

Adam Hunt

Chess Strategy

move by move



EVERYMAN CHESS

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About the Author

Adam Hunt is an International Master from Oxford with two Grandmaster norms. Since 2003 he has taught chess full-time at Woodbridge School in Suffolk, helping the school along the way to produce three England representatives. He has acquired a growing reputation for coaching having also worked with the England and Wales junior teams at many international events, including the World Youth Championships and World Under-16 Olympiad. He comes from a family of chess players, with his sister Harriet currently ranked as the top female player in England. This is his first book.

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Introduction

Welcome to the wonderful world of Chess Strategy! I really hope that you enjoy the material presented here – it has been the culmination of over a year's hard work and has been written whilst I have taken a sabbatical from my job, teaching chess at Woodbridge School. The writing has sat hand-in-hand with playing chess full-time, as I chased the dream of becoming a Grandmaster (which I failed at ☹). There have been many personal highs and lows along the way – usually as a direct result of how the various tournaments were going!

Chess strategy is concerned with the correct evaluation of a position and the formulation of an effective plan based upon its characteristic features. When the word 'strategy' is mentioned, people tend to jump to the conclusion that we are talking about long-term middlegame planning, and that you have to be some sort of psychic who can see the future, but that is rarely the case. Many features of a given position which are strategically important will evolve out of the opening and finish in the endgame, so it would be foolish to completely ignore these phases of the game. Plans can be short or long term, depending on how the landscape in front of you is changing as the game progresses. This is why the subject is so complex and so much material is available on it. I have decided to split the book into twelve chapters; to be honest each one could be extended into a whole book in itself (in some cases the subjects have!). In each, I hope to give a flavour of an area of the game which I think is important.

I hope that this book is interesting and unique, not necessarily because all the ideas are revolutionary and ground breaking – they most certainly are not. Indeed a lot of the ideas I have written about are taken from previous literature, but I have tried to present them with the enthusiasm and energy that would go into my day to day teaching. There are many 'classic' grandmaster games presented in this book, some of which you may be familiar with and some you may not (but all of which I think you will find useful to study). There are also a number of examples taken from my own games and those of my students in which there are mistakes aplenty that we can learn from. I am hoping this will appeal to the reader of this book and indeed be in keeping with the general interactive approach to the *Move by Move* series. I am also hopeful that this book can be used by teachers as well as students, and that a dip into it will provide useful coaching material for the next generation of up-and-coming chess players.

I would like to thank everyone who has supported me in the writing of this book. The proof-readers, Caro, Harriet and John for their helpful comments and patient, polite corre-

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tions of my terrible grammar. A big thanks also to Sabrina, for her assistance and advice throughout the course of the last year, and to Arthur for being a great coach and source of ideas. Thank you to John Emms for giving me the opportunity to write for Everyman Chess and Richard Palliser for the editing. Particular thanks go to my students, who have provided me with countless pages of material that I think you will find useful and interesting. Apologies in advance to those whose losses or mistakes I have included. To the ones whose brilliant wins I have put in, the least you can do is buy a copy of the book!

Appreciation of both strategy and tactics are the ‘Ying and Yang’ of a strong chess player. They sit side by side, in harmony with each other and you cannot hope to improve your play without working on both aspects of the game. Usually, in order to improve our tactical ability, we solve exercises and problems from books or electronic media. I hope that with this work, the questions and exercises I ask you to solve and think about will help improve your strategic play in a similar way. Let’s get started!

Adam Hunt,
Woodbridge, Suffolk,
February 2013

Chapter One

Central Control

What matters is not the breadth of the centre, but its solidity. – Max Euwe

The first maxim we are normally taught when learning to play chess is to control the middle of the board and in particular the central squares e4, d4, d5 and e5. This is relatively easy for the novice to understand and implement, from as early as move one with 1 d4 or 1 e4. Being in possession of a stable centre is recognized as advantageous. Pieces find it easier to move into attacking and defensive positions from the centre, and the advance of central pawns will more often than not create disruption in the opponent's position. In this chapter I will start by discussing the differing historical views on central control, before moving on to looking at some of the different types of pawn centre and how to handle them.

A Brief History of the Centre

In the past 150 years or so opinions have changed on the best way to fight for control of the centre. These differing schools of thought and the fashions of different openings are one of the many fascinating developments of chess theory. The 'Classical' viewpoint is to occupy the centre with pawns from the word go. The first recognized World Champion, Wilhelm Steinitz (born 1836, World Champion 1886-1894) was one of the first masters to champion this school of thought. Prior to Steinitz the age of chess was one of 'Romanticism', where players gave up pawns for fun. Steinitz took a more sober approach to the opening.

Later great players such as Siegbert Tarrasch (1862-1934) and the Cuban World Champion José Raul Capablanca (1888-1942) supported and developed the Classical view. Openings such as the Ruy Lopez and Queens Gambit Declined, where the central pawns are

quickly stabilized, grew in popularity, whilst flank gambits, such as the King's Gambit (1 e4 e5 2 f4) and the Danish Gambit (1 e4 e5 2 d4 exd4 3 c3), fell somewhat by the wayside. I would like to present a powerful game of the time, played by the Hungarian Grandmaster Richard Réti. Although Réti later became famous for his hypermodern thinking and development of the opening which bears his name (1 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d5 2 c4), here he produces an instructive example of straightforward Classical chess.

Game 1
R.Réti-K.Stark
Vienna 1910
Ruy Lopez

1 e4 e5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}b5$

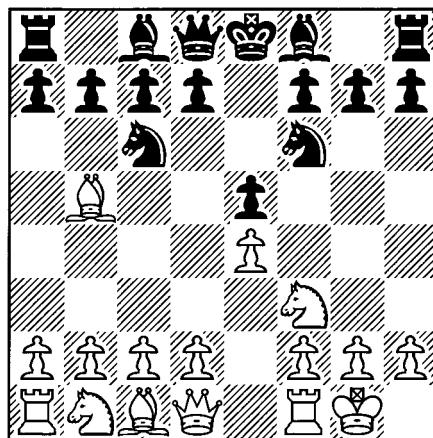
The starting point for the Ruy Lopez, or Spanish Opening, which has been White's main weapon against 1 e4 e5 at grandmaster level for some time. White develops the light-squared bishop to an active square whilst putting pressure on the central e5-pawn by attacking its defender.

3... $\mathbb{Q}f6$

3...a6 is the other main move.

4 0-0

It is worth noting that 4 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ dxc6 5 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ is met by the typical reaction 5... $\mathbb{W}d4!$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{W}xe4+$ 7 $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{W}xe2+$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ with a good game for Black, due to the two bishops and safer king.



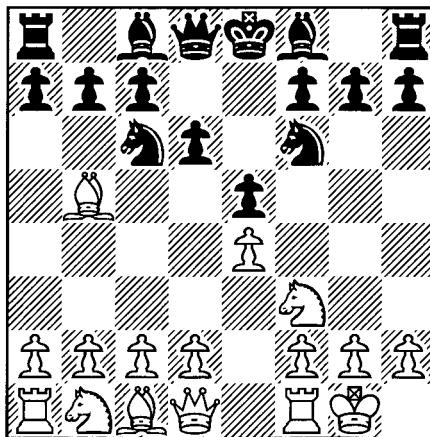
4...d6

Black secures his e5-pawn, but also locks his dark-squared bishop in.

These days the Berlin Defence starting with 4... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ has become all the rage. Former

World Champion Vladimir Kramnik used this opening to successfully defend against Garry Kasparov in their World Championship match of 2000. After 5 d4 (5 $\mathbb{Q}e1?$ and 5 $\mathbb{W}e2?$ have become popular ways to avoid the ending) 5... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $dxc6$ 7 $dxe5$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 8 $\mathbb{W}xd8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ the ‘Berlin endgame’ is reached, which certainly isn’t to everybody’s taste due to the early exchange of queens.

4...a6? 5 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $dxc6$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}xe5!$ would now just win a pawn, as 6... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 8 d3 would lead to disaster down the e-file for Black (but not of course 8 f3??, weakening the a7-g1 diagonal; indeed, 8... $\mathbb{Q}c5+$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{W}d4$ would be a sad end for White).



Exercise: What should White play after Stark’s 4...d6?

Answer: 5 d4!

White exploits his slight lead in development and safer king position to try and open some lines and grab the centre.

5... $\mathbb{Q}d7$

Black guards against threats of d4-d5.

6 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}g5$

White finishes the development of his last minor piece. Note that 7 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 8 $dxe5$ would not offer White much due to 8... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$.

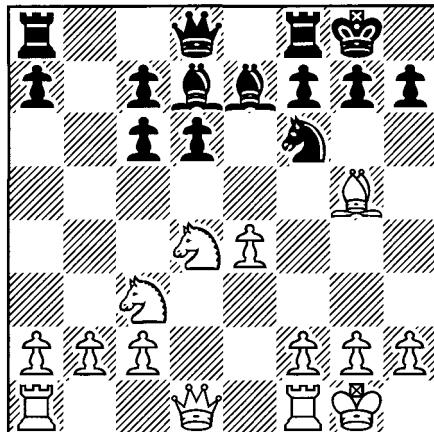
7...exd4

Black decides to release the tension in the centre.

8 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 0-0

8... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}xd7+$ $\mathbb{W}xd7$ 10 $\mathbb{W}xd4$ 0-0 is slightly better for White, due to his extra space and more active pieces.

9 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $bxc6$



Question: Hang on a minute – hasn't White just given up the bishop-pair and opened the b-file for Black's rook?

Answer: Well, yes, he has, but the problem was that Black was preparing to exchange off the knights and light-squared bishops with 9... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$. White has created an imbalance (bishop-pair for Black; better pawn structure and good knight on d4 for White), so not everything is in Black's favour.

10 $\mathbb{Q}d3$

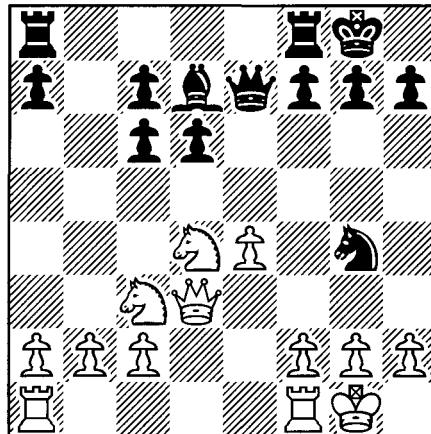
I am very fond of this queen move. Her Majesty eyes up the squares a6 and g3 whilst connecting the rooks and reinforcing the central e-pawn.

10... $\mathbb{Q}g4$

Stark looks to relieve some of the discomfort caused by White's space advantage through exchanges, which is a normal defensive strategy.

10... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ is a typical tactical motif, trying to exploit the undefended bishop on g5, but here it simply loses a piece to 11 $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ (11 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$? $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ is the idea) 11... $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$. Note that if the queen was on d1, this idea may have worked.

11 $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$



Exercise: What should White play here?

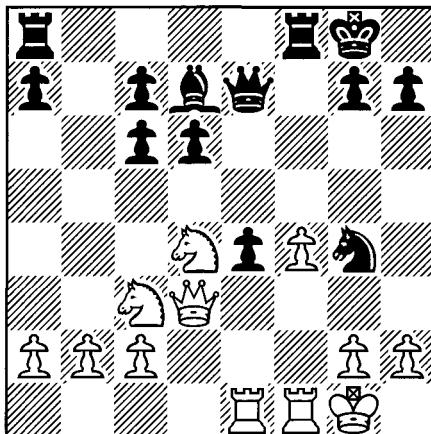
Answer: 12 f4!

Controlling the important e5-square.

12...f5

Black decides to fight back in the centre. I would have preferred 12... $\mathbb{Q}ab8$ 13 b3 $\mathbb{Q}fe8$, though I still think White is a bit better due to his central control.

13 $\mathbb{Q}ae1$ fxe4



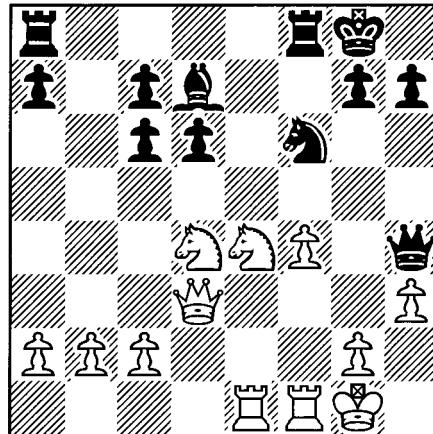
Question: Which is the best way to recapture?

Answer: 14 $\mathbb{Q}xe4!$

Centralization! This is a very important principle to remember. The knight is en route to a better home.

14 $\mathbb{R}xe4?$! is a bit too ‘obvious’. Rooks are often just as effective on the first rank and this is a good example of that. After something like 14... $\mathbb{W}f7$ 15 $\mathbb{R}fe1$ d5 16 $\mathbb{R}e7$ $\mathbb{W}xf4$ Black’s counterplay is in full swing. Meanwhile, we don’t want to swap the queens off with 14 $\mathbb{W}xe4$ $\mathbb{W}xe4$ 15 $\mathbb{R}xe4$ $\mathbb{R}ae8$ when Black is very comfortable.

14... $\mathbb{W}h4$ 15 $\mathbb{R}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$



Question: White has centralized all his pieces. What now?

Answer: 16 $\mathbb{Q}g5!$

The knight heads for the fabulous outpost on e6. Instead 16 $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ $\mathbb{W}xf6$ would ease Black’s defensive task.

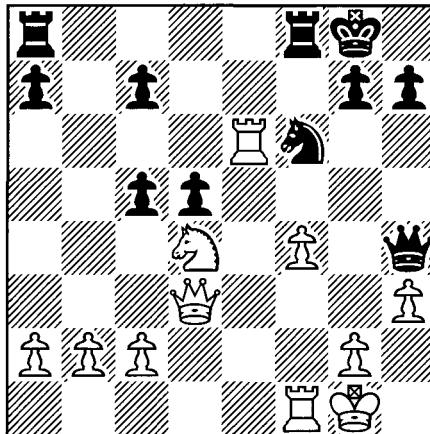
16...d5 17 $\mathbb{Q}ge6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$

Trying to exploit the pin down the e-file with 17... $\mathbb{R}fe8$ would be met with 18 $\mathbb{Q}f5!$ $\mathbb{W}h5$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}fxg7$, forking the queen and rook.

18 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$

Again the ‘obvious’ recapture is not necessarily the best. White attacks the c6-pawn and sets a well-concealed trap, whereas 18 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ allows 18... $\mathbb{R}f7$.

18...c5?



Exercise: Black's last move loses immediately. Can you see how?

Answer: 19 ♜f5 ♛h5 20 ♜xf6!

Hopefully you saw this detail before playing 19 ♜f5, but it requires some calculation. And rather unsportingly here Black resigned (1-0).

If 20...♜xf6 21 ♜xd5+ wins the rook on a8 and 20...gxsf6 21 ♜g3+ ♔f7 (21...♜g6 22 ♜e7+) 22 ♜g7+ ♔e6 23 ♜e7+ ♔xf5 24 g4+ also wins.

Summary

A very smooth game by Réti. White established a small but stable central advantage which made Black's position slightly the more difficult to play. 12...f5 seemed to help White as it gave him an access point for his knight. I also didn't like 7...exd4 as it conceded the centre too cheaply.

The Hypermodernists Have Their Say

After World War I (1914-18), a new school of thought regarding the opening emerged, the 'Hypermodern approach'. This was led by creative players, such as our friend Richard Réti, Aron Nimzowitsch and Alexander Alekhine. They argued that conceding the centre, waiting for the opponent to overextend and then counterattacking to obtain important squares for the pieces was an effective strategy. Openings such as the Nimzo-Indian, King's Indian and Grünfeld Defence became popular against 1 d4, and the Alekhine and Sicilian Dragon against 1 e4.

The Hypermodern approach appeals because from the word go an imbalance is created, leading to a more dynamic and often sharper struggle. From a strategic perspective, however, it can hardly be called correct due to the space conceded. The hypermodern player will have to have strong nerves and plenty of energy in order to prevail!

It is important as a strong chess player to be able to understand both the Classical and Hypermodern schools of thought equally well. Here future World Champion Dr. Max Euwe plays against perhaps the most extreme form of central control in the opening and shows that it is possible to counter such dominance.

Game 2
F.Sämisch-M.Euwe
Wiesbaden 1925
King's Indian Defence

1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 c4 g6 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 4 e4 d6

I have to admit that I have a soft spot for the King's Indian, having played it for the best part of 15 years, but from a strategic point of view it is very risky!

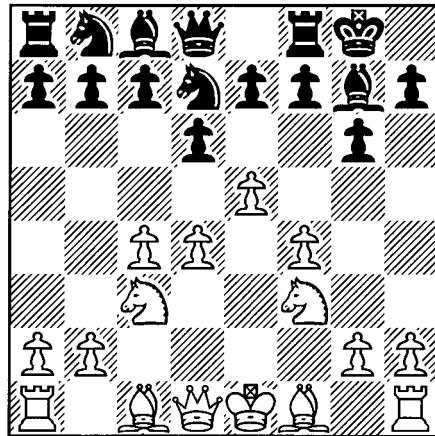
Black can also choose to be ultra-provocative and play 4...0-0 5 e5 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 6 f4 d6! 7 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ c5! 8 dx c 5 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ with excellent counterplay as the white centre collapses, R.Letelier Martner-R.Fischer, Leipzig Olympiad 1960.

5 f4

White chooses perhaps the most principled and dangerous continuation, the Four Pawns Attack (named for obvious reasons!). If Black doesn't react energetically and accurately, he can be blown away in the centre.

5...0-0 6 $\mathbb{Q}f3$

6 e5 is rare. After 6... $\mathbb{Q}fd7$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ the following position is reached:



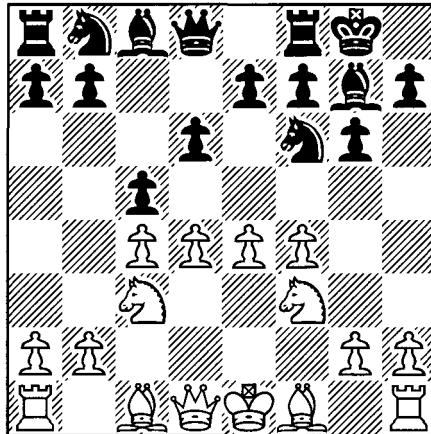
Exercise: Black looks passive, but actually his position is quite good! What should he play?

Answer: 7...c5! à la Fischer in the notes to move 4. The game might continue something like 8 exd6 exd6 9 d5 ♜e8+ 10 ♜e2 ♜f6 with a pleasant position for Black due to his control over the e-file.

6...c5

This has become established as the main line, although there are plenty of other options for Black:

- a) 6...♝bd7 7 e5 ♜e8 8 h4!? (starting a direct kingside attack due to Black's cramped position) 8...c5 9 h5 cxd4 10 ♛xd4 ♜c7 11 hxg6 fxg6 12 ♜e3 with a very unclear game, although I suspect White's chances are favourable, H.Poetsch-V.Kunin, German League 2010.
- b) 6...e5, 6...♝a6 and 6...♝g4 are all serious alternatives.



7 d5

White obviously doesn't want to allow open the centre whilst his king is still there.

Exercise: 7 dxc5 has also been played by a few grandmasters. How should Black respond?

Answer: 7...♛a5! is typical in such a position, avoiding the exchange of queens. Then:

- a) 8 ♜d3 ♛xc5 9 ♜e2 ♜c6 10 ♜e3 ♛a5 is a position which has occurred many times in high-level games. Black has a Sicilian Dragon-type position and will look to develop with ...♝g4 and ...♜ac8.
- b) 8 cxd6 ♜xe4! is the tactical point, after which Black is clearly better: 9 ♜d2 (9 dxe7 ♜xc3+ 10 bxc3 ♜e8 11 ♜c2 ♜xe7 is dreadful for White) 9...♜xc3 10 ♛b3 exd6 11 ♜xc3 ♜e8+ 12 ♜e2 ♜xc3+ 13 ♛xc3 ♜xc3+ 14 bxc3 ♜a6 when the wrecked white pawn structure ensures Black a clear advantage.

Instead 7...dxc5 8 ♛xd8 ♜xd8 9 e5 ♜e8 10 ♜e3 b6 11 ♜d5 ♜c6 12 0-0-0 was a little passive for Black in M.Kazhgaleyev-A.Kovalev, Istanbul Olympiad 2000.

7...e6

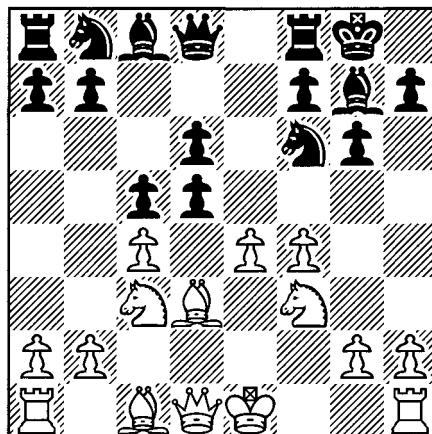
Black must chip away at the centre before he gets overrun.

7...b5! 8 cxb5 a6 is a Benko-style gambit which has been tried by some creative grandmasters. Play might continue something like 9 bxa6 $\mathbb{W}a5$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ (11 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ may be safer) 11... $\mathbb{W}xa6$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}fd7$ with a great score for Black of 88% from 20 games in *Mega Database 2012*!

8 $\mathbb{Q}d3$

These days 8 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ is the main line. After 8...exd5 9 cxd5 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ (I used to favour the complications after 9... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 10 e5 dxe5 11 fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ 13 0-0) 10 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ I slightly prefer White, as the threat of e4-e5 looms large.

8...exd5



Question: How should White recapture?

Answer: 9 cxd5

Keeping the e-file closed is sensible here. Instead 9 exd5? means White will have to lose a tempo with 9... $\mathbb{Q}e8+$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ (10 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ b5! 11 0-0 bxc4 12 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ gives Black a good game as the d5-pawn becomes a target), and after 10... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 11 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}a6$ Black is doing well as he is in possession of the only open file on the board and his minor pieces are active.

Exercise: Suggest a way for Black to continue after 9 cxd5.

9... $\mathbb{W}b6$

Answer: There are a few ideas here which are interesting. The text is designed to keep White's king in the centre for a while as 10 0-0?? loses a bishop to 10...c4+. However, 9... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 10 0-0 c4! seems to be the most active and accurate treatment, when 11 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ b5 gives Black good play due to the threat of ...b5-b4.

9...b5! is also very interesting: 10 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ (10 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ also leads to complications after 10... $\mathbb{E}e8$ 11 e5 dx5 12 fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}bd7$) 10... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{W}a5+$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{W}xb5$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{W}a6$ gives Black some compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

10 $\mathbb{Q}d2!$

A fine move, aiming to kick the black queen away with $\mathbb{Q}c4$.

10... $\mathbb{Q}g4$

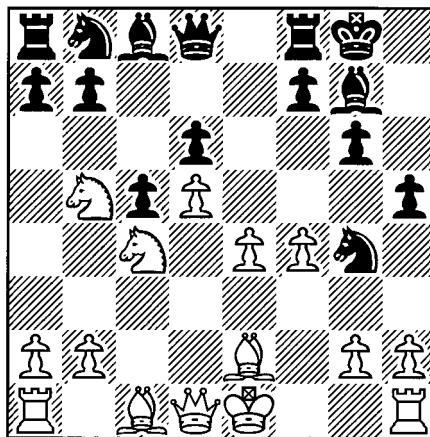
Black plays creatively, trying at all cost to prevent White's king from reaching safety.

11 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{W}d8$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}e2$

White still can't castle due to 12... $\mathbb{Q}d4+$.

12...h5 13 $\mathbb{Q}b5?$

13 $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ 14 $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 15 0-0 seems safer.

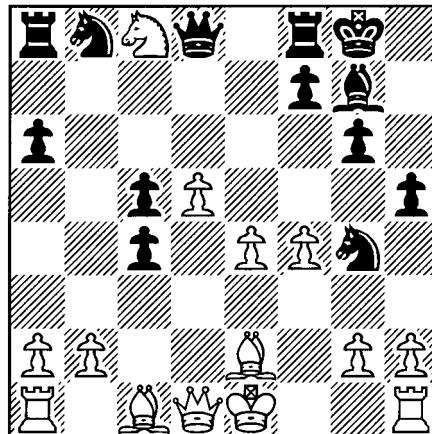


Exercise: White becomes too greedy. Leaving his king in the centre is a risky strategy. Is there a way for Euwe to exploit this?

Answer: 13...a6!

Temporarily sacrificing a pawn to embarrass the knights.

14 $\mathbb{Q}bx6$ b5 15 $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ $\mathbb{B}xc4$



Question: Isn't Black just winning a piece here?

Answer: Yes, he is, but the situation is far from clear. The central white pawns remain a real thorn in the side as they split the co-ordination of the black forces.

16 e5 ♜xc8 17 h3 ♞h6

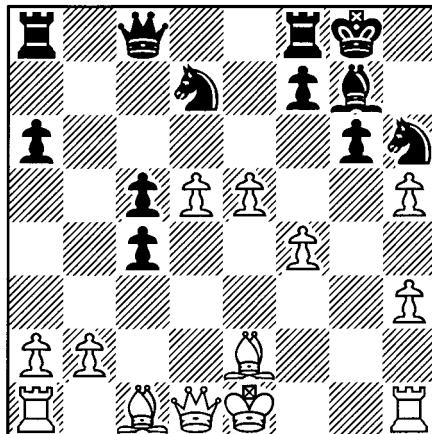
I would have seriously considered 17...♞xe5! which seems best after 18 fxe5 ♜f5!, keeping the king in the centre.

18 g4

The best move. Otherwise the black knight will re-enter the game from the f5-square. Despite being material up, Black's forces lack harmony and the game remains very tense.

18...♝d7 19 gxh5?!

19 d6 looks more logical as the black knight cannot come to c6 anymore.



Exercise: What is the best approach for Black here?**19...♞d8**

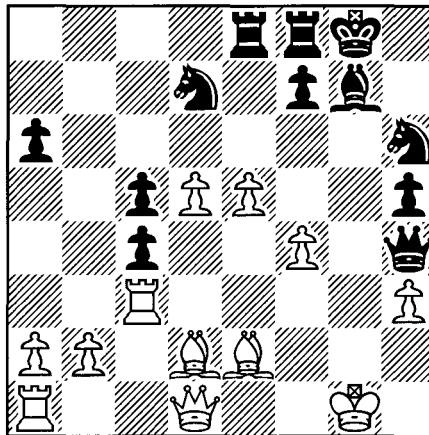
This forces White to castle, as ...♝h4+ is an unpleasant threat.

Answer: 19...♝f5! seems even better. After 20 hxg6 fxg6 21 0-0 ♜b6 White still has some compensation for the piece, but the black knights are now sitting on good squares.

Instead 19...gxh5?! looks more risky, as we open the g-file and the black knight when it arrives on f5 will be unstable.

20 0-0 ♜h4 21 ♜f3? gxh5?

Maybe both sides had a moment of ‘chess blindness’? I don’t understand why Euwe didn’t just play 21...♝xh5 when the discovered attack doesn’t promise much and the f5-square will be a beautiful post for the black knight.

22 ♜c3 ♜ae8 23 ♜d2**Question:** Is 23...♜xe5 a good move?

Answer: Yes! After it, the centre collapses and the black pieces will join the attack on the white king.

23...♜xe5!

23...♝f5 24 ♜e1! is a small problem for Black as the queens will be exchanged.

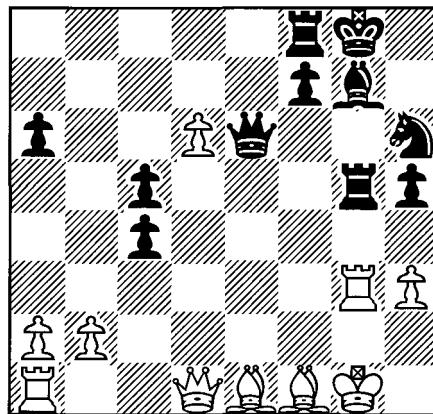
24 fxe5 ♜xe5

24...♜xe5! was even stronger, as 25 ♜xh6 ♜xc3 26 bxc3 ♜g3+ 27 ♜f1 ♜e5! threatening 28...♜f5+ will cost White material.

25 ♜e1 ♜e7 26 d6

Finally the passed d-pawn moves, but by now it is too late.

26...♜e6 27 ♜f1 ♜g5+ 28 ♜g3



Exercise: How should Black conclude the attack?

Answer: 28... $\mathbb{W}e3+$! 29 $\mathbb{Q}g2$

29 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ is curtains.

29... $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 30 $\mathbb{R}xg5+?$

White could have kept the game going with 30 $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{R}xg3+$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}xg3$, but 31... $\mathbb{W}g1+$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ is still winning for Black.

30... $\mathbb{W}xg5+$ 0-1

Summary

A real fight! Both sides had chances to improve their play and White certainly should have pushed his central d-pawn when he had the chance. This game goes to show one of the main drawbacks of a large centre: the cost in time taken to build it often results in a lead in development for the opponent. This resulted here in a weakened white king position which eventually decided the game.

Hypermodernism and Aron Nimzowitsch

It would be impossible to discuss hypermodern play without at least one example from perhaps its greatest exponent, Aron Nimzowitsch. Here he faces another famous grandmaster from the time, Akiba Rubinstein. A tense struggle ensues.

Game 3
A.Nimzowitsch-A.Rubinstein
Berlin 1928
Nimzowitsch-Larsen Attack

1 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d5 2 b3 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}b2$ e6

The game has transposed to a classical line of the so-called Nimzowitsch-Larsen Attack.

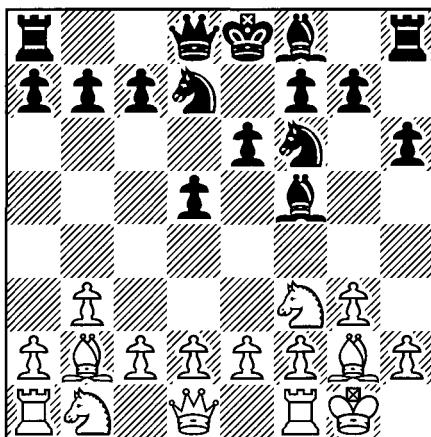
4 g3

Preparing the double fianchetto. Also possible here is development of the bishop to e2. The game might continue something like 4 e3 ♘f6 5 ♖e2 h6 6 0-0 ♗e7 7 c4 0-0 with an approximately equal position.

4...h6

At a later stage the light-squared bishop may want to retreat to h7.

5 ♖g2 ♗d7 6 0-0 ♗gf6



Question: Bearing in mind that Nimzowitsch doesn't want to obstruct his fianchettoed bishops, how should he complete his development here?

Answer: 7 d3

White controls the central e4-square and opens d2 for his knight.

7 c4 is also very sensible and after 7...c6, 8 d3.

7...♗e7

7...♗d6 looks more natural, but the problem is that an e2-e4 push by White will often be followed by e4-e5, forking the knight and bishop.

8 e3

White is in no rush to occupy the centre. Instead he simply wants to place his queen on a slightly better square (e2) and await developments.

8...0-0 9 ♕e2 c6

Black is playing very logically too, looking to restrict the power of the bishop on g2. The position is approximately equal.

10 ♜h1 a5

Black seeks to expand on the queenside...

11 a4

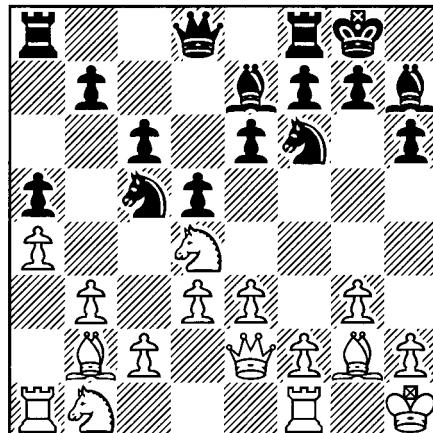
Chess Strategy: Move by Move

...and White prevents this idea!

11...♝c5?!

I'm not sure I like this, as it weakens control of e5. I would have completed the development of my queen: 11...♛c7 12 ♜bd2 and now perhaps 12...e5 13 e4 ♔h7, as 14 exd5 cxd5 15 ♜xe5 ♜xe5 as 16 ♛xe5 doesn't win a pawn due to 16...♛xc2.

12 ♜d4 ♔h7



Exercise: How should White improve his position here?

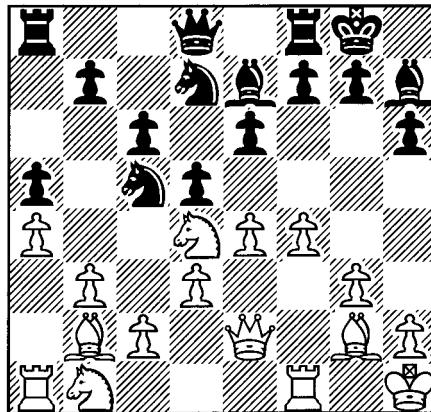
Answer: 13 f4!

Of course! White prevents ...e5 and now has a clear plan of expansion in the middle of the board with e3-e4.

13...♝fd7 14 ♜d2

White sensibly finishes his development.

Question: What would have been the most effective way for Black to counter had White gone 14 e4?



Answer: 14...dxe4 15 dxe4 e5! fights back in the centre when 16 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ is impossible due to the weak e4-pawn, 16 fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ gives Black a majestic knight on e5, and 16 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 17 exf5 exf4 18 $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ is very pleasant for Black too as all his minor pieces are well placed.

14... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 15 e4 dxe4 16 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ e5! 18 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ exf4

Surrendering the centre is not the only course of action here, but I imagine Black was worried about 18... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 19 f5, locking in on the h7 the bishop for good.

19 $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}fe8$ 20 e5

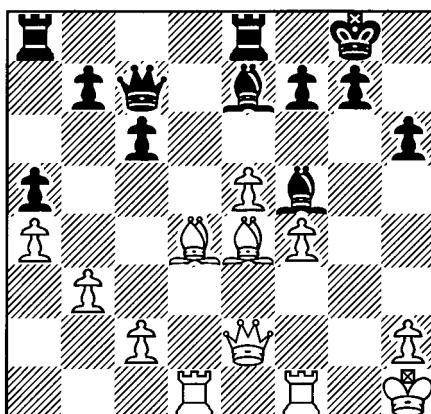
White tries to mobilize his pawn centre.

20... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}ad1$

Here White could have changed the course of the battle by playing 22 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ fxe6 23 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ (targeting the weak e6-pawn) 23... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}c4$. 22 f5 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ is also sensible.

22... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}e4$

Very logical by Nimzowitsch, looking to free his f-pawn.



Exercise: We have reached a critical moment in the game.
Should Black exchange the bishops?

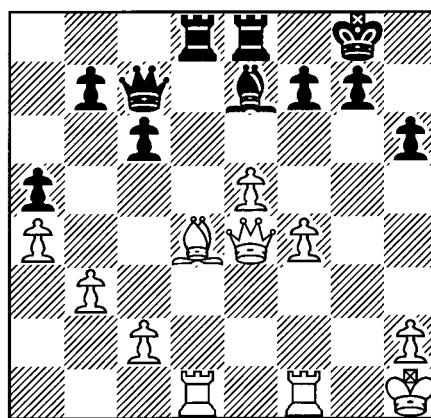
24...♝xe4+?

Answer: It is only here that Rubinstein makes a crucial strategic mistake. The f-pawn must remain blockaded at all costs. 24...♝c8! is the right move, allowing the exchange but at the same time blockading the f-pawn: for example, 25 ♜g1 ♛e6 26 ♜xf5 (if 26 ♜d3 ♜xe4+ 27 ♜xe4 f5!) 26...♜xf5 when the direct 27 e6 simply weakens White's position after 27...♝f6 28 exf7+ ♜xf7 29 ♜c4+ ♛e6 and Black is fine.

However, 24...♛d7?! 25 ♜b6 ♛e6 26 ♜xf5 ♛xf5 27 ♜d3 gives White an edge, due to his control of the d-file.

25 ♛xe4 ♜ad8?!

It was not too late for Black to seek counterplay with 25...c5 26 ♜b2 c4!.



Exercise: The time is now! How does White force through his attack?

Answer: 26 e6!

Instead 26 f5 would allow the tricky response 26...♝f6!.

26...♝f8 27 ♜e5

27 f5 is better here.

27...♛c8?

Black misses his chance. 27...♜xd1 28 ♜xd1 ♛e7! was correct, when 29 f5 fxe6 30 f6 gxf6 31 ♛g6+ ♜g7 32 ♜xf6 ♛f7 is an ultra-cool computer defence!

28 f5 fxe6 29 f6!

Now the attack is decisive.

29...♜xd1 30 f7+ ♜h8 31 ♜xd1 ♜d8 32 ♛g6! 1-0

After 32...♜xd1+ 33 ♜g2 Black cannot prevent mate on h6.

The Soviet Revolution

During the 1930s and 40s, the Soviet chess school started to take over, culminating in Mikhail Botvinnik, the sixth World Champion, coming to the chess throne in 1948. The Soviets looked to build upon both the hypermodern and classical ways of thinking. They tended to favour the classical approach, whilst stressing the importance of taking the initiative and using active piece play, often at the cost of central pawn weaknesses. A good example of this is a variation in the Sicilian Defence named after former world championship candidate Isaac Boleslavsky (1919-1977).

*Game 4
I.Grynfeld-I.Boleslavsky
Warsaw 1947
Sicilian Defence*

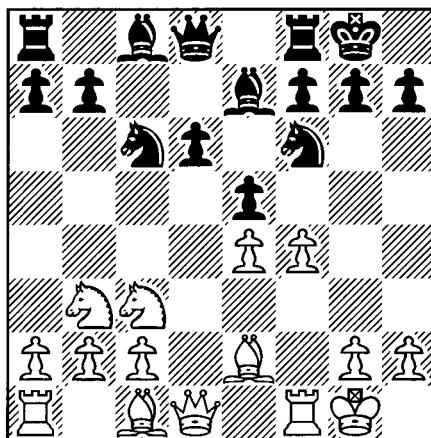
1 e4 c5 2 ♜f3 ♜c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♜xd4 ♜f6 5 ♜c3 d6 6 ♜e2 e5

This is the starting point of the variation which Boleslavsky gave his name to. Black fights back in the centre, removing the powerful white knight, but at the same time weakening the d6-pawn and the d5-square. An interesting fight in the centre now occurs.

7 ♜b3

7 ♜xc6?! bxc6 simply repairs the 'Boleslavsky hole'.

7...♜e7 8 0-0 0-0 9 f4



Question: How should Black continue?

Answer: 9...a5!?

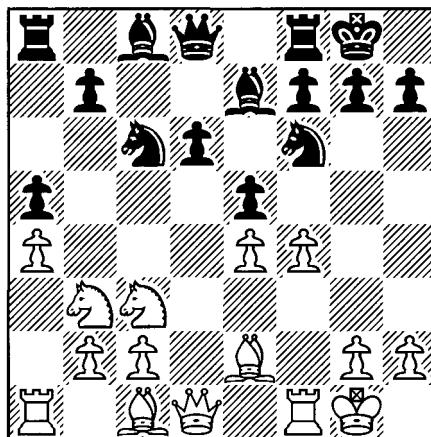
Black looks to go after the misplaced knight on b3. Another possibility, despite looking

Chess Strategy: Move by Move

rather ugly, is 9...exf4 10 ♜xf4 ♜e6 11 ♔h1 d5! 12 e5 ♜d7 13 ♜xd5 ♜dxe5 14 c4 (14 ♜xe7+ ♜xe7 15 ♜e1 is a better attempt for an advantage) 14...♜g5 15 ♜g3 ♜h4 16 ♜f4 ♜g5 17 ♜g3 ♜h4, which was agreed drawn in G.Kamsky-V.Anand, Buenos Aires 1994.

However, 9...♜e6? 10 f5 ♜xb3 11 axb3 is exactly what Black wants to avoid. Here there is little chance of Black ever being able to play the freeing advance ...d6-d5.

10 a4



Exercise: Bearing in mind that Black wants to break in the centre with ...d6-d5, can you find a good way to prepare this?

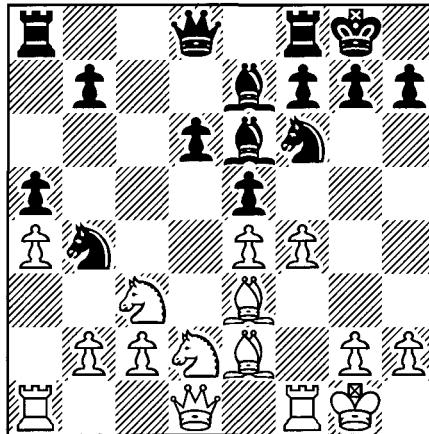
Answer: 10...♞b4

Taking advantage of White's last move which weakened his control of the b4-square. Instead 10...♜e6 would still run into 11 f5.

11 ♜e3 ♜e6

Timing is everything! The point is that now after 12 f5 ♜xb3 13 cxb3, 13...d5! is playable: 14 exd5 ♜fxd5 15 ♜xd5 ♜d5 16 ♜f2 e4 with a very comfortable position for Black, B.Perruchoud-K.Miton, Geneva 2001.

12 ♜d2?!



Exercise: Black has a typical Sicilian break. Can you find it?

Answer: 12...exf4

More accurate than 12...d5 13 fxe5 d4 14 exf6 ♖xf6, which occurred in S.Bolado Saez-E.Ubilava, Villalba 2003, when 15 e5! dxе3 16 exf6 would have been okay for White.

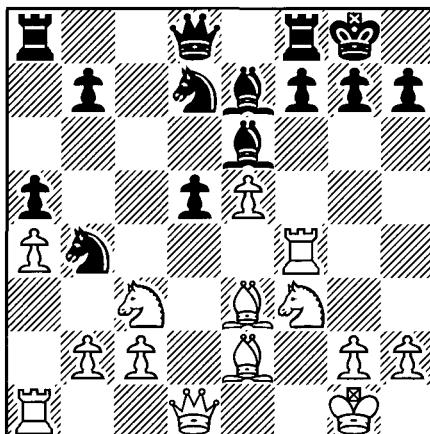
13 ♖xf4 d5!

Of course now the break comes.

14 e5

White cannot allow 14 exd5 ♖fxd5 15 ♖xd5 ♖xd5.

14...♖d7 15 ♖f3



Exercise: How can Black increase the pressure on the white centre here?

Chess Strategy: Move by Move

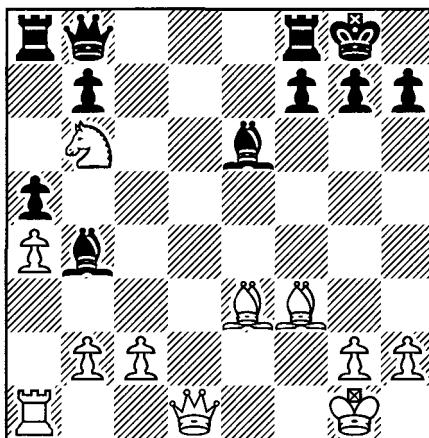
Answer: 15...♝b8

15...♝c7 is also good, as 16 ♜b5 runs into 16...♝xc2.

16 ♜xb4?

White sacrifices an exchange in order to win the d5-pawn, but in reality there isn't enough compensation. Thus 16 ♜d2 ♜xe5 17 ♜d4, occupying the square in front of the isolated pawn, would have offered better chances.

16...♜xb4 17 ♜xd5 ♜xe5 18 ♜b6 ♜xf3+ 19 ♜xf3



Exercise: One more accurate move should be enough to win.

What to do about the rook on a8?

Answer: 19...♝e5!

Taking advantage of the loose bishop on e3.

20 ♜d4

20 ♜d4 ♜c5! is crushing.

20...♝xd4 21 ♜xd4 ♜ad8 and Black converted in a further 18 moves. A fine example of how to undermine White's centre using active piece play.

The Modern Way

The way we think about the centre was brought into the modern era by the great American Bobby Fischer (1943-2008). He played in a very classical style as White, almost always playing 1 e4 while looking to develop quickly and directly. As Black his usual choice was to play an unbalanced, hypermodern Grünfeld or King's Indian Defence against 1 d4, and a dynamic Sicilian Defence against 1 e4. Being comfortable with all three different schools, Fischer's chess was the blueprint for many future greats, including Garry Kasparov. Here we see a 13 year-old (!) Fischer defeating Grandmaster Robert Byrne in a classic game which was dubbed 'game of century' by writer and arbiter Hans Kmoch in *Chess Review*.

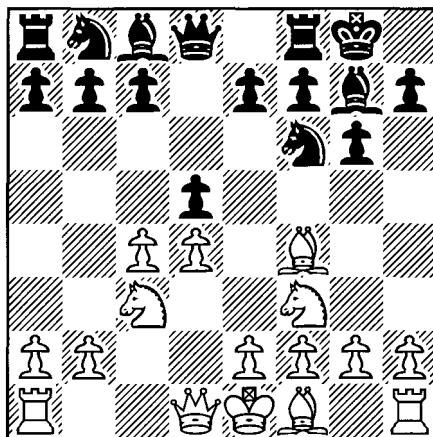
Game 5
D.Byrne-R.Fischer
 New York 1956
Grünfeld Defence

1 $\mathbb{Q}f3 \mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 c4 g6 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3 \mathbb{Q}g7$ 4 d4

Being comfortable in both the King's Indian and Grünfeld is useful here as 4 e4 d6 5 d4 would transpose to the former.

4...0-0 5 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ d5

This move is the trademark of the Grünfeld. Black exchanges his central pawn for White's c-pawn in order to open the centre and he will often apply pressure to White's d-pawn using his minor pieces.



6 $\mathbb{Q}b3$

White immediately challenges the Black central pawn. Alternatively:

a) 6 e3 is a more solid choice when 6...c5 7 dxc5 $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ dxc4 9 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 11 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}a5$ is the main line.

b) Winning a pawn with 6 cxd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}xc7$?! is considered unwise on account of 8... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 9 e3 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}ac8$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}a5+$ with ... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ to follow and a problem for White on c2.

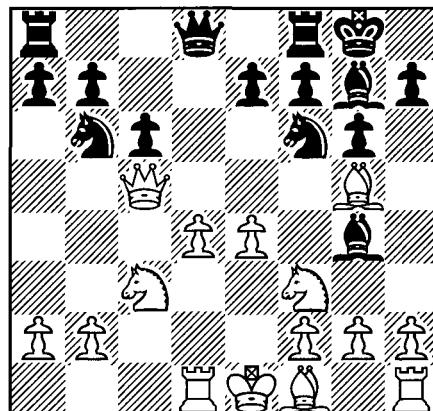
6...dxc4 7 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ c6 8 e4 $\mathbb{Q}bd7$

Kasparov later became fond of 8...b5! 9 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ when 11...c5?! gives Black good play against the centre.

9 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}g5$

This is a mistake. The old adage of not moving a piece twice in the opening is particularly relevant here, as White is already behind in development. I guess Byrne didn't want to play 11 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ because of 11... $\mathbb{Q}fd7$, harassing the white queen, but after 12 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 13

$\mathbb{Q}xf3$ e5 14 $dxe5$ $\mathbb{W}e8$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 16 0-0 White has a small advantage due to the bishops.



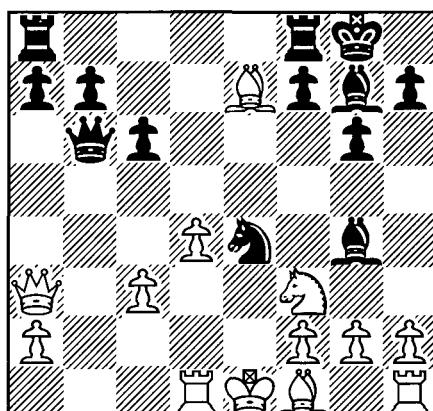
Exercise: With White lagging behind in development Black has an incredible tactical shot that will destroy the white centre – what is it?

Answer: 11... $\mathbb{Q}a4!!$ 12 $\mathbb{W}a3$

The knight is taboo due to 12 $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 13 $\mathbb{W}c1$ (13 $\mathbb{W}xe7$ also fails to 13... $\mathbb{W}a5+$ 14 $b4$ $\mathbb{W}xa4$ 15 $\mathbb{W}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}fe8$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 17 $gxf3$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ with a winning position) 13... $\mathbb{W}a5+$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 15 $gxf3$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ when Black is a pawn up and the white kingside is a mess.

12... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 13 $bxcc3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{W}b6$

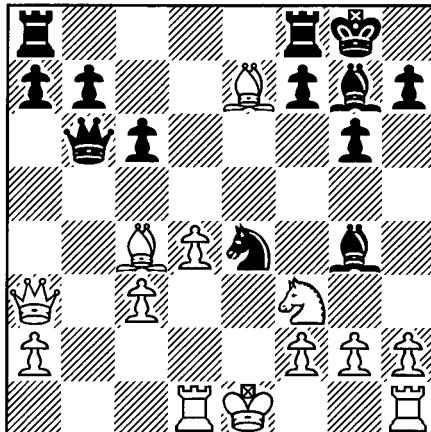
14... $\mathbb{W}d5!$, centralizing the queen and preventing White's next move, looks even stronger.



Question: Can White take the rook after Fischer's move?

Answer: No! After 15 ♖xf8 ♖xf8 16 ♕xb3, 16...♘xc3! is a lovely tactical shot: 17 ♕xb6 (17 ♕xc3 ♖b4 wins the queen) 17...axb6 18 ♘d2 ♖b4 and White is completely busted.

15 ♖c4



Exercise: Fischer very rarely missed a tactical trick. Calculate the consequences of blowing up the centre completely with 15...♘xc3.

Answer: 15...♘xc3! 16 ♖c5

Alternatively, 16 ♕xc3 ♕fe8 17 ♖xf7+ (17 ♕e3 ♖xf3 18 gxf3 ♕c7 19 0-0 ♕xe7 is hopeless for White; the presence of the opposite-coloured bishops in the middlegame will make the white king feel even more uncomfortable) 17...♔xf7 18 ♘g5+ ♔xe7 19 0-0 ♕xd1 20 ♕xd1 ♕ad8 is winning for Black.

16...♕fe8+ 17 ♔f1 ♔e6!

This is the second star move of the game and one Fischer saw before he took on c3. Black exploits the weakness of the white king to full effect.

18 ♖xb6

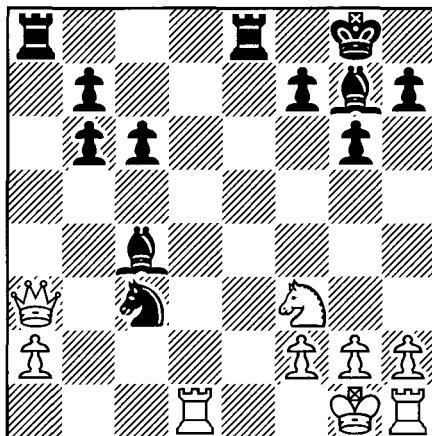
Otherwise:

a) 18 ♖xe6 ♕b5+ 19 ♔g1 ♔e2+ 20 ♔f1 ♔g3+ 21 ♔g1 ♕f1+! 22 ♕xf1 ♔e2 is a nice variation on the theme of smothered mate.

b) 18 ♕xc3 ♕xc5! (exploiting the pin along the long diagonal) 19 dxc5 ♖xc3 20 ♕xe6 ♕xe6 and Black should win.

c) 18 ♖d3 ♔b5 19 ♕b4 a5 20 ♕b1 ♕c7 is also winning for Black.

18...♖xc4+ 19 ♔g1 ♔e2+ 20 ♔f1 ♔xd4+ 21 ♔g1 ♔e2+ 22 ♔f1 ♔c3+ 23 ♔g1 axb6



The rest is relatively straightforward, since White is playing without the rook on h1.

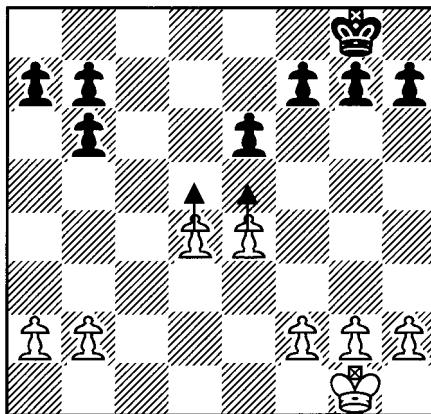
24 $\mathbb{W}b4$ $\mathbb{B}a4$ 25 $\mathbb{W}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ 26 $h3$ $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ 29 $\mathbb{W}d8+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 32 $\mathbb{W}b8$ $b5$ 33 $h4$ $h5$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}c5+$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}g3+$ 37 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}b4+$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}b3+$ 39 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}e2+$ 40 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}c3+$ 41 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 0-1

Summary

There is no right or wrong way to approach the battle for the centre. Personally I would always recommend a classical approach for the improving club player as there are fewer opening disasters that can happen if you put your pawns in the middle of the board! Having said that, if you need to play for a win with Black, an unbalanced, hypermodern opening might fit the bill perfectly.

The Mobile Pawn Centre

Alexander Kotov, in his classic book *The Art of the Middlegame*, defines this as a situation where one side has two or more united pawns in the centre which he endeavours to advance. Such a centre is extremely dangerous and it requires great precision from the opponent to deal with it.



A mobile pawn centre. The central white pawns are ready to advance.

Let's go back in time and have a look at a game by the American genius Paul Morphy. Morphy played in a very classical style. He loved open positions and control of the centre. Here he destroys a weaker player in double-quick time using his mobile pawn centre as a battering ram to open lines towards the black king.

*Game 6
P.Morphy-T.Hampton
London 1858
Evans Gambit*

1 e4 e5 2 ♜f3 ♜c6 3 ♜c4 ♜c5 4 b4

White gambits a pawn to occupy the centre. This, the Evans Gambit, named after the Welsh sea captain W.D.Evans, was very popular in the mid to late 19th century, and is still seen to this day at grandmaster level.

4...♜xb4 5 c3 ♜a5

5....♜d6 6 d4 ♜f6 is considered a decent alternative, but 5....♜c5 is not so good, in view of 6 d4 exd4 7 0-0 (or just 7 cxd4) 7...dxc3 8 ♜xf7+ ♜xf7 9 ♜d5+ ♜e8 10 ♜xc5.

6 d4 exd4 7 0-0 ♜b6

Alternatively:

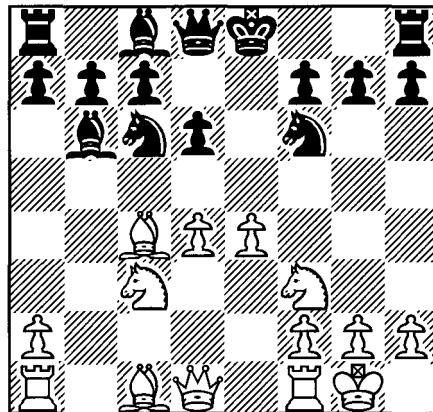
a) 7...dxc3 8 ♜b3 ♜f6 (8...♜e7 9 ♜xc3) 9 e5 ♜g6 10 ♜xc3 was played a lot between Anderssen and Zukertort in the mid-1800's.

b) 7...♜ge7 is another reasonable alternative: 8 cxd4 (8 ♜g5 d5 9 exd5 ♜e5 is considered satisfactory for Black, as in A.Morozevich-M.Adams, Wijk aan Zee 2001) 8...d5 9 exd5 ♜xd5 10 ♜b3 ♜e6! (10...♜ce7 11 ♜a3 c6 12 ♜xe7 ♜xe7 is messy) 11 ♜xb7 ♜db4 with the threat of ...♜b8, trapping the white queen.

8 cxd4 d6 9 ♜c3 ♜f6?

Chess Strategy: Move by Move

Better would have been 9... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ (pressuring the central d4-pawn) 10 $\mathbb{Q}b5 \mathbb{Q}f8$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 12 $gxf3$ which has been played a few times.



Exercise: Black's natural developing move, 9... $\mathbb{Q}f6$, is actually a mistake. Can you see why?

Answer: 10 e5!

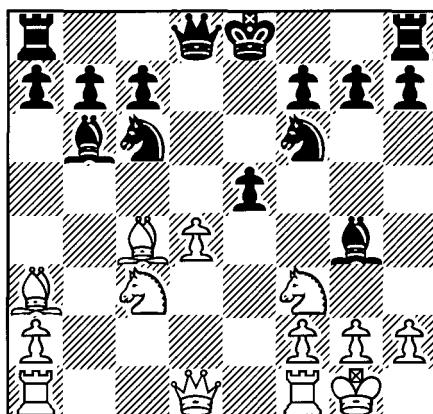
White must act quickly whilst the black king is still in the centre.

10...dxe5 11 $\mathbb{Q}a3$!

This is the clever idea, stopping Black from castling.

11... $\mathbb{Q}g4$?

11... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}b3 \mathbb{Q}d7$! is best, freeing the d8-square for the knight (Morphy's later two games in this position both saw 12... $\mathbb{Q}e6$? 13 $\mathbb{Q}xe6 fxe6$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}xe6+ \mathbb{Q}e7$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}xd4 exd4$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}fe1$ when White is winning). However, White still has a strong attack after 13 $\mathbb{Q}ae1$.



Exercise: Black's last move, 11... $\mathbb{Q}g4$, loses. Can you see why?

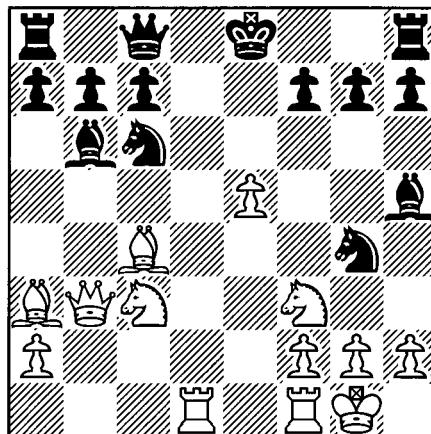
Answer: 12 $\mathbb{W}b3!$

A typical idea. White targets the weak point on f7.

12... $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 13 $dxe5$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 14 $\mathbb{R}ad1$

All the white pieces except the f1-rook are involved in the game.

14... $\mathbb{W}c8$



Exercise: Black seems to be holding for the time being, but Morphy finds a devastating follow-up. What is it?

Answer: 15 e6!

The central pawn decides the issue!

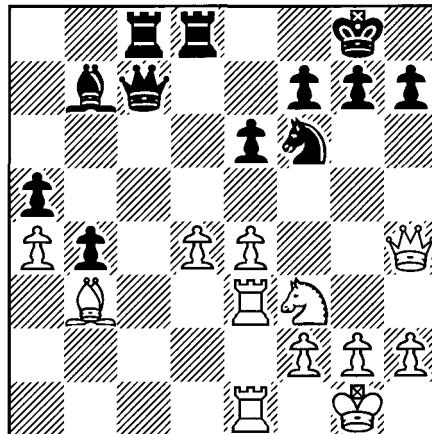
15...f6

15...fxe6 16 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{W}b8$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}d7+$ is carnage.

16 $\mathbb{W}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 1-0

It is often the case that the mobile pawn centre can be used as a distraction, drawing the opponent's pieces away to deal with the threat of creating a passed pawn. The following game fragment highlights the point nicely.

Game 7
P.Keres-R.Fine
Ostend 1937



21 d5!

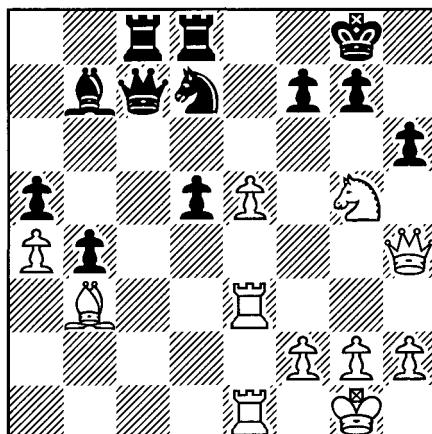
21 e5 ♜d5 is far from ideal for White, so Keres sacrifices a member of his mobile central 'team' to start a kingside attack.

21...exd5 22 e5 ♜d7?!

22...♜e4 is a much better move, but White can still react energetically: 23 e6! fxe6 24 ♜xe4 dxe4 25 ♜g5 with a dangerous attack.

23 ♜g5 ♜f8

Exercise: 23...h6 would allow White a killer blow – what is it?



Answer: 24 e6! hxg5 (24...fxe6 25 ♜xe6 wins) 25 exf7+ ♜xf7 26 ♜e7+ ♜g6! (26...♜g8 27 ♜xg5 ♜c3 28 ♜xd5+ ♜xd5 29 ♜xd5+ ♜h8 30 ♜h5+ ♜g8 31 ♜f7+ ♜h8 32 ♜e3 leads to

devastation on the h-file) 27 $\mathbb{W}d4$ $\mathbb{W}c3$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}c2+$ wins.

However, 24 $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 25 e6+ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 26 exd7 $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ is not so good for White.

24 $\mathbb{Q}xh7!$

Keres doesn't take no for an answer and opens the h-file at the cost of his knight.

24... $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{W}c1$

Trying to create some counterplay based on White's loose back rank.

26 $\mathbb{W}xh7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}he3!$

Snuffing out the threat. Material is equal, but White's king is much safer.

27...d4 28 $\mathbb{W}h8+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 29 $\mathbb{W}xg7!$

Ignoring the threat to the rook as 29...dxe3 30 $\mathbb{W}xf7$ is mate.

29... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 30 $\mathbb{W}f6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 31 e6! 1-0

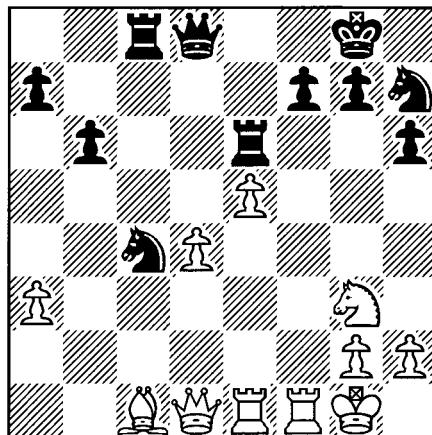
The e-pawn has the final say again! 31...dxe3 32 exf7+ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 33 $\mathbb{W}e6+$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}xc1+$ picks up the queen.

The Mobile Centre can be used to disrupt the harmony of the enemy pieces

Game 8

A.Kotov-W.Unzicker

Saltsjobaden Interzonal 1952



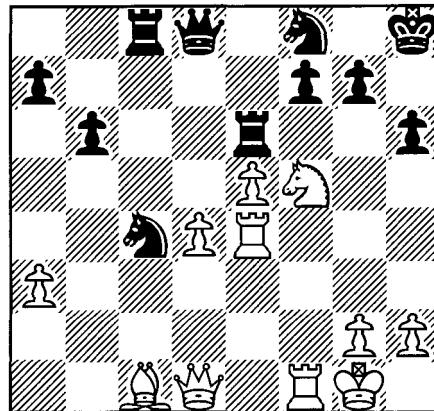
We pick up the game with Kotov in possession of the mobile pawn centre. You can see how the e5-pawn has undermined the position of the black knight and pushed it back to h7.

Question: How would you proceed as White here?

Answer: 23 $\mathbb{R}e4!$

The rook joins the attack by heading for g4.

23 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ is just as good. This is a dream square for a knight if it cannot be kicked away!
23... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$



Exercise: Find a way to continue the attack!

Answer: 25 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}xg7!$

Due to all White's pieces attacking the king, it should come as no surprise that such a combination works.

27... $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}xh6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}g4+$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 30 e6! 1-0

Again!

Summary

If you have a mobile pawn centre you should:

- 1) Look to advance it in order to create a passed pawn.
- 2) Use the threat of advancing it to tie down the opponent's pieces so that you can attack elsewhere.
- 3) If your opponent's king is still in the centre, try to use the mobile pawns to open lines towards it.

Closed Pawn Centres

Closed centres occur when the pawn structure in the middle of the board is fixed. Often the pawn chains of the two sides interlock. Files for rooks and diagonals for bishops are often blocked and the maxim that knights are better than bishops in such positions normally rings true. Positions with closed centres tend to lead to slower, more strategic play where flank attacks need to be prepared and developed. Here I will examine a game played by two of the modern greats in which Black gradually outplays White using instructive strategic play.

Game 9
G.Kasparov-V.Ivanchuk
 Horgen 1995
French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♜c3 ♜b4

The Winawer variation of the French Defence often leads to a closed centre, as the pawn on e4 is now attacked and will often advance.

4 e5 b6!?

More unusual than 4...c5 5 a3 ♜xc3+ 6 bxc3 ♜e7 7 ♜g4 ♜c7 which leads to a very sharp fight. Ivanchuk has a simple plan in mind – to exchange off the bad light-squared bishop on c8.

5 a3 ♜f8

Such an extravagant undeveloping move is possible here, due to the closed nature of the centre. The point is that Black wants to develop the g8-knight via e7 and also not have to worry about the sensitive g7-pawn which often gets attacked in this variation.

5...♜xc3+ 6 bxc3 ♜a6 7 ♜xa6 ♜xa6 8 ♜g4! would be typical, provoking either a weakening of the dark squares after 8...g6, or keeping the king in the middle with 8...♚f8.

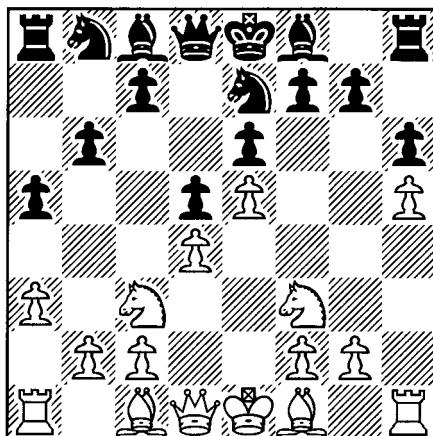
6 ♜f3 ♜e7 7 h4

Kasparov, using the fact that the centre is closed, aims to gain space on the kingside. His pawn chain d4-e5 dictates that he should be playing on the kingside as the e-pawn is the furthest advanced.

7...h6

Instead 7...♜a6 8 ♜xa6 ♜xa6 9 ♜d3 ♜b8 10 h5 h6 11 ♜e2 was better for White due to his space advantage in T.Henrichs-J.Raasch, Muelheim 2006.

8 h5 a5



Question: What is the point of Black's last move?

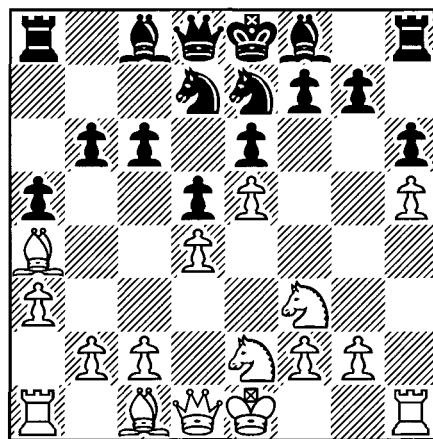
Answer: Well, there is a two-fold reason for it. Firstly, it prepares ... $\mathbb{Q}a6$. Secondly, Black seeks to gain space on the queenside where he will look to expand. Already the stage is set for an interesting fight.

After the immediate 8... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ 10 $\mathbb{W}d3$ Black's knight is driven back and 10... $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ transposes to the note to Black's 7th move.

9 $\mathbb{Q}b5+$

Kasparov plays ambitiously to avoid the exchange of bishops. However, this plan loses time.

9...c6 10 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}e2$



Exercise: What is Ivanchuk's best move here?

Answer: 11...b5!

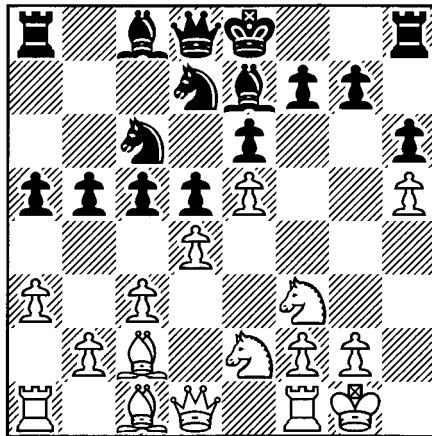
Good timing! Anything else would have allowed c2-c3 followed by the retreat of the bishop to c2 in one move.

12 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ c5 13 c3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$

Black retains the tension in the centre of the board.

14 0-0 $\mathbb{W}c7$

It is, of course, still unwise to castle kingside due to the weakness of the h7-square: for example, 14... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 0-0? 16 $\mathbb{Q}xh6!$ gxh6 17 $\mathbb{W}d3$ f5 (or 17... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 18 $\mathbb{W}h7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 19 $\mathbb{W}h8$ mate) 18 exf6 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 19 $\mathbb{W}g6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 20 $\mathbb{W}xh6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 21 $\mathbb{W}g6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ with 23 $\mathbb{W}h6+$ followed by 24 $\mathbb{Q}h7+$ threatened.



15 $\mathbb{H}e1?$!

Even the greatest players in the world sometimes get it wrong! Here Kasparov should have prepared the advance of his f-pawn. Indeed, 15 $\mathbb{Q}h2 \mathbb{A}e7$ 16 f4 with the idea of f5 would have been better.

15...c4

Now that White is slower in playing f2-f4-f5, Ivanchuk seizes the moment to close the centre and begin his own operations on the queenside.

16 $\mathbb{Q}c2 \mathbb{Q}b6$

The position seems easier to play for Black, even though my computer thinks White is doing well, but computers often find the assessment of closed positions difficult. There is a simple plan for Black here of breaking on the queenside with ...b5-b4, whereas White's pawn break (f4-f5) is more difficult to achieve.

17 $\mathbb{Q}f4 \mathbb{A}e7$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}g3 \mathbb{B}b8$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}h2 \mathbb{W}d8$

I also can't see anything wrong with immediately playing 19...b4 20 axb4 axb4.

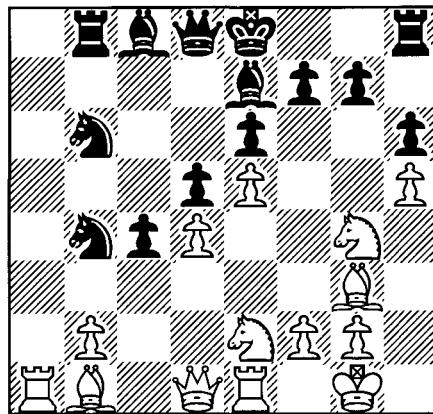
20 $\mathbb{Q}g4$

20 f4 doesn't quite have the same impact now as the white rook is not supporting the advance.

20...b4 21 axb4 axb4 22 cxb4?!

Kasparov seems to be out of sorts in this game. His move allows the black knight an active post.

22... $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 23 $\mathbb{A}b1$



Exercise: How can Black improve his position here?

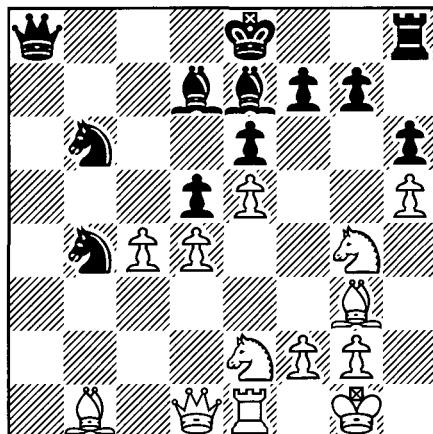
Answer: 23...♞d7!

Completing the development of his minor pieces at move 23! That is one of the features of closed positions. Development can be often be delayed for the sake of manoeuvring.

24 b3?

The maxim about not moving pawns on the side of the board where you are weakest applies here. Covering the a4-square with 24 ♜c3 ♞a8 25 ♜xa8 ♜xa8 26 ♜d2 is a better way to play.

24...♝a8 25 ♜xa8 ♜xa8 26 bxc4



Question: Which way should Black recapture here?

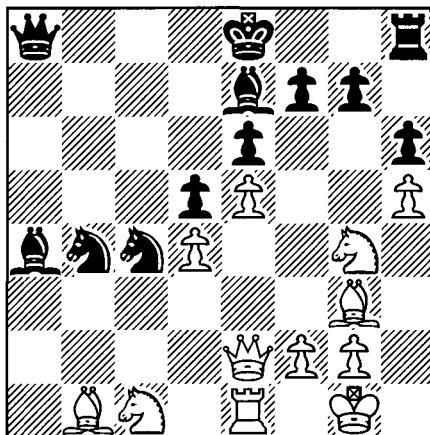
Answer: 26...dxc4

Creating a passed pawn is not so effective here as it can be easily blockaded: 26...dxc4 27 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ when White has the very useful e4-square for a minor piece of his choice.

27 $\mathbb{Q}c1?$

This leads to a hopeless position. Better would have been 27 $\mathbb{Q}e3$.

27... $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 28 $\mathbb{W}e2$



Exercise: Ivanchuk's minor pieces on the queenside make a pretty picture, but how does Black win material?

Answer: 28... $\mathbb{W}a7!$

Targeting the weak spot in the white position, which, surprisingly, is impossible to defend. The white position now collapses.

29 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}xd4$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $dxc4$ 31 $\mathbb{W}f1$ 0-0 0-1

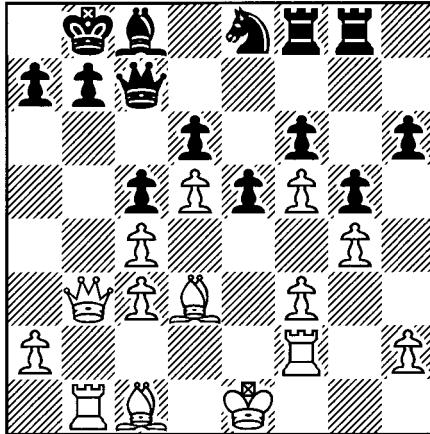
What a move with which to make Garry Kasparov resign! Of course White can play on, but I imagine the then World Champion was so disgusted with his play he threw in the towel immediately.

A nice demonstration by Ivanchuk of how to handle such a closed central position. He retained the tension until he felt that the opponent's kingside play would be too slow before advancing with purpose on the queenside.

Patience and the Opening of a 'Second Front'

It is often the case that in positions with a closed centre an attack on one flank will not be enough to win the game, as the enemy will have enough time to mass his defensive forces there. In such situations it is handy to keep the option open on the other side of the board of creating a second path for your pieces. Watch how German GM Robert Hübner cleverly executes this.

Game 10
M.Najdorf-R.Hübner
Wijk aan Zee 1971



From a strategic perspective Black stands very well here.

Question: Can you explain why and what Black's plan should be?

Answer: There are two reasons why Black is better here:

- 1) He has the only effective pawn break in the position (...h6-h5).
- 2) He has knight versus bishop in a position with a closed centre, with no chance of that centre being opened by White.

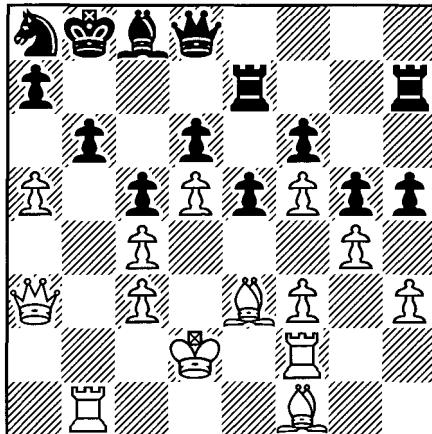
It is instructive to see the way that Black gradually opens files on the flanks. One thing that grandmasters certainly have is a lot of patience!

23.. $\mathbb{Q}h8!$ **24** $\mathbb{Q}e3$ **h5** **25** $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ **26** **h3** $\mathbb{Q}d7$

Preparing a path for the knight to the queenside.

27 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ **28** **a4** $\mathbb{Q}e7$ **29** $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ **30** **a5** $\mathbb{Q}d8$ **31** $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}hh7$ **32** $\mathbb{Q}b1$ **b6!?**

And here is the pawn break on the queenside. It looks very risky here as the black king is located there, but Black has plenty of pieces keeping his king secure. The aim is to open either the a- or b-files, or to provide the knight with a route into the game via b6.



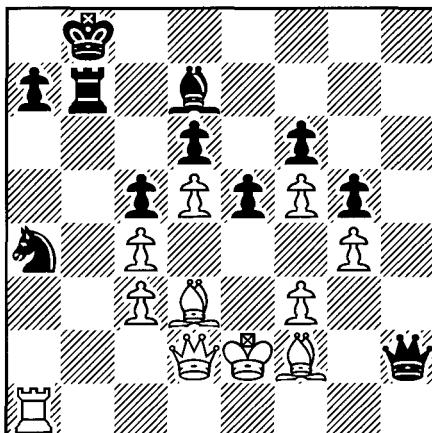
33 ♜d3 ♜b7 34 axb6 ♜xb6 35 ♜a1 ♛h8 36 ♜c2 hxg4 37 hxg4 ♜d7!

Again Grandmaster Hübner shows great patience, bringing his last piece into the game before penetrating on the h-file.

38 ♛a2 ♜h2 39 ♜d2 ♜xf2+ 40 ♜xf2 ♛h2 41 ♜e2 ♜a4!

The black pieces spring into the attack from both sides of the board!

42 ♛d2



Exercise: Here Black missed his chance to win material.

Can you see how he could have done this?

42...♜e8?

Answer: 42...♜b2 43 ♜c2 ♜b6! is a very cute switch-back, taking advantage of the weakness on c4, and would have been a great end to a fine strategic game:

Chess Strategy: Move by Move

- a) 44 $\mathbb{B}b1 \mathbb{B}xb1$ 45 $\mathbb{Q}xb1 \mathbb{Q}xc4$ nets a pawn with a winning position.
- b) 44 $\mathbb{Q}d3 \mathbb{Q}xc4$ 45 $\mathbb{Q}xc4 \mathbb{Q}b5$ is mate.
- c) 44 $\mathbb{W}d3 \mathbb{Q}a4$ 45 $\mathbb{B}c1 \mathbb{Q}b3!$ and White is tied up in knots.

43 $\mathbb{B}b1 \mathbb{B}xb1$ 44 $\mathbb{Q}xb1 \mathbb{W}f4$ 45 $\mathbb{Q}d3?$

45 $\mathbb{Q}a2$ offers more stubborn resistance.

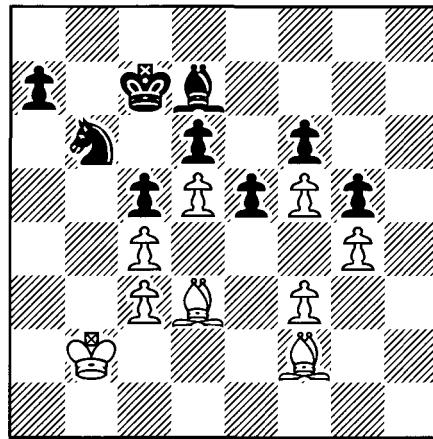
45... $\mathbb{W}xd2+$ 46 $\mathbb{Q}xd2 \mathbb{Q}b6$ 47 $\mathbb{Q}c1 \mathbb{Q}a4$

Due to the threat of ... $\mathbb{Q}b3$, the position is still winning for Black.

48 $\mathbb{Q}c2$

If 48 $\mathbb{Q}b2 \mathbb{Q}d1$.

48... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 49 $\mathbb{Q}d3 \mathbb{Q}c7$ 50 $\mathbb{Q}b2$



Question: How does Black decide the game?

Answer: 50... $\mathbb{Q}c8!$ 51 $\mathbb{Q}b3 \mathbb{Q}a6$ 52 $\mathbb{Q}e3 \mathbb{Q}xd5$ 0-1

Thanks to this trick the position is completely hopeless for White and here he resigned. As the white kingside pawns are fixed on light squares they will all fall to the enemy bishop after 53 $cxd5 \mathbb{Q}xd3$.

Controlling the opponent's pawn breaks in a closed position

The following game, played by the Spanish no.1, is a nice demonstration of keeping an eye on both sides of the board. His plan of winning a weak queenside pawn is combined with an excellent sense of simultaneously preventing the opponent's play on the other side of the board. Sadly his opponent was me!

Game 11

A.Hunt-F.Vallejo Pons

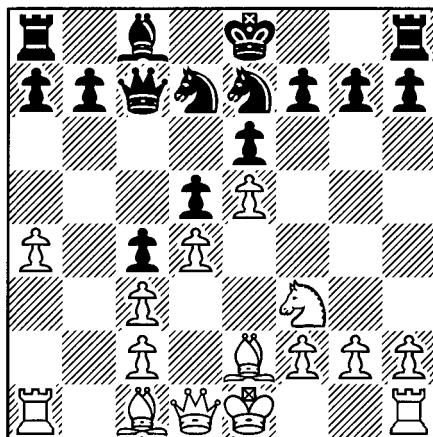
North American Open, Las Vegas 2011

French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♜c3 ♜b4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 ♜xc3+ 6 bxc3 ♜e7 7 a4 ♜c7 8 ♜f3 ♜d7 9 ♜d3 c4

Black closes the centre. In this case he has a specific idea in mind...

10 ♜e2



A normal-looking position from a French Winawer has been reached.

Question: How should Black proceed here?

Answer: 10...a5!

I must admit this came completely out of the blue, but in fact the move makes a lot of sense. Black is simply going to play to capture the weak white a-pawn, before rolling his queenside pawns down the board at me!

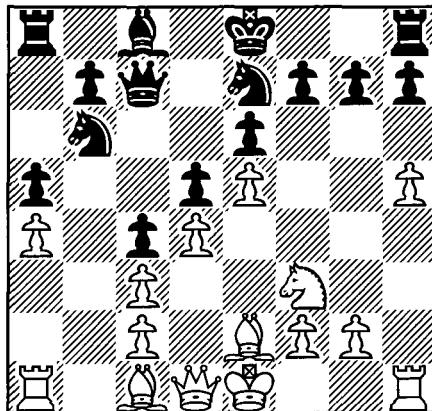
10...f6 has also been seen before, looking to blow up the centre. However, after 11 exf6 gxf6 I like 12 a5!.

11 0-0?!

Exercise: I think already this is a strategic mistake.

What would have been more to the point?

Answer: 11 h4 à la Kasparov is fairly standard in these sort of positions. Then 11...♜b6 12 h5 would lead to the following position:



Question: What should Black play here?

Answer: 12...h6!. Black cannot afford to loosen the dark squares so much with 12... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 13 h6 gxh6 (13...g6 14 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ 15 $\mathbb{W}d2$ also gives White tremendous compensation) 14 $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ which keeps his king in the centre.

11... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 12 $\mathbb{W}d2$ h6 13 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$

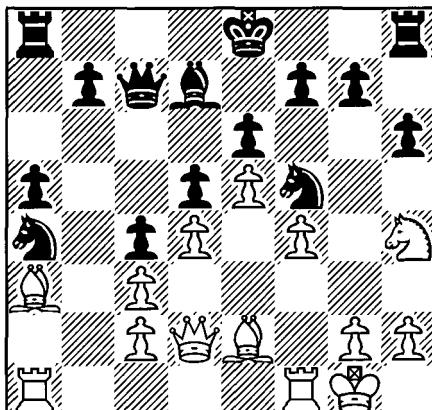
Although the a4-pawn will fall, White has some compensation in the form of his unopposed bishop on a3.

14 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ 15 f4

After the game my opponent commented that he thought this might have been a serious error. He was more concerned about 15 g4 which prepares the f4-f5 advance.

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

My engine hates this move, but I don't see why! Black prevents the f4-f5 pawn break and will gradually seek to expand on the queenside.



16 ♜xf5

Pretty much forced.

Question: Why can't White play 16 ♜f3 with the idea of g2-g4?

Answer: 16...h5! completely fixes the kingside and gives Black a free hand to play on the queenside.

16...exf5 17 ♜f3 ♕c6 18 ♜fb1 ♜e6

This game felt like pure torture from here on in as White has no counterplay for the extra black pawn. I went on to lose in 68 moves at about 1am! It didn't help that it was the second of two six-hour games I played on one day in Las Vegas!

Summary

In positions with a closed centre:

- 1) It's all about the flanks! Look to seize space where possible and keep your pawn breaks available in order to open files.
- 2) Development can often wait. Sometimes it is more important to seize valuable squares for your pieces for later in the game.
- 3) Look out for piece sacrifices in the centre to blow up the position.
- 4) Retaining the option to open up both sides of the board with pawn breaks is very useful, especially when you judge that you can't break through on just one side.

The Open Centre

An open centre is one in which all the central pawns have either been traded off or they are not present on any of the central four squares. This usually leaves a position which is very dynamic, with open files for the major pieces and diagonals for the bishops and queen. Here the strategy should be to look for active piece play at all costs.

Both sides should look to probe for weaknesses on the kingside or queenside flanks using their knights, bishops, rooks and queen. It is rare in positions with an open centre for pawn attacks on the flanks to work, as they will normally either cost too much time or create a weakness that is easy for the opponent to exploit with their active long-range pieces.

It is quite unusual to find openings where such an open centre arises, but in the right hands such positions can be very dangerous...

Game 12

M.Tal-V.Smyslov

Candidates Tournament, Belgrade 1959

Caro-Kann Defence

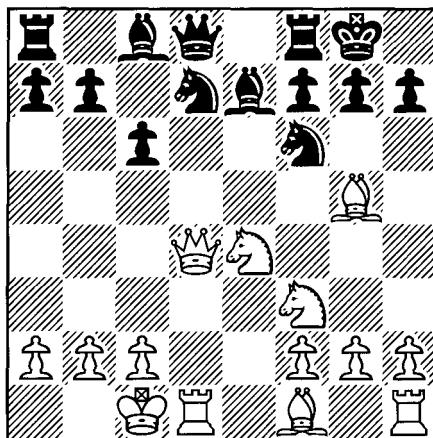
1 e4 c6 2 d3 d5 3 ♜d2 e5 4 ♜gf3 ♜d7 5 d4!?

It looks peculiar that such an approach can be good – White moves his d-pawn for a second time and in doing so liquidates the centre. However, this gives his bishops freedom and in the hands of such a gifted attacking player as Tal this proves effective.

5...dxe4 6 ♔xe4 exd4 7 ♕xd4 ♖gf6 8 ♔g5

8 ♜d6+ ♛xd6 9 ♕xd6 ♜e4 10 ♕a3 ♜df6 would be okay for Black.

8...e7 9 0-0-0 0-0



Black is forced to castle kingside as he cannot keep the king on the open file in the centre for too long.

