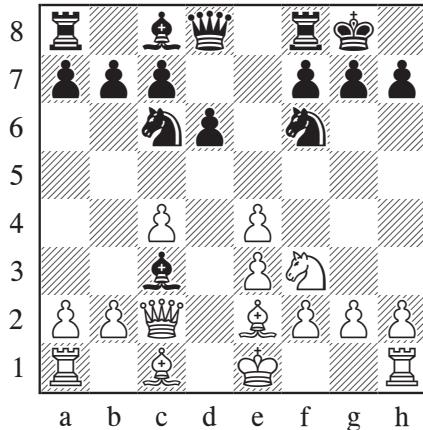
7...e4!

Black offers a pawn sacrifice, the acceptance of which will force White to take on two sets of doubled pawns which will greatly restrict his piece activity.

8.dxe4?!

In hindsight, I think White should have avoided the game continuation and instead chosen 8.♘d2!, although Black is at least equal after 8...exd3 9.♗xd3 ♘e5.

8...♗xc3†!



White now has an unfortunate dilemma. His pawn structure is extremely ugly after the way he played in the game, but maintaining a healthy structure also comes at a price.

9.bxc3?!

I think 9.♗xc3 was the lesser evil, although 9...♘xe4 accentuates Black's lead in development. After something like 10.♗c2 ♘f5 11.♗d1 ♘f6 I would prefer Black due to his active pieces and White's difficulty developing the queenside, but at least White is not yet facing dire long-term strategic problems.

9...♗g4

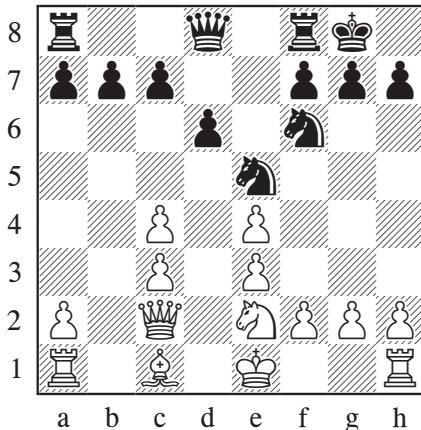
For the moment Black is a pawn down, but White's doubled pawns are so weak that he will probably have to let go of one of them at some point.

10.♘d4?

White should have tried something like 10.h3 ♘h5 11.g4 ♘g6 12.♘d2, holding on to his extra pawn as stubbornly as possible. Still, Black gets a lot of play after 12...♗e8 13.f3 d5! when White is badly behind on development.

10...♘xe2 11.♘xe2 ♘e5!

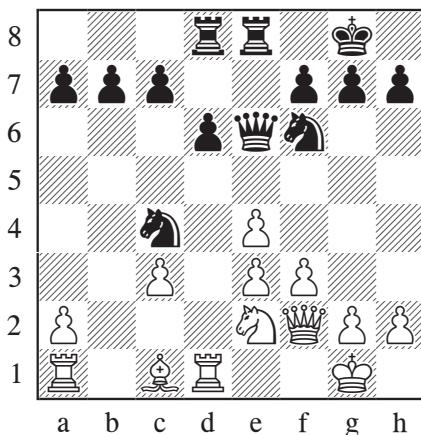
The c4-pawn cannot be saved.



12.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$

White's doubled pawns are not especially weak now, and it is far too early to talk about the potential for a passed pawn. But one look at the c1-bishop should be enough to realize that White is clearly worse. It simply has nowhere to go! White would love to move the e3-pawn sideways one way or the other, when he would be totally fine, but as is, he is doomed to passivity.

13. $\mathbb{B}d1$ $\mathbb{E}e8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 15. $f3$ $\mathbb{E}ad8$
16. $\mathbb{W}f2$ $\mathbb{W}e6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e2$



White's play does not inspire confidence. Moving the knight from e2 to g3, only to return it to e2 a few moves later, is hardly a

good sign in the early middlegame. Black is clearly better after any reasonable move, but Vudit opts for a dynamic approach, aiming to exchange one advantage for another.

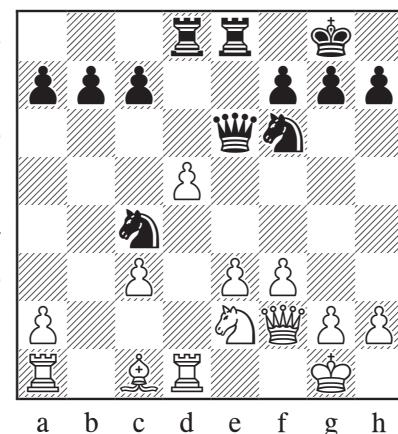
17...d5!!

Black allows White to trade off one of the doubled pawns. The decision is justified by Black's improved piece activity as well as some concrete tactical details.

18.exd5?

White overlooks his opponent's big idea.

It was much more resilient to play 18. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{W}e5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ when Black is not winning material on the spot, although he still is clearly better. For example, 19... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 20. $exd5$ and now 20... $f5!?$ appeals to me, as White will likely have to advance e3-e4 anyway, pitching a pawn.



18... $\mathbb{Q}xe3!$

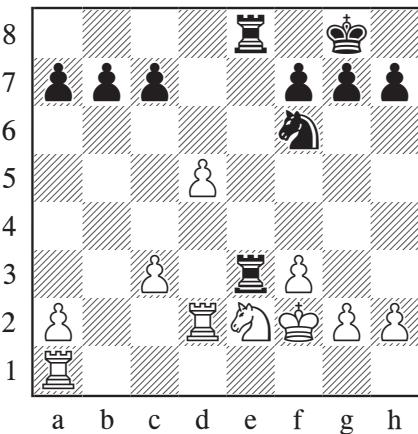
Well spotted.

19. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $\mathbb{W}xe3$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{E}de8$

The doubled pawns are gone and the bad bishop has been exchanged, but White now faces concrete problems instead. The e2-knight is loose and moving it will allow ... $\mathbb{E}e3xc3$.

22.♖d2

White tries to keep his position together but the rook is overworked, as becomes clear after Vidit's next move.

**22...♗xd5!**

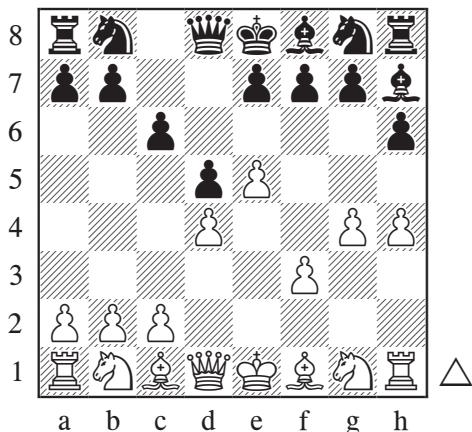
Black is a clean pawn up and won without much discussion.

**23.♗xd5 ♜xe2† 24.♗g3 ♜c2 25.♗d3 h6
26.a4 ♜e6 27.♗h3 ♜g6 28.g4 ♜c6 29.♗a3
a5 30.♗g3 g6 31.h4 b6 32.♗h3 g5 33.♗g3
♗g7 34.♗e3 ♜d6 35.hxg5 hxg5 36.f4 gx f4†
37.♗xf4 ♜g2 38.♗f3 ♜dd2 39.♗e7 ♜df2†
40.♗e3 ♜e2† 41.♗f3 ♜xe7 42.♗xg2 ♜e4
0–1**

I find that the most common reason a set of doubled pawns can be detrimental to one's own pieces is that a bishop stuck behind the less advanced one can have a hard time getting out. The next game (as well as the previous one) is a clear testament to the kind of struggles this might entail.

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave – Ding Liren

Paris/St Petersburg 2013



If Black can play ...e7-e6, he should have a fine position. White correctly prevented him from doing so with a strong pawn sacrifice.

7.e6!

Hoping to drag the f7-pawn to e6, after which it will be difficult for the f8-bishop to join the game.

7...♗f6?