Exercise: How would you continue now?

Answer: 10 ♟d6!?

We needed to be aware that Black had a threat in this position, using the indirect attack on the bishop on g5. With the text move White looks for an opportunity to gain the bishop-pair, which in a situation with an open centre is to his advantage.

10 ♜c4??, for example, would lose a piece to 10... ♜xe4 11 ♜xe7 (or 11 ♜xe4 ♜xg5+ 12 ♜xg5 ♜xg5+) 11... ♜xe7. 10 ♜d3 would avoid the loss of material, but 10... ♜xe4 11 ♜xe7 ♜xe7 12 ♜xe4 ♜c5 would be comfortable for Black.

10... ♔ a5

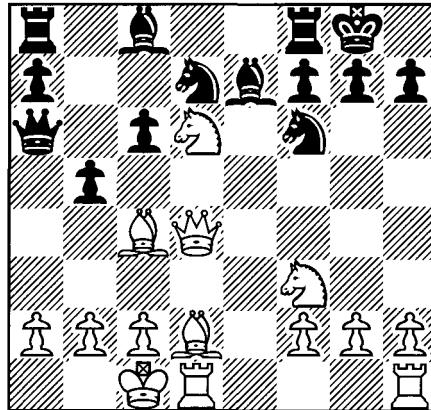
10... $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 11 $\mathbb{W}xd6$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 13 $\mathbb{W}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ would be unpleasant due to the pressure on the f7-square.

11 c4

Tal develops his final minor piece to an aggressive square.

11...b5 12 ♕d2! ♔a6

After 12... $\mathbb{W}a4$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ $\mathbb{B}axc8$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{W}xd4$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ White would retain a small advantage in the endgame due to his pair of bishops.



Exercise: Here the natural 13 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ costs White material after 13...c5 14 $\mathbb{Q}xc8 \mathbb{K}fxc8$ 15 $\mathbb{W}e3$ c4. What did White have planned instead?

Answer: 13 $\mathbb{Q}f5!$

The dream attacking square for the knight! Here it pressures both g7 and e7.

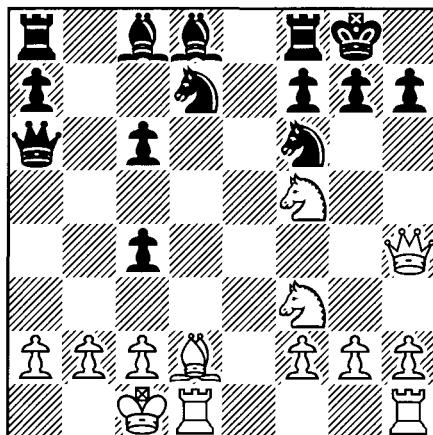
13... $\mathbb{Q}d8$

13... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ leads to huge complications after 14 $\mathbb{W}f4$ bxc4 15 $\mathbb{Q}c3!$ with the idea of $\mathbb{Q}xg7$.

14 $\mathbb{W}h4!$

White's energetic approach is perfectly in keeping with the position, unlike 14 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ c5.

14...bxc4



Question: How to continue the attack?

Answer: 15 ♜g5

Lots of other moves spring to mind here, such as:

a) 15 ♜h6 fails to 15...♛xa2 16 ♜g5 g6.

b) 15 ♜h6+ loses to the ice-cool 15...♚h8! (15...gxh6 16 ♜xh6 threatening ♜g5 is unclear) 16 ♜g5 ♛xa2 17 ♜gxf7+ ♜xf7 18 ♜xf7+ ♚g8.

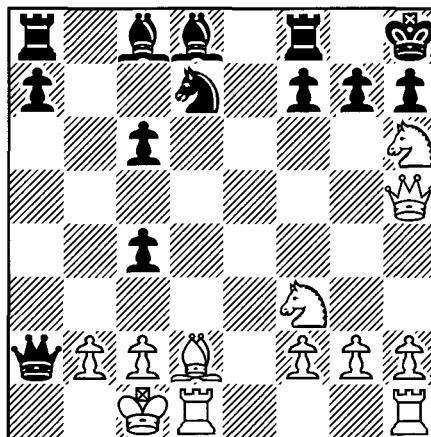
15...♜h5

15...g6 must also have come into consideration here, but I imagine that Smyslov wasn't happy to weaken the dark squares around his king. 16 ♜c3 ♛xa2 17 ♜h6 gxf5 18 ♜xd7! is a real mess, but probably just a draw after 18...♜xd7 19 ♜g5+ ♚h8 20 ♜xf6+ ♜xf6 21 ♜xf6+ ♚g8 22 ♜g5+ ♚h8 23 ♜f6+.

16 ♜h6+

16 ♜xh5? allows the simplifying sequence 16...♝f6 17 ♜g5 ♜xf5 18 ♜xf5 ♛xa2 when the black attack is the stronger!

16...♚h8 17 ♜xh5 ♛xa2



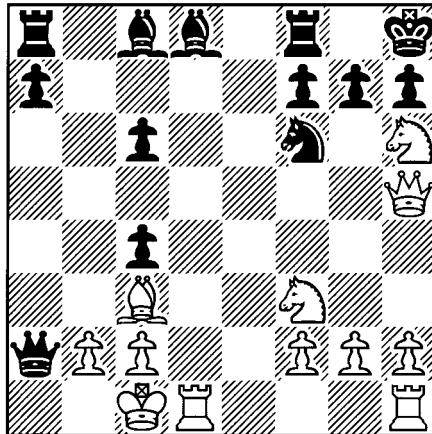
Exercise: The tables have turned, with Black now attacking on the queenside. What is the best way to defend against the threat of mate?

Answer: 18 ♜c3!

White gives his king space whilst putting pressure on the g7-pawn.

18...♝f6?

Black blunders under pressure. Correct would have been 18...♜f6 19 ♜xf7+ ♚g8 20 ♜g5 ♛a1+ 21 ♚d2 ♜xc3+ 22 bxc3 ♜f6!.



19 ♜xf7!!

Perhaps Smyslov only saw 19 ♜xd8 ♜a1+ 20 ♔d2 ♜xd8+ 21 ♔e3 ♜xh1 when Black is winning easily.

19...♜a1+ 20 ♔d2 ♜xf7

20...♜xd1+ 21 ♜xd1 ♜xf7 22 ♜xf7+ ♔g8 23 ♜xd8 is no better.

21 ♜xf7+ ♔g8 22 ♜xa1 ♜xf7 23 ♜e5+

The smoke has cleared, leaving White an exchange up and winning easily.

23...♔e6 24 ♜xc6 ♜e4+ 25 ♔e3 ♜b6+ 26 ♜d4 1-0

Summary

Positions with an open centre are generally less strategic and require good calculation as the pieces can come into the game that much faster. If you think you are a strong calculator, or particularly good at tactics (like Tal), you may like to consider heading for such positions.

Key Points

- 1) Understand the differences between the Classical and Hypermodern approaches to the centre. The hypermodern approach tends to be riskier, as space is given away at an early stage, but at the same time an imbalance is created in the opening and play is very dynamic.
- 2) If you favour hypermodern play, remember you must fight back in the centre at an early stage. A lack of space cannot be tolerated for long!
- 3) There are four basic types of pawn centre: mobile, fixed, closed and open. Each one requires handling in a different way.
- 4) Mobile pawn centres want to be advanced, setting up potential passed pawns or driving enemy pieces out of the way. Leave them for too long and they can become the sub-

Chess Strategy: Move by Move

ject of attack.

5) Fixed and Closed centres will usually mean that play is directed more towards the flanks. The game will often take on a slower, more strategic nature with both sides looking to build up their own play.

6) Open centres will usually lead to sharp games where the pieces will engage with each other at an early stage. Look out for potential sacrifices to blow open the enemy's king position and stay on your toes!

Chapter Two

Looking after the King

When your house is on fire, you can't be bothered with the neighbours. Or, as we say in chess, if your king is under attack, don't worry about losing a queenside pawn. – Garry Kasparov

Number one on the list of strategic and positional elements that need to be considered in a game of chess is the safety of the king. After all, a checkmated king ends the game! When evaluating a fresh position, a strong player will normally look at king safety second only to the material balance on the board, and sometimes even beforehand.

Kings in the Centre

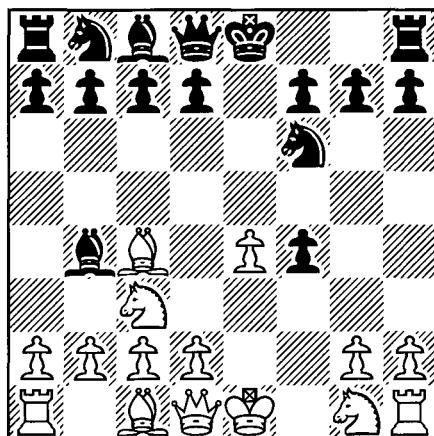
Castling is second nature to most of us. Not only does it put the king behind a wall of pawns, but it also activates a rook that would otherwise find it difficult to get into the game. In addition to this, with most operations taking place in the middle of the board in the opening, it is more than likely that files will be opened there due to an exchange of pawns. Therefore it is unlikely that the centre will be a safe place for your king. There are numerous examples of games finishing quickly due to one side failing to follow this basic advice. And it happens to the best of us! Check out this extraordinary game played by two future World Champions...

Game 13
A.Alekhine-M.Euwe
The Hague 1921
King's Gambit

1 e4 e5 2 ♜c3 ♜f6 3 ♜c4 ♜b4 4 f4 exf4

Euwe decides to abandon the centre, but hopes the time it takes White to regain the f4-pawn will compensate for this. To me, 4...d6 5 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ looks safer.

This position is more commonly reached via the King's Gambit: 1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$.



Question: How should White proceed?

Answer: 5 e5!

Our discussion in the previous chapter on how to use central pawns should have given you the clue that this is best. With this move White tries to disrupt the position of the black knight.

5... $\mathbb{Q}e7$?

After this move Black is lost!

5...d5! is a typical reaction to the e4-e5 thrust, and this would have certainly been better here: 6 $\mathbb{Q}b5+$ (6 exf6 dxc4 7 $\mathbb{W}e2+$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 8 fxg7 $\mathbb{Q}g8$ is better for Black due to his lead in development) 6...c6 7 exf6 cxb5 leads to a complicated position that is supposed to be okay for Black according to theory.

6 $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$

This is a very sad move to have to make, but there was no other square.

6... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 7 dxc3 $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ also gives White a tremendous position.

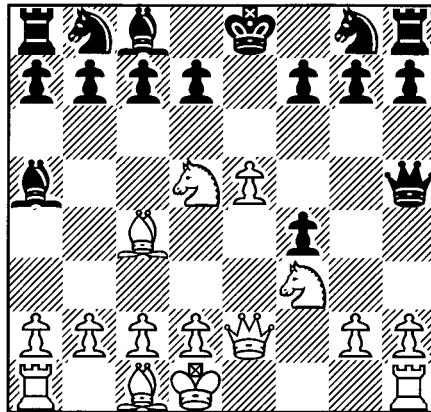
7 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{W}h4+$

7... $\mathbb{W}c5$ simply loses masses of material to 8 a3 b5 9 axb4 $\mathbb{W}xc4$ 10 $\mathbb{W}xc4$ bxc4 11 $\mathbb{Q}xc7+$.

8 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}f3$

It is logical to develop a piece whilst gaining time by attacking the queen.

9... $\mathbb{W}h5$



Question: How should White continue the attack?

Answer: 10 $\mathbb{Q}f6+!?$

When you have the opponent's king in the centre, opening files towards it is absolutely the best strategy, even if in this case it costs White a knight. Alekhine could have also proceeded with 10 $\mathbb{Q}xf4 \mathbb{W}g4$ 11 d3, with a winning position.

10...gx f 6 11 ex f 6+ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 12 $\mathbb{E}e1$ 1-0

Here Black resigned prematurely. After 12...c5 13 $\mathbb{W}e8+$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ White should be winning, but the game is still alive.

Summary

- 1) Don't allow minor pieces (usually knights) to be driven to bad squares by central pawns.
- 2) Against an uncastled king look to open lines towards it as quickly as possible, even sometimes at the cost of material.

The King Hunt

Of all the pitfalls that can happen to an uncastled king, a large proportion of them happen due to tactics on the f2- and f7-squares. Johannes Zukertort was one of the leading chess masters of his time. He lost what is seen as the first official World Championship match to Steinitz in 1886. Playing White here he takes apart an amateur player in double-quick time.

*Game 14
J.H.Zukertort-NN
Leipzig blindfold simul 1877
King's Gambit*

1 e4 e5 2 f4

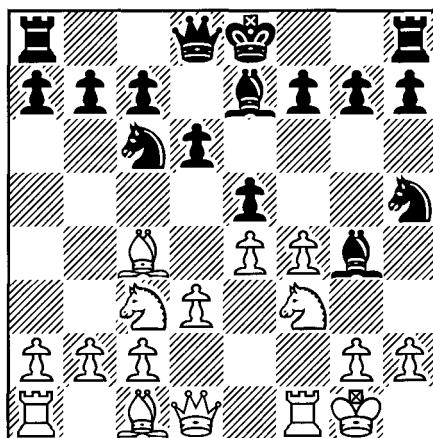
Chess Strategy: Move by Move

The King's Gambit remains one of the most aggressive openings played to this day and was all the rage during the 19th century.

2...d6

A solid, if slightly passive response. I usually recommend something to my students like 2... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ (3 $fxe5?? \mathbb{W}h4+ 4 g3 \mathbb{W}xe4+$ is a pretty dirty trap) 3...d6 as an active way of meeting this opening. Black seeks to prevent White from castling and 4 c3 (4 $\mathbb{Q}c4 \mathbb{Q}f6$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}c3 \mathbb{Q}c6$ 6 d3 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ is pretty typical) 4... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 5 h3 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 6 $\mathbb{W}xf3 \mathbb{Q}f6$ gives Black a reasonable game.

3 $\mathbb{Q}f3 \mathbb{Q}c6$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}c4 \mathbb{Q}f6$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}c3 \mathbb{Q}g4$ 6 d3 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 7 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}h5??$



A dreadful move that gives White an instantly winning position. The general advice not to move pieces twice in the opening until you are fully developed (which involves castling) rings true here.

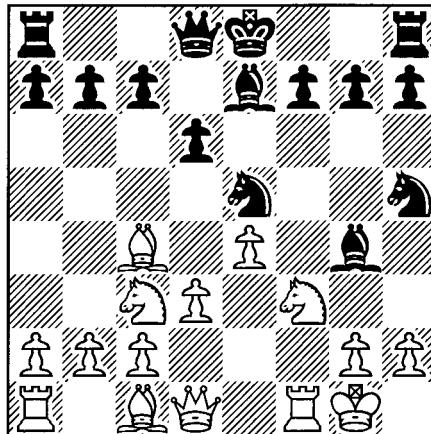
Exercise: How can White exploit Black's last move?

8 $fxe5?!$

Answer: 8 $\mathbb{Q}xf7+!$ was correct. The explosion on f7 causes maximum damage. Always be on the lookout for this trick! 8... $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}g5+ \mathbb{Q}e8$ (9... $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 10 $fxg5+ \mathbb{Q}f4$ 11 $\mathbb{W}xg4$ is also very strong) 10 $\mathbb{W}xg4$ is disastrous for Black.

8... $\mathbb{Q}xe5?$

Instead 8... $dxe5$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}xf7+!$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}xe5+$ would be even more painful, but 8...0-0, just accepting a pawn less, is the best option here.



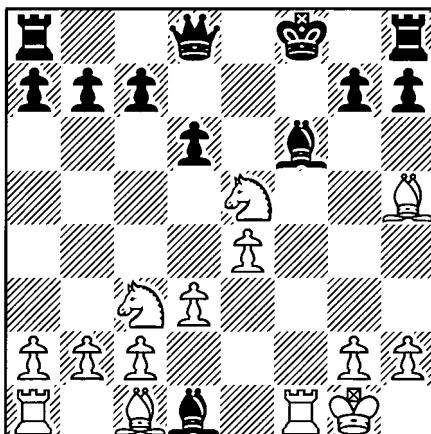
Exercise: Try to calculate the consequences of 9 $\mathbb{Q}xe5!!$.

Answer: 9 $\mathbb{Q}xe5!!$

Absolutely crushing. White gives up his queen, but embarks on a beautiful king hunt.

9... $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}xh5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$

11... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}f7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}d7+!$ is a lovely tactic to win the queen back and after 13... $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}e6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ White has a clear extra piece.



Temporarily closing the gates.

Question: How can White smash through now?

Answer: 12 $\mathbb{Q}xf6+!$

Chess Strategy: Move by Move

The white rook gives its life to open the black king up even further.

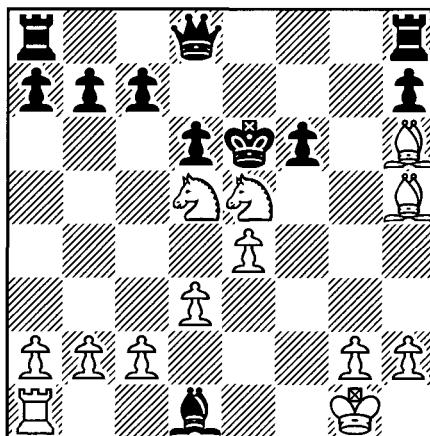
12...gxf6

Forced. After 12... $\mathbb{W}xf6$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}d7+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ White is winning easily with all his extra material.

13 $\mathbb{Q}h6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$

13... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}f7$ is mate.

14 $\mathbb{Q}d5+$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$



Exercise: It's forced mate in three. See if you can find it!

Answer: 15 $\mathbb{Q}f7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 16 c3! 1-0

This classy little quiet move forces mate. Black resigned as 17 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ is an unstoppable threat.

Summary

Be careful of the f7-square! If you really must delay castling make sure that no accidents are going to happen on it.

Next we will see another example of the hidden dangers lurking behind the bishop sacrifice.

*Game 15
E.Pendurin-A.Bakutin
Donskoj 2005
Two Knights Defence*

1 e4 e5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}g5$

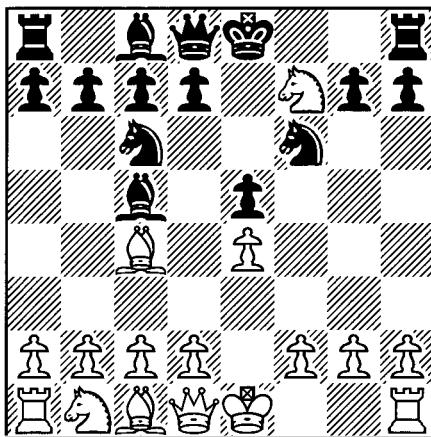
The Fried Liver Attack is a favourite weapon amongst juniors. It is a direct attempt to exploit the weakness of the f7-square, without having to resort to Scholar's mate!

4... $\mathbb{Q}c5!?$

Black ignores the threat and enters the murky complications of the Traxler Counter-gambit. Instead White is hoping to see something like 4...d5 5 exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5?$ (5... $\mathbb{Q}d4$, 5...b5 and 5... $\mathbb{Q}a5$ are all playable alternatives) 6 $\mathbb{Q}xf7!$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 7 $\mathbb{W}f3+$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}cb4$ 9 $\mathbb{W}e4$ with a strong attack.

5 $\mathbb{Q}xf7$

5 $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$ is also playable: 5... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 7 0-0 d6 8 h3 $\mathbb{W}e8$ leads to a highly double-edged position. Of the 30 games in *Mega Database 2012* only one has been drawn from this position (although my mum tells me she once did too in a Chester and District League game!).



Question: How can Black counter the fork?

Answer: 5... $\mathbb{Q}xf2+!$

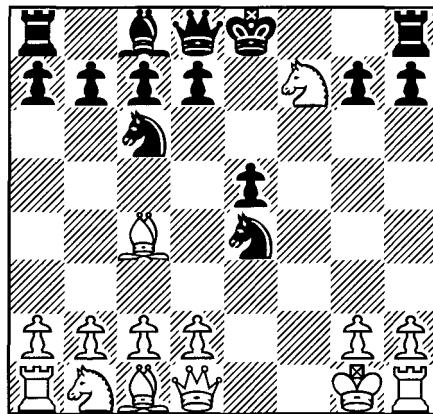
The explosion on f2 again!

5... $\mathbb{W}e7?$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}xh8$ has been played a few times, but White should be winning after both 6... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 7 $\mathbb{W}h5+$ g6 8 $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ and 6...d6 7 c3.

6 $\mathbb{Q}xf2$

6 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ may well be the most accurate here: 6... $\mathbb{W}e7$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}xh8$ d5!? 8 exd5 $\mathbb{Q}d4$, but not then 9 c3? (played the most often, but it turns out to be wrong) 9... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 10 $\mathbb{W}a4+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$. Instead 9 d6 cxd6 10 $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ looks like the critical test when after 10...d5 11 d3 (11 $\mathbb{Q}e2!?$) 11...dxc4 12 h3 cxd3 13 cxd3 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ 0-0-0 15 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}xh8$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ White was winning in N.Ninov-C.Marzolo, La Fere 2008.

6... $\mathbb{Q}xe4+$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}g1$



Exercise: Black must play energetically here. How should he continue?

Answer: 7...♘h4!

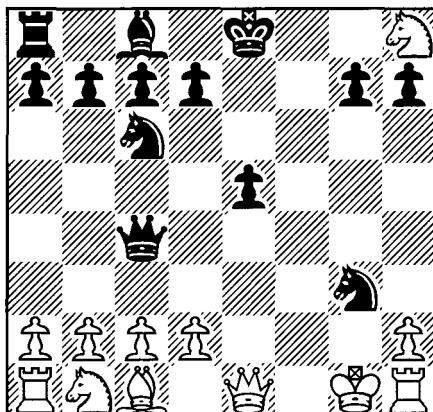
Threatening mate in one is always handy!

8 g3 ♘xg3 9 ♕e1?

White makes the crucial mistake in this highly tactical position.

9 hxg3 Wxg3+ 10 Qf1 Qf8 11 Wh5 d5 12 Qxd5 is a position that has been reached by a few strong players and now the novelty 12... Nb4! seems to be very strong. Instead 12... Nd4 was the choice of Mikhail Tal: 13 Wh2 (13 Qc3 is perhaps best) 13... Qg4 14 Wxe5+ Qe6 15 Qxe6 Wf3+ 16 Qg1 Qe2+ 17 Qh2 Wf2+ 18 Qh3 Wf3+ 19 Qh4 Wf2+ 20 Qh5 Wxf7+ 21 Qxf7+ Qxf7 22 Qh2 Wf3+ 23 Qh4 g5+ 24 Wxg5 Qg8 25 Wh5+ Wxh5+ 26 Qxh5 ½-½ *Pravda* readers-M.Tal, Moscow 1968.

9...♘xc4 10 ♘xh8



Question: How can Black maximise his attack now?

Answer: 10... $\mathbb{Q}e2+$!

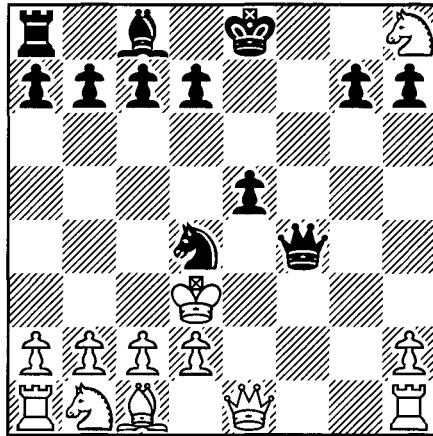
This is best. The more materialistic 10... $\mathbb{Q}xh1?!$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{W}d5$ 12 c4 $\mathbb{W}f3$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ d5 14 $\mathbb{Q}xc7+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ $\mathbb{Q}h3$ 16 $\mathbb{W}h4+$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ lost in O.Gorbunov-I.Yagupov, Donskoj 2003.

11 $\mathbb{Q}f2$

Now begins the start of another elegant king hunt, but 11 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ is no better: 11... $\mathbb{Q}xc1+$ 12 d3 $\mathbb{W}xc2$ and Black has more than enough material for the exchange.

11... $\mathbb{W}f4+! 12 \mathbb{Q}xe2 \mathbb{Q}d4+ 13 \mathbb{Q}d3$

13 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{W}f3+$ is, of course, the end.

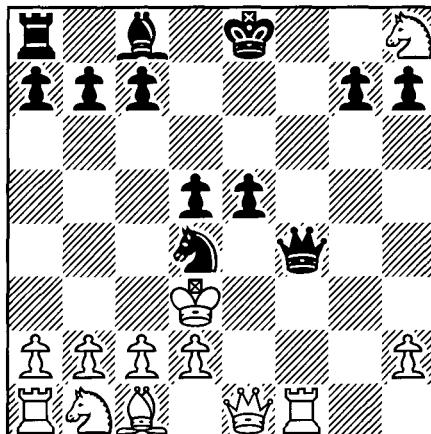


Question: How to continue here?

Answer: 13...d5!

Bringing the reserves into the attack!

14 $\mathbb{Q}f1$



Exercise: It's mate in three again! Can you calculate this one?

Answer: 14... $\mathbb{Q}f5+$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}b5+$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 0-1

Summary

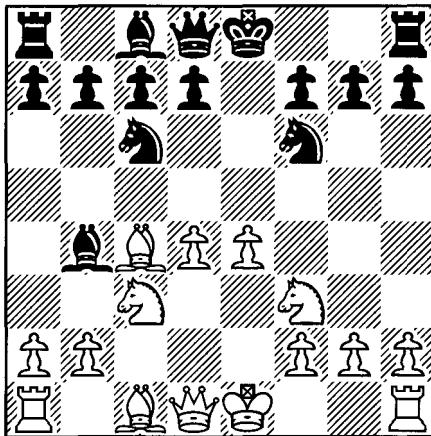
Tactics on f2 and f7 come about because one side has failed to pay close enough attention to possible sacrifices on those squares. If your opponent has a bishop targeting that pawn, be very mindful of tactical threats – and on the flip side, one of the first questions to ask yourself if you are hitting f2 or f7 is what happens if you sacrifice on that square.

The following was a really good battle from the recent National Girls Rapidplay finals at which I was coaching. White (graded 102) embarks on a direct attack against the uncastled king. Here we are going to put ourselves in Hannah's shoes and see if we can attack the black king!

Game 16
H.MacKenzie-S.Daniel
Birmingham (rapid) 2012
Giuoco Piano

1 e4 e5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 4 c3 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5 d4 exd4 6 cxd4 $\mathbb{Q}b4+$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}c3$

A well-known position from the Giuoco Piano has arisen.



7... $\mathbb{Q}xe4!$

The critical challenge to White's opening strategy. Instead 7...0-0 8 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ (8 e5 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 9 $\mathbb{W}c2$ d5!) 8...d6 gives White a very pleasant position after 9 0-0.

8 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}xc3?$!

8... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$! is correct, with the following variations:

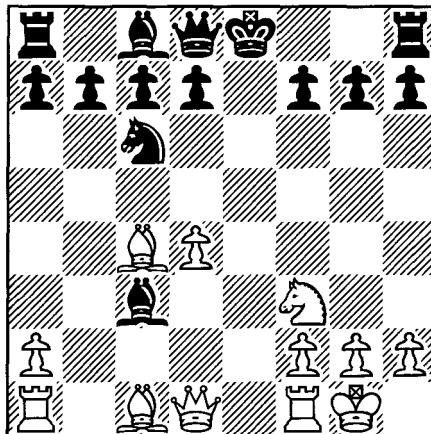
a) 9 d5! leads to some absorbing lines:

a1) 9... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 10 bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 11 $\mathbb{W}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}cd6$?! (11...0-0 was the choice of both Anand and Karpov and certainly seems like the safest) 12 $\mathbb{W}xg7$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ (12... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ also seems playable) 13 $\mathbb{W}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}e1+$! $\mathbb{Q}f8$ (14... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ is curtains) 15 $\mathbb{Q}h6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}e5$! $\mathbb{Q}fe4$ (16... $\mathbb{Q}de4$ is beautifully met by 17 $\mathbb{Q}d2$!! d6 18 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ dx e 5 19 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ mate) and now it seems that 17 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ with the idea of f2-f3 is crushing: for instance, 17...b6 (17...f6 18 $\mathbb{Q}e7$) 18 f3 $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 19 fxe4 f6 20 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ with a winning position for White. Just look at the rook on h8 if you don't believe me!

a2) 9... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ d6 12 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ h6 (13...0-0 14 $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ 15 $\mathbb{W}h5+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ is unclear after 16...f5) 14 $\mathbb{W}e2$ h x g5 15 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 16 dx e 6 f6 17 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ is about equal.

b) 9 bxc3? d5! is what Black wants, grabbing back space in the centre when White is just a pawn down.

9 bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$

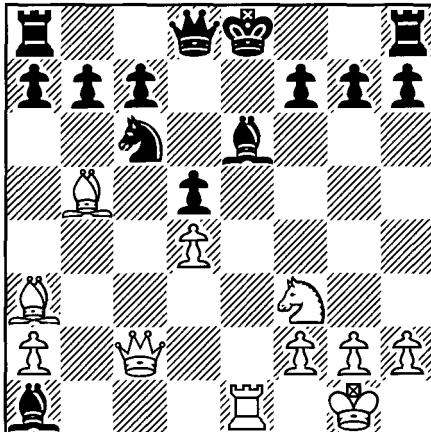


Exercise: Perhaps you are well versed in the games of Greco from the 17th century where this position was first seen?
If not, how would you continue here?

Answer: The good news is that there are lots of options and most of them are good!

10 ♜b3

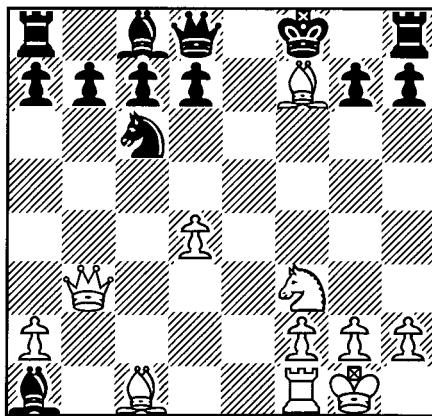
10 ♜b3, keeping the black king in the centre, is also very dangerous: 10...d5 (this seems relatively best; 10...♜xa1 11 ♜e1+ ♜e7 12 ♜xe7 ♜xe7 13 ♜xe7+ ♜xe7 14 ♜xa1 is winning for White) 11 ♜b5 ♜xa1 12 ♜e1+ ♜e6 and now the new idea 13 ♜c2!.



White is a rook and two pawns down, but all the pieces are playing! It seems as though Black has to give up the queen to survive: 13...♜d7 (if 13...♜c8 14 ♜e5 ♜f6 15 ♜xc6+ bxc6 16 ♜xc6+ ♜d8 17 ♜xa1) 14 ♜e5 ♜xd4 15 ♜xd7 ♜xd7 16 ♜c1 with a very unclear position,

although I would take White due to Black's exposed king. 10 $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$ should have suggested itself as well, but Black is probably okay after 10... $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 11 $\mathbb{W}b3$ d5 12 $\mathbb{W}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$.

10... $\mathbb{Q}xa1$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$



Question: So we are a rook down. How to continue?

Answer: 12 $\mathbb{Q}g5!$

The most energetic.

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

Sacrificing the queen may again be best: 12... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 13 $\mathbb{W}a3+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$, although after 15 $\mathbb{Q}g5+!$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 16 $\mathbb{W}d3$ we can see the effectiveness of the queen and knight as an attacking combination.

13 $\mathbb{Q}e5$

Hannah revealed after the game that she was still in her preparation!

13...d5

13... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ d5 15 $\mathbb{W}f3+$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}e6+$ is winning for White.

14 $\mathbb{W}f3!$

Again not letting up. The lazy 14 $\mathbb{Q}xa1$ would allow Black some time to reorganize with 14... $\mathbb{W}d6$ 15 $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$.

14... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}e6$

Despite being a rook and pawn down, White is completely winning. All the white pieces are participating in the attack.

15...h6

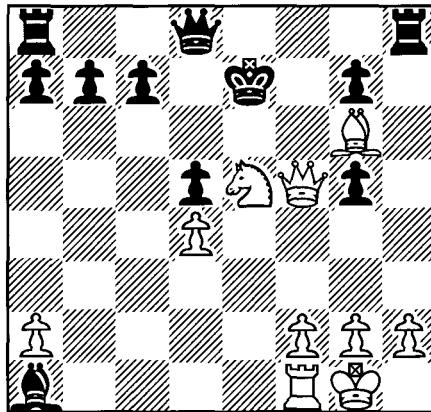
15... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ leads to disaster on the f-file after 17 $\mathbb{Q}e6+$.

16 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $hxg5$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}g6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f5!$

The only move. 17... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 18 $\mathbb{W}f7$ is mate.

18 $\mathbb{W}xf5+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$

18... $\mathbb{W}f6$ loses the queen to 19 $\mathbb{Q}d7+$.



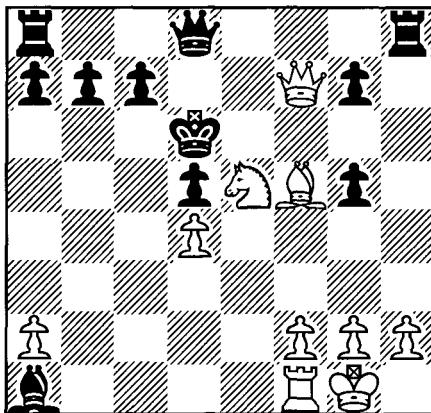
Exercise: Can you find the most direct win?

19 ♜f7+?

White gets carried away momentarily and forgets about her rook! It is worth making the point that players are all too often tempted into throwing in checks when other moves are stronger.

Answer: 19 ♜e1!, introducing the last piece into the attack, forces mate quickly: 19...♜d6 (if 19...♝xd4 20 ♜c4+ ♜e5 21 ♜xe5 mate) 20 ♜f7+ ♜c6 21 ♜c2+! ♜b5 (21...♜d7 22 ♜f5 mate) 22 ♜c5+ ♜a6 23 ♜d3+ b5 24 ♜xb5 mate.

19...♜d6 20 ♜f5

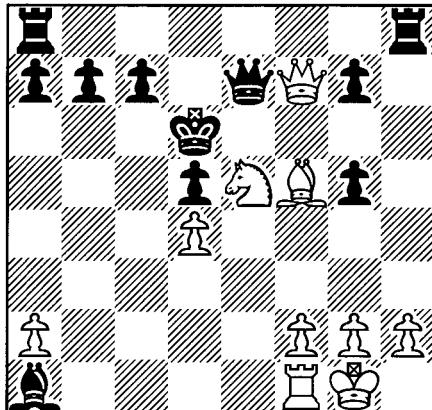


Question: Black needs a good defensive move and fast! Any ideas?

20...♜e8

The right idea (to exchange queens), but probably the wrong square as it doesn't force the swap.

Answer: 20... $\mathbb{Q}e7!$ would have been the best practical try. The computer doesn't even want to swap after this!



Exercise: Find a way to keep the queens on!

Answer: 21 $\mathbb{Q}c4!!$ (after 21 $\mathbb{Q}g6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}f7+$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ Black can breathe more easily) 21...dxc4 22 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ (threatening mate on c5) 22...b6 23 $\mathbb{Q}c1$.

21 $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ c6 22 $\mathbb{Q}f7+$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}xh8+$

Now White is material up with a strong attack. The rest needs no comment.

23... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}b1+$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}d3+$ b5 26 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ $\mathbb{Q}b2$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}a3$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}b4+$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}c7+$ $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}xa7+$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 1-0

Summary

This concludes our discussion of the king hunt. I hope these examples have given you a few ideas that can be useful in your own games as you look to attack the uncastled king.

In the next game between two strong players we once again see one of the problems of pawn-grabbing in the opening. It is very rarely a good idea when the other side is able to open up files and diagonals in the centre.

Game 17
H.Van Riemsdijk-J.Hobaica
Pinamar 2001
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ a6 6 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ e6 7 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ b5 8 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 9 f4

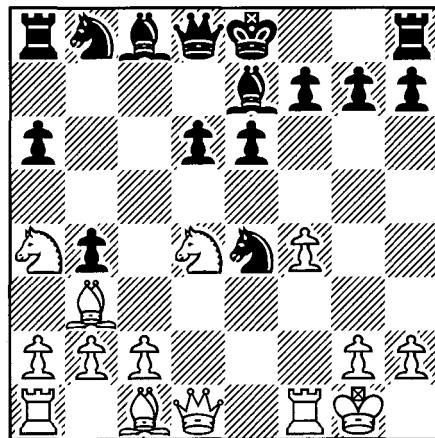
Chess Strategy: Move by Move

This is a tabiya of the Fischer-Sozin Attack against the Najdorf. With Black's next move he raises the stakes by pushing the white knight to the edge of the board.

9...b4 10 ♜a4

Surprisingly the knight is better placed here than on e2, as it looks to jump into the b6-square once supported by the dark-squared bishop.

10...♞xe4?



Black misjudges the situation in the middle of the board.

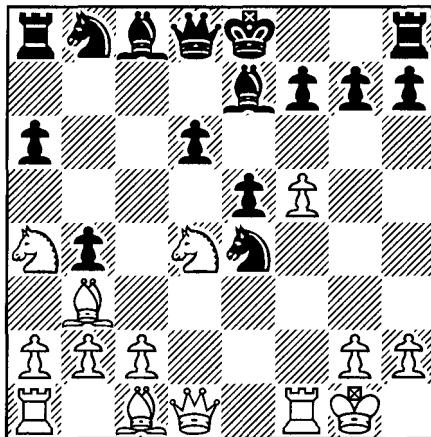
Exercise: Despite the solid-looking pawn cluster on e6 and d6
White has the potential to open up the position. How?

Answer: 11 f5!

This was a favourite idea of Bobby Fischer. Combining the strong knight on d4 with the bishop on the long diagonal (towards f7!) is remarkably effective.

11...e5

11...exf5 12 ♜xf5 ♜xf5 13 ♜xf5 ♜f6 allows our old friend 14 ♜xf7+! ♜xf7 15 ♜d5+, picking up the rook on a8.



Black must keep the centre closed.

Question: How should White continue?

Answer: 12 ♜d5!

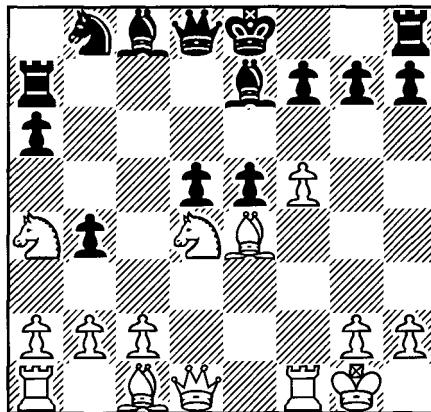
This fork is perhaps the simplest. Alternatively:

a) 12 ♜e6! is a move very much in keeping with the spirit of the position. After 12...fxe6 (12 ...♜xe6? 13 fxe6 ♜f6 14 exf7+ ♛f8 15 ♜f3 and White was winning in T. De Hoop-M.Visschedijk, Hengelo 1999) 13 ♜h5+ ♛d7 14 fxe6+ ♛c7 15 ♜e3 White retains a strong attack and is having all the fun. He is a piece down, however!

b) Credit too if you found 12 ♜xf7+ ♛xf7 13 ♜e6! which seems to work: 13...♝e8 (13...♜xe6 14 fxe6+ ♜xe6 15 ♜g4+ ♛d5 16 ♜e3 and Black cannot hope to survive) 14 ♜g4 ♜f6 15 ♜xe4 when White is once again in the driving seat.

12...♝a7 13 ♜xe4 d5

13...exd4 14 ♜xd4 ♜c7 15 ♜xg7 nets White a pawn with a raging attack due to the open e-file.



Exercise: White is a piece for a pawn up, but Black seems to be winning it back. What is the most aggressive move here?

Answer: 14 ♜e6!

Once again the knight lands on e6 before Black has a chance to castle!

14...♜xe6

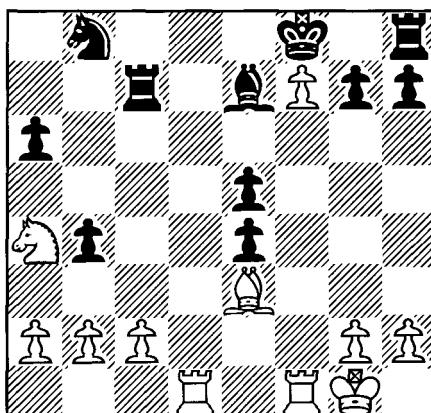
14...fxe6 loses immediately to the typical queen check 15 ♕h5+ ♔d7 16 fxe6+ ♔c6 (or 16...♔xe6 17 ♕f7+ ♔d6 18 ♕xd5+ ♔c7 19 ♕a5+) 17 ♜e3! ♜b7 18 ♜ad1.

What a pretty picture! All the white forces are active and involved in the attack, leaving Black doomed.

15 fxe6 dxe4 16 ♜e3

White calmly develops his last piece. I think I would have kept the queens on here with 16 exf7+ ♔f8 17 ♜e2 when White is in control as Black is playing without his rook on h8.

16...♕xd1 17 ♜axd1 ♜c7 18 exf7+ ♔f8



The material is equal, although all the black pieces are worse than their white counterparts.

Exercise: Be direct! How can White keep the pressure up?

19 c3?!

Answer: 19 $\mathbb{Q}b6!$ is the most energetic and should finish the game quickly: 19... $\mathbb{R}c6$ (19... $\mathbb{R}xc2$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}d7!$ is a nice way to introduce the rook on to the seventh rank) 20 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ and the knight sits majestically in the centre.

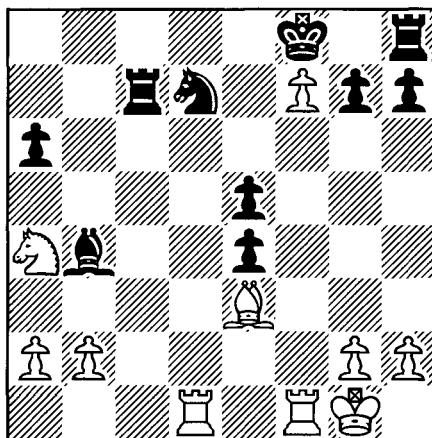
19... $\mathbb{Q}d7$

If 19... $bxc3$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$.

20 cxb4 $\mathbb{Q}xb4?$

Black commits his final error.

Better would have been 20... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 22 $bxc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ when White retains a big advantage with bishop against knight and a queenside pawn majority, but there is still some work to do.



Exercise: Finish Black off!

Answer: 21 $\mathbb{Q}b6!$ 1-0

Black resigned here due to the weakness of the back rank.

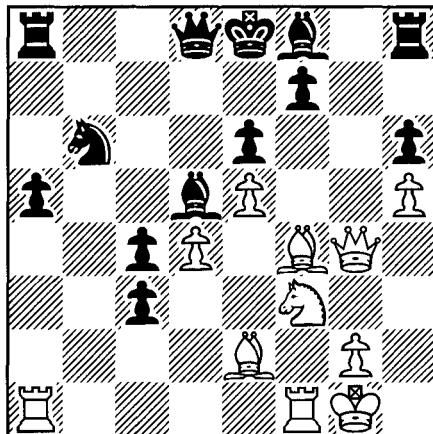
Summary

Yet again Black paid for his greed in the centre. White reacted energetically and Black was toast!

I would like to end this discussion of the relative weakness of the uncastled king with a

remarkable concept from the current world no.1 Magnus Carlsen. Despite the game only being a blitz affair, it is well worth a look.

Game 18
H.Nakamura-M.Carlsen
Gjovik (blitz) 2009



The position has come about from a sharp variation of the Slav Defence. Black has seemingly nowhere safe to put his king, but has other trumps such as the passed pawns on c3 and a5, and the mighty bishop on d5. White has just opened the f-file and is looking to attack the black king along it.

Question: What is Black's best plan?

Answer: 21...♔d7!

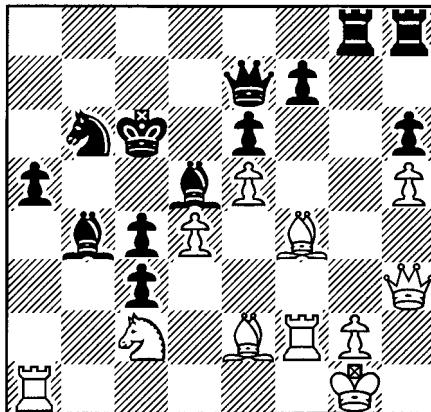
Carlsen evacuates his king over to the queenside where he is strongest, despite all the heavy pieces still being on the board. Due to the closed nature of the centre and his ability to close the queenside, he comfortably has the time to do this.

22 ♔e1 ♕c6 23 ♔c2 ♕b4

Keeping the queenside closed, whilst at the same time preparing an attack down the g-file.

24 ♕f2 ♘e7 25 ♘h3 ♕ag8

The black king sits perfectly safe on the c6-square and it is the white king that starts to feel the heat.



26 ♜f1 ♜g7 27 ♜e3 ♜b7 28 ♜g4 ♜d7 29 ♜c1 ♜c6 30 ♜e3 ♜b6?!

30...♜hg8 would have left Black in a strong position: for instance, 31 ♜xc4 ♜xc4 32 ♜xc4 ♜g3.

31 ♜xd5! ♜xd5

31...exd5 allows the white rook to penetrate on the sixth rank with 32 ♜f6+ ♜c7 33 ♜f3.

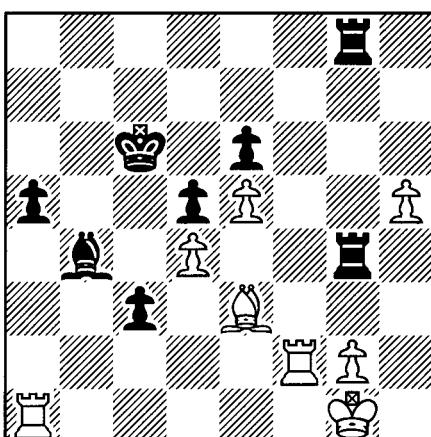
32 ♜xc4 ♜hg8

Black has misplayed the last few moves (easy to do in blitz!).

33 ♜xd5+ exd5 34 ♜xh6?

34 ♜f6+ ♜c7 35 ♜a2! nicely defends the kingside.

34...♜g3 35 ♜f5 ♜e6 36 ♜xe6+ fxe6 37 ♜f4 ♜3g4 38 ♜e3



Exercise: The dust has settled and we have an endgame with equal material. How should the world no.1 continue?

Answer: 38... $\mathbb{Q}b5!$

The king rejoins the party on the queenside.

39 h6 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 40 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 41 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 42 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}f8+$ 43 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}fg8$ 44 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}b3$

Now it's over. The black king will assist the promotion of the c-pawn.

45 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ a4 46 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 47 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 48 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 49 h7 $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 50 g4 a3 51 g5 $\mathbb{Q}b2$ 52 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 53 $\mathbb{Q}g2+$ $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 0-1

Summary

Castling is not so important in positions with a closed centre, as we saw in Chapter One. There will be no open files in the middle of the board for the opponent to attack down. Here Carlsen's king was beautifully positioned for the endgame that eventually occurred.

Castling on Opposite Sides of the Board

Some of the sharpest and most exciting struggles on the chessboard occur when the two players decide to castle on opposite wings to each other. Here a direct attack on the king is often the best strategy. A *pawnstorm*, or use of the pawns as the first wave of attack, is often required to blow open files and diagonals for the major pieces. Time can be of the utmost importance and unnecessarily delaying your attack can have grave consequences. *Hooks* for the foot soldiers to latch on to make pawn attacks even more effective. Examine the following game to see exactly what I mean.

Game 19
A.Hunt-M.Senff
World U12 Championship, Duisburg 1992
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ g6

The Sicilian Dragon can be one of the most exciting openings in chess if the players choose to castle on opposite flanks.

6 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 7 f3

The Yugoslav Attack which begins with this move is the most uncompromising and double-edged choice. These days I tend to prefer to steer the game into quieter waters, but at the time I was a naive (and hyper-aggressive) 12 year-old!

7...0-0 8 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}c4$

White completes his development and places the bishop on a dangerous diagonal. The drawback is that White will lose time as the bishop becomes a target for Black's queenside attack.

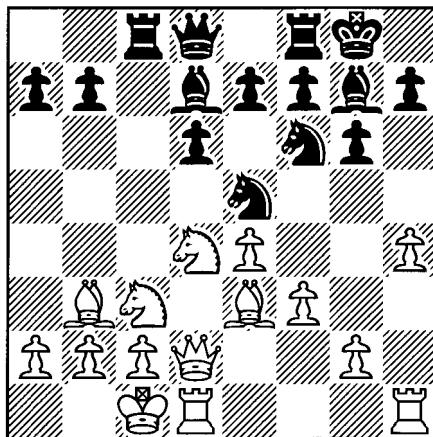
9 0-0-0 d5 is the other main line.

9... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 10 0-0-0

And the stage is set. Both sides have set their stall out for war!

10...♝c8 11 ♜b3

Necessary as 11 h4? ♔xd4 12 ♕xd4 ♔g4 wins a piece due to the overloaded white queen.

11...♝e5 12 h4

White makes his intentions clear. He wants to use the g6-pawn as a *hook* and the h-pawn as a *lever* to open the file for his rook.

12...h5

Black chooses to stop the h-pawn in its tracks, but at the same time weakens his king-side somewhat.

12...♝c4 13 ♛xc4 ♜xc4 14 h5 ♔xh5 15 g4 ♔f6 has been played many times at all levels. Then 16 ♜h6 ♔xe4 17 ♜e3 ♜xc3 18 bxc3 ♔f6 led to a highly unclear game in G.Kasparov-J.Piket, Tilburg 1989.

13 ♜h6

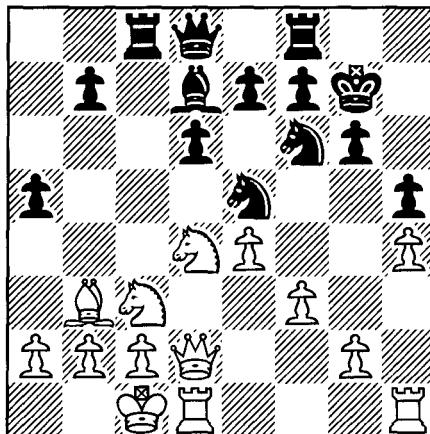
White chooses a direct method, going after the powerful 'Dragon bishop'. Although being quite highly-graded at the time, I wasn't fully aware of all the subtleties of this particular position.

13 ♜g5 is most frequently played, with the idea of exchanging off the other black defensive piece at the right time. Here 13...♜c5 14 ♛b1 b5 15 g4 hxg4 16 h5! has led to some fascinating battles.

13...a5

Black launches a pawn of his own! Note though that with the white queenside pawns still on their starting squares, it will be more difficult to get the attack going as there are no hooks to use to open up lines.

14 ♜xg7 ♛xg7



Exercise: How should White continue here?

Answer: 15 $\mathbb{Q}dg1$

White prepares the advance of his g-pawn.

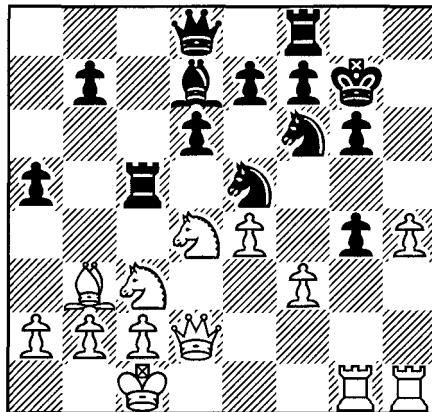
If you had suggested 15 g4?! immediately I would have been perhaps even happier. The direct attack is very much in keeping with the position. Critical is 15...hxg4 16 h5 $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ gxh5 18 $\mathbb{Q}g5+$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}f5+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 20 exf5 which led to a draw in J.Rodriguez-S.Arias Torio, Gijon 1999. I would be surprised if Black wasn't doing well here, but White's attack is in keeping with the spirit of the Yugoslav!

15... $\mathbb{Q}c5$

Black defends along the fifth rank, whilst also preparing to advance his b-pawn.

15... $\mathbb{Q}h8$?! had been played by the same player earlier in the tournament, a fact I was blissfully unaware of! White played the not very aggressive 16 $\mathbb{Q}de2$ (16 g4! would have been much stronger) 16...b5 17 a4 b4 18 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 19 exd5 $\mathbb{Q}e8$! and Black duly won in D.Keller-M.Senff Duisburg 1992.

16 g4 hxg4



Question: How should White proceed here?

Answer: 17 h5!

Of course! The g- and h-files must be opened at all costs.

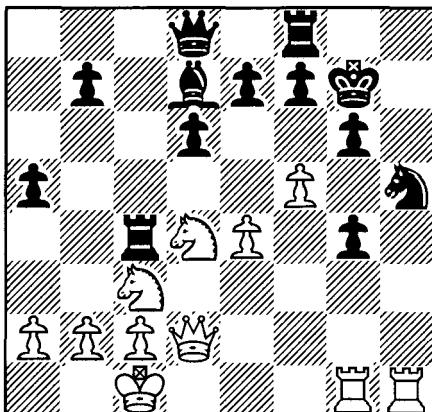
17...d5xh5

17...gxh5 would have been well met by 18 d4!, removing the rook from its defensive post: 18...c8 (after 18...xa4 19 d5+ g8 20 g5+ d6 21 xg6+ we can see the power of the bishop on b3!) 19 g5+ d6 20 d5+ is crushing.

18 f4 d5c4 19 d5xc4 c8xc4

Despite being two pawns down, White's attack is in full swing, whereas Black's is yet to get started. I would take White here any day of the week!

20 f5!



Exercise: Black needs to tread a fine line here. Can you find his most accurate defensive move?

20... $\mathbb{Q}h8?$!

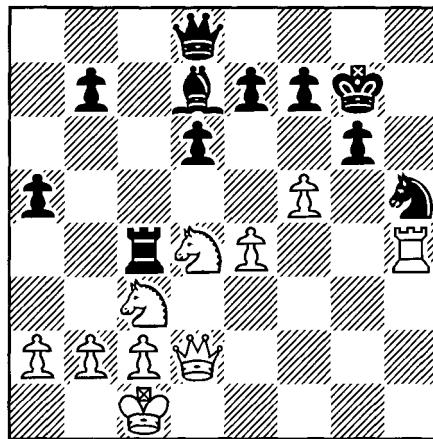
Answer: 20...e5! seems best. This defends the weak g5-square whilst gaining a tempo on the knight and 21 fxe6 leads nowhere after 21...fxe6 22 $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ e5!.

However, 20...b5? would also have been bad as 21 $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ gxh5 22 $\mathbb{W}g5+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ leads to mate.

21 $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}gh4$

White wins control of the all-important h-file with this move and is now probably winning.

22... $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$



Exercise: The tempting 24 $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ needs to be calculated. Does it win?

Answer: I don't think so. 24 $\mathbb{Q}xh5?$ seems to just lead to a perpetual as White has run out of attacking pieces after 24...gxh5 25 $\mathbb{W}g5+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}xh5+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 27 $\mathbb{W}g5+$.

24 $\mathbb{W}g5$

This creates the very powerful threat of $\mathbb{Q}xh5$.

24... $\mathbb{W}h8$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$

25...fxg6 26 $\mathbb{W}xe7+$ is curtains.

26 $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ f6 27 $\mathbb{W}h4$ 1-0

The h-file decides matters!

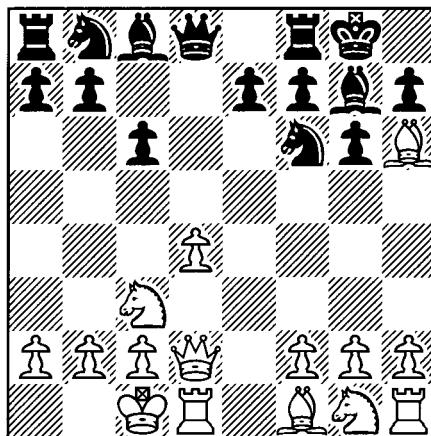
Summary

With just a couple of inaccurate moves Black got into trouble. This is one of the reasons

why the Sicilian Dragon could be considered risky from a strategic point of view and why the Yugoslav Attack is considered the most testing response. The hook on g6 means that Black must be very accurate in order to avoid the attack on the h-file crashing through. Be very careful about opposite side castling if you have already created a target on the side of the board where you will castle.

Attacking a Kingside Fianchetto

Game 20
R.Fischer-K.Robatsch
Varna Olympiad 1962



One of the hallmarks of Bobby Fischer's play was his direct, clear attacking style. Here we see another nice example of attacking a kingside fianchetto.

Exercise: What should White play here?

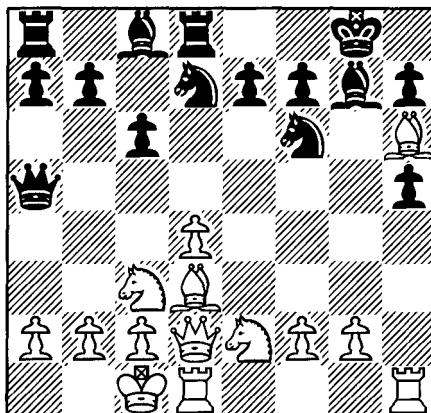
Answer: 9 h4!

Even with the bishop and knight still sleeping on the kingside White gets on with it! The plan once again is to lever the h-file open with h4-h5.

9...♝a5 10 h5! gxh5

10...♞xh5 11 ♞xg7 ♛xg7 12 ♜e2 ♝f6 13 ♜h6+ ♔g8 14 ♝f3 is a lovely example of the white pieces coming alive on the kingside; ♝f3-g5 spells curtains for Black.

11 ♜d3 ♝bd7 12 ♜ge2 ♜d8



Exercise: Now that the minor pieces have been developed, it is time to continue the attack, but how?

Answer: 13 g4!!

No need to mess about. This is straight to the point.

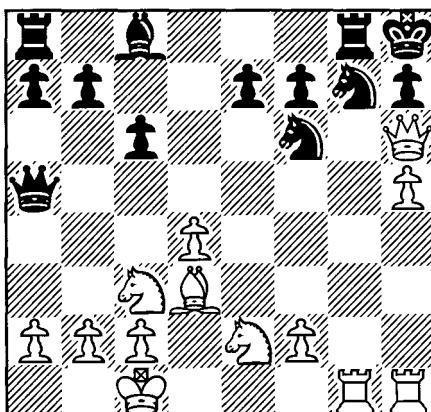
13...h5

13... $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ 14 $\mathbb{R}dg1$! is devastating. All the white pieces are in the game and Black's queenside play hasn't even started!

14 gxh5 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 15 $\mathbb{R}dg1$

The white attack almost plays itself!

15... $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}xg7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 17 $\mathbb{W}h6$ $\mathbb{R}g8$



Exercise: Get the rook on h1 into the attack as fast as you can!

Answer: 18 ♜g5!

Gaining a tempo for doubling the rooks due to the attack on the black queen.

18...♜d8 19 ♜hg1 ♜xf5 20 ♜xf5 1-0

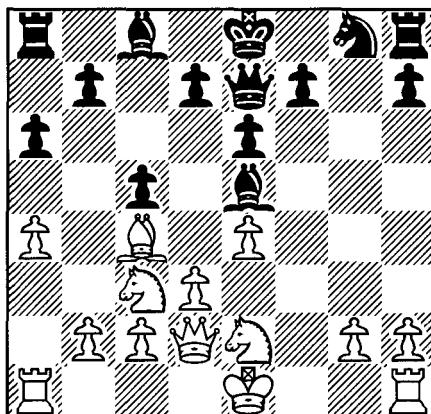
Summary

A kingside fianchetto can be a dangerous strategy in opposite side castling situations! The attacking plan of ♜d2 and ♜h6 to swap off the bishop followed by the h4-h5 push is really effective. Don't say I didn't warn you if you want to allow it as Black!

More on Hooks and Levers

The Bunratty tournament in Ireland is one of the strongest weekend tournaments in the British Isles and great fun to play in. In this event we find another example of the drawback of the hook. Even though Black hasn't castled yet, White will soon find himself in trouble, although the fact that Black hasn't castled will make the situation more complicated as his rook can't participate in the attack.

Game 21
P.Cafolla-S.Williams
Bunratty 2011



13 0-0-0?

I guess White didn't believe that Black could get to his king with so few pieces developed. However, one of the drawbacks with queenside castling in general is that the a2- and a1-squares are not defended by the king and are therefore that bit weaker compared to h2 and h1, which are defended when White castles kingside.

Exercise: Simon Williams rarely misses the opportunity to attack when he can. How does he get the ball rolling here?

Answer: 13...b5!

Opening a queenside file due to the hook on a4.

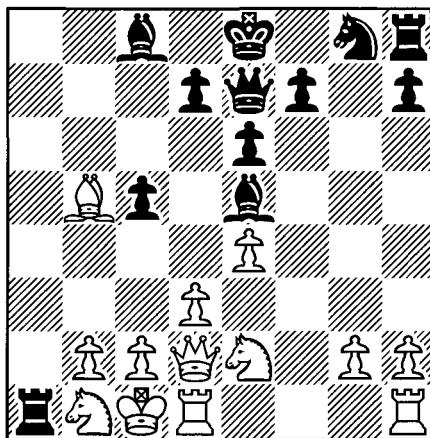
14 axb5?!

I would have preferred to have kept the a-file closed with 14 ♜b3 when Black should probably keep things flexible and get some more pieces out. After 14...♝f6 15 ♛b1 I think Black can afford to play 15...♜g8, leaving his king in the middle, as he has good control of the central squares and there is no obvious way for White to open things up.

14...axb5 15 ♜xb5 ♜a1+

Black drives the white knight back to a passive square.

16 ♜b1



Question: White has closed the door for the moment. How can Black keep the attack going?

16...♝g7!

Williams is very resourceful when it comes to finding ways to attack and a study of his games will definitely improve your attacking chess! Here he reroutes the bishop to the diagonal where the king is trapped and threatens ...♝h6 followed by ...e6-e5 when the knight blocks.

17 e5?!

White gives back the pawn and perhaps believes that he will find some attacking chances of his own by opening the e-file. However, the Sicilian pawn structures (in this case a Kan/Taimanov structure with pawns f7-e6-d7) are remarkably resilient and can stand up to a lot of pressure if necessary.

17...♝xe5 18 c3

White gives his king some air and blocks the long diagonal.

18...♝f6

18... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 20 $\mathbb{W}e1$ was also certainly a possibility.

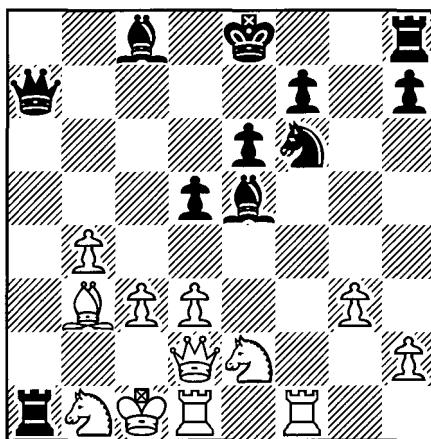
19 g3 c4?!

A square clearance sacrifice that seems unnecessary. Following the basic principles of development and centralization would have been better: 19... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}hf1$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ and Black stands well.

20 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{W}c5$ 21 b4

21 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $fxe6$ 22 d4 is an interesting tactical shot, but it seems that after 22... $\mathbb{W}b5$ 23 $dxe5$ $\mathbb{Q}e4!$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{W}xe5$ Black is still doing well (24... $\mathbb{Q}f2?$ allows 25 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ with a double attack on the queen and knight).

21... $\mathbb{W}a7$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}hf1$ d5 23 $\mathbb{Q}b3$



The situation remains tense. As I mentioned above, one of the drawbacks of not castling is that the rook on h8 can't join in the game and here, because the g-pawn has gone, castling is unlikely.

Question: If we forget about the rook for the moment, can you find another way for Black to get his remaining pieces going?

Answer: 23... $\mathbb{Q}g4!$

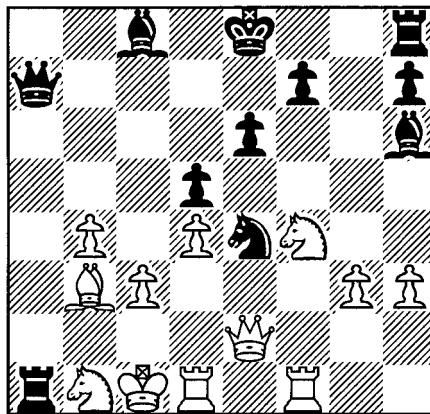
Threatening ... $\mathbb{Q}e3$ whilst allowing the dark-squared bishop the opportunity to retreat along the long diagonal.

24 d4 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 25 h3?

I never find myself comfortable whilst in a pin and here White should have taken the opportunity to remove it with 25 $\mathbb{Q}b2$. As it is, the threat of ... $\mathbb{W}a3+$ hangs above White's head like the Sword of Damocles.

25... $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 27 $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$

Black's position has certainly improved. 28... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ and 28... $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ are threatened and White is now in two pins!



28 ♕f3?

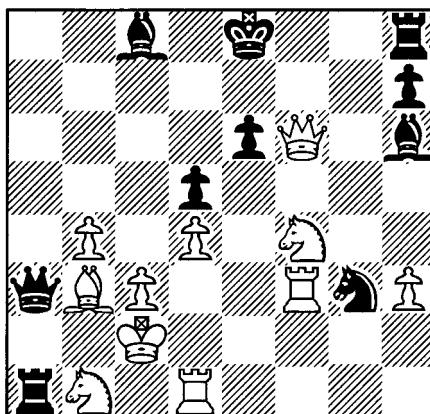
This loses due to an overloading trick. Relatively best was 28 ♔b2 0-0 (28...♘xg3 29 ♔e5 is unclear).

28...♘xg3 29 ♔e5 f6!

A very nice move. Black lures the enemy queen to a vulnerable square.

30 ♔xf6 ♘a3+ 31 ♔c2

31 ♔d2 ♘e4+ shows the point of Black's 29th.



Exercise: Can you finish White off here?

Answer: 31...♖a2+! 32 ♔xa2 ♘xa2+ 33 ♔d3

33 ♔c1 ♘e2 is mate.

33...♖a6+ 34 c4 ♘xc4+ 0-1

White resigned as 35 ♔c3 ♘e4 is mate. A really good fight.

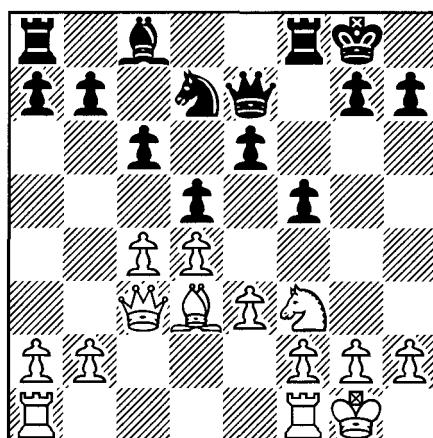
Summary

White found himself on the back foot following his mistake on the 12th move, which was castling into a 'lever' (the ...b7-b5 pawn break) The situation was complicated due to the position of the black king (and the resulting lack of help from his king's rook), but White didn't extract himself from the pin along the first rank in time and ultimately paid the price.

Same Side Castling: The Pawnstorm

One is ill-advised to start a same side pawnstorm if the opponent has the ability to open the centre quickly. Watch how Alexander Alekhine dealt with such a faulty strategy.

*Game 22
A.Alekhine-G.Maroczy
Karlsbad 1923*



12 $\mathbb{Q}ac1$

The position has arisen from a Queen's Gambit Declined and Black has employed a Stonewall pawn set-up (f5-e6-d5-c6) to control the centre. White is better here, due to the passive nature of the bishop on c8 and the fact that the black pawns limit its scope. Moreover, here Black loses patience and embarks on a faulty plan:

12...g5?

12... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ followed by connecting the rooks is a much better plan.

Exercise: Black dreams of pushing the knight on f3 away, before swinging the rook and the queen to the h-file. How should White react to this?

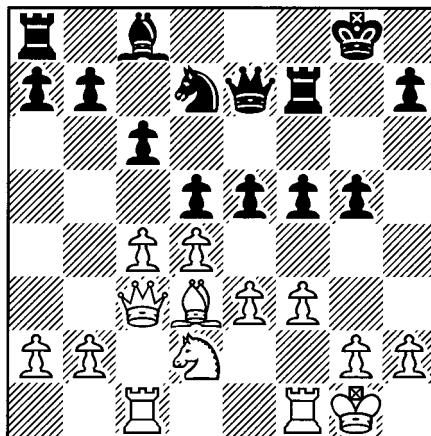
Answer: 13 $\mathbb{Q}d2!$

A great move! White's plan, which is typical when the opponent carries out a flank attack, is to counter in the centre of the board. By retreating the knight, White will play f2-f3 and e3-e4, opening lines towards the black king. He also removes the knight from a square where it would have been a target for the ...g5-g4 push.

13... $\mathbb{E}f7$

13...g4 would have been met by 14 f3! $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 15 $\mathbb{E}ce1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 16 fxg4 fxg4 when 17 e4! would leave White with a clear advantage.

14 f3 e5?



Exercise: Black continues to play boldly, but due to the better development of his pieces, with accurate play White can gain a clear advantage. Can you see how to do this?

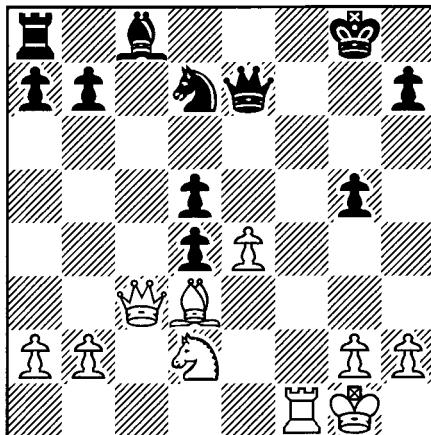
Answer: 15 cxd5 cxd5 16 e4!

After this move Black's position falls apart with alarming speed.

16...fxe4

Keeping lines closed with something like 16... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 17 dxе5 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ is necessary, although Black remains in big trouble as he has a pawn less.

17 fxe4 $\mathbb{E}xf1+$ 18 $\mathbb{E}xf1$ exd4



Exercise: If White makes the obvious recapture, Black can get the queens off with 19...Qc5. Can you find a stronger way to play?

Answer: 19 ♕c7!

Absolutely crushing! This ties down the knight on d7 and the black queen is shackled to defending the back rank. The rest is easy.

19...♝g7 20 ♜f5 dxе4 21 ♜xe4 ♕b4 22 ♜xg5+ 1-0

The g5-pawn, which was designed to be used as an attacking weapon, falls and the black king is doomed.

Summary

The main reason that Black's strategy didn't work in this game was down to the fact that the centre wasn't closed and White was able to open it rapidly. As a side issue, Black's development was also lagging which meant that once files became open he was unable to defend his king in an adequate manner. Be very careful before employing a strategy such as the kingside pawnstorm!

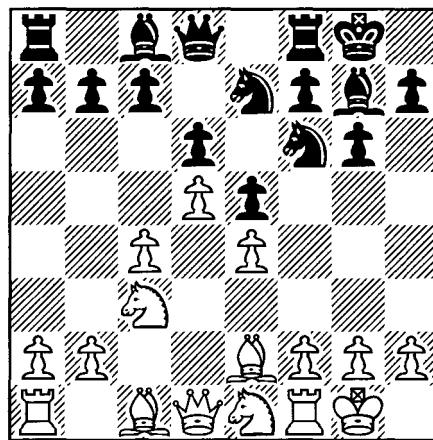
Closed Centres make Flank Attacks more effective

With a closed centre the kingside pawn-storm becomes a much more reasonable strategy, which is logical as play is directed towards the flanks in such situations. This is most markedly shown in the King's Indian Defence, where often White employs a queenside attack and Black a kingside attack. The following is a modern classic in this particular opening and one of the games that made me take up the opening!

Game 23
J.Piket-G.Kasparov
Tilburg 1989
King's Indian Defence

1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ g6 3 c4 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 0-0 5 e4 d6 6 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ e5 7 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 8 d5

White chooses to enter the most principled line, grabbing space and driving the knight away. He also closes the centre and therefore both sides should look to play on the flanks.



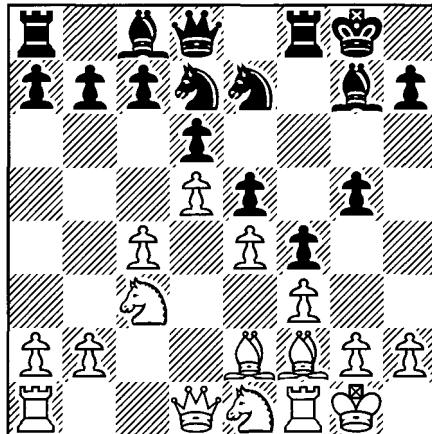
Exercise: White looks to reroute his knight to the d3-square, where it will be used to support the c4-c5 advance. How should Black react here?

Answer: 9... d7

For a King's Indian player this idea comes very naturally, though the choice of square is interesting. On d7 the knight obstructs the bishop, but also overprotects the c5-square. The main point behind the move is to start kingside action though.

10 ♠e3 f5 11 f3 f4 12 ♠f2 g5

Black must use his pawns in this instance as the first wave of attack, as there are many pieces protecting the white king.



13 b4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$

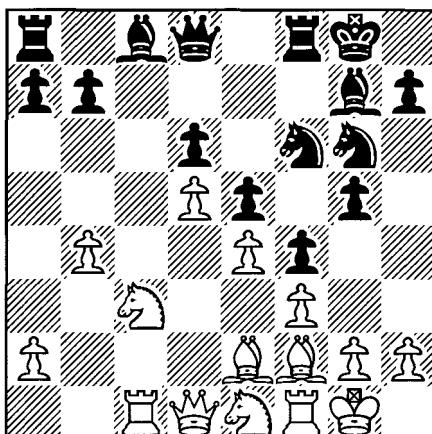
13...h5, of course, also suggests itself and is perfectly reasonable.

13...b6? is a move I have seen quite a lot in this sort of position, but it doesn't help and only weakens the queenside. The point is that after something like 14 $\mathbb{E}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ the break 15 c5 will happen anyway and the light squares will become a problem for Black. Don't touch pawns on the side of the board where you are weakest!

14 c5 $\mathbb{Q}g6$

Both sides are playing very naturally, developing their attacks on the flanks.

15 cxd6 cxd6 16 $\mathbb{E}c1$



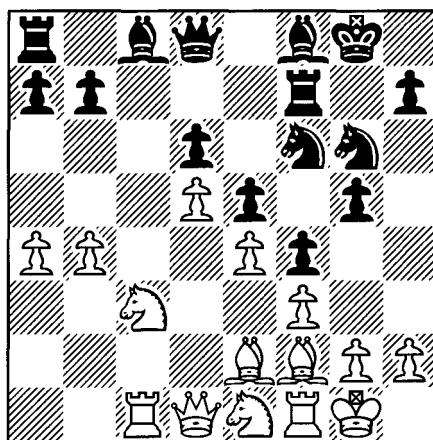
16... $\mathbb{E}f7$

Question: What is wrong with the logical 16...h5 here?

Answer: We must be aware of what our opponent is up to! White has weakened the queen-side and plans to invade on the c7 square. 16...h5?! 17 $\mathbb{Q}b5!$ almost forces a pawn sacrifice, as 17...b6 (17... $\mathbb{B}f7$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 19 a4 g4 was J.Piket-V.Spasov, Groningen 1989, when 20 $\mathbb{Q}b5!$ would have left Black in a perilous state) 18 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ is really bad for Black.

At an opportune moment White will play $\mathbb{Q}e6$ to exchange off the dangerous light-squared bishop. Instead with the text move Kasparov covers the sensitive c7-square.

17 a4 $\mathbb{Q}f8!$?



Question: This looks rather passive. What is the point?

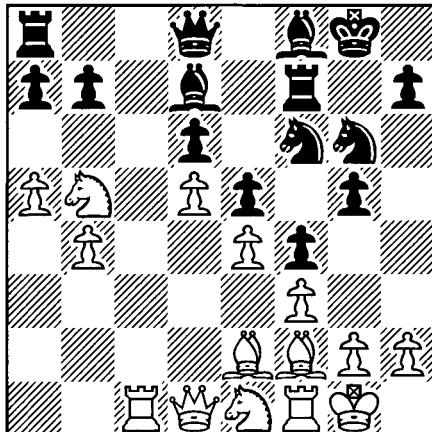
Answer: Black's move has two ideas behind it. Firstly, the bishop overprotects another weak square in the black camp (d6), but more importantly it allows the f7-rook to swing over on to either the h- or g-files where the white king is situated. Prior to this game 17...h5 had been the main move.

18 a5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$

Again Black chooses to wait, completing his development before undertaking any king-side action.

19 $\mathbb{Q}b5$

19 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ would have been a useful waiting move, giving the dark-squared bishop the g1-square.



Exercise: Multiple choice time! Choose between the following options:

- a) 19...a6, taking a time-out to save the a7-pawn and attack the knight.
- b) 19... $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ to remove the dangerous knight.
- c) 19...b6 to defend the pawn without giving the b6-square away.
- d) 19...g4, getting on with it.

Answer: 19...g4!

A difficult one to judge, but as is often the case in this opening Black must sacrifice on the queenside or face positional ruin.

a) 19...a6?! gives away the b6-square: 20 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ with all still to play for, though I prefer White, due to his ability to exchange Black's light-squared bishop at will with $\mathbb{Q}e6$.

b) 19... $\mathbb{Q}xb5$? would be a positional mistake: 20 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ and Black can kiss his kingside hopes goodbye as this bishop is really needed to sacrifice itself on h3 when necessary.

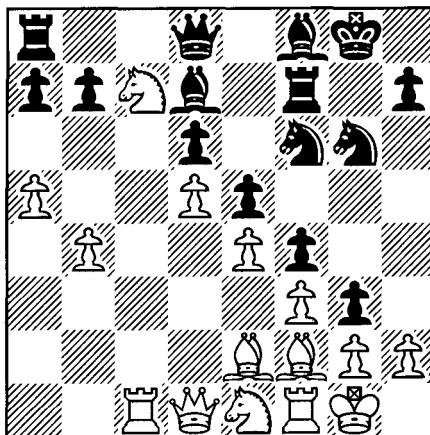
c) 19...b6 20 axb6 axb6 21 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ followed by doubling on the c-file would be unpleasant.

20 $\mathbb{Q}c7$!?

The tactical point is that 20 fxg4 allows 20... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$.

20 $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ was probably the critical test: 20...gxf3 (20...g3 runs into 21 $\mathbb{Q}b6$) 21 gxf3 (21 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{W}b8$! 'traps' the knight and Black will capture it next move) 21... $\mathbb{Q}h3$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}h1$! $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ with good compensation for the sacrificed exchange.

20...g3!



A pretty pawn chain!

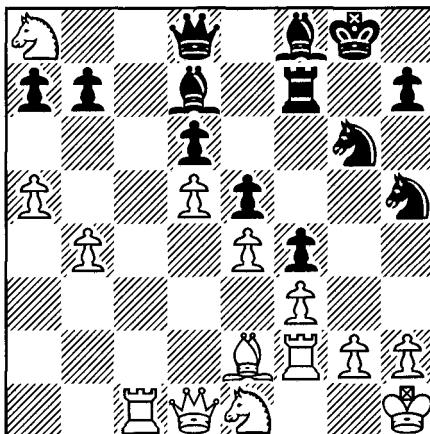
21 ♜xa8?

21 hxg3 fxg3 22 ♜xg3 ♜h5 was the idea, trying to use the dark squares as entry points for the knights and dark-squared bishop. However, things remain murky after 23 ♜f2 ♜gf4 24 ♜e6! ♜xe6 25 dxе6 ♜xe6 26 ♜c4.

21...♜h5 22 ♜h1

ChessBase gives this as the only move, but I'm not so convinced about this. After 22 ♜xa7 ♜h4 (22...gxh2+ 23 ♜xh2 ♜h4+ 24 ♜g1 ♜g3 looks very dangerous, but doesn't contain a threat other than to win the exchange; in the meantime White can get on with things on the queenside and after 25 ♜b6 ♜xf1 26 ♜xf1 he is simply a piece up) 23 h3 ♜xh3! (showing why we need the light-squared bishop!) 24 gxh3 ♜xh3 25 ♜f2! gxf2+ 26 ♜xf2 it's not clear that Black has more than a perpetual with 26...♜g3+ 27 ♜f1 ♜h3+ 28 ♜f2.

22...gxе2 23 ♜xf2



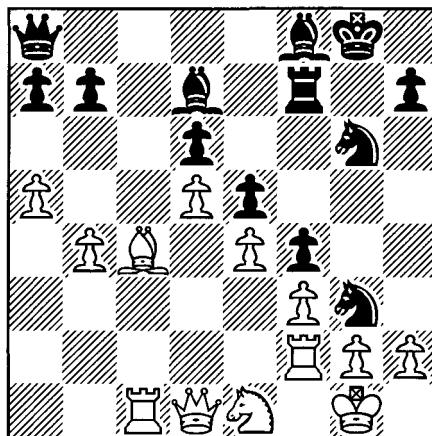
Exercise: It seems as though the worst is over for Piket, as the white king sits comfortably behind his pawn shield. Kasparov has other ideas though! What did he play?

Answer: 23... $\mathbb{Q}g3+$! 24 $\mathbb{Q}g1$!

Acceptance of the piece sacrifice with 24 hxg3 leads to a pretty mate: 24...fxg3 25 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{W}h4$! 26 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{W}h2+$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ and ... $\mathbb{W}h1$ is unstoppable.

24... $\mathbb{W}xa8$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}c4$

Accepting the piece still leads to the same problem: 25 hxg3 fxg3 26 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$! preventing White from breaking with f3-f4 again nicely demonstrates how a weak colour complex (the dark squares here) can be fatal; ... $\mathbb{W}d8-h4-h2$ can only be avoided at huge material loss.



Exercise: We have talked about the weakness of the dark squares for White. Can you see a way to exploit this?

Answer: 25...a6!

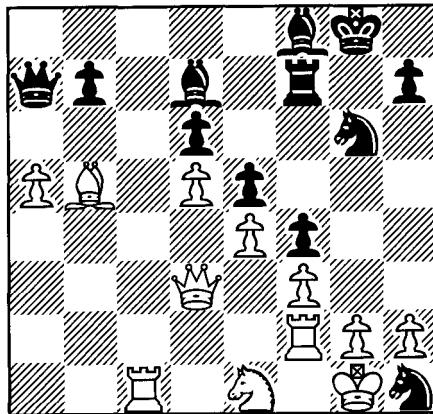
The queen heads for the a7-g1 diagonal.

26 $\mathbb{W}d3?!$

26 $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{W}a7$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ would have been relatively best.

26... $\mathbb{W}a7$ 27 $b5$ $axb5$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}h1!$ 0-1 (see following diagram)

An imaginative game by Kasparov, who combined patience in the early middlegame with a pawnstorm followed by thematic piece sacrifices later on to try to get at the white king. Piket tried to keep the kingside files closed, but in the end, although the white king's pawn shield was still intact, the weakness of his dark squares decided the game.



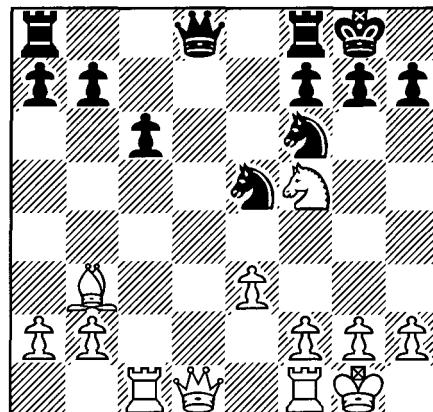
Summary

- 1) Same side pawnstorms should only be attempted if the centre can be kept closed.
- 2) Often the pawnstorm on its own will not be enough and piece sacrifices will be needed to soften the opponent's defences.

Using Your Pieces to Get to the King

Game 24
A.Alekhine-E.Lasker
Zurich 1934

We pick up this game after 17 moves, played by the eventual winner of the tournament. It is a nice example of using the pieces to probe for weaknesses on the kingside when a pawnstorm simply won't work. Notice the open centre.



17...♞b6?

Lasker fails to appreciate the danger to his king. The knight on f5 is going to be a real menace. Safer was 17...♝xd1 18 ♜fxd1 ♜fd8 19 ♖d6 ♜d7 with a slight advantage to White.

18 ♖d6! ♜ed7 19 ♜fd1 ♜ad8 20 ♜g3

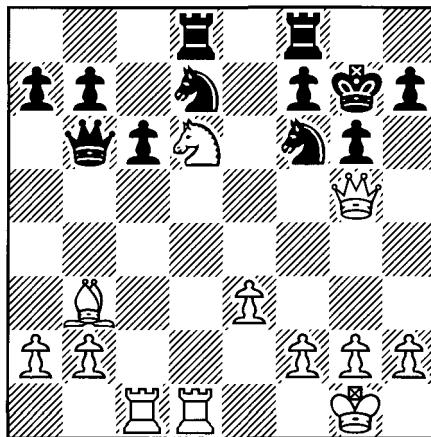
Forcing Black's next move, creating some kingside weaknesses.

20...g6 21 ♜g5 ♔h8?

More tenacious was 21...♜e4 22 ♜e7 gxf5 23 ♜xd7 ♜xd7 24 ♜xd7 ♜b5! when Black's pawn structure looks ugly, but his active knight provides some compensation.

22 ♜d6

The knight jumps from one dream square to another!

22...♝g7

Exercise: Having forced some concessions on the kingside, Alekhine now missed a very strong continuation. Can you find it?

23 e4

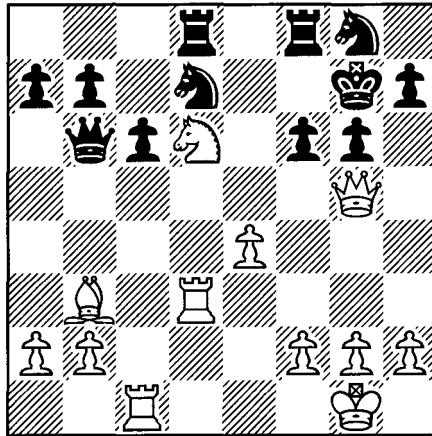
Answer: The rook lift 23 ♜c4! is very dangerous. The rook heads for f4 or h4 and Black has practically no useful moves. After something passive like 23...♝g8 24 ♜f4 ♜df6 25 ♜e5 he is virtually in zugzwang!

23...♝g8 24 ♜d3

I think I would have used the other rook with 24 ♜c3, as it is not doing much on the c-file, but I guess there is not much in it.

24...f6?

This loses immediately, but it's very difficult to suggest a decent alternative for Lasker. Perhaps 24...♜df6 is best.



Exercise: Can you find the pretty finish?

Answer: 25 ♜f5+ ♚h8 26 ♕xg6! 1-0

The queen punches a hole in the black kingside with devastating effect. Mate is inevitable after 26...hxg6 27 ♜h3+, so Black resigned.

Summary

When pawns cannot easily be used to attack the enemy's castled king, it is up to the player to use pieces to create weaknesses in the opponent's camp. Here Alekhine successfully did that using the combination of knight and queen, before a classic rook lift finished off the game.

Key Points

- 1) Leaving your king in the centre of the board carries a serious health warning. Get the king castled unless there is no way for the opponent to open the centre.
- 2) If you see a potential 'hook' after your opponent has castled, think seriously about castling on the opposite side of the board and playing for direct checkmate.
- 3) Against an enemy fianchetto look to remove the fianchettoed bishop, which will otherwise do a superb job of protecting the king.
- 4) Pawnstorms on the same side that you have castled on will normally only work if your opponent cannot open the centre.
- 5) In such situations it is often better to use the pieces to probe and provoke weaknesses around the opposition king.

Chapter Three

Decisive Development

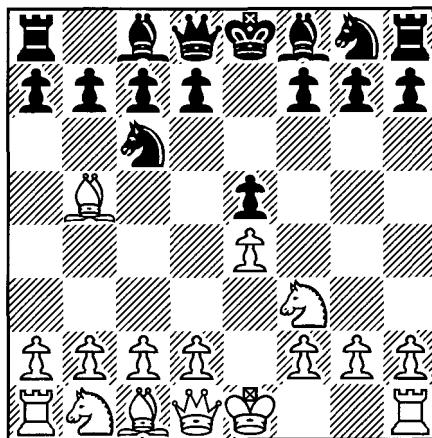
© 2018, 2020 by David Llada

To develop: “*to bring one’s pieces into play during the opening phase.*” – *The Oxford Companion to Chess*

Development usually relates to our pieces on the back rank and after taking some control of the centre of the board (with pawns), mobilizing these pieces is the next phase of classical opening strategy.

Develop With Tempo

1 e4 e5 2 ♜f3 ♜c6 3 ♜b5



The Spanish is considered a testing opening for Black for many reasons, but one of the simplest to understand is that White develops a piece whilst attacking an enemy unit (in this case applying some indirect pressure to the central e5-pawn by threatening the defender). The concept of developing with tempo forms the basis of effective, speedy development. Don't delay and don't move your pieces twice (or three, or four times) until everything is developed!

Falling behind in development in the opening is a very risky idea. It often happens due to one player moving a piece more than once, often to grab a pawn or two. Witness the following massacre as a warning shot.

Game 25
H.Bird-E.Lasker
Newcastle 1892
Danish Gambit

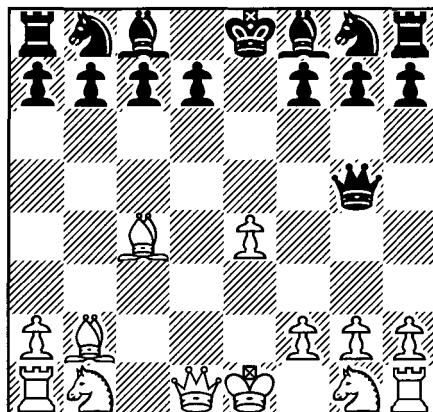
1 e4 e5 2 d4 exd4 3 c3 dxcc3 4 ♕c4

The Danish gambit was one of the favourite openings of my youth. White offers two pawns for a pair of magnificent bishops and a lead in development. The problem was hardly anybody took the second pawn!

4...cxb2 5 ♕xb2 ♔g5?

Oh dear. Black wants all of White's pawns! A terrible decision by Lasker, who in his prime was regarded as the strongest player of his generation. What possessed him to play this move I do not know.

5...d5! is Black's safest option, returning the pawn for development of his own: 6 ♜xd5 ♛f6 7 ♜xf7+ ♛xf7 8 ♜xd8 ♜b4+! 9 ♜d2 ♜xd2+ 10 ♜xd2 ♜e8 11 ♜gf3 ♜c6 has been played many times and is approximately equal, but not 11...♜xe4? 12 ♜e5+ ♜xe5 13 ♜xe5, winning an exchange.



Question: What should White do about the hanging pawn on g2?

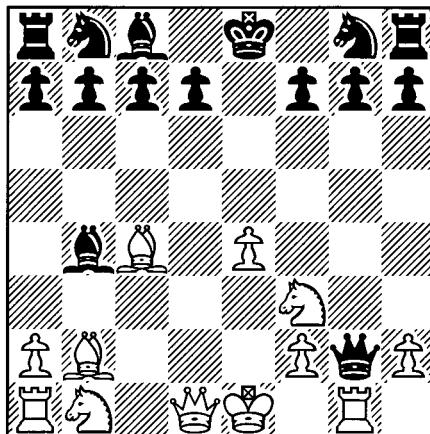
Answer: 6 ♘f3!

Ignore it, of course! White chooses instead to develop another minor piece *with tempo*.

6... ♕xg2 7 ♘g1

With tempo on the queen. A simple count says it all. White has four pieces (two bishops, knight and rook) developed, with open lines for the queen as well. Black has only developed his queen. Indeed, it is no surprise this game doesn't last much longer.

7... ♖b4+



Exercise: Make a brief comment on the following moves:

8 ♘e2, 8 ♘bd2, 8 ♘c3, and 8 ♖c3, and choose the best.

Answer: 8 ♘e2!

Perhaps it was this move that Black didn't consider. White keeps maximum lines open, which equals maximum firepower for his pieces.

8 ♘bd2 ♖xd2+ leaves White in a slightly awkward situation, as his pawn on f2, knight on f3 and rook on g1 are all slightly loose. 9 ♘e2! is still good for him though!

8 ♘c3 cannot be recommended as it blocks the dark-squared bishop in.

8 ♖c3? should not even be seriously considered, swapping off White's mighty bishop far too cheaply.

8... ♖h3 9 ♖xf7+

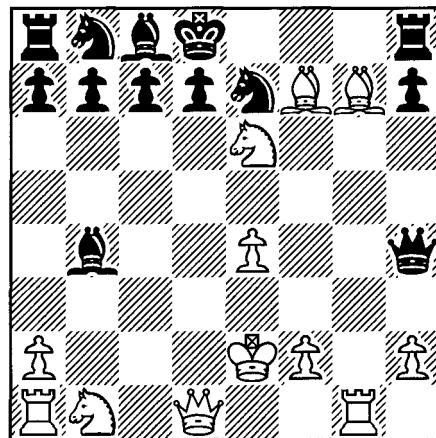
This trick again! Instead 9 ♘g5 allows 9... ♖h5+.

9... ♖d8

Other moves show the power of open lines: 9... ♖xf7 10 ♘g5+, 9... ♖e7 10 ♖xg7 and 9... ♖f8 10 ♖xg7+.

10 ♜xg7

I bet Black regretted taking that g2-pawn now. His position is completely hopeless.
10...♝e7 11 ♜g5! ♕h4 12 ♜e6 mate (1-0)



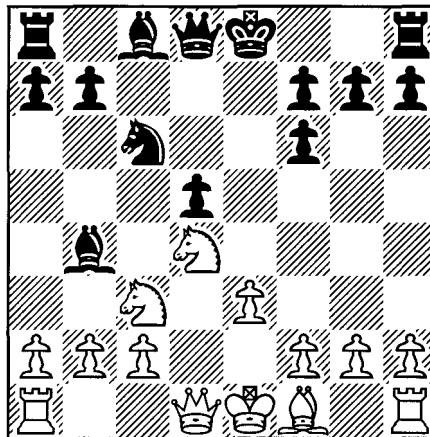
A pretty picture to finish. White didn't even want the black rook in the corner!

Summary

I cannot stress enough the importance (especially to juniors) of the perils of pawn grabbing in the opening as Lasker found out to his great cost.

Exploiting a Lead in Development

Having a lead in development is all very well and good, but it is just as important to realize that such an advantage is very much *short term*, as your opponent will probably get round to bringing their pieces out eventually! It is therefore vital that you are able to use this lead in development quickly when the opportunity arises. Take a look at the following game extract, taken from John Walker's book *Attacking the King*, where Black uses his development advantage to maximum effect.

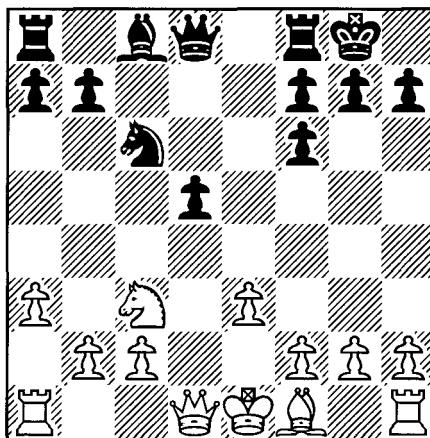


8 ♜de2?

White tries to stop Black doubling his queenside pawns, but at the same time obstructs his bishop and therefore makes castling more difficult.

8 ♜e2 0-0 9 0-0 is about equal.

8...0-0 9 a3 ♜xc3+ 10 ♜xc3



Exercise: Cast your mind back to the previous chapter and the section on attacking the uncastled king. What should Black play here?

Answer: 10...d4!

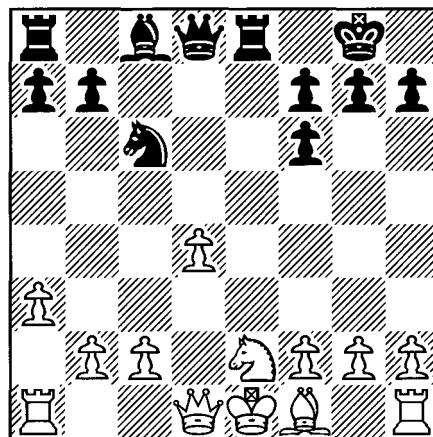
Opening up lines for an attack on the white monarch. Something slow like 10...♜e6 would allow White to develop his bishop and castle.

11 exd4

Sadly for White it is already too late to keep the e-file closed with 11 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $dxe3$ 12 $\mathbb{W}xd8$ as Black wins a pawn with 12... $exf2+$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{B}xd8$.

11... $\mathbb{B}e8+$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}e2?$

Grimly hanging on to his extra pawn, but 12 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ should again be preferred, as White just has time to put his king into safety after 12... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 13 0-0, since 13... $\mathbb{Q}xe2+$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ $\mathbb{W}xd1$ 15 $\mathbb{B}axd1$ $\mathbb{B}xe2$ allows back rank mate with 16 $\mathbb{B}d8+$.



Exercise: Find a good way to continue your development!

Answer: 12... $\mathbb{W}b6$

Developing with tempo again, in this case attacking b2. Instead the tempting and obvious 12... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ allows White to exchange queens with 13 c3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 14 $\mathbb{W}xd8$ $\mathbb{B}xd8$ when Black's advantage is at a minimum.

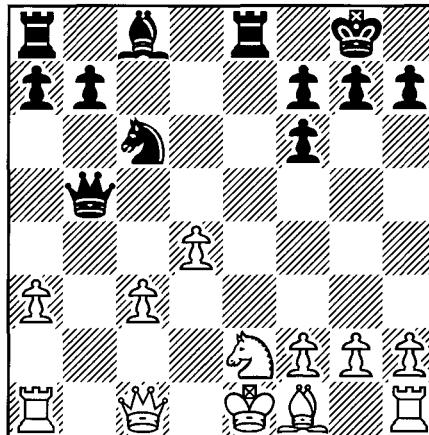
13 c3

White reinforces the central pawn.

13 $\mathbb{B}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ is now crushing as after 14 c3 $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 16 $\mathbb{B}a1$ $\mathbb{B}ad8$ 17 $\mathbb{W}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ Black wins a piece.

13... $\mathbb{W}xb2$ 14 $\mathbb{W}c1$ $\mathbb{W}b5$

Black has the attack and White is lagging behind in development, so why exchange the most powerful attacking piece?



Exercise: A critical moment in the game has arisen.
White is in huge trouble. What is his best move here?

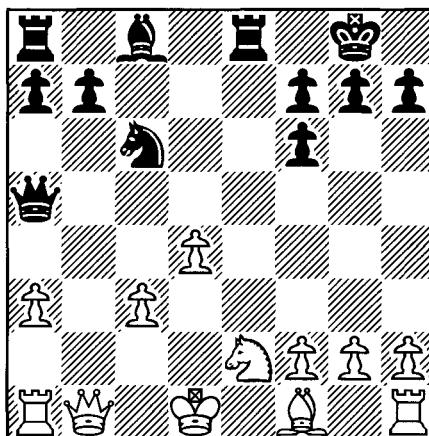
15 ♕b1?

Leaving himself pinned down the e-file is fatal.

Answer: 15 f3! was best, looking to shelter the king on f2 and escape the pin, although, of course, Black's position is still preferable.

15...♕a5 16 ♔d1

16 ♕b2 ♗xd4! is virtually all over.



Exercise: A nice easy one. Develop with tempo please!

Answer: 16...♝f5

Activating the bishop whilst hitting the white queen and not forgetting about the rook in the corner either.

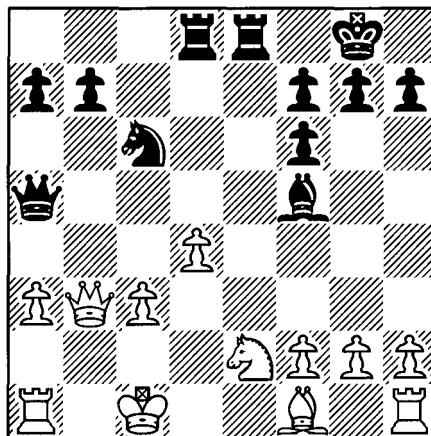
17 ♜b3

17 ♜xb7 ♜a4+ 18 ♔e1 ♜ab8 19 ♜c7 ♜c2 makes for a sad picture for White.

17...♜ad8!

Simple chess! Black completes his development and maximises his firepower down the central files.

18 ♔c1



Exercise: We have five pieces developed to White's two. That should be more than enough to bring about a swift finish. Can you find a way?

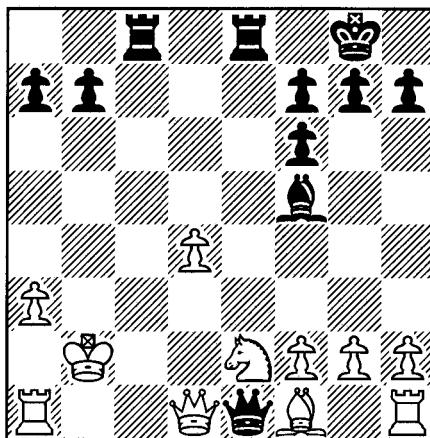
Answer: 18...♞xd4!

Crushing. The knight gives its life to open the c-file and White simply cannot defend.

19 cxd4

19 ♞xd4 ♜xd4! 20 cxd4 ♜e1+ 21 ♔b2 ♜d2+ 22 ♜c2 ♜xc2 is mate.

19...♜e1+ 20 ♜d1 ♜c8+ 21 ♔b2



Question: How does Black finish a lovely game?

Answer: 21... $\mathbb{Q}xe2+$!

Destroying the defender of the c3-square.

22 $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}c3+$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}a2$ $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}b3+$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}a1$ $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ 0-1

Summary

After a couple of inaccuracies by White, Black showed perfectly how a lead in development can be exploited. By constantly creating threats, there was no time for the white king to get out of the centre. Remember to develop with tempo and look to exploit your lead in development as quickly as possible!

In 1857 Paul Morphy played a 24 game blindfold match against John William Schulten, which he won 23-1! The following game shows Morphy at his best, exploiting his lead in development in aggressive and decisive style.

Game 26
J.Schulten-P.Morphy
New York (blindfold) 1857
King's Gambit

1 e4 e5 2 f4 d5

The Falkbeer Countergambit, an aggressive response to the King's Gambit.

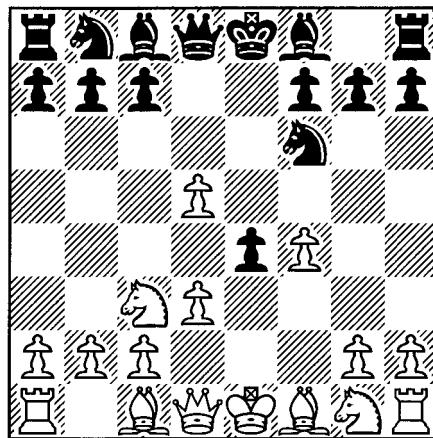
3 exd5

Of course, not 3 $fxe5??$ $\mathbb{Q}h4+$ which is already winning for Black.

3...e4

Immediately disrupting the development of White's king's knight.

4 ♜c3 ♜f6 5 d3



Question: What is the best way for Black to continue here?

Answer: 5...♝b4!

Developing the bishop, pinning the knight and preparing to castle.

Winning the pawn back with 5...exd3 6 ♜xd3 ♜xd5 allows 7 ♜b5+ c6 8 ♜xd5! cxb5 9 ♜xd8+ ♜xd8 with a clear advantage to White.

6 ♜d2

6 dxe4 has scored poorly for White in practice: for example, 6...♜xe4 7 ♜d4 ♜xc3+ 8 bxc3 0-0 9 ♜f3 ♜e8 with good compensation for the pawn, C.Von Jaenisch-H.Staunton, London 1851.

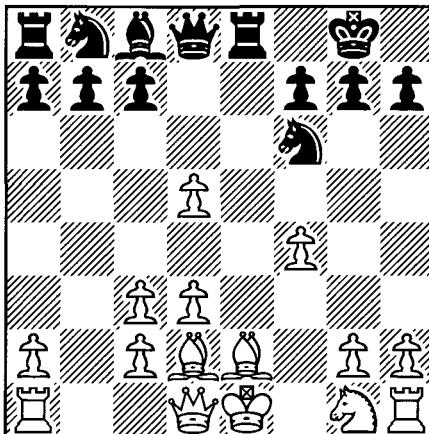
6...e3!?

Black sacrifices a second pawn in order to open the e-file.

7 ♜xe3 0-0 8 ♜d2 ♜xc3 9 bxc3

9 ♜xc3 has also been tried: 9...♜xd5 10 ♜d2 (10 ♜d2?! ♜e8+ 11 ♜e2 ♜c6 12 c3 was L.Toth-L.Vass, Hungarian League 1999, and now 12...♜f5 would have given Black a clear advantage; here 12 ♜f3 ♜e7! keeps the white king in the centre) 10...♜e8+ 11 ♜e2 and now the novelty 11...♜g4!? gives Black good play, such as after 12 0-0-0 ♜xc3 13 bxc3 ♜e6 14 c4 ♜d6 with pressure on the queenside.

9...♜e8+ 10 ♜e2



Exercise: What's best for Black here?

Answer: 10...Bg4

Again we see how the development of the black pieces come with tempo. This time there is no direct threat, but the move continues to make the development of the g1-knight awkward.

11 c4!

A good response by White, slowing down Morphy's attack by cementing the centre.

Question: How can we continue to play energetically here?

Answer: 11...c6!

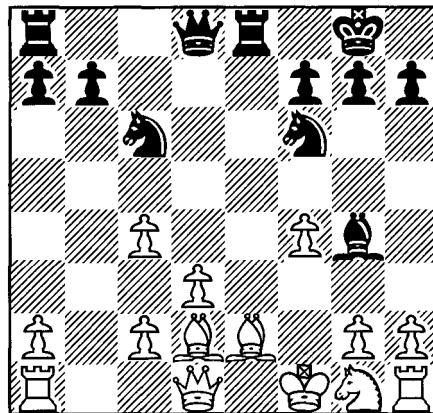
A great move, preparing the development of the black knight to its most aggressive square and the introduction of the queen's rook into the game.

12 dxc6?

Too co-operative. This mistake was made again almost 150 years later as we will see in the note to Black's 14th!

12 h3 was called for, giving back the pawn to complete development: 12...Qxe2 13 Qxe2 cxd5 14 cxd5 Qxd5 15 0-0 Nc6 with an approximately equal game.

12...Nc6 13 f1



Exercise: White unpins himself and gets ready to exchange the bishops. What should Black do about this?

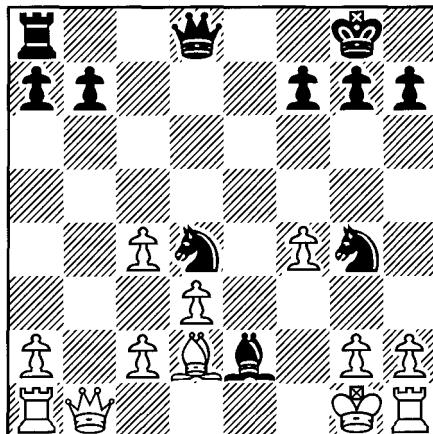
Answer: 13...♝xe2!

Anyone familiar with Morphy's famous game against the Duke of Brunswick and Count Isouard in 1856 (which we will see again in Chapter Six) should know this motif!

14 ♝xe2 ♞d4

Here White resigned in P.Vikar-V.Kovar, Havlickur 2005, but Schulten decided to prolong the agony.

15 ♜b1 ♞xe2+ 16 ♔f2 ♞g4+ 17 ♔g1



Exercise: Can you find Morphy's beautiful finish?

Answer: 17... $\mathbb{Q}f3+!!$ 18 $\mathbf{gxf3}$ $\mathbb{W}d4+$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{W}f2+$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{W}xf3+$ 0-1

White resigned, as 21 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}f5+$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{W}h5$ is mate.

Summary

Power chess from Morphy! Every developing move came with a threat and just one mistake on move 12 cost White the game.

Rudolf Spielmann (1883-1942) was another great attacking chess player, very much of the romantic school of chess thinking. Another *Move by Move* author, Neil McDonald, even wrote a whole book about him! Here we see another great example of how to exploit a lead in development, even at the cost of material.

Game 27
E.Grünfeld-R.Spielmann
 Sopron 1934
Grünfeld Defence

1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 c4 g6 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ d5

A Grünfeld Defence, played against Mr Grünfeld himself! Indeed, Ernst Grünfeld popularized this opening at international level in Vienna 1922, where he defeated Alexander Alekhine with it and hence it bears his name. It remains one of the most popular and dynamic ways to counter 1 d4 to this day.

4 e3

A solid choice, reinforcing the centre.

4... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 0-0 6 $\mathbb{Q}d2$

A slightly strange developing move, as the bishop doesn't appear to be any better on d2 than it is on c1.

6...c6

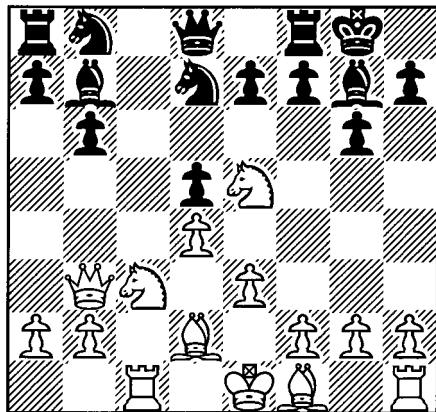
Another solid move.

6...c5 is the typical Grünfeld pawn break: 7 dx5 $\mathbb{Q}a6$ (7... $\mathbb{W}a5$ would be the normal way to win the pawn back, but now we can see the point of the bishop on d2: 8 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ just wins a pawn) 8 cxd5 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ a6 10 a4 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 11 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}c8$ with decent compensation for the pawn in B.Ivkov-J.Timman, Skopje 1976.

7 $\mathbb{W}b3$ b6 8 cxd5 cxd5 9 $\mathbb{Q}c1$

It is interesting to see how White keeps his bishop on f1 for the moment, as it is not clear what the best square for it is. Is it e2, d3, b5 or even a6? Grünfeld awaits developments before making a decision. This is why it is generally considered that knights should be developed before bishops. Their best squares are nearly always c3 and f3 (for White), and c6 and f6 (for Black).

9... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}fd7$



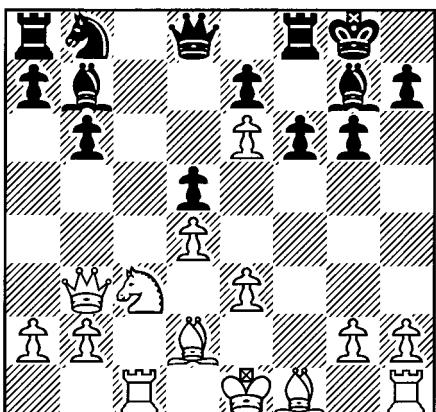
Question: That looks a bit weird! Why has Black decided to put that knight on d7 and not the undeveloped one on b8?

Answer: 10... $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 11 f4! is White's plan. Now the e5-knight becomes hard to shift. In fact, Spielmann had reached this position earlier in the same year. Play continued 11... $\mathbb{E}c8$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 13 fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{E}xc1+$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ dx $e4$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ e6 17 0-0 and a draw was agreed a few moves later in R.Rey Ardid-R.Spielmann, Sitges 1934.

Instead 10... $\mathbb{Q}c6$?! 11 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}a6$! controls the c-file and gives White a small advantage. We can see how useful it was to wait with the bishop in this variation!

11 $\mathbb{Q}xd7$

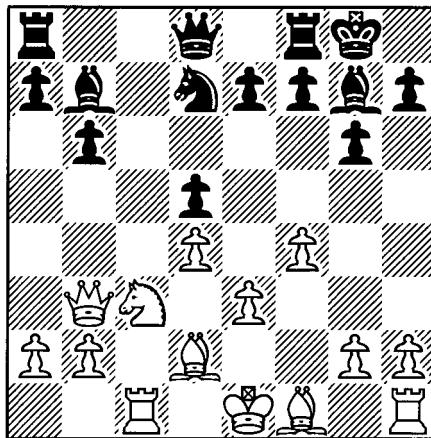
11 f4 still has to be considered. After 11... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ (the immediate 11...f6? allows the shot 12 $\mathbb{Q}xg6$! hx $g6$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ – 13... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 14 $\mathbb{W}xd5+$ picks up the rook – 14 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ with a winning position for White) 12 fxe5 f6! (trying to blow up the centre whilst the enemy king is still there) 13 e6 the situation looks a little tricky for Black.



Exercise: The e6-pawn acts as a thorn in Black's side and the knight cannot be developed to c6 without dropping the d5-pawn. What can we do about this?

Answer: 13...f5! (looking to catch the king in the centre) 14 ♜e2 f4! 15 0-0 ♜c6 with good counterplay for Black as the d4-pawn is a target.

11...♝xd7 12 f4



White looks to clamp down on the ...e7-e5 break.

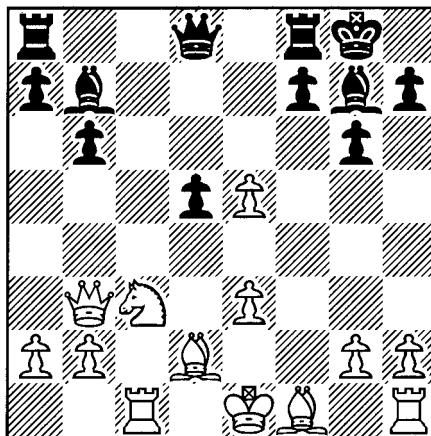
Question: Is there an effective plan for Black here?

Answer: 12...e5!

From a practical point of view this is absolutely the right idea, even though my computer thinks White can defend against this move. Black looks to rip open central lines as White is still two moves away from castling.

Something lethargic like 12...♝c8 13 ♜d3 ♜f6 14 0-0 would give White a small edge. Black has no pawn breaks and so the middlegame will be more difficult for him to play.

13 fxe5 ♜xe5 14 dx e5



Exercise: Open lines means maximum firepower for the pieces.

What is better than the automatic recapture 14... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$?

Answer: 14...d4!

Opening the a8-h1 diagonal for the bishop and the d-file for the queen.

15 $\mathbb{Q}d1$!?

15 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ may have been a better way to defend, trying to force the issue of what to do with the d4-pawn: 15... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 16 exd4 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{W}xd4$ with definite compensation, although without the dark-squared bishop the situation is not so dangerous for White.

15... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 16 e4

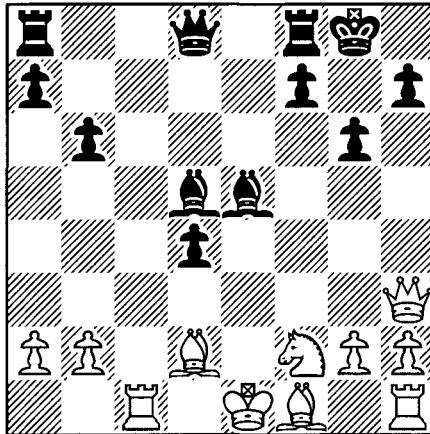
White gives back a pawn in order to try and organize his defences.

16... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$

It is clear that the sacrifice has been successful. Black has a beautiful pair of bishops on the open board and two pawns for the piece.

18 $\mathbb{W}h3$

White wants to develop his f1-bishop without dropping the pawn. Personally I would have preferred to get my bishop out, even at the cost of g2: 18 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$, though Black's position is still for choice here.



Exercise: We must be fast! Our lead in development isn't going to last long as White looks to get castled. Can you find a way to keep the king in the centre?

Answer: 18...♝e7 19 ♜e2 d3!

Very imaginative! Black uses typical pressure along the e-file to keep the king stuck in the centre.

Not 19...♜fe8? 20 0-0 and White is safe!

20 ♜xd3

20 ♜xd3 ♜xg2 21 ♜g1 ♜b7 is similar to the note to White's 18th, above.

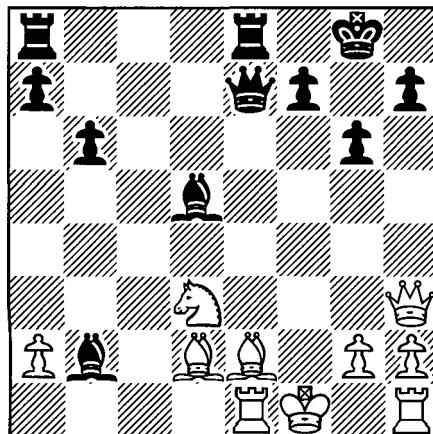
20...♜fe8! 21 ♔f1?

White cracks under pressure, but this is unsurprising thanks to Spielmann's energetic play.

21 0-0 ♜d4+ is the main point, when the e2-bishop will fall. Instead 21 ♜e3! was the best defence when one sample line runs 21...♜h4+ 22 g3 ♜xg3+ 23 ♜xg3 ♜xg3+ 24 hxg3 ♜xh1 25 ♜f2 ♜d5 with all still to play for in the endgame.

21...♜xb2 22 ♜e1

White's king is boxed in by his own pieces.

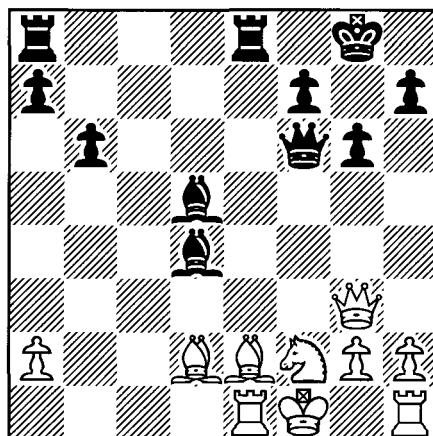


Question: How can Black exploit this?

Answer: 22... $\mathbb{Q}f6+$! 23 $\mathbb{Q}f2$

23 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $g5$ would regain the sacrificed piece with interest, while 23 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}d4+$ is terminal.

23... $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}g3$



Exercise: White is completely tied up and Black can conclude the game. Can you see how?

24... $\mathbb{Q}e4?$

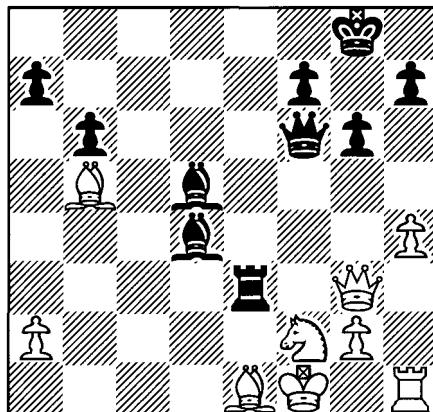
Answer: 24... $\mathbb{Q}e4!$ was the way forward: 25 $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ (25 $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{Q}c4+$ wins the

white queen) 25... $\mathbb{Q}c4$ and White is trussed up like a turkey with 26... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ coming.

25 h4?

White misses his chance to unravel a bit. 25 $\mathbb{Q}c1!$, defending c4 and preparing $\mathbb{Q}f3$, offers good chances to resist.

25... $\mathbb{Q}ae8$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe1+$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ $\mathbb{Q}e3$



Now it's hopeless for White. The black pieces are just too well co-ordinated.

28 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe1!$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2+$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}f3+$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3+$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}d8+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 0-1

Summary

A very powerful attacking game from Spielmann, who recognized with 12...e5! that he could exploit his small lead in development (in this case the opponent's uncastled king). The idea of doubling to attack a piece on the e-file (the bishop on e2) was particularly important to prevent Grünfeld's king from finding safety.

Not Him Again!

One of the big problems in the early middlegame is deciding where to develop your rooks. Pawn exchanges in the opening make the middlegame easier in the sense that open files will be available for the rooks and therefore should dictate where they will be placed. But it's not always as easy as that! Witness Bobby Fischer taking down Robert Byrne once again.

Game 28

R.Byrne-R.Fischer

US Championship, New York 1963

Grünfeld Defence

1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 c4 g6 3 g3

Delaying the development of the b1-knight is a little bit annoying for a Grünfeld player.

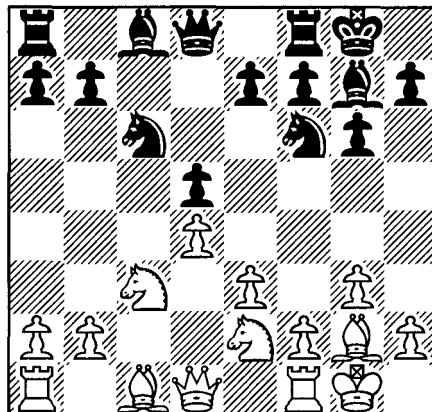
3...c6

After 3... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ d5 (4...0-0 5 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ makes ...d5 difficult to play) 5 cxd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 6 e4 due to the absence of the knight on c3, Black cannot carry out his typical exchange followed by ...c7-c5 break. Here 6... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ was a favourite weapon of Anatoly Karpov.

4 $\mathbb{Q}g2$

4 d5!? is not the most ridiculous move in the world here, simply to prevent Black's next: 4...cxd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 $\mathbb{Q}c3$, as in V.Korchnoi-E.Geller, Moscow Candidates 1971.

4...d5 5 cxd5 cxd5 6 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 7 e3 0-0 8 $\mathbb{Q}ge2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 9 0-0



Exercise: A good time to ask yourself – how do I most effectively complete my development and where does the bishop on c8 want to be?

Answer: 9...b6

Fischer chooses to put his bishop on a6-f1 diagonal, where it can't be disturbed.

Instead 9... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 10 h3 clearly doesn't help Black, but 9... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ is quite logical, although Black needs to be wary of the typical idea 10 $\mathbb{Q}b3$, attacking both the b7- and d5-pawns. In this particular case it can be met with 10... $\mathbb{Q}a5$.

10 b3

Byrne follows suit.

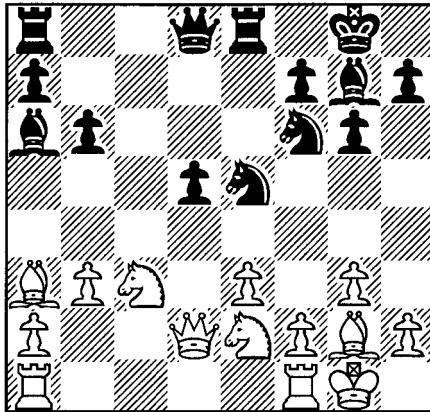
10... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}d2$

It is common for the white queen to come to e2, d2 or c2 in the opening to connect the rooks.

12...e5

A brave move, which probably left Robert Byrne a bit taken aback. In exchange for the severely weakened d5-pawn Black obtains minor piece activity. Such a dynamic approach was very much in keeping with Fischer's style! For more on this see Chapter One.

13 dxе5 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$



14 ♕fd1?

Very natural. White seeks to place his rooks on their best squares (d1 and c1), but in doing so gives Black a target for his pieces.

14 ♜ad1 was given as best by Fischer.

Question: What is the drawback of the move $\mathbb{N}f1-d1$?

Answer: It weakens f2. The pawns on f2 and g3 now give rise to some tactical opportunities which Fischer is quick to exploit.

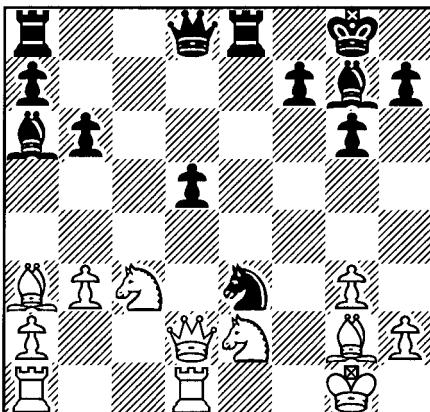
14...♞d3 15 ♜c2

White prepares to play $\mathbb{Q} \times d3$.

15...♞xf2!

Highlighting the drawback to White's 14th move.

16 ♔xf2 ♕g4+ 17 ♔g1 ♕xe3 18 ♔d2



Exercise: Fischer's next move completely surprised Byrne, who was expecting 18... $\mathbb{Q}xd1$. What was it that he had underestimated?

Answer: 18... $\mathbb{Q}xg2!$

Very logical! Black gives himself two bishops on an open board and commendably doesn't take the material on offer.

19 $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ d4 20 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7+$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 0-1

White resigned due to the overwhelming weaknesses on the light squares.

Summary

When developing your rooks, take a good look at the pawns they will no longer be defending and check there is no easy way for the opponent to get at these pawns. This is particularly true of the kingside rook as the f2- and f7-pawns cover some important squares.

Problems with the Rooks in Closed Positions

The following game highlights how a player with deep understanding overcomes the challenges facing his rooks in a closed position. As we know, rooks like to be on open files!

*Game 29
A.Stripunsky-O.Gavrijushin
Moscow 1995
French Defence*

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 4 e5 c5 5 a3 $\mathbb{Q}xc3+$ 6 bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 7 h4!?

I must admit that I am very fond of this eccentric-looking move in the French. White looks to advance the h-pawn to h6 (if possible) in order to create some dark-square weaknesses for his unopposed bishop to exploit. We've already seen the idea in Kasparov-Ivanchuk in Chapter One.

Both 7 $\mathbb{W}g4$ and 7 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ are more common.

7... $\mathbb{W}a5$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}a4$ 9 h5

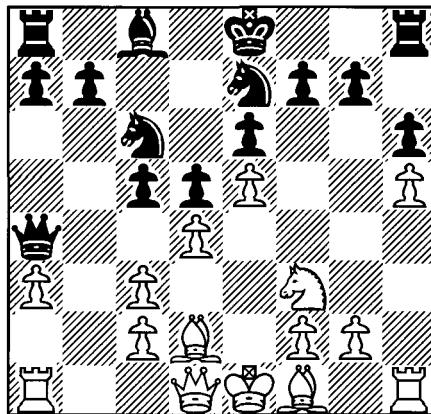
Ignoring the threat to the d4-pawn.

9...h6

Black stops the white pawn in its tracks.

Instead 9... $cxd4$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}ge7$ (White gains huge compensation for the pawn after 10... $dx c 3 11 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}ce7$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ a6 13 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ with a big lead in development) 11 $cxd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ is the so called 'Kasparov Gambit', after the famous man introduced it in a 1992 game against Vishy Anand: 12... $\mathbb{Q}ec6$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 14 $\mathbb{W}xf3$ b6?! (14... $\mathbb{W}d4$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ is the critical test) 15 h6 $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 16 hxg7 $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ $\mathbb{W}xa6+$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ left Black in huge trouble in G.Kasparov-V.Anand, Linares 1992.$

10 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}ge7$



Question: How should White proceed with his development here?

Answer: 11 $\mathbb{R}h4!$?

This is actually pretty standard for such a position. The white rook has no future in the centre of the board and so eyes up the black kingside pawns, as well as the black queen!

11 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ would be a little lazy, as Black is able to carry out the thematic exchange of his light-squared bishop: 11...b6 12 $\mathbb{B}b1 \mathbb{Q}a6$ with a decent position.

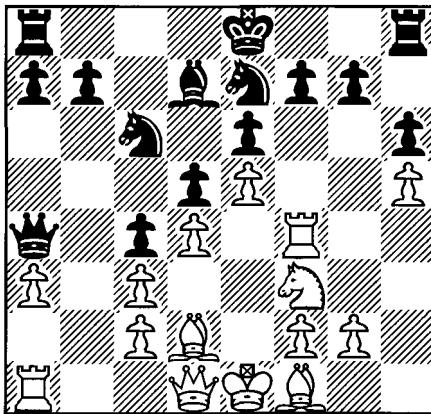
11...c4

Black is forced to close the queenside for the moment as White was threatening to take on c5.

12 $\mathbb{R}f4$

The rook lift discourages Black from ...o-o-o, due to the weakness of the f7-pawn.

12... $\mathbb{Q}d7$



Exercise: A difficult position to handle! Which side of the board should White be playing on and how can he improve his position?

Answer: The kingside, due to his pawns on e5 and h5.

13 ♜h4!

With his last move White opens a path for his queen to target the other weak black pawn on g7.

Instead 13 ♜e2?! would be a typical case of indecisive development! The bishop doesn't achieve anything on this square, other than blocking the white queen. However, 13 ♛b1 could be considered.

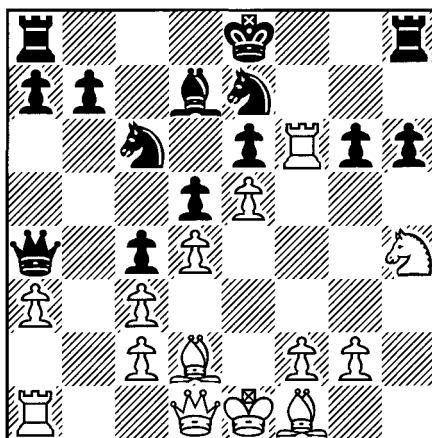
13...g5?!

Black reacts violently, but simply weakens the kingside pawns further – don't touch your pawns on the side of the board where you are weakest!

13...♜f5 is a better move, as played by one of the leading French experts of modern times: 14 ♜xf5 exf5 15 g4!? fxg4 16 ♜e2 ♜d8 17 ♜xg4 ♜e6 with an unclear game, A.Khalifman-Y.Shulman, Khanty-Mansiysk 2005.

14 hxg6 fxg6 15 ♛f6

The rook infiltrates the black camp!



15...0-0-0

15...g5 16 ♛h5+ ♜d8 17 ♜f3 would also have been bad for Black.

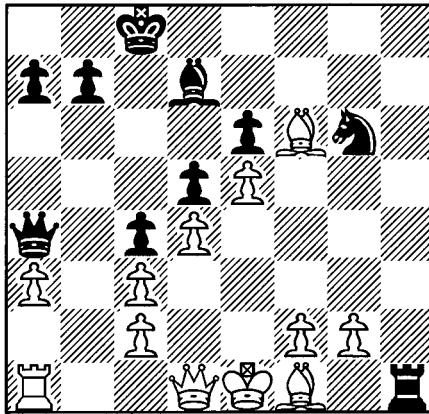
16 ♜xg6 ♜xg6 17 ♛xg6 ♜e7

Black seeks counterplay down the h-file at the cost of another pawn.

18 ♛xh6 ♛xh6 19 ♜xh6 ♛h8 20 ♜g5

Here we can see the value of White having not moved his f1-bishop. There is no annoying check on h1!

20...♜g6 21 ♜f6 ♛h1



Exercise: How does White best extract himself from the pin?

Answer: 22 $\mathbb{Q}d2!$

Calm. The closed centre provides shelter for the white monarch, whilst he also defends the sensitive c2-pawn, allowing the queen to move!

22... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 23 $\mathbb{W}g4$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 24 f4

White is two pawns up and the kingside gets ready to roll.

24... $\mathbb{W}d7$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{W}xe7$ 27 $\mathbb{W}g7$ a5 28 f5 $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 29 $\mathbb{W}f6$ $\mathbb{W}e8$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ $\mathbb{W}g8$ 32 fxe6 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 34 g4 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ b5 36 g5 $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 37 $\mathbb{W}b6+$ 1-0

Summary

In closed positions development of pieces to their 'natural' squares becomes less important than seeking out targets using less orthodox manoeuvres. Here White did an excellent job of that with his kingside rook and later his king and queen to bring home the point. Black's 13th move did little to help the situation, though, providing Stripunsky with further targets for his pieces.

Throwing a Spanner in the Works

Often an early pawn sacrifice is used to hinder the effective development of the other side's pieces. Let's look at a fun (if rather obscure) example I found.

Game 30
P.Ovidiu-A.Johansson
Internet (blitz) 2003
Caro-Kann Defence

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 4 g4!?

Chess Strategy: Move by Move

A good line for blitz chess!

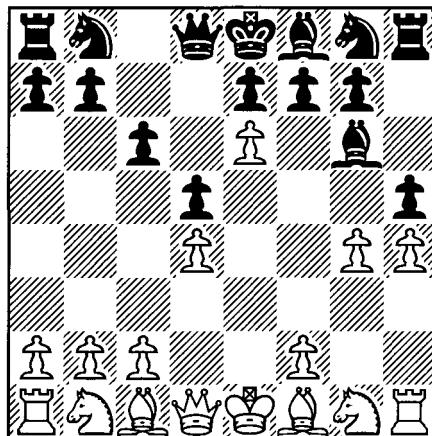
4...♝g6

4...♝e4 5 f3 ♜g6 6 h4 h5 7 e6 ♛d6! (7...fxe6 8 ♜d3 ♜f7 9 g5 is similar to the game) is a good antidote as in A.Hunt-H.Hunt, Oxford 1992. The Hunt household saw many blitz games with this, which eventually made me give up the variation.

5 h4 h5

5..h6 6 h5 ♜h7 7 e6 fxe6 8 ♜d3 is also very playable for White.

6 e6!?



White has only moved pawns in the first six moves (not to be recommended if you want to get your rating up!), but in this particular case his last move makes a lot of sense. White ‘jams’ the enemy dark-squared bishop in.

6...fxe6

Question: What would your follow up be here?

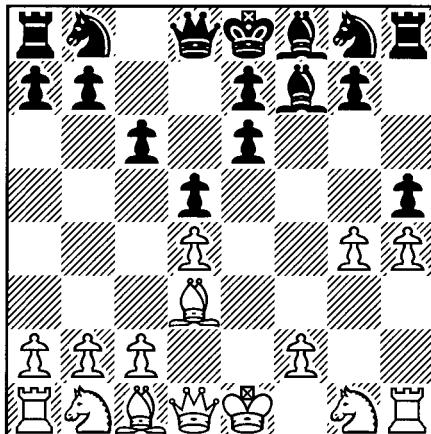
Answer: 7 ♜d3

The lead in development is a short-term advantage, so White goes for the black king immediately by looking to seize the short diagonal h5-e8!

7 g5 is also very natural in order to prevent another piece from being developed. This position has occurred twice in practice and both times Black has tried the counter sacrifice 7...e5! in order to free his position: for example, 8 dx5 e6 9 ♜d3 (9 ♜h3!?) 9...♝e7 10 ♜e2 ♛c7 with a pleasant position for Black in J.Prokop-M.Cervinka, Czech Republic 1999.

7...♝f7

7...♜xd3 8 ♛xd3 hxg4 9 ♛g6+ ♜d7 10 ♛xg4 is a strange position. White has good practical compensation for the sacrificed pawn due to the position of the black king and the bad bishop on f8.



Exercise: How can White restrain development of the Black pieces here?

Answer: 8 g5

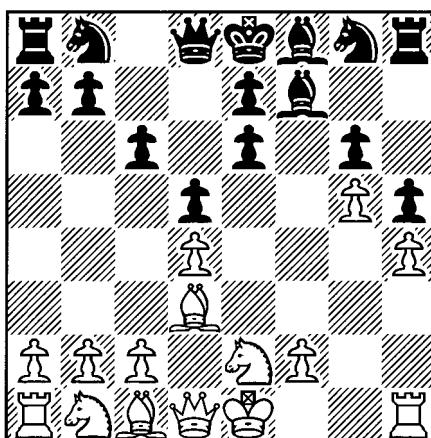
Preventing the development of the g8-knight.

8 $\mathbb{Q}f3!$? is also very interesting. White gives up the pawn for a great knight. 8...hxg4 9 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ and now the second player failed to defend correctly: 9... $\mathbb{Q}h5$? (9... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ is better, but White still has some compensation) 10 $\mathbb{W}xg4!$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}g6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ 12 $\mathbb{W}xg6+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}f7+$ was unfortunate for Black in J.Havela-M.Forsstroem, Hyvinkaa 1994.

8...g6

Forced due to the threat of g5-g6.

9 $\mathbb{Q}e2$



Here Black played 9... $\mathbb{Q}g7$? and had White found 10 $\mathbb{Q}f4!$ Black would have been in

huge trouble. Instead **10 ♜f4** was the game, which was eventually drawn.

Question: What should Black have played instead?

Answer: 9...e5! 10 dx5 e6 would have seen Black surviving. The bishop on f7 acts like a big pawn, but at least it can defend g6 and Black can complete his development. White also has some issues defending his e5-pawn.

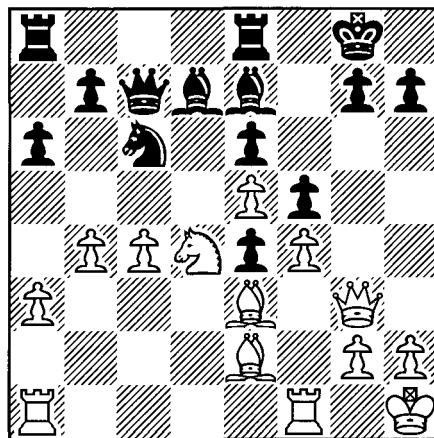
Hindering your opponent's development and harmony in the middlegame

It is always useful to be thinking about where your opponent wants to place his pieces in an ideal world. Preventing the opponent's development in the opening, as we saw in the last example, can lead to some sharp fights. In the next example Black manages to successfully neutralize his opponent's slight advantage by thinking about limiting the effective development of the white rooks.

Game 31

Q.Ducarmon-A.Hunt

Aquila 2012



This game was played in a recent GM round-robin. White appears to enjoy a small edge due to his space advantage on the queenside.

Exercise: Can you figure out what (a) White's best plan is, and (b) how to somehow prevent it?

Answer: **17 ... ♗xd4 18 ♜xd4 ♜a4!**

This prevents the development of the white rooks to the key d-file (key as it is the only open file on the board), as well as the queen manoeuvre $\mathbb{W}g3-b3$, followed by expansion on the queenside. White cannot exchange the bishop with $\mathbb{B}e2-d1$, due to the weakness of the c4-pawn.

19 $\mathbb{W}e3!$

Touché! This prevents a rook coming to d8 due to the threat of $\mathbb{B}b6$.

19... $\mathbb{W}c6$ 20 $\mathbb{B}ac1$

20 $\mathbb{B}b6$ may have been best, stopping the rook coming to d8.

20... $\mathbb{B}ed8$

This seems a little more logical to me than 20... $\mathbb{B}ad8$ as it gives the queen room to retreat to e8.

21 $\mathbb{B}b6$ $\mathbb{B}d7$ 22 $h3$ $\mathbb{B}d8$ 23 $\mathbb{B}c5$ $\mathbb{B}e7$

23... $\mathbb{B}c7?$ would have walked into 24 b5 axb5 25 cxb5 $\mathbb{B}xb5$ 26 $\mathbb{B}d6$ $\mathbb{W}a6$ 27 $\mathbb{W}b3!$ winning the house.

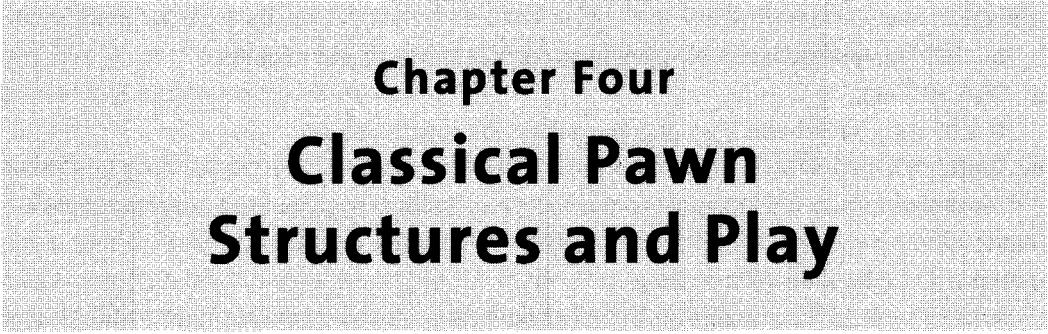
24 $\mathbb{B}b6$ $\mathbb{B}d8$ ½-½

Summary

Trying to hinder your opponent's plan is often as effective as carrying out your own, as we will discuss further in the next chapter. Here Black managed to equalize by preventing the effective development of the white rooks by taking control of the key d1-square.

Key Points

- 1) When developing, try to do so with tempo wherever possible. This should lead to speedy mobilization of the forces.
- 2) Remember that a lead in development is a short-term advantage and will disappear quickly if not used well. If the opponent's king is in the centre, try to open files and diagonals towards it as quickly as possible.
- 3) Be careful before deciding where to develop your bishops and rooks. Don't forget that these pieces can often be just as effective in influencing the game from their starting squares.
- 4) In closed positions, development can often be delayed in exchange for the sake of manoeuvring to control key squares.
- 5) Often the advance and potential sacrifice of a pawn can hinder the opponent's development to your advantage.



Chapter Four

Classical Pawn

Structures and Play

The pawns are the soul of the game. – Philidor

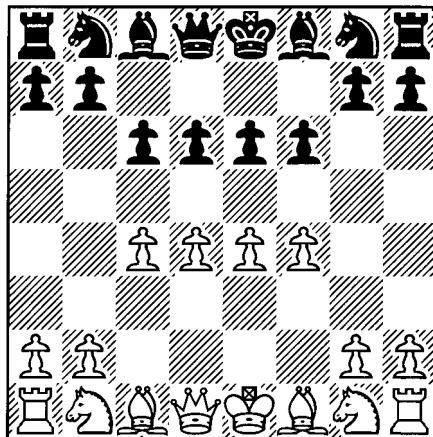
My trainer during the course of my year playing chess full-time, GM Arthur Kogan, nicely describes pawn structures as “the GPS of chess”. A quick-fire way if you like of recognising what you should be looking to do in a given middlegame position. A successful understanding of common structures will enable you to play both familiar and, perhaps most importantly, unfamiliar middlegame positions arising from the opening with confidence. I am reliably informed that the so-called ‘Russian chess school’ spend a great deal of time on this part of the game, whereas in Western Europe, particularly in the training of young players, it is often overlooked.

A good fundamental grounding in the typical pawn structures and ways that we use pawns is invaluable and will certainly improve your game. I have learnt an awful lot during the course 2011-12 – perhaps more on this than on any other subject, simply because I didn’t appreciate how important these little guys are!

The Basics

One thing we are all taught at a young age (hopefully!) is that advancing your pawns gives you more space. This is quite rightly seen as a good thing, as it gives the pieces more freedom to move behind them. Take the following simple opening position after **1 e4 e6 2 d4 d6 3 c4 c6 4 f4 f6** (*see following diagram*).

White enjoys a clear space advantage and this allows him to develop his knights to their natural squares (c3 and f3), and gives the bishops the options of d3 and e3. Black, on the other hand, in order to castle will have to develop his knights to a6 and h6, or via d7-b6 and e7-g6, and thus lose valuable time. This comes as second nature to the experienced player, but at novice level building a wall of pawns like this is incredibly tempting and common.



A slightly less obvious benefit lies in the ability to later use a space advantage in one area of the board to force through an attack. This is particularly true if the pawns cross the fourth rank and enter the opponent's half of the board.

The following was a training game I played against members of the Abbey chess club, the prep school of Woodbridge. We will skim over some of the slightly dubious opening moves to highlight an important point.

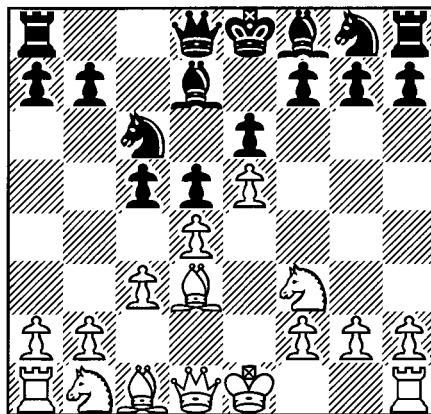
Game 32
A.Hunt-The Abbey
 Woodbridge 2009
French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5

Exercise: In the French Defence when White places his pawn on e5 in which area of the board does he usually try to play: the queenside, kingside or the centre?

Answer: The pawn on e5 has crossed the 'halfway line' on the king's side of the board (files e-to h-). Therefore logic dictates we have more space in that area and it should be where we look to attack.

3...c5 4 c3 ♜c6 5 ♜f3 ♜d7 6 ♜d3



Question: What should Black play here?

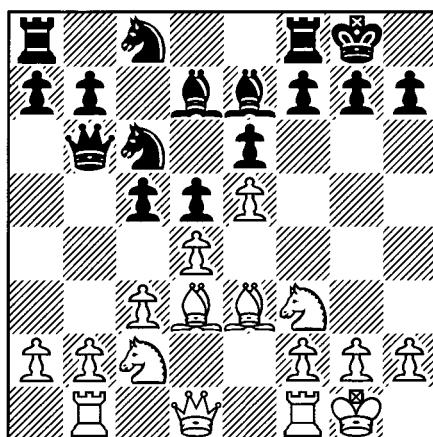
Answer: 6... $\mathbb{W}b6!$

The Abbey are playing well! The French Defence requires great energy on the black side or White's space advantage will lead to a promising position for him.

7 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}ge7$

7... $cxd4$ 8 $cxd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{W}xd4$ is the Milner-Barry Gambit. My friend, French specialist GM Simon Williams, doesn't rate this gambit too highly for White. However, it remains a dangerous weapon at club level.

8 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 10 $\mathbb{B}b1$ 0-0 11 $\mathbb{Q}e3$

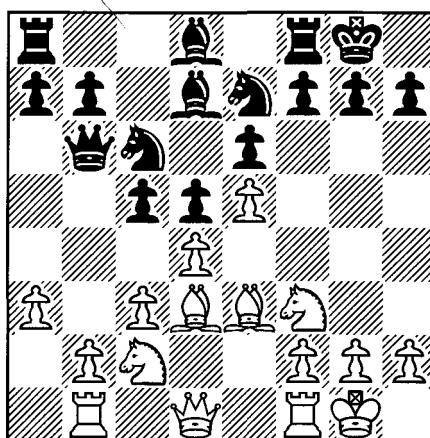


Question: What should Black do here?

11...♝d8?

Answer: 11...c4! is the best move. Timing this move correctly is very important in the French. After 12 ♜e2 the bishop is forced back to a passive square and the black king will feel a lot more comfortable.

12 a3 ♛g8e7?



Exercise: White can win a pawn with 13 dx5, but there are bigger fish to fry! How does White launch a decisive attack?

Answer: 13 ♜xh7+!

The so called Greek gift sacrifice! For more examples of this classic theme see Vladimir Vukovic's classic work *The Art of Attack in Chess*.

13...♚xh7

13...♜h8 is the only move that doesn't lead to mate, but after 14 ♔g5 ♛g8 15 ♕h5 ♜h6 16 dx5 ♖c7 White is two pawns up with a strong attack.

14 ♔g5+ ♛g8 15 ♕h5 f6?

15...♜e8 is the only move to prevent immediate mate, but that's only a temporary state after 16 ♕h7+ ♛f8 17 ♕h8+ ♛g8 18 ♔h7+ ♛e7 19 ♜g5+ ♔f6 20 ♜xf6+ gxsf6 21 ♜xf6 mate.

16 ♕h7 mate (1-0)

Summary

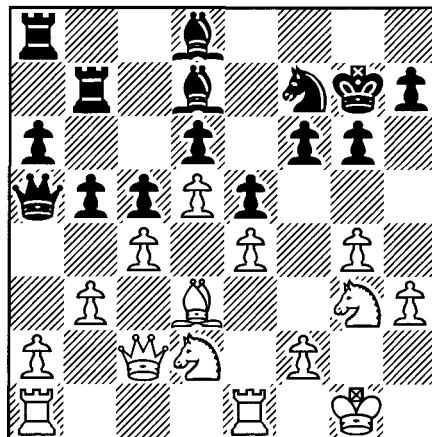
What can we learn from that game? Well, first and foremost it shows how a space advantage can be turned into a decisive mating attack in a matter of moments (without the aid of any other pawns), if there are enough pieces trained at the king and the opponent makes a mistake. It seemed to me at the time that in closed positions my students, who are clearly quite capable of playing a decent opening, weren't really playing with any great

understanding of *pawn breaks* and how important they are in closed positions. This leads us nicely on to that subject!

No pawn exchanges, no file-opening, no attack." – Aron Nimzowitsch

A pawn break, to put it simply, is the offer to exchange a pair of pawns, usually in order to open up a file. In my experience of coaching juniors, most could make more effective organization and use of pawn breaks. As Nimzowitsch put it, this is the key to a successful attack, particularly in positions of a closed nature. When you think about it this idea makes a lot of sense. Rooks and in a lot of cases queens cannot function properly without open files. Let's first demonstrate exactly what we mean by a pawn break, using an example taken from one of my own games.

Game 33
A.Hunt-D.Bojkov
European Club Cup, Plovdiv 2010



Exercise: Identify the pawn breaks available to both sides in this position.

Answer: This position has come about from a main line Spanish opening and we can see that only one pair of pieces (knights) has been exchanged. Both sides have pawn breaks available to them. White can play a2-a4, b3-b4, f2-f4 and h3-h4-h5. These are all pawn breaks, discounting for the moment the effectiveness of each one. Black has fewer breaks: ...a6-a5-a4 (after the queen moves), ...f6-f5 and ...h7-h5. However, the breaks that he has are more effective as they are easier to carry out without compromising his position. Indeed,

a2-a4 will open the b-file for the black rook, while the b4-square is very well covered by Black. Similarly, f2-f4 will give Black a strong outpost on e5 for his knight and advancing the h-pawn will leave the white g4-pawn and king weaker. As a result Black's position is much easier to play.

The following interesting game, played by one of my students, involves some instructive pawn breaks. White is graded ECF 141 (converted Elo 1778) and Black 115 (Elo 1570).

Game 34

M.McLachlan-Z.Varney

West of England U12 Championship, Swindon 2012

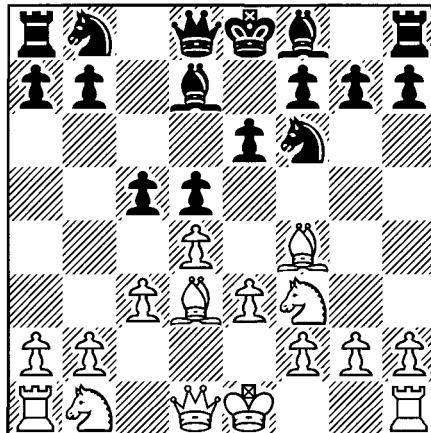
London System

1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ d5 4 e3 $\mathbb{Q}d7?$!

This is unnecessary. In general we should try not to develop pieces unless they are going to squares which improve their activity and thus benefit our position.

More common is something like 4...c5, taking the time to make a pawn break which will open the position in the future. After 5 c3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ 0-0 we reach a roughly balanced position.

5 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ c5 6 c3



Exercise: An interesting moment has arisen.

How do you rate the move 6...c4?

6...c4?!

Answer: We saw this move in the previous game in a different structure (with a white pawn on e5 already). In that case it was good because the bishop had to go back to e2

which allowed Black to thwart the dangerous threat to h7. It's not an easy one to get to the bottom of, but I don't like the move in this particular position. The reason being that Black releases the pressure on White's d-pawn. This makes White's forthcoming pawn break (which we will see in a minute) more effective.

As there was no threat to capture on c5, it would have been better to finish development with something like 6... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 7 0-0 and then:

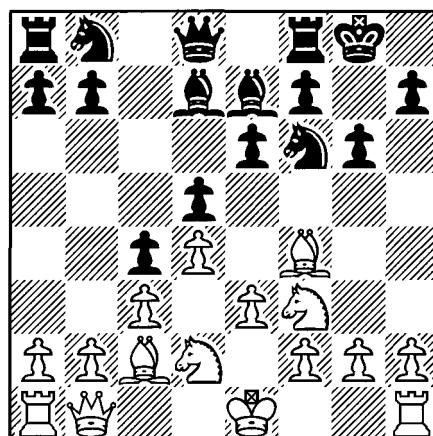
- a) 7... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ (a typical exchange, gaining a tempo after the bishop has moved)
- 8... $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ 0-0 with equal chances.
- b) 7... $\mathbb{Q}h5$ is quite a typical move in such positions, trying to grab the bishop-pair, but it doesn't seem to achieve the aim after 8 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ (8...f6 9 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ g5 10 $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ is curtains for Black due to the hanging knight on h5) 9 b3 h6 10 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ g5 11 $\mathbb{Q}e1!$.

7 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ 0-0 9 $\mathbb{W}b1?$!

An odd-looking move which doesn't really improve the position of the white queen.

9...g6?

This is unnecessary, weakening the dark squares around the king too much. If Black had wanted to release the knight then 9...h6 would have made more sense.

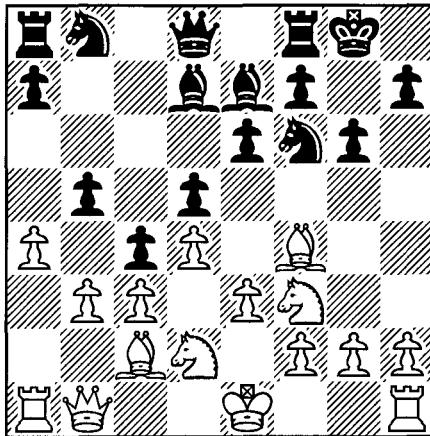


Question: White has two possible pawn breaks in the position, b2-b3 and e3-e4. Which one should he prepare?

Answer: 10 e4

This is the better of the two, and the effective pawn break that I was referring to earlier.

10 b3 b5 11 a4 would be a typical way of trying to break up the strong queenside pawn chain as 11...a6 is impossible due to 12 axb5 and Black cannot recapture with her a-pawn.

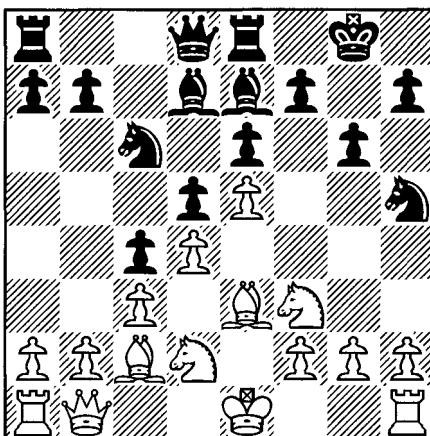


Exercise: However, the last two of White's moves leave the c-pawn weak which Black is able to exploit. How?

Answer: 11...b4! (11... $\mathbb{Q}a5?$ 12 axb5 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 13 bxc4 dxc4 14 $\mathbb{Q}g5!$ is devastating) 12 cxb4 c3 13 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ leaves Black very comfortably placed.

10... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 11 e5 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}g3?$

White makes an instructive mistake. One of the big drawbacks of Black's 9th move (...g7-g6) was that it created a 'hook' in the position. As we have seen, a hook is a pawn that can be used by the opponent to lever open a file using a pawn break. In this case after 12 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$



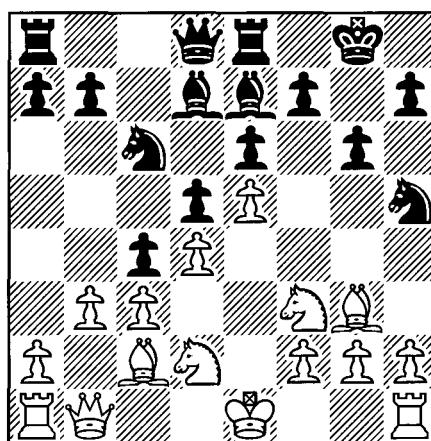
13 g4! $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 14 h4! White's attack is already in full swing, as h4-h5 will open the h-file for the rook using the g6 hook. Here we can see another drawback of closing the centre too

early with 6...c4?!. White is free to attack on the kingside, even though he hasn't castled. For example, if Black tries to get some queenside play going with something like 14...b5 then after 15 h5 b4 16 hxg6 (much stronger than the greedy 16 h6? bxc3 17 bxc3 $\mathbb{W}a5!$ 18 hxg7 $\mathbb{W}xc3$ when the active black pieces after ... $\mathbb{B}b8$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}a3$ give good compensation for the piece) 16...hxg6 17 $\mathbb{Q}xg6!$ fxg6 18 $\mathbb{W}xg6$ White's attack crashes through.

12... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 13 b3?

Perhaps understandably, White becomes frustrated with his position. It is now much more difficult to find a constructive plan as his kingside play is hampered by his dark-squared bishop and his only pawn break now helps Black! Instead:

- a) 13 0-0 b5 14 a3 a5 also leaves Black with good play on the queenside.
- b) The plan of releasing the bishop with 13 h4 b5 14 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ now turns out to be too slow: 14...b4 15 g4 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 16 h5 bxc3 17 bxc3 $\mathbb{W}a5$ and the white queenside will collapse.



Exercise: White faces some strategic difficulties after 13 b3?. What should Black play?

13...b5

Very natural, but if Zoe had considered the drawbacks to White's last move a little more carefully she may have found:

Answer: 13... $\mathbb{W}a5!$ 14 b4 (or 14 bxc4 $\mathbb{W}xc3$ 15 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ 16 hxg6 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{W}xd4$ with a clear advantage to Black, while here after 15 cxd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{W}xd4$ White will be ruining the fact that he hasn't castled already) 14... $\mathbb{W}a3$ 15 b5 $\mathbb{Q}d8$ is terrible for White.

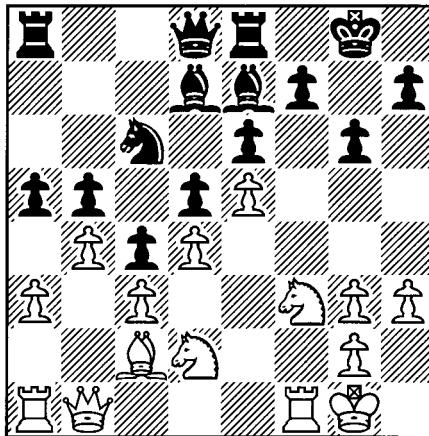
14 h3?

White looks to play $\mathbb{Q}g3-h2$, but just weakens his kingside pawn structure.

14... $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ 15 fxg3 $\mathbb{Q}b8?$

15... $\mathbb{W}a5$ is now even stronger.

16 b4 a5 17 a3 $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 18 0-0



Exercise: Black's last few moves have been very logical, but which of the following moves would you play here: 18... $\mathbb{Q}a6$, 18... $\mathbb{Q}xb4$, 18... $f6$ or 18... $a4$?

18... $\mathbb{Q}xb4$?

As with the earlier ...c5-c4 move I'm not a massive fan of this one. Maintaining the tension is better. Black has three squares on the a-file to use for her major pieces (a6, a7 and a8), whilst White only has two (a1 and a2), so Black should win control of the file.

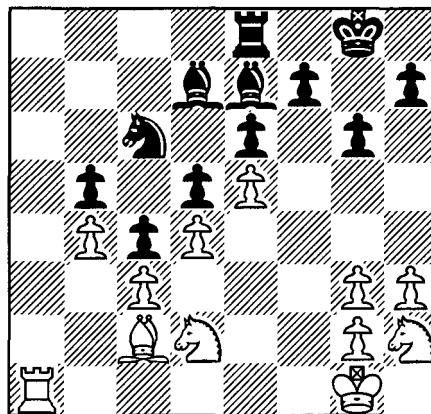
Answer: 18... $\mathbb{Q}a6$! is the most natural continuation. Black wants to double, or in some cases triple her major pieces on the a-file before releasing the tension. You would have needed to calculate the consequences of 19 a4?! before playing the move, however: 19... $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ (20 $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ is a free pawn) 20... $\mathbb{Q}xa1$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}xa1$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$! 22 $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ is clearly better for Black, since the b-pawn is in huge trouble, as shown by 23 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4$! 25 $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$. Instead 19 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ with the idea of abandoning the a-file for some kingside play looks best here: 19... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}ea8$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}ac1$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}a3$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ is still unclear.

Of the other options, 18... $f6$? allows the shot 19 $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ $\mathbb{Q}hg6$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xg6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}g5$! $\mathbb{Q}fxg5$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}f7$ which is the end, and 18... $a4$? is strategically very wrong as Black loses all play on the side of the board on which she is strongest. It also gives White a free hand to play on the kingside: 19 $\mathbb{Q}h2$!! with the idea of $\mathbb{Q}g4$ gives White a big advantage.

19 $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}xa1$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xa1$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}xa1$

21... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ would be very risky for Black as the sensitive dark squares come under attack after 23... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}e3$.

22 $\mathbb{Q}xa1$



Question: What should Black play here?

Answer: 22...f6!

Of course! Despite the absence of the queens and the fact that she has given up the a-file, Black continues to play actively. This thematic pawn break in French structures can be useful even in the endgame.

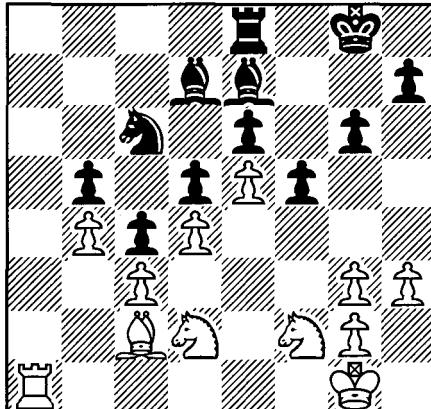
23 ♜g4?!

23 exf6 ♜xf6 24 ♜g4 ♜g7 25 ♜f3 is a better way of controlling the centre.

23...f5?

Black loses all dreams of an advantage with this move. Now there are no more breaks possible and with the a-file under control White should be safe. Instead 23...fxe5! 24 ♜xe5 ♜xe5 25 dxе5 d4! 26 cxd4 ♜xb4 gives Black excellent winning chances due to the connected passed pawns on the queenside, as 27 ♜e4 ♛g7 28 ♜a7 can be met by 28...♜e7.

24 ♜f2?!



Exercise: White's last move was a little careless.

Can you see what Black should play here?

24 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ would have defended the bishop and meant the coming idea would be ineffective.

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

Answer: Always stay alive to tactical possibilities! After 24... $\mathbb{Q}xb4$? 25 cxb4 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ (if 26 $\mathbb{Q}a7 \mathbb{Q}d8$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}d1 \mathbb{Q}c6$) 26... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ Black will get three very dangerous connected passed pawns for the piece: 27 $\mathbb{Q}f3$! (holding the e-pawn seems best; 27 $\mathbb{Q}b1 \mathbb{Q}xe5$ looks tremendous for Black) 27... $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}a7 \mathbb{Q}e7$ is still very unclear, but I would prefer to be Black here.

25 $\mathbb{Q}f3$

White went on to win after 70 moves. A good fight!

Next we shall see another closed position arising from a French Defence and see how Nigel Short, one of Britain's greatest ever players, handles the black side.

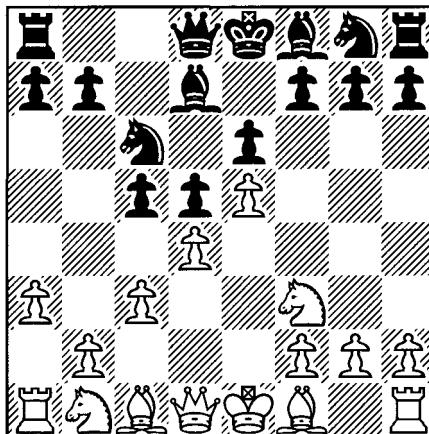
Game 35
A.Grischuk-N.Short
Reykjavik 2000
French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$

Just as in my game against the Abbey students!

6 a3

Why are you stopping us on move 6 I hear you cry! Well, if you search the games of the top-rated players in the world you will find that this is not considered the most accurate move. The reason is that the black queen in all likelihood will not go to b6 anymore, but instead provide increased pressure on the e5-pawn.



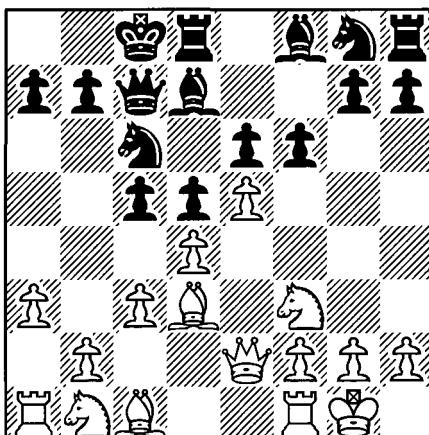
Question: What Black should play here?

Answer: 6...f6

A classic French pawn break!

A serious alternative and in fact the most popular move in the position is 6...c4 which stops the white bishop coming to d3, as well as fixing the weak square on b3. However, once again Black loses some of the dynamism in his position, as his only real way of opening lines is then ...f7-f6. 7 g3 is now logical as the white bishop looks for a better diagonal and after 7...d5 8 bd2 g7 9 g2 c8 10 0-0 b6 11 e1 c7 12 f4 h5 13 c2 0-0-0 14 e3 f5 both sides called it a day due to the lack of effective pawn breaks in Peng Xiaomin-Zhang Zhong, Beijing 2000.

7 d3 c7 8 0-0-0-0 9 e2



Question: Black has made an interesting decision to castle long. What should his plan be now?

Answer: 9...h6

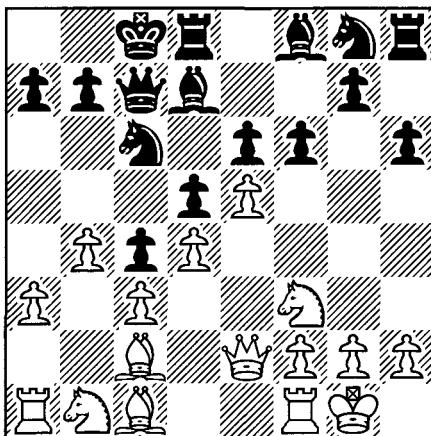
It is interesting to see how Short retains the tension in the centre. His last move plans ...g7-g5 and a kingside attack.

Instead 9...c4 10 ♜c2 h6 would have allowed an extra option for White in 11 b3 cxb3 12 ♜xb3, with chances for both sides.

10 b4 c4

10...fxe5 must also have come into consideration here. Short might have been worried about something like 11 ♜xe5 ♜xe5 12 ♜f4 c4 13 ♜c2 ♜d6 14 dxe5 ♜f8 15 ♜d2 with a good potential outpost on d4 if the knight can reach it.

11 ♜c2



Question: Okay, what now?

Answer: The queenside is closed as there are no pawn breaks available there, so Black can turn his attention to playing on the kingside.

11...f5

A very interesting decision, which apparently closes the position up. Less inexperienced players often think that the game is inevitably heading for a draw in such positions. However, there are still chances to open lines, so it's actually far too early to say that!

The first move that came to my mind was 11...g5, but there seems to be a problem: White can change the pawn structure with 12 exf6 ♜xf6 13 ♜e1 ♜d6 14 a4 ♜de8 15 ♜e5!, with the age old problem of a knight occupying the outpost! White enjoys a decent game here thanks to the position of the knight and may follow up with b5 and ♜a3 to exchange

off the dark-squared bishop.

12 ♜h4?!

Grischuk wants to shut down the kingside with f2-f4, but doesn't really achieve his aim, as the ...g7-g5 pawn break is still always possible.

12 h4 would be another way of trying to keep the kingside closed. Then:

a) 12...♜e8! would be a typical manoeuvre, bringing the bishop to h5 and allowing the queen to join in the game.

b) 12...g5?! is the most energetic move and I also like this suggestion. Perhaps the only problem is that after 13 hxg5 ♜e8 White can close the h-file with 14 g6. Having said that, after 14...♜xg6 15 ♜f4 ♜h5 I still like Black's position.

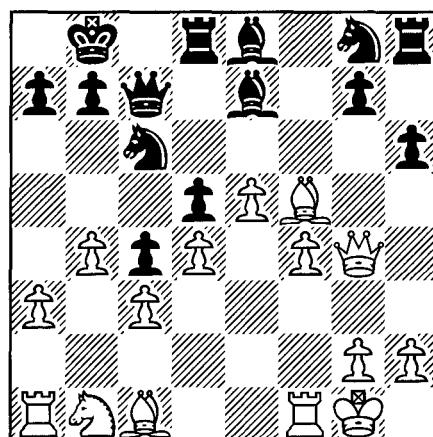
12...♜e8 13 f4 ♜e7 14 ♜xf5?!

Incredible! White must have felt so uncomfortable about the threat of ...g7-g5 that he decides to sacrifice a piece. A famous saying in chess is that "*the threat is stronger than the execution*", which is usually attributed to Aron Nimzowitsch (though the chess historian Edward Winter thinks that the quote could be earlier than this, from the late 19th century). One of the points is that the psychological pressure of the threat can cause the opponent to make an unexpected and in this case sub-optimal reply.

After the more natural 14 ♜f3 Black can build up with 14...♜h5 (if 14...g5 15 fxg5 hxg5 16 ♜xg5 ♜h5 17 ♜f2) 15 ♜e3 ♛b8 16 a4 g5 17 ♜a3 ♜d7 with good play, although of course the game is far from over.

14...exf5 15 ♜xf5+ ♛b8 16 ♜g4?!

16 ♜c2 is better, since 16...g5 can now be met with 17 f5.



Exercise: Find an effective way to open lines against the white king.

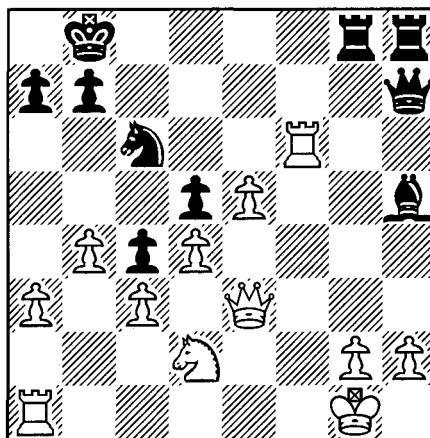
Answer: 16...g5!

Anyway! Black gives up a pawn, but opens both the g- and h-files in the process.

17 fxg5 hxg5 18 ♖xg5 ♖h5 19 ♕g3 ♖xg5 20 ♕xg5 ♔ge7 21 ♔d2 ♕dg8

Black is beautifully co-ordinated and the position should be winning for him.

22 ♕e3 ♔xf5 23 ♕xf5 ♕h7 24 ♕f6



Exercise: Find the most effective way to clear the h-file.

Answer: 24...♔e2

Cheeky. The bishop heads for the d3-square and is immune since 25 ♕xe2 ♕xh2+ 26 ♔f1 ♕h1+ 27 ♔f2 ♕xg2+ wins the queen.

25 h3 ♖d3 26 ♔h2 ♔e7 27 ♔f3 ♔f5 28 ♕f4 ♔a8 29 ♕g1 ♕h5 30 e6 ♔e4 31 ♕f1 ♕g3 32 ♕xf5 ♕xh3+ 0-1

White resigned as it is checkmate next move.

Summary

A very well-played game from Nigel Short. By retaining the tension for as long as possible after his ...c5 and ...f6 breaks, Black was able to shift his king to the queenside before starting his attack. 12...f5 was well timed and, as is often the case, when White couldn't see a comfortable way to meet his opponent's threat (the pawn break ...g7-g5), he decided to sacrifice material unsoundly.

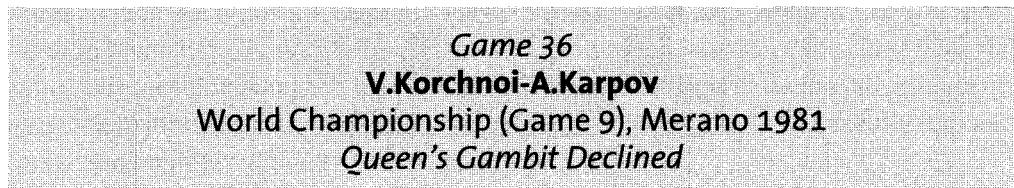
The Isolated Pawn

Okay, let's start with the basics. An isolated pawn by definition is a pawn that has no friendly pawn on an adjacent file. An isolated queen's (d-) pawn is often called an isolani. Isolated pawns are usually a weakness because they cannot be protected by other pawns. Whole books have been written on the subject of the isolated pawn. In fact, whole books have been written specifically on the subject of the isolated queen's pawn, such as *Winning Pawn Structures* by Alexander Baburin. I cannot begin to discuss the isolated pawn in

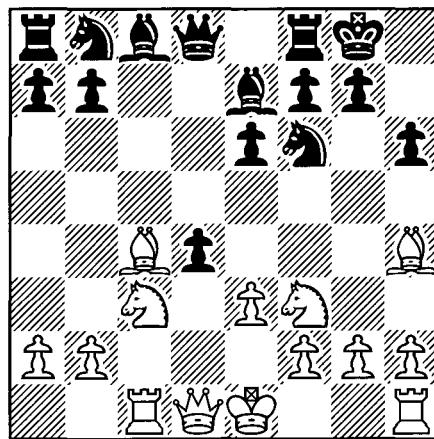
as much depth as such a book, but I hope to give you a flavour of the interesting positions that can arise.