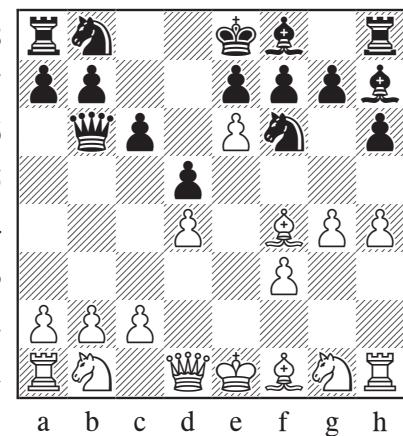
Black does not fully appreciate the strategic danger in his position. He had one – and only one! – chance to force the e6-pawn away. For better or worse, he needed to play 7...♗d6! when White is forced to take on f7. He is probably still better after 8.exf7† ♗xf7 9.f4, but the game does go on.

8.♗f4!

White has no interest in taking on f7, since that would allow ...e7-e6 in the near future. Instead MVL takes an excellent prophylactic decision, preventing Black's queen from coming to d6 to harass the e6-pawn. Sooner or later, Black will have to take on e6.

8...♗b6

I really like how Vachier-Lagrave handled the next phase of the game. He was completely unconcerned with the queenside pawn count, as he realized that the key to the game was making sure that a pawn (whether white or black!) would remain on e6. If it does, then he will effectively have a decisive material advantage as the f8-bishop (and consequently the h8-rook) will not be able to join the game.



9.♘c3! ♜xb2 10.♖d2!

White's king is surprisingly safe in the center. Or perhaps it's not so surprising, considering that Black's kingside pieces are entirely shut out of play.

10...♝b6 11.♗ge2 a6 12.♗b1 ♛a7

The computer now wants to take on f7, but I like MVL's move even more.

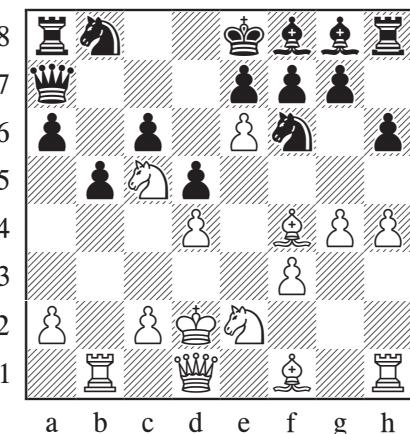
13.♗a4!

The c5-square is beckoning.

13...b5

The sad-looking 13...♗bd7!? was probably Black's best try, but after 14.exd7† ♗xd7 15.♔e1± Black does not have enough for a piece.

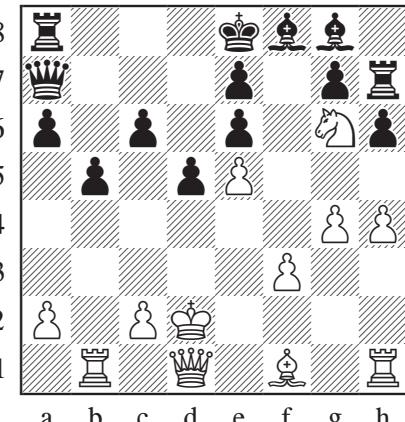
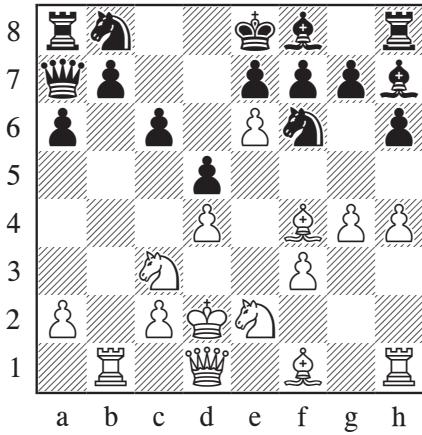
14.♗c5 ♜g8



15.♔e5!

Black's pieces are totally locked down. He felt the need to take on e6 now just to make the d7-square available, but that only allowed White to show his strategic dominance.

15...fxe6 16.♗f4 ♗bd7 17.♗xd7 ♗xd7 18.♗g6! ♗xe5 19.dxe5 ♜h7



20.h5!

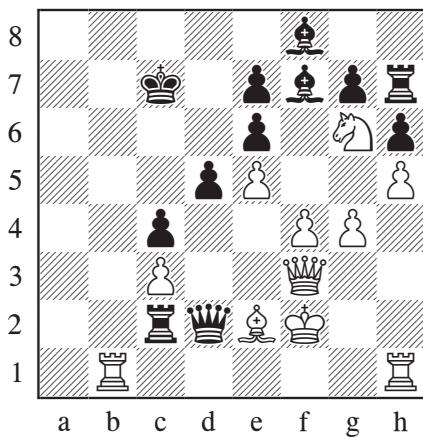
I find this position amusing. Black has two extra pawns, a large center, two bishops and a safer king... yet he is absolutely lost! He simply has no way to get the f8-bishop (and, by extension, the h7-rook) into the game.

20...c5 21.f4 ♖f7 22.♗f3 0–0–0 23.♗e2 c4

All White has to do now is play as if he is up a piece. Because he essentially is. The first step is opening the position to make his superior force felt.

24.a4! ♖c7 25.axb5 axb5 26.♗xb5 ♖d4† 27.♗e1 ♖a8 28.♗b1 ♖a2 29.c3 ♖d2† 30.♗f2 ♖c2

I like the final touches that MVL puts on this game.

**31.♗e3!**

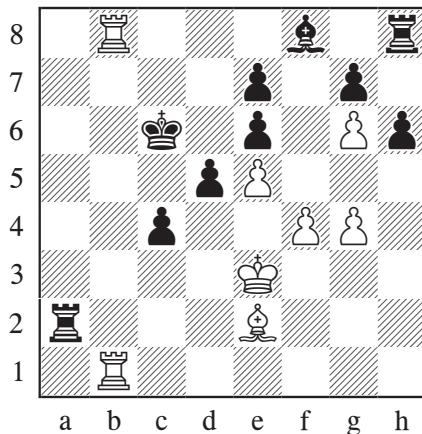
White is more than happy to trade queens. The more trades there are, the closer he is to a trivially winning endgame.

31...♖xe3† 32.♔xe3 ♖xc3† 33.♔d4 ♖c2

34.♗he1

If either of Black's e-pawns were able to move to either side, or even to vanish from the board, Black would probably be fine as his f8-bishop could get out. As things stand, he is effectively down a ton of material.

34...♔c6 35.♗b8 ♖xg6 36.hxg6 ♖h8 37.♗eb1 ♖d2† 38.♔e3 ♖a2

**39.♗b6†**

Black resigned. The game might have concluded with 39...♔c7 40.♔d4! ♖xe2 41.♗c5 and Black will be mated. It's tough to play an entire game without two pieces!

1–0

We saw some examples in Chapter 13 of a bishop becoming permanently entombed as well, and it's not a pretty sight when it happens. This brings us to our second guideline.

Doubling your opponent's pawns, in such a way as to block his bishop behind the less advanced doubled pawn, is almost always a good idea.

This guideline clearly holds true in the previous two examples. Neither the c1-bishop nor the f8-bishop had much hope for a future. Vidit allowed the bishop to be exchanged, but only when it allowed him to transform his positional advantage into a material one, which he easily converted.

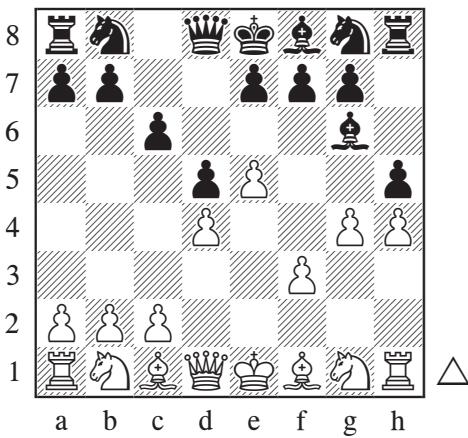
Obviously, not all cases are this cut and dried. As usual, there is another guideline you should be aware of, which may overrule the previous one.