The reason that an isolani is so common is that although the isolated pawn is generally recognized as a weakness, many openings are designed to allow this structure, for certain other benefits, such as a lead in development, a space advantage or control of a crucial square. Throughout my chess career I have always played the Panov-Botvinnik Attack against the Caro-Kann, which often leads to IQP (Isolated Queen's Pawn) positions and many other openings lead to the same structure, including variations of the Slav and Queen's Gambit, the French and the Tarrasch Defence.

Let's start with a classic example of how to play against an isolated pawn and see if we can play like former World Champion Anatoly Karpov!



1 c4 e6 2 ♜c3 d5 3 d4 ♜e7 4 ♜f3 ♜f6 5 ♜g5 h6 6 ♜h4 0-0 7 ♜c1 dxc4 8 e3 c5 9 ♜xc4 cxd4



Exercise: This is where White faces his first major decision. Which way should he recapture?

Answer: 10 exd4

White decides to give himself an isolani. When there are so many pieces still on the board, this weakness is rarely felt. It is only when the endgame approaches that this pawn may fall.

Question: In exchange for the isolated pawn what positional advantages does White obtain?

Answer: Threefold:

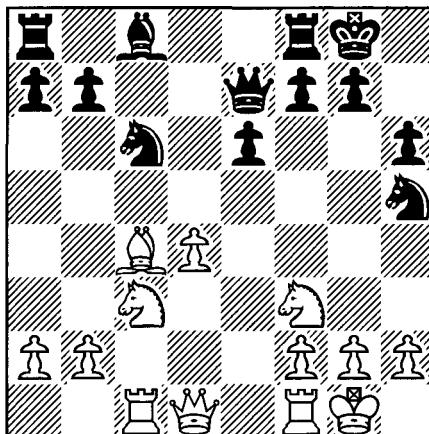
- 1) Most importantly White enjoys a slight space advantage. The d4-pawn cramps Black's position by hindering the ...e6-e5 advance. Consequently the power of the c8-bishop is reduced and this piece will be hard to develop. Black will often have to play ...b6 and ... $\mathbb{Q}b7$, which can use up valuable time, as well as set up some tactical ideas for White based on the weak h1-a8 diagonal and the loose knight on c6.
- 2) The d-pawn gives White some control over c5 and more importantly e5, which is a valuable central square in the black camp that could be used by a knight in the future. We will see how useful this can be in the game Hunt-Danielian later on.
- 3) Finally, the d4-pawn can often be advanced to d5, bringing the white pieces to life and opening up the central file towards the black queen.

10 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ would have also been perfectly reasonable, but would have given Black the freeing ...e5 break whenever he wished. In fact these days this move is seen more often, perhaps as a result of this game?

10... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 11 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7!$

The classical way to play against an isolated pawn is to control (and often occupy) the square in front of it. This 'fixes' the weakness for later attack and prevents the freeing d4-d5 move.

Exercise: If instead Black had played 12... $\mathbb{Q}xe7$, which is a positional mistake, can you see how White should respond?



Chess Strategy: Move by Move

Answer: 13 d5! – if you got this move, then well done as we haven't discussed this typical central thrust yet, but it is seen time and time again. White 'cashes in' his isolated pawn to give his pieces access to the central squares and open files. After 13...exd5 14 ♜xd5 ♛d6 15 ♜e1 (threatening 16 ♜e7+) 15...♚h8 16 ♜e7 ♛xd1 17 ♜xd1 White enjoys a pleasant advantage due to his more harmonious and active pieces.

13 ♜b3 ♜f6

13...♜d5 would be rushing things too much. Black understandably wants to occupy d5, but here White will simply trade on d5 and Black will be left with an isolani too! After 14 ♜xd5 exd5 15 ♜e5 White would retain a slight advantage based on his better-placed knight and queen's rook.

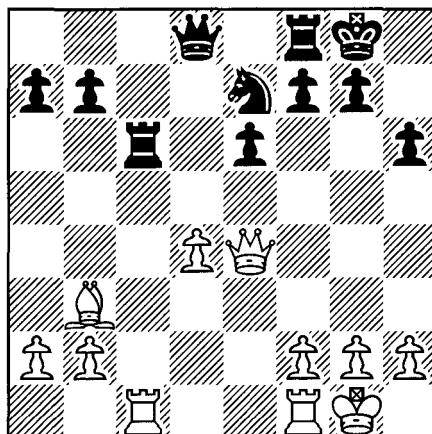
14 ♜e5 ♜d7

14...b6 would be another way to attempt to develop the bishop: 15 ♜e1 (15 ♛f3 ♜b8 16 ♜fd1 ♜b7 is okay for Black), and now not 15...♜b7? which allows the typical sacrifice 16 ♜xf7 ♜xf7 (if 16...♝xf7 17 ♜xe6+ ♜e8 18 d5! and d5-d6 cannot be effectively stopped) 17 ♜xe6 ♜f8 18 ♛e2 ♜g6 19 ♜xf7 ♜xf7 when White has the better chances due to the exposed nature of the black king.

15 ♛e2 ♜c8 16 ♜e4 ♜xe4 17 ♛xe4 ♜c6!

Karpov plays very concretely to restrain and fix the weak d4-pawn. To this end, he is unconcerned about the 'sacrifice' of ceding his bishop for White's knight.

18 ♜xc6 ♜xc6



19 ♜c3

Question: If instead White had played 19 ♜xc6,
which way would you have recaptured?

Answer: 19...bxc6 is best, fixing the d5-square permanently. Instead 19...♜xc6 20 d5 exd5 21 ♜xd5 should still be okay for Black, but I prefer White here with his more active bishop.

19... ♕d6

In the next phase of the game Karpov instructively simply increases the pressure on the d4-pawn, thus tying White's forces down to its defence.

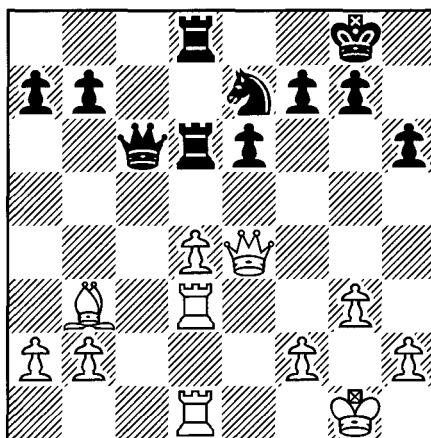
20 g3 ♘d8 21 ♘d1 ♘b6

21... ♘d7?? with the idea of ... ♘d6 would be met by 22 ♖a4.

22 ♘e1 ♘d7

22... ♘b4 would have allowed the ingenious tactical shot 23 d5! ♖xd5 (23... exd5 24 ♘e3 ♘d7 25 ♘ed3 and White has plenty of pressure against the d5-pawn) 24 ♖xd5 exd5 25 ♘cd3 d4 (or 25... ♘b5 26 a4 ♘c5 27 b4) 26 a3 ♘xb2 27 ♘xd4 ♘xd4 28 ♘xd4 ♘xd4 and White should hold.

23 ♘cd3 ♘d6 24 ♘e4 ♘c6

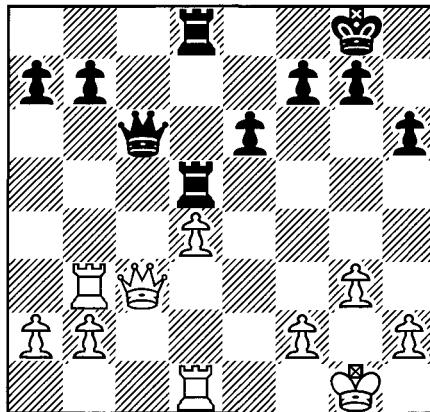


Question: To swap or not to swap?

Answer: 25 ♘f4

Best. Instead I suppose 25 ♘xc6?! would at least have left Black with a difficult choice. Due to the lack of pieces on the board and the pressure down the d-file, 25... ♖xc6 is the most forcing: 26 d5 ♖b4 27 ♘c3 ♖xd5 28 ♖xd5 ♘xd5 (28... exd5!?) 29 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 30 ♘c7 ♘b5 leaves Black with all the chances, though the old saying of Dr Tarrasch that all rook endings are drawn (untrue of course, but they do have a high drawish tendency) may come into play here!

25... ♖d5 26 ♘d2 ♘b6 27 ♖xd5 ♘xd5 28 ♘b3 ♘c6 29 ♘c3



Exercise: What did Karpov play here?

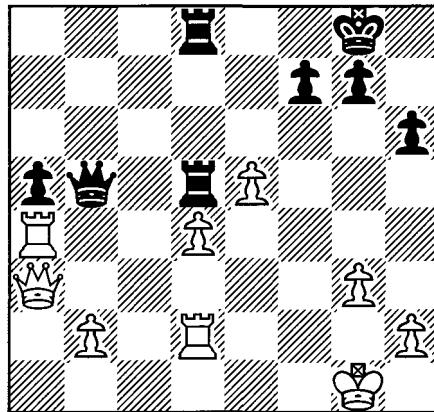
Answer: 29...♝d7!

Exchanging queens with 29...♛xc3? would be a big mistake as White repairs his pawn structure just in time as the b7-pawn is hanging. After 30 bxc3 b6 31 ♜e1 White removes himself from the pin.

30 f4

White must prevent ...e6-e5, but this move weakens his king position.

30...b6 31 ♜b4 b5 32 a4 bxa4 33 ♛a3 a5 34 ♜xa4 ♛b5 35 ♜d2 e5 36 fxe5 ♜xe5



37 ♛a1?

The decisive mistake, although the white position was very difficult anyway. Perhaps he could have tried something like 37 ♜f2 ♜e1+ 38 ♜g2 ♛c6+ 39 d5 ♜xd5 40 ♛f3.

37...♛e8! 38 dxe5 ♜xd2 39 ♜xa5 ♛c6 40 ♛a8+ ♔h7 41 ♛b1+ g6 42 ♛f1 ♛c5+ 43 ♔h1 ♛d5+ 0-1

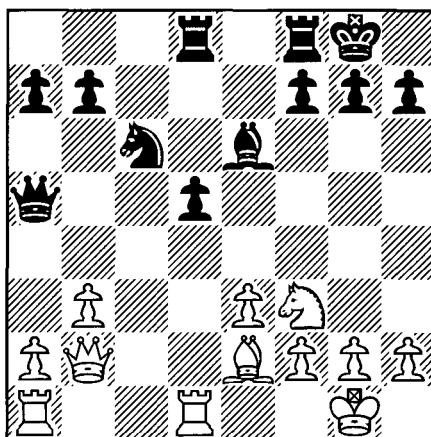
Korchnoi resigned, as ...♜d1 will follow.

Summary

A highly instructive tussle between two greats of the game. It isn't easy to put your finger on exactly where Korchnoi went wrong, but Karpov managed to effectively prevent the d4-pawn from becoming too big an obstacle to the development of his light-squared bishop. I particularly liked 11... $\mathbb{Q}h5$ in the early middlegame, exchanging pieces to relieve his space deficiency.

Here is another superb example of how to play against an IQP, which I first came across in Drazen Marovic's book, *Understanding Pawn Play in Chess*.

Game 37
M.Botvinnik-E.Zagoriansky
Sverdlovsk 1943



Question: How should White play here?

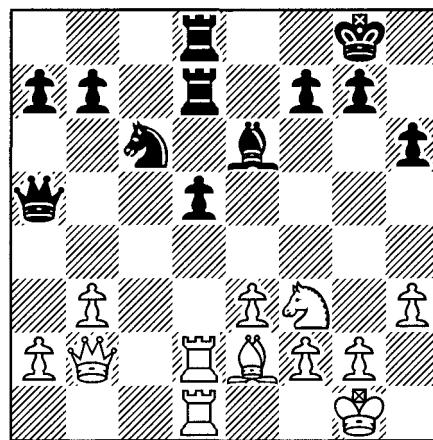
Answer: 16 $\mathbb{Q}d2$

Simple and strong. White plans to build up pressure on the d5-pawn, again tying Black down to the defence of his isolated pawn. 16 $\mathbb{Q}ac1$ (the computer's first choice!) is also very natural to try and take control of the semi-open c-file. Play might continue 16... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 17 $h3$ $\mathbb{Q}fd8$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ with a slight edge to White.

16... $\mathbb{Q}d7$?

The start of a passive plan. Since the d5-pawn is relatively safe at the moment due to the e6-bishop, I would take the chance to occupy the c-file and gain some counterplay with 16... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$.

17 ♘ad1 ♘fd8 18 h3 h6



Exercise: White has improved his position just about as much as he can without engaging the enemy. How would you continue now?

Answer: 19 ♗e5!

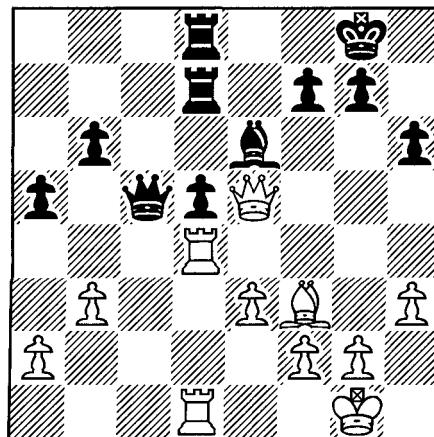
Whilst the c6-knight doesn't directly defend the d5-pawn, it does defend the square in front of it. Access to this square will allow Botvinnik to set up a kingside attack.

19 ♗d4 would also have been good, but was not as forcing as it doesn't threaten the rook.

19...♘xe5

19...♗c7 would allow 20 ♖f3, increasing the pressure on d5.

20 ♕xe5 ♕c5 21 ♖f3 b6 22 ♖b2 ♖c8 23 ♖e5 ♖cd8 24 ♖d4 a5



Exercise: White has amassed all his forces (apart from his king!) against the d5-pawn, but Black stands firm.

Calculate the consequences of the thematic breakthrough 25 e4.

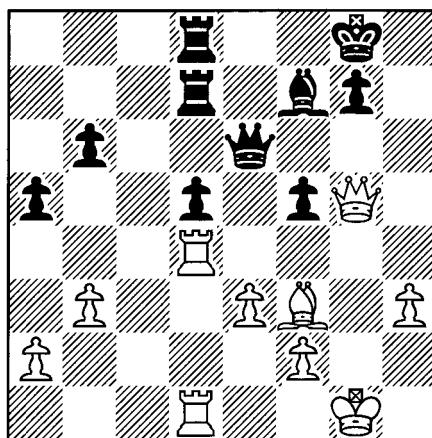
Answer: We saw this typical motif in Korchnoi-Karpov, but here it isn't enough: 25 e4?! dx e 4 26 $\mathbb{W}xc5$ b xc 5 27 $\mathbb{B}xd7$ $\mathbb{B}xd7$ 28 $\mathbb{B}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ and a position is reached where despite Black's two isolated pawns it will be difficult for White to exploit his advantage, as the pawns can only be attacked by the king and not the light-squared bishop.

25 g4

Having presumably seen that 25 e4 didn't promise enough, Botvinnik uses the hook on h6 to lever open the g-file. Of course, such a move should not be made lightly as it weakens both White's pawn structure and also his king. However, without any active pieces other than the queen on c5 Black's counterplay is limited. White attempts to open a 'second front' on the kingside to create further weaknesses, while Black's rooks and bishop are passively placed and therefore will find it difficult to switch their sphere of operations.

25... $\mathbb{B}c6$ 26 g5 hxg5 27 $\mathbb{B}xg5$ f6 28 $\mathbb{B}g6$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 29 $\mathbb{B}g3$ f5 30 $\mathbb{B}g5$ $\mathbb{B}e6$?

30... $\mathbb{B}d6$ would have been much better, trying to use the g-file towards the white king.



Exercise: White has certainly made some progress, though the black position still holds firm. What candidate moves would you consider in this position?

Answer: 31 $\mathbb{Q}h1$

Taking the king off the g-file is logical, both for king safety and a potential attack.

The move that immediately springs to my mind, along with the text, is 31 $\mathbb{B}f4$ attacking the second weakness. Indeed after 31...g6 (31... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 32 h4) 32 h4! $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ White enjoys

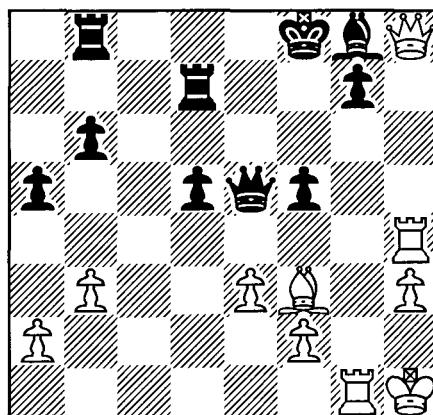
good prospects of a kingside attack.

31...♜e5 32 ♜g1 ♜f8 33 ♜h6

The attention has shifted away from the d5-pawn, but note the superb position of the white rook on d4 in front of the isolani!

33..♝b8 34 ♜h4 ♔f8 35 ♜h8+ ♜g8

Giving up a pawn with 35...♚e7 is a better option, but after 36 ♜xg7 ♜xg7 37 ♜xg7 ♔f6 38 ♜hh7 the white rooks still put a lot of pressure on the black position.



Question: What now for White?

Answer: 36 ♜f4!

A very classy move, turning the attention away from the h-file to the weak f5-pawn with the idea of ♜g5 or ♜h5.

36..♝bb7 37 ♜g5 ♜f7 38 ♜h5

38 ♜h5 ♜f6 39 ♜g6 is even stronger.

38...♛a1+ 39 ♔g2 g6 40 ♜xg6 ♜h7 41 ♜d6+ ♜fe7 42 ♜d8+ 1-0

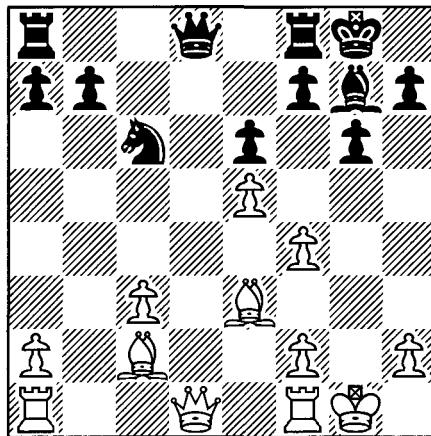
Summary

An instructive game which was very typical of Botvinnik's style. White built up slowly against the isolated pawn, tying the black forces down to its defence, before switching the direction of the attack to the kingside where Black was unable to cope with the opening of a second front. Note the way that 19 ♜e5 gave White important access to and control of the square in front of the isolani.

Playing against an Isolated Pawn

The following snippet is taken from one of my recent games played at the London Chess Classic in the Open section against experienced FIDE master, friend and 4NCL team-mate of mine, Laurence Webb. Sadly I failed to find the correct plan here. Can you do any better?

Game 38
L.Webb-A.Hunt
 London 2011



Exercise: Black has managed to damage White's pawn structure in the opening, but how should he continue?

Answer: 15...♝a5

On the surface this looks like a good move, immediately hitting the weak pawn. I was surprised by Arthur Kogan's reaction to it though, which I felt was instructive. White's problem here (apart from his shattered kingside pawn structure) is obviously the weak pawn on c3. However, the presence of the bishop-pair as well as the open b-file provides certain compensation for this. The idea of preventing the c-pawn from advancing and occupying the square in front of it never even occurred to me during the game. Perhaps I should have studied more of Botvinnik's games!

15...♝c7! is the move I now like the most. It prepares the immediate jump of the knight to c4 via a5 and keeps the black rooks' options open: for example, 16 ♕e4 ♛a5 17 ♜a4 ♜ac8 18 ♜ab1 (18 ♜xa7?? b6) 18...b6 and Black will look forward to the better long-term prospects.

I also wondered about 15...♝h4, switching the queen to the kingside. It is logical as the white king position is draughty. However, 16 ♜f3 with the idea of ♜g3 shoring up the kingside looks okay for White (16 ♕e4? ♜xe5 was the trick I had in mind).

16 ♕e4 ♜ac8

16...♝xc3 17 ♜a4 gives White loads of play for his pawn.

17 ♜b3 b6

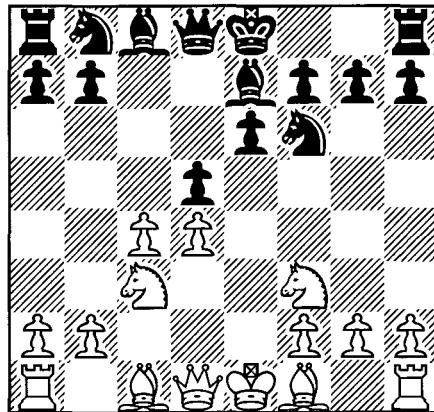
The game was drawn some time later, but the key instructive moment is over. Black failed to control the square in front of the isolated c-pawn.

Playing with the Isolated Pawn

Next we are going to see a nice example of how to use the isolani to your advantage. My sister Harriet and I grew up on a staple diet of the Panov-Botvinnik Attack against the Caro-Kann and this game went a long way towards helping her achieve probably her biggest chess success to date, the World Under-20 Girls' title in Zagan, Poland.

Game 39
H.Hunt-E.Danielian
Zagan 1997
Caro-Kann Defence

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 c4 ♜f6 5 ♜c3 e6 6 ♜f3 ♜e7



Question: What should White play here?

Answer: 7 cxd5

A point worth making is that White would like to develop the light-squared bishop, but if 7 ♜d3 Black will win a tempo with 7...dxc4 8 ♜xc4 0-0. There are theoretical arguments about this position of course, but White's play in the game seems more logical to me.

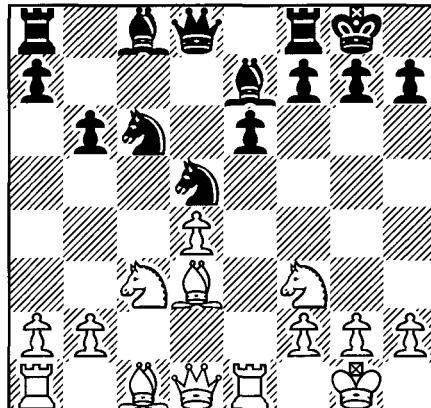
7...♝xd5

7...exd5 8 ♜d3 0-0 9 h3 ♜c6 10 0-0 0 leaves White with a very slight edge due to the more active bishop on d3, eyeing the black kingside.

8 ♜d3 0-0 9 0-0 ♜c6 10 ♜e1 ♜f6

Black exerts more pressure on the IQP.

Exercise: Instead 10...b6? would be a natural move, but also a serious mistake. Can you see why?



Answer: 11 $\mathbb{Q}xd5!$. It is important to be alert to such tactical tricks – here the undefended black knight on c6 comes under fire. Both responses leave Black in trouble:

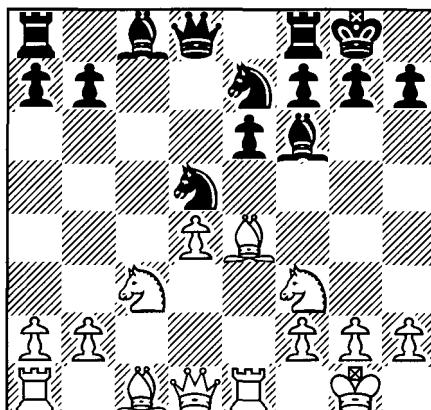
- a) 11...exd5 12 $\mathbb{Q}xh7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}c2+\mathbb{Q}g8$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ nets a pawn.
- b) 11... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ leaves Black in all sorts of trouble due to the exposed queen on d6.

11 $\mathbb{Q}e4$

This creates the mini positional threat of 12 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$. White would be quite happy with the resulting transformation as she is ahead in development.

11... $\mathbb{Q}ce7$

Black shores up the d5-knight.



Question: What should White play here?

Answer: 12 ♟e5!

Using the d4-pawn as a springboard in the centre. The knight increases its influence, whilst opening up the d1-h5 diagonal for the queen.

12...g6

This has been played by some strong players, but I don't like the weakening of the kingside. The main problem for Black in this position is that the natural sequence of captures $12\dots\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 13 $dxe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 14 $bxcc3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ leaves Black with virtually no sensible way of developing her pieces.

Arguably the greatest-ever exponent of the Caro-Kann preferred 12... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 13 $\mathbb{W}f3$ (Harriet was thinking about 13 $\mathbb{W}h5$ here) 13... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 14 $bxc3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 15 $dxe5$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ against the world's strongest-ever female player. After 16 $\mathbb{B}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 17 $\mathbb{W}e2$ $a6$ 18 $\mathbb{B}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $e5$ 20 $c4$ a draw was agreed in a complicated position in J.Polgar-A.Karpov, Tilburg 1996.

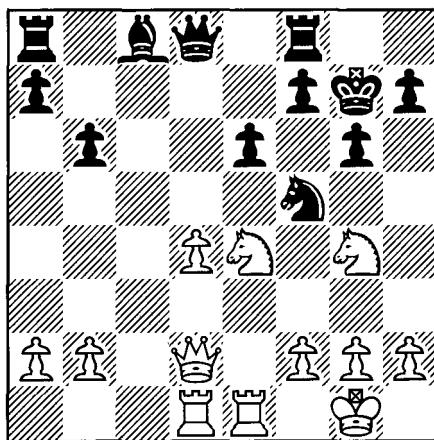
13 h6 g7

If 13... $\mathbb{E}e8$ 14 $\mathbb{W}f3!$ with some indirect pressure on f7.

14 ♔d2 ♕f6 15 ♙ad1

Unlike in the game Korchnoi-Karpov, we can see that the c8-bishop is trapped whilst all the white pieces are actively placed.

15...♝xe4 16 ♜xe4 ♞f5 17 ♕xg7 ♔xg7 18 ♜g4 b6??



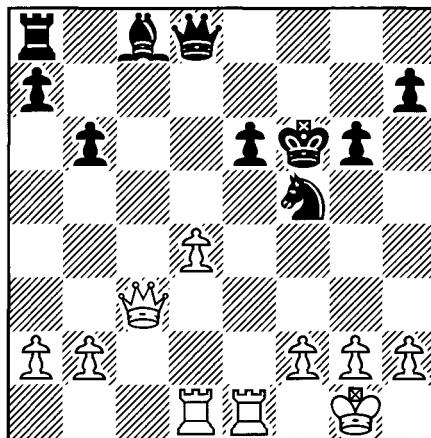
Question: This is a blunder. How can White take advantage?

Answer: 19 c3!

With the threat of d4-d5 and also in some situations ♕c6.

19...f6 20 \mathbb{Q} xf6! \mathbb{K} xf6 21 \mathbb{Q} xf6 \mathbb{K} xf6

21... $\mathbb{W}xf6$ 22 $\mathbb{W}c6$ wins the rook, thanks to the fork 22... $\mathbb{B}b8$ 23 $\mathbb{W}c7+$.



Question: How did Harriet finish the game?

Answer: 22 d5+

Our old friend appears!

22...e5

It is too much to hope for that Black can survive with 22... $\mathbb{Q}g5$: for example, 23 dxe6 $\mathbb{W}e7$ 24 $\mathbb{W}d2+$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 25 $\mathbb{W}d5$ and Black will either lose the rook or allow the white e-pawn through.

23 $\mathbb{W}c6+$ 1-0

Summary

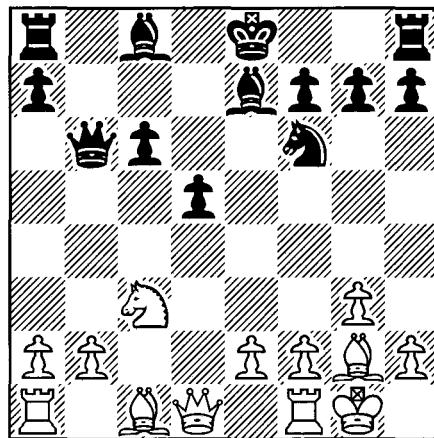
This game has always stuck in my mind as a nice model of how to handle the white side of the Panov-Botvinnik and use the IQP. I hope it can be useful to you too! The jump of the knight into e5 combined with the kingside play that followed, provoking ...g7-g6 ahead of exploiting the weakened black king position was particularly instructive.

The Backward Pawn

We now move on to a discussion of the ‘backward’ pawn, which is a pawn behind friendly pawns on adjacent files and one that cannot move without being lost. Backward pawns are particularly vulnerable if they are on semi-open files, as the opposing major pieces can build up pressure and tie the owner of the backward pawn down to defending it, in a similar way to what we have seen with isolated pawns. The similarities continue as there is often a hole in front of a backward pawn that can be occupied by an enemy piece. We shall start by taking a look at a strategic masterpiece by Polish Grandmaster Akiba Rubinstein against his one-time training partner Georg Salwe.

Game 40
A.Rubinstein-G.Salwe
 Lodz 1908
Tarrasch Defence

1 d4 d5 2 ♜f3 c5 3 c4 e6 4 cxd5 exd5 5 ♜c3 ♜f6 6 g3 ♜c6 7 ♜g2 cxd4 8 ♜xd4 ♜b6 9 ♜xc6 bxc6 10 0-0 ♜e7



Exercise: What move would you play as White?

Answer: 11 ♜a4

Rubinstein is quick to notice the weakness in Black's camp and will now concentrate his efforts against the backward c-pawn.

Perhaps just as good were:

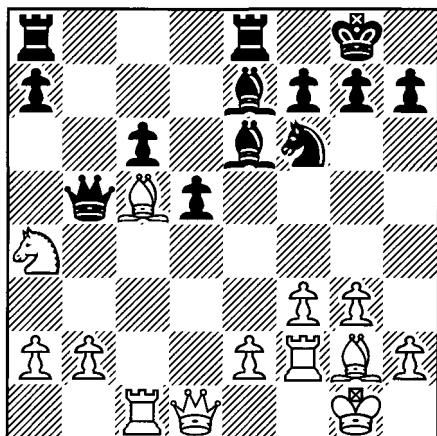
a) 11 ♜c2 0-0 12 ♜e3 ♜a5 (if 12...d4 13 ♜a4) 13 a3 ♜d8 14 ♜fd1 ♜e6 15 b4 ♜a6 16 ♜a4 with similar play to the game.

b) 11 e4!? looks like it might be best and has certainly become the most popular move in the position, immediately forcing matters in the centre: 11...dxe4 12 ♜xe4 0-0 (12...d5 looks better) 13 ♜e3 ♜a5 (13...♜xb2?! is risky: 14 ♜d4 ♜b5 15 ♜xf6+ ♜xf6 16 ♜xf6 gxf6 17 ♜c1 with obvious compensation for the pawn due to Black's crippled pawn structure, S.Gligoric-P.Keres, Moscow 1967) 14 ♜g5 with a slight edge for White.

11...♜b5 12 ♜e3

White spends the next few moves focusing his attention on the square in front of the backward c-pawn.

12...0-0 13 ♜c1 ♜g4 14 f3 ♜e6 15 ♜c5 ♜fe8 16 ♜f2



A deep move. White wants to free his queen from the defence of the e2-pawn, whilst preparing the eventual transfer of his king's rook to c2.

16...♝d7 17 ♜xe7 ♜xe7 18 ♛d4!

White wants to prevent the c5-pawn from advancing and if necessary play ♜a4-c5 in order to exchange off the defender of the square in front of the pawn, just as in our examples of playing against an isolated pawn. The move also has the merit of preventing ...♝a8-c8, as the a7-pawn would then fall.

18...♝ee8 19 ♜f1

White sees that the bishop cannot exert any real pressure along the long diagonal and instead moves to force the black queen away from the defence of the c5-square.

19...♝ec8 20 e3 ♜b7 21 ♜c5

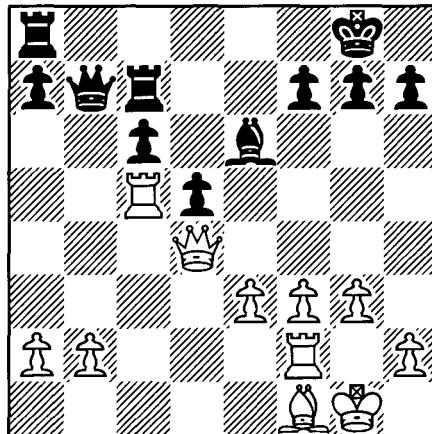
21 ♜fc2 is also a good move and the one I think I would have played here. After 21...♝ab8 (21...♝f5 22 ♜c3) 22 b3 ♜f5 23 ♜c5 will come and after 23...♝xc5 24 ♜xc5 White is better.

21...♝xc5 22 ♜xc5

This position is highly unpleasant for Black due his lack of counterplay.

22...♝c7

It is understandable that Black didn't want to weaken himself further with 22...a5!, but it does at least give him some ideas of playing ...a5-a4 (and possibly ...a4-a3) followed by obtaining some pressure on the b-file. It also stops White's strong plan which is executed a few moves later.



Question: How would you increase the pressure in this position?

Answer: 23 $\mathbb{Q}fc2!$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$

Exercise: We have now tied down two black pieces to the defence of the c-pawn, but what should we do next?

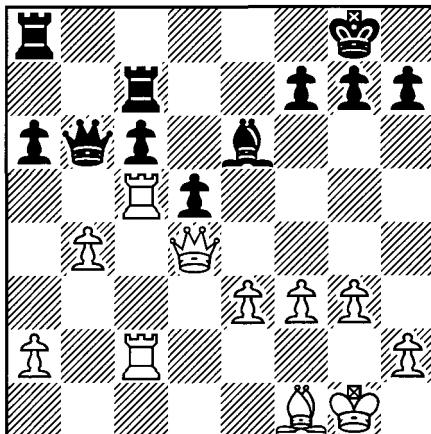
Answer: 24 b4!

As we saw in the Karpov game earlier in the chapter, the pin, combined with the threat of advancing the pawn to b5, is very difficult to counter.

24 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ would not be correct here as White loses control of the e4-square which gives Black time to play 24... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ a5, preventing White's plan. White is still unquestionably better due to the pressure on the c-file, but it's not so easy to make progress.

24...a6

24...a5 simply loses a pawn to 25 $\mathbb{Q}xa5$.



Exercise: The harmony in White's position is clear. Good co-ordination of the pieces often leads to tactical opportunities and here White has a chance for immediate action. Evaluate the consequences of 25 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$.

25 $\mathbb{Q}a5$

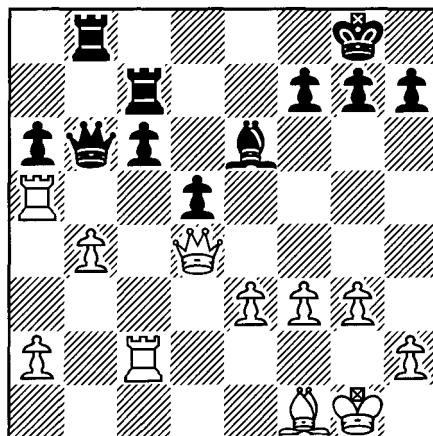
White sensibly prefers to increase the pressure on the a6-pawn.

Answer: 25 $\mathbb{Q}xd5?$ is poor. A small forcing line arises after 25... $cxd5$ (25... $\mathbb{Q}xd4?$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ just wins a pawn and should be winning for White) 26 $\mathbb{Q}xb6 \mathbb{Q}xc2$. I hope you managed to get this far. It is time to take stock. White has queen and pawn for the two rooks, along with a dangerous-looking queenside pawn majority. Having said that, the white king is slightly exposed and Black has good counterplay due to the activity of the c2-rook: for instance, 27 a4 (27 $\mathbb{Q}xa6 \mathbb{Q}h3!$ leaves the white king feeling rather uncomfortable: 28 a4 $\mathbb{Q}g2+$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}h1 \mathbb{Q}c2$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ is an immediate draw if Black wants it due to the weakness of the back rank) 27...h5! (giving the black king some air and also preventing the important defensive idea g3-g4) 28 a5 $\mathbb{Q}c1$. I think it is easier to go wrong as White here and if we compare this position to the one before 25 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ it is clear White has allowed too much counterplay.

25... $\mathbb{Q}b8?$

This weakens the a6-pawn beyond repair.

25... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 26 $exd4 \mathbb{Q}b7$ 27 a3 (27 $\mathbb{Q}xc6?$ would be an instructive mistake, giving Black too much activity in exchange for the pawn after 27... $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}cxa6 \mathbb{Q}xa6$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}xa6 \mathbb{Q}f8$) 27... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ would have been a much better defensive try as the rook isn't pinned down the c-file any more.



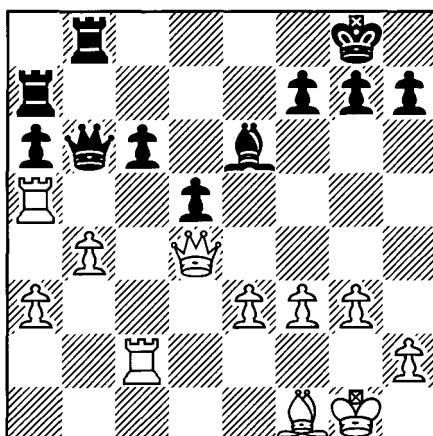
Question: What should White play here?

Answer: 26 a3!

Securing his b-pawn and preparing to win the a6-pawn.

26...♝a7?

Salwe capitulates, although I can't see a good way of saving the a6-pawn. Indeed, 26...♜cb7 27 ♜xa6 ♛xd4 28 exd4 ♜b6 29 ♜d3 would also be good for White.



Exercise: As mentioned previously, good co-ordination often leads to tactical shots. How did White break through here?

Answer: 27 ♜xc6

Splat! The c-pawn eventually falls and the game is technically won.

27... $\mathbb{W}xc6$ 28 $\mathbb{W}xa7$ $\mathbb{B}a8$ 29 $\mathbb{W}c5$ $\mathbb{B}b7$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $h5$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $g6$ 32 $\mathbb{W}d6$ $\mathbb{W}c8$ 33 $\mathbb{B}c5$
 33 $\mathbb{B}xa6$ $\mathbb{B}xa6$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ gives Black unnecessary counterplay.
 33... $\mathbb{W}b7$ 34 $h4$ $a5$ 35 $\mathbb{B}c7$ $\mathbb{W}b8$ 36 $b5$ $a4$ 37 $b6$ $\mathbb{B}a5$ 38 $b7$ 1-0

Summary

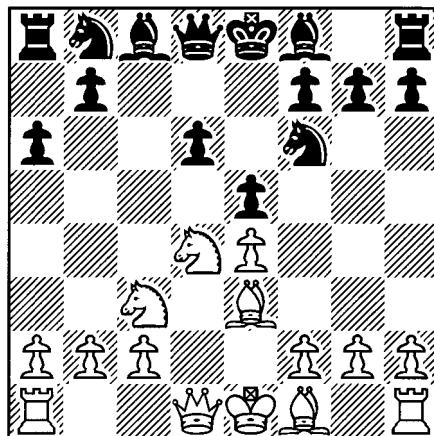
Rubinstein played a good strategic game against the backward c-pawn, firstly by immobilizing it, then by gradually exchanging off minor pieces, leaving the black rooks and queen tied down to its defence. He then used the typical motif of advancing a pawn to exploit the pin down the c-file and exert further pressure. This provoked Black into creating another weakness (in this case the a-pawn), before eventually White picked the c-pawn off.

The Dynamic Fight against the Backward Pawn

It would be impossible for me not to discuss the issue of the backward pawn without talking about my true opening love, the Sicilian Najdorf. No opening better highlights the struggle against a backward pawn than this one and it leads to some fantastically interesting strategic and tactical battles.

*Game 41
 S.Karjakin-V.Anand
 Wijk aan Zee 2007
 Sicilian Defence*

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!?



A very risky strategic move in itself and yet one that crops up in many types of Open Sicilian! The reader I am sure will have at least seen this position before, as it was the

weapon of arguably the two most famous World Champions of them all, Garry Kasparov and Bobby Fischer. Black voluntarily gives himself a backward d-pawn on a semi-open file and permanently weakens the d5-square. In exchange for this he removes the white knight from its strong square on d4 and allows his light-squared bishop (in most cases) to take up an active residence on e6. Is that really enough for the long-term weakness he has given himself? Current theory thinks it probably is, though White obviously has a wide variety of ways to play. What is certain is that it is of the utmost importance that the second player continues dynamically or he will find himself in serious trouble. Here we examine a game played by two of the strongest players in the world and highlight some of the key ideas.

7 $\mathbb{Q}b3$

The most aggressive choice.

Exercise: 7 $\mathbb{Q}f5?$! has only been played 16 times compared to 8873 with the text and has scored a piffling 22%. How Black should react?

Answer: 7 ...d5! at once liberates the backward pawn! After 8 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ d4 9 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ I like the dynamic 9 ...gxf6!? (9 ... $\mathbb{W}xf6$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{W}d8$ is also fine) 10 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 11 exf5 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ which gives Black a good position. Yes, his kingside is out of shape, but White's development is slow and the black king will find a safe haven on the queenside.

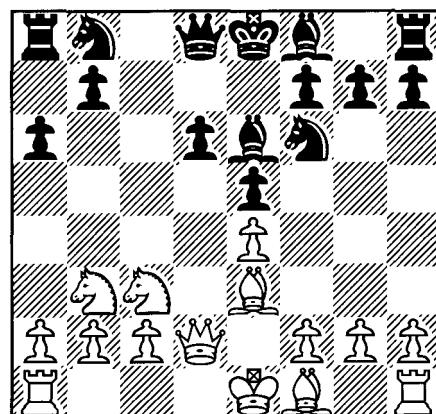
Gain credit too if you would have played 7 ... $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 8 exf5 d5 9 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ d4 10 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ which is comfortable for Black.

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

Black seeks to control d5 and can now think about advancing the d-pawn at some stage.

8 $\mathbb{W}d2$

8 f3 is also very popular and often transposes.

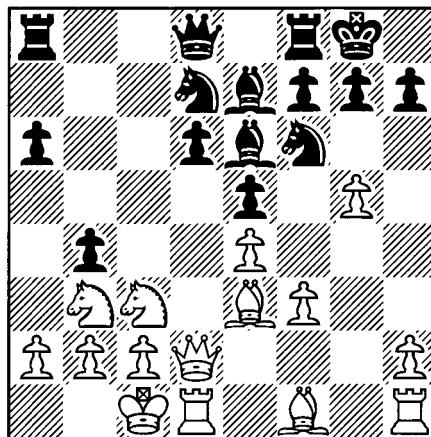


Question: Well, isn't 8...d5 possible now?

Answer: Be very careful of making pawn breaks when you are lagging behind in development! 8...d5? 9 exd5 wins at least a pawn, since 9...Qxd5? (the sad 9...Qf5 is best) 10 0-0-0 Qb4 11 Qc4 wins a piece due to the pin down the d-file.

Instead 8...Qe7 9 f3 0-0 10 g4?! d5 11 g5 d4! 12 gxf6 Qxf6 with a good game for Black is a well-known idea here.

8...Qbd7 9 0-0-0 b5 10 f3 Qe7 11 g4 0-0 12 g5 b4



Question: There is a gaping hole on d5.

Why doesn't White occupy it with 13 Qd5?

13 Qe2

Answer: Well, of course, 13 Qd5 is a very logical move, but here Black can 'repair' his pawn structure with 13...Qxd5 14 exd5 Qf5. After 15 h4 a5 I am not saying the position is better for Black by any means (in fact the situation is still very tense as both sides look to attack), but after something like 16 Qd3 Qxd3 17 Wxd3 f5! (a typical move in this variation to gain some control of the central squares or open the f-file) 18 gxf6 Qxf6 19 h5 Wd7 Black was at least equal in E.Postny-A.Delchev, Andorra 2004.

13 gxf6 bxc3 14 Wxc3 Qxf6 has also been tried, but results have favoured Black.

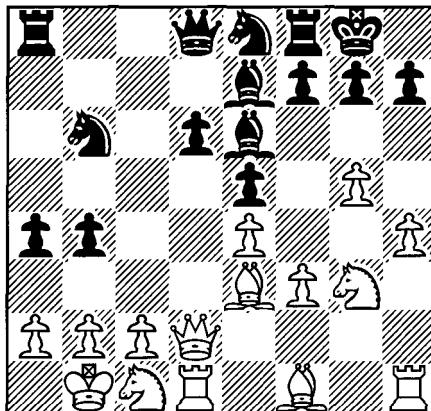
13...Qe8 14 h4

There are many other moves in this position. The current trend is to go 14 f4 a5 15 f5 a4 16 Qbd4! with wild complications.

14...a5 15 Qb1

Giving the knight a square on c1.

15...Qb6 16 Qg3 a4 17 Qc1



Exercise: Hopefully by now you know what Black would like to play in this position. Assess the complications arising from 17...d5.

17...d5

Answer: It leads to a huge mess after Karjakin's response!

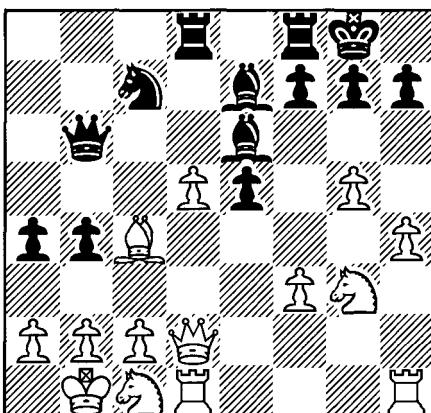
18 ♜xb6

Critical. Instead 18 exd5 ♜xd5 19 ♜c4 ♜ec7 is pleasant for Black as he can extract himself from the pin on the d-file after 20 ♜f2 with something simple like 20...♝b8. Black's pieces are very harmoniously placed and he has the advantage. Note that the advance of the backward pawn has given the dark-squared bishop new life, whilst the knight occupies a fantastic square on d5.

18...♝xb6 19 exd5 ♜d8!

And you would have needed to have seen this one before you played 17...d5.

20 ♜c4 ♜c7



21 dxe6!

The queen sacrifice looks best in this position, since if Black is allowed to recapture on d5 he will have a very active position. In exchange for the queen White gets a rook, knight and two pawns, as well as a very menacing looking pawn on f7. Karjakin also reminds Anand that he can play energetically!

21...♝xd2 22 exf7+ ♕h8 23 ♜xd2 ♜b5

Summary

We can stop here. Anand went on to win the game eventually, but analysis shows the position to be about equal. This game serves to introduce and illustrate just how important the ...d5 break is for Black in such positions, as well as how the fight for the square in front of the backward pawn is rarely straightforward.

Hanging Pawns

No chess match has ever attracted more media interest or spawned more books and films than the 1972 World Championship match between the American Bobby Fischer and the Russian champion Boris Spassky. In the sixth game of the match Fischer astounded the world by playing 1 c4, as he was a habitual 1 e4 player, and won a brilliant game. It is a great demonstration of how to play against the so called 'hanging pawn' formation: two pawns side by side without any other friendly pawns to defend them. Such a pair can often become immobile targets for the enemy pieces, in the same way that isolated or backward pawns can.

*Game 42***R.Fischer-B.Spassky**

World Championship (Game 6), Reykjavik 1972
Queen's Gambit Declined

1 c4 e6 2 ♜f3 d5 3 d4 ♜f6 4 ♜c3 ♜e7 5 ♜g5

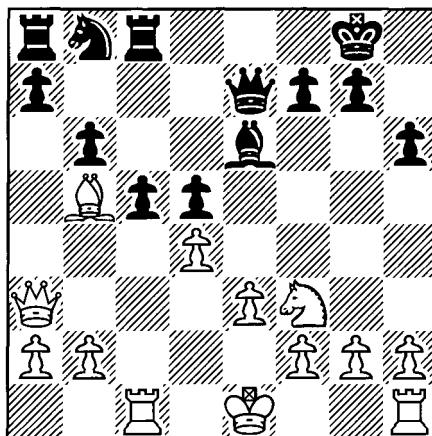
The game has transposed into a Queen's Gambit.

5...0-0 6 e3 h6 7 ♜h4 b6 8 cxd5 ♜xd5

Spassky decides to exchange off some pieces as he has a slight space disadvantage.

9 ♜xe7 ♜xe7 10 ♜xd5 exd5 11 ♜c1 ♜e6 12 ♜a4 c5 13 ♜a3 ♜c8 14 ♜b5!?

These days 14 ♜e2 is seen more often.



Exercise: This is a key moment for Spassky who is trying to avoid being lumbered with a set of immobile hanging pawns. What should he play?

14...a6

This move has only seen the light of day three times since the 1970's! After Fischer's powerful display, few players have ventured to repeat Spassky's choice.

Answer: 14... $\mathbb{W}b7!$ with the idea of ...c5-c4 is the most dynamic move, trying to take advantage of the misplaced white bishop on b5. The detail is that after 15 dxc5 bxc5 16 $\mathbb{B}xc5$ $\mathbb{B}xc5$ 17 $\mathbb{W}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}a6!$ Black gets good play following 18 $\mathbb{W}c6$ (or 18 $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ $\mathbb{W}xa6$ 19 $\mathbb{W}a3$ $\mathbb{W}c4$ $\mathbb{W}c4$ when the white king is stuck in the centre, as in J.Timman-E.Geller, Hilversum 1973) 18... $\mathbb{W}xc6$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{B}b8!$, with the neat point that White cannot hang on to his pawn with 20 b3 as 20... $\mathbb{B}c8$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ wins material thanks to the pin on the bishop to the c1-square. Note that if the pawn was on b2 then White would have $\mathbb{Q}a4$, defending.

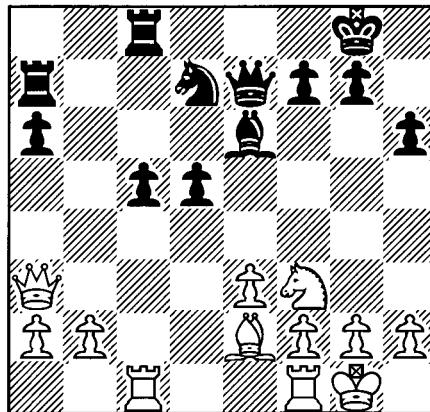
15 dxc5 bxc5

The hanging pawns have arrived on the scene!

16 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}a7$

16... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{B}xc6$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{B}c7$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}d3!$ was, I imagine, the idea when White looks to probe the hanging pawns.

17 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$



Question: What should Fischer's plan be?

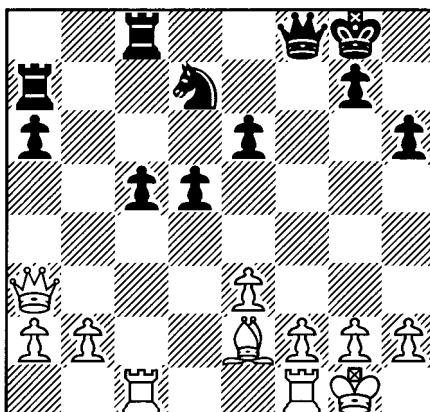
18 ♟d4!

Answer: White's plan is to apply as much pressure as possible to the hanging pawn centre. Pawn structure so often dictates how we should play the middlegame. With his last move White looks to either increase the pressure with ♘b3 or transform the position in his favour (to bishop versus knight) with ♗xe6.

18... ♕f8

Jan Timman gives this move a question mark in his analysis and gives 18... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ as better, preventing White's plan in the game. This encourages 19 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ (19...c4 20 $\mathbb{W}xe7$ $\mathbb{R}xe7$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ gives White a pleasant pull in the endgame), when I think White can still claim to have a small edge after 20 $\mathbb{R}c3$, preparing to double the rooks (20 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6!$ is a useful defence).

19 ♔xe6 fxe6



Question: So White has traded and obtained
bishop against knight, but what next?

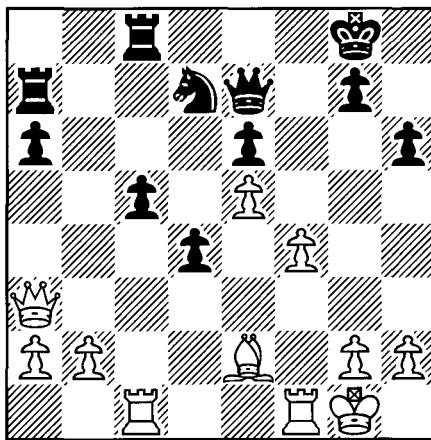
Answer: 20 e4!

A fine pawn break, looking to open up diagonals and files, not to mention loosen the hanging pawns further.

20...d4?

This move was rightly criticized at the time, as the pawns become fixed on dark squares. The passed pawn that is created is irrelevant due to the fact that it is unlikely to be able to advance. Black must keep the c- and d-pawns together with something like 20... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 21 exd5 exd5 22 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ when White is still better due to the pressure on the hanging pawns.

21 f4 $\mathbb{W}e7$ 22 e5



Exercise: White starts to dream of some attacking chances
on the kingside as his pawn crosses the 'halfway line'.
Can you find a way to make Black's passed pawns mobile?

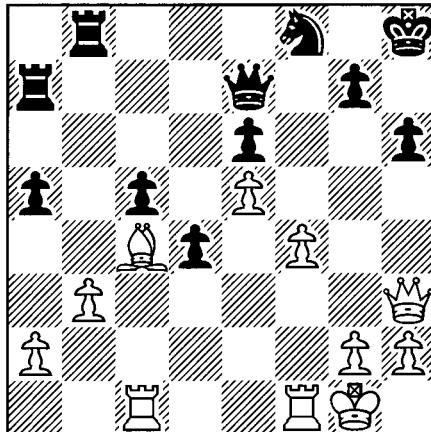
22... $\mathbb{Q}b8?$

Answer: 22... $\mathbb{Q}b6$! unpinning the pawn, heading for d5 and preventing White's next move is Black's best and most active defence. For example, if White carries on with 23 f5 then 23...c4 24 $\mathbb{W}a5$ d3 gives Black counterplay.

23 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$

Sadly it's too late now for 23... $\mathbb{Q}b6$, in view of 24 $\mathbb{W}b3$!

24 $\mathbb{W}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 25 b3 a5



Exercise: The position makes for a sad sight for Black whose pieces are uncoordinated. How should Fischer proceed?

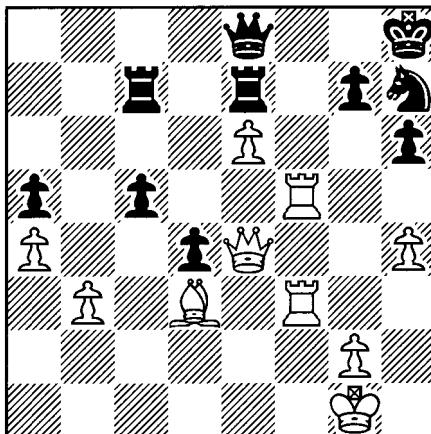
Answer: 26 f5!

Of course! This break opens both the a2-g8 diagonal and f-file which far outweighs the weakening of the e5-pawn.

26...exf5 27 ♜xf5 ♞h7 28 ♜cf1

White has a clear advantage, but is not as yet winning. Over the next few moves Fischer plays to dominate the h7-knight before advancing his e-pawn, having avoided the blunder 28 ♜f7?? ♞g5.

28...♛d8 29 ♛g3 ♜e7 30 h4 ♜bb7 31 e6 ♜bc7 32 ♛e5 ♛e8 33 a4 ♛d8 34 ♜1f2 ♛e8 35 ♜2f3 ♛d8 36 ♜d3 ♛e8 37 ♛e4



Exercise: Calculate the winning lines for White if Black plays 37... $\blacksquare x e 6$ or 37... $\blacksquare f 6$.

Answer: 37... $\blacksquare f 6$

37... $\blacksquare x e 6$ allows a nice checkmate after 38 $\blacksquare f 8 +!$ $\blacksquare x f 8$ 39 $\blacksquare x f 8 +$ $\blacksquare x f 8$ 40 $\blacksquare h 7$ mate.

38 $\blacksquare x f 6!$ $\blacksquare g x f 6$ 39 $\blacksquare x f 6$

Actually not too much calculation was needed. White blows up the kingside and the game is over.

39... $\blacksquare g 8$ 40 $\blacksquare c 4$ $\blacksquare h 8$ 41 $\blacksquare f 4$ 1-0

Summary

With a set of hanging pawns the key question is whether or not they can be mobilized. If they can't, as in this game, they will become a target as the game progresses. The fixing of the pawns on c5 and d4 allowed Fischer's bishop into the game via c4 and he eventually won due to a direct kingside assault.

The Minority Attack

Here I present a game played by the leading French Grandmaster Maxime Vachier Lagrave against your scribe at the super-strong Gibraltar tournament. It is a nice example of using a minority attack (usually a 2 vs. 3, or 3 vs. 4 pawn deficit on one side of the board) to create weaknesses in the opponent's position on that side.

Game 43
M.Vachier Lagrave-A.Hunt
Gibraltar 2012
English Opening

1 $c 4$ $e 5$ 2 $g 3$ $\blacksquare f 6$ 3 $\blacksquare g 2$ $\blacksquare c 6$ 4 $\blacksquare c 3$ $\blacksquare c 5$ 5 $e 3$

Of course there are other possibilities such as 5 $d 3$ and 5 $a 3$.

5... $d 5$?

An interesting way to unbalance the position.

6 $c x d 5$

6 $\blacksquare x d 5$ $\blacksquare x d 5$ 7 $\blacksquare x d 5$ (7 $c x d 5$ $\blacksquare b 4$ 8 $d 3$ $\blacksquare x d 5$ transposes to the game) 7... $\blacksquare b 4$ 8 $\blacksquare e 4$ 0-0 followed by ... $f 5$ and ... $\blacksquare d 3 +$ gives Black good compensation for the pawn.

6... $\blacksquare b 4$ 7 $d 3$

7 $d 4$ $exd 4$ 8 $exd 4$ $\blacksquare e 7$ 9 $\blacksquare f 3$ $\blacksquare b x d 5$ 10 0-0-0 11 $\blacksquare e 1$ $c 6$ 12 $\blacksquare d 2$ $\blacksquare e 8$ was comfortable for Black in G.Hertneck-L.McShane, German League 2001.

7... $\blacksquare f x d 5$ 8 $\blacksquare x d 5$ $\blacksquare x d 5$ 9 $\blacksquare f 3$ $\blacksquare b 4 + ?$

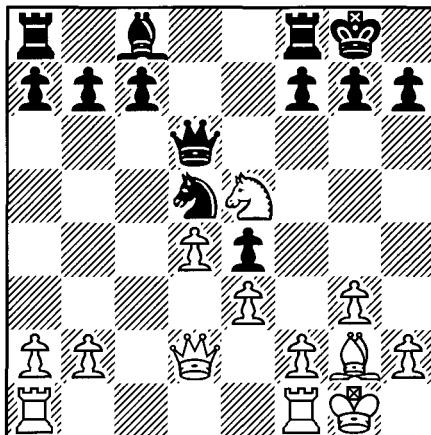
This is a positional mistake. Black exchanges off White's worst piece. I was worried

about losing a tempo to the move d3-d4, but after 9... $\mathbb{W}e7!$ 10 0-0 0-0 11 d4 (11 a3 with the idea of b2-b4 is perhaps better here) 11...exd4 12 exd4 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 13 $\mathbb{E}e1$ $\mathbb{W}d6$ Black will play ...c6 and ... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ with a comfortable game. Arthur Kogan made the point that the IQP position here is not dangerous for Black, as White's light-squared bishop is not on the b1-h7 diagonal pointing towards the black king, unlike in the Hunt-Danielian game, above.

10 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2+$ 11 $\mathbb{W}xd2$ $\mathbb{W}d6$

11...f6 would be better here, freeing the queen for other duties.

12 0-0 0-0 13 d4 e4 14 $\mathbb{Q}e5$



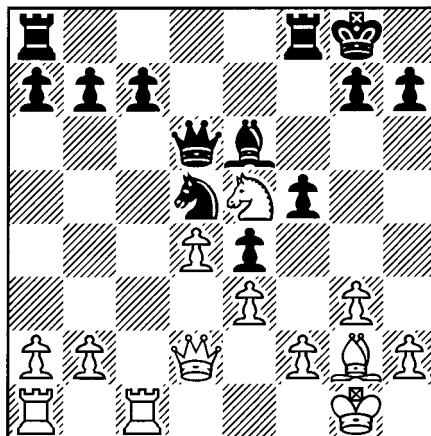
Exercise: There are three candidate moves that spring to mind in this position for Black: 14...f6, 14...f5 and 14... $\mathbb{Q}f6$. Which one is best?

14...f5?!

The tactical point that I hadn't seen up until here is that 14...f6? loses a pawn to 15 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $fxe5$ 16 $dxe5$ $\mathbb{W}xe5$ 17 $\mathbb{W}xd5+$ $\mathbb{W}xd5$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}xd5+$.

Answer: 14... $\mathbb{Q}f6$! is the best move, as Black retains some counterchances on the kingside, with moves like ... $\mathbb{Q}f5$, ... $\mathbb{W}e6$, ... $\mathbb{Q}h3$ and ...h7-h5. The e4-pawn should have given me some indication of the side of the board to play on, namely the kingside.

15 $\mathbb{E}fc1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$



Question: What should White's plan be?

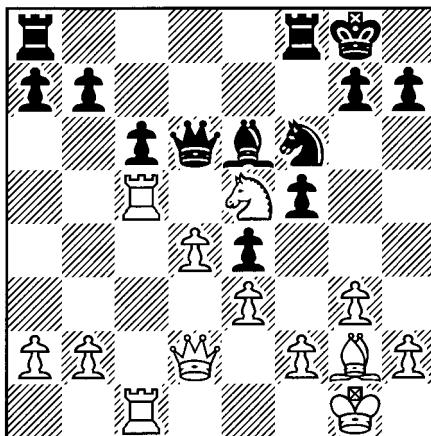
Answer: 16 $\mathbb{Q}c5!$

Simple chess! White plans to double (or if necessary treble) on the c-file to provoke a target in the black camp.

16... $\mathbb{Q}f6$

Preparing to exchange off the monster on e5.

17 $\mathbb{Q}ac1$ c6



Question: How should White continue now?

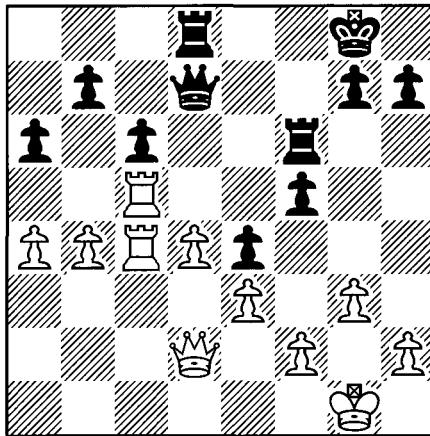
Answer: 18 b4!

White begins a classic minority attack, aiming to use the hook on c6 to either open the c-file or create a lasting pawn weakness on the queenside.

18...♝d7 19 ♜xd7 ♛xd7

Maxime thought I should have played 19...♝xd7 which may have been slightly better to keep an eye on the b5-square, but still after 20 a4 a6 21 ♜f1 it will be difficult to stop b4-b5.

20 ♜f1 a6 21 ♜c4 ♜xc4 22 ♜xc4 ♜ad8 23 a4 ♜f6



Question: Now should White proceed?

Answer: 24 ♜e2

During the game I was impressed by this move, played after a long think. The queen keeps an eye on both sides of the board and adds another defender to the b5-square. However it does allow a counterblow...

24 b5 would have been consistent, but 24...cxb5 (if 24...axb5 25 axb5 cxb5 26 ♜c1) 25 axb5 f4! gives Black counterplay: for example, 26 exf4 axb5 27 ♜b4 ♛h3 followed by ...♜h6. **24...♜a8**

24...f4!? was possible, in keeping with the theme of the last note. I missed the opportunity as sometimes happens if you feel you are slowly being squeezed out of a game. However, if I'd thought about the drawback to my opponent's moves, then 24...f4 comes to mind pretty quickly as White has weakened the defence of the d4-square:

a) 25 gxf4 ♜g6+ 26 ♜g5 ♜xg5+ 27 fxg5 ♛h3 and suddenly the white king starts to feel a bit draughty.

b) 25 exf4 b5! is the main idea. After 26 axb5 axb5 27 ♜c3 ♛xd4 White's only way of keeping the advantage according to the computer is by playing the far from obvious 28 ♜g2 (28 ♜xc6 ♜xc6 29 ♜xc6 ♛d1+ 30 ♛xd1 ♜xd1+ 31 ♜g2 ♜b1 is a draw) 28...♛xb4 29 ♜xc6 ♜xc6 30 ♜xc6 with the idea of pushing the f-pawn. Black gets much better drawing

chances than in the game if he plays like this though.

25 ♔g2 ♜h6! 26 ♔g1

26 h4 g5 27 hxg5 f4 28 ♔g1 f3 is not what White wants.

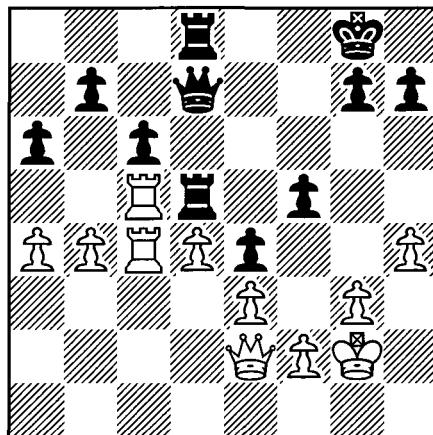
26...♜d6

Here the active defence 26...f4 can be countered by 27 exf4 ♜h3 28 ♜xe4 ♜xh2+ 29 ♔f1 ♜h3+ 30 ♔e2 ♜g4+ 31 ♔e1 when White remains better.

27 h4 ♜d5

Perhaps best in this position was to anticipate the opening of the queenside and hide the king away as a prophylactic measure, to avoid any nasty checks later on: 27...h6 28 b5 axb5 29 axb5 ♔h7.

28 ♔g2 ♜d8



Question: White has ensured the safety of his king.
Can he now break with b4-b5?

Answer: Yes!

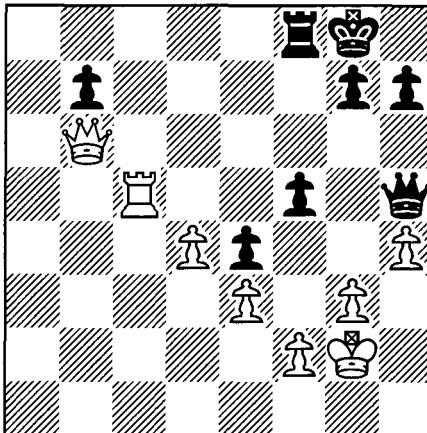
29 b5 axb5 30 axb5 cxb5 31 ♜xd5 ♜xd5 32 ♜c5 ♜f7 33 ♜xb5

Here we see the fruits of White's labour with his minority attack. He has obtained two weaknesses to target, as well as a passed d-pawn. Indeed, he is now clearly better.

33...♜f8

Desperately trying to keep some counterplay open with ...♜h5, but 33...g6 was probably better.

34 ♜b6 ♜h5

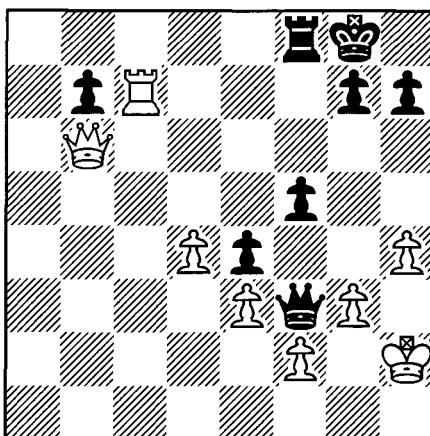


Exercise: Black prepares 35... $\mathbb{W}f3+$. How should White react?

Answer: 35 $\mathbb{E}c7!$

As is normally the case with strong grandmasters, Maxime refuses to be bluffed! Black's back rank problems mean there is no genuine counterplay.

35... $\mathbb{W}f3+$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{W}d1+$ 37 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{W}f3$



Question: How does White completely snuff out Black's counterplay?

Answer: 38 $\mathbb{W}b3+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 39 $\mathbb{W}c2$

Covering the f2-pawn and preparing the exchange of rooks if necessary. Now the d-pawn should decide matters.

39...h6 40 d5 b5 41 d6 ♜h7 42 ♜b2 ♜g8 43 ♜f7 ♜g6 44 ♜e7 ♜d1 45 d7 ♜h7 46 ♜xb5 ♜f3
47 ♜b2 ♜d1 48 ♜e5 ♜f3 49 ♜f4 ♜xf4 50 gxf4 ♜d8 51 h5 1-0

Summary

A very nicely controlled game by White, apart from the one moment when he allowed the tactical chance with 24...f4. White proceeded with a classic minority attack, combining pressure down a semi-open file with the b4-b5 pawn break against the c6 hook.

Key Points

- 1) The pawn structure will often determine the side of the board that you should be playing on. Be thinking about whether you are further advanced on the kingside or queenside and let your pawns guide you!
- 2) Pawn breaks make the middlegame much easier to handle as they allow your major pieces into the action. An early break in the opening is often useful in this respect. As a caveat be careful about making pawn breaks on the side of the board where you are weakest.
- 3) Weak pawns, such as doubled or isolated pawns, can have their dynamic advantages in the middlegame. Doubled pawns give you open files and isolated pawns can act as a springboard for the pieces to reach important central squares. However, the further in the game we go, the more difficult it will be to defend such pawns.
- 4) Hanging pawns are normally dead ducks unless they manage to become mobile. Look to restrict their potential advance and pick them off later in the game.

Chapter Five

Holes, Outposts and Weak Squares

It is annoying that the rules of chess do not allow a pawn to take either horizontally or backwards, but only forwards... This psychological tuning is ideal for attacking purposes, but what about for defence? – David Bronstein

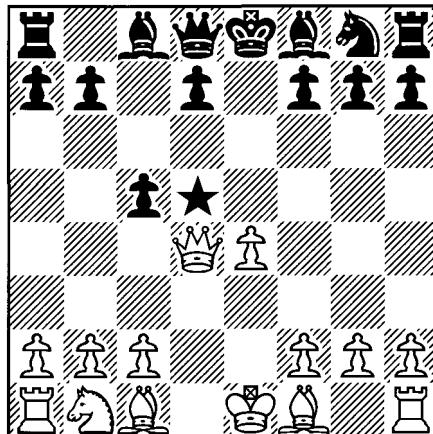
One mistake that seems to crop up a lot at amateur level is the failure to recognize the weakness of individual squares or a complex of squares (a number of squares of the same colour that are linked). I find this is particularly true at junior level, where children are playing to give mate most of the time! Seizing control of an important square can be as important as other advantages we have already discussed, such as a lead in development or a space advantage.

What is a weak square? We can define a weak square as one that cannot be defended by a pawn and as a result of this is a great place for a higher-valued piece belonging to the enemy to occupy. Outpost squares are particularly weak squares. Nimzowitsch, in *My System*, defines an outpost as: “by an outpost we mean one of our own pieces (normally a knight), which is placed, being protected (by a pawn) and on an open file within enemy territory.”

The bit about being in enemy territory is particularly important, as a knight’s influence grows significantly the further up the board it is. I would also add that I usually refer to an outpost only if the piece or square cannot be attacked by an enemy pawn. Personally I don’t think it matters too much as to the exact definition of the term, but what is important is that an outpost square is quickly recognized as a great one for our pieces!

1 e4 e5 2 ♜f3 ♜c6 3 d4 exd4 4 ♜xd4 ♜xd4 5 ♜xd4 c5?!

There’s no going back! Black weakens the d5-square for good and it becomes an outpost square for the white knight on b1 which can reach it via c3.

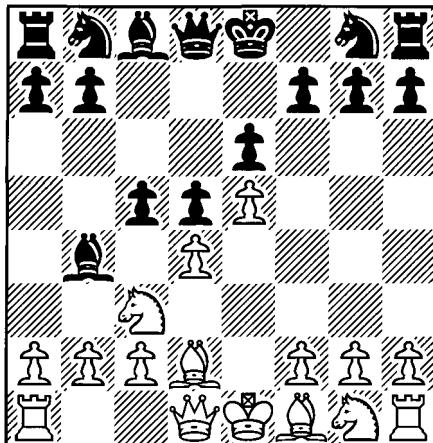


Let's look at a nice example of exploiting an outpost, taken from another one of my favourite trappy openings I played when young.

Game 44
V.Stoica-O.Foisor
Eforie Nord 1988
French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♜c3 ♜b4 4 e5 c5 5 ♜d2!?

This breaks the pin and the knight on c3 dreams about the d6-square! It is a tricky move, but one that with accurate play by Black shouldn't promise White any advantage.



5...♜c6

5... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2+$ 7 $\mathbb{W}xd2$ 0-0 is considered the safest when the outpost on d6 doesn't make itself felt so much as the black king has been evacuated. For example, 8 c3 $\mathbb{Q}bc6$ 9 f4 cxd4 10 cxd4 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ a6 12 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ f6 was okay for Black in H.Nakamura-P.Harikrishna, Oropesa del Mar 2000.

I could have also included countless games from my youth where my opponents played 5...cxd4?! 6 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2+$ (6... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 7 $\mathbb{W}g4!$ is annoying) 7 $\mathbb{W}xd2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}d6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 9 f4 with a great position, similar to the game.

6 $\mathbb{Q}b5$

The point of White's last move. The knight immediately heads for the d6-square, which is under his control.

6... $\mathbb{Q}xd2+$ 7 $\mathbb{W}xd2$ cxd4?!

7... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ still gives White the option of jumping into d6, but safest for the advantage is 8 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ cxd4 9 f4 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}f3$.

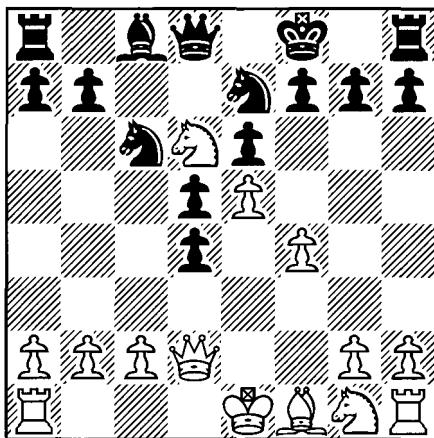
8 f4

There's no hurry to give the check: d6 can't be defended and White takes a move to reinforce his control of the outpost.

8... $\mathbb{Q}ge7$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}d6+$

Is the knight in an outpost? I would say so, even though the d-file is closed.

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



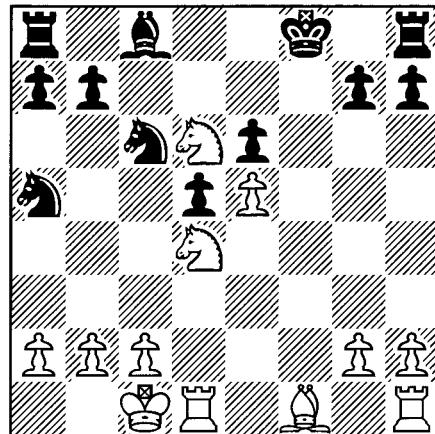
White enjoys a clear advantage due to the knight on d6. His simple strategy should now be to complete development.

10 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ f6?!

Black understandably wants to undermine the e5-pawn, but this move has the drawback of reducing the safety of his king.

A knight on such a square cannot be tolerated for long and so 10... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ should probably have been preferred, although White still enjoyed a good position after 11 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ exf5 12 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ g6 14 0-0-0 in B.Spassky-C.Garcia Palumbo, German Rapid Cup 1989.

11 0-0-0 ♕a5 12 ♖xa5 ♗xa5 13 ♗xd4 fxe5 14 fxe5 ♗ec6



Exercise: Black has managed to get the queens off, but his king remains a big problem. How should White proceed?

Answer: 15 ♘b5!

A very energetic move! Stoica completes the development of his minor pieces and prepares to occupy the f-file. He is able to give away his defender of the outpost square as doing so will open files for his rooks.

15...♘xe5

15...♗d8 16 ♖xc8 ♜xc8 17 ♔d7 ♜b8 18 ♗xe6+ wasn't much better for Black in J.Janda-R.Turner, Czech League 2010.

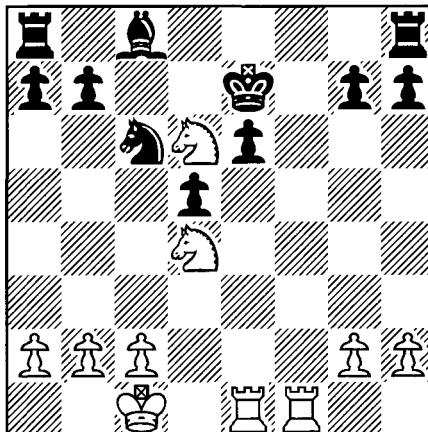
16 ♜de1!

Not giving Black the time to reorganize his pieces. Note that the other rook wants to be on the f1 square.

16...♘ac6

16...♔e7 would lose a piece to 17 ♖xc8+ ♜axc8 18 ♜xe5.

17 ♜xc6 ♗xc6 18 ♜hf1+ ♔e7



Exercise: White has harmoniously centralized all his pieces. How should he continue?

Answer: 19 ♟xc8+!

Under normal circumstances this would be a dreadful idea (exchanging the powerful knight for an undeveloped bishop), but here the white pieces simply invade via e6.

19...♜axc8 20 ♜xe6+ ♕d8 21 ♜d6+ ♔c7 22 ♜xd5 ♟d8?

Black's best chance probably lay in the rook ending after 22...♝xd4 23 ♜f7+ ♕b8 24 ♜xd4 ♜c7, but this should also be winning for White.

23 ♜e1 ♟c6 24 ♟xc6?!

24 ♟e6+ ♕b8 25 ♜d7 looks cleanest.

24...♛xc6 25 ♜g5 ♜c7 26 ♜e6+ ♔d7 27 ♜xg7+ ♛xe6 28 ♜xc7 1-0

Black had seen enough and resigned. The outpost handed to White in the opening was the key factor in deciding the game.

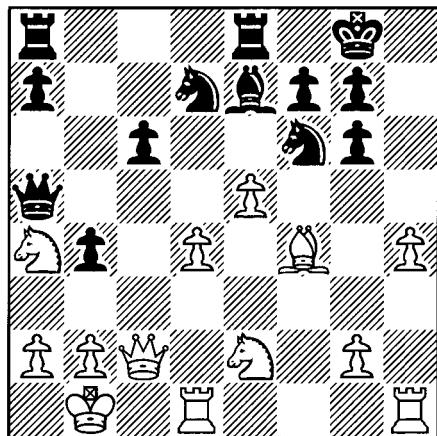
Weak squares are created by the advance of pawns. Too many thoughtless pawn moves weaken the squares around them and this can often result in disaster! Knights are particularly useful in outposts as we have just seen. The reason for this is that they need advanced support points in order to be effective due to their relatively short range of movement, when compared to, say, a bishop or rook which can influence operations from further away. It is the dream of a knight to find a central outpost (on the c-, d-, e- or f-files) in enemy territory on the fifth, or even better the sixth rank.

"Holes, dug by little moles" – Mercury Rev, 'Deserter Songs'

Actually dug by little pawns, Mercury Rev. We can think of outposts as extreme forms of

holes. If we are trying to define the terms we can say that a hole and an outpost differ in that an outpost is controlled by a pawn, whereas a hole is simply a square that cannot be defended by the enemy's pawns. As a small exercise examine the position below.

Game 45
M.Carlsen-H.Nakamura
Bazna 2011



Exercise: Name all the holes and outposts
in both the white and black positions?

Answer: White has holes in his position on d2, d3, e3, e4, f2, g3, g4 and h2. There is also an outpost for a black piece on d5.

Black has holes on a6, a4, b7, c7 and h7 and there are outposts for the white pieces on c5 and d6. The holes on the third and fourth ranks (rather than the second) are more pronounced and important.

"Weak points or holes in the opponent's position must be occupied by pieces, not pawns." – Siegbert Tarrasch

The Sicilian is one of those openings which often gives rise to weak squares at quite an early stage. Due to the early advance of the c-pawn, a later movement of the e-pawn is often required in order to develop the dark-squared bishop. As a result this will weaken the d6- and d5-squares. Watch what happens here to Black's position with a couple of thoughtless moves.

*Game 46***A.Hunt-D.Poliakov**

European U20 Championship, Aviles 2000

*Sicilian Defence***1 e4 c5 2 ♜f3 ♜c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♜xd4 ♜f6 5 ♜c3 d6**

The Classical variation of the Sicilian has always had a good reputation.

6 ♜g5 e5?!

In certain Sicilian positions this thrust is okay, but here it doesn't make so much sense as the d5-square becomes very weak. Instead:

a) 6...e6 is much more restrained and sensible!

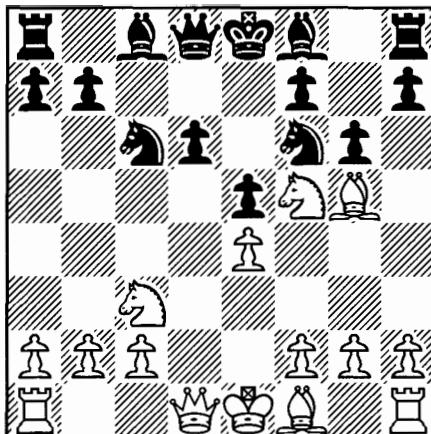
b) 6...g6 7 ♜xf6 exf6 would be a mess for Black. Not only can he not defend d5 sensibly, but once he fianchettoes d6 will be critically weak.

7 ♜f5

The direct 7 ♜xf6! is actually much stronger: 7...gxsf6 (7...♜xf6 8 ♜d5 ♜d8 runs into 9 ♜b5) 8 ♜f5 when Black's pawn structure is compromised as well as all the holes around it!

7...g6??

7...♜xf5 8 exf5 ♜e7 9 ♜xf6 ♜xf6 10 ♜d5 is still a bit better for White.



Exercise: I got lucky on this particular day, coming across a pretty highly-rated opponent who didn't seem to appreciate the importance of weak squares. What is the drawback of Black's last move and how do we exploit it?

Answer: 8 ♜d5!

7...g6 weakened the knight on f6. It is now attacked more times than it is defended and it is also pinned. The text move wins material straight away.

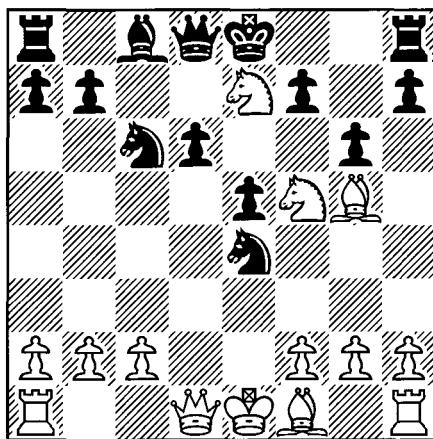
8...♝e7

Question: How would you have met 8...♛a5+?

Answer: 9 b4! is the only way to take advantage (if 9 ♜d2 ♛d8), and 9...♝xb4 10 ♜xf6+ ♔d8 11 c3 is a lot of fun for White.

9 ♜dxe7 ♛xe4

Trying to muddy the waters while avoiding 9...♝xe7 10 ♜xd6+ ♔f8 11 ♜xf6.



Exercise: A little precise calculation is now required.

Find the most efficient way to win.

Answer: 10 ♜xc6! ♛c7

10...♛xg5 loses to 11 ♜xd6+ ♛xd6 12 ♛xd6 bxc6 13 ♛xc6+.

11 ♜xd6+ ♛xd6 12 ♔f6 1-0

Summary

A bad day at the office for Mr Poliakov. Many games are decided by the destruction of the defender of an outpost. In this case the defender was already pinned by the bishop and so his plan made zero sense. Let's move on to a more sophisticated example of the strategy of playing against a weak outpost square.

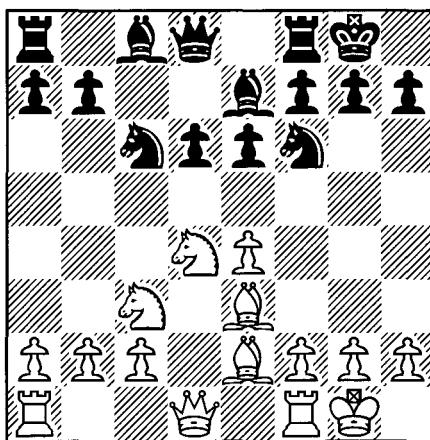
Vassily Smyslov (1921-2010) was the seventh World champion between 1957 and 1958. He had a very clear strategic style of play and was considered to be a very fine endgame player. Here we see him use a clear and direct plan to utilize a central outpost.

*Game 47***V.Smyslov-J.Rudakovsky**

USSR Championship, Moscow 1945

*Sicilian Defence***1 e4 c5 2 ♜f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♜xd4 ♜f6 5 ♜c3 d6 6 ♜e2**

A classical approach to the Scheveningen Sicilian employed by Black.

6...♜e7 7 0-0 0-0 8 ♜e3 ♜c6**Question:** Both sides have developed sensibly so far.

How would you continue as White here?

Answer: 9 f4

By far the most popular move, gaining space on the kingside.

9...♝c7 10 ♜e1 ♜xd4 11 ♜xd4 e5

The typical Sicilian thrust again! In isolation this isn't a mistake...

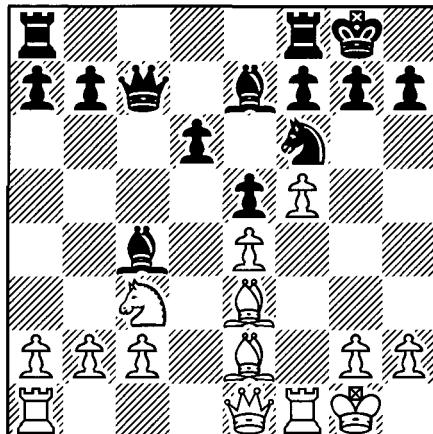
12 ♜e3 ♜e6?!

...but with the addition of this move it probably is.

After this game the favoured treatment for Black became 12...exf4 13 ♜xf4 ♜e6 14 ♜g3 ♜d7!. Here we can see that Black aims to employ his knight to the outpost e5, whilst keeping an eye on d5 with his bishop. The position is about equal.

13 f5 ♜c4

Perhaps 13...♜d7 should have been considered, looking to reroute the bishop to c6 to defend the outpost square.



Question: How can White win the battle for the d5-square?