If a bishop can eventually get out from being entombed or you cannot force the doubling of the pawns to entomb it in the first place, it often is not worth your effort to try.

Let's examine a similar position to the previous encounter.

Francisco Vallejo Pons – Wesley So

Tbilisi 2017



The position is nearly identical to the one Vachier-Lagrave had, but there are two major differences. First, Black's h-pawn is on h5, which gives him some pressure down the h-file. Secondly, the bishop is much better placed on g6 than it would be on h7, and it can defend against any threats of e6xf7†. Vallejo did not appreciate the difference and quickly got into trouble.

7.e6?

The pawn will not be secure here.

White should have preferred simple development. The game might continue 7.Qe2 e6 8.Qf4 Qe7 with chances for both sides, though I have to say I would be more comfortable with Black.

7...Qd6!

Just one move after trying to compel Black to give himself doubled e-pawns to lock in the f8-bishop, White has to abandon the plan.

Of course, Black avoids the compliant 7...fxe6? when White's play would be fully justified.

8.exf7† Qxf7†

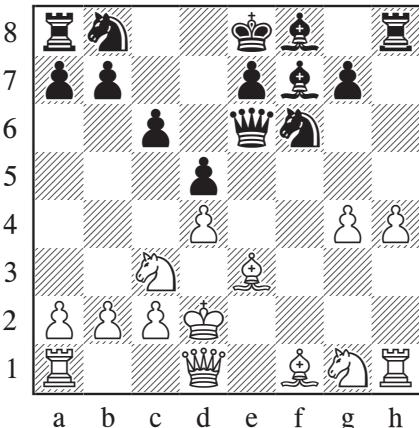
White cannot stop the freeing ...e7-e5, after which his king will be much more exposed than his counterpart.

9.Qe3 hxg4 10.fxg4 Qf6

Wesley's choice is fine, although I would prefer the more direct 10...e5. The position is opening, and the f8-bishop is a lot more active than White was hoping it would be when he played e5-e6.

11.Qc3 Qe6 12.Qd2?

12.Qe2† was essential.



12...Qxg4+

I don't think I have ever seen a 2700 player get a lost position with White this quickly before. To Vallejo's credit, he fought back hard with Black the following day to try to force a tiebreak.

13.Qg5 Qf2 14.Wf3 Qxh1 15.Wxh1
 Wd6 16.Qh3 e6 17.Qf1 Qe7 18.Qf4 Wb4
 19.Qge2 Qd7 20.a3 Wxb2 21.Qb1 Wxa3
 22.Qxb7 Wa6 23.Qb1 Qxh4 24.Qf1 Qxf4
 25.Qxf4 Wa5 26.Qe1 Qg5 27.Qg3 Qh6
 28.Qd3 0-0-0 29.Qb3 e5 30.dxe5 d4
 0-1

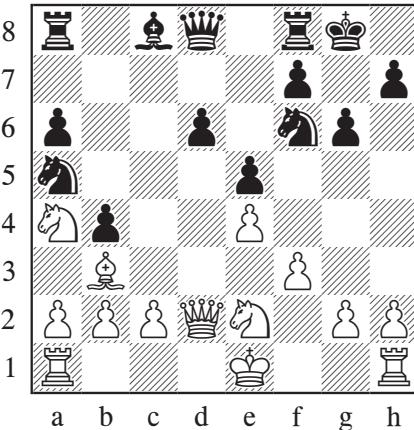
The contrast between this game and the previous one can be seen when examining the second guideline. When Vachier-Lagrave advanced with e5-e6, Black had only one chance to force him to take on f7, and even then White stood better. Once the moment had passed, the pawn on e6 left the f8-bishop paralyzed for the remainder of the game. On the other hand, Vallejo's e5-e6 was mistaken because he could not actually force the f7-pawn to come to e6. Instead, he lost his space advantage in the center and fell behind in development, and any hope of locking in the f8-bishop was quickly squelched.

While bishops are the most common casualties

of doubled pawns closing lines, other pieces can also feel the pain. I like the way Black handled the following position.

Hou Yifan – Hikaru Nakamura

Wijk aan Zee 2013



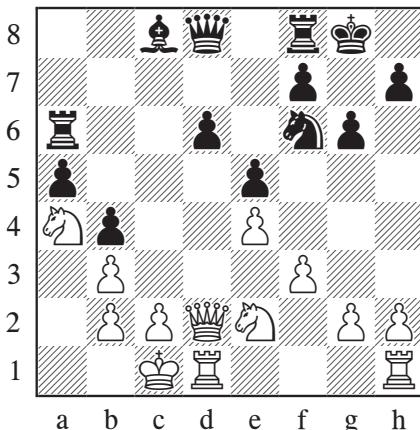
White has misplayed a Sicilian Dragon and allowed Black to get quick counterplay on the queenside and in the center; but at the same time, her position looks reasonably solid. However, Hikaru finds a strong plan which involves exploiting the deficiencies of White's soon-to-be doubled pawns.

15...Qxb3! 16.axb3 a5=

White's knight is stuck on a4, with no route back into the game. It is totally safe and cannot be captured, but it has no other squares which it can go to, and White will almost feel like she is playing a piece down. By contrast, if the b3-pawn was back on a2, White would be able to play b2-b3 and bring the knight back into play via b2, with a reasonable position.

Incidentally, Black also gets good play by breaking the center open with 16...d5, but I much prefer Nakamura's choice.

17.0-0-0 Ea6!



Simple and strong. The d6-pawn is firmly defended and White has no real counterplay.

18.h4

White could have brought the knight back into the game with 18.♘c5 ♜c6 19.♘d3, but this would have led to a host of other problems. The knight is hardly a point of pride on d3 and, more importantly, Black can smash straight through on the queenside. 19...♝c7! 20.♗b1 ♝e6! Black intends ...♝fc8 next, and White will be crushed. Note how she has no counterplay at all on the kingside, which is largely due to having spent so many tempos moving the knight around.

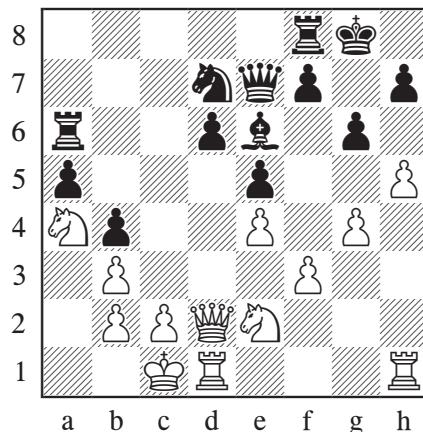
18...♝e6 19.h5?!

White now had her one and only chance to do something with the a4-knight: 19.♘c5! ♜c6 20.♘xe6 fxe6† Black is still better, but White should have preferred this over allowing the knight to sit on a4 forever.

19...♝e7!

Black is entirely unfazed by any kingside thrusts and can always recapture with ...f7xg6 to defend against White's threats along the h-file. White has no major threats and will soon feel the pain of the knight on a4 being unable to participate in the fight on the kingside or in the center.

20.g4 ♛d7



21.f4?

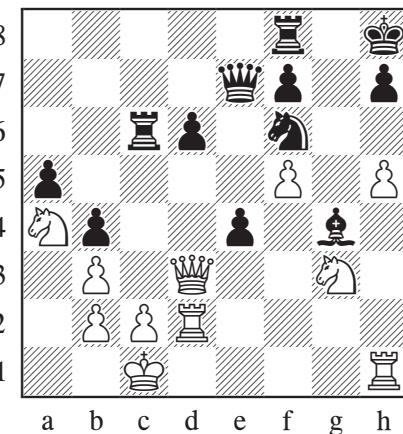
This seems like desperation, but the position was bad anyway.

White should have preferred something like 21.♗b1 although Black has easy play after 21...♜c8, with ...♝ac6 to follow. My computer thinks White is okay here, which I think is insane. Nonetheless, this was preferable to simply losing material.

21...♝xg4 22.f5 gx f5–+

With two extra pawns, and the knight still paralyzed on a4, the rest was easy for Hikaru.