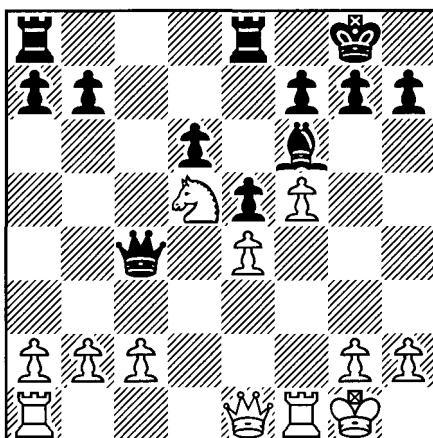
Answer: 14 ♜xc4

14 ♜g5 leads to some complications based on the weakness of the b2-pawn: 14...♝b6+ 15 ♔h1 ♜xe2 16 ♜xe2 ♜xb2 17 ♜xf6 ♜xf6 18 ♜d5 ♜fc8 gives White compensation for the sacrificed pawn, but probably no more.

14...♝xc4 15 ♜g5!

Smyslov continues in a very logical manner, looking to destroy the defender of our key outpost square, d5.

15...♜fe8 16 ♜xf6 ♜xf6 17 ♜d5



And the knight arrives! It is worth pointing out that the strength of the outpost increases when the opponent has no remaining knight or a bishop of the same colour as the

outpost square. On its own the outpost isn't enough to win the game, so the next phase of the battle sees White gradually improving his position.

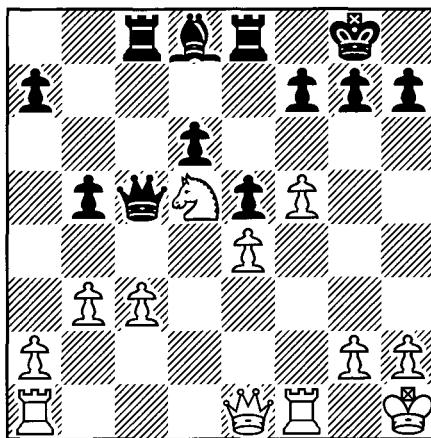
17...♝d8

17...♝xc2? runs into 18 ♜f2! (18 ♜c1 ♜xb2 19 ♜c7 ♜xa2 isn't so clear as Black has plenty of pawns for the exchange; the tempting 18 ♜xf6+ gxf6 doesn't seem to lead anywhere either as White doesn't have enough pieces in the attack) 18...♜c5 19 ♜c1 ♜d4 20 ♜c7, picking up the exchange.

18 c3

Preventing any counterplay down the c-file for the moment.

18...b5 19 b3 ♜c5+ 20 ♔h1 ♜c8



Exercise: How to proceed? Black's position is passive, but he doesn't have any serious weaknesses, apart from the d5-square!

21 ♜f3?!

Another logical move, looking to swing the rook to the kingside while reinforcing the c3-pawn.

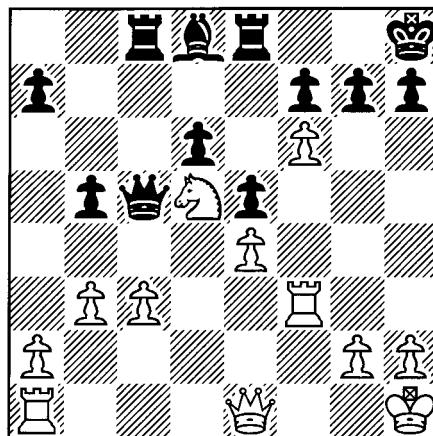
Answer: However, 21 f6! is stronger though, if you spotted the pretty idea 21...gxf6 (21...g6 simply loses to the typical motif 22 ♜d2 ♔h8 23 ♜h6 ♜g8 24 ♜f3 with the dual threats of ♜xh7+ and ♜h3) 22 ♜xf6! (22 ♜xf6+? ♜xf6 23 ♜xf6 ♜xc3 gives Black good counterplay) 22...♜xf6 23 ♜xf6+ ♜g7 (23...♜f8 24 ♜d7+ wins the queen) 24 ♜h4 when Black is helpless to defend against the vicious combination of knight and queen: for instance, 24...♜xc3 25 ♜xh7+ ♜f8 (25...♜xf6 26 ♜f1+ ♜e6 27 ♜xf7 is mate) 26 ♜g8+ ♜e7 27 ♜d5+ ♜d8 28 ♜g5+ ♜d7 29 ♜f5+ ♜c6 30 ♜xc3.

21...♔h8

21...f6 is a really sad move to have to play, but looks best.

22 f6!

Smyslov isn't going to make the same mistake twice! The beast on d5 acts as a superb aide to the kingside attack.



22...gxf6 23 ♜h4 ♜g8 24 ♜xf6

White can finally afford to exchange off knight for bishop, as the attack is so strong.

24...♜g7

24...♜xf6 25 ♜xf6+ ♜g7 26 ♜g3 ♜cg8 27 ♜d1 transposes to the game.

25 ♜g3 ♜xf6 26 ♜xf6 ♜cg8 27 ♜d1 d5 28 ♜xg7 1-0

Black resigned as he will have to give up his queen to avoid mate after 28...♜xg7 29 ♜xd5.

Summary

White managed to win the battle for the weak d5-square thanks to a careless exchange of light-squared bishops by Rudakovsky. Once the knight was in place it was used as a support for an attack on the flank. Powerful stuff from Smyslov.

Managing Your Weaknesses

Here is a nice game by Garry Kasparov as it shows two of the best ways to fight against an outpost square. Firstly he exchanges off the enemy knight and then breaks with the pawn behind the outpost.

Game 48

J.Arnason-G.Kasparov

World U20 Championship, Dortmund 1980

Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♜f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♜xd4 ♜f6 5 ♜c3

As already mentioned in this book, Kasparov favoured dynamic openings which promised early imbalances. The Najdorf was ideal for this during the 80s and 90s, when there wasn't so much information available on the openings. These days the opening has been pretty much analysed to death!

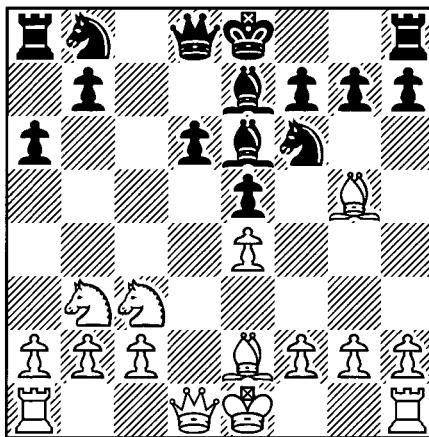
5...a6 6 ♜e2 e5 7 ♜b3 ♜e7

7...♜e6 8 0-0 ♜e7 9 f4 ♜c7 10 f5 ♜c4 11 ♜g5 shows an important difference to the Smyslov game we have just examined – the black knight can be strengthened by his colleague: 11...♝bd7 12 a4 0-0 13 ♜h1 ♜fc8, as in L.Oll-G.Kasparov, Moscow Olympiad 1994.

8 ♜g5

White carries out the same plan as before.

8...♜e6



Question: Should White take on f6 here?

Answer: Yes! Otherwise Black will again have time to play ...♝bd7 which gives d5 more security.

9 ♜xf6 ♜xf6 10 ♜d3

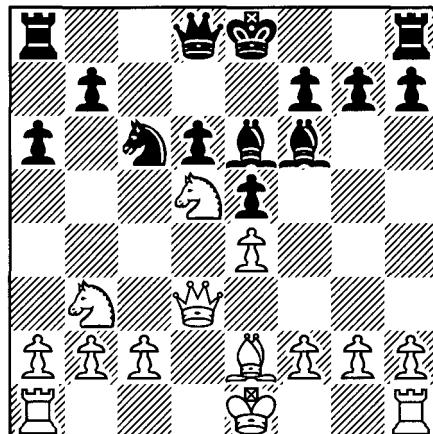
White continues to play logically. Here he plans to build up pressure on the weak d6-pawn.

10...♝c6 11 ♜d5

11 0-0-0 is definitely a more testing move. In fact during my year out I reached this position! 11...♝d4?! 12 ♜xd4 exd4 13 ♜d5 ♜xd5 14 exd5 0-0 15 ♜b1 ♜e8 16 ♜f3 ♜a5 17 ♜d3 ♜e5 18 g4 ♜xd5 19 ♜xd5 ♜xd5 20 f4 g6?? (20...g5 is better) 21 b4! left my rook high and dry with nowhere to go in Y.Liou-A.Hunt, Fremont 2012. I feel slightly better that I am not the only person to make this blunder in the given position. In fact I can find six other examples of this (with an average Elo for Black of about 2400!), with White scoring 5½/6!

11...♜b6?! is a typical way out, giving up the pawn for play down the d-file: 12 ♜xd6

$\mathbb{Q}e7$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 14 $\mathbb{W}xd5$ 0-0 15 $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{W}xf2$ was shortly agreed drawn in V.Anand-V.Topalov, Linares 2000.



Question: How should Black react to the arrival of the white knight?

Answer: 11... $\mathbb{Q}g5$

A good move! Black activates his bishop. Others:

- 11... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 12 $\mathbb{W}xd5$ is a bit better for White due to the continued pressure on the d6-pawn.
- b) 11... $\mathbb{Q}e7?$ would be too early as Black's king side will be wrecked after 12 $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ $gxf6$ 13 0-0-0 with a clear advantage to White.

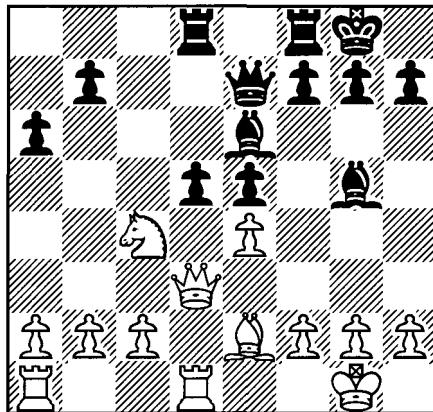
12 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}e7!$

And this is the big plan, getting rid of the knight whilst keeping the bishop-pair.

13 $\mathbb{Q}xe7$

13 c4 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 14 cxd5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ would leave Black feeling happier about his prospects as the backward pawn on d6 has been 'fixed' by the closure of the d-file.

13... $\mathbb{W}xe7$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}fd1$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 0-0 16 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ d5!



The second phase of the plan is complete. Black has removed his backward d-pawn, repaired the hole on d5 and now stands well due to his pair of bishops.

17 exd5

17 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ allows the clever move 17 ... $\mathbb{Q}c8!$ 18 $\mathbb{W}g3$ (18 $\mathbb{W}c3$ dx e 4) $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 19 $\mathbb{W}f4$ g5 20 $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{W}xe4$ 21 g3 $\mathbb{W}xe4$ when Black is a bit better.

17... $\mathbb{B}xd5$ and Black, having more than equalized, went on to win in 58 moves.

Summary

Kasparov demonstrated an effective strategy against the weak d5-square. Note that he wasn't in a rush to hack the knight off as soon as it landed on d5 – instead he played around it until the exchange was favourable for him.

Exploiting Holes Around the King

Fianchettoing in the opening gives that side holes on the squares around it. Watch how Miguel Najdorf exploited this in the famous Mar del Plata tournament.

Game 49
L.Pachman-M.Najdorf
Mar del Plata 1955
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ d6 3 d3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 4 g3

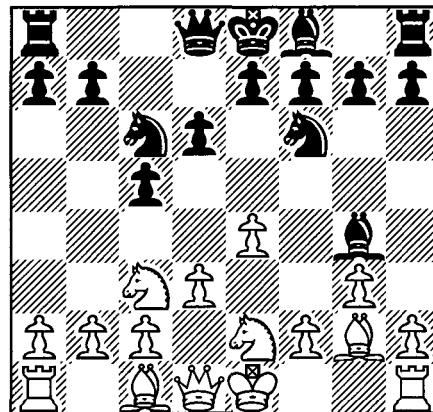
A Closed Sicilian – not something we have encountered yet in this book. Note already that the fianchetto here gives White holes on f3 and h3.

4... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4!$

A provocative development of the bishop and quite a good way to shake White out of his comfort zone.

6 ♜ge2

Pretty automatic, but this loosens the weak squares (h3 and f3) a little further. Instead 6 f3 ♜d7 7 ♜e3 g6 8 ♜d2 would have led to a different sort of game.



Exercise: There are two ways to try and immediately exploit the holes. What are they?

Answer: 6...♜d4!

6...♜d7 preparing ...♝h3 was the other move I had in mind, though White can simply avoid this with 7 h3 ♜h5 8 0-0, with a pretty decent position.

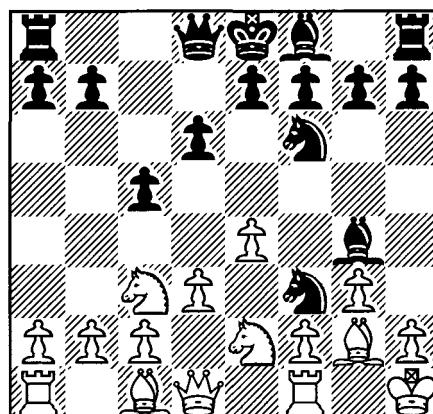
Okay, I will also give you that 6...♝e5 hits f3, but the text move is more energetic.

7 0-0

7 h3 is probably better here.

7...♝f3+ 8 ♜h1

8 ♜xf3 ♜xf3 would, of course, weaken the light squares terribly.



Question: How should Najdorf continue here?

Answer: 8...h5

Aggressive and good! Black turns his attention to an immediate kingside attack.

9 h3

9 ♜e3 h4 10 h3 ♜d7! is terrific for Black.

9...e5!

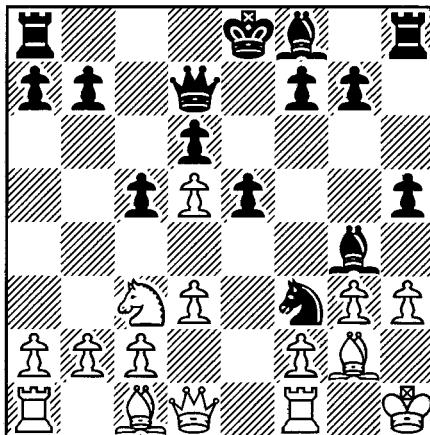
Fixing the centre, thereby securing his king's safety for the moment and also preventing the jump of the e2-knight to the useful f4-square.

10 ♜d5

White tries to make use of the outpost created.

10 hxg4 hxg4+ 11 ♜h3 ♜xh3+ 12 ♔g2 ♜h2 mate would be embarrassing.

10...♜xd5 11 exd5 ♜d7 12 ♜c3



Exercise: White voluntarily walks into a discovered attack!

With a multitude of choices, what did the Polish-born Argentinean Grandmaster choose to do?

Answer: 12...♝f5!

Keeping the pressure on. In fact White's last move was quite clever as the tempting 12...♜h2 13 hxg4 hxg4 (13...♞xf1 14 ♜xf1 hxg4+ 15 ♔g1 at first sight looks promising for Black, but in fact he simply doesn't have any pieces left to mate White; the fianchettoed bishop has no opponent, so the open h-file is not so important) 14 ♔g1 ♜f5 15 ♜e1 ♜f3+ 16 ♔f1! is good for White.

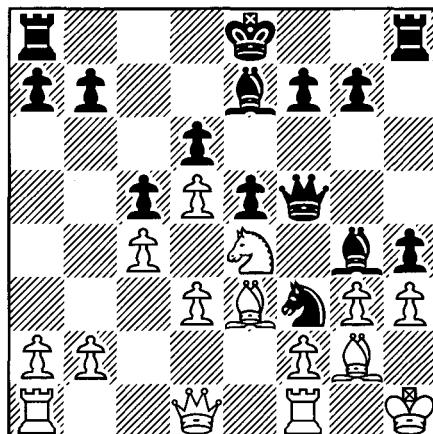
13 ♜e3 h4!

Preparing to soften up the weak h3-pawn by opening the h-file.

14 ♜e4 ♜e7

There is no rush. Black finishes his minor piece development. After the hasty 14...hxg3 15 fxg3 ♜xh3+ 16 ♜xh3 ♜h5 17 ♜g5! White defends.

15 c4



Exercise: Can you find a beautiful way to finish White off?

Answer: 15...hxg3 16 fxg3 ♜xh3+ 17 ♜xh3 ♜h5! 18 ♜a4+

18 ♜f2 blocks the pressure on the f3-knight and thus 18...♜xh3 just wins.

18...♞f8 19 ♜xf3 ♜xh3+ 0-1

White resigned as he will lose his queen after 20 ♔g1 ♜xf3 21 ♜c2 ♜h1+ 22 ♜f2 ♜g2+ 23 ♔e1 ♜xc2.

Summary

A tremendous game by Najdorf, who systematically exploited the holes on f3 and later h3 to get at the white king.

The white player in the next game is actually one of my sister's students, but I'm sure she won't mind me analysing this game as her pupil won!

*Game 50
C.Foster-J.Levene
Oxford (rapid) 2012
Ruy Lopez*

1 e4 e5 2 ♜f3 ♜c6 3 ♜b5 ♜f6

The Berlin Defence which we first came across in Chapter One.

4 0-0 ♜xe4 5 ♜e1 ♜d6 6 ♜xc6 dxc6 7 ♜xe5 ♜e7 8 d4 ♜e6 9 ♜f4 0-0 10 ♜d2 ♜f5 11 ♜df3

The e5-knight is not on an outpost due to the potential attack from the black f-pawn. However, it is still well placed, as any future ...f7-f6 attack will create a hole on e6.

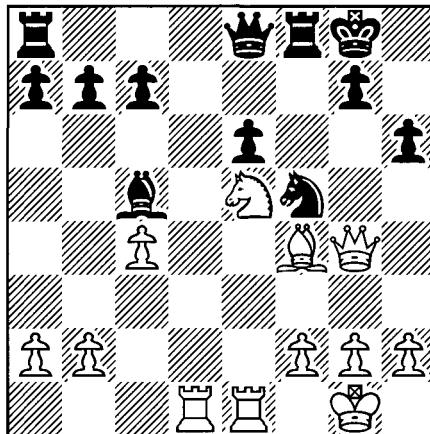
11...c5 12 dxc5 ♜xc5 13 ♜g5!

White uses the chance to apply pressure to the e6-bishop.

13...♜d5?

I think Black needed to accept the ending after 13...♝xd1 14 ♜axd1 ♜fe8 15 ♜xe6 ♜xe6. Being slightly higher-graded, it could be that he wanted to win at all costs.

14 c4 ♜e6 15 ♜h5 h6 16 ♜xe6 fxe6 17 ♜ad1 ♜e8 18 ♜g4



Exercise: What do you make of the move

18...h5, gaining a tempo on the queen?

18...h5?

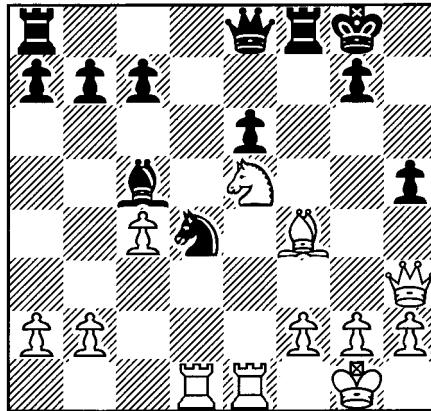
Answer: Black wants to free the d4-square for his knight by shifting the queen off the g-file, but from a positional point of view this is definitely wrong as it weakens the g5-square. So what you may ask? Well, g5 is important as a white bishop on that square makes fighting for the d-file with ...♝d8 very difficult. Now Black has big holes on e5, g5 and g6.

18...♝d8 would have been better.

19 ♜h3 ♜d4

So the knight arrives on d4, but it is not secure as the defender (the bishop on c5) can be removed quite easily.

19...♜d4! would have made more sense as the defensive knight on f5 is the more stable minor piece.



Exercise: Can you see a way to eliminate the irritating black knight on d4?

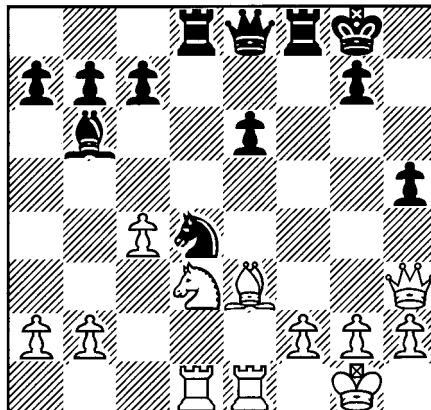
20 ♜e3

Now the battle rages over the d4-square.

Answer: 20 ♜d3! straightaway would have been even stronger.

20...♜d8 21 ♜d3! ♜b6

21...b6 22 ♜xc5 bxc5 would leave Black a pawn down in the ending after 23 ♜xd4 ♜xd4 24 ♜xd4 cxd4 25 ♜xe6+ ♜xe6 26 ♜xe6.



Question: What's best for White here?

22 c5

Answer: Exploiting the weak square immediately with 22 ♜g5! ♜d7 23 c5 would have been best.

22...♝c2 23 ♜g5 ♜xe1 24 ♜xd8 ♜f3+?

This was a rapidplay game and we can only assume that both players were short of time. Instead 24...♜xd3 25 ♜xd3 ♜xc5 leaves Black a pawn up.

25 gxf3 ♜xd8 26 ♜xe6+

Now White is winning easily.

26...♚h8 27 cxb6 ♜g5+ 28 ♚h1 ♜xf3 29 ♜e8+ ♚h7 30 ♜e4+1-0

Summary

An interesting fight for the central squares. The innocuous-looking 18...h5? actually turned out to be a major mistake, as it weakened a crucial square from which White's bishop could then control the d-file.

David Bronstein was one of the strongest-ever players never to become World Champion. I was lucky enough to play him when I was 13 and he taught me a strategic lesson about holes!

Game 51

D.Bronstein-A.Hunt

Maidstone 1994

Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♜f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♜xd4 ♜f6 5 ♜c3 a6 6 ♜e3 e5 7 ♜f3

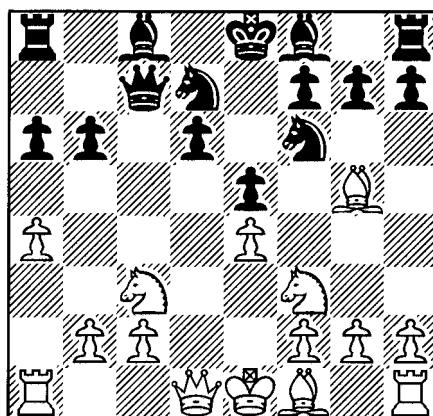
A more positional approach to the Najdorf.

7...♜c7

Designed to prevent the bishop coming to c4.

7...♜e7 8 ♜c4 0-0 9 0-0 ♜e6 is a more popular way of fighting for the d5-square.

8 a4 b6 9 ♜g5 ♜bd7



Exercise: This move was forced in order to retain some control of d5. Can you now, though, find a way for White to increase his control over this crucial square?

Answer: 10 ♜d2!

Preparing ♜f1-c4 whilst reinforcing the e4-pawn.

10...♝b7 11 ♜c4 ♜e7 12 ♜e2

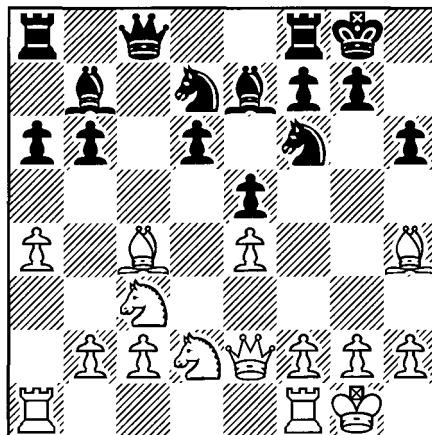
I've landed in one of those passive Najdorf positions which is miserable for Black to play. The ...b5 and ...d5 breaks have been prevented and White can slowly improve his position. It is no surprise that White has scored very well from here in the *Mega Database 2012*.

12...0-0 13 0-0 h6 14 ♜h4

Of course Bronstein doesn't want to release the tension with 14...♜xf6 ♝xf6.

14...♝c8?

Something extreme like 14...g5 15 ♜g3 ♜c5! was called for. Black at least fights for some squares of his own. After 16 f3 ♜e6 17 ♜xe6 fxe6 he was okay in R.Hübner-J.Hjartarson, Tilburg 1988.



Exercise: Can you figure out the idea behind the strange-looking text move? Then I want you to find a plan for White to improve his control of the d5-square.

15 ♜fd1 ♜c6

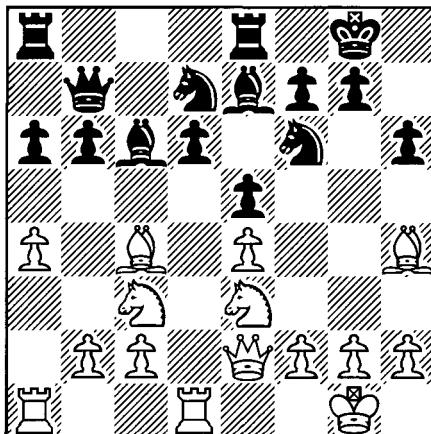
Answer: This was my 'brilliant' idea – to try and increase the pressure on e4 with ...♝b7 whilst protecting the a6-pawn. Unfortunately it's just too slow.

16 ♜f1!

This is the main idea behind White's last. The knight heads for e3.

16...♝b7 17 ♜e3 ♜fe8

There was no time for 17...g5 due to 18 ♜f5.



Question: How should White continue here?

Answer: 18 ♜f5!

The other way! One of the dream squares for a knight is f5, from where it eyes up the g7-h6 pawn complex and also the weakness on d6. Black's position now collapses like a house of cards.

18 ♜cd5 ♜xd5 19 ♜xd5 would also have been strong, but I like the text more as it gets nearer the king.

18...♝f8 19 ♜xd6

Splat!

19...♛c7

19...♛xd6 20 ♜xd6 ♛c7 21 ♜xf7+ ♔h7 22 ♜xe8 is also a disaster.

20 ♜xf7+ 1-0

20...♔xf7 21 ♛c4+ ♔g6 22 ♜xc6 is the end.

Summary

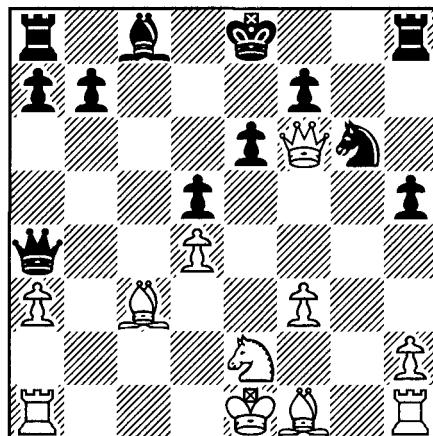
The final white position is a picture of harmony. The knight on f5 is truly a monster. A model strategic game against the Najdorf in which Bronstein methodically increased his control over the d5-square so Black couldn't break there. The game was then decided by an invasion on another weak square, f5.

Colour Complexes

Weak colour complexes are a little more difficult to understand and can be harder to recognize than weak individual squares. They are a network of the same colour squares (ei-

ther light or dark) that have been weakened due to the relevant pawns all being on squares of the opposite colour.

Game 52
A.Hunt-P.Sowray
Richmond Rapidplay 2012



One of the best examples of a weak colour complex can arise from the French Winawer. In this position a simple count tells us that five of the six black pawns are on light squares. Therefore Black is vulnerable on the dark squares as the pawns are not controlling them. This is made worse by the fact there is no dark-squared bishop present to control the dark squares and doubly worse by the presence of White's dark-squared bishop. Being a piece for two pawns up also helps!

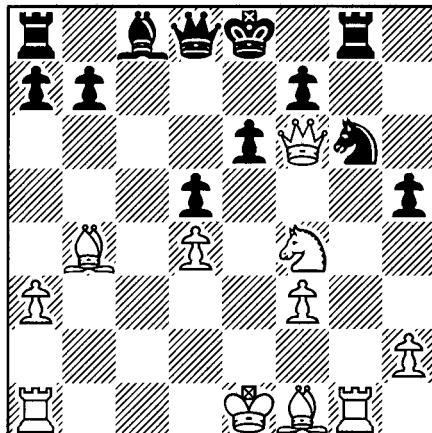
21 ♜g1 ♜g8

Before Black's last move White was threatening 22 ♜xg6 fxg6 23 ♜xh8+.

22 ♜b4!

Renewing the threat as mate will be threatened on e7.

22...♛d7 23 ♜f4 ♛d8



Exercise: Black desperately needs the queens off to survive. How should White continue?

Answer: 24 ♜b5+ ♜d7 25 ♜xd7+ ♜xd7

25...♜xd7 26 ♜xf7+ ♜c8 27 ♜xe6+ is totally over.

26 ♜xg6 a5 27 ♜e5 ♜xg1+ 28 ♜f2 1-0

The game is decided as 29 ♜h8+ and the black queen are both threatened.

Summary

This snippet shows us that it is risky to put a lot of your pawns on one colour of square due to the resulting creation of a weak colour complex. This is magnified if an opponent's bishop or queen (or both) is still present.

Here is another good example of the exploitation of a weak colour complex, taken from last year's British Championship. This one is a little less obvious, as both sides lose their dark-squared bishop which would otherwise dominate the weakened dark squares.

Game 53

A.Jaunooby-D.Walker

British Championship, North Shields 2012

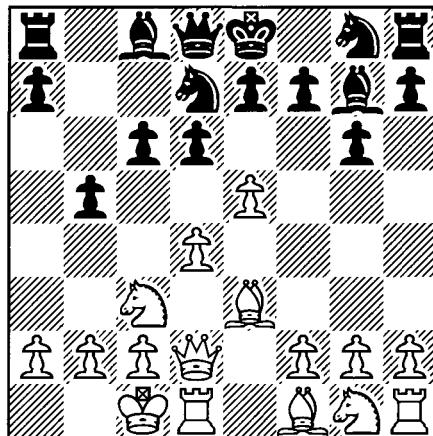
Modern Defence

1 d4 d6 2 e4 g6 3 ♜e3 ♜g7 4 ♜c3 c6 5 ♜d2

A pretty standard and logical set-up. White looks to discourage ...♝f6, as he will then exchange the dark-squared bishops with ♜e3-h6.

5...♝d7 6 0-0-0 b5 7 e5!?

A very aggressive move! White sinks the g8-knight for the moment.



Question: How should Black respond to this bold thrust?

Answer: 7...d5

Black chooses to close the centre.

7...dxe5 8 d5 (8 dxe5!? is an interesting novelty: 8...♝xe5 9 ♝f3 ♜g7 10 ♝e4 ♝gf6 11 ♝xf6+ ♜xf6 12 ♜h6 with decent compensation for the pawn) 8...♝b7 9 dxc6 ♜xc6 10 ♜xb5 ♜xb5 11 ♜xb5 was slightly better for White in L.Mista-P.Vavra, Czech League 1999.

8 ♜d3

I guess this is designed so that after a ...b5-b4 push, the knight can go back to e2 without blocking the bishop's defence of c4.

8...♝b6 9 h4 h5 10 b3 e6

With all the black pawns on light squares, it is desirable for White to try and get the dark-squared bishops exchanged.

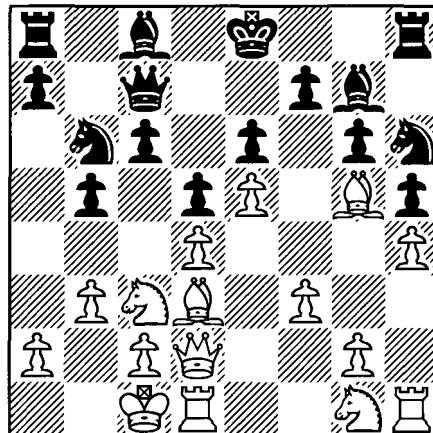
11 f3

Something like 11 ♜g5 ♜c7 12 ♜ce2 also suggests itself, removing the target for the black pawns on the queenside.

11...♞h6?!

I don't like this move. f5 is normally a good square for the knight, but here it can easily be attacked (with g2-g4), and perhaps more importantly it weakens the sensitive f6-square. Getting on with it on the queenside with 11...a5 12 ♜h3 a4 would have made more sense.

12 ♜g5 ♜c7



13 ♜f4

Question: White could have immediately exchanged the bishops with 13 ♜f6 ♜xf6 14 exf6. What do you make of this?

Answer: I don't like it. Remember weak squares (such as f6 in this case) like to be occupied by pieces not pawns, as Dr Tarrasch said. In fact here the f6-pawn simply becomes a target: 14...♝g8 15 ♜g5 ♜d8 with an acceptable position for Black.

13...b4 14 ♜f6!

There is no need to hang about! The threat to the bishop forces the next sequence of moves.

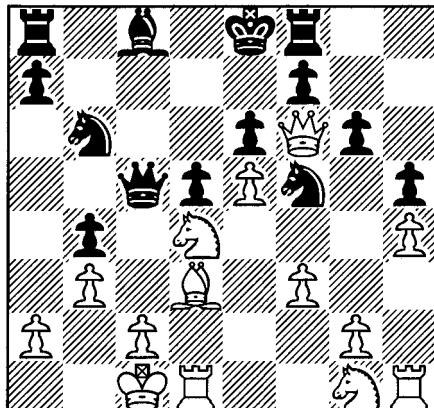
14...♜xf6 15 ♜xf6 ♜f8 16 ♜ce2 c5?

Looking to open the c-file, but giving away important squares in the process.

17 dxc5 ♜xc5 18 ♜d4!

A highly desirable square for the white knight. Of course it can't be taken: 18...♜xd4?? 19 ♜b5+ ♜d7 20 ♜xd4 wins the queen.

18...♞f5



Exercise: Which way would you take on f5: with the knight or bishop?

Answer: 19 ♜xf5!

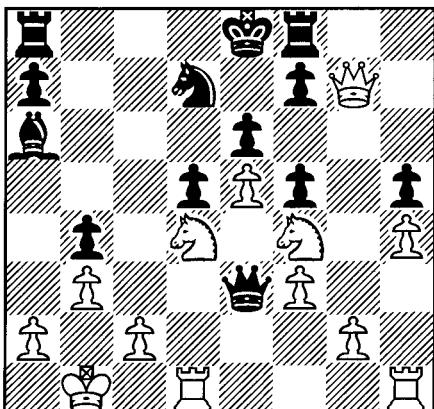
The correct decision. The bishop is relatively ineffective as the black pawns are all on light squares.

19...gxf5 20 ♜ge2

Now White has a target for his pieces on h5.

20...♜d7 21 ♜g7 ♜a6 22 ♜f4 ♜c3 23 ♜b1 ♜e3?!

I think I would have castled here and given the pawn for free, though Black's position is still desperate as the White h-pawn is very fast: 23...o-o-o 24 ♜xh5 ♜e3 25 ♜he1 with a virtually winning advantage.



Question: What's the strongest continuation here for White?

24 ♜g5?!

Answer: After 24 ♜xd5! exd5 25 ♜he1 ♜c3 26 e6! the black position collapses.

24 Rhei ♜xf4 25 g3! is also quite pretty.

24... ♜xe5 25 ♜xh5 ♜h8 26 ♜he1 ♜d6 27 ♜xf5 1-0

Summary

Despite the closed nature of the position out of the opening, White played consistently to exchange off Black's defender of the dark squares, before Black committed an error in opening up the middle of the board.

Strong Colour Complexes

On the flip side of the weak colour complex is the deliberate placement of your pawns in the middlegame on the same colour squares as your opponent's bishop in order to restrict it, thereby making a strong pawn complex. Check out Adam versus Adams for an interesting fight and example of this!

Game 54

A.Hunt-M.Adams

British Championship, Canterbury 2010

Ruy Lopez

1 e4 e5 2 ♜f3 ♜c6 3 ♜b5 ♜c5 4 c3 ♜f6 5 0-0 0-0 6 d4 ♜b6 7 ♜g5 h6 8 ♜h4 d6 9 ♜d3 g5?!

The start of an ambitious plan.

10 ♜g3

Of course Black's last move could not have been undertaken without serious analysis of the consequences of 10 ♜xg5 hxg5 11 ♜xg5, but it seems that he is doing well after 11... ♜g7 12 f4 (12 ♜g3 loses to 12... ♜xe4) 12... exd4! (12... ♜d7? 13 fxe5 ♜h7 14 ♜f6+ was winning for White in So.Polgar-R.Bayon Fernandez, Oviedo (rapid) 1993) 13 ♜h1 ♜h8.

10... ♜h5 11 ♜xc6

Perhaps if White sees what is coming, he might keep hold of his light-squared bishop.

11 ♜a3 exd4 12 cxd4 f5!? was a bold decision taken in F.Caruana-P.H.Nielsen, Amsterdam 2008.

11... bxc6 12 ♜bd2 a5 13 dxe5?!

Opening the position for the pair of bishops can only be justified if White can win the e5-pawn.

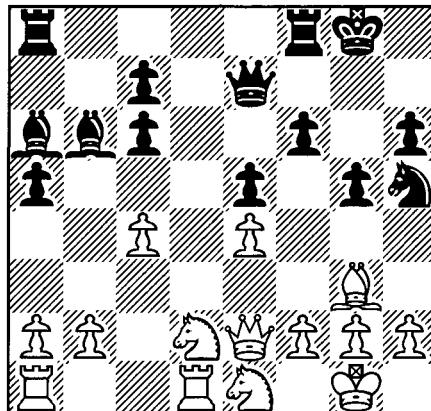
13... dxe5 14 ♜e2

14 ♜xd8 ♜xd8 15 ♜xe5 g4 is the tactical point, so I'm not really sure why I took on e5.

14... ♜a6 15 c4 f6!

Without White's light-squared bishop this strategy is completely justified. The bishop on g3 is completely dead and Black stands better.

16 ♜fd1 ♜e7 17 ♜e1



Exercise: White tries to plug the gaps in his position.
What should Black do about the threat to his h5-knight?

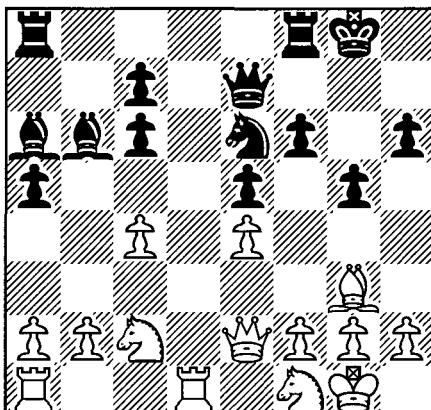
Answer: 17...♞g7

The knight heads for the juicy d4-square.

Instead 17...♞xg3? would go completely against the dark-square strategy on the king-side to restrict the enemy bishop, whilst 17...♝f4 18 ♜xf4 exf4 leaves an interesting material balance (two bishops against two knights), with an unclear position.

18 ♜c2 ♜e6 19 ♜f1

White looks to get to the weak square on f5.



Question: Is there a good way to prevent this plan?

Answer: 19...♝h7!

A very good move. Adams uses the pressure on the e4-pawn to restrict the f1-knight whilst also supporting a future kingside pawn push.

20 b3

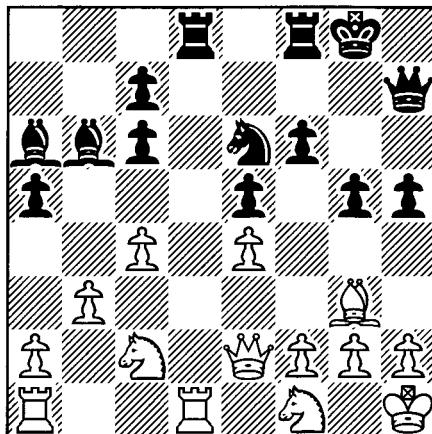
I play to block out the a6-bishop. The problem is that it can come back into the game via c8 whilst my bishop remains stuck.

20...♞ad8?!

Mickey criticized this move after the game and unsurprisingly he seems to have been right. 20...♝c5! 21 ♝d2 ♞ad8 would have kept the pressure firmly on, as the rooks can't be traded and the knight eyes up another hole on d3.

21 ♛h1

Planning the release of my bishop with f2-f3, but perhaps this should have been played two or three moves earlier.

21...h5

Exercise: It's multiple choice time! How should White deal with the threat of ...h5-h4: with 22 h4, 22 h3 or 22 f3?

Answer: 22 h4

A good decision! Instead:

- a) 22 h3 ♜c8 makes it awkward for White to play his main plan of f2-f3, as this would then compromise his kingside dark squares significantly.
- b) 22 f3? would be a serious mistake as it gives Black a dream square for his knight on f4! Then 22...h4 23 ♞xd8 (23 ♜f2 ♝f4 24 ♜e1 h3! is horrific) 23...♜xd8 24 ♜e1 ♝f4 is disgusting for White.

22...g4 23 f3 gxf3 24 gxf3 ♛h8 25 ♜fe3

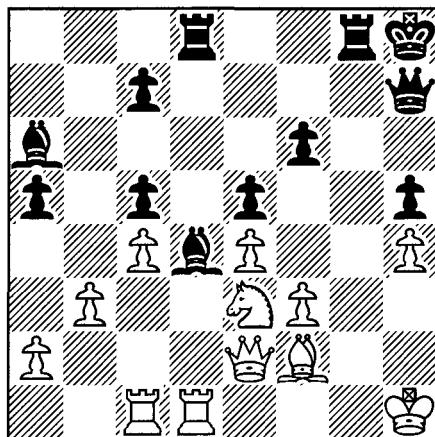
White has managed to keep himself afloat and his knight now eyes up the weak f5-square.

25...♝d4 26 ♞xd4 ♝xd4 27 ♜ac1 ♜g8 28 ♜f2

I must admit I was feeling much happier about my position here.

28...c5

28...♝c8 29 ♜g1 ♜e6 was probably a touch better.



Exercise: Black cements his bishop on d4, but also gives away the d5-square. What is the correct strategy for White here?

Answer: Get the rooks off!

29 ♜g1

Due to the exposed nature of the white king, it is important to get some major pieces exchanged. Notice also how Black's weaker pawn structure could play a part in any ending.

29...♝c8 30 ♜xg8+ ♜xg8 31 ♜g1 ♜e6 32 ♜xg8+ ♜xg8 ½-½

Here Mickey offered a draw. The tournament situation was such that this result would almost certainly guarantee him first prize, whilst I was happy as I had made my second GM norm just by playing him! I remember GM Chris Ward, who was commentating at the time, saying how surprised he was by the draw offer. In reality I think White has no problems any more as long as he keeps an eye on his king, though perhaps it is still slightly easier to play as Black. After 33 ♜e1 a4 34 bxa4 ♜d7 35 a5 ♜a4 there is still some chess to be played.

Summary

Thanks to good opening preparation Black managed to carry out a plan of restriction against the dark-squared bishop which left White in some strategic difficulties. This was in part due to my early decision to give up my light-squared bishop. From a defensive per-

spective it was important to recognize that this also left some squares weak in the black camp (f5 and d5), and White needed to react accordingly in order to gain counterplay. In the end I managed to neutralize the pressure in the nick of time by exchanging off the heavy pieces.

Keeping an Eye on Weak Squares

Game 55
M.Klinova-A.Hunt
 Washington 2012
French Defence

1 e4 e6

Question: What's this? Something other than the Sicilian?

Answer: In fact this was only the second time I had played the French in a rated game. It's sometimes handy to be so one dimensional for surprise value!

2 ♜f3 d5 3 ♜c3

The Two Knights Variation is a relatively uncommon but very playable way to meet the French.

3...♜f6 4 e5 ♜fd7 5 d4 c5 6 dx_c5 ♜c6 7 ♜f4 ♜xc5!?

This is less common than 7...♜xc5, but I had spotted that my opponent played in a slightly unusual way against this line.

8 ♜d3 ♜e7

There is no need to rush to take off the d3-bishop as it doesn't have any better squares.

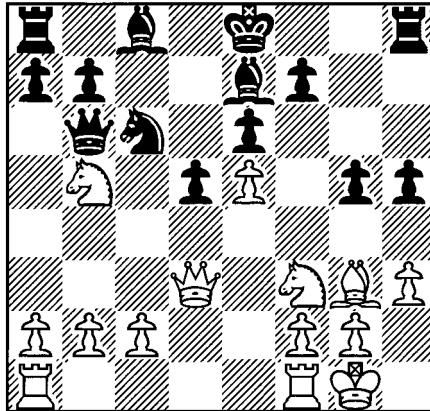
9 0-0?! g5!

A violent reaction, but also quite a good one. Black will castle queenside.

10 ♜g3 h5

Targeting the dark-squared bishop immediately. Due to the closed nature of the centre Black can get away with such a strategy.

11 h3 ♜xd3 12 ♜xd3 ♜b6 13 ♜b5



White prepares to try and exchange off the e7-bishop and then looks to exploit the resulting weakened dark squares.

Question: How should Black respond?

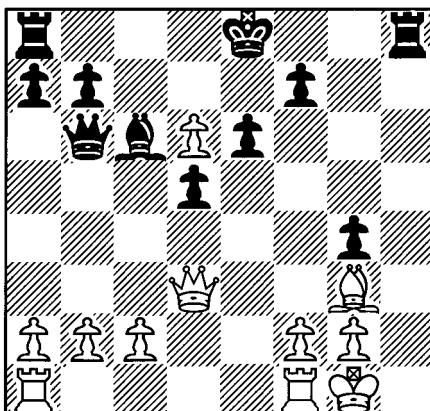
Answer: 13...g4!

This disrupts White's strategy and prevents the other white knight jumping to e5, unlike something like 13... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}d6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 15 exd6 0-0-0 16 $\mathbb{Q}e5$.

14 hxg4 hxg4 15 $\mathbb{Q}fd4?$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$

Black doesn't fear the check on d6 and completes his development.

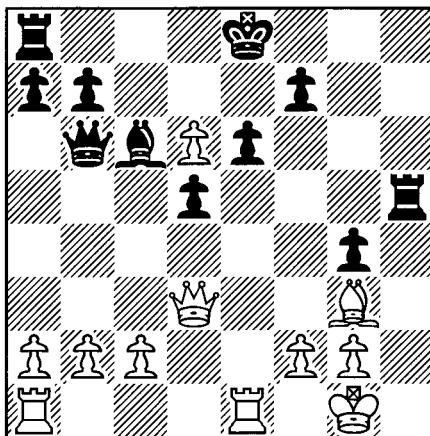
16 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}d6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 18 exd6



Exercise: Black clearly has the initiative, but a pure opposite-coloured bishop middlegame has been reached, which might become very double-edged. What do you make of 18... $\mathbb{Q}b5$?

18...♝h5

Answer: 18...♝b5 wins material, but at some cost to Black's king after 19 c4! (which I had missed initially) 19...♝xc4 20 ♜c3 ♜h7 21 ♜fc1; although Black should still be better after 21...♚d7!. The text move is designed to fight for control of the e5-square.

19 ♜fe1

Exercise: Try to calculate the complications arising after 19...♝xb2. Also, are there any good alternatives?

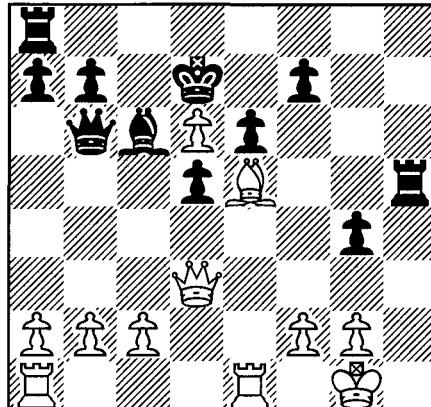
19...♚d7!

Answer: From a practical point of view I am quite happy I played this. It prevents the white bishop from coming to life and prepares the transfer of the last black piece into the game.

Just as I was about to play 19...♝xb2? I noticed 20 ♜xe6+ fxe6 21 ♜g6+ which looks very scary and highlights some of the dangers of opposite-coloured bishops in the middlegame. White is a whole rook down, but Black has to tread carefully: 21...♚f8 (the only move I calculated, but 21...♚d8 22 ♜e1 ♜h8! is actually winning) 22 ♜xh5 (22 ♜e1 ♜h8 wins due to the threat of mate on h1) 22...♜xa1+ 23 ♜h2 ♜e8! (an important defensive resource) 24 ♜h6+ ♜g7 25 ♜xe6. I actually got this far in my calculations, but chickened out in the end as I didn't trust myself.

What I had missed in the midst of all of this was 20 ♜e5!! ♜b5 (20...♜xe5? 21 ♜eb1 is a crafty way of trapping the black queen) 21 ♜d4 when White retains a decent bishop on e5 as compensation for the pawn.

20 ♜e5



Question: How should Black continue his initiative?

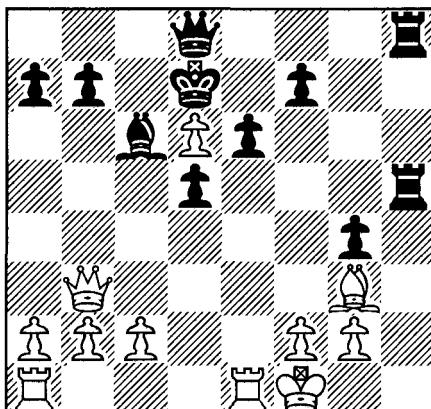
20...Bg8

Answer: This move is very logical, looking to come up and over to h6, but the direct transfer of the queen appears to be stronger. Indeed, 20...Qd8! would have been better. After 21 Qf1 (21 Qg3 Qf6 would be a better square for the black queen) 21...Qh4 Black has a very strong attack.

21 Qb3?!

This just encourages Black to execute his plan.

21...Qd8 22 Qg3 Qgh8 23 Qf1



Exercise: There are lots of tempting options for Black in this position.

Make a list of them before deciding what you would do here.

Answer: 23...d4

The bishop is finally brought to life. Alternatively:

- a) 23... $\mathbb{W}a5!$ is perhaps the strongest move, looking to invade via d2 while preparing a check on the a6-f1 diagonal.
- b) 23... $\mathbb{W}f6$ also springs to mind.

24 a4 $\mathbb{W}a5$ 25 $\mathbb{W}c4?$

An unfortunate blunder after White had put up stubborn resistance for the last few moves.

25 $\mathbb{W}e2$ is relatively best, although Black is just a pawn up with an attack after 25... $\mathbb{Q}xg2$.

25... $\mathbb{W}d2$ 0-1

26... $\mathbb{Q}h1$ mate cannot be sensibly stopped so White resigned.

Summary

Here Black was successful in defending his weak dark-square colour complex by blockading the pawn on d6. This helped keep control of the position without allowing the opponent unnecessary counterplay. Opposite-coloured bishop middlegames are particularly sharp and a restrictive strategy against the enemy bishop can often prove important.

Key Points

- 1) The advance of too many pawns in the opening can create holes and, sometimes more significantly, outposts which enemy pieces can exploit. If you see such a square a successful strategy will often be to destroy any potential defenders before occupying it.
- 2) Remember pieces, not pawns, in outposts. Knights love them, especially if they are on the fifth and sixth ranks.
- 3) Fianchettoes weaken the kingside (or queenside) pawn structure and create potential holes. Look to exchange off the fianchettoed bishop for maximum effect.
- 4) Squares are linked to each other diagonally by colour, creating *complexes* which bishops and queens can look to exploit. Be very wary about creating pawn chains for this reason, placing all your pawns on squares of the same colour. However, if your opponent only has one bishop remaining, you can look to target that piece by restricting its movement using a chain.

Chapter Six

Improving the Worst Piece

If you are stuck for a plan, improve your worst-placed piece.

This famous piece of chess advice is very useful to remember. Its origins are still unclear, but popular opinion seems to be that they are the words of Grandmaster Vladimir Makogonov (1904-1993), who was one of Garry Kasparov's first chess trainers. It is of particular importance in positions where there are no obvious targets or weaknesses to aim at in your opponent's camp. Notably this simple idea can be substituted for middle or long-term planning. It is very rarely a bad idea to improve a piece that is not working at full power. To see an example, let's take a look at a game of two-time Soviet champion Vitaly Tseshkovsky.

Game 56
V.Kozlov-V.Tseshkovsky
Aktjubinsk 1985
Ruy Lopez

1 e4 e5 2 ♜f3 ♜c6 3 ♜b5 a6 4 ♜a4 ♜f6 5 0-0 ♜e7 6 ♜e1 b5 7 ♜b3 0-0 8 c3 d6 9 h3 ♜a5

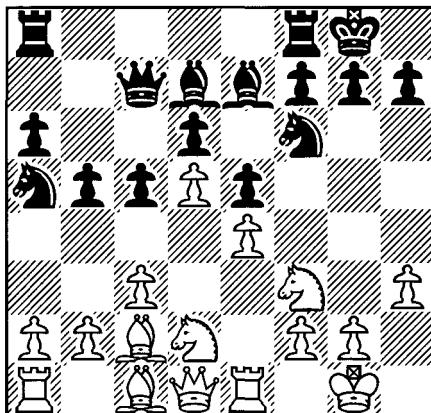
The Chigorin variation of the Ruy Lopez is one of the most studied and famous opening variations of them all! Black misplaces his knight temporarily in order to drive the enemy bishop away and prepares to gain space on the queenside.

10 ♜c2 c5 11 d4 ♜c7

Retaining the tension.

12 ♜bd2 ♜d7 13 d5

White closes the centre before Black has a chance to gain counterplay down the c-file. 13 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ cxd4 14 cxd4 $\mathbb{Q}ac8$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ is another popular line.



Exercise: Identify Black's worst-placed piece and find a way to improve it.

Answer: 13...c4!

Question: What was the piece?

Answer: The knight on a5! Black seeks to reroute this guy to c5. It is rare for one side to be able to tolerate a knight on the edge of the board for too long. I am sure you know the saying “a knight on the rim is dim”, due to its lack of mobility.

The current position is closed and therefore there is more time for the knight manoeuvre to be carried out. As there are no obvious pawn breaks or open files available to Black it wouldn't have made a lot of sense to develop the rooks to the centre either. It is in such closed positions that knights truly find their feet!

The immediate 13... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ would give White an extra preventative option of 14 b3 c4 15 b4!, stopping the knight on b7 from rejoining the game.

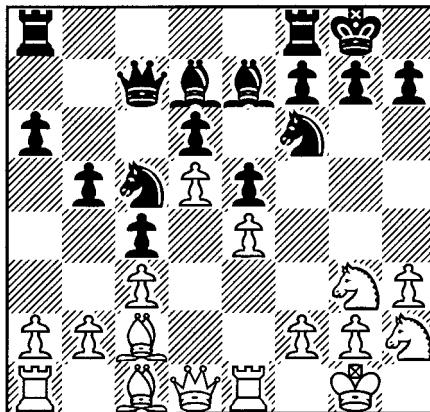
14 $\mathbb{Q}f1$

White also looks to improve his knight, heading for that dream square on f5.

14... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}h2$

In order to remove the knight White would have to weaken his queenside pawns a bit: 16 b4 cxb3 17 axb3 $\mathbb{Q}fc8$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ a5 and Black was comfortable in V.Lepsakov-Y.Balashov, Ishevsk 2010.

Instead 16 $\mathbb{Q}f5$?! would be wrong, as the white d-pawn would become very weak after 16... $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 17 exf5 $\mathbb{Q}b7$. We want a piece (knight) on f5, not a pawn. Remember what was said in the chapter on outposts? Neither does 16 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ really help as after 16...g6 White will lose more time getting the knight back into play.



Exercise: White's knight manoeuvres are quite common in the Ruy Lopez.

He looks to increase his control over f5. Suggest a plan for Black!

Answer: 16...a5!

With all his pieces harmoniously placed Black starts to advance on the queenside where he is strongest.

17 ♜f3 b4 18 ♜f5 ♜xf5 19 ♜xf5 ♜fb8

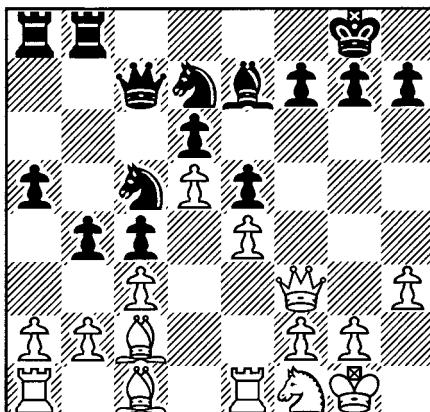
Tseshkovsky isn't afraid to leave his kingside, as he correctly judges that there will be no way through for White.

19...bxc3 20 bxc3 ♜d3 also suggests itself, but Black shows more restraint in the game.

20 ♜f3 ♜fd7

Again rerouting an inactive piece over to the queenside.

21 ♜f1



Question: What is Black's worst piece here and how would you improve it?

21...b3

Answer: 21... $\mathbb{W}d8!$ prepares the exchange of Black's poor dark-squared bishop with ... $\mathbb{Q}g5$. Exchanging off a bad piece is usually just as effective as improving it.

22 axb3 cxb3 23 $\mathbb{R}d1$ a4 24 $\mathbb{B}b1$!?

24 $\mathbb{R}a3$ would have been better than the text move. It seems a bit strange to use a rook to block a pawn charge, but it is a necessity here.

24... $\mathbb{W}d8$!

Black hits upon the right plan.

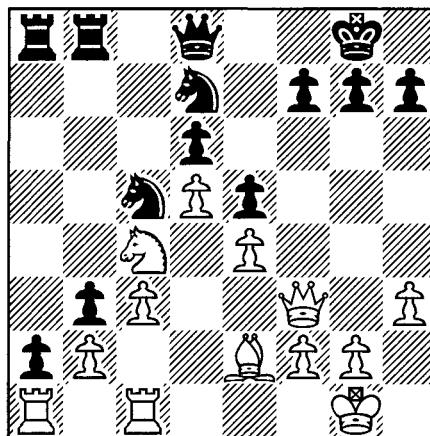
25 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}d2$

The black position is tremendous. Over the course of the last ten moves, using the 'worst piece' strategy, White has been outplayed. Black is now ready to launch his breakthrough on the queenside.

26...a3! 27 $\mathbb{Q}c4$

The tactical point is that after 27 bxa3 b2 28 $\mathbb{B}xb2$ $\mathbb{B}xb2$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ Black wins a piece for two pawns and with White's queenside in ruins, he shouldn't last long.

27...a2 28 $\mathbb{Q}a1$ $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}exc1$



Question: White is hoping to get some counterplay based on the weak pawn at d6. What should Black do about this?

Answer: 29... $\mathbb{Q}b6$!

Exchanging off his bad knight for his opponent's best minor piece.

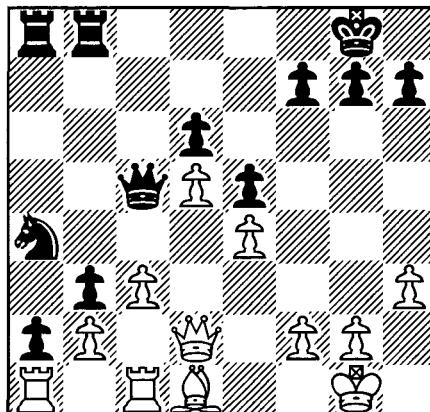
30 $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{W}xb6$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 32 $\mathbb{W}d2$

After 32 $\mathbb{W}xb6$ $\mathbb{B}xb6$ the b-pawn will fall.

32... ♕c5

Setting up a devastating tactic.

33 ♘d1



Exercise: Assess the move **33... ♗xb2**.

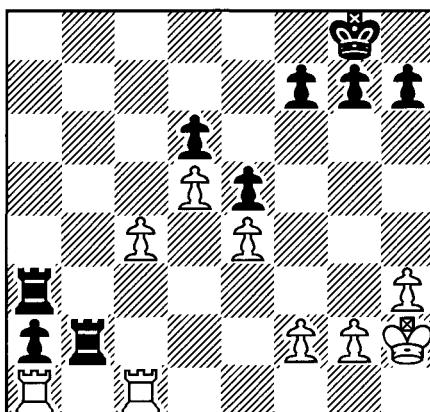
Answer: 33... ♗xb2!

It works. Kudos if you saw that Black doesn't win any material, but instead obtains a very big advantage in the arising rook endgame.

34 ♕xb2 ♕a3 35 ♕xa3

35 ♘d2 b2 is neat.

35... ♕xa3 36 ♘xb3 ♕xb3b3 37 ♔h2 ♕b2 38 c4



Question: What would you play now?

Answer: 38...♚f8!

Not forgetting about the king in the endgame! Instead the greedy 38...♜xf2 would have allowed White a bit of counterplay with 39 c5 dxc5 40 ♜xc5.

39 f3

39 c5? now loses to 39...dxc5 40 ♜xc5 ♜b1 and there is no back-rank mate.

39...♜e7 40 ♛g3 ♜d8!

With the white rook on a1 tied down and out of the game, Black slowly turns the screw. The rest of the game requires no comment.

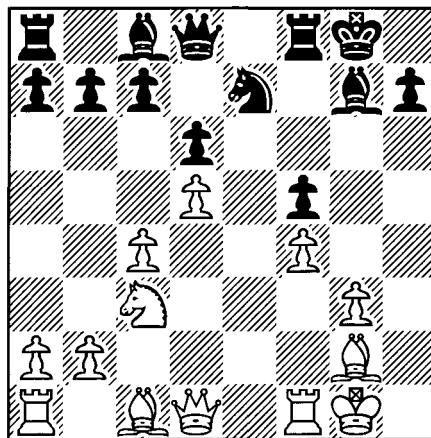
41 ♜f1 h5 42 h4 ♜c3 43 ♜f2 ♜cc2 44 ♜xc2 ♜xc2 45 f4 f6 46 fxe5 fxe5 47 ♛f3 ♜c7 48 g4 ♜c3+ 49 ♛e2 ♜a3 50 ♛d2 hxg4 0-1

Summary

This was one of those games that leaves you wondering what White did wrong! A great display by Tseshkovsky on how to play the black side of the Spanish opening and a good model for how our ‘worst piece’ approach can be adopted.

Tigran Vartanovich Petrosian (1929-1984) was World Champion from 1963 to 1969. His style of play was generally pretty cautious, but Petrosian was the master of prophylaxis and positional play and almost impossible to beat. Here Bobby Fischer is on the back foot for a change!

*Game 57
T.Petrosian-R.Fischer
Portoroz Interzonal 1958*



Black has been left in an unpleasant position in a King's Indian Defence, thanks to a

mistake on the 13th move. His pawn structure on the kingside is split and both his light-squared bishop and knight lack good squares.

Question: How does White go about improving his position here?

Answer: 15 ♜e3 ♜d7 16 ♜d4!

Petrosian employs the strategy of exchanging off his opponent's best piece, the bishop on g7.

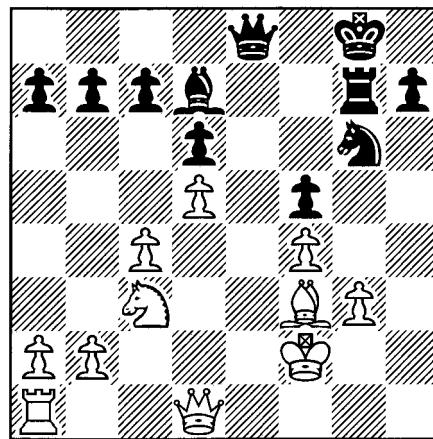
16...♝g6 17 ♜e1 ♜f7?!

17...♜xd4+ 18 ♜xd4 h5! was Black's best chance to find some play.

18 ♜f3!

Now he won't get that chance again!

18...♛f8 19 ♔f2 ♜e8 20 ♜xe8 ♛xe8 21 ♜xg7 ♜xg7



Exercise: Can you find a way to improve a piece that is not playing?

Answer: 22 ♛d4!

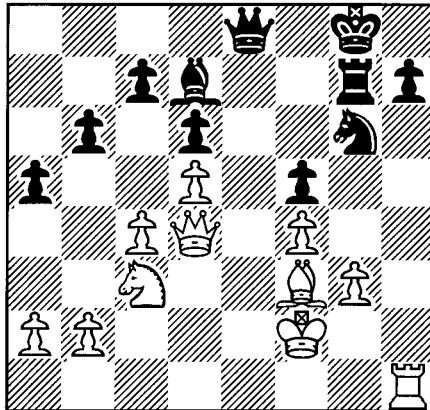
Centralizing the queen!

22 ♛e2, to bring the knight to d4, is also very logical, although it then takes a little longer to introduce the white rook on a1 into the game as the first rank is still blocked.

22...b6 23 ♜h1

23 ♜e1 is, of course, also possible, developing with tempo, but at the same time allowing Black to relieve a bit of the pressure by exchanging the rooks with 23...♜e7 24 ♜xe7 ♛xe7.

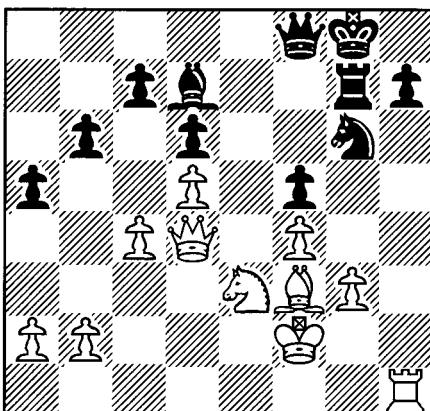
23...a5



Exercise: Now find a way to improve the worst-placed white piece!

Answer: 24...♞d1

The knight heads for a better home on e3, from where it pressures the isolated f5-pawn.
24...♝f8 25 ♞e3



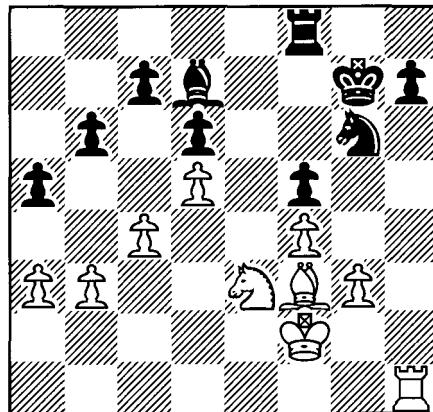
Question: Black's position looks very passive. In order to reduce the pressure which set of pieces would he like to exchange?

Answer: 25...♝f7!

It seems to me the best white piece is the queen and so Black challenges it along the long diagonal by vacating the g7-square.

26 b3 ♚g7 27 ♜xg7+ ♔xg7 28 a3 ♜f8

The situation is still difficult for Black, but at least he has taken the queens off.



Exercise: Identify White's worst piece here and find a way to improve it.

Answer: 29 ♘e2!

The white bishop is doing nothing so heads to d3 to pressure the isolated pawn.

29...♝e7 30 ♘d3 h6 31 ♜h5 ♘e8

Setting a little trap.

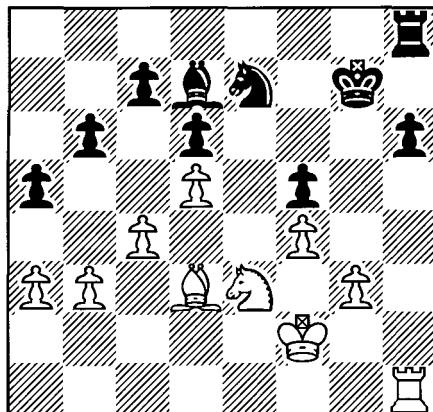
32 ♜h2!

32 ♜xf5+ ♜xf5 33 ♜xf5 temporarily misplaces the rook. After 33...♜h8! the threat of ...♜g6 cannot be stopped. Likewise 32 ♜xf5 allows the same trick with 32...♜h8!.

32...♝d7 33 ♜h1

True to his style, Petrosian continues to watch and wait. Former World Champion Max Euwe described him as “a python waiting to strike”. Here White has all the time in the world as any queenside break by Black will weaken his position.

33...♜h8



Question: Can White continue to improve his minor pieces?

Answer: 34 $\mathbb{N}c2!$

Yes! The d4-square is better for the knight than the e3-square, as from there it gains access to the outpost square on e6.

34... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 35 $\mathbb{N}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}e2$

The computer also thinks that White is better here, but cannot find a good way to improve it. One of the problems is that 36 b4 axb4 37 axb4 $\mathbb{Q}a8!$ gives Black counterplay down the a-file.

36... $\mathbb{Q}g8?!$

36... $\mathbb{Q}a8$ to keep control of the a-file is safer.

37 b4!

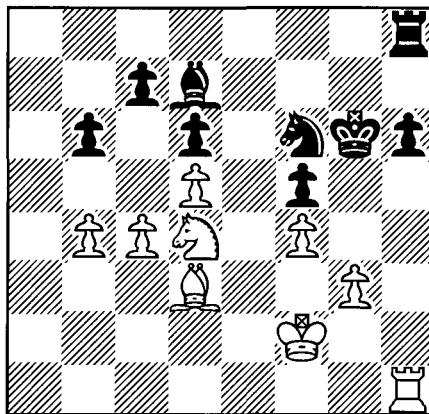
The python strikes!

37... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ axb4

Now the play becomes sharper.

38... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 39 bxa5 bxa5 40 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ is unpleasant for Black.

39 axb4 $\mathbb{Q}g6$



Question: How should White continue here?

Answer: 40 $\mathbb{Q}a1!$

Of course! Petrosian grabs the a-file and prepares an invasion along the seventh rank.

40... $\mathbb{Q}g4+$ 41 $\mathbb{Q}e2$

White must tread carefully: 41 $\mathbb{Q}f3?$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ gives Black serious chances down the e-file, with a fork on e3 already threatened.

41... $\mathbb{Q}e8+$ 42 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$

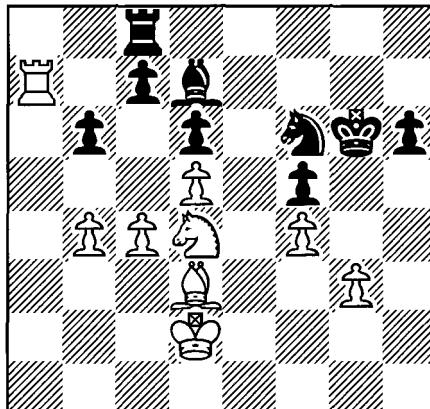
Black would dearly love to invade with 42... $\mathbb{Q}e3$, but the poor placement of his bishop

causes him problems: 43 $\mathbb{Q}a7!$ $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ 44 $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ $\mathbb{Q}f2!$ 45 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}e4+$ 46 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $fxe4$ 47 $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}d3+$ 48 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 49 $\mathbb{Q}xd6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 50 c5 should be winning for White.

43 $\mathbb{Q}a6$

43 $\mathbb{Q}a7$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ would transpose to the game.

43... $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 44 $\mathbb{Q}a7$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$



Exercise: Black remains very tied down, with his knight being the only piece he can sensibly move. Petrosian sees a chance to improve his d4-knight at the cost of a pawn. Can you see how?

Answer: 45 c5?! $bxc5$

Not 45... $\mathbb{Q}xd5?$ 46 c6 and the bishop can't move due to the check on f5.

46 $bxc5$ $dxcc5$ 47 $\mathbb{Q}f3$

This was the point. The knight heads further into the black camp.

47... $\mathbb{Q}f7!$

Dogged defence. Instead 47... $\mathbb{Q}xd5?$ loses a piece to 48 $\mathbb{Q}e5+$.

48 $\mathbb{Q}e5+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 49 $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 50 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$

White has transformed his advantage, as he now has bishop against knight and the c-pawns are doubled. However, the exchange of one pair of minor pieces has made the position easier for Black to defend, which is why I gave 45 c5 a dubious symbol.

50... $\mathbb{Q}f8!$ 51 g4

Trading down to a rook and pawn ending seems to be just a draw: 51 $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 52 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ (52 $\mathbb{Q}a6$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$) 52... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 53 $\mathbb{Q}a6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 54 $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ $\mathbb{Q}e8+$ 55 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ c4.

51... $\mathbb{Q}d6?$

51... $\mathbb{Q}f6!$ was a cheeky defence: 52 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5!$ 53 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ and Black should hold as he will win the g-pawn and at the very worst (if he loses all his pawns) get a theoretically drawn rook against bishop and rook endgame.

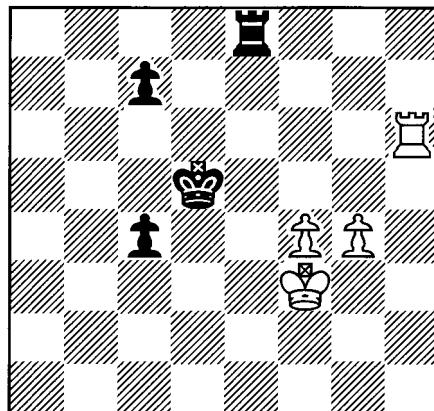
52 $\mathbb{Q}xd7!$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 53 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e8+!$

Black cuts off the king from the passed c-pawn.

54 ♔f3

54 ♔d3 ♕g8 was the point, when the g4-pawn is not defensible.

54...♔d6 55 ♕a6+ ♔xd5 56 ♕xh6 c4



Compared to the note to the move 51, the white g-pawn is one square further forward. In his notes Petrosian assessed this position as winning, but it is still highly complicated.

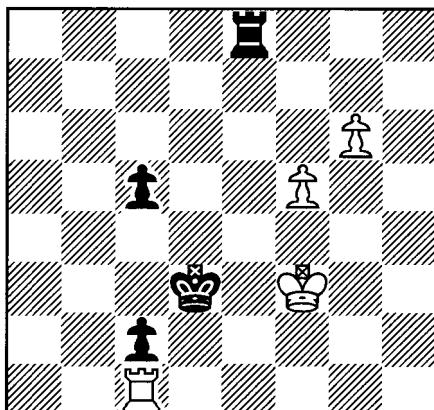
57 ♕h1?

I won't show you all the analysis, but the key line runs 57 ♕h7!. The rook belongs behind the passed pawns for the moment. After 57...c6 58 ♕d7+ ♔c5 59 ♕d1 c3 60 g5 ♔c4 61 g6 c2 62 ♕c1 ♔c3 63 f5 ♕g8 64 ♔f4 ♔d2 65 ♕xc2+ ♔xc2 66 ♔g5 c5 67 f6 c4 68 f7 ♕xg6+ 69 ♔xg6 c3 70 f8= White wins!

57...c3 58 g5 c5 59 ♕d1+

59 g6 ♕g8 60 f5 ♔e5! 61 ♔g4 ♔f6 62 ♕c1 c4 63 ♕xc3 ♕c8 is also holding.

59...♔c4 60 g6 c2 61 ♕c1 ♔d3 62 f5



Exercise: One last test, which is not relevant to this chapter, but good for you anyway! Find the drawing move here!

Answer: 62... $\mathbb{R}g8$!

Halting the pawns in their tracks is crucial.

62... $\mathbb{R}d2?$ should lose to 63 $\mathbb{R}xc2+$ $\mathbb{R}xc2$ 64 g7 c4 65 f6 $\mathbb{R}g8$ 66 f7 $\mathbb{R}xg7$ 67 f8 \mathbb{W} as the black king and rook are too far away from each other.

63 $\mathbb{R}f4$ $\mathbb{R}d2$ 64 $\mathbb{R}xc2+$ $\mathbb{R}xc2$ 65 $\mathbb{R}g5$ c4 66 f6 c3 67 f7 ½-½

Here this epic battle was agreed drawn as after 67 ... $\mathbb{R}xg6+$ 68 $\mathbb{R}xg6$ $\mathbb{R}b1$ 69 f8 \mathbb{W} c2 there is nothing more to play for, so long as you remember the trick 70 $\mathbb{W}b4+$ $\mathbb{R}a1$ 71 $\mathbb{W}c3+$ $\mathbb{R}b1$ 72 $\mathbb{W}b3+$ $\mathbb{R}a1!$.

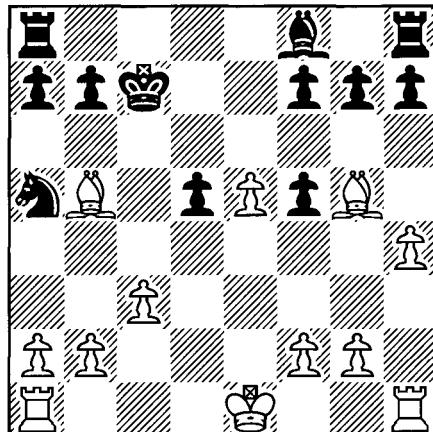
Summary

Petrosian probed and prodded Fischer's position for some time, not rushing but instead 'massaging' his slight advantage by using the worst piece strategy. Against a weaker player this probably would have resulted in Black losing patience and committing hara-kiri, but here Black stayed patient. In the end an interesting rook and pawn endgame was reached and with dogged defence Fischer managed to draw.

Game 58

A.Hunt-V.Sarandos

Leros 2012



A small exercise on improving the worst placed piece taken from a tournament on the beautiful Greek island of Leros.

Exercise: Identify Black's worst piece and find its best square.

Answer: 17... $\mathbb{N}c6!$

It should be pretty easy to see that the knight is misplaced on a5, but perhaps not so easy to find its dream square. I certainly hadn't seen this coming.

18 $\mathbb{Q}f4$

18 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6 19 0-0-0 cannot be worse for White due to the pawn structure, but hardly promises any real advantage.

18... $\mathbb{N}d8!$

The knight heads for a fabulous square on e6 where it cannot be touched.

19 0-0-0

19 e6+ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ is the tactical point when White loses a pawn.

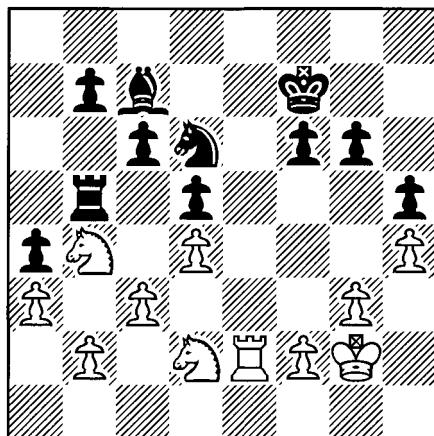
19... $\mathbb{N}e6$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ and Black is absolutely fine.

Game 59

I.Kurnosov-M.Carlsen

Astana (rapid) 2012

This recent game made a nice impression on me and was made all the more impressive due to the fact that it was a rapidplay game. Let's put ourselves in Carlsen's shoes.



Exercise: White has just played 39 $\mathbb{Q}b4$. What is the worst piece here for Black and how do we go about improving its position?

39...♝d8!

39...♜a5 would also have been very sensible, to reroute the rook via the eighth rank, but Carlsen prefers to start with the bishop.

Answer: As it's an ending assessing the activity of the pieces should be relatively easy. We can go through them in turn. Black has four pieces left on the board (excluding pawns):

1) The rook on b5 is currently blocked by the white knight and so we could argue that it is poorly placed. It is, however, potentially putting some pressure on b2 if the knight can be shifted.

2) The bishop on c7 is not really participating in the game. The white pawn chain on the dark squares hampers the bishop so a case could have been made for 39...♝a5 in order to trade it off. However, I think White would reply with 40 ♜d3 when the bishop doesn't really have a future on a5.

3) The knight on d6 is clearly the best black piece currently. It eyes up two good squares (e4 and c4), whilst preventing White from thinking about breaking with c3-c4.

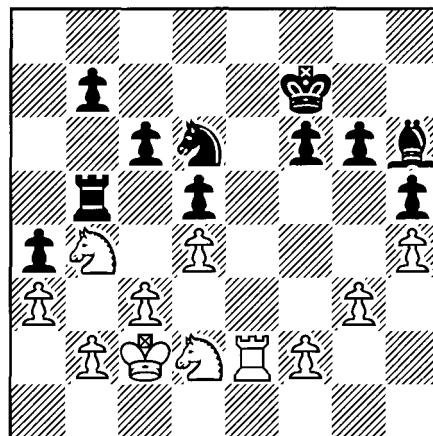
4) The black king should also be considered, especially as it's an endgame. It is not badly positioned, as it prevents the white rook from entering the black camp via e7. Indeed, there is no obvious way to improve the king's position as the white rook controls the e-file.

40 ♜f1 ♜e7 41 ♜e1 ♜f8

It becomes clear that Black wants to reposition his bishop on the only open diagonal available to it on h6.

42 ♜d1 ♜h6 43 ♜c2

Before carrying out his manoeuvre Carlsen would have needed to have foreseen whether his plan could be hindered. 43 f4?! would block the bishop, but also create a weakness at g3 and increase the vulnerability of the e4-square (as it can no longer be defended by a pawn). I suspect that play may have gone something like 43...♝f5 44 ♜f1 ♜f8! 45 ♜d3 b6 with a later pawn break of either ...c6-c5 or ...g6-g5. White, on the other hand, is passive and lacks an active plan of his own.



Question: So the bishop has been improved, but what next?

Answer: 43... $\mathbb{B}a5$

It must have been tempting to exchange the bishop off to give the black knight access to the holes on c4 and e4, with 43... $\mathbb{B}xd2$ 44 $\mathbb{Q}xd2$, but it is not so clear how to proceed after that. More importantly perhaps Carlsen wants to keep an imbalance of bishop against knight and therefore more tension in the position, making it easier for White to go wrong. His determination to win every game is one of the hallmarks of his play.

44 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{B}a8$ 45 $\mathbb{Q}c5?!$

Losing a tempo.

45... $b6$ 46 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{B}c8$ 47 $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{B}xd2$

At the opportune moment Carlsen cashes in his advantage. 47... $g5$ 48 $hxg5$ $fxg5$ 49 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ would not have been so pleasant due to the weak e5-square.

48 $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $g5$ 49 $hxg5$ $fxg5$ 50 $\mathbb{Q}e1$

Kurnosov is also following the worst piece principle. His rook and knight are both active, but his king must return to prevent Black's pawn majority from becoming too dangerous.

50... $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 51 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $b5$ 52 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $g4$ 53 $f3$ $\mathbb{B}e8$ 54 $\mathbb{B}f2$

54 $\mathbb{B}xe8$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ 55 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ should probably draw, but with his flag hanging White keeps the rooks on. Here, however, 55 $\mathbb{Q}xc6?!$ $gxf3+$ 56 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 57 $\mathbb{Q}a7$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ strands the knight.

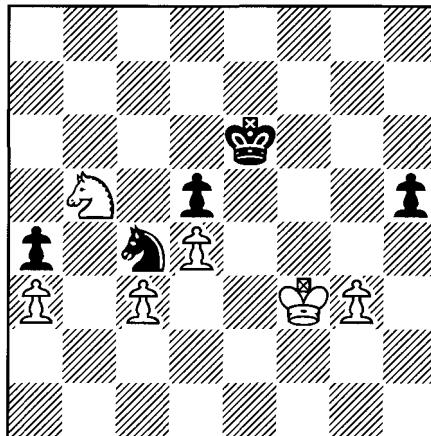
54... $gxf3+$ 55 $\mathbb{B}xf3+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 56 $\mathbb{Q}xc6?$

It was not too late for 56 $\mathbb{B}f2$ when I can't see a way for Black to make progress.

56... $\mathbb{B}e2+$ 57 $\mathbb{B}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2?$

Black makes a mistake of his own. Instead 57... $\mathbb{B}xf2+$ 58 $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ has the benefit of threatening ... $\mathbb{Q}d1+$ forking the white king and pawn: for example, 59 $\mathbb{Q}a7$ $\mathbb{Q}d1+$ 60 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3+$ 61 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 62 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}xg3$.

58 $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 59 $\mathbb{Q}a7!$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 60 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 61 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$



62 ♕e2??

White forgets about his poor knight for one move too long!

62 ♔c7+ ♕d6 63 ♔a6 ♔xa3 64 ♔c5 is just a draw.

62...♔d7 63 ♔d3 ♔c6 64 ♔a7+ ♔b7 0-1

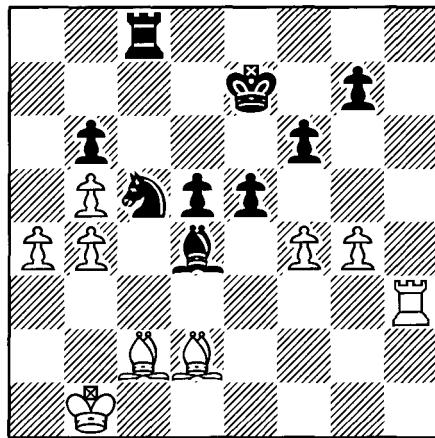
White resigned, as 65 ♔b5 ♔b6 traps the knight.

Summary

Black slowly improved his position, first by manoeuvring his bishop and then his rook. He had the time to do this as White didn't have an active plan of his own. Igor Kurnosov defended well, but the game was decided in time trouble when the b5-knight was marooned on the queenside.

You must be so careful about the placement of your trickiest pieces. Tseshkovsky demonstrated a model example of how to handle the knight in the first game of the chapter, whilst Kurnosov under time pressure allowed his knight to be trapped. I will now show another example of how *not* to handle the knight.

Game 60
S.Marco Garza-A.Hunt
El Aguila 2012



Up to this point the game has been quite balanced, but here I made a pretty dumb move.

Exercise: There are four squares for the knight that don't lose material. Which are the best and worst?

31...♞b7?

Answer: It definitely isn't this one! The principle of centralization is a powerful one and I momentarily forgot about it. Watch what happens to this poor beast.

31...♝e6! and 31...♝e4 are about tied for top spot. Both offer Black a small advantage I think, but 31...♞d7?! is quite ugly as the knight again doesn't have a route out.

32 ♞h7! ♜f7

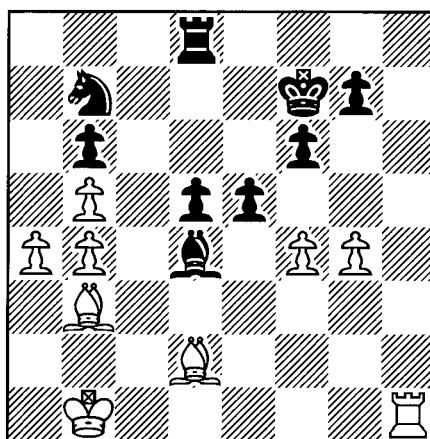
Or 32...♜g8 33 ♜b3 ♜d6 34 a5 and again the knight is completely miserable.

33 ♜b3

Suddenly Black is on the back foot, having to parry White's threats.

33...♝d8 34 ♜h1

34 f5 ♛g8 35 ♜h3 followed by a queenside pawn push is also good.



Exercise: With one piece (out of four) out of play Black must tread very carefully. Can you see a way of getting the knight back into the game?