23.exf5 ♖h8 24.♗d3 ♜c6 25.♗d2 ♘f6 26.♗g3 e4



Note that the entirety of the fight is happening in the center and on the kingside. Normally White should be happy about that since her king is safe on the queenside, but here she is essentially playing a piece down.

27. $\mathbb{W}e3$ $\mathbb{W}e5$ 28. $\mathbb{E}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 30. $\mathbb{W}d4$ $\mathbb{E}fc8$ 31. $c4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 32. $\mathbb{W}xe5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 33. $\mathbb{E}xe2$ $d5$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $dxc4$ 35. $\mathbb{E}xe4$ $f6$ 36. $bxc4$ $\mathbb{E}xc4$ 37. $\mathbb{E}e2$ $\mathbb{E}h4$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{E}d8$ 39. $\mathbb{E}c2$ $b3$ 40. $\mathbb{E}c3$ $\mathbb{E}b4$ 41. $\mathbb{E}c8$ $\mathbb{E}xc8$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 43. $\mathbb{E}g1\#$ $\mathbb{E}g4$ 44. $\mathbb{E}e1$ $\mathbb{E}g2$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 46. $\mathbb{E}d1$ $a4$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{E}c2\#$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$

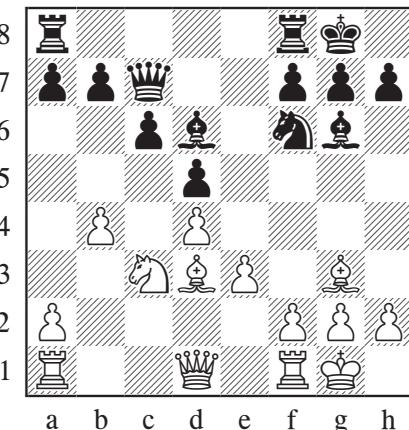
0–1

The same kind of restrictions can happen to a knight on the edge of the board, especially when on the rim. This brings us to the final guideline of the book.

If your opponent has a knight on the edge of the board, it may well be worth considering doubling a nearby pawn to restrict the knight's ability to re-enter the game.

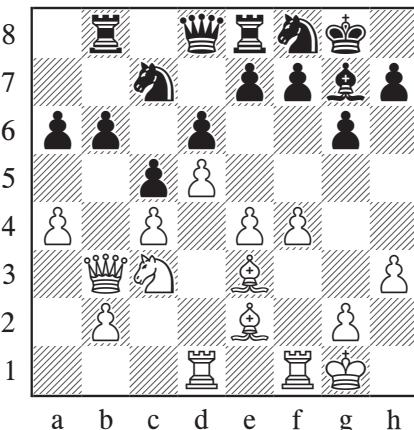
Exercises

Vyacheslav Ikonnikov – Krishnan Sasikiran,
Vlissingen 2016



The g3-bishop and d6-bishop have been staring each other down for the past several moves. Black now chose to break the tension and take on g3. What do you think of his decision?

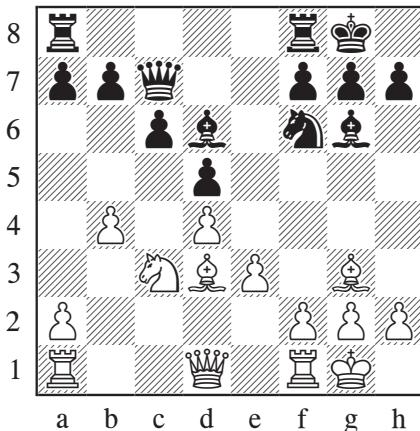
Bui Vinh – Hoang Nam Thang,
Dalat City 2004



How should White proceed?

Vyacheslav Ikonnikov – Krishnan Sasikiran

Vlissingen 2016



In non-forcing positions like this one, the right move is often at least somewhat open for debate. But I really like how Sasikiran played, and he won convincingly.

14... $\mathbb{Q}xg3!$

This is the best choice because it will critically weaken the g4-square. Once a knight lands there, White could face real problems on the kingside.

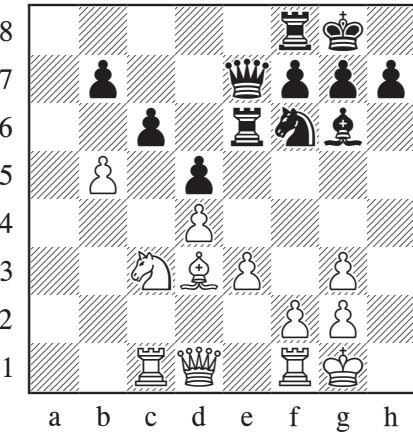
15.hxg3

White now continued with a standard minority attack as if nothing had happened on the kingside. We'll see how that works out for him.

15...a6 16. $\mathbb{B}b1$ $\mathbb{B}ae8$ 17.a4 $\mathbb{B}e6$ 18. $\mathbb{B}c1$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ 19.b5 axb5 20.axb5?

It took several moves, but finally Black can demonstrate why the g3-pawn is misplaced.

White needed to pay more attention to the g4-square. He should have tried 20. $\mathbb{Q}xg6!$ in order to keep his queen on d1 and make ... $\mathbb{Q}f6-g4$ harder to accomplish, though I still prefer Black after 20...fxg6!, with ...h7-h5 and ... $\mathbb{Q}f6-g4$ to follow.



20... $\mathbb{Q}xg3!$ 21. $\mathbb{W}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}g4!$

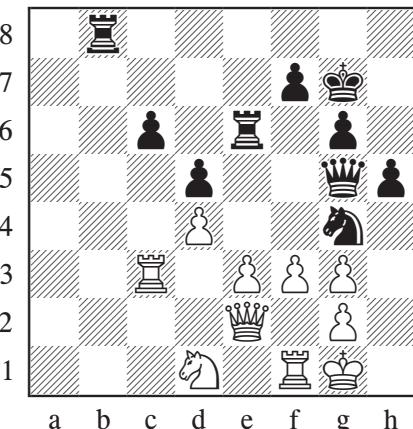
The knight is extremely well placed on g4, and it cannot be kicked by f2-f3 due to the perpetual weakness of the e3-pawn. Now ... $\mathbb{W}g5-h5$ is a serious threat.

22. $\mathbb{W}f5$ h5!?

This is decent but unnecessary.

The queen is extremely annoying on f5, and she can be expelled by 22... $\mathbb{Q}h6!$ 23. $\mathbb{W}d3$ f5!. The knight retreat to h6 was only temporary and it will soon return to g4, without any annoyance from $\mathbb{W}d3-f5$ this time.

23.bxc6 bxc6 24. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ g6 25. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{B}b8$
26. $\mathbb{E}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 27. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{W}g5$ 28.f3



White finally managed to play f2-f3 to kick the knight away, but in doing so he created more weaknesses. The g3-pawn is an issue, since it is the forward doubled pawn and it no longer receives the protection of another pawn. We have seen the kind of difficulties this may cause in Chapter 12 (guideline on page 231).

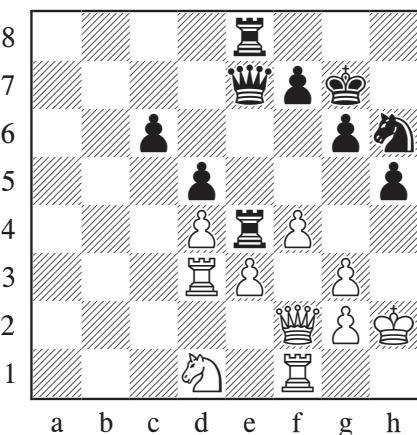
28...Qh6 29.Qf2 Qf5 30.Qh2 Bbe8 31.Qb3

Black now finished off the game with a stylish maneuver, forcing the f3-pawn forward once again to make the g4-square a permanent outpost.

31...We7! 32.Qg1 Wc7 33.f4

A sad necessity, as 33.Qh2? is refuted by 33...h4.

33...We7 34.Qh2 Be4 35.Qd3 Qh6!

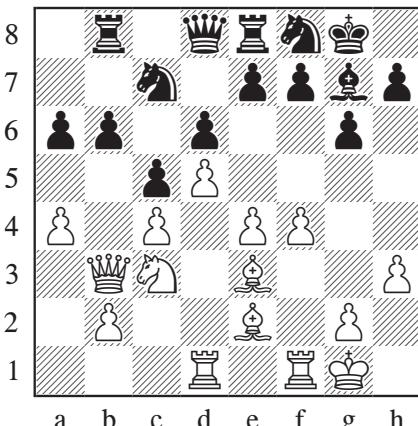


Back to g4 we go! Sasi won easily.

**36.Qg1 Qg4 37.We2 Qxe3 38.Qxe3 Bxe3
39.Bxe3 Wxe3† 40.Wxe3 Bxe3 41.Bc1
Bxg3 42.Qf2 Bd3 43.Bxc6 Bxd4 44.g3 h4
45.gxh4 Bxf4† 46.Qg3 Bf5**
0-1

Bui Vinh – Hoang Nam Thang

Dalat City 2004



White has more than one good move, but I especially like the game continuation.

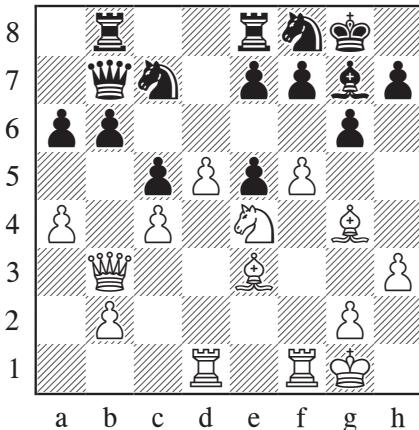
17.e5!

I find the machine's recommendation of 17.f5 unfathomable. Why would White allow Black's pathetic f8-knight access to the e5-square, and give the g7-bishop a permanently good diagonal? After 17...Qd7± White is better, but Black has obvious trumps too.

17...dxe5 18.f5!

By pitching a pawn before playing f4-f5, White opens the kingside under far more favorable circumstances. Black's extra e5-pawn is more of a hindrance than a strength: his bishop is blunted on g7 and his knights no longer have access to the e5-square. The disappearance of the e4-pawn also helps White, by improving the scope of his light-squared bishop and creating an outpost on e4 for his knight.

18...Wc8 19.Qg4 Wb7 20.Qe4+-



Black is strategically busted. His extra pawn is of no consequence, his pieces are disastrously poor, and White will soon break through on the kingside and in the center. When contrasting this to the position where White advanced f4-f5 without first playing e4-e5, I think anyone would prefer this one.

20... $\mathbb{E}ed8$ 21.d6

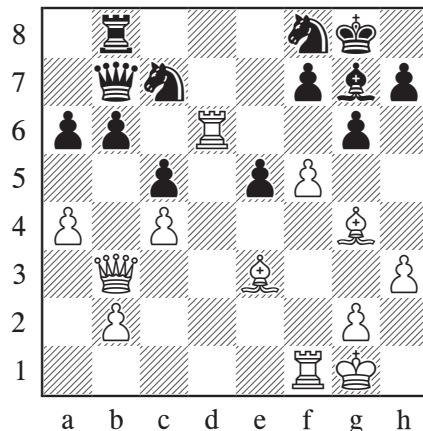
This wins material on the spot, although I almost feel sad at the bind being broken.

I would tend to prefer the sadistic 21. $\mathbb{W}c2!?$, when Black is still badly stuck and White can slowly but surely bring his forces to the

kingside. Still, the move in the game was enough to win, and maybe objectively the better choice.

21...exd6 22. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{E}xd6$ 23. $\mathbb{E}xd6+-$

With a material advantage and better pieces, White went on to win easily.



23... $\mathbb{E}xf5$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}ce6$ 25. $\mathbb{W}d1$ $\mathbb{W}e7$
 26. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $fxe6$ 27. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $b5$ 28. $cxb5$ $axb5$
 29. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $bxa4$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{W}h4$ 31. $\mathbb{W}f2$ $\mathbb{W}xf2$
 32. $\mathbb{E}xf2$ $e4$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 34. $\mathbb{E}e2$ $a3$ 35. $bxa3$
 $\mathbb{E}b1\uparrow$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $e3$ 37. $g3$ $\mathbb{E}a1$ 38. $\mathbb{E}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$
 39. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}d4$

1–0

Game Index

Part I

Judit Polgar – Garry Kasparov, Linares 1994	9
Sam Shankland – Georg Meier, Biel 2012	11
Hrant Melkumyan – Burak Firat, Golden Sands 2012	19
Julio Granda Zuniga – Eduardo Iturriaga, Mexico City 2016	21
Sam Shankland – Kacper Piorun, Havana 2017	24
Nguyen Ngoc Truong Son – Baskaran Adhiban, Tbilisi (1.5) 2017	24
Karl Gilg – Aron Nimzowitsch, Carlsbad 1929	27
Deep Sengupta – Sam Shankland, Dresden 2013	30
Anatoly Karpov – Vladimir Tukmakov, Leningrad 1971	33
Emil Sutovsky – Garry Kasparov, Tel Aviv (2) 1998	37
Jose Raul Capablanca – Frederick Yates, Hastings 1919	41
Boris Kostic – Saviely Tartakower, Bled 1931	42
Sam Shankland – Marc Esserman, Las Vegas 2013	46
Maxime Vachier-Lagrave – Evgeniy Podolchenko, Plovdiv 2010	47
Viswanathan Anand – Boris Gelfand, Moscow (14) 2012	52
Ricardo De Guzman – Sam Shankland, San Francisco 2008	53
John Bryant – Sam Shankland, St Louis 2010	55
Sergei Tiviakov – Orlen Ruiz Sanchez, Villahermosa 2016	57
Robert Zelcic – Loek van Wely, Elista (ol) 1998	60
Xie Jun – Natalia Zhukova, New Delhi (4.1) 2000	64
Sam Shankland – Surya Ganguly, Edmonton 2016	65
Garry Kasparov – Boris Spassky, Tilburg 1981	68
Viktor Korchnoi – Garry Kasparov, Amsterdam 1991	72
Yu Yangyi – Deep Sengupta, Gibraltar 2015	74
Dmitry Svetushkin – Andrey Zhigalko, Eilat 2012	75
Anatoly Karpov – Mark Taimanov, Moscow 1972	78
Roman Lovkov – Zhou Weiqi, St Petersburg 2009	84
Georgios Souleidis – Markus Ragger, Germany 2007	85
Artur Kogan – Vladimir Tukmakov, Ljubljana 1997	94
Daniel Hugo Campora – Vladimir Epishin, Seville 2000	96
Alexander Motylev – Rail Makhmutov, Bilbao 2014	98
Anthony Miles – Tamaz Gelashvili, Saint Vincent 2000	99
Sam Shankland – Timur Gareyev, Las Vegas 2012	101
Bator Sambuev – Jerry Xiong, Ottawa 2009	104
Niclas Huschenbeth – Sam Shankland, Greensboro 2017	105