34...e4?

Answer: 34...♞d6! is a surprising pawn sacrifice, but it brings the knight back to life: 35 ♜xd5+ ♛e7 (threatening ...♝xb5) 36 ♜c6 exf4 37 ♜xf4 ♜c3 keeps Black very much in the game.

35 ♜d1 ♛e6 36 ♜e1 ♛e3 37 ♜g3?!

37 ♜xd5+! would have been a nice shot to finish things off: 37...♜xd5 38 f5+ ♜xf5 39 gxf5+ ♛xf5 40 ♜d7 and the black knight is trapped.

37...f5 38 gxf5+

38 ♜h4 would have been even better.

38...♛xf5 39 ♜h4 ♜d7

39...♜a8 would have been more stubborn, but after 40 ♜xd5+ ♛g4 41 ♜g5 ♜xf4 42

Chess Strategy: Move by Move

$\mathbb{Q}xf4 \mathbb{Q}xf4$ 43 $\mathbb{Q}d7 \mathbb{Q}d8$ 44 $\mathbb{Q}xg7 \mathbb{Q}e3$ 45 $\mathbb{Q}b2$ the white pieces still dominate the board.

40 $\mathbb{Q}xd5 \mathbb{Q}xf4$

40... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 41 $\mathbb{Q}e1 \mathbb{Q}xf4$ 42 $\mathbb{Q}g3+$ is annoying.

41 $\mathbb{Q}f1+$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 42 $\mathbb{Q}c6$

The knight on b7 has not moved since move 31. It is now lost by force and so is the game.

42... $\mathbb{Q}d4$

If 42... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 43 $\mathbb{Q}g3+$.

43 $\mathbb{Q}g3+ \mathbb{Q}e6$ 44 $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ and White won in 57 moves.

Summary

I hope these last two examples have highlighted how important it is to keep your pieces happy, especially your knights as they are more easily trapped and immobilized than your other forces. Here I forgot about my knight temporarily and paid a heavy price.

Playing to Restrict your Opponent's Pieces

As a follow-on from my moment of madness against Señor Garza, I would like to reverse the roles and argue that concentrating all your energies against one misplaced enemy piece can be a very effective strategy. It requires good judgement and forward thinking, but look at what happens if you get it right...

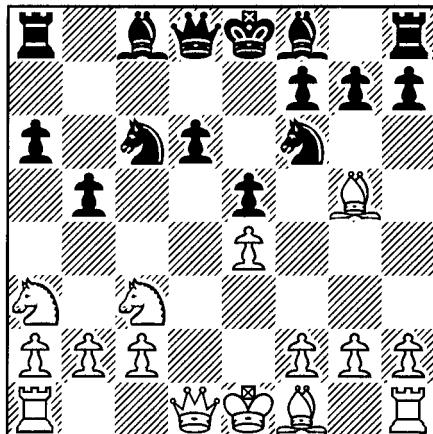
Game 61
G.Kasparov-A.Shirov
Horgen 1994
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}db5$ d6 7 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ e5 8 $\mathbb{Q}g5$

The Sveshnikov Sicilian is another example of a complex, dynamic opening which has been analysed to near death at the top level with the aid of computers.

8...a6 9 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ b5

Already playing against the misplaced knight on a3. White must act quickly.



10 ♜d5

10 ♜xf6 gxf6 11 ♜d5 is the sharper main alternative. Here I used to like the fun line that ran 11...f5 12 ♜xb5!? axb5 13 ♜xb5 ♜a4 14 ♜bc7+ ♔d7 15 0-0 mainly because my opponents could fall for mate in two if they were not careful! After 15...♜xe4 (15...fxe4 16 ♜g4+ f5 17 ♜xf5 mate is highly embarrassing) 16 ♜h5 ♜d4 17 ♜xf7+ ♔c6 Black has scored well in practice, though he must be careful of his king.

10...♜e7 11 ♜xf6 ♜xf6 12 c3

Not forgetting about the knight on a3.

12...♝b7 13 ♜c2 ♜b8?!

Alexei Shirov is one of the specialists in this particular opening, but his tactics here get him into trouble.

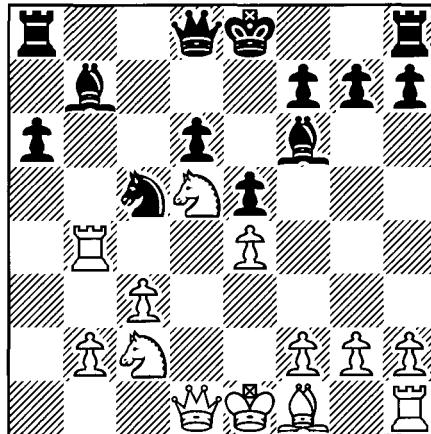
14 a4

A standard move to break up the queenside pawns and expose a6 as a target.

14...bxa4 15 ♜xa4 ♜d7 16 ♜b4!

This idea was new at the time of this game.

16...♝c5



Question: What did Kasparov have in mind?

His rook looks a little strangely placed.

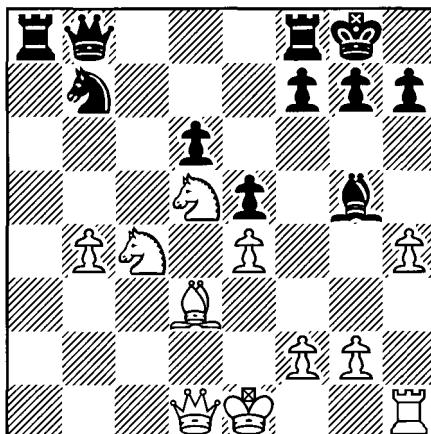
Answer: 17 $\mathbb{R}xb7!$? $\mathbb{N}xb7$ 18 $b4!$

Compare the positions of the white knight on d5 and the black knight on b7! One is breathing fire in all directions whilst the other sits meekly on b7. The exchange sacrifice is widely used at the top level.

18...N g5 19 Na3 0-0 20 Nc4 a5 21 Nd3

We don't want to let the knight out by advancing the b-pawn with 21 b5? $\mathbb{N}c5$.

21...axb4 22 cxb4 N b8 23 h4!



Another nice move to displace the bishop from its best square. It must now choose which diagonal it wishes to control.

23...♝h6

23...♝d8 looks more passive, but controls the important b6- and e7-squares. Even here, though, I don't see much future for the b7-knight!

24 ♞cb6 ♜a2 25 0-0

25 ♞d7 can be met with 25...♝a7, attacking the f2-square.

25...♜d2 26 ♜f3 ♜a7 27 ♞d7 ♞d8?!

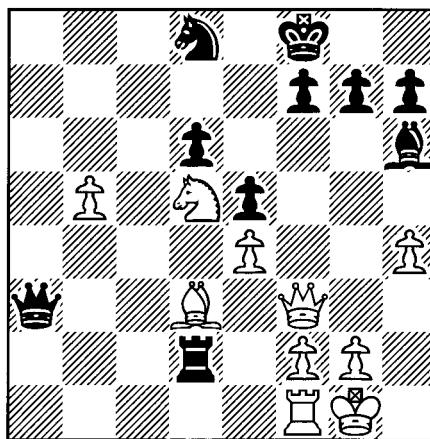
Perhaps understandably Shirov decides to give back the exchange in order to try and activate his knight, but his position remains pretty rotten.

27...♜a8 28 ♞e7+ (28 ♞c4!?) to activate the bishop is maybe what White had in mind)

28...♚h8 29 ♜xf7 ♜xd3 30 ♞f8! ♜a2 is probably a draw after 31 ♞eg6+ hxg6 32 ♞xg6+ ♚h7 33 ♞f8+ ♚h8 (but not 33...♜xf8 34 ♜xa2).

28 ♞xf8 ♜xf8 29 b5! ♜a3

29...♞e6, heading for d4, allows White's last piece into the game: 30 b6 ♜b7 31 ♜a1! with a winning position for White.



Exercise: Can you find the flaw in Black's last move?

Answer: 30 ♜f5!

Emphasizing the plight of the black knight.

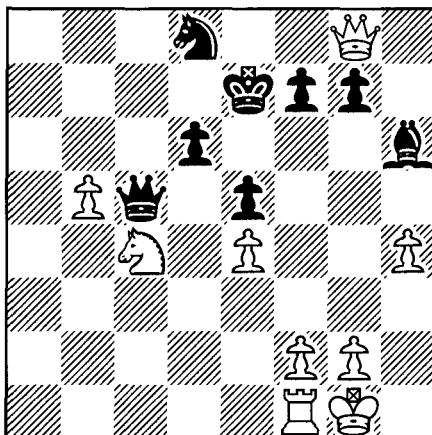
30...♞e8

Otherwise, 30...♜xd3 31 ♜d7 with the dual threats of ♜xd8+ and ♜e7 followed by ♜e8 mate wins, while 30...♞e6 31 ♜xh7 threatens mate on h8.

31 ♞c4

Opposite-coloured bishops during the middlegame are very dangerous! There is no opponent to the piece on c4 and the black bishop number is stuck on h6! Shirov is lost.

31...♜c2 32 ♜xh7 ♜xc4 33 ♜g8+ ♜d7 34 ♜b6+ ♜e7 35 ♜xc4 ♜c5



Exercise: What is the cleanest way to finish Black off?

Answer: 36 ♜a1!

The rook enters the game with decisive effect.

36...♜d4

36...♜xc4 37 ♜a7+ ♔f6 38 ♜xd8+ ♔g6 39 ♜xd6+ is also over, as long as White doesn't fall into a perpetual check on the c1- and f4-squares.

37 ♜a3 ♞c1 38 ♖e3 1-0

Black is forced to take the knight and is just an exchange and a pawn down.

Summary

White focused his attention on playing against the knight on b7 and the bishop on h6. He even gave up an exchange to do so here! Always be on the lookout for misplaced enemy pieces and try to keep them that way.

Here we see another example of the strategy of playing to limit the scope of an opponent's piece. This one will make the boss happy – it was against him and I lost! Pay rise perhaps!?

Game 62

A.Hunt-J.Emms

Hastings Challengers 1995/96

Ruy Lopez

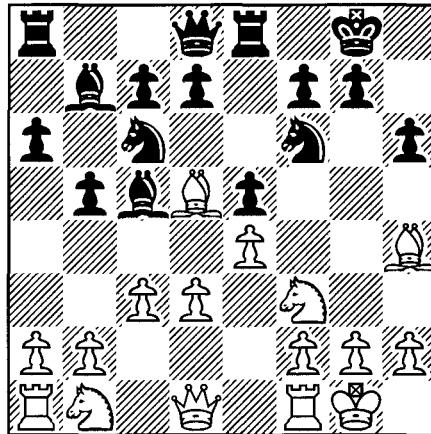
1 e4 e5 2 ♜f3 ♜c6 3 ♜b5 a6 4 ♜a4 ♜f6 5 0-0 b5 6 ♜b3 ♜c5 7 ♜d5

Definitely not the best. White goes after the e5-pawn, but in doing so moves a piece twice when his queenside is still asleep.

7...0-0 8 d3

And then gets cold feet! At least I didn't play 8 ♜xc6?! dxcc6 9 ♜xe5 ♛e8 which would have given Black a massive lead in development and lots of open lines for his pieces.

8...♛e8 9 ♜g5 h6 10 ♜h4 ♛b7 11 c3



Question: Which piece can Black play against and how?

Answer: 11...g5!

A very similar idea to the Hunt-Adams game in the previous chapter, so I hope you were paying attention there! Black tries to put the bishop on h4 to sleep.

12 ♜g3

12 ♜xg5 hxg5 13 ♜xg5 can be met by 13...♝e7, breaking the awkward pin. Instead 12 ♜xg5? hxg5 13 ♜xg5 ♜xd5 14 ♜h5 would have kept Black on his toes, but he has 14...♝f6! 15 ♜xf7+ ♜h8 16 ♜g6 ♛e7! (ice-cold defence from the computer) 17 ♜xf6+ ♜g8 with ...♝g7 to follow.

12...d6

We can see why ...♝b7 was necessary before playing ...g7-g5. The knight on c6 had to be defended.

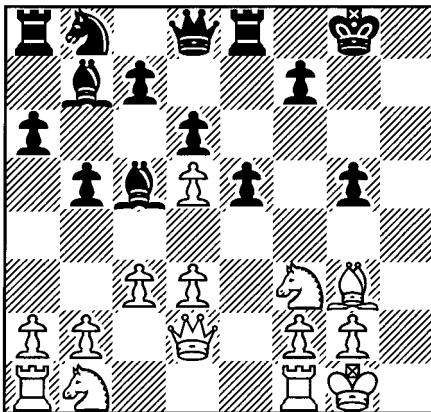
13 h4?

This turns out just to weaken the white kingside. As in the Hunt-Adams game, preserving the light-squared bishop for the future with 13 ♜b3 would have been best.

13...♞xd5 14 exd5 ♜b8!

Rerouting the knight.

15 hxg5 hxg5 16 ♜d2



Exercise: What's best here for Black: 16...g4, 16...f6 or 16... \mathbb{Q} xd5?

Answer: 16...f6!

How White wishes he still had his light-squared bishop!

However, 16...g4? would have been careless as it lets the bishop back into the game: 17 \mathbb{Q} h4 f6 18 \mathbb{W} h6 with sudden problems for Black.

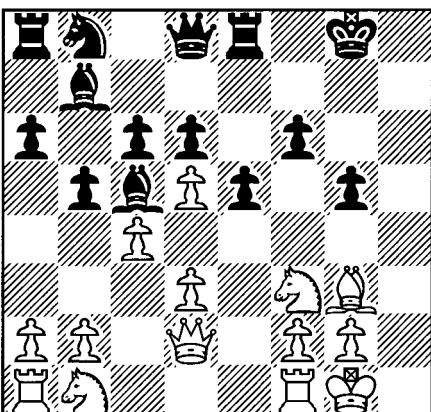
16... \mathbb{Q} xd5?! is tempting to get the bishops working together, but somehow allowing the king to be opened up doesn't appeal: 17 \mathbb{Q} xg5 \mathbb{Q} d7 18 c4?! bxc4 19 \mathbb{Q} c3 with strong counterplay.

17 c4

Trying to play against the light-squared bishop.

17...c6?!

Completing development with 17... \mathbb{Q} d7 was safest.



Exercise: John Emms understandably wants to open the position for his two bishops, but in doing so gives White a chance. What is it?

18 $\mathbb{Q}c3$?

Answer: 18 d4!, shaking things up in the centre, is absolutely the right decision, especially given the slightly shaky nature of the black kingside (remembering that a flank thrust is normally best met by a central one). After 18... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ (Black wouldn't feel entirely comfortable either after 18...exd4 19 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ cxd5 20 cxd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ with definite compensation for the pawn) 19 dxe5 dxe5 20 d6! the black bishops can't quite work harmoniously together as ...c6-c5 blocks one of them in.

18...b4 19 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$

Of course, not 19... $\mathbb{Q}xc3??$ 20 cxb7 cxd2 21 bxa8 \mathbb{W} .

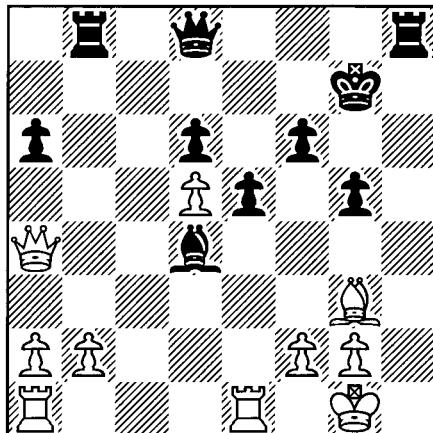
20 $\mathbb{Q}d5 \mathbb{Q}g7$

White's knight has found a home on d5, but the bishop on g3 remains completely out of the game. As well as that, the h-file is open for Black to attack down. Indeed, I think White is positionally lost.

21 $\mathbb{Q}fe1 \mathbb{Q}h8$ 22 d4?!

White gets impatient and tries to mix things up. In fact the immobilization strategy Emms has employed works particularly well against impulsive, aggressive players, such as the 14 year-old Adam Hunt, who get frustrated easily if they aren't able to attack.

22... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 24 $\mathbb{W}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 25 $\mathbb{W}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 26 cxd5



Exercise: A picture of contrast between the two bishops!

How did John Emms wipe out any counterplay?

Answer: 26... $\mathbb{W}e8$

Nice! Black exchanges off White's best piece.

27 ♜xe8

27 ♜xa6 ♜h5 leads to curtains on h1.

27...♜hxe8 28 ♜ac1 ♜xb2 29 ♜c6 ♜d8 30 a4 f5 0-1

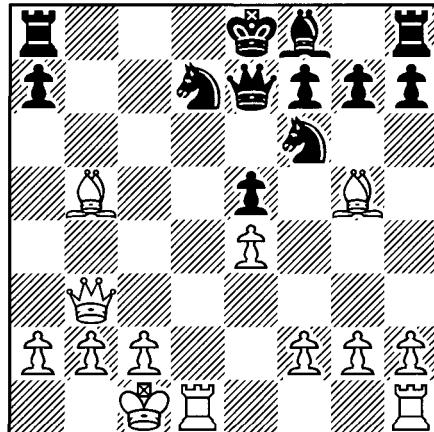
White could fight on with 31 ♜f1 f4 32 ♜h2, but it is a lost and painful cause. Just look at that bishop on h2!

Summary

If you know your opponent is an aggressive player, a restriction strategy often works well, as it can provoke a hasty reaction from the opponent if they lose patience. A good policy against juniors perhaps?!

It's not always the case that improving an inactive piece is confined to slow, strategic positions. Just check out the end to a classic game!

Game 63
P.Morphy-Duke of Brunswick & Count Isouard
Paris Opera 1858



Exercise: Find the most direct way of improving White's worst piece!

Answer: 13 ♜xd7!

Quite a lot of the time from my students I get the answer 13 ♜d2, with the idea of doubling rooks, or 13 ♜a4. The text move is best though as it is just a faster way of getting the h1-rook to the d-file.

13...♝xd7 14 ♕d1!

Black is hopelessly lost. All the white pieces are participating in the attack, whilst Black has a bishop and rook still at home. The game is finished.

14...♛e6 15 ♜xd7+ ♜xd7 16 ♜b8+! ♜xb8 17 ♜d8 mate (1-0)

Missing the Target

Always beware the hidden dynamic factors in a position! You must certainly be careful when embarking on a strategy to improve your worst piece, especially if the plan takes a number of moves. Be aware of what the opponent might be able to do in the meantime. This game between two World Champions is a good example of this.

Game 64
M.Botvinnik-J.Capablanca
 AVRO, Holland 1938
Nimzo-Indian Defence

1 d4 ♜f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♜c3 ♜b4 4 e3

The Rubinstein variation of the Nimzo-Indian, one of the most strategically complex openings around and one where Black often gives away the bishop-pair to double White's pawns.

4...d5 5 a3 ♜xc3+ 6 bxc3 c5 7 cxd5 exd5 8 ♜d3 0-0 9 ♜e2 b6 10 0-0 ♜a6

Up until this point the game has required little comment. Both sides have got on with development and it seems as though Black is doing well as he succeeds in exchanging off White's superior light-squared bishop. However, the dynamics of the pawn break e3-e4 make the issue more complicated.

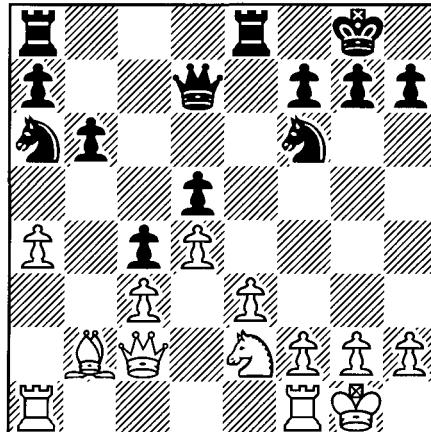
11 ♜xa6 ♜xa6 12 ♜b2

Despite White's famous win in this game, this move never saw the light of day again. More popular these days is to prepare the pawn push as quickly as possible with something like 12 f3 ♜e8 13 ♜g3 ♜c7 14 ♜d3, as in V.Kramnik-D.Alsina Leal, Barcelona (simul) 2002.

12...♛d7 13 a4 ♜fe8 14 ♜d3 c4

With a good grip on the e4-square, Capablanca decides to close the centre. He has a specific plan in mind.

15 ♜c2



Exercise: Can you see what the great Cuban's deep idea might be?

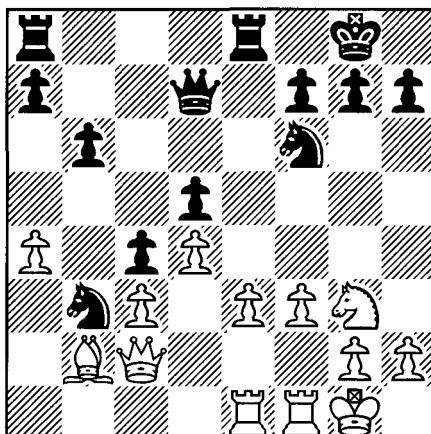
Answer: 15...Nb8

This is the start of the master plan. Capablanca sees that the b3-square is a potential outpost and that if he lands his knight there the a4-pawn may fall. However, the knight manoeuvre takes four moves.

Question: How did Botvinnik react?

Answer: 16 Nae1

White really only has one idea in the position – to prepare a central breakthrough.
16...Nc6 17 Ng3 Na5 18 f3 Nb3



Exercise: The knight has arrived and the a4-pawn is, indeed, doomed. However, momentarily the black pieces will be 'offside' on the queen's wing. What would you do here as White?

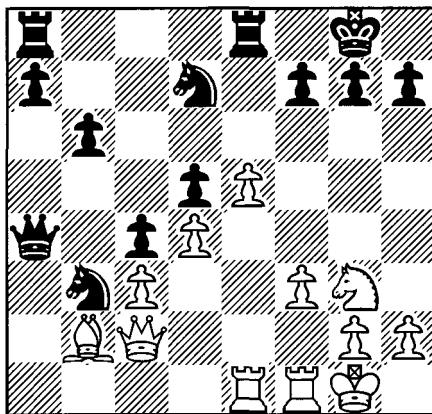
Answer: 19 e4!

Of course Botvinnik cannot afford to hang about.

19... $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ 20 e5

Again White must react quickly, otherwise the black queen will come back to defend.

20... $\mathbb{N}d7$



Question: How should White continue?

Answer: 21 $\mathbb{Q}f2$

White isn't tempted to jump in immediately with his knight and instead doubles on the f-file with some ideas of bringing the queen to g3 when the knight moves.

Instead 21 $\mathbb{N}f5$ $\mathbb{N}f8$ 22 $\mathbb{N}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 23 f4 $\mathbb{N}c5!$ allows the black knight back into the game. The text move prevents this manoeuvre.

21...g6

Creating a hook for the white f-pawn, but also preventing the knight from coming in. Perhaps 21... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ gives Black a few more options based on possible ... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ defences.

22 f4 f5

Virtually forced. Capablanca can't allow White to open the f-file.

23 exf6

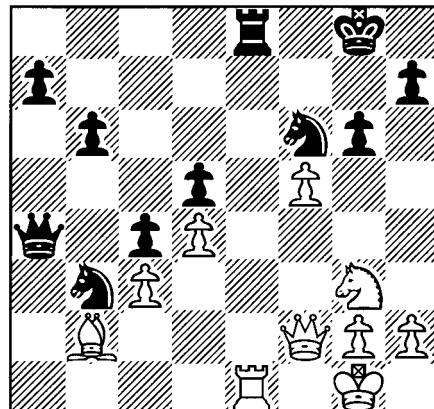
Anything else and Black has time to reposition his d7-knight on e6 via the f8-square.

23... $\mathbb{N}xf6$ 24 f5! $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ $\mathbb{Q}e8?$

Surprisingly perhaps, but this move is a mistake, even though it looks logical to exchange off the rooks.

25... $\mathbb{Q}f8!$ was the most accurate choice, keeping an eye on the f6-knight. After 26 fxg6

hxg6 27 $\mathbb{E}e6$ $\mathbb{G}g7$ there is no obvious way through the black position.



Exercise: What should Botvinnik play here?

Answer: 26 $\mathbb{E}e6$!

Using the springboard of the f5-pawn to occupy the e6-square is very powerful. Now the exchange of rooks is virtually forced.

26... $\mathbb{E}xe6$ 27 $\mathbb{F}xe6$ $\mathbb{G}g7$ 28 $\mathbb{W}f4$

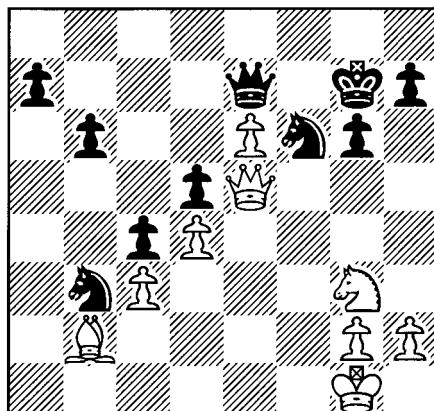
White looks to penetrate on the dark squares.

28... $\mathbb{W}e8$ 29 $\mathbb{W}e5?$

It seems that 29 $\mathbb{W}c7+!$ $\mathbb{W}h6$ 30 $\mathbb{W}e5$ might have been even stronger, but Botvinnik had seen a tactic...

29... $\mathbb{W}e7?$

29...h6 was necessary to stop any tricks on the kingside.



Exercise: Amazingly this move loses by force. Can you see why?

Answer: 30 ♘a3!

The bishop wakes up with decisive effect!

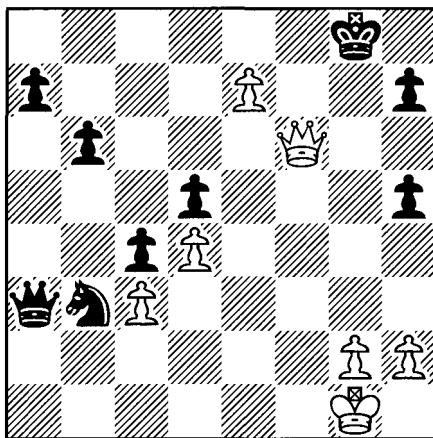
30... ♗xa3 31 ♔h5+

And this is the crucial follow-up. The squares around the black king are now just too weak.

31... gxh5 32 ♗g5+ ♔f8 33 ♗xf6+ ♔g8

33... ♔e8 34 ♗f7+ ♔d8 35 ♗d7 is mate.

34 e7



The knight that landed on b3 on move 18 has been a bystander ever since. The pawn that Black won has had no influence either and now White's central strategy triumphs! An elegant king walk brings home the point.

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

With no checks left Capablanca resigned.

Summary

Games can easily pass knights by, especially if they are not centrally placed. Here Capablanca didn't fully appreciate the danger in the centre. When you see the enemy temporarily misplace his pieces on one side of the board, a swift response on the other side or through the centre is often called for!

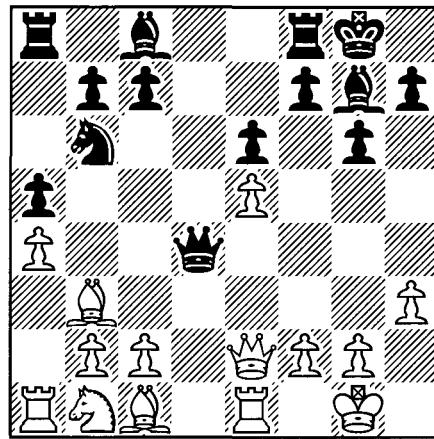
I will finish this chapter by giving a classic example of improving the worst piece, which if you haven't already seen, you won't forget in a hurry!

Game 65
N.Short-J.Timman
Tilburg 1991
Alekhine's Defence

1 e4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 e5 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 3 d4 $d6$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ g6 5 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 7 $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 8 0-0 0-0 9 h3

Prophylactic chess. Short prevents $\mathbb{Q}g4$ which would increase the pressure on e5. We will revisit this idea in Chapter Eight.

9...a5 10 a4 dxe5 11 dxe5 $\text{h}4$ 12 $\text{xd}4$ $\text{xd}4$ 13 $\text{e}1$ e6?!?



Exercise: It's White to move. Improve the worst piece!

Answer: 14 ♟d2!

Actually there are three undeveloped pieces on the queenside, but the bishop and rook were more difficult to get out!

14 ♔c3 ♔d7! puts sizeable pressure on the e5-pawn.

14...d5 15 f3 c5 16 e4

Nigel Short is a very powerful and creative attacking player given a chance. Here he looks to transfer his queen to h4 followed by ♖c1-h6.

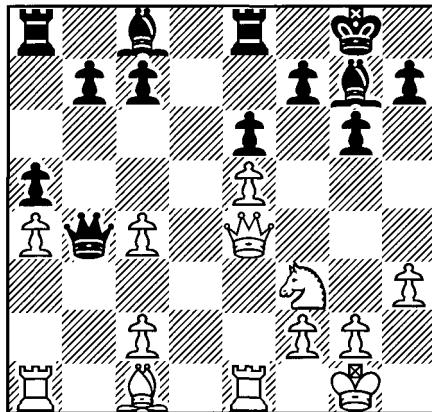
16... ♜b4 17 ♜c4! ♞b6 18 b3!

Voluntarily wrecking his pawn structure, but in compensation the two black bishops are very badly placed. Another example of dynamics triumphing over static factors.

18...♞xc4 19 bxc4

Now 20 ♜a3 is threatened.

19...e8



Exercise: Play to restrict your opponent's worst piece.

Answer: 20 $\mathbb{Q}d1!$

Preventing the development of the bad bishop on c8.

20... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ b6

21... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ simply loses a piece to 22 $\mathbb{Q}a3$.

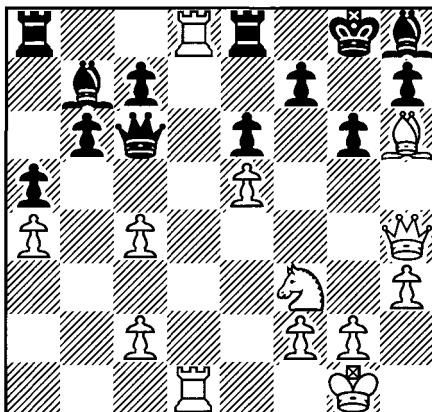
22 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$

Grandmaster Ian Rogers, in his commentary for *ChessBase*, suggests 22... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ as a necessity, but White's position is still really good after 23 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ h6 24 $\mathbb{Q}e4$.

23 $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$

Black needs the fianchettoed bishop to cover the holes around his king. Short now seeks to improve his queen's rook.

24 $\mathbb{Q}d8$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}ad1$



Question: What is White's threat in this position?

25...♝g7

Answer: 26 ♜e7! would be crushing against most other moves.

26 ♜8d7

Now 26 ♜e7 just loses a piece to 26...♝xh6.

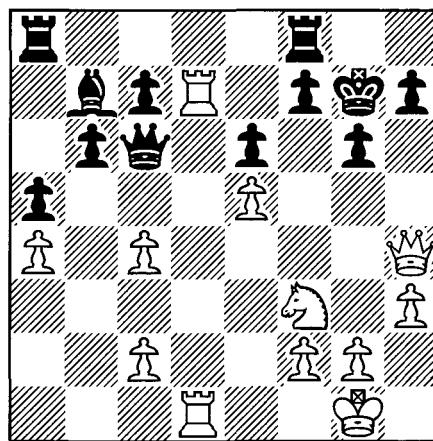
26...♜f8

Timman grimly hangs on. Alternatively:

a) After 26...♝xh6 27 ♜xh6 White threatens 28 ♜xf7!.

b) 26...♝e4 27 ♜xf7!! is a fantastic blow: 27...♝xf7 28 ♜d7+ ♚g8 29 ♜xg7+ ♚h8 30 ♜f6 and the game is up for Black.

27 ♜xg7 ♚xg7



Exercise: All White's pieces are active. Can you find a way for him to improve his position?

Answer: 28 ♜1d4!

The strongest move. This rook swing eyes up the kingside while preventing Black from playing to exchange the queens with ...♝e4.

28...♜ae8 29 ♜f6+ ♚g8 30 h4

A typical motif try and to soften up Timman's kingside pawn structure.

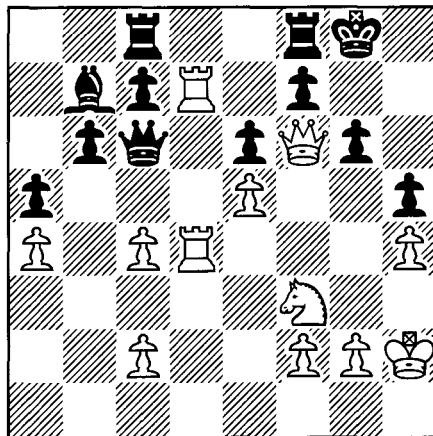
30...h5

Black cannot take his eyes off the a8-h1 diagonal as 30...♝xa4 31 ♜g5, preparing to take on f7, is crushing.

31 ♚h2 ♜c8

31...♜c8 again allows 32 ♜g5! ♜xd7 33 g4! which, although it is hard to believe, is com-

pletely winning for White: for instance, 33...hxg4 34 h5 gxh5 35 $\mathbb{W}h6$.



Question: How does Short improve his position here?

Answer: 32 $\mathbb{Q}g3!$ $\mathbb{E}ce8$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}f4!$

One of the most famous king walks in the history of the game.

33... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}g5!$ 1-0

After 34... $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}h6$ Black cannot avoid mate on g7.

Summary

This game goes to show that the king can be used as an active fighting piece in the mid-game! The whole game contained elements of improving the worst-placed piece and of restricting the opponent's. It was finished in some style.

Key Points

- 1) When you are stuck for a plan, remember the simple strategy of improving a badly-placed piece.
- 2) One poor piece can be the reason for losing a game – aim for harmony between your forces at all times.
- 3) Knights are particularly prone to being misplaced and trapped.
- 4) Be aware that manoeuvring takes time and always be thinking about whether the opponent can use that time to attack you elsewhere on the board.

Chapter Seven

The Initiative

Attack! Always Attack! – Adolf Anderssen

The ‘initiative’ is a slightly mysterious chess term (well, it is to me anyway), but a hugely important and very commonly used one. When you make a move which threatens one of your opponent’s pieces, he has to parry the threat or make a counterattack. If a number of such moves can be made in quickly, then often a serious advantage can be built up.

A nice comparison (well I think so anyway) can be made with a game of tennis. The server (let’s call him Pete Sampras), as long as his serve is fast and accurate, should gain the upper hand in the rally, as the returner (let’s call him Rafael Nadal) is simply trying to put the ball back into the court. This leads to a situation where Pete has the initiative, as long as he makes good shots. If, for some reason, he plays a poor or ponderous shot it will give Rafa the opportunity to seize the initiative with a good shot of his own. If the game is on a slower surface, such as clay, then the importance of the initiative is reduced somewhat, in the same way that a slower paced chess game (which, say, has a closed centre) will rely less on the initiative and more on other strategic factors.

The initiative is very closely linked with time or tempo in chess. It is very much a short-term advantage and thus must be used as energetically as possible. Witness the following awesome display by White, where he doesn’t let up for a moment.

Game 66
V.Kupreichik-J.Sunye Neto
Palma de Mallorca 1989
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♜c3 a6

This is becoming quite a popular way of dealing with White's move order.

3 ♜f3 b5 4 d4 cxd4 5 ♜xd4 ♜b7 6 ♜d3

White sets up to overprotect his e4-pawn.

6...e6 7 0-0 ♜c7 8 ♜e2

And this is a good move in that it discourages the development of the g8-knight.

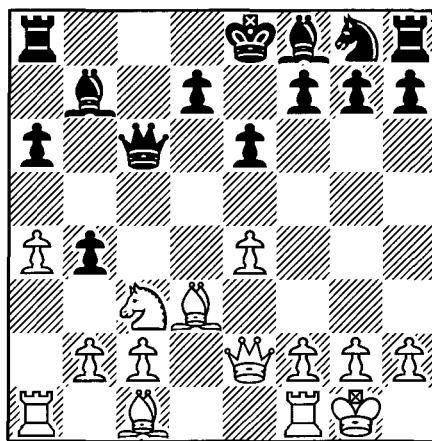
8...♜c6

8...♜f6 9 e5! would be awkward to meet.

9 ♜xc6 ♜xc6 10 a4

With a slight lead in development White tries to provoke some weaknesses in the black camp.

10...b4



Question: Where would you put the white knight?

Answer: 11 ♜d5!

White is creating problems for his opponent from the word go.

11...♜f6

Alternatives:

- a) 11...exd5 12 exd5+ picks up the queen.
- b) 11...♜d6 12 ♜d2 threatens the b4-pawn when 12...a5? 13 ♜b5 ♜c8 14 ♜b6 would be a good example of using the initiative to rapidly obtain a winning position.

12 ♜c4

I think if it were me I would have taken that knight on f6 off and left the black king with a lack of shelter on both sides of the board: 12 ♜xf6+ gxf6 13 ♜d2 with an advantage for White.

12...♜d6?!

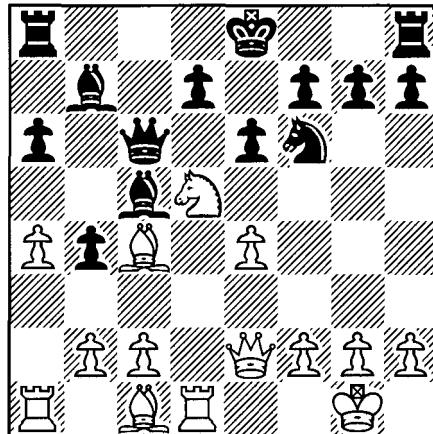
Black develops his bishop to a slightly vulnerable square, which results in a loss of time.

Chess Strategy: Move by Move

12... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ would perhaps have been better, but even then White can generate threats with 13 $\mathbb{Q}f4$!

13 $\mathbb{B}d1!$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$

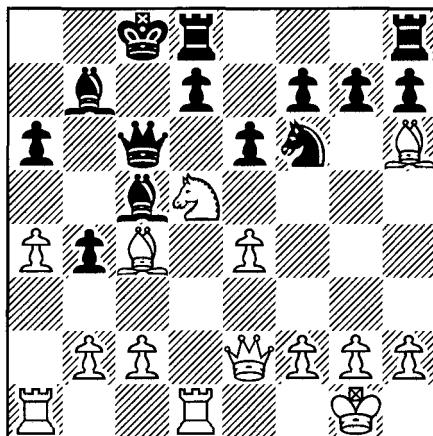
13...0-0 loses material to 14 $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ $gxf6$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}h6$ as $\mathbb{W}g4+$ is threatened, but 13... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ should probably have been preferred.



Exercise: Can you find a move to keep the pressure on,
ideally a developing move with tempo?

Answer: 14 $\mathbb{Q}h6!$

This probably came as a bit of a shock to the system for Black. I bet you thought the bishop was going to f4! However, 14 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 15 $exd5$ $\mathbb{W}c8$ gives Black a little respite.
14...0-0-0



Exercise: Black wants to get his king out of the centre, but his last move runs into a huge problem. What is it?

Answer: 15 ♕b5!

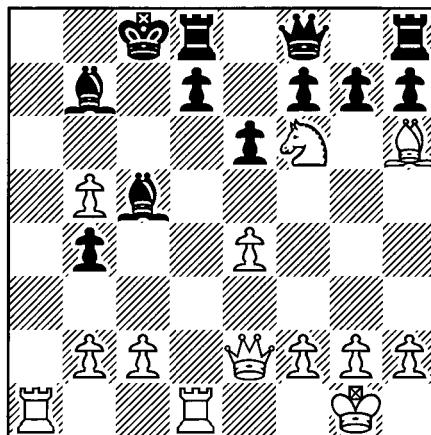
Brilliant. The black queen is very short of squares and the a-file is opened for the white rook.

15 ♕xg7 exd5 16 exd5 ♖d6 is not so strong.

15...axb5 16 axb5 ♖d6

16...♖xd5 17 exd5 gxh6 gives Black three pieces for the queen, but again he just isn't in time to survive after 18 ♜c4! d6 19 dxe6.

17 ♜xf6 ♖f8



Question: Is there a way to keep up the attack?

Answer: 18 ♕xg7!

Decoying the black queen from the defence of the bishop on c5.

18...♖xg7 19 ♜c4 d6

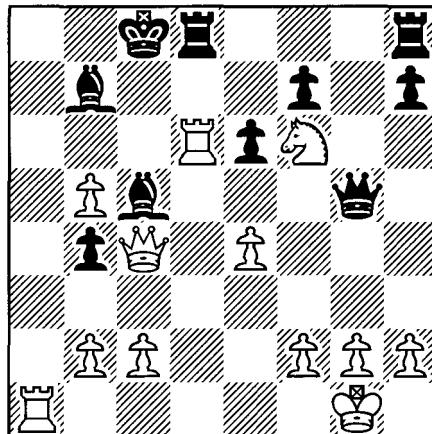
If 19...♖f8 then 20 e5! would be the first move White has played in a while that doesn't threaten a piece! However, it does threaten ♜e4 and ♜d6: for example, 20...♖e7 21 ♜d6 with a winning attack.

20 ♜xd6!

Apologies for all the exclamation marks, but I think Kupreichik deserves them.

20...♗g5

If 20...♖xd6 21 ♖xc5+ ♔b8 22 ♖xd6+.



Exercise: Keep the energy going!

Answer: 21 ♜d5!

Attacking c5 again. This time it can't be defended.

21...exd5 22 ♜xc5+ ♛b8 23 ♜c6 1-0

Black resigned as after 23...♜xc6 24 ♜xc6 he must give up his queen to stop ♜a8 mate.

Summary

Phenomenal stuff from White. Black simply didn't have time to put his pieces in order due to the barrage of threats.

The Initiative vs. Static Positional Factors

Strong players will often unbalance the game in order to seize the initiative. Here White makes what looks like a very dubious positional decision to wreck his own pawn structure, but at the same time grabs some attacking chances.

Game 67

A.Hunt-A.Yakimenko

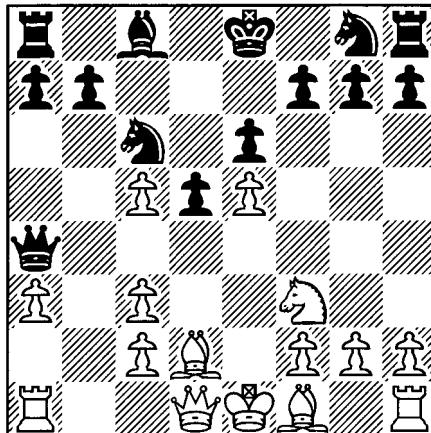
Golden Sands 2012

French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♜c3 ♜b4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 ♜xc3+ 6 bxc3 ♜a5 7 ♜d2 ♜a4

Black looks to apply pressure to the centre, whilst stopping White from playing a3-a4 to open the a3-f8 diagonal.

8 ♜f3 ♜c6 9 dxc5?



This certainly raises the stakes. White destroys his pawn structure, but banks on the time lost by Black regaining the pawn as more than adequate compensation. It also gives White access to the important d4-square for his knight. It is one of the very few examples of a situation where giving yourself triple isolated pawns can be seriously considered!

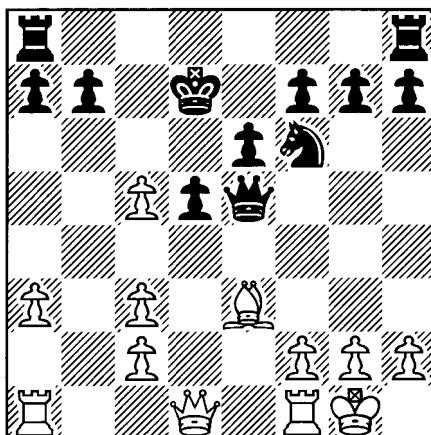
9...♝e4+

9...f6 is the alternative, trying to wrest the initiative from White by grabbing the centre. However, after 10 ♜d4! the threat is ♜b5 and so the following sequence is forced:
 10...♜xd4 11 cxd4 ♜xd4 (11...fxe5 12 ♜h5+) 12 ♜b5+ ♛f7 13 0-0 ♜xe5. In practice White does very well from this position as long as he keeps the pressure up! Indeed, 14 c4 d4 15 ♜e1 ♜c7 16 ♜h5+ g6 17 ♜h4 looks good to me.

10 ♜e3 ♜xe5 11 ♜xe5 ♜xe5 12 ♜b5+

This is the point behind White's play. Black is forced to move his king.

12...♚d7 13 ♜xd7+ ♛xd7 14 0-0 ♜f6



Exercise: The situation is quite tense. If Black can organize his pieces and get his king out of the centre he stands well.
Can you keep up the initiative here?

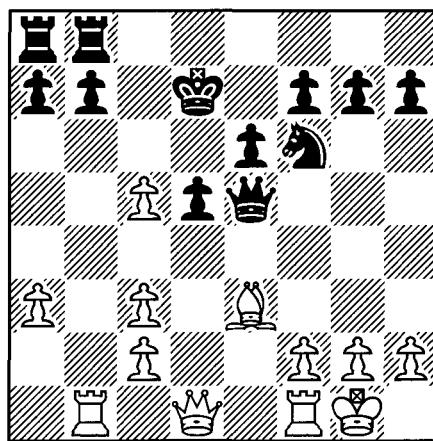
Answer: 15 $\mathbb{B}b1$!

A good move which forces Black to misplace a piece to deal with the threat to the b-pawn. This is about where I had got to in my pre-match preparation. It is worth pointing out that the fight for the initiative can start before even a piece has been moved!

15 $\mathbb{A}d4$ $\mathbb{W}f5$ 16 $\mathbb{B}b1$ would also have been good.

15... $\mathbb{B}h8?$

Played after a long think, but not the best move. The plan is to evacuate the king to the kingside.



Question: Is there a way to blast the central files open?

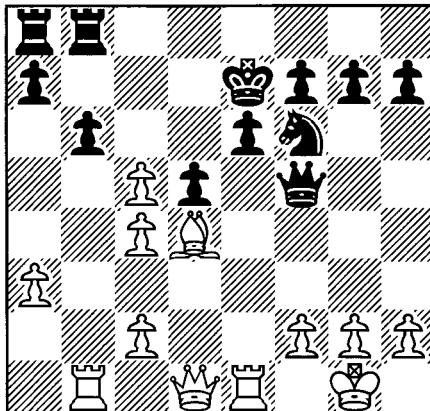
Answer: 16 c4!

Getting ready to remove one of the tripled pawns whilst trying to soften up the black central pawn structure.

16... $\mathbb{B}e7$ 17 $\mathbb{A}d4$ $\mathbb{W}f5$ 18 $\mathbb{B}e1$

Every move is designed to create a threat. Here White improves a rook whilst preparing both 19 $\mathbb{A}e5$ and 19 $\mathbb{B}e5$.

18... $b6$



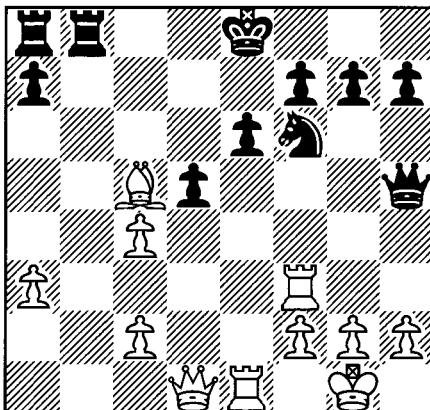
Exercise: This came as a surprise to me, but it isn't a bad move. The point is to try and activate the rook on a8 at the cost of a pawn. Would you take on b6?

Answer: 19 ♕b3

No! Black still doesn't have time to get his king out of the centre and so White keeps the rook shut in. Now the black queen starts to come under attack.

19...bxc5

After 19... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 21 $h4!$ $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $gxf6$ 23 $cxd5$ Black is being crushed.
20 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}xc5+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$



Exercise: Now the king is stuck in the centre for good, White can rest a little more easily. Can you find a way to open up more lines to the king?

Answer: 22 c3! ♜b7 23 ♜a4+ ♜d7

23...♜d7 24 ♜xe6+ fxe6 25 ♜f8 was a pretty mate I was hoping for.

24 ♜c6 ♜ad8?

24...♜b8 keeps the game going, though after 25 ♜xa7 ♜bd8 26 ♜c5 ♜b8 27 ♜d6 ♜bd8 28 ♜b4! ♜b8 29 ♜c5 White wins due to the weak dark squares.

25 ♜xe6+ 1-0

Summary

Similarly to Kupreichik's game, using a series of threatening moves White managed to prevent Black from getting his king to safety and organizing his defences. Gradually his advantage built as his pieces became more and more active. Most certainly the initiative and attack outweighed the tripled isolated pawns White gave himself.

Seizing and Developing the Initiative

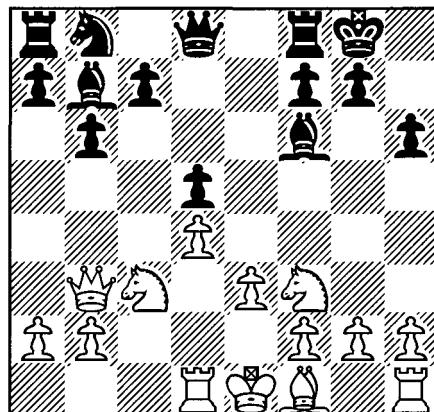
Of all the great champions, Garry Kasparov is perhaps the most famous for his ability to seize the initiative out of the opening, often playing with ferocious energy and crushing his opponents, even with Black. This was thanks largely to his dynamic opening repertoire which he worked very hard on. Here is an early game played by the fourteen year-old Kasparov.

Game 68
E.Magerramov-G.Kasparov
Training game, Baku 1977
Queen's Gambit Declined

1 ♜f3 ♜f6 2 d4 e6 3 c4 d5 4 ♜c3 ♜e7 5 ♜g5 0-0 6 e3

The game starts quietly enough.

6...h6 7 ♜h4 b6 8 ♜b3 ♜b7 9 ♜xf6 ♜xf6 10 cxd5 exd5 11 ♜d1



A prophylactic move, White reinforces his strong point on d4, whilst if the only black pawn break (...c7-c5) occurs, then he will also have pressure down the d-file. Having said this, the move played doesn't get White any nearer to castling and Kasparov is quick to try and use this.

Exercise: Can you see how?

Answer: 11...c5!?

Anyway! Black tries to open up the game for his bishop-pair.

12 dx c 5

White, of course, doesn't have to accept this pawn, but otherwise Black will get some queenside space advantage after 12 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ c4 13 $\mathbb{W}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ which would defeat the purpose of the queen sortie to b3 on move 8.

12... $\mathbb{Q}d7!$

The knight heads for c5, forcing the queen to retreat.

13 c6!?

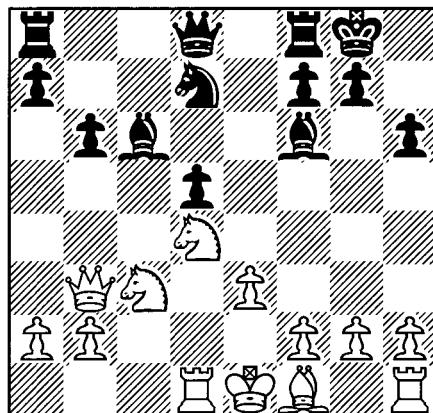
An interesting moment. Magerramov, who himself was a very strong player, decides to try and limit the activity of the black pieces.

13 cxb6 $\mathbb{Q}c5!$ 14 $\mathbb{W}c2$ axb6 15 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ would have been another way for White to play, though after something like 15... $\mathbb{Q}xc3+$ 16 bxc3 $\mathbb{W}e7$ 17 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}fc8$ Black would have had good pressure against the white queenside pawns.

13... $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}d4!?$

Very natural, but almost certainly a mistake.

14 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ $\mathbb{W}xf6$ 16 $\mathbb{W}c3!$ $\mathbb{W}xc3+$ 17 bxc3 would have been safer.



Exercise: If Black plays quietly here, with something like 14... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ then White will simply play 15 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ followed by 0-0. Can you see a way to force the issue instead?

Answer: 14...♝xd4!

A difficult move to play! Black gives up his uncontested dark-squared bishop, but in doing so creates concrete threats.

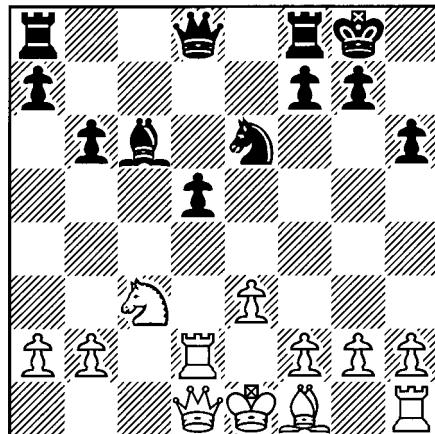
15 ♜xd4

15 exd4 ♛g5! makes it difficult to develop the f1-bishop, whilst also threatening ...♜e8+.

15...♞c5 16 ♜d1

If only the piece on d4 was a knight, White would be laughing. As it is the rook will be forced back.

16...♞e6 17 ♜d2



Question: But now what?

Answer: 17...d4!

Opening the diagonal for his bishop and the e-file for his rook at the cost of a pawn. This was the idea Kasparov had in mind when he played his 14th move.

18 exd4

18 ♜e2 was probably better, though Black could keep the pressure up with 18...♛e7 19 ♜xd4 ♜xd4 20 ♜xd4 ♜ad8!.

18...♜e8

The black pieces have sprung to life.

19 f3

Trying desperately to get the bishop to e2. Alternatively:

a) It is not possible to block the e-file with the bishop as 19 ♜e2 ♜xg2 20 ♜g1 ♜f4 is too strong.

b) 19 d5! trying to counterattack was probably the best practical try, though I suspect Kasparov would have found 19...♝f4+ 20 ♜e2 ♜xg2+ 21 ♜f1 ♜d7! 22 ♜g1 (22 ♜xg2 ♛g5+ 23 ♜f1 ♜h3+ 24 ♜e1 ♛g2 is very painful) 22...♝h4 with an ongoing initiative.

19...♕xf3

Smash! This opens the short h4-e1 diagonal for the queen.

20 gxf3

20 ♕xf3 would lose the queen for two pieces to 20...♗g5+ 21 ♕e2 ♜xe2+.

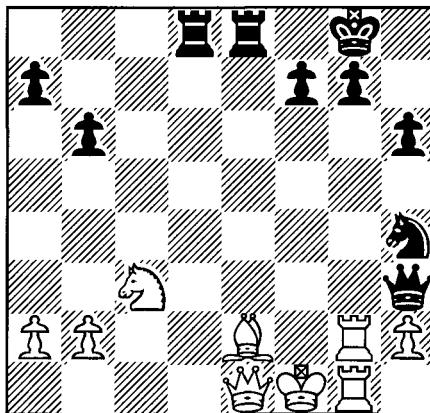
20...♜h4+ 21 ♜f2 ♗xd4+

21...♗f4+! seems to be even better, as after 22 ♜e2 ♗g2+ 23 ♔d2 ♜xd4+ 24 ♔c1 ♜xf2+ White is doomed.

22 ♜e2 ♗xf3+ 23 ♔f1 ♜h3+ 24 ♜g2 ♗h4

I also quite like 24...♜ad8, bringing the final piece into the attack.

25 ♜hg1 ♜ad8 26 ♜e1



Exercise: White plans 27 ♜g3, trying to exchange the queens whilst threatening mate on g7. Can you stop this plan whilst creating a threat of your own?

Answer: 26...♜d3!

A great move. The idea is to play ...♜f3+.

27 ♜f2 ♗f3 28 ♜h1 ♜de3 29 ♜hg1

White has given up. 29 ♜g3 would have been better, but Kasparov would still have been winning easily.

29...♔h8

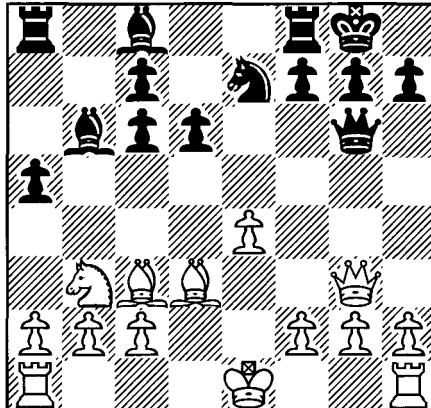
Despite the mass of defensive pieces around the white king, Magerramov is completely tied up.

However, 29...♜xc3! would have been the most powerful finish. Perhaps Kasparov started to relax as it was just a training game? It's all over after 30 bxc3 ♗xh2+ 31 ♔e1 ♜xc3+ 32 ♔d1 ♜d8+.

30 ♜h1 b5 0-1

White had understandably had enough.

Game 69
A.Muzychuk-V.Ivanchuk
Amsterdam 2012



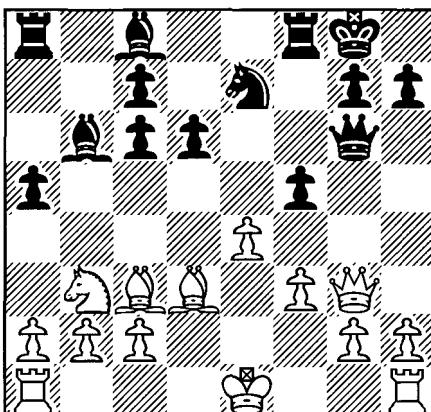
Question: How to seize the initiative here as Black?

Answer: 13...f5!

Vassily Ivanchuk is superb at spotting such chances. Black looks to open the centre with the white king still residing there.

14 f3?

14 $\mathbb{W}xg6 \mathfrak{Q}xg6$ 15 0-0-0 was safer, although Black's position would have been very comfortable after 15... $\mathfrak{Q}f4$ 16 $\mathfrak{Q}c4+$ $\mathfrak{Q}e6$ 17 $\mathfrak{Q}xe6+$ $\mathfrak{Q}xe6$.



Exercise: White's last move loosened the dark squares too much, a theme we will revisit later in the chapter. What should Black do here?

Answer: 14... $\mathbb{W}h6!$

Very logical. With no obvious escape for the white king, Black chooses to keep the queens on. He also threatens the nasty ...f5-f4, trapping the queen.

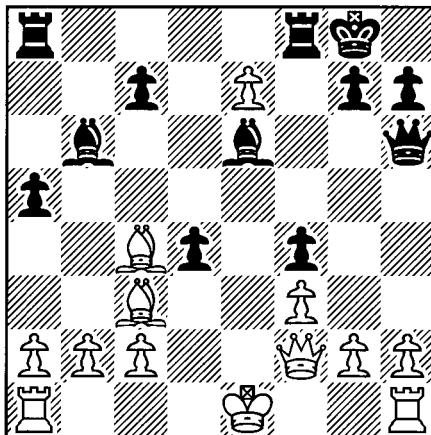
15 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ f4 16 $\mathbb{W}f2$ c5 17 $\mathbb{Q}c4+$

17 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ c4! 18 $\mathbb{Q}xc4+$ d5 would win a piece.

17...d5!

Not giving White the chance to reorganize her pieces. Ivanchuk's energy over the next few moves is tireless.

18 exd5 cxd4 19 d6+ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 20 dx e7



Question: But what now?

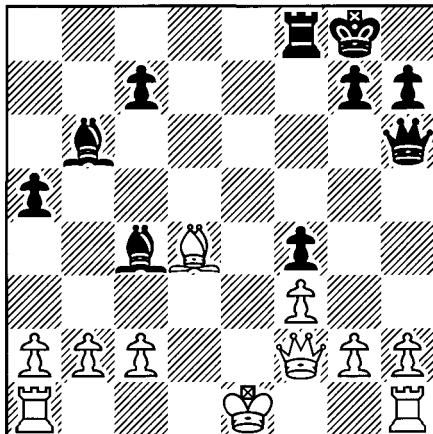
Answer: 20... $\mathbb{Q}xc4!$

20... $\mathbb{W}fe8$ 21 $\mathbb{W}e2!$ defends for the moment.

21 exf8 $\mathbb{W}+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8$

Now that the smoke has cleared White is an exchange up, but her king is still stuck hopelessly in the centre.

22 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$



Exercise: Can you find a simple way to finish the game?

Answer: 22 ... ♜e8+ 23 ♔d2 ♜d8!

The pin decides things.

24 c3 c5 0-1

Not only will Black get two fantastic bishops for the rook, but the white king cannot hope to survive in the centre, so Muzychuk resigned.

It would be criminal of me not to demonstrate at least one game played by Mikhail Tal, arguably the greatest attacking chess player of all time. In the next game the space advantage White achieves is the precursor to his seizing the initiative.

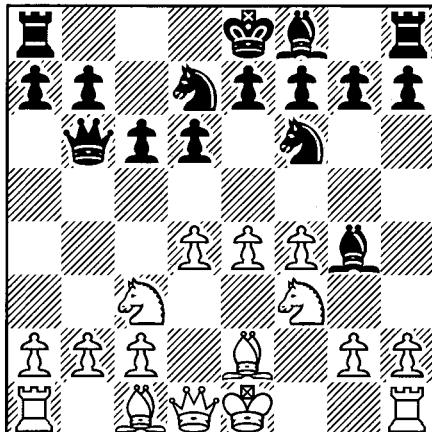
Game 70

M.Tal-V.Simagine

USSR Championship, Leningrad 1956

Pribyl Defence

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d6 3 ♜c3 ♜f6 4 f4 ♛b6 5 ♜f3 ♜g4 6 ♜e2 ♜bd7



Exercise: Can you find the way to seize the initiative already?

Answer: 7 e5!

White grabs space whilst threatening the knight.

7...♝d5 8 0-0

An interesting decision. Tal lets Black double his c-pawns in order to gain activity for his rook along the b-file.

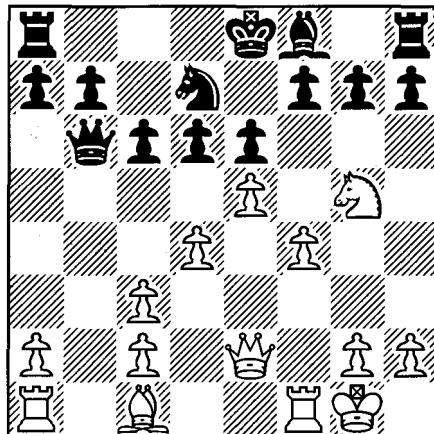
8...♝xc3

It is already not so easy to suggest a good way of developing for Black, as 8...e6 would be well met by 9 ♜e4!, taking advantage of the weak d6-square and preparing the advance of the c-pawn.

9 bxc3 e6

Here Black could have won a pawn with 9...♜xf3 10 ♜xf3 dx5 (10...d5 11 e6! would have been a typical blow to disrupt the Black development – see Chapter Three for more on this) 11 fx5 ♜xe5, but after something like 12 ♜e4 ♜d7 13 ♜f4 White has a big lead in development and the bishop-pair as compensation.

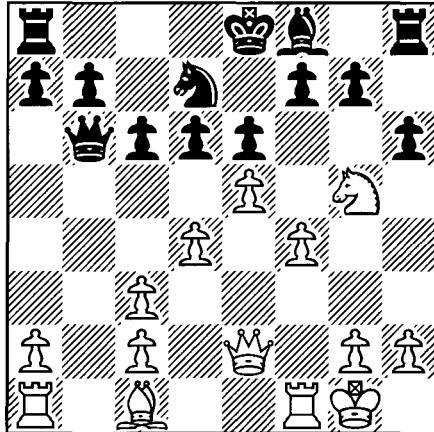
10 ♜g5 ♜xe2 11 ♜xe2



The knight on g5, combined with the queen on e2, means that Black is in quite a tough spot already.

11...h6

11... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}xe6!$ $fxe6$ 14 $\mathbb{W}xe6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 15 $\mathbb{R}e1$ would win a couple of pawns, as 15... $\mathbb{W}d8$ can be met by 16 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ and 15...0-0-0 16 $\mathbb{W}xe7$ $\mathbb{R}de8$ by 17 $\mathbb{W}xe8+$ $\mathbb{R}xe8$ 18 $\mathbb{R}xe8+$.



Exercise: What did White play here? See how far you can calculate down the forcing line that arises:

Answer: 12 $\mathbb{Q}xf7!$

Of course, the knight is not going to go back: 12 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $d5$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}d6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 14 $exd6$ would give Black time to castle.

12 $\mathbb{W}h5$ g6 13 $\mathbb{W}h3$ would, though, be another way to maintain the initiative, as then the e6-pawn comes under attack.

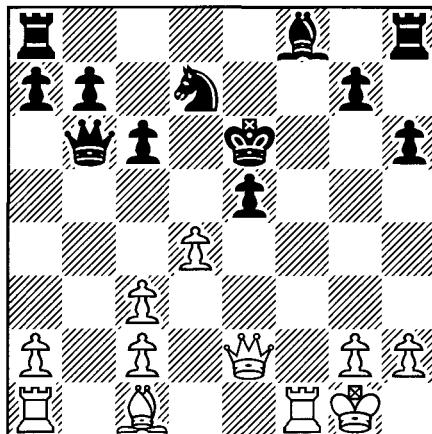
12... $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 13 f5!

Black cannot be allowed to play ...g7-g6, securing control of the important f5-square.

13...dxe5 14 fxe6+

It seems that 14 $\mathbb{W}h5+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 15 fxe6 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ is even stronger for White, as the queen is better placed.

14... $\mathbb{Q}xe6$



Question: Can White stop Black running his king over to c7?

Answer: Yes!

15 $\mathbb{R}b1!$

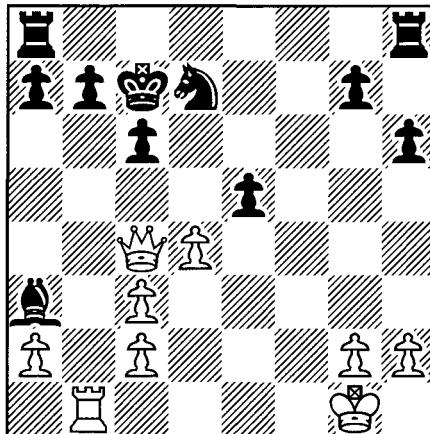
Cheeky. Tal uses the open file to maximum effect, as he can force the black king to a dark square so that his discovered check works.

15... $\mathbb{W}xb1$

Simagin decided to return some material. Unfortunately for him, though, Tal's initiative persists.

15... $\mathbb{W}a6$ 16 $\mathbb{W}g4+$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 17 dxe5+ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ is very bad for Black.

16 $\mathbb{W}c4+$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}a3+$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 18 $\mathbb{R}xb1$ $\mathbb{Q}xa3$



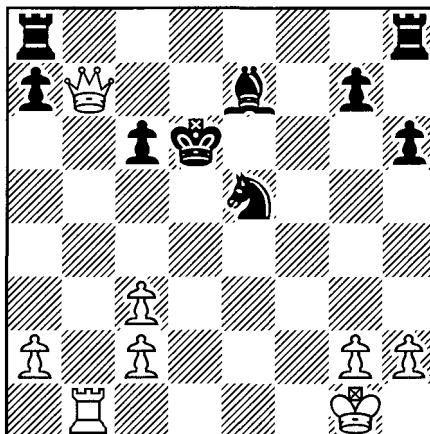
Exercise: White must keep up the initiative! Material-wise Black is ahead still, so he cannot be allowed to reorganize. Can you find a way?

Answer: 19 ♜b3

Thanks to this move, which hits the weaknesses on a3 and b7, White can keep the attack going despite his lack of pieces.

19...♚e7 20 ♜xb7+ ♔d6 21 dxе5+ ♞xe5

And still there should be no let up. Tal pushes the king even further into the open and the king-hunt begins.



22 ♜d1+ ♔e6 23 ♜b3+ ♔f5 24 ♜f1+ ♔e4

Forced as 24...♔g6 25 ♜e6+ ♔f6 26 ♜f5+ ♔f7 27 ♜xe5! wins the knight.

25 ♜e1+ ♔f5

Now that queen and rook cannot give any more checks the reserves arrive!

26 g4+! ♜f6 27 ♜f1+ ♜g6 28 ♜e6+ ♜h7 29 ♜xe5

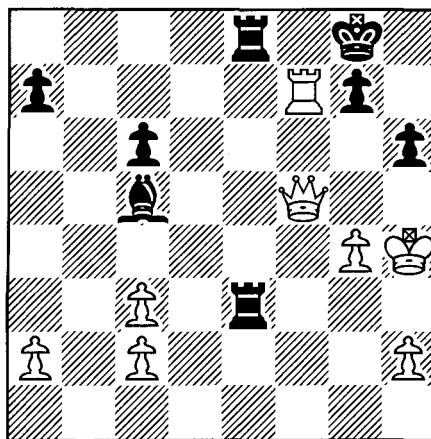
White is winning and the rest is should be a matter of technique. Tal complicates the issue a little bit though.

29...♜he8 30 ♜f7 ♜f8 31 ♜f5+ ♜g8 32 ♜f2?!

A little bit risky. Black gets a couple of dangerous checks in now. 32 ♜f1 would have been safer.

32...♜c5+ 33 ♜g3 ♜e3+ 34 ♜h4 ♜ae8

34...♜e7+ 35 g5! (forced, as 35 ♜h5 ♜d8! threatens to win the queen with ...♜d5)
35...♜xg5+ 36 ♜h5 seems to still be enough for White.



Exercise: Can you find a way to minimize the danger to your king here?

Answer: 35 ♜xg7+!

Tal removes the dangerous g-pawn.

Instead 35 ♜g6 ♜e7+ 36 g5 allows 36...♜f6!! which is a great computer-generated defence, blocking the rook's path back and preparing some deadly checks for Black: for instance, 37 ♜xf6 ♜8e4+ 38 ♜h5 ♜h3 mate.

35...♜xg7 36 ♜xc5

Now the white king is secure and the queen has enough pawns to help her win the ending.

36...♜8e6 37 ♜xa7+ ♜g6 38 ♜a8 ♜f6 39 a4 ♜e5 40 a5 ♜d5 41 ♜d8+ ♜e4 42 a6 ♜f3 43 a7 ♜e2 44 ♜d3+ ♜2e3 45 ♜xe3+ 1-0

Summary

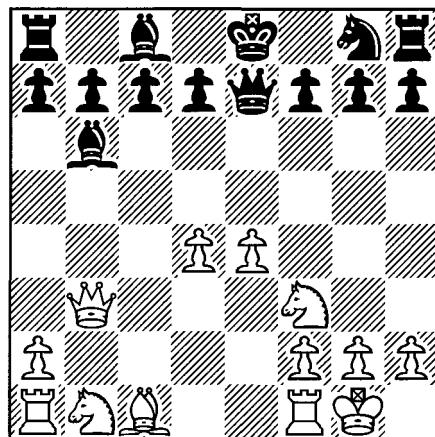
This game concludes our examination of how to use the initiative to start a direct attack on the king. Remember that it is the ability to make threats of your own, rather than de-

fending against them, that gives you the initiative. A lead in development, a space advantage or a target for attack for your pieces (such as an uncastled king) are all good indicators that a dangerous initiative might be there. If blunders are not made in a game of chess, then the only way to win is by attacking and only the side with the initiative can attack! Thus I would recommend trying to seize the initiative at the earliest stage possible.

Missing the Opportunity to Take the Initiative

We are going to examine two examples from my student (sorry Zoe!) of situations where White misses the chance to take the initiative.

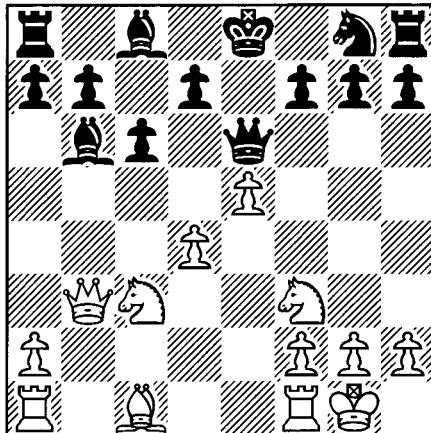
Game 71
Z.Varney-E.Ressell
Birmingham (rapid) 2012



11 e5!

An excellent move, hindering the development of the knight on g8, as well as making it difficult for Black to play ...d7-d6, due to the resulting opening of the e-file.

11...c6?! 12 ♜c3 ♛e6

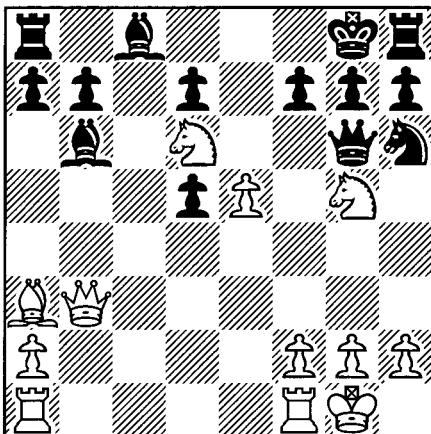


Question: How should White take control here?

13 ♕xe6+?

Missing the chance to use the queen as a target for the white pieces.

Answer: 13 d5! was the key move (which I guess 11...c6 was designed to stop). After 13...cxd5 14 ♔g5! (14 ♔xd5?! gives Black a chance to develop with 14...♝e7) 14...♛g6 15 ♔b5! (Black is being bombed from both sides!) 15...♝h6 16 ♔d6+ ♚f8 17 ♔a3! ♛g8...



Exercise: And to finish, create one more threat!

Answer: 18 ♛b4! and Black has had it. This threatens 19 ♔f5 followed by 20 ♛f8 mate and 19...♛xg5 fails to 20 ♔e8!, preventing Black from defending the f8-square with her queen.

13...dxe6

White eventually won, but the initiative has clearly evaporated.

Game 72
Z.Varney-A.Purvis
Birmingham (rapid) 2012
Caro-Kann Defence

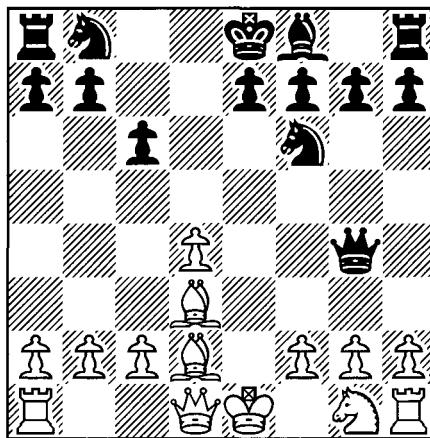
1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♜c3 dxe4 4 ♜xe4 ♛f5 5 ♜g3 ♛f6?!

A tricky move designed to throw White out of her comfort zone, but in fact this move is highly dubious. White gains a sizeable lead in development and the bishop-pair whilst Black takes time to regain the piece.

6 ♜xf5 ♛a5+ 7 ♜d2

7 c3 is more logical, keeping the bishop for an active square.

7...♛xf5 8 ♜d3 ♛g4



Exercise: Again the developed queen should be seen as a target, rather than a strength for Black. What should White play?

Answer: 9 ♜f3! was the way to maximize the initiative. At the cost of a pawn Zoe would have obtained a huge lead in development and the black queen would have become a target for the white forces.

Instead 9 ♛xg4?! was played in the game. Although White does retain a decent size lead in development, there are no longer any targets for her pieces to attack and so Black should be able to complete her development. After 9...♜xg4 the game was drawn after a long fight.

Let's see you continue to play the position after 9 $\mathbb{Q}f3!$ as White against me:

9... $\mathbb{W}xg2$

Question: But what now?

Answer: 10 $\mathbb{R}g1$

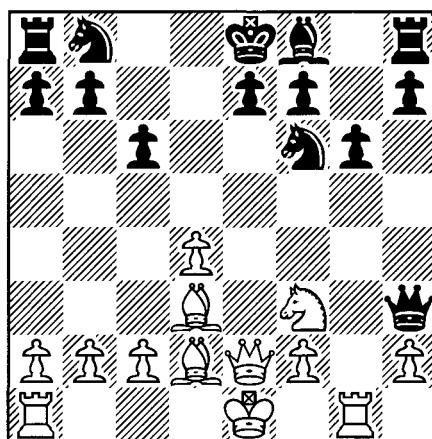
Of course. Developing the rook to the open file and gaining time on the queen.

10... $\mathbb{W}h3$ 11 $\mathbb{B}e2$

Taking a time-out from the threats against the black queen and completing development seems best here.

11... $g6$

11... $e6$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{W}h5$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{W}h3$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}f5!$ would be a disaster for Black.



Exercise: Black is preparing to evacuate the king after developing the bishop. Can you find a way keep the threats up?

Answer: 12 $\mathbb{Q}c4!$

Eying up the f7-square and the queen for knight fork.

Instead 12 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{W}h5$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{W}h3$ would be a perpetual on the queen.

12... $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ $\mathbb{W}xh6$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}g5!$

Black comes under severe pressure.

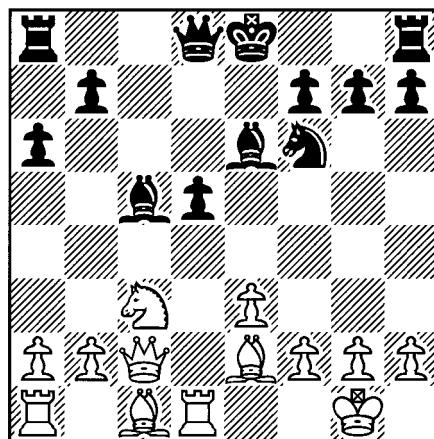
Summary

Hopefully these two examples have shown us the importance of seeking out, or in some instances creating, targets which our pieces can then attack. In these examples we saw how the queen can used as a target, even at the cost of a pawn.

Neutralizing the Initiative

The difficulty level of successfully neutralizing an initiative depends, of course, on how serious it is in the first place. We have seen some examples so far of how an initiative can snowball into a dangerous and potentially winning position quite quickly. It is important to sense the danger early and deal with threats precisely, so that they don't grow into something more serious. One of the best players in the world at doing this is the current World Champion Vishy Anand.

Game 73
B.Gelfand-V.Anand
World Championship (Game 6), Moscow 2012



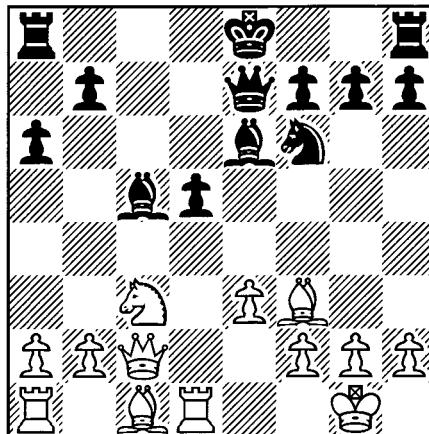
Exercise: Having wasted a little time earlier in the game (with ...c6 followed by ...c5 in the opening), Black finds himself under a little bit of pressure. What would you do here?

Answer: 13...♝e7!

A good move, removing the queen from the d-file and defending the bishop. Having loose pieces is a great way to lose quickly in the opening!

14 ♘f3

Gelfand logically puts some more pressure on the Isolani.



Question: What should Black do about it?

Answer: 14...0-0!

14...Qd8 would have been the choice of a lot of people I'm sure, but Anand favours activity over the pawn.

15 Nxd5 Qxd5 16 Qxd5 Nxd5 17 Qxd5 Rac8

By giving up the pawn Black has taken a slight lead in development.

18 Nd2

Interestingly Gelfand gives it back to secure full development and retain a very small edge. Being the World Championship it is very likely that this position was heavily analysed before the start of the match!

18 We2 We4! 19 Wd3 Wxd3 20 Wxd3 Wfd8 21 Wxd8+ Wxd8 keeps the initiative for Black into the ending, which should be enough for a draw after something like 22 Cf1 Nd1+ 23 Ne2 Nh1.

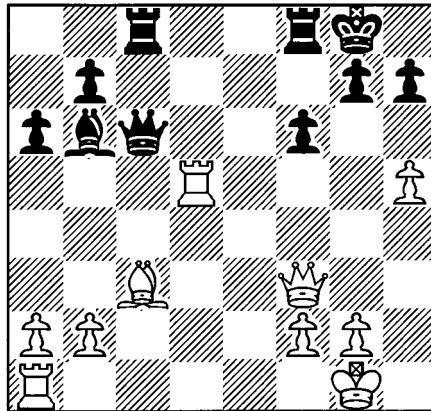
18...Qxe3 19 Qc3 Qb6 20 Wf5

Preparing Nd7.

20...We6 21 Wf3

21 Wxe6 fxe6 22 Nd2 Wfd8 is nothing for White.

21...f6 22 h4 Wc6 23 h5



Exercise: Gelfand looks to probe on the kingside, trying to fix the kingside pawns on dark squares. What should Vishy do about this?

Answer: 23... $\mathbb{Q}fd8$

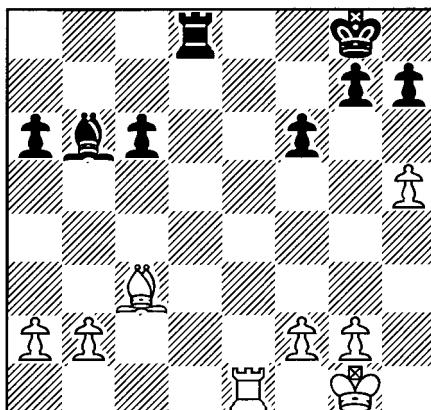
Offering the gradual exchange of more pieces.

23...h6 was also possible and even Kasparov and Svidler, who were commentating at the time, didn't think this was a very serious problem for Black as the weak pawns are on one side of the board only.

24 $\mathbb{Q}xd8+$

24 $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}xd8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $bxc6$ should also be equal.

24... $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $bxc6$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}e1$



Exercise: The last point when you need to be precise. Find Anand's next move.

Answer: 26...♚f7!

This secures the draw, as the entry squares on e6 and e7 are covered.

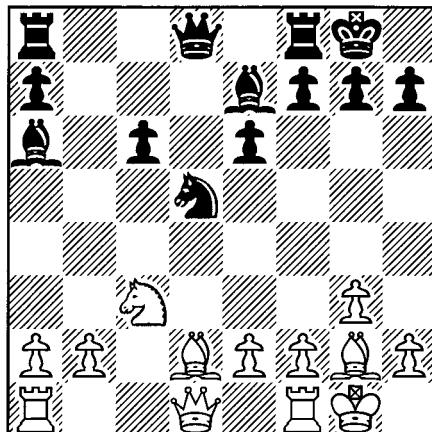
Trying to enter a rook ending immediately with 26...♜d4 27 ♜xd4 ♜xd4 28 ♜c1 would be a touch better for White.

27 g4 ♜d4 28 ♜c1 ♜xc3 29 ♜xc3 ♜d4 ½-½

Summary

Anatoly Karpov once said: "It is dangerous to maintain equality at the cost of placing the pieces passively." Always try to have in the back of your mind the idea that active play (in this case giving up the weak d-pawn) is nearly always better than passive play. Anand did a good job of neutralizing any white advantage in this game by using this idea, whilst Gelfand also favoured active play and completing development on move 18.

*Game 74
T.Petrosian-S.Gligoric
Candidates, Bled/Zagreb/Belgrade 1959*



Here, thanks to a fairly slow opening by White, Gligoric has managed to build up a position where his moves are threatening vulnerable points in Petrosian's position and White is therefore forced to defend. It is fair to say that Black has a small initiative.

Question: Can you defend this position as White?

Answer: Yes!

12 ♜f3

Overprotecting e2 against the gaze of the a6-bishop.

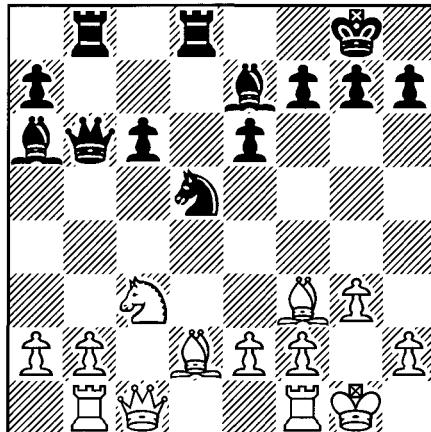
12...♝b8

Pressuring the b2-pawn. 12...♝b6, 12...♞ac8 and 12...♝fd8 were also possible.

13 ♕c1!

Keeping the queen out of range of the black knight.

13...♝b6 14 ♜b1 ♜fd8



Exercise: And what to play here?

Answer: 15 ♜d1!

With a series of precise moves Petrosian manages to neutralize the initiative, by protecting his all of his vulnerable points.

Instead 15 ♜a4 is a touch too early: 15...♝d4 16 b3 ♜b5 and Black is well placed.

15...♜bc8 16 ♜a4 ♜b5 17 ♜c3 ♜b6 18 ♜a4 ♜b5 ½-½

Here the two grandmasters agreed to a draw. Not the most thrilling finale, but (I hope) instructive nonetheless, in the way that White didn't allow the black advantage to grow into anything serious.

The Long-term Initiative

Despite the fact that most of the time the initiative is short lived, certain openings give rise to longer-term advantages, thanks to the presence of static factors, such as superior piece activity or a better pawn structure. A good example of this is the Benko or Volga Gambit. The Volga Gambit was its original name (after the longest river in Europe that runs through Russia), but due to the work of the Hungarian Grandmaster Pal Benko with the opening, his name stuck in English-speaking countries. I hope that the next game demonstrates what I mean about the longer-term initiative.

Game 75
L.Kaufman-P.Benko
 US Open, Aspen 1968
Benko Gambit

1 d4 ♜f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5

A gambit is a good way to try to wrest the initiative from White at an early stage. The Benko is one of the sounder ways of doing this.

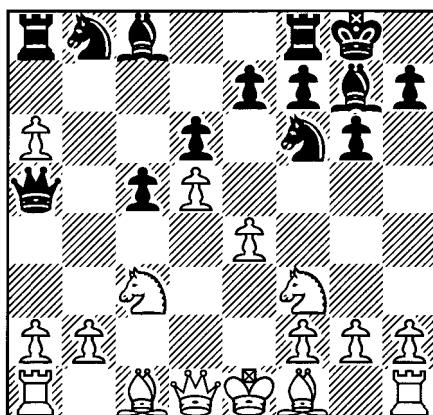
4 cxb5

White takes up the challenge. I am always a bit reluctant to give up the initiative when I play White (after all, it is easier to attack than be attacked!), and so would recommend something to my students like 4 ♜f3 g6 5 ♜c2 bxc4 (or 5...♜g7 6 e4 d6 7 cxb5 a6 8 ♜c3) 6 e4 d6 7 ♜xc4 with a decent game.