Part II

Vladislav Tkachiev – Eloi Relange , Bastia 1998	111
Eric Lobron – Harald Keilhack , Altenkirchen 2001	112
Jan Timman – Garry Kasparov , Amsterdam 1994	117
Jon Ludvig Hammer – Wouter Spoelman , Wijk aan Zee 2011	120
Marco Ubezio – Christian Bauer , Saint Vincent 2000	126
Leonid Yudasin – Vladimir Antoshin , Nikolaev 1983	127
Stanislav Savchenko – Gabriel Battaglini , Le Touquet 2007	129
Levan Aroshidze – Handszar Odeev , Antalya 2009	133
Yannick Gozzoli – Romain Edouard , Internet 2017	135
Ivan Morovic Fernandez – Zdenko Kozul , Solin 1999	136
Viswanathan Anand – Vassily Ivanchuk , Leon (rapid) 2008	137
Sergey Fedorchuk – Dariusz Swiercz , Lublin 2012	138
Hikaru Nakamura – Varuzhan Akobian , St Louis 2009	142
Irina Sudakova – Sergey Fedorchuk , Llucmajor 2014	143
Ivan Saric – Jonas Lampert , Biel 2013	150
Sergey Tiviakov – Orlen Ruiz Sanchez , Villahermosa 2016	153
Boris Gelfand – Kiril Georgiev , France 2000	154
Simon Ansell – Radoslaw Wojtaszek , Birmingham 2005	157
Matthias Wahls – Mikhail Gurevich , Germany 1994	159
Tigran L. Petrosian – Boris Avrukh , Kemer 2007	162
Sam Collins – Jonathan Rogers , England 2012	164
Sam Shankland – Jonny Hector , Helsingør 2015	167
Konstantin Sakaev – Maxim Sorokin , Sochi 2006	171
Emil Sutovsky – Dmitry Svetushkin , Subotica 2008	173
Vitaly Kunin – Manuel Bosboom , Amsterdam 2016	177
Ivan Ivanisevic – Levon Aronian , Dresden 2008	180
Christopher Debray – Levan Aroshidze , Barcelona 2012	182
Alexander Areshchenko – Rasmus Svane , Gjakova 2016	186
Veselin Topalov – Garry Kasparov , Novgorod 1995	187
Eugenio Torre – Michal Krasenkow , Manila 1995	193
Didier Leuba – Tony Miles , Lugano 1989	196
Magnus Carlsen – Oluwafemi Balogun , Tbilisi (1.1) 2017	198
Ilya Smirin – Tomasz Markowski , Plovdiv 2003	200
Daniil Dubov – Daniil Yuffa , Kolomna 2016	204
David Howell – Danny Gormally , Birmingham 2016	205

Part III	
Ray Robson – Alexander Ivanov , St Louis 2011	213
Sam Shankland – Oliver Barbosa , New York 2009	215
Wang Hao – Oliver Dimakiling , Abu Dhabi 2014	219
Giorgi Kacheishvili – Michael Roiz , Las Vegas 2013	220
Alexander Grischuk – Alexander Riazantsev , Moscow 2009	225
Magnus Carlsen – Levon Aronian , St Louis 2017	227
Vassilios Kotronias – Gata Kamsky , Moscow 2011	230
Tatev Abrahamyan – Sergey Erenburg , Berkeley 2011	232
Sam Shankland – Dmitry Zilberstein , Berkeley 2011	234
Judit Polgar – Magnus Carlsen , Mainz (rapid) 2008	236
Sam Shankland – Krishnan Sasikiran , Matanzas 2017	239
Richard Rapport – Rakesh Kulkarni , Abu Dhabi 2015	242
Jorden van Foreest – Sandro Mareco , Hasselbacken 2016	243
Alexey Dreev – Dmitry Jakovenko , Togliatti 2003	245
Nikola Djukic – Dimitar Mogilarov , Plovdiv 2012	247
David Navara – Ruslan Ponomariov , Wijk aan Zee 2007	251
Emil Sutovsky – Ju Wenjun , Gibraltar 2013	253
Nigel Short – Vladimir Kramnik , London 2011	255
Vladimir Kramnik – Nigel Short , Moscow 1996	258
Kateryna Lagno – Vassily Ivanchuk , Cap d'Agde 2010	260
Matthias Bluebaum – Arkadij Naiditsch , Minsk 2017	261
Part IV	
Laurence Matheson – Bobby Sky Cheng , Canberra 2014	267
Parimarjan Negi – Daniel Naroditsky , San Francisco (rapid) 2017	270
Vassily Ivanchuk – Magnus Carlsen , London 2013	273
Li Chao – Xu Xiangyu , Graz 2016	275
Sam Shankland – Mikhail Antipov , Biel 2017	276
Levon Aronian – Maxime Vachier-Lagrave , Karlsruhe 2017	278
Ian Nepomniachtchi – Daniel Fridman , Aix-les-Bains 2011	281
Gata Kamsky – Jordi Magem Badals , Madrid 1994	286
Tin Jingyao – Viktor Laznicka , Ho Chi Minh City 2016	287
Alexei Shirov – Daniil Dubov , Moscow 2013	289
Viktor Gavrikov – Olli Salmensuu , Hallsberg 1996	291
Maxime Vachier-Lagrave – Zoran Stojcevski , Plovdiv 2010	293
Roy Robson – Alexander Onischuk , St Louis 2016	294
Kiril Georgiev – Artur Jakubiec , Panormo 2001	297

Baadur Jobava – Hikaru Nakamura , Khanty-Mansiysk 2015	298
Valery Salov – Artur Yusupov , Paris (rapid) 1992	300
Jose Raul Capablanca – Christoph Wolff , New York (casual) 1915	304
Markus Ragger – Dorsa Derakhshani , Münich 2016	305
Jon Ludvig Hammer – Erik Blomqvist , Malmo 2014	307
Magnus Carlsen – Wang Hao , Wijk aan Zee 2011	310
Bharathakoti Harsha – Vidit Gujrathi , Douglas 2017	313
Maxime Vachier-Lagrave – Ding Liren , Paris/St Petersburg 2013	315
Francisco Vallejo Pons – Wesley So , Tbilisi 2017	318
Hou Yifan – Hikaru Nakamura , Wijk aan Zee 2013	319
Vyacheslav Ikonnikov – Krishnan Sasikiran , Vlissingen 2016	322
Bui Vinh – Hoang Nam Thang , Dalat City 2004	323

Name Index

A

Aagaard	5
Abrahamyan	232
Adhiban	23, 24
Akopian	141, 142
Anand	19, 52, 137
Ansell	157
Antipov	276
Antoshin	125, 127
Areshchenko	185, 186
Aronian	180, 181, 184, 227, 228, 229, 232, 278, 280
Aroshidze	133, 182, 183, 184
Avrukh	161, 162, 163

B

Balogun	198
Barbosa	215
Battaglini	129
Bauer	125, 126
Bharathakoti	313
Blomqvist	307
Bluebaum	259, 261, 262
Bosboom	177
Bryant	55
Bui Vinh	321, 323

C

Campora	96
Capablanca	41, 42, 303, 304
Carlsen	198, 199, 227, 228, 229, 236, 238, 273, 274, 310, 311, 312
Cheng	267, 268
Collins	161, 164

D

Debray	182
De Guzman	53
Derakhshani	303, 305
Dimakiling	219
Ding Liren	315
Djukic	247, 251
Dreev	245, 246, 247, 249, 251
Dubov	203, 204, 289

E

Edouard	135
Epishin	96
Erenburg	232
Esserman	45, 46

F

Fedorchuk	138, 141, 143
Firat	19
Fridman	281, 284

G

Ganguly	63, 65
Gareyev	101
Gavrikov	291
Gelashvili	99, 100, 101
Gelfand	19, 52, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158
Georgiev	154, 156, 157, 297
Gilg	27
Gormally	203, 205
Gozzoli	135
Granda Zuniga	21
Grischuk	223, 225
Gurevich	159

H

Hammer 120, 123, 307
 Hector 167
 Hoang Nam Thang 321, 323
 Hou Yifan 319
 Howell 203, 205, 206
 Huschenbeth 103, 105

I

Ikonnikov 321, 322
 Iturriaga 21
 Ivanchuk 137, 259, 260, 273, 274
 Ivanisevic 180, 182, 184
 Ivanov 213

J

Jakovenko 245, 249, 251
 Jakubiec 297
 Jobava 298, 300
 Ju Wenjun 253, 254

K

Kacheishvili 220, 221
 Kamsky 230, 231, 285, 286
 Karpov 33, 34, 37, 38, 78, 79, 81
 Kasparov 9, 10, 11, 13, 37, 38, 39, 40,
 44, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74,
 80, 117, 119, 185, 187, 188, 308
 Keilhack 112
 Kogan 94, 96
 Korchnoi 72
 Kostic 42, 44
 Kotronias 230
 Kozul 136
 Kramnik 255, 256, 257, 258, 262
 Krasenkow 193
 Kulkarni 241, 242
 Kunin 177

L

Lagno 259, 260
 Lampert 150
 Laznicka 285, 287
 Leuba 196, 199
 Li Chao 275, 276
 Lobron 112
 Lovkov 83, 84

M

Magem Badals 285, 286
 Makhmutov 98
 Mareco 241, 243
 Markowski 200
 Matheson 267
 Meier 11, 14
 Melkumyan 19
 Miles 99, 100, 196, 197
 Mogilarov 247, 251
 Morovic Fernandez 136
 Motylev 98

N

Naiditsch 259, 261
 Nakamura 141, 142, 298, 319
 Naroditsky 269, 270
 Navara 251, 253
 Negi 192, 270, 272
 Nepomniachtchi 281
 Nguyen 23, 24
 Nimzowitsch 27

O

Odeev 133
 Onischuk 294

P

Petrosian 161, 162
 Piorun 23, 24
 Podolchenko 45, 47, 48
 Polgar 9, 10, 73, 236, 238
 Ponomariov 251

R

- Ragger 83, 85, 303, 305
 Rapport 241, 242
 Relange 111
 Riazantsev 223, 225
 Robson 213, 214, 294, 295, 296
 Rogers 161, 164
 Roiz 220
 Ruiz Sanchez 57, 62, 153, 156

S

- Sakaev 171, 173
 Salmensuu 291
 Salov 300
 Sambuev 103, 104
 Saric 150
 Sasikiran 239, 321, 322
 Savchenko 129
 Sengupta 30, 31, 33, 35, 37, 38, 74
 Shirov 289, 290
 Short 255, 257, 258, 262
 Smirin 200, 202
 So 318
 Sorokin 171, 173
 Souleidis 83, 85
 Spassky 68, 80, 308
 Spoelman 120, 123
 Stojcevski 293
 Sudakova 141, 143
 Sutovsky 37, 173, 174, 175, 177, 253, 254
 Svane 185, 186
 Svetushkin 75, 78, 173
 Swiercz 138

T

- Taimanov 78, 79
 Tartakower 42, 44
 Timman 117
 Tin Jingyao 285, 287
 Tiviakov 57, 153, 154, 156, 157
 Tkachiev 111, 112
 Topalov 185, 187, 188
 Torre 193
 Tukmakov 33, 35, 36, 37, 38, 79, 94, 95

U

- Ubezio 125, 126
V
 Vachier-Lagrave 45, 47, 48, 278, 293, 294, 315, 316, 318, 319
 Vallejo Pons 318
 Van Foreest 241, 243
 Van Wely 60, 61, 62
 Vidit 313, 314, 315, 318

W

- Wahls 159
 Wang Hao 218, 219, 220, 310
 Wojtaszek 157
 Wolff 303, 304
X
 Xie Jun 63, 64
 Xiong 103, 104
 Xu Xiangyu 275

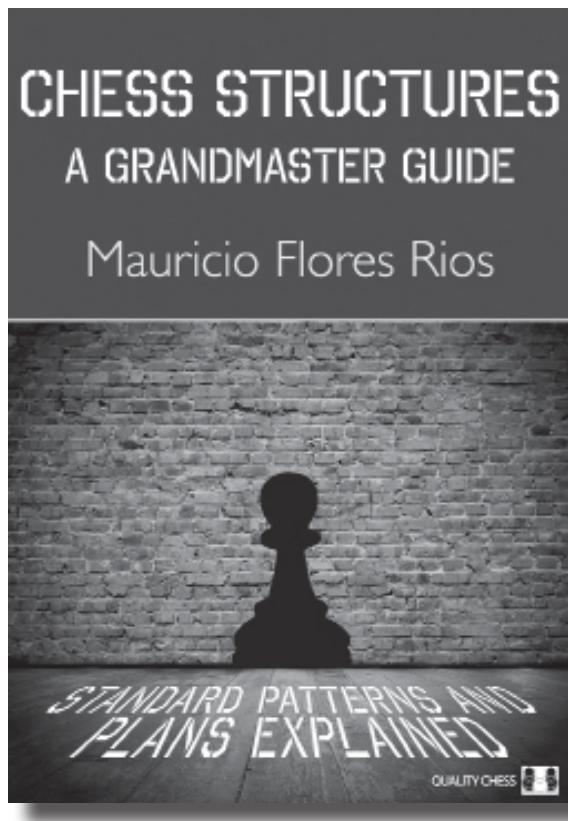
Y

- Yates 41
 Yudasin 125, 127
 Yuffa 203, 204
 Yusupov 300
 Yu Yangyi 74

Z

- Zelcic 60
 Zhigalko 75, 76, 78
 Zhou Weiqi 83, 84
 Zhukova 63, 64
 Zilberstein 234

Chess Structures – A GM Guide



Mauricio Flores Rios provides an in-depth study of the 28 most common structures in chess practice. In *Chess Structures – A Grandmaster Guide* you will find:

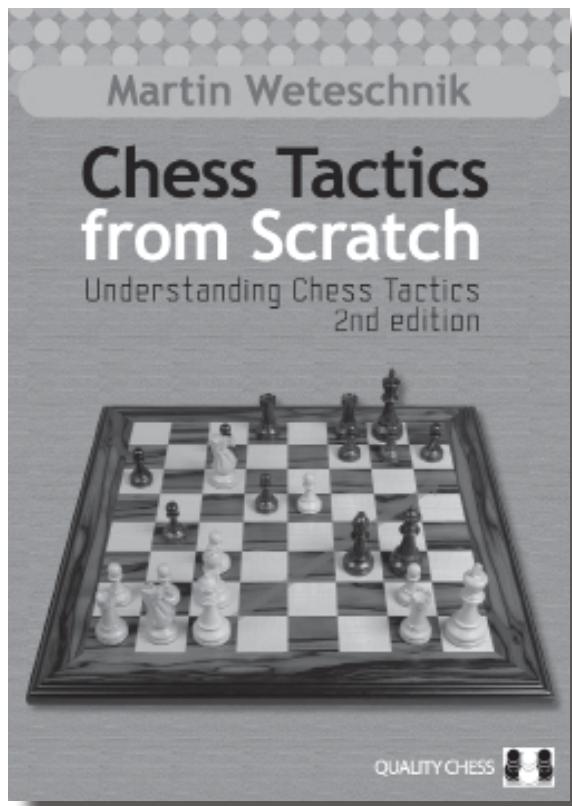
- * Carefully selected model games showing each structure's main plans and ideas
- * Strategic patterns to observe and typical pitfalls to avoid
- * 50 positional exercises with detailed solutions

GM Axel Bachmann from the Foreword:

“Chess Structures – A Grandmaster Guide is an excellent selection of model games. By studying the 140 games and fragments in this book, the reader will learn many of the most important plans, patterns and ideas in chess.”

Mauricio Flores Rios is a grandmaster from Chile. He achieved the title at eighteen, and is a regular member of Chile's Olympiad team.

Chess Tactics from Scratch



An improved and expanded second edition of a modern classic.

'Chess is 99 per cent tactics' is an old saying. This may be an exaggeration, but even the remaining 1 per cent still depends on tactics. When Martin Weteschnik started working as a trainer in his local chess club, he quickly realized that even the stronger club players had great weaknesses in their tactical play. He also discovered that simply asking them to solve a huge number of puzzles did not fix the problem. These players clearly needed a good book, but when Weteschnik looked for it he found nothing suitable, so he decided to write it himself.

But Weteschnik was not completely satisfied with the book and decided to restructure and rewrite it completely. The first edition of this book, *Understanding Chess Tactics*, was hailed as a modern classic. This expanded and improved second edition offers more puzzles to test the tactical chess skill that Weteschnik helps the reader develop.