4...a6 5 e3

5 b6!? is another way to return the pawn whilst keeping the a-file closed.

5...g6 6 ♜c3 ♜g7 7 bxa6 0-0 8 ♜f3 d6 9 e4 ♜a5



Black bases his compensation on the pressure that will be applied to the white queen-side, most notably the a- and b-pawns thanks to the two open files. This should make it more difficult for White to develop his queen's bishop, thereby keeping him passive.

10 ♜d2

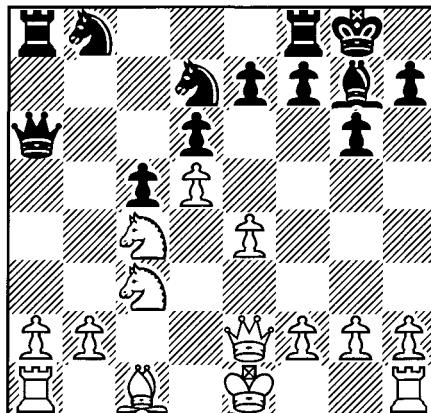
10 ♜d2 is perhaps a better way of playing the position, as in P.Motwani-M.Hebden, London 1982, which went on 10...♜xa6 11 ♜xa6 ♜xa6 12 ♜e2 ♜fd7.

10...♜xa6 11 ♜xa6 ♜xa6 12 ♜e2 ♜fd7

The Benko is one of those openings where rather than being scared stiff about a brutal attack, White is slightly uncomfortable about his position for a long time. Here Black is not too fussed about the queen swap as 12...♝bd7 13 ♜xa6 ♜xa6 14 ♜c4 ♜g4 is also playable, as in I.Borocz-V.Balogh, Budapest (rapid) 1996.

13 $\mathbb{Q}c4$

13 $\mathbb{W}xa6$ $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ 14 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{W}fb8$ would leave Black very nicely placed.



Exercise: How would you continue as Black here?

Answer: 13...f5!?

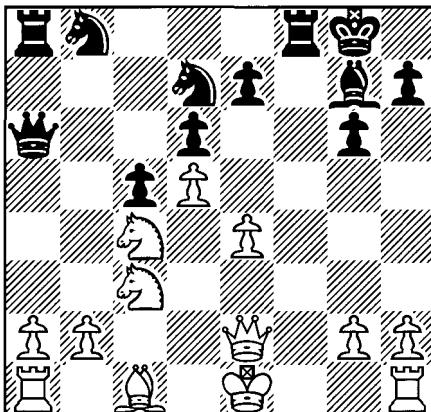
A brave move, but it also has its drawbacks, of course, such as weakening the square on e6 for good. Here it shakes White into a mistake, but more in keeping with the opening would have been 13... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{W}xb6$ 15 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ when Black will look to apply pressure slowly to the white queenside.

14 f3?!

White reacts too passively. 14 exf5 $\mathbb{W}xf5$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}f8$ 16 a4! would have been much better, looking to secure the b5-square for his knight.

14...fxe4 15 fxe4

Now without the ability to castle, the white king is stuck in the centre for some time.



Question: What should Black's plan be now?

Answer: 15...♝b6!

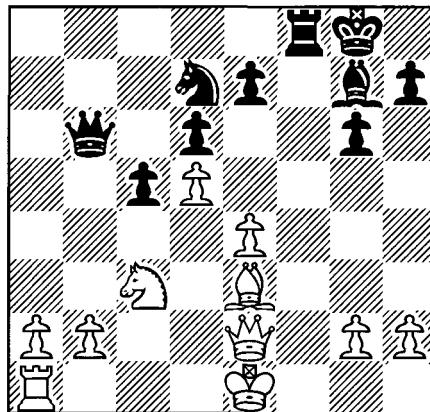
This is the best way to complete development, freeing the d7-square for the other knight whilst exchanging off White's best piece.

15...♝e5 16 ♜xe5 ♜xe5 17 ♜h6! would give White a useful tempo.

16 ♜xb6 ♜xb6 17 ♜f1

I imagine this was the idea that Kaufman had in mind when he played f2-f3. However, it doesn't secure the safety of the king.

17...♝d7 18 ♜xf8+ ♜xf8 19 ♜e3



Exercise: At first sight this position doesn't look too bad for White. After all, he is a passed a-pawn up! However, the bishop on g7 is supreme and crucially Black can generate threats quite easily. How would you continue here?

19...♝b8

Answer: 19...♝b4! looks best to me. The black pieces come to life quickly after something like 20 ♜c1 ♜e5 21 ♜c2 c4!, securing the d3-square.

20 ♜d1 ♜e5 21 ♜f1 ♜b4!

Benko activates his pieces powerfully.

22 ♜d2 ♜f8+ 23 ♜g1 ♜d4+

The difference in activity between the two positions is striking. White has not had a chance to get his extra pawn moving due to the threats to his king.

24 ♜e3

24 ♜h1 ♜xd2! would win due to the weakness of the back rank.

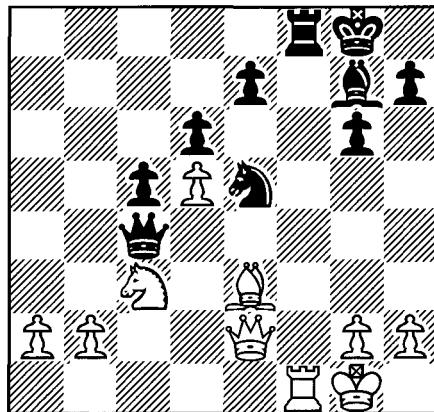
24...♜xe4 25 ♜c3 ♜c4

Chess Strategy: Move by Move

Again Black doesn't fear the trade. It is possible to keep the initiative even without the queens on the board!

26 $\mathbb{E}f1$

After 26 $\mathbb{W}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}d4+$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{E}f2$ Black is dominating.

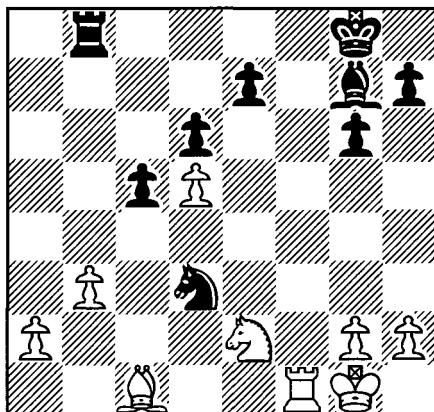


Question: How would you respond to this handy defensive move?

Answer: 26... $\mathbb{E}b8!$

Targeting the weak queenside pawn.

27 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{W}xe2$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 29 b3



Exercise: When one queenside pawn moves, the other becomes weaker. How can you exploit this?

Answer: 29... $\mathbb{Q}b4$

29... $\mathbb{B}a8$ 30 a4 $\mathbb{B}b8!$ would also have been a nice manoeuvre.

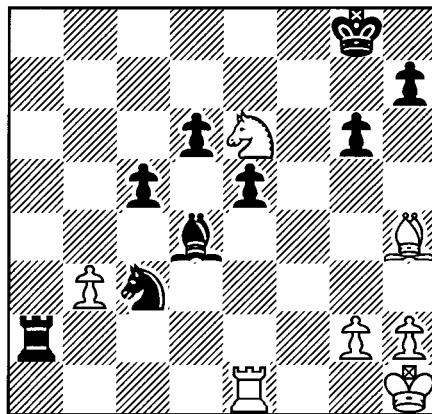
30 $\mathbb{B}g5 \mathbb{Q}xd5$

Finally Black wins material!

31 $\mathbb{B}d1 e6$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}f4 \mathbb{B}d4+$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}h1 \mathbb{Q}c3$

Again keeping the pieces on maximises the problems for White, although 33... $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}xf4 e5$ is also very strong.

34 $\mathbb{B}f1 \mathbb{B}f8$ 35 $\mathbb{B}e1 e5$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}e6 \mathbb{B}f2$ 37 $\mathbb{Q}h4 \mathbb{B}xa2$



Exercise: With two extra central pawns Black is winning easily, as long as you find the defence to 38 $\mathbb{B}f1$. Have you seen it? Benko had!

Answer: 38 $\mathbb{B}f1 \mathbb{B}a8$ 39 $\mathbb{B}d8! \mathbb{B}f2!!$

Classy! The bishop can't be captured due to the back-rank mate, which gives Black the chance to cover the threat to his own back rank.

40 g3 $\mathbb{B}a2$ 41 $\mathbb{Q}g2 \mathbb{Q}e4$ 42 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d5 43 $\mathbb{B}d1 \mathbb{B}d4$ 44 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ cxd4 45 $\mathbb{B}e1 \mathbb{B}f2+$ 46 $\mathbb{Q}g4 \mathbb{B}xh2$ 0-1

Summary

A lovely demonstration by Pal Benko of how a long-term initiative (thanks to the passive position of White's dark-squared bishop) can be exploited. A weaker player would perhaps have panicked at being a pawn down, but Black trusted in his position.

Key Points

- 1) The initiative belongs to the player who can make threats which have to be dealt with and is therefore on the attack. It is almost always advantageous to have the initiative.
- 2) Try to improve the position of your pieces with threatening moves. If you can do this your initiative should grow, often into a decisive attack.
- 3) Be aware of the dynamics of the initiative and how static features, such as pawn structure, will often be compromised by stronger players for its possession.

Chapter Eight

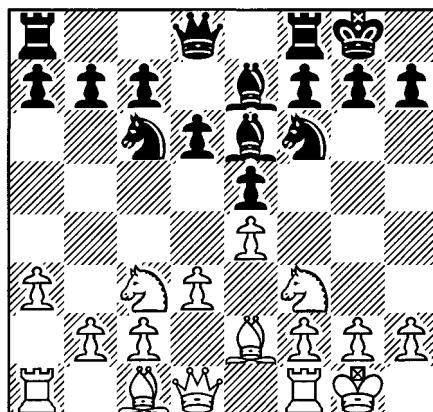
Prophylaxis

and Overprotection

More haste, less speed. – The Hare and the Tortoise, Aesop's Fables

The concepts of prophylaxis and overprotection are very important in the world of chess strategy. My *Oxford English Dictionary* defines prophylaxis as “action taken to prevent disease”. Well, that doesn’t help us too much in the chess world, so let’s replace ‘disease’ with ‘danger’. So, in essence *prophylaxis is any measure taken to avoid danger to us on the board before it happens.*

We probably all use prophylactic moves in our games already, but perhaps are not fully aware of them. My aim in this chapter is to try and make you more aware of the importance of prophylactic play and some of the most important ways that it can be applied to the game. Let’s look at a really basic example of prophylaxis, taken from the game of an anonymous Abbey student.



1...h6

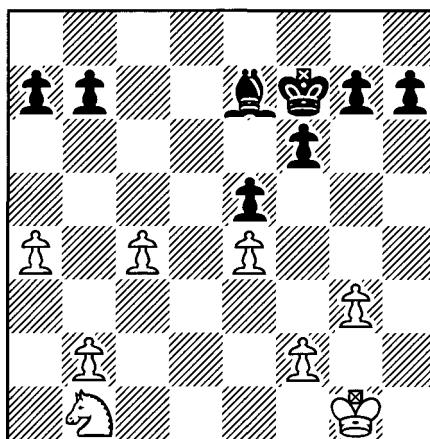
Adam: "Did you play that to stop ♜g5?"

Student: "No, I played it to stop bank rank mate, which always seems to happen to me!"

Bravo! This is prophylaxis, but at a very basic level. The stronger and more experienced we become as chess players, the more developed our sense of danger becomes. A better chess player will instantly be able to recognize that in the current position, the possibility of being back rank mated is a very distant threat (in fact it is hardly a threat at all), due to, amongst other things, the closed nature of the position and the presence of three black pieces on the back rank. Therefore there are more useful moves that can be made in the position (such as the pawn break ...d6-d5 to take the centre).

Be Aware, Be Very Aware

So we can say that prophylaxis is prevention of your opponent's idea. In fact if we develop this even further we could say that it is *being aware of your opponent's idea and trying to evaluate whether you need to take action to stop it*. This involves a certain degree of anticipation as to what the enemy's plan is going to be in a given position. Let's try a simple exercise!



Exercise: It's Black to move. Hopefully you have read the previous chapters, particularly the one on holes! What is the best move here?

Answer: 1...♜b4!

A good prophylactic move, defending against the knight manoeuvre to the strong d5-square.

2 ♞c3?

This eases Black's task, though the white position is bad anyway: for instance, 2 ♕f1 ♜e6 3 ♔e2 ♜d6 4 ♜d3 h5 and Black is winning.

2... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 3 $\mathbb{B}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 4 c5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$

Black wins the king and pawn endgame easily.

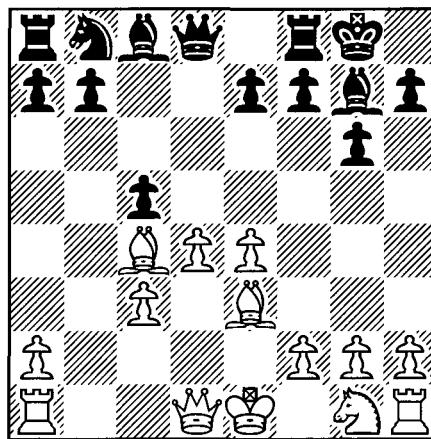
Prophylactic Thinking in the Opening

There are many examples of prophylaxis in the opening. It is a particularly important idea to remember for the side that possesses the centre. Prophylactic thinking can often be applied to prevent it coming under attack. Witness the following passage of play from the main line of the Grünfeld Defence.

1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 c4 g6 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ d5 4 cxd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 5 e4 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 6 bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}g7$

Black has conceded the centre, but plans to attack the white central pawns as fast as he can.

7 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ c5 8 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 0-0



Question: What is the best move for White here: 9 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ or 9 $\mathbb{Q}f3$?

Answer: 9 $\mathbb{Q}e2$!

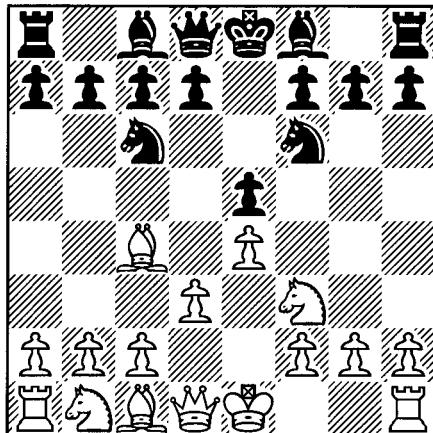
White 'foresees' that his d4-pawn will come under rapid attack after 9 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 10 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}g4$.

Now after 9... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 10 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ White has **11 f3** and the centre is secure, at least for the moment.

Useful Prophylaxis in the Opening – the little pawn move

One of the most common prophylactic measures in the opening is the advance of the flank pawns one square. Generally *not* for the reason the Abbey player gave above, but rather to stop the development of an enemy bishop or knight to those squares. Take the following basic opening:

1 e4 e5 2 ♜f3 ♜c6 3 ♜c4 ♜f6 4 d3



Exercise: White immediately ‘threatens’ ♜c1-g5, pinning the black knight. Would you prevent it with ...h6, or continue developing with ...♜c5?

Answer: 4...♜c5!

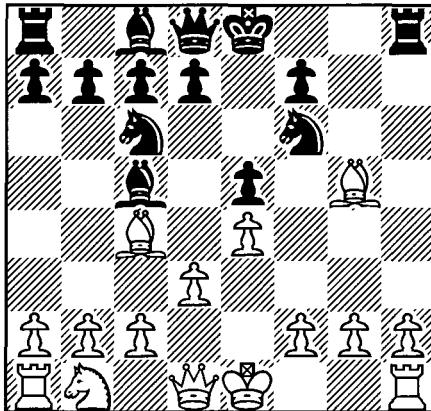
4...h6?! is commonly played, but unnecessary. Here you actually want your opponent to play ♜c1-g5!

5 ♜c3

After 5 ♜g5 h6! the pin is not dangerous as we can employ a dark-square strategy against the white bishop with 6 ♜h4 g5 and then:

a) 7 ♜g3 d6 8 c3 ♜e7 followed by queenside castling was comfortable for Black in a game between two future stars, J.Piket-S.Agdestein, Gausdal 1986.

b) Here the piece sacrifice shouldn't be dangerous after 7 ♜xg5 hxg5 8 ♜xg5 as there is no open king on g8, but we should still, however, be considering prophylactic measures after it.



Exercise: Can you find a decent way of preventing White's counterplay against the weak knight at f6?

Answer: 8...Qe7! does the job nicely, while 8...Qd4! is a creative solution to the problem of 9 Wf3. After 9 Qc3 (9 c3 Qe6), 9...c6! prevents Qd5.

5...d6

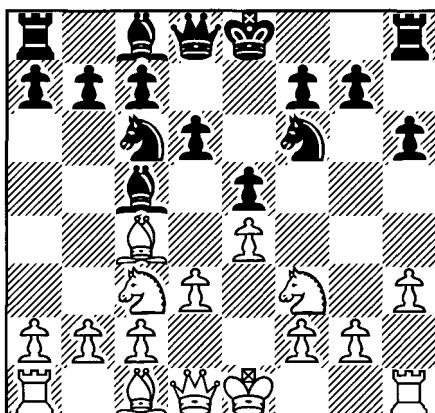
I generally recommend to my students that the move ...h7-h6 or h2-h3 is only employed if you have castled and your opponent can then pin you. For example, 5...0-0?!, 6 Qg5 h6 7 Qh4 g5 is more annoying for Black.

6 h3

White decides to prevent the bishop coming to g4.

6 0-0 Qg4 7 h3 Qh5 8 g4 Qxg4 9 hxg4 Qxg4 10 Qe3 Wf6 11 Qg2 0-0-0 is unclear.

6...h6!



To prevent any headaches on the h4-d8 diagonal. An equal if rather dull position is reached.

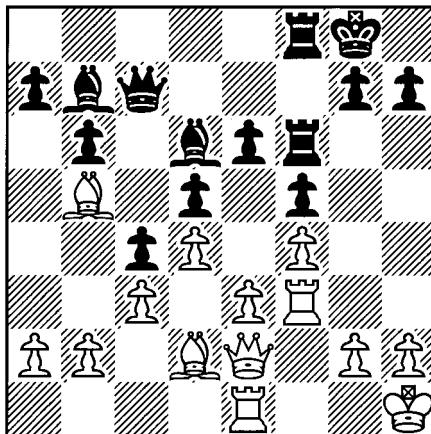
Summary

Perhaps the most common example of prophylaxis in the opening, the flank pawn move can often be used to prevent an awkward pin or an enemy knight from raiding forwards.

Learning from the Masters: Middlegame Prophylaxis

Let us examine a great demonstration of prophylactic play from one of the true masters of the subject, Jose Raul Capablanca. I will make it more difficult for you by not showing the earlier moves and thus the plans previously employed.

Game 76
A.Kupchik-J.Capablanca
Lake Hopatcong 1926



Exercise: Try putting yourself in the great Cuban's shoes and work out what White wants to do and how to stop it?

Answer: 19...h5!

White really only has one idea in this position, which is to break on the kingside with g2-g4. Black is stronger on the queenside and the pawn structure dictates that this is the side of the board he should be playing on, thanks to the advanced pawn on c4. Before doing so, however, he prevents White's plan, to advance on the kingside.

20 \mathbb{K} ef1

After both 20 $\mathbb{B}h3$ g6 and 20 $\mathbb{B}g3$ $\mathbb{B}h6$ 21 $\mathbb{B}g5$ g6! the pawn structure is rock solid.

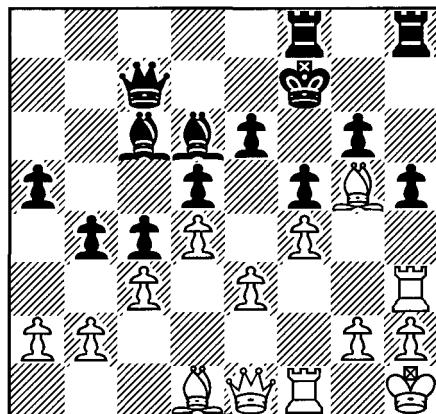
20... $\mathbb{B}h6$ 21 $\mathbb{B}e1$ g6 22 $\mathbb{B}h4$

White has sensibly improved the position of his bad bishop, but still lacks a good plan.

22... $\mathbb{B}f7$ 23 $\mathbb{W}e1$ a6 24 $\mathbb{B}a4$ b5 25 $\mathbb{B}d1$ $\mathbb{B}c6$ 26 $\mathbb{B}h3$ a5 27 $\mathbb{B}g5$ $\mathbb{B}hh8$ 28 $\mathbb{W}h4$

Kupchik still feels as though he has some chances on the kingside, but without a pawn break it is very tough to see what he can do.

28...b4 29 $\mathbb{W}e1$

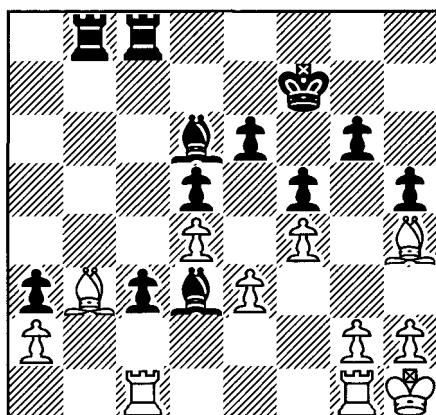


It's always a good sign when your opponent starts going backwards! White tries to regroup his pieces, but Black is clearly better. Without any kingside play to worry about, he can simply transfer his pieces to the queenside.

29... $\mathbb{B}b8!$ 30 $\mathbb{B}hf3$

My computer wants to go 30 $\mathbb{W}h4$ here!

30...a4 31 $\mathbb{B}3f2$ a3 32 b3 cxb3 33 $\mathbb{B}xb3$ $\mathbb{B}b5$ 34 $\mathbb{B}g1$ $\mathbb{W}xc3$ 35 $\mathbb{W}xc3$ bxc3 36 $\mathbb{B}c2$ $\mathbb{B}hc8$ 37 $\mathbb{B}h4$ $\mathbb{B}d3$ 38 $\mathbb{B}cc1$



Exercise: Can you find the pretty finish?**Answer:** 38... $\mathbb{Q}xb3!$ 39 axb3 a2 0-1

White resigned as 40 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}b1$ 41 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 42 $\mathbb{Q}xb1$ axb1 \mathbb{W} 43 $\mathbb{Q}xb1$ just leaves Black a piece up.

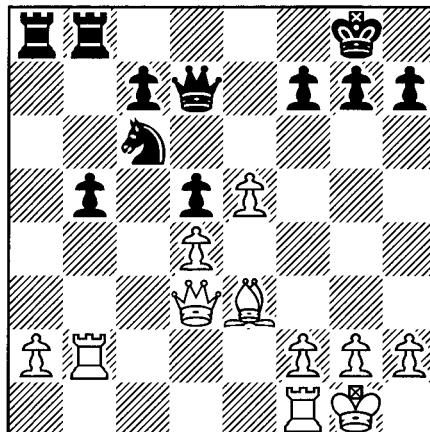
Anatoly Karpov is seen as one of the truly great modern prophylactic players. Here he squeezes the life out of one his biggest rivals of the 80's and 90's, Artur Yusupov.

Game 77**A.Karpov-A.Yusupov**

USSR Championship, Moscow 1983

*Ruy Lopez***1 e4 e5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ a6 4 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$**

The Open Variation of the Ruy Lopez.

6 d4 b5 7 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ d5 8 dxе5 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 9 c3 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ 0-0 11 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 11... $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ f6 and 11...f5 12 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}fd4$ are the main alternatives.**12 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}fd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$** 13... $\mathbb{Q}xe5??$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ (if 14... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$) 15 $\mathbb{W}xd4$ just wins a piece.**14 cxd4 a5 15 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ a4 16 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ a3 17 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ axb2 18 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 21 $\mathbb{W}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}fb8$** **Exercise:** What is the best way to restrict the queenside plan of ... $\mathbb{Q}a5-c4$?

Answer: 22 ♕fb1!

For the moment Black is forced to deal with the threat to his b5-pawn.

White could have immediately started kingside operations with 22 f4, but after 22... $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 23 f5 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ Black would get serious queenside counterplay.

Likewise, 22 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 23 $\mathbb{W}xb5$ $\mathbb{N}xe5!$ offers White no advantage.

22...b4 23 h3

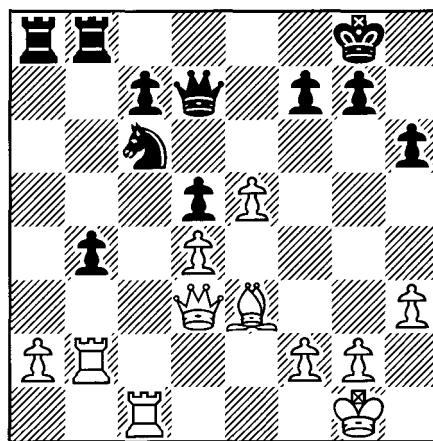
Well, Yusupov wasn't threatening back-rank mate, but in some positions if the a- and b-pawns get exchanged then he might be. The move is also quite handy in that it stops the black queen coming to its most active square on g4.

23...h6

Black responds in turn.

23... $\mathbb{Q}a3??$ 24 $\mathbb{W}xa3$ $bxa3$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}xb8+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ is an example of the back-rank issues that Yusupov was faced with.

24  c1



Question: How does this prevent ...

Answer: 24... $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 25 $\mathbb{W}b1!$ $\mathbb{Q}c4?$ 26 $\mathbb{K}xb4$ $\mathbb{K}xb4$ 27 $\mathbb{W}xb4$ $\mathbb{K}xa2??$ 28 $\mathbb{W}b8+$ $\mathbb{K}h7$ 29 $\mathbb{W}b1+$ is the deep tactical point, forking king and rook.

24... ♜b6 25 ♔b1

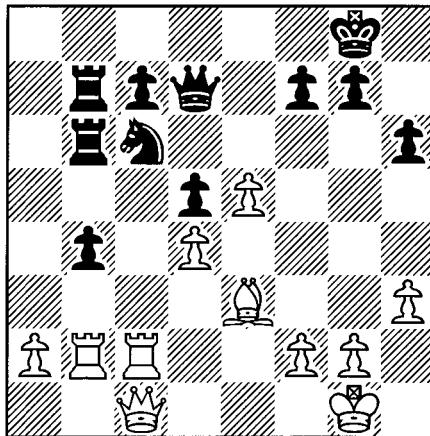
Pressuring the b4-pawn again.

25 ♕c5! ♔a5 26 ♕b1 is also good enough.

25... \mathbb{Q} a8 26 \mathbb{Q} c5! \mathbb{N} d8 27 \mathbb{Q} cc2 \mathbb{N} c6 28 \mathbb{Q} c1!

From a psychological point of view this prophylactic strategy is very frustrating for the opponent. Without an active plan Yusupov is forced to simply defend his weaknesses and wait.

28... ♔8b7



Exercise: What was the idea behind Black's last move and how do we prevent his plan?

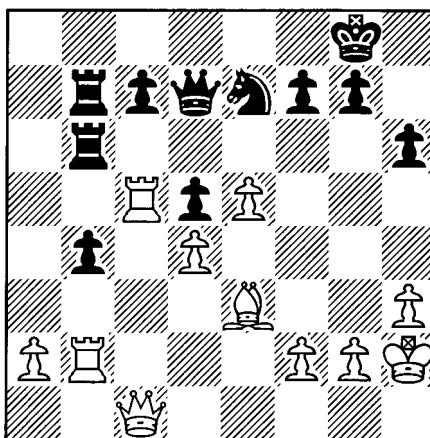
Answer: 29...Rc5!

With ...Rb8-b7 Black defended the c7-pawn. This means that his knight can move. As we know it would like to be on c4, where it is on an outpost square and hitting the rook. In fact if it gets there Black is doing well. Therefore Karpov's move is very strong and very logical. Not only does the rook prevent ...Nc5-a5-c4, it also targets the d5-pawn.

29...Nc7

29...Nd8, trying to re-route the knight, would I suspect have been met by 30 Ra5 Ne6 31 f4!.

30 Rh2



Question: What is the idea behind Karpov's last move?

Answer: He wants to play $\mathbb{B}b2-c2$, without allowing the ... $b4-b3$ pawn break which will give Black activity based on the potential pin from queen to king along the first rank.

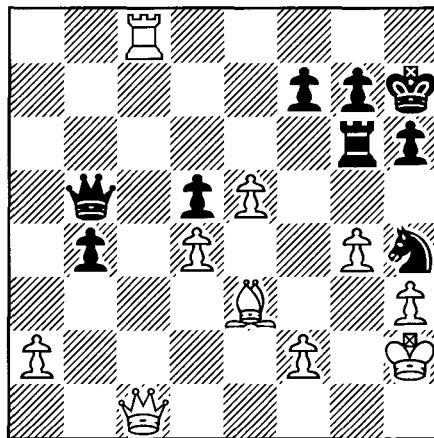
30... ♟ f5?

Getting frustrated, Black loses the c7-pawn.

31 bc2 g6

31... $\Delta xe3$ 32 $fxe3$ b3 33 axb3 $\Delta xb3$ 34 $\Delta xc7$ $\Delta xc7$ 35 $\Delta xc7$ $\Delta f5$ would have given Black some activity and perhaps better chances of survival.

32 \mathbb{Q} x c 7 \mathbb{Q} x c 7 33 \mathbb{Q} x c 7 \mathbb{W} b5 34 g4 \mathbb{N} h4 35 \mathbb{Q} c8+ \mathbb{Q} h7



Exercise: How do you prevent any penetration here?

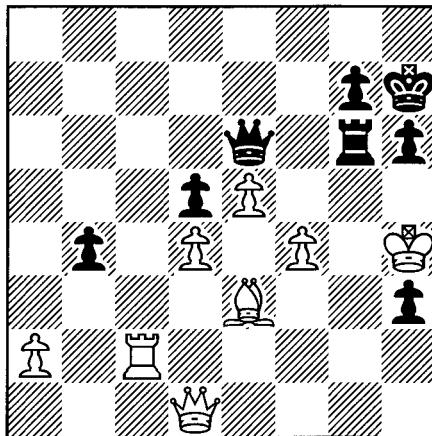
Answer: 36 ♕d1!

This covers the weak light squares on d3, e2 and f3.

36... ♕a6 37 ♟c2 f5 38 ♔g3!

Now the black knight is trapped.

38...fxg4 39 ♜xh4 gxh3 40 f4 ♕e6



Exercise: One last throw of the dice by Yusupov. The white king looks vulnerable, but can you see a good way that we can cover him?

Answer: 41 ♜h5

Defending the f5- and g4-squares.

41... ♜e7+

41... ♜a6, trying to get in around the back, is met by 42 ♜e2.

42 ♔xh3 ♜f7 43 ♜h2 ♜d7+ 44 f5 1-0

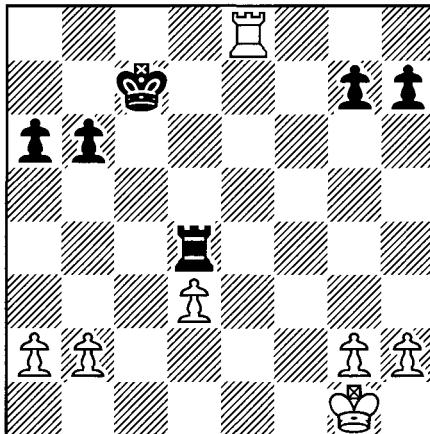
Summary

The main prophylactic moments of the game came on moves 21-28, when White frustrated Black's attempted queenside counterplay. Always be thinking about your opponent's plans just as much as your own!

Prophylaxis in the Endgame

The following is one of the best examples I have seen of prophylaxis in the endgame, taken from Irving Chernev's book *The Most Instructive Games of Chess Ever Played*. White is a pawn up in the position, but it is hard to win against good defensive play, as the black rook and king are both active.

Game 78
S.Tarrasch-E.Thorold
Manchester 1890



Exercise: Which is better here: 26 $\mathbb{R}e7+$ or the more passive 26 $\mathbb{R}e3$?

Answer: 26 $\mathbb{R}e3$!

26 $\mathbb{R}e7+$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 27 $\mathbb{R}xg7$ $\mathbb{R}xd3$ 28 $\mathbb{R}xh7$ $\mathbb{R}d1+$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{R}d2+$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{R}xb2$ gives Black good drawing chances, with his rook being so active. It also means there will be a pawn race on, so White losing becomes a possible result.

26... $\mathbb{Q}d7$

Question: What should the next phase of action be for White?

Answer: 27 $\mathbb{Q}f2$

Activating the king through the centre of the board.

27... $g6$ 28 $\mathbb{R}f3$ $h5$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}e3$

The defence of the d-pawn frees up the rook for more active duties.

29... $\mathbb{R}d6$

29... $\mathbb{R}b4$ 30 $b3$ $a5$ 31 $\mathbb{R}f6!$ causes Black problems.

30 $d4$ $\mathbb{R}e6+$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{R}e1$

Looking to obtain some counterplay round the back of the white pawns.

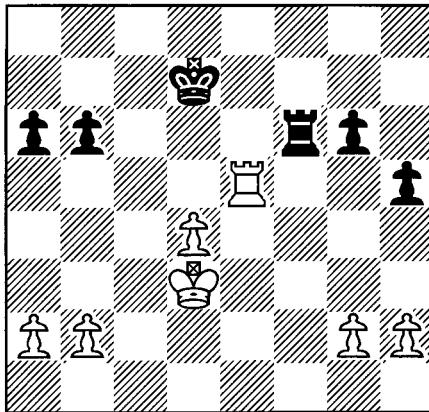
32 $\mathbb{R}g3$

This forces the rook back to the third rank.

32... $\mathbb{R}e6$ 33 $\mathbb{R}e3$ $\mathbb{R}d6$

33... $\mathbb{R}xe3+$ leads to a hopeless king and pawn endgame after 34 $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 36 $d5+$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 37 $\mathbb{Q}d4$.

34 $\mathbb{R}e5$ $\mathbb{R}f6$



Question: What should the next stage of White's plan be?

Answer: Removal of the pawns from the second rank where they are targets for the black rook.

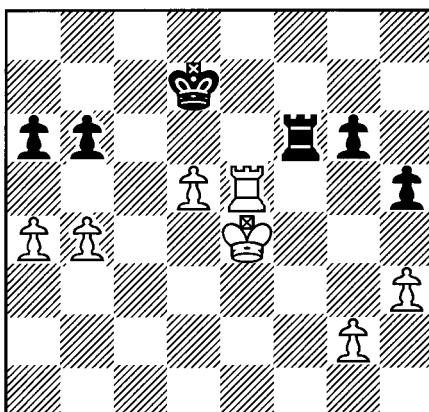
35 a4! ♜f2 36 ♜e2!

Keeping control. Instead 36 ♜g5 ♜xb2 37 ♜xg6 ♜b4 gives Black counterplay.

36...♜f6 37 b4 ♜f8 38 ♜e5 ♜f2 39 ♜g5

Now that the queenside pawns are more secure, White can put his rook on the more active g5-square to tie the enemy rook to the third rank.

39...♜f6 40 h3 40...♚d6 41 ♔e4 ♜e6+ 42 ♜e5 ♜f6 43 d5 ♔d7



Exercise: White has made definite progress.

Can you improve Tarrasch's position further?

Answer: 44 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 45 $\mathbb{Q}g3!$

This breaks Black's resistance, as the threat of $\mathbb{Q}f3$ and transforming the game into a winning king and pawn ending forces his king away from defence of the important e5-square to make room for his king.

45... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 46 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 47 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$

Black is trying desperately to hold but...

48 $d6+$! $\mathbb{Q}d7$

...after 48... $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 49 $\mathbb{Q}f7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 50 $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ White will win the pawn race easily.

49 $\mathbb{Q}f7+$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 50 $\mathbb{Q}c7+$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 51 $\mathbb{Q}c2!$

Cutting off the Black king. Now Black is dead.

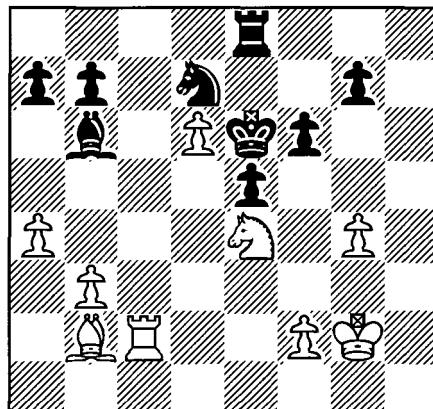
51... $\mathbb{Q}e8+$ 52 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $b5$ 53 $d7$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 54 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{Q}h7+$ 55 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 56 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ 1-0

Summary

I thought Tarrasch said all rook and pawn endings were drawn? This was a demonstration of great control and prophylactic play by White, limiting the opponent's counterplay and not giving him the chance to complicate the position. I particularly liked the way Tarrasch removed his pawns, one by one from the second rank. I wish I could play like this!

To finish our small study of prophylaxis in the endgame, let's examine a game between two of the all-time greats, Spassky and Karpov.

Game 79
B.Spassky-A.Karpov
6th matchgame, Leningrad 1974



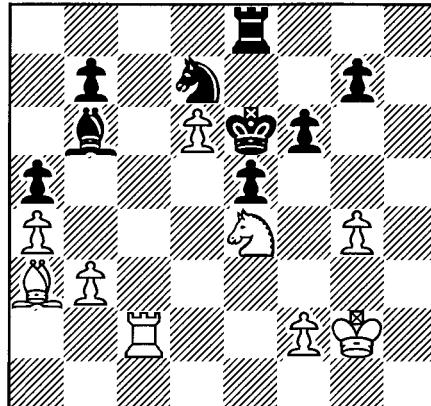
Exercise: Spassky has just played a3-a4.
Can you work out his plan and how to prevent it?

Answer: 33...a5!

Preventing the intended further queenside expansion. White was planning b3-b4 followed by a4-a5, gradually seizing space. Karpov parries the threat for the moment.

34 ♜a3

Consistent. This defends the d6-pawn and increases his control over the c5-square.



Question: Is there a way to generate some counterplay as Black and how seriously should we take the b3-b4 break?

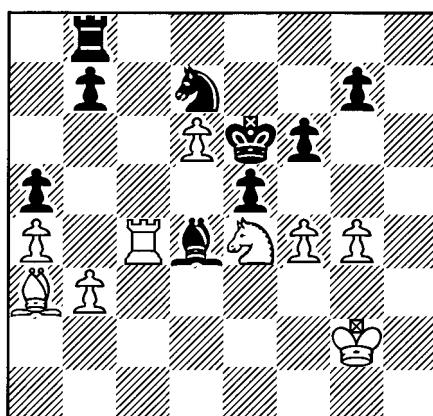
Answer: 34...♝b8!

An exclamation mark? Well, Tibor Karolyi in his book *Endgame Virtuoso* gave it two! The idea is to prepare the ...b7-b5 pawn break after the bishop moves.

35 ♜c4

The answer to the second part of the question was that 35 b4?! is not good as White gives himself a weakness on a4: 35...axb4 36 ♜xb4 ♜a8! 37 ♜a2 ♜d4 and Black stands well.

35...♝d4 36 f4



Exercise: Spassky tries to become active on the kingside. How should Black react?

Answer: 36...g6!

Preventing the pawn advance.

After 36...b5 37 axb5 $\blacksquare x b 5$ 38 f5+ $\blacksquare d 5$ 39 $\blacksquare c 3 +$ $\blacksquare x c 3$ 40 $\blacksquare x c 3$ a draw would be the most likely outcome.

37 $\blacksquare g 3$

Again preparing the f4-f5 advance.

37...exf4 38 $\blacksquare x d 4$ $\blacksquare x g 3$ 39 $\blacksquare x g 3$ $\blacksquare c 8$

Black is now better. He has the more active king, the open c-file and a superb square for his knight on e5. Karpov went on to win after 55 moves.

Overprotection

Overprotection is basically just an extension of the theme of prophylaxis. It was first encountered in Aron Nimzowitsch's classic book *My System*. He wrote: "Strategically important points should be overprotected. If the pieces are so engaged, they get their regard in the fact that they will then find themselves well posted in every respect."

Although we don't, of course, have to take everything that Nimzowitsch says to be completely true, securing important squares can be regarded as an important part of middle-game play. Successful overprotection will often persuade the opponent to switch his focus away from such a square or piece (it can be either), to the detriment of his position. This game by the man himself highlights the idea.

Game 80

A.Nimzowitsch-A.Giese

Riga 1913

Caro-Kann Defence

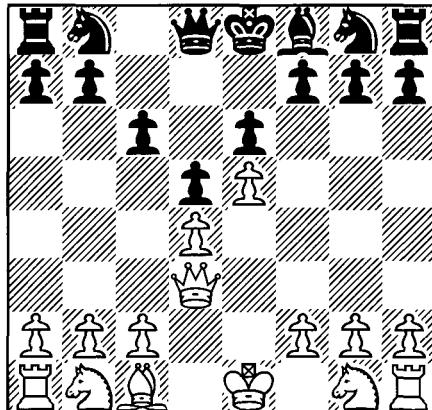
1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5

Overprotection of pawn chains (such as the d4-e5 chain here) in closed positions can be particularly important, as the opponent's pawn breaks against such chains will be easier to manage.

3... $\blacksquare f 5$ 4 $\blacksquare d 3$

White chooses a quiet line. 4 $\blacksquare f 3$, 4 h4 and 4 $\blacksquare d 2$ are more popular nowadays.

4... $\blacksquare x d 3$ 5 $\blacksquare x d 3$ e6



Exercise: Let us take a moment to think about how best to develop our minor pieces. If we go with the idea that our centre is going to come under attack at a later stage with the typical breaks ...c6-c5 and/or ...f7-f6, what is the best way to continue?

Answer: 6 ♜e2

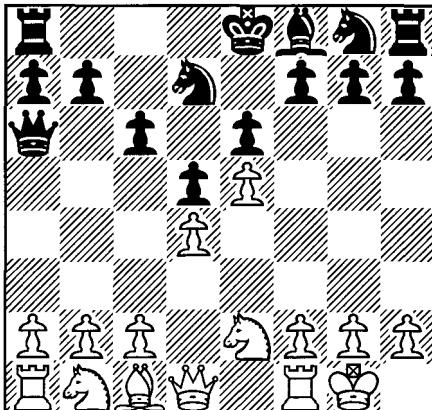
White doesn't commit his f-pawn yet and remains flexible. I like this move as any premature ...f7-f6 break will now leave e6 to be attacked by the white knight (via f4).

Instead 6 ♜f3 leaves the knight on b1 without a purpose: 6...c5 7 c3 ♜c6 8 a3 c4 9 ♛c2 ♜ge7 left Black with a good position in De Gremont-A.Karpov, San Giorgio (simul) 1995.

6...♝b6 7 0-0 ♜a6 8 ♜d1

White, of course, doesn't wish to exchange queens at such an early stage. With a solid pawn structure and no weaknesses Black would be fairly comfortable in the endgame.

8...♞d7



Exercise: Back to the concept of overprotection.
Where does the knight on b1 now belong?

Answer: 9 ♟d2!

The knight heads for f3. This set-up of white knights is also seen in the French Tarrasch, another opening which can lead to a closed centre.

9...♝e7 10 ♟f3 ♗g6?!

Perhaps a small inaccuracy. I think the optimal square for this knight is c6, so would have been more inclined to play something like 10...c5 11 c3 ♜c6 with a solid position for Black.

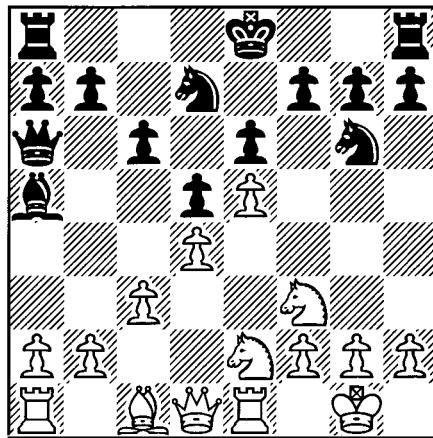
11 ♜e1

Nimzowitsch remains true to his prophylactic style, discouraging ...f7-f6 even further.

However, a case could have been made here for the typical attacking move 11 h4!? c5 (11...h5 simply gives White a beautiful square on g5 for one of his minor pieces) 12 h5 ♜e7 13 c3 and White can claim a small advantage due to his extra space.

11...♝b4 12 c3 ♜a5?!

The bishop would be much better employed on e7, discouraging the advance of the h-pawn and covering the important g5-square. Therefore 12...♜e7! should have been preferred.



Exercise: Let's keep trying to think like Nimzowitsch! Can you find another move to increase the defence of the centre?

Answer: 13 ♜f4

I don't think this move is strictly necessary, but it is interesting to see how these white pieces come alive later in the game.

Again, I think that 13 h4! is the most testing, but that wouldn't be thinking like Nimzowitsch!

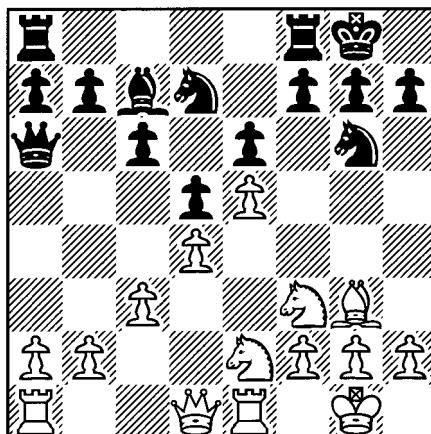
13...0-0

13... $\mathbb{Q}xf4?$ would be a positional mistake, as then the white knight comes to life via f4: 14 $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 0-0 15 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ leaves the black kingside uncomfortable.

14 $\mathbb{Q}g3$

Removing the sensitive bishop from any possible exchange.

14... $\mathbb{Q}c7$



Here we can see that White's plan of removing the possibility of the ...f6 pawn break (and also in this case for the moment ...c6-c5) has stifled Black's counterplay.

Question: How would you proceed in this middlegame?

Answer: 15 $\mathbb{Q}g5$

The conditions are met for a kingside attack – the pawn on e5 cramps the black position. The attack, however, must be built up slowly.

15... $\mathbb{R}fe8$

15...c5 should have been played, seeking to pressurize the white centre a bit.

16 $\mathbb{Q}f4$

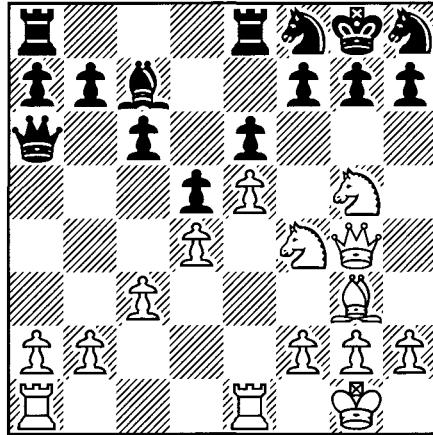
Seeking to exchange off a defender of the black kingside.

16... $\mathbb{Q}h8?!$

I don't like this – Black is playing too passively.

16... $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ h6 18 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ c5 still leaves Giese in reasonable shape.

17 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$



Exercise: Over the last few moves White has steadily improved his position. What should he play now?

18 $\mathbb{Q}e3$

Without any direct black counterplay Nimzowitsch seeks to gather more attacking forces on the kingside.

Answer: 18 $\mathbb{Q}h5!$ should probably have been preferred. The knight targets both the g7-pawn and the f6-square. For example, 18... $\mathbb{Q}hg6$ 19 $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}f6+!!$ is a brilliant sacrifice which highlights how useful that e5-pawn is! After 20... $\mathbb{Q}h8$ (20...gxf6 21 exf6 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 22 $\mathbb{W}h5$ followed by $\mathbb{W}h6-g7$ is devastating) 21 h4! h6 22 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ White has a very dangerous attack with h4-h5 coming: for instance, 22...gxf6 23 exf6 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ 25 h5.

18...b6?

Again Black just doesn't respond quickly enough and sense the danger in time.

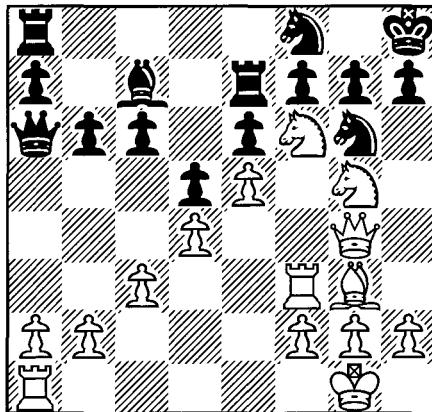
18...h6 would be better, removing this dangerous knight: 19 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}hg6$ with only a slight edge to White.

19 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}hg6$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}f6+!$

Finally the enemy is engaged and note the use of the overprotected e5-pawn.

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

21...gxf6 22 exf6 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ 24 $\mathbb{W}h3$ is curtains. The g7-square is too weak.



Exercise: Finish Black off! Nimzowitsch couldn't find the win here, but can you?

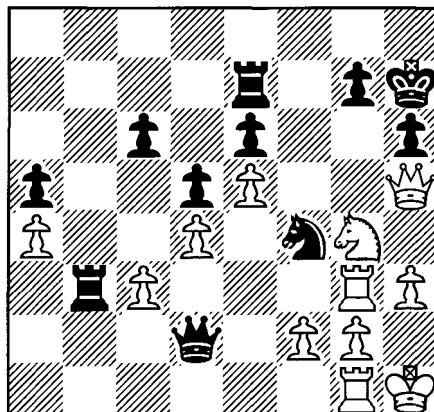
22 ♖h5?

Answer: 22 ♖fxh7! is completely crushing: 22... ♗xh7 23 ♖xf7+ ♕xf7 24 ♖xf7 and Black will lose material or perhaps get mated if the h-pawn arrives on h5!

22...h6

Suddenly the game is back in the balance and White has to win it all over again. I will give the remaining moves without comment for you to play over. Suffice to say that had Nimzowitsch found the win he would have proclaimed his triumphant overprotection strategy. Instead we will have to do it for him!

23 ♔h1 ♖d8 24 b4 ♕e2 25 ♕g1 a5 26 ♖g4 ♔g8 27 ♖xf7 ♖d2 28 ♖xd8 ♕xd8 29 bxa5 bxa5 30 ♖h4 ♖xh4 31 ♖g6 32 ♖h5 ♔h7 33 a4 ♕b8 34 h3 ♕b3 35 ♖g3 ♖f4



36 ♜xh6+!

A stylish finish!

36...gxh6 37 ♜f6+ ♔h8 38 ♜g8 mate (1-0)

Summary

Overprotection is an advanced form of prophylaxis and is usually applied to *central* squares. It is useful in denying the opponent any tactical opportunities and, as we saw in this game, overprotection of e5 led to a powerful kingside attack for White.

Key Points

- 1) Prophylaxis is the prevention of the opponent's plans and ideas. It is linked closely with ideas we will examine in Chapter Ten as it limits the enemy's counterplay.
- 2) We can apply prophylactic thinking to all phases of the game, but it is particularly useful in situations where your centre will come under attack in the opening.
- 3) Overprotection is a term coined by Nimzowitsch to define the strategy of guarding important central squares and in particular pawns. This can lead to potential kingside and queenside attacks later on.

Chapter Nine

Evaluating Positions

Methodical thinking is of more use in chess than inspiration. – Cecil Purdy

Being able to accurately evaluate and assess a position, often as it is changing through the course of the game, is a really important skill to have. Such ‘chess diagnostics’ often can be very simple: for example, if one side is clearly ahead on material for no compensation then the evaluation is easy. However, in other cases the margins can be much finer.

I would urge you, upon every move you play, to think about how that move affects the position in front of you as the landscape of the game will be constantly changing. List in your mind the positional advantages and disadvantages and try to act accordingly. With such a lot going on in a game, the process of evaluation can be a daunting prospect. I do my evaluations ‘ceteris paribus’ (with all other things being equal), in isolation from the other factors if you like and try to then put it all together before reaching a verdict. Correctly evaluating a position will not only help tell you what is going on at that particular moment in the game, but perhaps more importantly should guide you towards how you should proceed.

The Imbalances to Look For

Imbalance has become an important word in the vocabulary of chess trainers and one of the most successful chess books of recent times *How To Reassess Your Chess* by Jeremy Silman focuses almost exclusively on this particular area of the game. Put simply an imbalance is ‘any difference between the white and black positions at a given moment of a game’.

Let’s make a list of what factors we can look at to determine the difference between two positions:

- 1) Material.
- 2) King Safety.
- 3) Development and the Initiative.
- 4) Space.

- 5) Activity of the pieces.
- 6) Control of an important square, file, rank or diagonal.
- 7) Pawn Structure.

I think these are the most important ones, though different authors and trainers will have different names for these factors (some will split them down even further as Silman does). When it comes to evaluating the position I would urge you to try and evaluate these factors *in this order*. The reason is that there is an important difference between the *static* and *dynamic* elements. I would encourage dynamic, positive thinking at all times, which is why the short-term factors can and should be examined first. The static features of a pawn structure can be examined at the end.

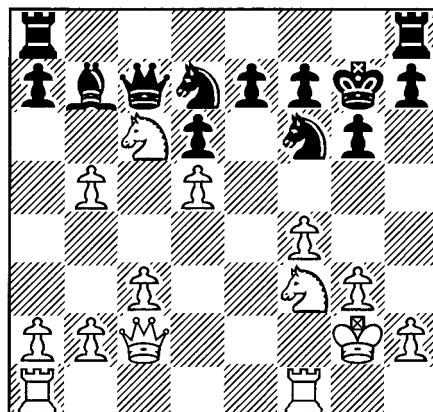
Calculating the Material Balance

Being able to quickly and accurately calculate the material situation on a board is a massively useful skill to have. Grandmasters are able to do this in a matter of seconds and will usually do it before they take into account the positional factors at work. They can do this so quickly as they have had years of practise and probably can't explain how they do it so fast – it just comes naturally as their brains have been wired to work at such a fast speed. The weaker and less experienced you are, the longer it will take you to reach these conclusions.

At novice level a count up of the points is a complicated and difficult task – I have found that out so many times with my students! Often they attempt to do the evaluation by adding up the points of each piece they still have left and then comparing the total to that of the opponent. As expected a lot will get lost halfway through the calculation, or realize they have made a mistake in their addition and have to start again.

There is a simpler way!

Fortunately for us there is a much easier way of calculating the material balance and that is by *cancelling the equivalent pieces of our army and our opponent's*. Let us take a completely random position that has popped into my head to see what I mean.



Remember that at this stage it is not important to do anything else other than calculate the material balance. So the cancellation method is to compare the equivalent pieces in the two positions. In this case it is as follows:

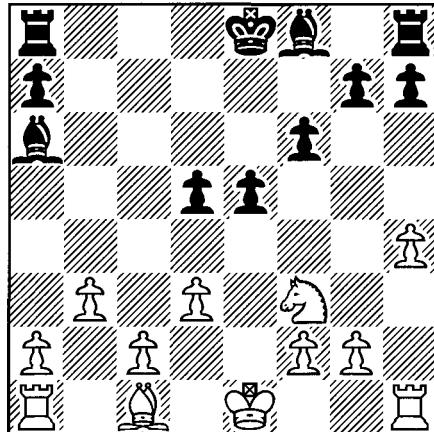
- 1) Both sides have a king, so no difference there (always the case).
- 2) Both sides have a queen: we can cancel those out.
- 3) Both sides have two rooks: we can cancel them.
- 4) White has two knights, Black has two knights, so we can cancel them.
- 5) Black has an extra bishop: three points to him.
- 6) White has eight pawns, Black has six: two points to White.

Conclusion

Black has a lead in simple terms of material of one point. In more advanced terminology we would say a piece for two pawns, as stronger players tend to stick to the points system only very loosely. The relative activity of the pieces affects their worth.

Let's take a game from the recent World Championship match between Anand and Gelfand, which saw the Indian Grandmaster retain his title by the narrowest of margins.

*Game 81
V.Anand-B.Gelfand
World Championship (Game 12), Moscow 2012*



Exercise: Calculate the material situation.

Answer: Again let's use the cancellation method (ignoring the kings this time):

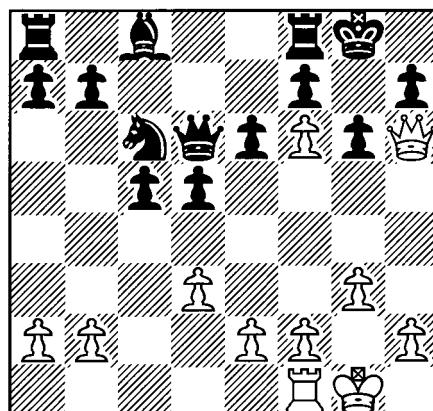
- 1) White has two rooks, as does Black – we can cancel/ignore them.
- 2) White has a bishop and a knight, Black has two bishops. **IMPORTANT:** we have a material imbalance!
- 3) White has seven pawns, Black has six. We have another material imbalance: White is a pawn up!

Conclusion: White is a pawn up, but Black has two bishops versus bishop and knight. This imbalance crops up perhaps more than any other. The points system tells us there is no great difference between the two pieces, but the more experienced player will have other ideas, depending on the specific position in front of him. These two pieces move in very different ways, so the specific features of the position will affect their values. In this particular case Black has a pair of bishops, which is more powerful than just a single one (coupled with a knight), as they can control both the white and black squares in unison. They both also have good diagonals to occupy and the board is relatively open.

We will come back to this position later when our evaluation skills have improved further. If you still feel as though the cancellation system is difficult, keep practising until it becomes second nature. The material situation in any game of chess, in any position can be evaluated in this way. Next time you are at a tournament or watching a game at home make a conscious effort to evaluate the material using this system before you do anything else!

King Safety

After the initial material evaluation is done, we must turn our eyes towards the positional features which are prominent and it will often be the case that something will strike you immediately. King Safety often overrides the material situation. In fact if the king is in immediate peril then that is normally going to be the factor that decides the game. The following is a basic example of this.



White is a rook and two minor pieces down but that doesn't matter – the material is irrelevant as he is about to win by checkmate!

Some may even start by trying to evaluate the king safety *before* the material balance and I don't think there is a right or wrong way round to do this. Personally I evaluate the material first because it's more clear cut – one side will be up or down, whereas king safety can be a little more difficult to assess.

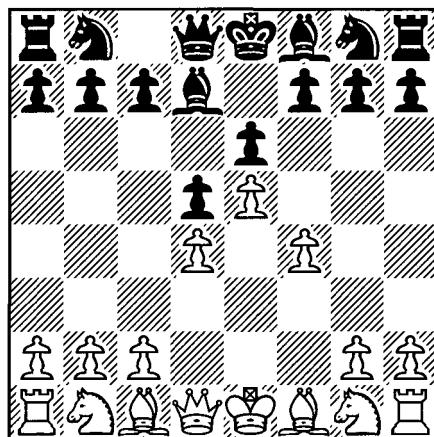
Factors affecting the Safety of a King

The safety of a king can be determined by a number of factors all of which we should be aware of when we assess his situation:

- 1) Whether or not it is castled.
- 2) The number of open files and diagonals open towards the king.
- 3) The number of attacking and defensive pieces that can get to the king.
- 4) The pawn structure; whether or not there are any weak squares in the king's vicinity.
- 5) How quickly the situation on the board is likely to change. Can one side expose the king quickly?

This fifth element is one that a lot of people get wrong. They look at the situation as a fixed moment in time, rather than as an ongoing part of the game. It might not always be possible to see far enough into the future to calculate a win, but you may get a sense that the king will remain a target for some time. This is particularly true in games with lots of pieces still on the board. We need to put all this together before we can reach a definite conclusion on how safe the king is. The following is a basic example, again from my students.

Being Realistic



Question: Is the White king safe?

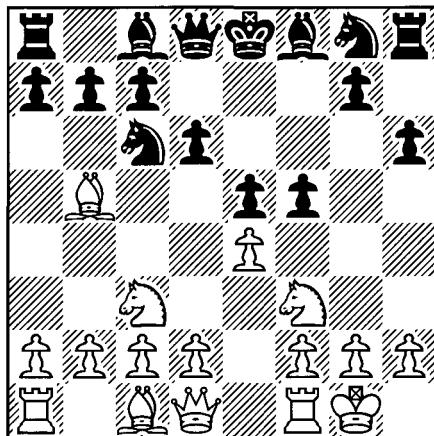
Answer: When I ask for an assessment of the position here after four moves I often get the

answer (before any of my training I hasten to add!), that ‘the white king is more open and weak’. I disagree with the weakness bit. We must be realistic about our opponent’s chances of attack here. In his favour are the two open diagonals towards the king, but the closed centre, the lack of pieces attacking the king and the number of white pieces that can protect it mean that the white player should be perfectly fine as long as he is a little careful along the diagonals.

Development and the Initiative

It is relatively easy to evaluate the development situation. A count of the number of pieces that are off their starting squares and in the game will give you a good starting point for your assessment.

Game 82
N.Lastochkin-A.Emelyanov
Woodbridge 2012



Exercise: After a dodgy opening Black has just gone ...f7-f5 to attack the centre. How big is White’s lead in development and how should he proceed?

Answer: If we ignore the pawns for the moment a count will show us that White has four pieces developed: two knights, one bishop and the king/rook (I would call castling one move of development). Black has developed one piece (the knight on c6). It is White to move so we can call this another half-move lead in development. *Thus in total White’s lead in development is three and a half.*

The Search for Chess Perfection

International Master and Australian chess author Cecil Purdy tragically died of a heart attack whilst playing chess (not a good advertisement for the game I know), but his writings are of great interest. His view was that a lead in development of two and a half or greater is extremely dangerous. Well, here we have a three and a half move lead and not everything else is equal – we have another factor in our favour! The opponent's king is exposed along the weak h5-e8 diagonal!

My evaluation: White is probably already winning with good play.

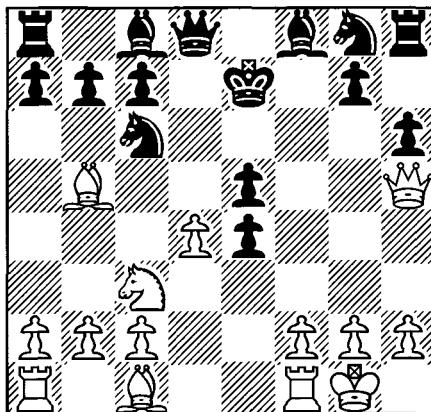
6 d4!

Energetic and absolutely correct. White seeks to open more lines to the king whilst applying central pressure.

6...fxe4 7 ♜xe5!

A tough move for a junior to play, sacrificing a piece. Nikolay clears the diagonal to h5 for his queen.

7...dxe5 8 ♜h5+ ♔e7



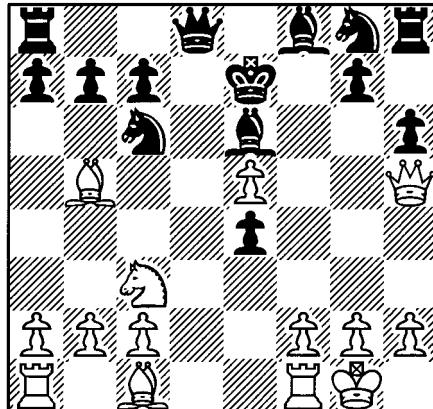
Question: What should White play here?

Answer: 9 dxe5!

As Grandmaster Reuben Fine once said: "the first principle of attack is not to let the enemy develop!" This quiet recapture prevents the development of the g8-knight, but carries no immediate threat. It is perhaps difficult to believe that White is completely winning here, but if we hang on to the idea that we are still three moves up in development, with all the pieces still on the board and the king in the centre, it should soon become easy to see why. The tempting continuation 9 ♜xc6 bxc6 10 ♜xe5+ is not so good as after 10...♜e6 Black is surviving.

9...♜e6!

A good move, covering the weak d5-square.



Exercise: White can win material back immediately here with 10.Qg5+. What do you make of this?

Answer: 10.Qg5+? would be a serious mistake that would throw away much of White's advantage. After 10...hxg5 11.Qxh8.Qxe5 the black knight will come to f6 and shield the king. We must make development more difficult for our opponent!

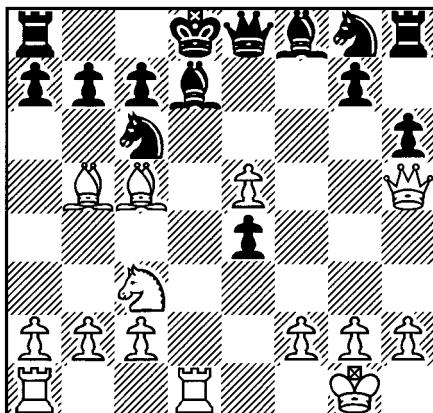
10.Qe3!

A very calm move under the circumstances, but also a strong one. White stays a long way ahead in development and now creates the terrible threat of Qc5+. Black is helpless.

10...Qe8?!

10...Qf7 would have kept the fight alive, but after 11.Qf5.Qd7 12.Qxe4 White has a raging attack and Black still can't get his kingside pieces out!

11.Qc5+ Qd8 12.Qfd1+ Qd7



Exercise: Can you see a powerful way to continue the attack?

Answer: 13 $\mathbb{Q}xd7+$! $\mathbb{W}xd7$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}d1$

14 $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ would have been even stronger.

14... $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}xd7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 16 $\mathbb{W}g4+!$ 1-0

An accurate final move. Nikolay doesn't allow Artem time to develop his knight. Black resigned as he will lose the h8-rook.

Summary

Any count which shows a lead in development of two or more should ring the warning bells in your mind. If you have the lead look to use it to attack, whilst if you are behind you really should be getting those pieces out ASAP! Remember that a development lead is very much a short-term advantage and if not used quickly is likely to evaporate.

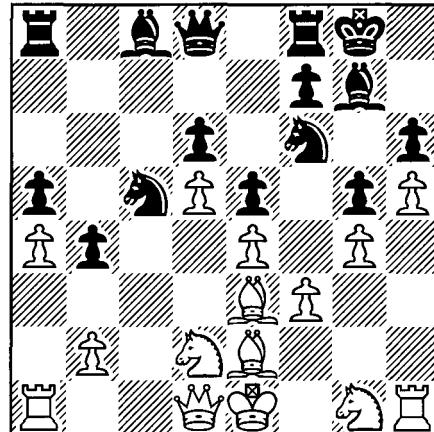
Space – The Final Frontier

Or should that be the first frontier? Evaluating a space advantage is primarily done by looking at the pawn structure. As discussed in Chapter Four, pawns that are further advanced give the owner more space. The more space you own, the more options your pieces have. Often it will be obvious as to who has the more space. A quick look should suffice.

If you are after a more sophisticated explanation, Grandmaster Larry Evans, in his book *New Ideas in Chess* picks up on the point to look at how many squares in the opponent's half of the board you control or occupy with your pawns and pieces. The more squares you attack, the more space you have. A space advantage on its own isn't usually enough to win a game. Instead it can be used as a precursor to an attack on the enemy king (as we saw in the game Tal-Simagin in Chapter Seven), or to tie down and in some cases immobilize the enemy pieces. Amongst grandmasters space is a particularly valuable asset. If you study the games of one of the truly great positional players, such as Tigran Petrosian or Anatoly Karpov, you will see a number of examples of them slowly squeezing the life out of their opponent by restricting their space.

Game 83
T.Petrosian-S.Schweber
Stockholm Interzonal 1962

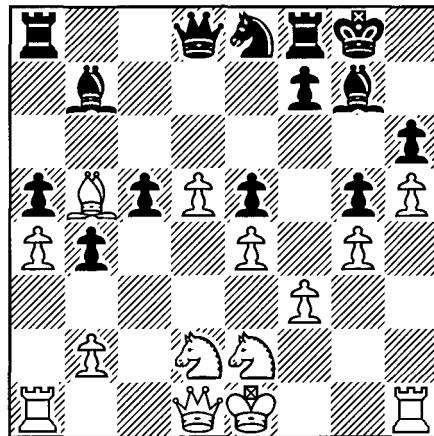
Exercise: Who has more space in this position? Try to use the Evans' method to calculate this, before deciding upon Petrosian's next move.



Answer: 17 ♜xc5!

By my calculations White was controlling 12 squares in the opponents half of the board: a6, b5 (twice), c5, c6, d5, e6, f5 (twice), g6 and h5 (twice). Black was controlling 14 squares: a4, a3, b3, b4, c3, d3, d4, e4 (twice), f4 (twice), g4 (twice) and h4. With Petrosian's move he removes the active c5-knight and therefore reduces Black's control over the White half of the board. He also creates a strong protected passed pawn on d5.

17...dxc5 18 ♜b5 ♜b7 19 ♜e2 ♜e8



20 ♜xe8!

An instructive decision. The Armenian World Champion has given up both his bishops as the position is closed and the knights should carry more influence on proceedings.

20...♜xe8 21 ♜c4

Question: How many squares in the opponent's territory are both sides controlling now?

Answer: White now attacks fourteen squares: a5, b5, b6, c6, d6, d5, e6, e5 (twice), f5 (twice), g6 and h5 (twice). Black attacks 10: a3, b4 (twice), c3, d4 (twice), f4 (twice) and h4. Thus White has a clear space advantage. It is also evident that even if the light-squared bishop is exchanged for the active knight on c4, the other knight will dominate the dark-squared bishop on g7, which leads a miserable existence.

21...♝a6 22 ♜b3

22 b3? would be a positional mistake as 22 ...♝xc4 23 bxc4 would improve Black's chances greatly as the c4-square was the main entry point for the white pieces.

22...♞f6 23 ♜c1

White is clearly better and went on to win convincingly.

Formulating a Plan Based on the Relative Activity of the Pieces

Another quick and easy way of assessing a position is to look at the equivalent pieces on both sides and come to a decision as to whose are better placed. This can very rapidly paint a picture of who is better and can also provide a simple plan for improving your position.

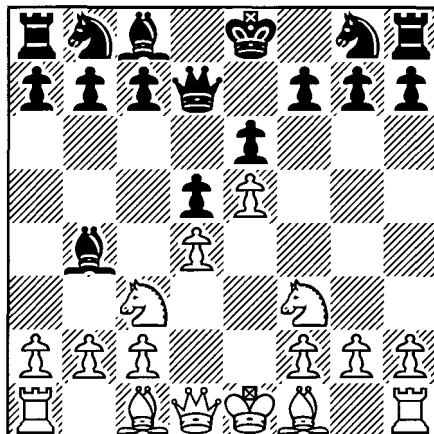
Game 84

P.Moe-E.Berg

Nord Odal 2010

French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♜c3 ♜b4 4 e5 ♜d7 5 ♜f3



Question: What should Black play here?

Answer: A quick comparison of the pieces in this French position will tell us that the major problem Black faces is his light-squared bishop, which is clearly worse than its white counterpart. Therefore a simple and effective strategy is to exchange it off:

5...b6!

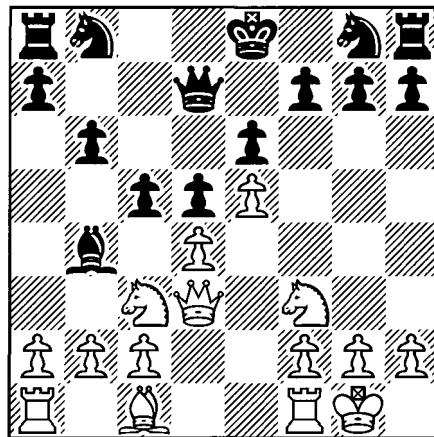
As we saw in the Kasparov-Ivanchuk game.

6 ♖d3?!

Not really grasping the point of Black's last move.

6 ♖d2 ♖a6 7 ♔e2 ♖f8 is a curious sequence of moves, designed to avoid exchanges and keep the position complex.

6...♖a6 7 0-0 ♖xd3 8 ♕xd3 c5



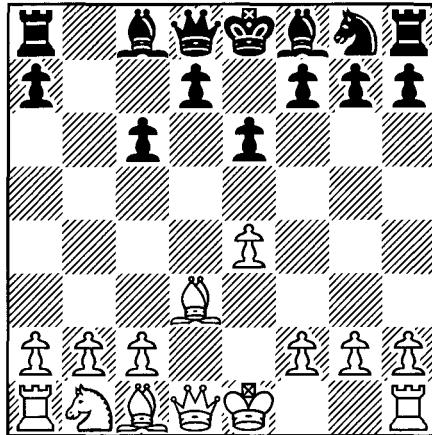
Without any structural weaknesses Black has a decent position.

Summary

If you can see an easy way of exchanging off an inferior piece it is usually a good idea. In this particular case Black also had less space so the decision made perfect sense.

*Game 85
R.Allicock-A.Madan
Coulson 2008
Sicilian Defence*

1 e4 c5 2 ♔f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 ♖c6 5 ♖xc6 bxc6 6 ♖d3



Exercise: By comparing the relative activity of the pieces it is fairly obvious that Black's light-squared bishop is inferior to its counterpart. Can you find a way of getting rid of it?

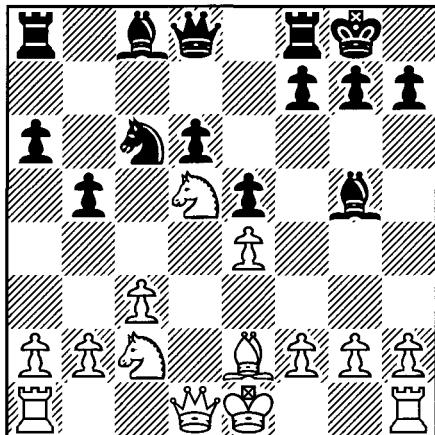
Answer: 6... $\mathbb{Q}a6!$ 7 0-0

7 $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ $\mathbb{W}a5+$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{W}xa6$ has the added benefit of preventing White from castling.
7... $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 8 $\mathbb{W}xd3$ d5 9 exd5 cxd5

Black was comfortably placed and went on to win.

Game 86
Z.Almasi-A.Shirov
 French League 2005
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3 d4 cxd4 4 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ e5 6 $\mathbb{Q}db5$ d6 7 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ a6 8 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ b5 9 $\mathbb{Q}d5$
 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 11 c3 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 0-0 13 $\mathbb{Q}e2$



Exercise: By evaluating the relative merits of the minor pieces here try to come up with a good strategy for Black.

Answer: 13...♞e7!

Very sensibly Black seeks to try and undermine the superior white knight on d5. One of Black's main advantages in this position is the bishop-pair, so he tries to maintain that advantage by using his knight for the exchange.

14 ♞cb4

White of course is in no mood to 'repair' the hole on d5 by capturing back with his pawn or queen.

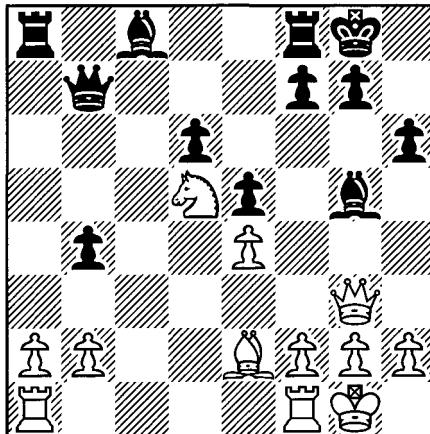
14...a5 15 ♞xe7+ ♕xe7 16 ♜d5 ♕b7 17 ♕d3

The white queen eyes up the b5-pawn.

17...b4 18 cxb4

18 c4 would appear to make sense, keeping an iron grip on the d5-square, but there are no real targets in the black position: 18...♝e6 19 ♜d1 a4 20 0-0 ♜a5! is a typical Sicilian motif and would be a creative way of trying to fix a pawn at d5. Black is better here as his bishop exerts more influence over the game than its counterpart by controlling the c1-square. With all the heavy pieces on the board Black has every chance of converting his advantage.

18...axb4 19 ♜g3 h6 20 0-0



Question: What should Black's strategy be here?

Answer: 20...♔h8

To undermine the d5-knight. In order to do that Black must play for ...f7-f5, so he sensibly moves his king off the weak a2-g8 diagonal.

The premature 20...f5 allows White into the black camp after 21 h4! ♖d8 22 ♕g6 with unpleasant pressure.

21 ♜b3

Hitting the weak pawn on b4.

21...♝b8

The immediate 21...f5 is also quite possible: 22 exf5 ♖xf5 23 ♜xb4 ♔e4 24 f3 ♔h7 gives Black good compensation for the sacrificed pawn due to his central pawn mass and White's weak dark squares.

22 ♜ad1 f5

The pawn break finally arrives.

23 ♔f3 ♜a7

Removing the queen from the long diagonal.

24 ♜xb4?!

24 exf5 ♖xf5 25 ♜xb4 was safer, but the dynamism of the black position would still be evident after 25...e4 26 ♔e2 e3! 27 f3 ♜b6, with a real thorn in the side on e3.

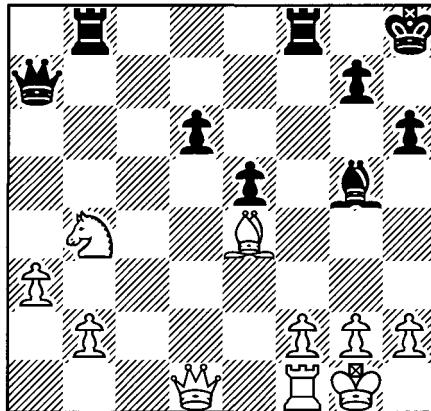
24...fxe4 25 ♔xe4 ♔g4!

The bishops' collective power is evident.

26 a3

White is forced to sacrifice the exchange, as 26 ♜xd6 ♜c5 forks the rook and knight. 26 ♜b1 ♜c5 27 a3 ♔e2 also collects the exchange due to the weakness on f2.

26...♜xd1 27 ♜xd1



Question: How should Black defend the d6-pawn?

Answer: 27... $\mathbb{B}bc8!$

He shouldn't! Hopefully by now we are thinking first and foremost about active, aggressive moves. Tying down a piece to defence of the backward pawn makes little sense.

28 g3

28 $\mathbb{W}xd6$ $\mathbb{W}xf2+$ 29 $\mathbb{B}xf2$ $\mathbb{B}c1+$ 30 $\mathbb{B}f1$ $\mathbb{B}cxf1$ mate is the tactical justification.

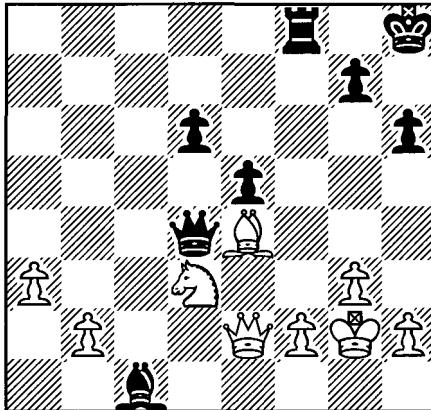
28... $\mathbb{B}c1$ 29 $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{B}xf1+$

29... $\mathbb{B}xf2$!? 30 $\mathbb{W}xf2$ $\mathbb{B}e3$ looks very tempting, but after 31 $\mathbb{B}g2$ $\mathbb{B}xf2$ 32 $\mathbb{B}xc1$ White has very good control of the light squares and it is the black king that must be a little careful.

30 $\mathbb{B}xf1$ $\mathbb{W}d4$

30... $\mathbb{B}e3$ again looks good and to be honest I'm not so sure why Shirov didn't go for this – it seems to force a weakening of the dark squares, such as after 31 $f3$ $\mathbb{W}d4$.

31 $\mathbb{B}g2$ $\mathbb{B}c1$ 32 $\mathbb{B}d3$



Exercise: Try to put yourself in the black bishop's shoes. Which diagonal would you ideally like to be on and how do you get there?

Answer: 32... d2

Heading for the b6-f2 diagonal!

33 ♜f3 ♜a5 34 b4 ♜b6 35 a4 ♛c4 36 ♛e4 ♛c2 37 a5 ♜d4 38 ♛g6?

White fatally allows the central pawns to advance, possibly as a result of time pressure. I don't see anything wrong with 38 a6 ♕a2 39 b5 as White can elegantly give up a piece: 39...♕b1 40 ♕d5! ♖xd3 41 a7 ♕a3 42 a8♕ ♖xa8 43 ♖xa8+ ♕xa8 44 ♖xa8 with a likely draw.

38...d5 39 ♠xd5 ♟xf2+ 40 ♔h3 ♗xh2+ 41 ♔g4 h5+ 0-1

Summary

It was interesting to note the way that Shirov played around the strong knight on d5, undermining it in order to preserve his bishop-pair. Try to force yourself to constantly reassess the situation on the board and ask yourself questions about the activity of your pieces. Make them happier and your games will improve!

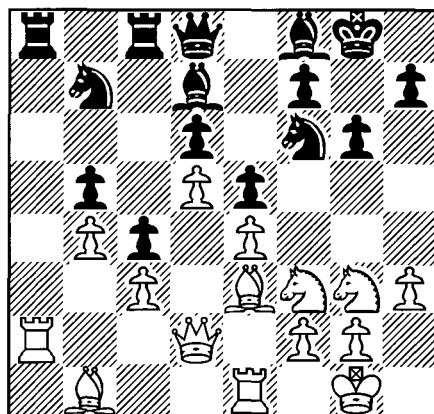
Control of an Important File, Rank or Diagonal

This can be a major factor to consider, particularly if the position is closed and there aren't many good lines available for your major pieces.

Game 87

A.Karpov-W.Unzicker

Nice Olympiad 1974



Exercise: Evaluate the position by examining the factors we have already discussed before coming up with a strategy for White.

Answer: We find:

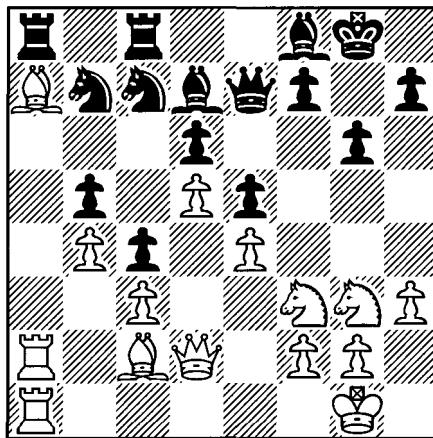
- 1) Using the cancellation method we see that material is equal.
- 2) Both kings are perfectly safe – they have castled on the same side and there are plenty of pieces defending them.
- 3) Development is not an issue to either side.
- 4) The position is closed and there are no pawn breaks in sight.
- 5) White has a queenside space advantage and deprives the black pieces of good squares thanks to the pawns on b4 and d5. Having said this, it is not all in White's favour as the c4-pawn means that the b1-bishop is very passive.
- 6) There is one open file on the board which is currently being evenly contested. It is not easy to see any way to improve...

Karpov found:

24 ♜a7!

A very elegant idea. White latches on to the key feature of the position (the battle for the a-file), and seeks to work on that. Now White can reorganize his queenside pieces.

24...♝e8 25 ♜c2 ♜c7 26 ♜ea1 ♜e7



Phase one of the plan is complete. White controls the majority of the squares along the a-file whilst retaining the tension by keeping the rooks on the board.

27 ♜b1 ♜e8 28 ♜e2

White now seeks to expand his control of the board by improving the kingside.

28...♝d8 29 ♜h2

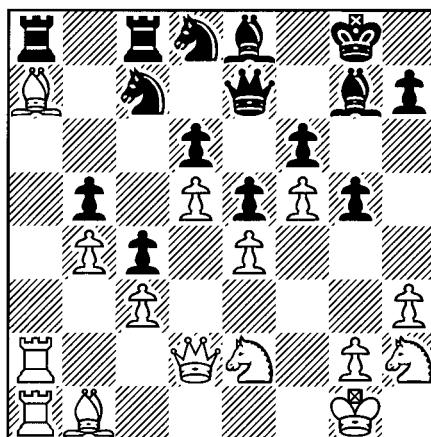
A typical move in the Ruy Lopez, creating a route for the knight to g4 and preparing the f2-f4 pawn break. Black's position is so solid that opening a second front is needed here.

29...♝g7 30 f4 f6

30...exf4 opens the diagonal for the dark-squared bishop and gives Black access to the e5-square, but loses control of d4. It is important to note that the only way to get a black knight to e5 would be by playing ..f7-f6, weakening the e6-square.

31 f5 g5

Perhaps something like 31...gx f5 32 exf5 ♜f8!, preparing to improve the terrible g7-bishop, would have made more sense.



Exercise: Unzicker bases his defence on keeping lines closed and hoping that White will not be able to penetrate.

How can White improve his position further?

Answer: 32 ♜c2!

Improving the worst piece. Great manoeuvring from White as the bishop heads for the h5-square.

32...♝f7 33 ♜g3 ♜b7 34 ♜d1 h6

34...♜e8 wouldn't prevent White from executing his plan to exchange the light-squared bishops: 35 ♜f3 ♜f8 36 ♜e2 ♜e7 37 ♜h5.

35 ♜h5 ♜e8 36 ♜d1

Black is in a vice-like grip. The question is whether White can crack the black position.

36...♜d8 37 ♜a3 ♜f8 38 ♜1a2

Taking the rook off the back rank is a prophylactic measure that improves the white position slightly.

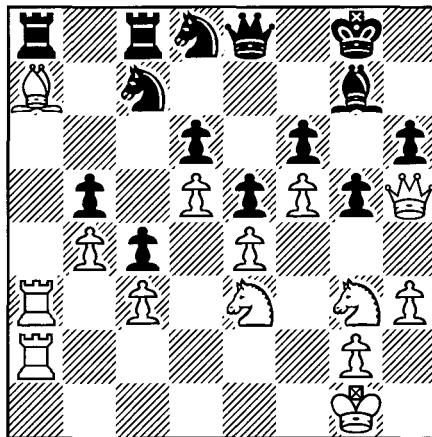
38...♝g8 39 ♜g4 ♜f8 40 ♜e3

Improving the worst placed piece once more.

40...♝g8 41 ♜xf7+ ♜xf7

If 41...♜xf7 42 ♜h5 ♜xh5 43 ♜xh5 ♜f7 44 ♜b6! opening the a-file would prove decisive.

42 ♜h5 ♜d8



Question: How does White make progress here?

Answer: 43 ♜g6!

Freeing the important h5-square for the g3-knight.

43...♚f8

43...♜xg6 44 fxg6 isn't any better as one knight will sink itself in f5 and the other h5.