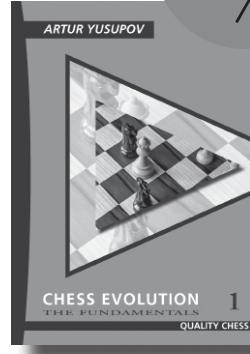
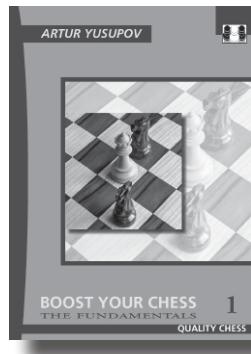
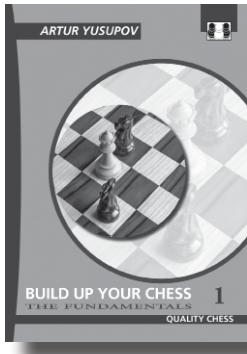
Yusupov's Chess School

9
hardbacks for
the price of

7

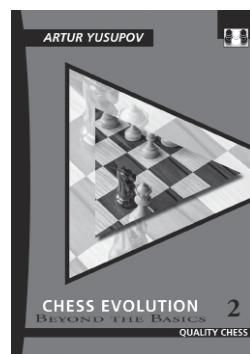
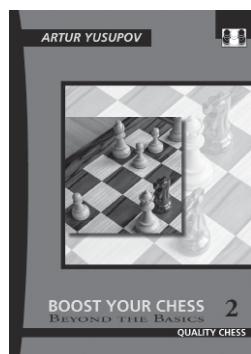
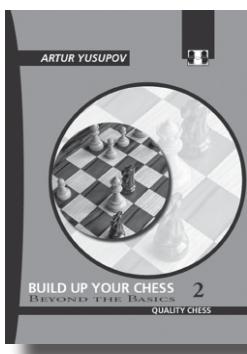
Fundamentals

a good place to start



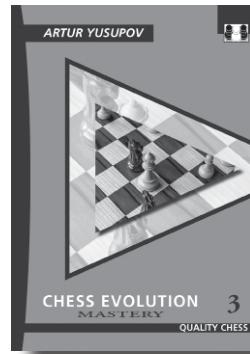
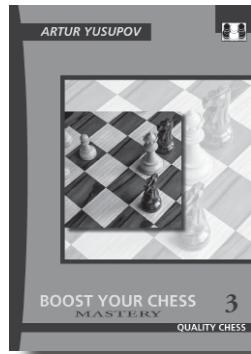
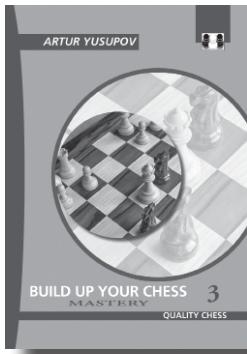
Beyond the Basics

where you go next



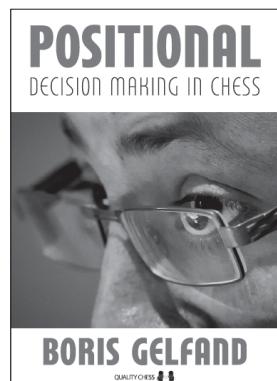
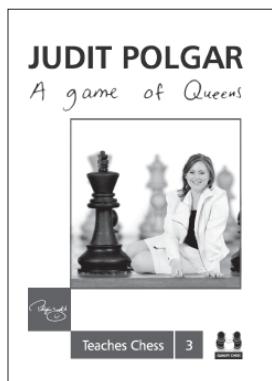
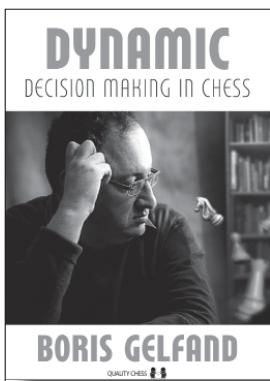
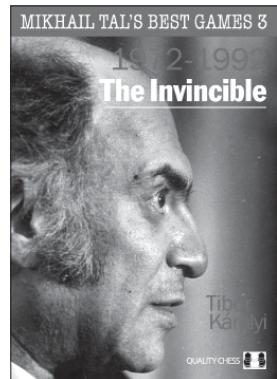
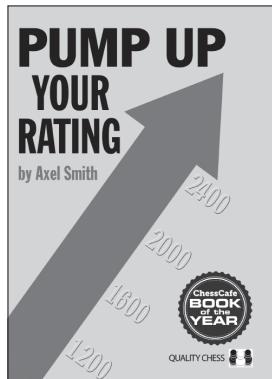
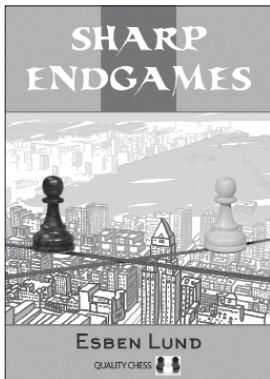
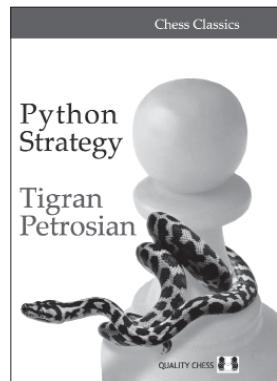
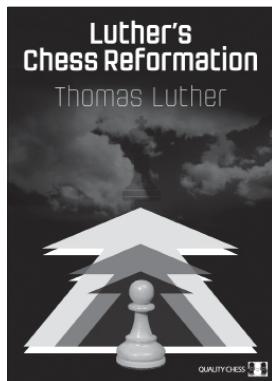
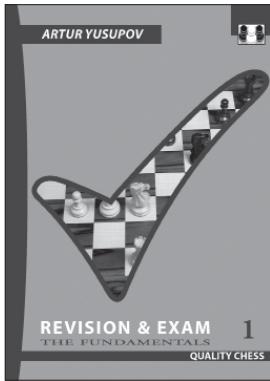
Mastery

worth aspiring to!



GM Artur Yusupov's groundbreaking series was recognized by the World Chess Federation as the best instructional chess books with the first ever Boleslavsky Medal (ahead of Garry Kasparov and Mark Dvoretsky in 2nd and 3rd place).

Improvement books



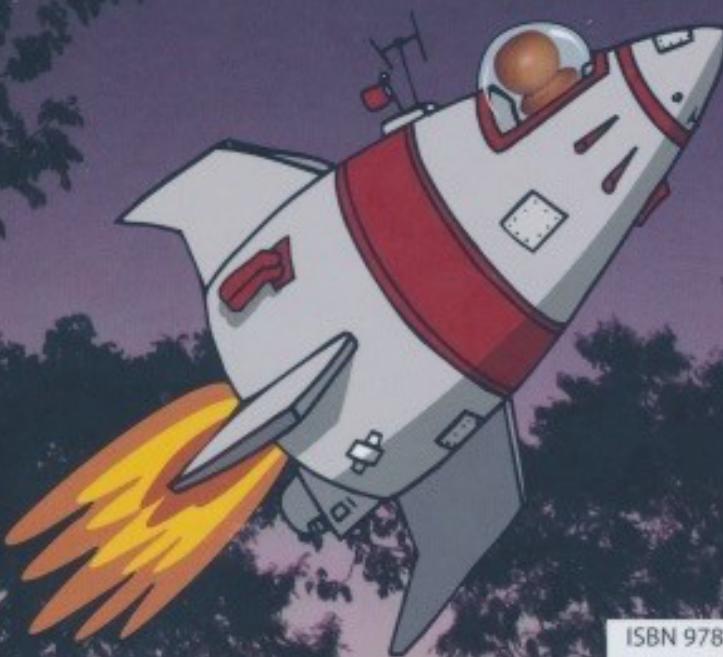
Small Steps to Giant Improvement

Master Pawn Play in Chess

by Sam Shankland

In chess you cannot take your move back, but you can always return a misplaced piece to its former square at the cost of some time. Pawns on the other hand can never move backwards, making pawn moves truly permanent decisions. This irreversibility makes Pawn Play among the most difficult aspects of chess strategy, which is one reason few books have been written about this topic - and some that have are almost incomprehensible. Double Olympiad gold medallist Sam Shankland has gone the other way - breaking down the principles of Pawn Play to basic, easily understandable guidelines every chess player should know.

Sam Shankland is a Grandmaster and permanent member of the US national team, winning an Individual Gold Medal in 2014 and Team Gold in 2016. In 2015 and 2017 he played Board 1 for the US team at the World Team Championship. This is his first book.



£29.99

ISBN 978-1-78483-051-9



9 781784 830519



QUALITY CHESS

www.qualitychess.co.uk