44 ♜h5 1-0

Black isn't even material down, but resigned anyway. 44...♜e7 45 ♜b6 ♜ab8 46 ♜xc7 ♜xc7 47 ♜g4 ♜f7 48 ♜a6 is total domination on both sides of the board.

Summary

Karpov managed to correctly identify the imbalance in the position which he could control (the fight for the a-file), which coupled with his space advantage led to a python-like squeeze of the black position. Beautiful positional play.

In the next game we will see how Black, some 500 rating points higher than his opponent, wrests control of important squares and thus improves his minor pieces significantly.

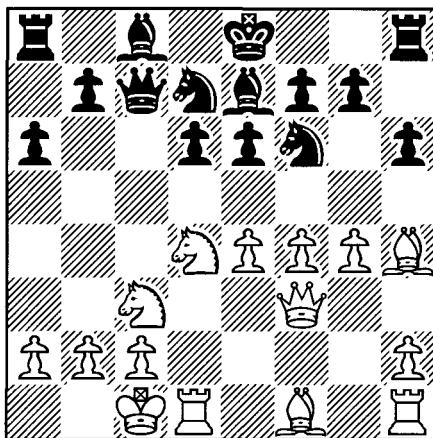
Game 88
K.Prem-B.Gundavaa
Al Ain 2008
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♜f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♜xd4 ♜f6 5 ♜c3 a6 6 ♜g5 e6 7 f4 h6!?

Quite a useful way of avoiding some of the main lines of the $\text{g}5$ Najdorf.

8 $\text{h}4 \text{ e}7$ 9 $\text{f}3 \text{ bd}7$ 10 $0-0-0$ $\text{c}7$ 11 $\text{g}4!$?

11 $\text{d}3$ $\text{g}5$ 12 $\text{fxg}5$ $\text{e}5$ 13 $\text{e}2 \text{ fg}4$ is a better way to allow the black pawn break.



Exercise: Stop and evaluate the position. Pay particular attention to the minor pieces. It appears as though all the white pieces are superior to the black ones. Can you find a way to challenge this assessment?

Answer: Evaluating:

- 1) Material is equal.
- 2) White's king is more secure than Black's at the moment and it is hard to see Black castling into that mass of white kingside pawns.
- 3) White has five pieces developed to Black's four (though it is Black to move).
- 4) White has more space.
- 5) All of the white pieces that are developed are more actively placed than their counterparts.

Question: How can the assessment of this position be anything other than White is better?

Answer: Gundavaa latches on to the concept of control of a very important central square and his pieces come to life.

11...g5!

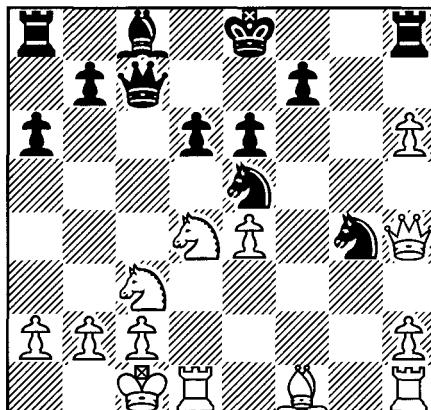
A very nice idea! Black uses the slightly exposed position of the h4-bishop to gain control of the e5-square for his knight.

12 $\text{fxg}5$

12 $\text{e}5?$ leads to a complete mess, but it is a fascinating way to block the e- square and is

a very principled way to play, trying to open up lines to the black king. After 12...dxe5 13 fxe5 hxg5 14 ♜g3 ♜b8 15 h4 gxh4 16 g5 ♜d5 (16...♜h5? 17 g6! was clearly better for White in I.Smolikov-A.Areshchenko, Alushta 2002) 17 ♜xd5 ♜xg5+ 18 ♛b1 exd5 19 ♜xd5 ♜f6 Black is hanging on by a thread.

12...♜e5 13 ♜g3 ♜fxg4 14 gxh6 ♜xh4 15 ♜xh4



Question: Black's knights have come to life, but his king is still in some danger. How can Black deal with this?

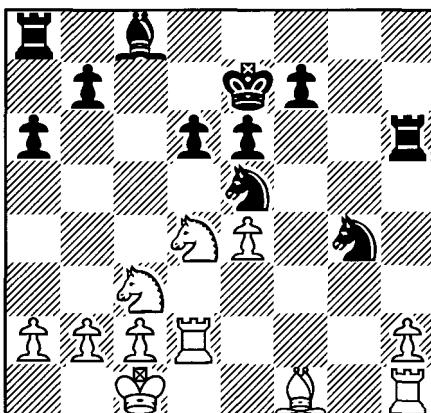
Answer: 15...♛e7!

A fine move, offering to exchange the queens or seize control of the g5-square.

16 ♜xe7+

16 ♜g3 should probably have been preferred, but after 16...♛g5+ 17 ♛b1 ♛e3! Black's queen will not take 'no' for an answer!

16...♛xe7 17 ♜d2 ♜xh6



Exercise: Re-evaluate the position.

Who is better here, by how much and why?

Answer: An evaluation:

- 1) Material is equal.
- 2) Neither king looks in any real trouble as the queens have been exchanged.
- 3) The telling factors here are the pawn structure and the activity of the pieces.
- 4) I would say that both black knights are superior to their white counterparts. There are no access points for either white knight due to the black pawn structure covering the important squares d5, f5 and b5. The c3-knight could make a play for the b6-square, however. The black knights have a brighter future due to weaknesses on the squares c4, e3, f3 and f2.
- 5) The rook on h6 is excellently placed, targeting the weak white h-pawn and the other black rook can back it up or occupy the open c- or g-files.
- 6) In the endgame, as we know, the pawn structure becomes a more telling factor. Here Black has two pawn islands to White's three. The h-pawn is passed (and therefore must be kept an eye on), but also a target for attack. Of bigger concern is the isolated e4-pawn, which if it falls will give Black a huge central pawn majority.

Conclusion: for these reasons we can assess this position as clearly better for Black.

18 h3 ♜d7

Preventing the white knight from accessing a4, whilst preparing for the development of the a8-rook.

19 ♜d1 ♜f6

Black targets the weaknesses in the white position.

20 ♜g2 ♜g8 21 ♜e3?

This natural looking move is a mistake, as White forgets about the defence of his e4-pawn momentarily.

21...♜e1 would have been better. Black could continue to build up slowly here with something like 21...♝h4 22 ♜c3 b5 23 a3 ♜c8!, looking to transfer the bishop to the long diagonal.

21...♝h4!

Now the e4-pawn falls.

22 ♜e2 ♜xe4 23 ♜d4 d5 24 ♜xe4 dxe4

Gundavaa doesn't want to ease the pressure on his lower-rated opponent's position by exchanging a pair of rooks. The h4-rook also keeps the white h-pawn in check.

25 ♜c3 ♜g3 26 ♜c4 ♜xc4 27 ♜xc4 f5?!

27...♜c6 would have been much simpler, depriving White of any counterplay on the seventh rank.

27 ♜c7! ♜d6 29 ♜xb7 ♜c6 30 ♜b6

30 ♜d1+ ♔e5 31 ♜b6 ♜e8 should be winning for Black, although the king on e5 isn't all

that comfortably placed.

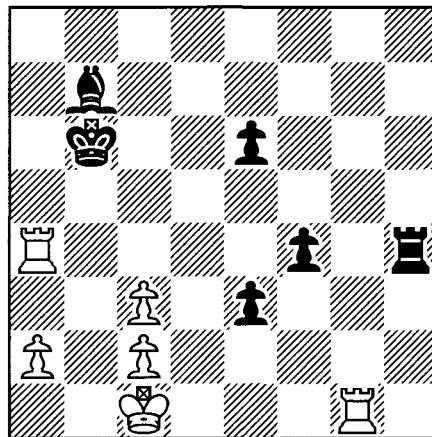
30...♝gxh3 31 ♜d1+ ♔c7 32 ♜xa6 ♜xc3?

Rather an unnecessary exchange sacrifice. Much simpler would have been 32...e3 33 ♜a7+ ♔b7 34 ♜e2 f4 when the black pawns are going to touch down.

33 bxc3 e3 34 ♜a7+ ♔b7 35 ♜e1

35 ♜d4! seems to be the most tenacious defence here: 35...♜h1+ 36 ♜d1 ♜h7 37 ♜a5! looking to get to the e5-square when the game is very much still alive.

35...f4 36 ♜g1 ♔b6 37 ♜a4



Exercise: Can you find a cute way to finish the game here?

Answer: 37...f3! 38 ♜xh4 f2 39 ♜b4+ ♔c5

39...♔a7?? would throw away all the hard work after 40 ♜g7 f1♛+ 41 ♔b2 ♛a6 42 ♜bxh7+ ♛xb7+ 43 ♜xb7+ ♔xb7 44 ♔c1 with a winning king and pawn ending for White.

40 ♜f1 e2

A triumph for the central pawns!

41 ♜xf2 e1♛+ 42 ♔b2 ♛xf2 43 ♜xb7 e5 44 ♜b4 ♛f3 45 a4 e4 46 a5 e3 47 a6 e2 0-1

Summary

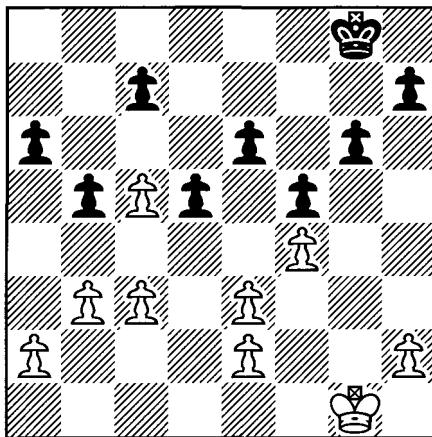
Dynamic pawn play by Black gave his minor pieces excellent central squares which proved very important. When making evaluations of piece activity be aware of the dynamic ways to fight for control of the important squares for the pieces, as with 11...g5 here.

Quickly Evaluating Pawn Structure in the Endgame: Pawn Islands

There are a number of different pawn structures that you should now be able to recognize pretty quickly when making an evaluation. Doubled pawns, isolated pawns, passed pawns, backward pawns and hanging pawns have all been discussed in the chapter on pawn play.

The pawn structure can give dynamic characteristics to the position. Doubled pawns allow the owner open files, isolated pawns can control strategic strongholds, and passed pawns need no introduction as they strive to become new queens.

Having said that, in general the pawn structure itself is a static feature – it will not change quickly and we can often assess the outcome of an endgame based on this. A quick way of assessing the general qualities of a pawn structure can be done by looking at the number of *pawn islands* a player possesses. A pawn island is a group of friendly pawns that are connected. In general, the more pawn islands you have, the weaker your structure is.

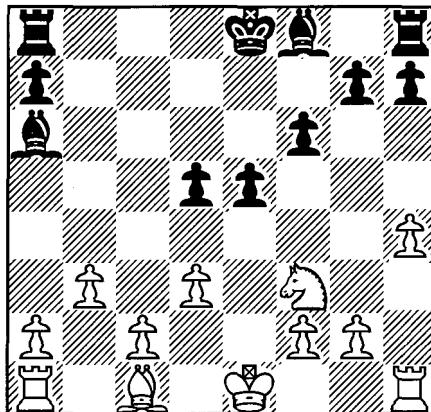


In this position Black has one pawn island, whereas White has three (h2, the e2-e3-f4 pawn mass and the queenside island). Material is equal and the kings are equally active. Evaluation: Black has good winning chances.

Revisiting the World Championship

Game 89
V.Anand-B.Gelfand
 World Championship (Game 12), Moscow 2012

Exercise: Our initial material assessment here saw White a pawn up, but of course we cannot stop there. What other factors are in play in this position and how would you proceed as Black?



Answer: There are other imbalances in the position, which we must take into account and in this particular case they favour Black. He has a pair of bishops (which is given in some sources a value of 7), control of the centre and an open c-file so pressure can be applied to the pawn on c2. Given these factors I would say that Black has full compensation for the pawn. The computer agrees, giving an evaluation of +0.11, a microscopic advantage to White. Bearing in mind the factors at work here, I would say that finishing development, followed closely by applying pressure down the c-file would be a logical course of action.

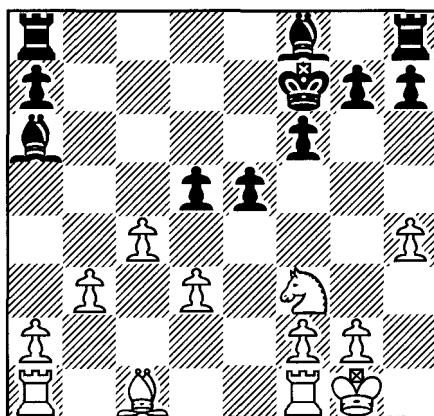
16 0-0

White decides to evacuate his king, due to the pawn break ...e5-e4 which threatens to open lines towards it.

16...♞f7

Of course in the endgame there is no reason to castle. The king will be perfectly safe and better placed in the centre.

17 c4

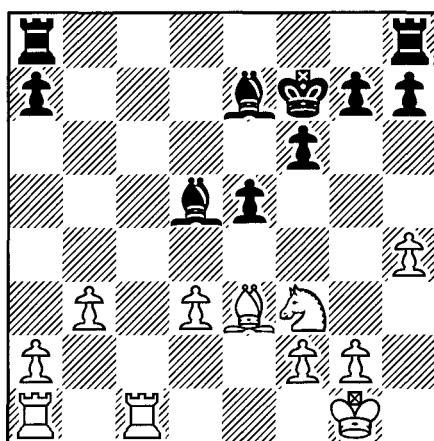


Exercise: This changes matters. The c-file is no longer the best for the black rooks. What is the drawback to White's move and what should the black plan be here?

Answer: 17...♝e7

The break weakened the d3-pawn and d-file will now probably become open. As well as this the bishop on a6 is now not so well placed and the long a8-h1 diagonal should also open. Black seeks to finish development before trying to use these factors. Note that Black is in no rush to defend his d5-pawn as after 18 cxd5 ♜hd8 19 ♜e3 ♜xd5 he will regain both pawns with a good position.

18 ♜e3 ♜b7 19 cxd5 ♜xd5 20 ♜fc1



Question: White has grabbed control of the c-file himself. How should Black generate counterplay?

Answer: 20...a5!

An accurate move, using a minority attack to weaken the white queenside.

20...♜xf3 21 gxf3 ♜hd8 would also be a logical way to play, but would give White more chances than in the game. After a sequence like 22 ♜c7! ♜xd3 23 ♜c5 ♜e8 24 ♜xa7 ♜xf3 25 ♜d1 the connected passed queenside pawns look dangerous.

21 ♜c5 ♜hd8 22 ♜xe7 ½-½

Here a draw was agreed. After something like 22...♝xe7 23 ♜c7+ ♜d7 24 ♜ac1 a4 25 ♜d2 axb3 26 axb3 ♜a3 the queenside will be liquidated and Black will be absolutely fine.

Key Points

- 1) Being able to evaluate a position well will give you an idea of what the plans for both sides should be in the future.
- 2) An initial material assessment can be done quickly and easily using the cancellation method, and should give you a good starting 'handle' on what is going on in the game.
- 3) Positional factors such as king safety, development, space, etc, should then be taken into account. King safety will often override material in terms of importance.
- 4) Be aware of how the situation is changing over the course of the game. After a number of moves, stop and reassess. What's changed? What should the plan now be?
- 5) When evaluating an endgame you can get a quick idea as to who is better by counting the number of pawn islands both players possess.

Chapter Ten

Winning Won Positions

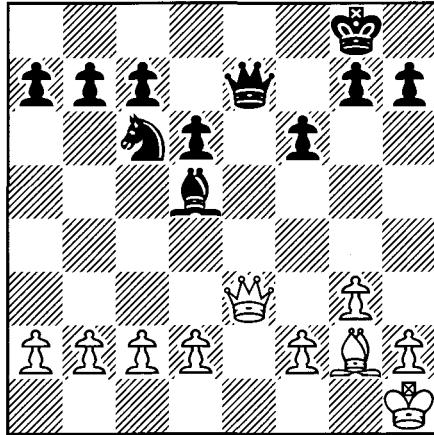
The hardest part of chess is winning a won game. – Frank Marshall

Who agrees with the American Grandmaster? “I do, I do” I hear you cry. It would be against Marshall anyway, as he was known as the master of the swindle! It certainly sometimes feels like it’s the hardest part of the game for me anyway. I suspect if there was a book out there called ‘Winning Won Positions’ (a quick internet search fails to throw it up), then it would make the author an awful lot of money. Sadly I am not qualified to write such a book. The number of points I have squandered in my life as a result of failing to convert winning advantages is huge. So remember when it happens that you’re not the only one, even if at times it can feel like you are.

Before you skip this chapter, distraught at the fact that I cannot provide the magic formula you seek, please read on! I hope that in my search for improvement in this area I have picked up some useful advice I can pass on to you.

Basic Winning Techniques 1: Exchanging to Win

When we are material up, one of the most valuable techniques we have at our disposal to convert the position is to start looking to exchange pieces into an endgame. This is good because it normally reduces the amount of counterplay and chances your opponent can create as he has fewer pieces left. In the diagram below Black is a piece up:



Exercise: The simplest way to convert this winning position is to play what?

Answer: 1... $\mathbb{Q}xg2+$

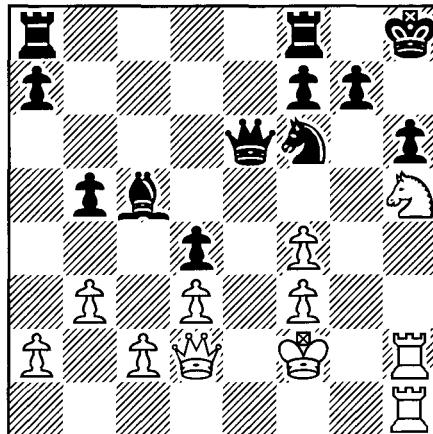
1... $\mathbb{W}xe3??$ would allow the intermediate 2 $\mathbb{Q}xd5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 3 $f xe3$.

2 $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $\mathbb{W}xe3$ 3 $f xe3$

Black will win the endgame with the extra knight. This fundamental technique should become your bread and butter, your staple diet for converting winning positions when you are substantially up on material.

Here is a nice simple example of exchanging off to win, taken from a recent chess camp I worked at. Incidentally, Arul playing White, has the same initials as the current World Champion!

Game 90
A.Viswanathan-A.Seela
NorCal House of Chess Camp 2012



Exercise: Black is a piece up, but under some mild pressure down the h-file. What is the simplest way to convert the position?

Answer: 1... $\mathbb{Q}e3+$!

Trading the queens removes any hint of counterplay.

2 $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $dxe3+$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$

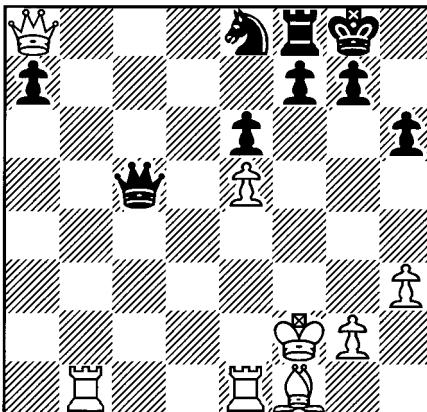
Black keeps the knights on, as he seeks to remove the blockader of his passed e-pawn. Unsurprisingly he won a few moves later.

I would have been just as happy to be honest had you played 3... $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ f5 which is also easily winning.

Exchanging to Win – A More Complex Example

Game 91
S.Chevannes-N.Regan
British League 2010

We pick the game up between two of England's strongest female players with White up a rook for two pawns, although her king is the more exposed. Watch the way that Sabrina carefully extinguishes any Black counterplay:



Question: What is the safest way to respond to the check?

Answer: 26 $\hat{Q}g3!$

The aim is to run the king to safety on h2. Otherwise:

- a) 26 $\hat{Q}e3?? \hat{Q}c2+$ would be embarrassing.
- b) 26 $\hat{Q}f3?!$ would allow more counterplay than is necessary after 26...f6.
- c) 26 $\hat{Q}e2?$ is the wrong way to go. The king will be exposed in the middle of the board after 26... $\hat{Q}f6$ 27 $\hat{Q}b7 \hat{Q}d5$.

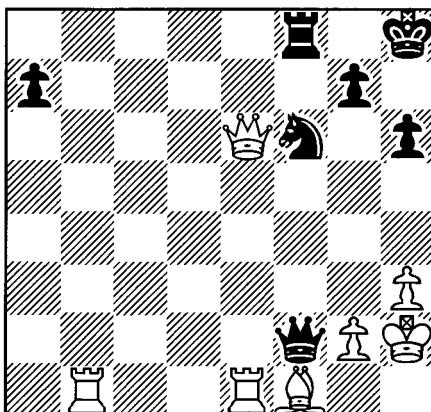
26...f6 27 $\hat{Q}e4!$

As we have seen on many occasions throughout this book, the principle of centralization is extremely strong. 27 $\hat{Q}h2 fxe5$ 28 $\hat{Q}e4$ would be just as good.

27...fxe5 28 $\hat{Q}xe5 \hat{Q}f2+$

Black must of course keep the queens on to have any chance.

29 $\hat{Q}h2 \hat{Q}f6$ 30 $\hat{Q}xe6+ \hat{Q}h8$



Exercise: Find a good way to remove any lingering black counterplay by trying to exchange pieces.

Answer: 31 ♕e3 ♘h4 32 ♕g3!

The white queen completely covers the king and the game is over.

32...♝d4 33 ♖bd1 ♜b4 34 ♖d6! 1-0

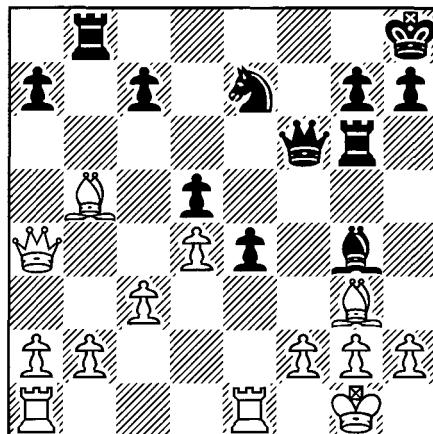
Threatening to exchange pieces can often gain you time if your king is exposed.

My brother Laurence also plays a handy game of chess himself. Here we will see him apply the exchanging principle to a position where he is a pawn up in order to neutralize any initiative Black might have.

Game 92

L.Hunt-J.Ruigrok

Guernsey 2002



Exercise: White has grabbed a pawn in the opening, but Black has some activity to show for it. With best play Laurence can stay in control here. What's best for him?

Answer: 20 ♖e8!

A good move, disrupting the harmony between Black's rook and bishop.

20...♝h6

20...♝g5? 21 h4 ♖f5 22 ♖d7 would be a crafty way of winning material!

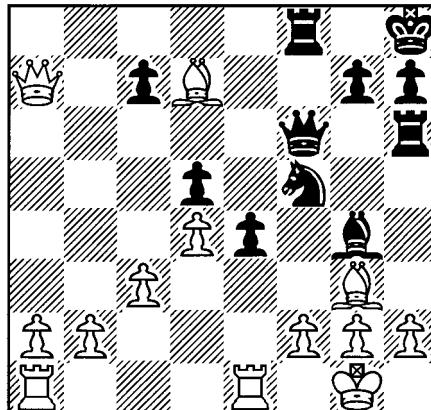
21 ♜d7!

This is the main idea. White removes the potentially dangerous g4-bishop (it had dreams of sacrificing itself on f3).

21...♝f5

After 21...♜xd7 22 ♜xd7 Black doesn't have any compensation for the extra pawn and 21...♝g6 would be a waste of time, of course, and after 22 ♜xg4 ♜xg4 23 ♜xa7 ♜xb2 24 ♜xc7 White nets another pawn.

22 ♜xa7 ♜f8



Exercise: Unfortunately for Black the rook has to stay on the weak back rank. What's the cleanest winning plan here for White?

Answer: 23 ♜xf5!

Best. Simplifying the kingside situation.

Instead 23 ♜xc7? ♜xg3 24 fxg3 (24 ♜xg3 ♜xd7) 24...♜f2+ 25 ♔h1 ♜f7! is a nasty switch-back. 26 ♜f1 is now not possible for White so he loses the d7-bishop. Always try to limit your opponent's counterplay when you are winning!

23...♜xf5 24 ♜xc7

White is two pawns up. The extra foot soldiers are also big trumps here as they are connected passed pawns.

24...♝f3

Black tries to use the light squares around the king.

25 ♜e5

Again following the exchanging approach, Laurence centralizes his queen. Actually 25 gxf3 also wins: 25...exf3 26 ♔h1 ♜h3 27 ♜g1 and Black is out of ideas.

25...♝d7

25...♜xe5 26 dxе5 ♜g4 27 a4 is an opposite-coloured bishop ending that White will win due to the a- and b-pawns.

26 a4 1-0

There is of course some play left in the position, but White is too well placed for Black to seriously trouble him.

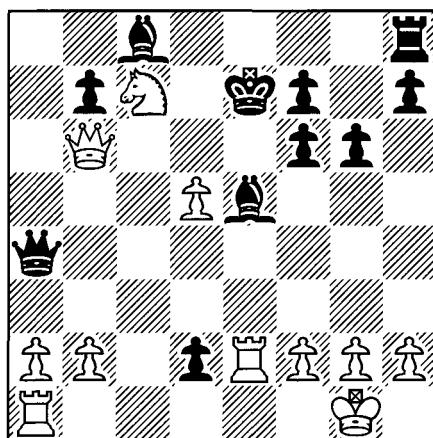
Summary

Having a clear idea of which basic endings are winning will help you know the right time to exchange pieces. In this game White efficiently converted his extra pawn by exchanging on the kingside to neutralize any initiative, leaving his extra material on the queenside to win the day.

Basic Winning Technique 2: Keeping the Pieces On If You Have the Attack

If you have an attack and you are already material up, keep the pieces on and go for the king rather than exchanging. Remember that checkmate ends the game and can save you hours of long hard graft. It is often the case that the opponent will shed more material trying to defend against the attack. Here we will see me spectacularly fail to apply that principle back on the island of Leros.

*Game 93
A.Hunt-L.Andersen
Leros 2009*



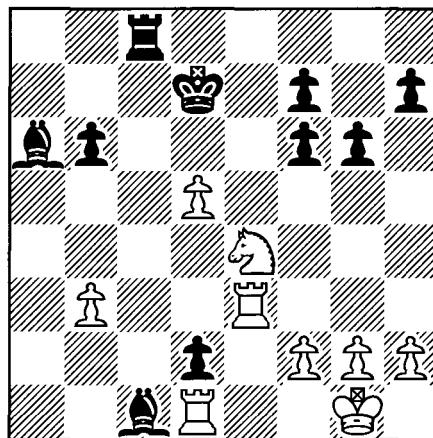
Exercise: Black has just captured on a4, leaving White an exchange up. How would you proceed?

25 ♕b3?

Answer: Not like this! White assumes that the endgame will be easily winning for him and therefore exchanges queens, but this is definitely wrong.

I have no idea why I didn't just play the correct move 25 $\mathbb{Q}xd2$. Perhaps I was giving my opponent's attack too much credit after 25... $\mathbb{W}f4$, but it is the white attack that is the stronger after 26 d6+ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ (or 26... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 27 d7! $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{W}xh2+$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{W}h1+$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{W}xa1$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}e6+$! followed by $\mathbb{Q}d8$ mate) 27 $\mathbb{W}b5+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 28 $\mathbb{W}a5!$

25... $\mathbb{W}xb3$ 26 axb3 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}c1$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ b6 30 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$



Exercise: Black has cleverly organized his rook and bishops to limit the white pieces. Does 32 $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ help White?

32 f4?

Answer: Yes! Here I was still annoyed with myself for exchanging the queens and missed this relatively straightforward idea. White could just win the pawn with 32 $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}e4+$ as 33... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ (33... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$? loses to 34 $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}xd2+$) 34 g4 still gives him good winning chances.

32...f5 ½-½

Black is definitely not worse here and I was quite pleased Lars offered me a draw!

Summary

It's easy after you make a mistake (and you often realize you have straight after making the move) to compound your error by beating yourself up about it. It is very important to remember to stay calm. Everyone makes mistakes! It is often how we react to them that is the most important thing. Here I threw away the win twice: once by exchanging queens unnecessarily and then at the end through sheer frustration. Keep calm and carry on!

Limiting the Opponent's Counterplay

One of the more common ways of not winning a game of chess you really should do is by giving your opponent more counterplay than is necessary. This can lead to muddy waters where although the win may still be there, the enemy has the chance to complicate the issue. Witness the following example by up and coming junior Adam Taylor.

Game 94

A.Taylor-J.Pink

Hastings 2010/11

Petroff Defence

1 e4 e5 2 ♜f3 ♜f6 3 ♜xe5 ♜xe4?

A basic error.

The main line Petroff defence runs 3...d6 4 ♜f3 ♜xe4 5 d4. Here 5 ♜e2?! is a surprisingly common continuation I see: 5...♜e7 6 d3?! ♜f6 with a completely equal game. However, 5 ♜c3?! is a pretty handy alternative to try and unbalance the game: 5...♜xc3 (5...d5?! 6 ♜e2! is strong) 6 dxc3 ♜e7 7 ♜e3 followed by ♜d2 and o-o-o.

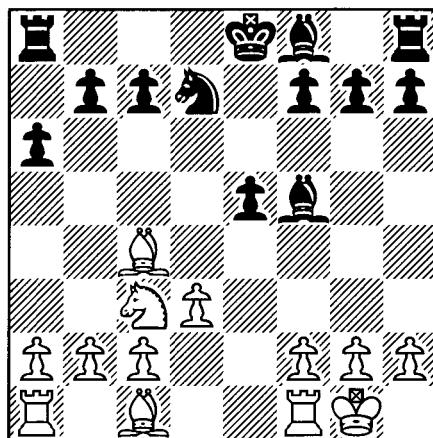
4 ♜e2 ♜e7

At least Black didn't compound his error with 4...♜f6?? 5 ♜c6+.

5 ♜xe4 d6 6 ♜c4?

Adam didn't want an extra pawn! 6 d4 dxе5 7 dxе5 is just that – an extra pawn for no compensation.

6...♜xe5 7 ♜xe5+ dxе5 8 0-0 ♜f5 9 d3 ♜d7 10 ♜c3 a6



Exercise: Can you make use of your slight lead in development here?

Answer: 11 f4! Commendably with the black king still in the centre, White tries to open up the e- and f-files.

11 $\mathbb{Q}d5?!$ looks tempting, but allows Black an easy game with 11...0-0-0.

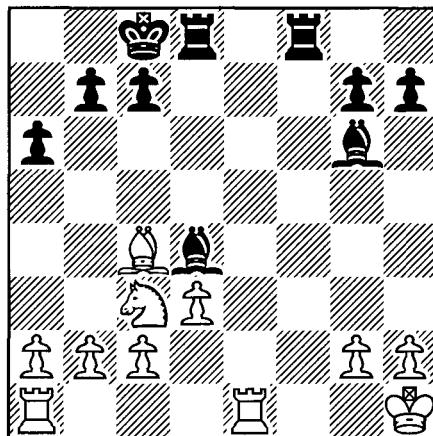
11... $\mathbb{Q}c5+$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 13 $f\times e5$

13 $f5$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}e4!$ strikes me as being more natural, trying to play against the misplaced bishop on h5 as 15 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ is threatened.

13... $\mathbb{Q}\times e5$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $f6$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 0-0-0 16 $\mathbb{Q}\times e5$ $f\times e5$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}x e5$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$

White has won a pawn, but Black has the bishop pair as some compensation.

18 $\mathbb{Q}ee1$ $\mathbb{Q}hf8$



Exercise: A spot of prophylaxis for you! What is Black threatening and what can White do to prevent this threat?

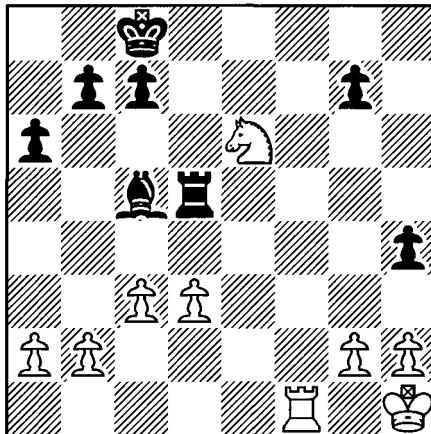
Answer: 19 $\mathbb{Q}f1$

A good move, stopping the invasion of the rook to f2.

19... $h5?!$

The start of a mistaken plan. This gives White time to organize his queenside pieces. There are no targets on the kingside so this plan is flawed. 19... $\mathbb{Q}de8$ seems much more natural to me.

20 $\mathbb{Q}ab1$ $h4$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 22 $c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}e6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf1+$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$



Question: We now find White a pawn up with the move in an endgame, with a decision to make: to exchange the knight for the bishop or not?

27 ♜xc5?

Answer: The desire to remove the supposedly superior bishop is not the best. Notice how play now also enters a single rook endgame. Remember Dr Tarrasch's words? Watch what happens here!

27 d4 ♜e7 28 ♜xg7 is much cleaner. It gives White two extra pawns and the black bishop is hampered by the white pawn chain.

27...♜xc5 28 d4 ♜c6 29 ♜f8+ ♔d7 30 ♜f7+ ♔d8 31 ♜xg7?

From a practical point of view this is a serious error. White fails to consider Black's counterplay.

The strongest move was 31 ♔g1! which prevents the opponent's rook from invading on the second rank: 31...g6 (31...♜e6 32 ♔f2 is the point) 32 ♔f2 ♜e6 33 ♜h7.

31...♜e6!

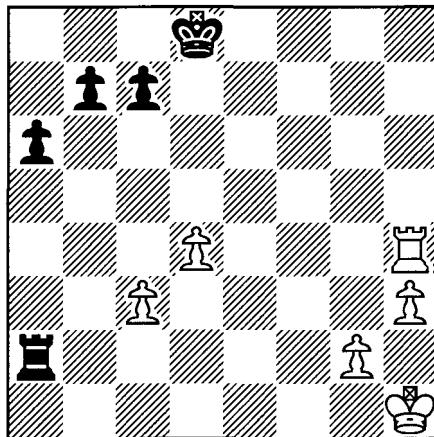
Now there will be a race on, as the rook will start eating the white queenside pawns.

32 h3

It is important to recognize there a race is about to start and thus push the pawns as every tempo is crucial, although 32 g4! hxg3 33 ♜xg3 ♜e1+ 34 ♜g1 ♜e2 35 ♜b1 ♔d7 is still going to be difficult to win.

32...♜e2 33 ♜g4 ♜xb2 34 ♜xh4 ♜xa2

The problem for Adam now is that there are three possible results in the game. Black, from nowhere, has obtained some winning chances thanks to his outside passed pawn.



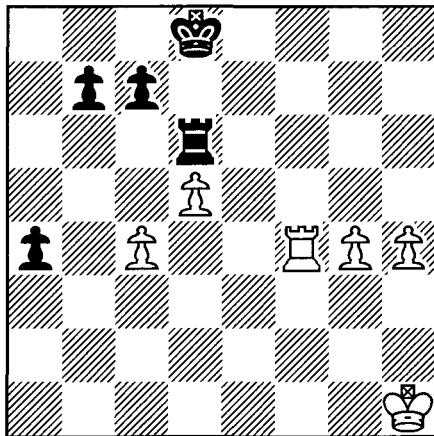
35...Rf4!

A good multipurpose move, preparing if necessary to defend the c-pawn whilst freeing the kingside pawns to advance.

35...Ra5 36 g4 Rd5 37 c4?!

In a race such as this time is everything! 37 h4 a5 38 g5 Rd6 39 h5 Rd5 40 h6 Rxg5 41 Rf2 Rg8 42 h7 Rh8 43 Rf7! wins for White, as Rg7 followed by Rg8+ is threatened.

37...Rd6 38 d5 a5 39 h4 a4



Exercise: The a-pawn is fast as the black rook can support it from a6. Which is the right way for the white rook to go? In front of the pawn or behind it?

Answer: 40 Rf8+ Ke7 41 Ra8??

Following the basic endgame principle of putting the rook behind the passed pawn, but failing to appreciate the specifics of the position.

41...♜a6

Suddenly it's over. Black is winning.

42 ♜c8 a3 43 ♜xc7+ ♔d6 44 ♜f7 a2 45 ♜f1 a1# 46 ♜xa1 ♜xa1+ 47 ♔g2 ♜c1 48 h5 ♜xc4 49 ♔f3 ♔xd5 50 g5 ♔e6 51 h6 ♜h4 0-1

White resigned, as after 52 ♔g3 ♜h1 53 ♔g4 b5 he cannot make any progress on the kingside.

Summary

This game highlights two main points.

1) When ahead always keep focused on your opponent's potential counterplay. With 31 ♜xg7? Adam took his eye off the ball momentarily and gave Black chances.

2) Try to be as concrete as you can on the specifics of the position, remembering that every game is different, and look out for small details that can make all the difference. Here White forgot about 41...♜a6.

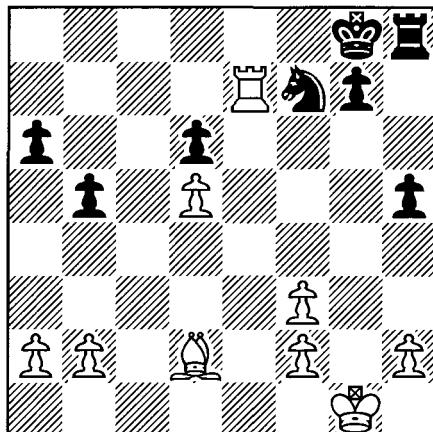
Limiting the Opponent's Counterplay 2: 'The Return of the Counterplay'

Sounds like a movie title doesn't it? Peter Svidler has played a brilliant game up to this point and is certainly winning the following position with best play against the current World Champion.

Game 95

P.Svidler-V.Anand

Dos Hermanas 1999



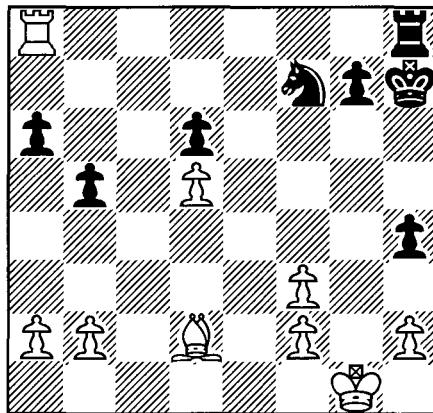
Exercise: Can you prevent any possible black counterplay
and thus give yourself the ‘cleanest’ win there is?

32 ♜a7?!

So natural to go after the a-pawn, but this gives Anand the chance to generate play.

Answer: 32 h4! was the killer: for example, after 32... ♔e5 33 ♕g2 ♔h7 34 ♜c3 White is well and truly in control.

32...h4! 33 ♜a8+ ♔h7



Question: Which piece to take, the pawn or the rook?

Answer: 34 ♜xa6

Svidler decides that the minor piece ending is not so easy to win, due to the weak white pawn structure. Indeed, 34 ♜xh8+ ♔xh8 35 ♕g2 ♔g6 36 ♕h3 ♕f5! gives Black good chances to hold.

34...♔g6 35 ♜b6 ♜c8!

Black seeks the maximum counterplay possible down the open c-file.

36 ♜xb5?!

Svidler goes three pawns up, but now the black rook enters on the second rank.

36 ♜c3 would be the natural way to stop the penetration of the rook and was probably safer than the game. Then 36...♜c5! 37 f4 ♜xd5 38 ♜b7! ties Black down quite effectively.

36...♜c2 37 ♜c3

The passive-looking 37 ♜e1 may well have been better here, as it covers the back rank: 37...♛e5 38 ♜b3 ♜c1 39 ♛f1 seems to keep everything under control.

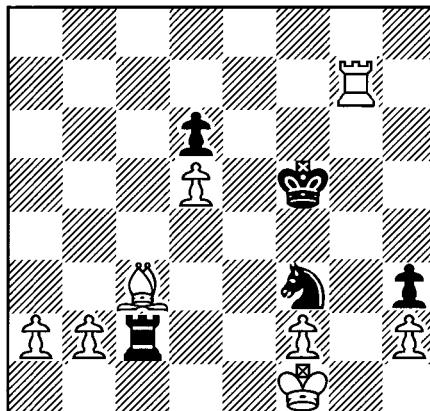
37...h3

Now there is a mate in one to deal with.

38 ♛f1 ♗g5

The situation is extremely unclear and strong nerves will now play an important role.

39 ♜b7 ♜xf3 40 ♜xg7+ ♔f5



Exercise: Can you find a good defensive move for White?

Answer: 41 ♜g3!

In the nick of time the rook comes back to help the king.

41...♔e4 42 ♜xh3 ♜c1+ 43 ♔e2

Not 43 ♔g2?? ♜g1 mate!

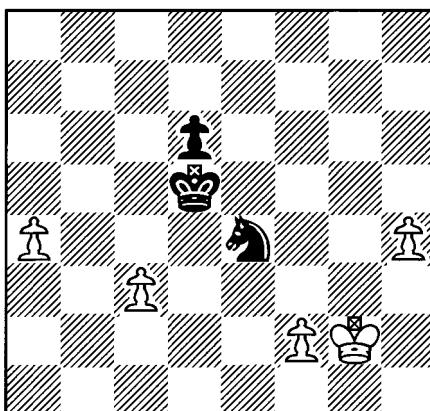
43...♜xc3! 44 bxc3 ♜g1+ 45 ♔f1 ♜xh3

I'm sure Svidler didn't envisage being a piece down (okay for three pawns!) 15 moves ago. Due to some tenacious and active play by Black the result is still unclear.

46 a4

Passed pawns must be pushed!

46...♕xd5 47 ♔g2 ♜g5 48 h4 ♜e4



Question: What should White play here?

Answer: 49 h5!

Due to the passed pawns on both flanks Black doesn't get any respite.

49... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 50 c4 $\mathbb{Q}d2$

50... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 51 f4! is a nice demonstration of how to use split pawns against an enemy king.

51 a5 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 52 a6 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 53 a7 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 54 f4!

Svidler has managed to navigate his way back to a winning position and will now improve his king. Black can only sit and wait.

54... $\mathbb{Q}a8$

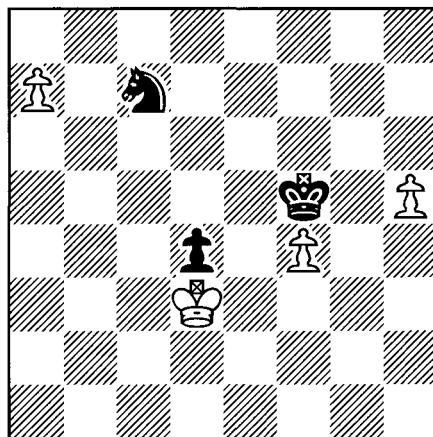
54... $\mathbb{Q}xf4??$, of course, allows the pawn to queen after 55 h6.

55 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d5 56 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 57 $\mathbb{Q}d2!$

Seeking to bring the king around the queenside to hassle the black knight.

57 $\mathbb{Q}d4??$ would be very careless: 57... $\mathbb{Q}b5+$ 58 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ is a draw.

57... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 58 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 59 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ d4 60 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 61 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$



Exercise: If it were Black to move here, Anand would be in zugzwang (as ... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ would allow $\mathbb{Q}e4$). Can Svidler somehow make this happen?

Answer: 62 $\mathbb{Q}e2!$

Triangulation wastes the move.

62... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 63 $\mathbb{Q}f2$

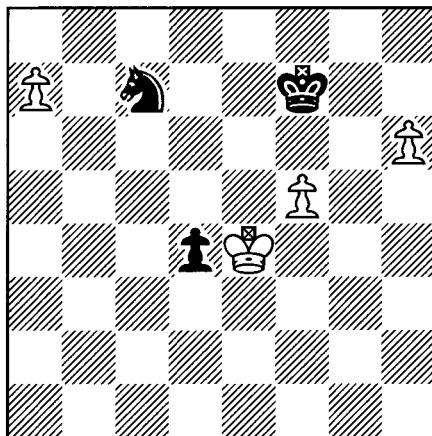
63 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ would have been just as good: 63... $\mathbb{Q}a8$ (or 63... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 64 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 65 $\mathbb{Q}e4$) 64 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 65 $\mathbb{Q}e4$.

63... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 64 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 65 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 66 $\mathbb{Q}d3$

Now it is Black to move, but Anand keeps going.

66... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 67 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 68 $f5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 69 $h6$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ ½-½

Here a draw was, indeed, agreed! A tremendous fight. Anand showed steely determination, even in what seemed like a hopeless position, while White should probably have kept a closer hold on the black counterplay when he had a chance. The final position is an exercise in calculation.



Exercise: Actually White is winning here after 70 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$. How much can you calculate?

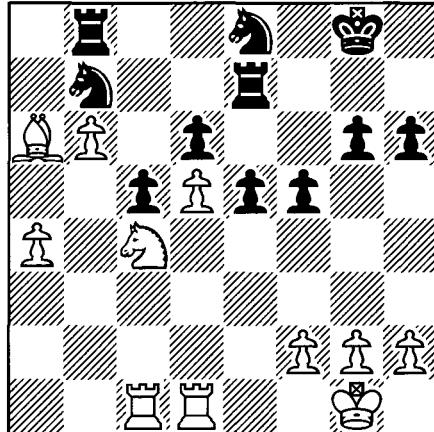
Answer: The analysis here comes from Hecht in *Mega Database 2012*. White wins by force after 70... $\mathbb{Q}b5+$ 71 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ 72 $\mathbb{Q}b6!$ (a lovely idea, dominating the black knight; now 72... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ is met by the motif 73 $f6!$ $\mathbb{Q}c8+$ 74 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 75 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ followed by $\mathbb{Q}e7$ when the pawn will queen) 72... $\mathbb{Q}c8+$ 73 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ and now:

- a) 73... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 74 $h7!$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ (or 74... $\mathbb{Q}d5+$ 75 $\mathbb{Q}d6$) 75 $f6+!$ wins.
- b) 73... $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 74 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$ (if 74... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 75 $h7!$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 76 $f6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ 77 $f7$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 78 $\mathbb{Q}e8!$) 75 $h7$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 76 $f6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ 77 $f7$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 78 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ and wins.

Overrating a Material Advantage

It can sometimes be the case that we overrate the ‘progress’ we are making when we convert a large positional advantage into a material gain. It can often be the case that the opponent, who previously had a horribly passive position, gains some counterplay that wasn’t warranted. Here Harriet is level on material against the strong Irish player Mark Quinn, but has two huge connected passed pawns on the queenside and the knights on e8 and b7 are badly tied down.

Game 96
H.Hunt-M.Quinn
Witley 1996



Exercise: What should White play here?

28 a5?

Answer: 28 $\mathbb{Q}b5$, re-routing the bishop to the stronger c6-square, seems best. There it covers the d5-pawn, freeing the rooks to move to the a- and b-files to support the passed pawns. After 28... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 29 a5 $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ Black will probably have to give a rook for one of the pawns.

28... $\mathbb{Q}xa5!$

Mark must have jumped at this opportunity. At the cost of a piece both of the dangerous pawns are removed and his rooks have life again down the a-, b- and c-files.

29 $\mathbb{Q}xa5 \mathbb{R}xb6$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}c4 \mathbb{R}a7$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}c6 \mathbb{R}d7$ 32 $\mathbb{R}b1$

White still has the position under control, but the win is that much further away. In the end after a huge battle amazingly Black won.

Summary

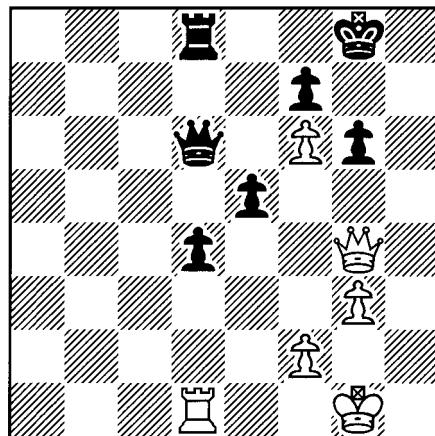
Sometimes patience is the best policy when you have a strong position. This can be particularly true if your advantage is positional and your opponent's position is passive. Seek to maximize the strength of all your forces before making the decisive breakthrough.

It's all in the Mind

A lot of the difficulty associated with winning won positions is mental. Perhaps the most

common reason we don't win as many games as we should is due to relaxing too early in winning positions. This subject will be touched upon again in Chapter Eleven on Defensive Resourcefulness, but for now let me illustrate what I mean by looking at one of my most painful defeats ever in the beautiful Italian town of Bratto.

Game 97
A.David-A.Hunt
 Bratto 2007



Black has survived a 'pseudo-attack' on the kingside and is a safe pawn up. The tournament situation was such that this last round win by either player would earn a decent prize.

35...Qh4

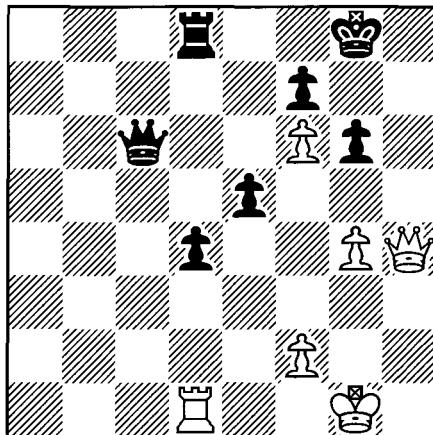
My thoughts at the time were something like this: "I'm actually going to win this game. Why is this guy playing on? Okay, he can't go Qh6 as his f6-pawn is hanging, so I'll improve the position of my queen."

35...Qc6

"I wonder what I'm going to do with all the money? Perhaps buy some nice shiny Italian leather shoes for work and I'll probably also win a nice cheese!" (They give them out as prizes in Bratto.)

36 g4

"Okay he wants to go g4-g5 followed by Qh6, but I've got that covered."



Exercise: What is the cleanest way for Black to win?

36... $\mathbb{W}f3??$

"I've stopped the threat of $\mathbb{R}d3$, am covering the f6-pawn and the g4-pawn. He's going to go $\mathbb{R}c1$ and I'm going to queen my d-pawn."

Answer: 36... $d3!$ wins relatively easily, as 37 $g5$ $\mathbb{R}d4$ 38 $\mathbb{W}h6$ $\mathbb{R}g4+$ 39 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{W}g2+$ 40 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{W}e4+$ 41 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}e2+$ 42 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{W}c2$ is mate.

37 $\mathbb{R}d3!!$

Time stopped for a second, before the sheer horror of what had just happened became clear. Usually in such situations I turn a bright shade of red before storming unsportingly out of the tournament hall! (Remember this if you play me, and apologies in advance.) This move, of course, is completely crushing, as it gains a tempo for the rook to swing to the h-file.

37... $\mathbb{W}f4$

37... $\mathbb{W}xd3$ 38 $\mathbb{W}h6$ $\mathbb{W}d1+$ 39 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ is the end of the checks.

38 $\mathbb{R}h3$ $\mathbb{W}c1+$ 39 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{W}c6+$ 40 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ 1-0

And after resigning I stormed out, hating chess, my opponent and in particular myself for relaxing too early. Such crushing psychological blows have been dealt time and time again at all levels. For me they usually result in wanting to give up chess for good (but try as I might, I can't). What we can and should do instead is to be strong and learn from the mistake, endeavouring not to let it happen again.

Summary

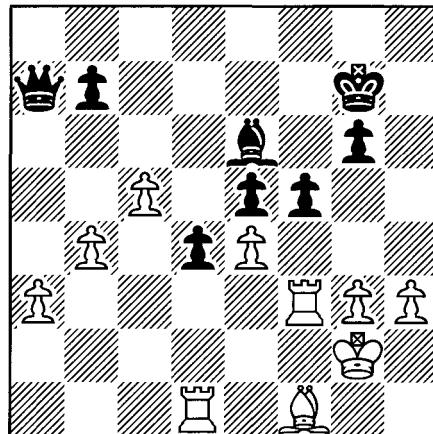
Relaxing too early in a won position is one sure-fire way of shedding points and I can point to this as the reason I missed 37 $\mathbb{R}d3$ in this particular game. Keep focused until your opponent resigns! The silver lining was that I won a nice Italian cheese anyway.

Beware the 41st Move!

"The number of 'unnecessary' errors that have been committed on move 41 are legion." – Edmar Mednis

A big tragedy that can befall a player with the winning position comes just after the time control, whether that be move 31, 41, 61 or whenever. We've probably all been there, surviving a furious time-scramble and feeling contented when that last move has been made and extra time has been added. Adrenaline has been pumping through your system and now the brain starts to relax. This is when we often make mistakes. Look, it can happen even to the greatest! Here we pick the game up with four moves to the time-control. Black has just played 36...f5 and is now winning.

Game 98
E.Santasiere-R.Fischer
 West Orange Open 1957



37 ♜d3

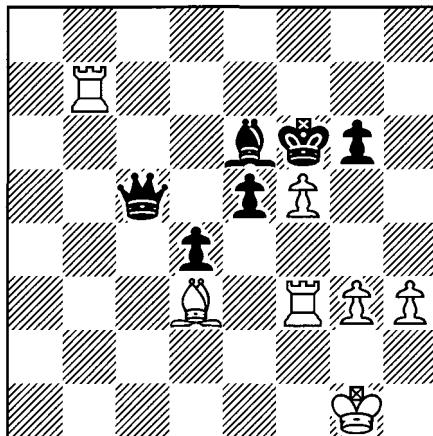
Unfortunately for White due to his weakness along the a8-h1 diagonal he cannot hold all his pawns.

37...♛xa3 38 ♔g1 ♛xb4 39 ♜b1 ♛xc5 40 ♜xb7+ ♔f6?

On the last move before the time control Fischer puts his king in the line of fire.
 40...♔h6 was safer and better.

41 exf5?

41 ♔g2! was a more stubborn defence.



41... ♜d5??

Fischer relaxes and blunders away the game horribly!

Both the recaptures 41...gxsf5 and 41...Rxsf5 win easily.

42 fxe6+! 1-0

Presumably Black had missed that 42...♜xf3 43 ♜f7+ would pick up the queen.

Summary

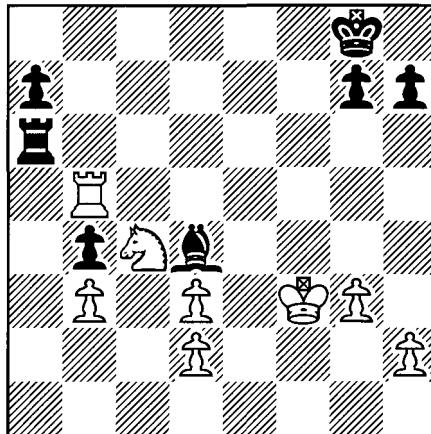
Don't relax just because you have made the time control! Take a few moments – go for a walk and clear your head of what has gone before. Often the battle will only just have got started and you need to redouble your efforts after the time control. Don't forget that once the enemy has nothing to lose he can become an even more dangerous opponent!

Stay Positive and Don't Expect the Position to Win Itself

Let's take a look at a game of one of my former students, Callum Kilpatrick, played in another beautiful town in Italy. This was his first round game against the experienced GM Rotstein after almost a year away from the board. Little did he know at the time he would go on to make his first IM and first GM norm in the same tournament!

Game 99
C.Kilpatrick-A.Rotstein
Livigno Open 2011

Let's take stock. White is a pawn up and it is passed (the d-pawn), but also doubled and isolated. Black has a bishop against a knight, or should I say that White has a knight against a bishop?



41...Qf6+

Question: What should we do with the king?

Answer: 42 Qe4!

Positivity is the name of the game here. White abandons his kingside pawns for the moment as his trump card lies through the centre.

42...Qg1 43 Bb8+ Qf8

Black cannot dare expose his king even though he would like to keep the rooks on the board.

The attacking combination of king, knight and rook is too dangerous after 43...Qf7 44 Qe5+ Qe6 45 d4!.

44 Bxf8+

A good decision. Endgames can often be won by thinking in ‘phases’. The first phase was to get the rooks off. Next will be to secure the kingside pawns before advancing the d-pawn. Instead 44 Bxb4? Qxh2 45 Bb7 Qxg3 46 Bxa7 h5 gives Black too much counterplay and any result is suddenly possible. The black bishop is now the superior piece as it can be used to both support the kingside pawns and cover against the white queenside advance.

44...Bxf8 45 h3

The pawns should be placed on the opposite-coloured squares to the enemy bishop.

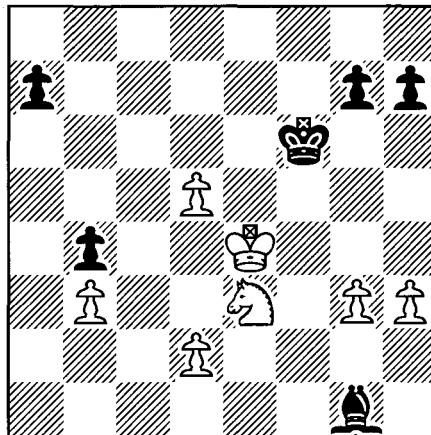
45...Qe7 46 d4

46 Qd5 is also positive and good, heading for the queenside. If 46...Qd7 47 Qe5+ Qc7 48 Qc6 wins the b-pawn.

46...Qe6 47 d5+ Qf6 48 Qe3

48 d4 would also have been very logical, cutting off the bishop from the defence of the queenside for the moment: for example, 48...Qf2 49 g4 Qe7 50 Qe5 with the knight heading to c6. However, White’s task would be made much harder after the hasty 48 d6? Qe6 49 d4

$\mathbb{Q}f2$ 50 $g4$ $\mathbb{Q}g3$ 51 $d5+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ when the weakness of the doubled isolated pawns is apparent.



Exercise: Callum wants to free a path for his king to the queenside. What is Black's best response?

Answer: 48...h5

A good move, trying to put some doubt into White's mind as to whether he can abandon his kingside pawns. In a pawn race Black is now one step closer to making a queen!

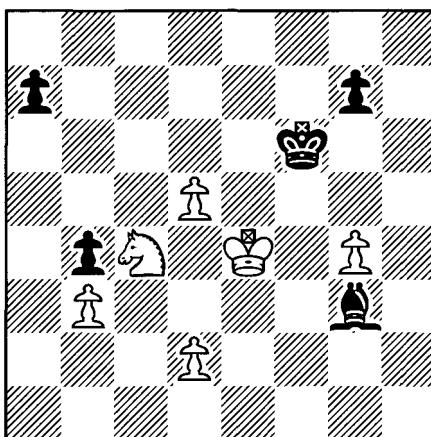
49 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}f2$ 50 $g4$ $h4xg4$

50... $h4$ 51 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 52 $d6$ is way too slow for Black.

51 $h4xg4$ $\mathbb{Q}e1$ 52 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}f2+$

Rotstein finds a clever way of keeping the door shut on the white king for the moment.

53 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}g3$



Question: How to make progress here?

Answer: Think about improving your pieces in stages.

54 ♜a5!

The knight simply looks for a better square on c6, where it targets both black queenside pawns.

54...♜c7

Going after the g4-pawn looks tempting, but 54...♚g5 55 ♜b7! ♜xg4 56 d6 is hopeless for Black.

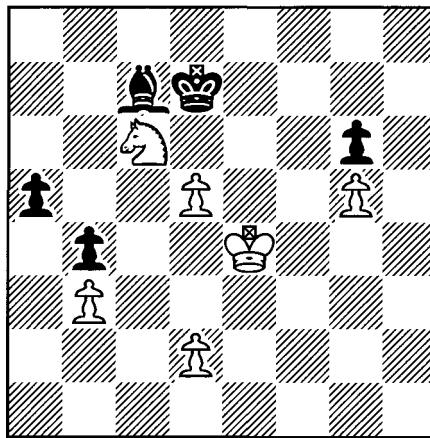
55 ♜c6 a5 56 ♜d4

Centralization! Here the knight sets up fork tricks which are annoying and prevents Black winning the g4-pawn.

56...g6 57 g5+?!

Not strictly necessary and it places the pawn on a dark square. I would have preferred 57 ♜e6 ♜d6 58 ♜d4 with the plan of sending the king to c6.

57...♚e7 58 ♜c6+ ♚d7



Exercise: What do you make of the king and pawn ending that could arise after 59 ♜e5+?

59 d4

Answer: The hasty 59 ♜e5+?? would be a catastrophe for White as after 59...♜xe5 60 ♜xe5 a4! it is Black who is suddenly winning as one of his queenside pawns touches down.

59...♜e8 60 ♜e5! ♜d8

Now after 60...♜xe5 61 dx e5 the connected passed pawns will keep the black king at bay whilst White can mop up the a5- and b4-pawns.

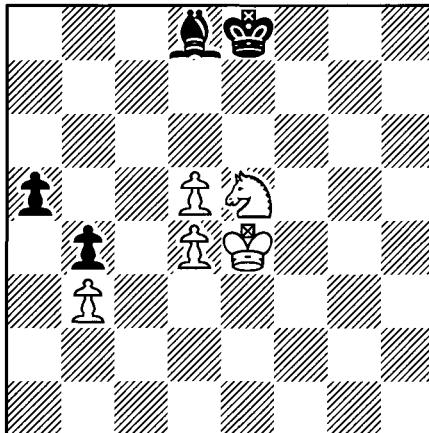
61 ♜xg6 ♜xg5

With the g-pawns eliminated there is very little chance of any black counterplay. The more active white king will have a field day on the queenside.

62 ♜e5

62 d6 ♔d7 63 ♜e5+! would also be good enough due to the fork trick 63...♔xd6 64 ♜f7+.

62... ♜d8



Question: With the g-pawns successfully eliminated what the next phase of action be?

63 ♔d3?!

Answer: The right idea (to bring the king to the queenside pawns), but not as positive or strong as 63 d6! completely cutting the enemy king out of the game.

63... ♜b6

63...♜c7 64 ♜c4 ♜e7 is more stubborn when White should again reroute his knight with 65 ♜d3 ♜b8 66 ♜c5 ♜a7 67 ♜e4! to control the d6-square.

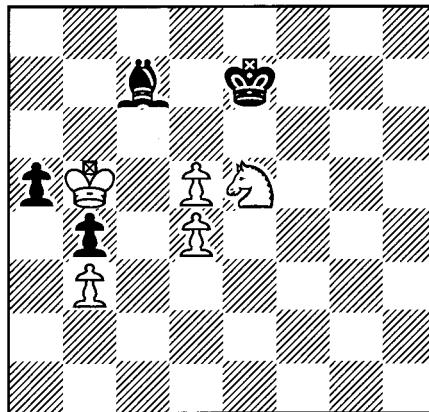
64 ♜c4

Now the king cannot get to d6 in time and the game is clearly won.

64... ♜c7

After 64...♜e7 65 ♜b5! again the pawn is immune due to the knight fork: 65...♜xd4 66 ♜c6+.

65 ♜b5 ♜e7



Exercise: One more accurate move, to prevent any Black activity, should be enough. What is it?

Answer: 66 ♜c4

Controlling the d6-square and not allowing the black king into the game.

66...♚d7 67 d6!

Here White still needed to be careful and not relax! 67 ♜xa5?? ♚d6 was the one last trick that the wily GM was playing for. He would then win both d-pawns when the game should be a draw.

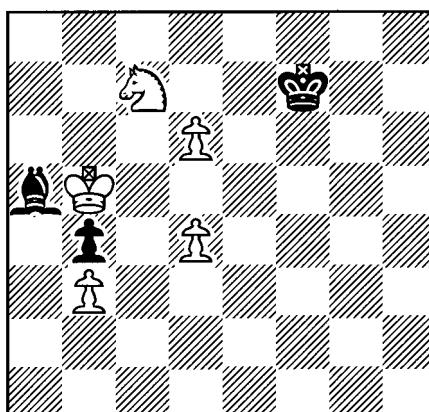
67...♜d8 68 ♜xa5

Now the a-pawn is free to be captured and the knight fork on b7 means d6 is also safe.

68...♝h4 69 ♜c4 ♜g3 70 ♜c5

70 ♜xb4 also wins.

70...♚e6 71 ♜c6 ♜h4 72 ♜e3 ♜d8 73 ♜d5 ♜a5 74 ♜c7+ ♚f7 75 ♜b5 1-0



Domination of the bishop by the knight! Not something you see every day.

Summary

A nicely played endgame! Callum remained positive throughout, striving for maximum activity and trusting his trump cards. It also highlights the idea of thinking ‘in phases’ in the ending and how a bishop is not always superior to a knight on an open board!

Key Points

- 1) Basic winning techniques when up on material include exchanging off into the end-game and being direct and attacking the enemy king.
- 2) Stay positive at all times. Don’t expect the position to win itself just because you are material up!
- 3) Don’t relax when you are winning as the opponent has nothing to lose and will be looking for tricky defensive resources. This is particularly true just after a time scramble as the body starts to relax.
- 4) Look to restrict your opponent’s counterplay as much as possible. This will limit the possible outcomes of the game to just two – a win for you and a draw.

Chapter Eleven

Defensive Resourcefulness

It is hard to beat a person who never gives up. – Babe Ruth

Of all the subjects in this book, the one that I am probably best qualified to write about is defensive resourcefulness. The reason is simple – the number of passive or worse positions I have reached in my time as a result of a lack of opening knowledge is so numerous! I don't think anybody particularly likes defending. As alluded to in Chapter Seven when we were talking about the initiative, being on the attack is the way to make things happen and to be in control of the game. Having said this, I am yet to meet a grandmaster who cannot, if asked, defend a worse position tenaciously. It's a skill that simply must be acquired if you are going to make progress.

I have also met grandmasters who use the defensive strategy to win games. Normally this arises through taking material (normally pawns), then stubbornly defending the position, basing their play on the 'money in the bank' that they already have. As Bobby Fischer put it: "Concentrate on material gains. Whatever your opponent gives you take, unless you see a good reason not to."

One of the big theoretical contributions that Fischer made was to the Poisoned Pawn variation of the Sicilian Najdorf, an incredibly complex opening where Black has to defend against a dangerous lead in development. I think the next game is a nice introduction to the subject of successful defence.

Game 100
G.Tringov-R.Fischer
Havana 1965
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♜f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♜xd4 ♜f6 5 ♜c3 a6 6 ♜g5

Unquestionably the most aggressive move against the Najdorf. White looks to double the black pawns on f6.

6...e6 7 f4 ♜b6

And this is the most principled reply, challenging the weakened white queenside at an early stage. Warning: playing this variation requires a lot of knowledge!

8 ♜d2

White takes up the gauntlet, sacrificing the b2-pawn for a lead in development.

8 ♜b3 takes the knight off its most dangerous square and leads to quieter play: for instance, 8...♜bd7 9 ♜f3 ♜c7 10 0-0-0 b5 11 a3 ♜b7, as in V.Akopian-L.Van Wely, Cap d'Agde (rapid) 1996.

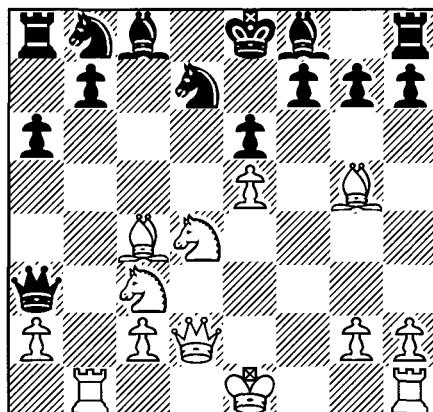
8...♜xb2 9 ♜b1 ♜a3 10 e5

The most direct move, which has undergone a resurgence of interest in recent years.

The sharpest alternative is 10 f5 and here after 10...♜c6 11 fxe6 fxe6 12 ♜xc6 bxc6, 13 e5! is a very interesting move. Many variations of the Poisoned Pawn have now been worked out to a forced draw. Here are the moves of one such example: 13...dxe5 14 ♜xf6 gxf6 15 ♜e4 ♜xa2 16 ♜d1 ♜e7 17 ♜e2 0-0 18 0-0 ♜a7 19 ♜f3 ♜h8 20 ♜g3 ♜d7 21 ♜h6 ♜f7 22 ♜h5 ♜xd1+ 23 ♜xd1 ♜a5 24 ♜f1 ♜d8 25 ♜xf7 ♜xd1+ 26 ♜f2 ♜xc2+ 27 ♜f3 ♜d1+ 28 ♜f2 ♜c2+ 29 ♜e3 ♜c5+ 30 ♜xc5 ♜xc5+ 31 ♜d2 ♜f2+ 32 ♜c3 ♜d4+ 33 ♜c2 ♜f2+ 34 ♜c3 ½-½ F.Vallejo Pons-G.Kasparov, Moscow 2004.

10...dxe5 11 fxe5 ♜fd7 12 ♜c4?!

12 ♜e4 is the most testing move here, first introduced into practise by Paul Keres in the late 1950's. After 12...h6! 13 ♜h4 ♜xa2 14 ♜d1 ♜d5 a heavily discussed theoretical position is reached, which we will leave for another day!



Exercise: White has a big lead in development, so Black must act with caution. What do you make of 12...♝xe5?

12... $\mathbb{Q}b4!$

Gaining a tempo with development.

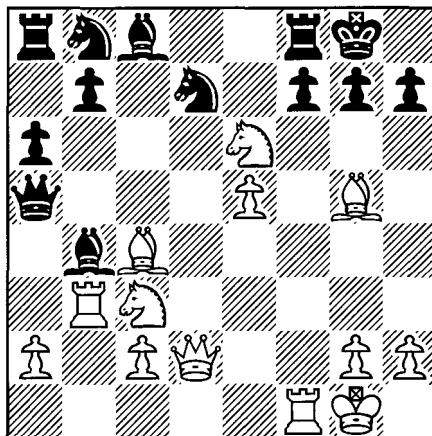
Answer: 12... $\mathbb{Q}xe5?!$ is highly risky! Amazingly the only game according to *Mega Database 2012* with this move was played by Tringov himself a year prior to this game. That game went 13 $\mathbb{Q}xe6 \mathbb{W}a5$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}d8$ when Black has to be on his toes to survive, but 14... $\mathbb{Q}f3+!$ 15 $gxf3 \mathbb{W}e5+$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}e4 fxe6$ was eventually drawn in J.Bednarski-G.Tringov, Kecsemet Zonal 1964. Here 14 $\mathbb{Q}b5+!?$ might be the way forward: 14... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}xd7+ \mathbb{Q}bxsd7$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}xf8 \mathbb{W}xf8$ 17 0-0 with lasting compensation based upon the weakness of the black king.

13 $\mathbb{W}b3 \mathbb{W}a5$ 14 0-0 0-0

Again Fischer refuses the second pawn. There is a line that even he dare not cross!

14... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ allows the disruptive sacrifice 15 $\mathbb{W}xb4! \mathbb{W}xb4$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ which looks crushing for White, but the ice cold defence 16... $\mathbb{W}b6+ 17 \mathbb{Q}e3 \mathbb{Q}xc4!$ seems to just about hold: for example, 18 $\mathbb{Q}xg7+ \mathbb{Q}f8$ 19 $\mathbb{W}xf7+ \mathbb{Q}xf7$ 20 $\mathbb{W}d5+ \mathbb{Q}xg7$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}xb6 \mathbb{Q}xb6$ 22 $\mathbb{W}d4+ \mathbb{Q}g8$ 23 $\mathbb{W}xb6 \mathbb{Q}c6$ with a bizarre material imbalance.

15 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$

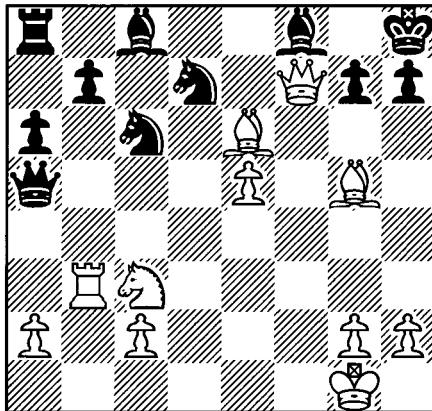


Very scary, but the art of good defence is to stay cool and not panic, even if something happens on the board that you have not seen. I'm guessing, though, that Fischer had, of course, seen this particular sacrifice and knew it to be unsound.

15... $fxe6$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}xe6+ \mathbb{Q}h8$ 17 $\mathbb{W}xf8+ \mathbb{Q}xf8$ 18 $\mathbb{W}f4 \mathbb{Q}c6$

18... $\mathbb{W}xe5$ would give the piece back and reach an approximately level ending after 19 $\mathbb{W}xe5 \mathbb{Q}xe5$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xc8 b5$.

19 $\mathbb{W}f7$



Exercise: Find a way to defend against the threat of $\mathbb{W}g8$ mate.

Bear in mind that Black is currently a knight for a pawn up...

Answer: 19... $\mathbb{W}c5+$ 20 $\mathbb{B}h1$ $\mathbb{N}f6!$

Beautifully done. Black generates counterplay based on the weakness of the white back rank and the loose bishop on g5.

21 $\mathbb{Q}xc8$

21 $\mathbb{exf6}$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 22 $\mathbb{W}xe6$ $\mathbb{W}xg5$ would also be winning for Black.

21... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$

21... $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{W}e3!$ would do the job too.

22 $\mathbb{W}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}eg4$ 0-1

The white attack has been stopped in its tracks and Black has the decisive attack.

Summary

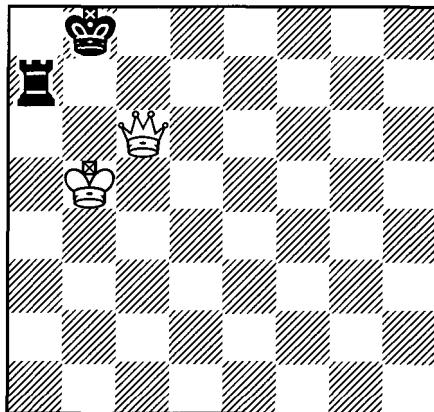
The first principle of successful defence is to remain calm under pressure. Here Fischer calculated accurately and saw through the white aggression. At the right moment he could return some of his extra material in order to defuse the attack. We will revisit this ‘money in the bank’ strategy later in the chapter.

Recurring Defensive Themes in the Endgame

Having a basic understanding of a few recurring defensive ideas in the ending should put you in reasonable shape, in terms of what positions to head for when in difficulties. Although every game of chess will be different, there are a few ideas which are important to remember and understand. These are particularly relevant in the last phase of the game when material has been reduced. This is often a time when the player with the advantage relaxes (as they think the win is close at hand), and allows some devious defensive resource. Stay alert at all times!

Stalemate Tricks

There are a few classic stalemating ideas worth remembering. In king and queen against king and rook (which is technically a win), one of the big traps that can be set is this:



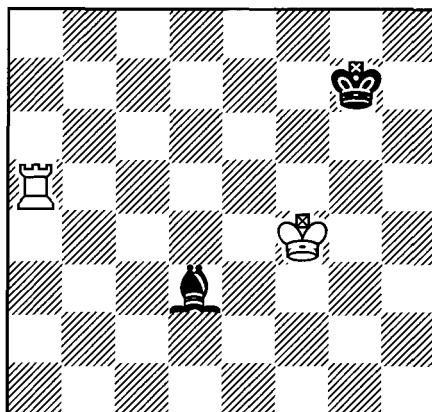
1 ♕b6??

The win is achieved through breaking the coordination between the king and the rook:
 1 ♕e8+ ♔c7 2 ♕e5+ ♔b7 (or 2...♔c8 3 ♕b6 ♜b7+ 4 ♕c6 with mate to follow) 3 ♜d4! ♔b8
 (the king must stay in contact with the rook) 4 ♕b6 ♜b7+ 5 ♕a6 and Black is in zugzwang:
 for example, 5...♔c8 6 ♜h8+ ♔c7 7 ♜g7+, picking up the rook.

1...♜a6+! 2 ♔xa6

It's stalemate!

Game 101
A.Hunt-J.Defibaugh
 Washington 2012

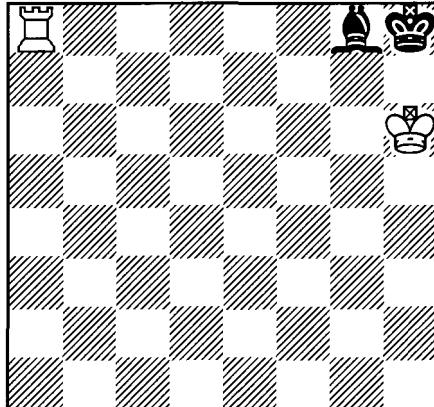


Chess Strategy: Move by Move

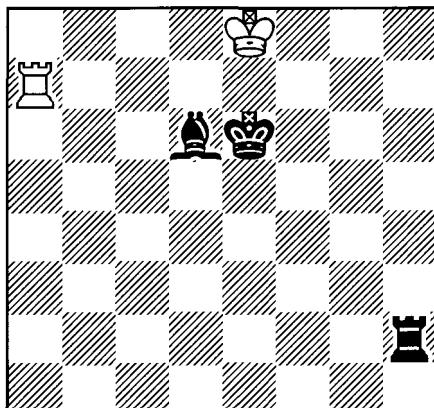
Black draws this position easily by heading with his king towards the opposite-coloured corner to his bishop, then using stalemate ideas.

1...♝g6 2 ♛g5 ♜d3 3 ♜a7+ ♚h8 4 ♛f6 ♜c4 5 ♜a4

Otherwise, 5 ♜a8+ ♜g8 doesn't get anywhere and 5 ♛g6 ♜d3+ 6 ♛h6 ♜c4 7 ♜a8+ ♜g8 is the basic stalemate position.



5...♝g8 6 ♜h4+ ♚h7 7 ♜h3 ♛g8 8 ♜c3 ♛h8 9 ♛f7 ♜g8+ 10 ♛f6 and a draw was agreed a few moves later. And on a similar note...



The rook and bishop versus rook endgame is a draw, though it is notoriously hard to achieve, especially if you don't know the defensive technique! Here White can employ a stalemate trick as part of the 'second rank defence' to push the opponent's king away.

1 ♜e7+! ♜d5

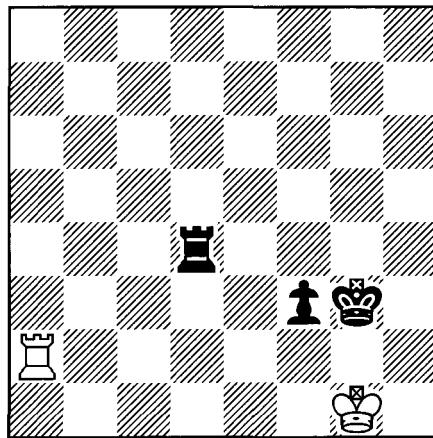
1...♝xe7 is, of course, stalemate.

2 ♜f7

With a theoretical draw.

Next we find the last game to finish in the last round of the World Under-16 Olympiad in Turkey, 2011 where I was coaching the England team. It was an important game for the team as the result meant the difference between finishing ahead of Scotland or behind them! The WFM playing White didn't know the defensive resource here, so I thought it would be useful to include.

Game 102
A.Nouman-C.Whitfield
Turkey 2011



Exercise: It's White to play and mate on d1 is threatened.
 Can you find the defensive resource?

107 ♜a1?

Now White is losing. Correct was 107 ♜g2+! ♔f4 (107...fxg2 is the stalemate trick) 108 ♜a2 ♜d3 109 ♔f2 with an easy draw as the white rook will check the black king and force it back from the fourth rank.

107...♜d2! 108 ♜b1

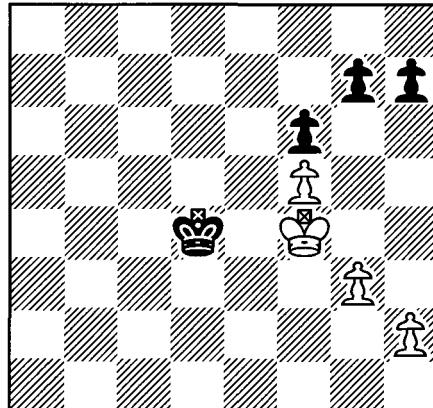
Now comes the important winning motif:

108...♜g2+ 109 ♔f1 ♜h2 0-1

White resigned as after 110 ♔g1 f2+ 111 ♔f1 ♜h1+ the rook on b1 is lost.

Keep searching for stalemate tricks in the endgame, even in the simplest looking positions. Here two of the most famous players of their time had a huge battle in Ostend resulting in this king and pawn endgame:

Game 103
M.Chigorin-S.Tarrasch
Ostend 1905

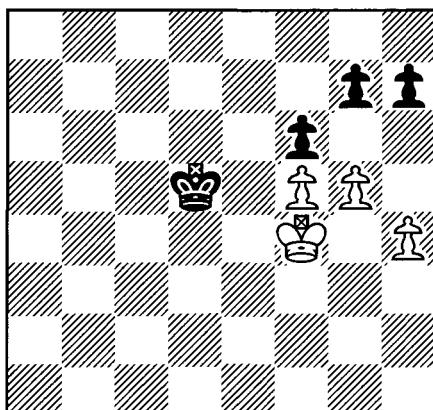


Question: Black is better here due to his more active king. How should he continue?

Answer: 47... \mathbb{Q} d5

Tarrasch aims to make Chigorin run out of useful moves.

48 h4 \mathbb{Q} d4 49 g5! \mathbb{Q} d5

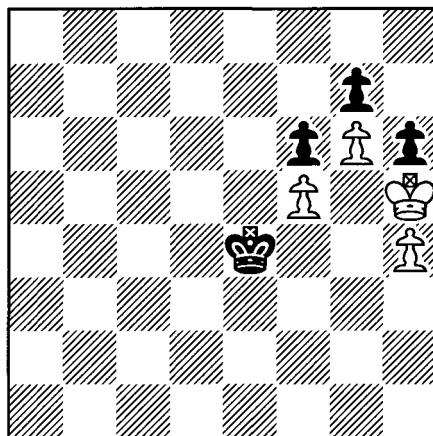


Exercise: It's White to move and draw. Find the stalemate resource!

50 gxf6??

White doesn't see the stalemate trick in time.

Answer: 50 $\text{Bg}4!$ $\text{Be}4$ 51 $\text{g}6$ is the correct defensive idea, as after 51... $\text{hxg}6$ 52 $\text{fxg}6$ the pawn race will be equal: 52... $\text{f}5+$ 53 $\text{Bg}5$ $\text{f}4$ 54 $\text{h}5$ $\text{f}3$ 55 $\text{h}6$ $\text{gxh}6+$ 56 $\text{Bxh}6$ $\text{f}2$ 57 $\text{g}7$ $\text{f}1\text{W}$ 58 $\text{g}8\text{W}$ with a draw. Instead 51... $\text{h}6$ 52 $\text{Bh}5!$...



...reveals the brilliant 'self stalemate' when Black cannot make progress.

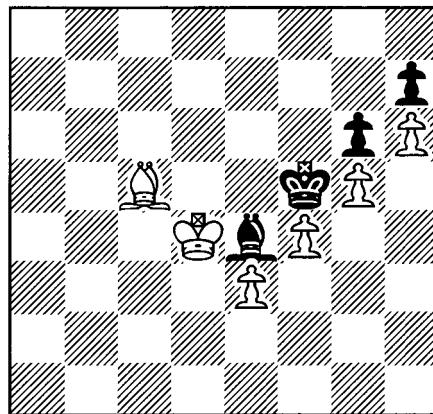
However, 50 $\text{g}6?$ $\text{h}5!$ would also be winning for Black.

50...gxf6 51 Bg4 Be4 52 Bh3 Bf4 0-1

White resigned, as both the pawns will fall.

Opposite-Coloured Bishops

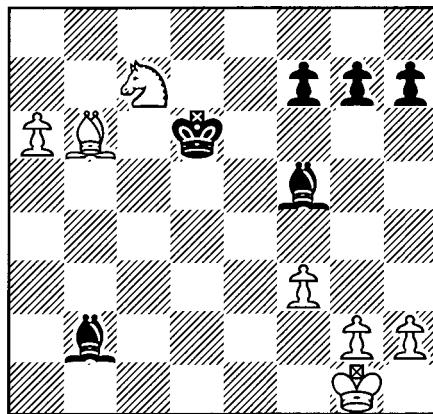
Endgames with opposite-coloured bishops tend to be quite drawish in nature, due to two reasons. One is the inability of the bishops to be exchanged and the other is the way that a bishop can stop passed pawns in their tracks along a diagonal, sometimes even if they are in vast numbers. This can lead to some interesting fortress positions where it is impossible for the side with the extra pawns to break through.



Here White, despite being two pawns up, cannot make any progress due to the fixed nature of the pawn chain.

1 ♜d6 ♜f3 2 ♛c5 ♛e6 3 ♜c7 ♜e4, etc. One of the key features of a fortress position is the lack of pawn breaks available.

Game 104
J.Lautier-S.Rublevsky
Poikovsky 2003



Exercise: Black to move is a pawn down with a difficult looking position, although he does possess the two bishops. What is the best plan here for Black?

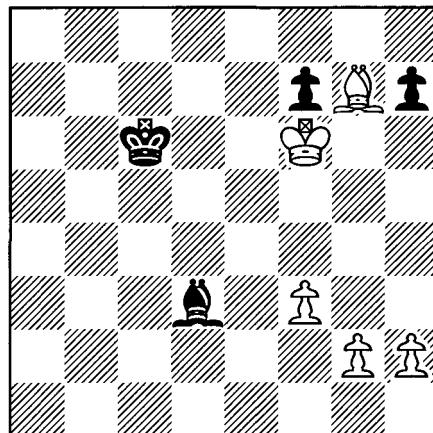
Answer: 32...♝d4+!

A fine move, ignoring the fact that he will lose the g-pawn and instead heading into that all important opposite-coloured bishop ending.

33 ♜xd4 ♛xc7 34 ♜xg7 ♛b6

White unfortunately can't save the a-pawn, so he seeks to activate his king as quickly as possible.

35 ♔f2 ♛xa6 36 ♔e3 ♛b7 37 ♔f4 ♜d3 38 ♛g5 ♛c6 39 ♔f6



Question: Should the bishop keep an eye on both pawns on g6, or stay active on c4?

Answer: 39...♝c4!

Activity cannot be underestimated!

39...♝g6?! would be risky as the bishop is more passive on the g6-square and the white pawns can hassle him: for example, 40 f4 h5 41 f5 ♜h7 42 ♛g5 with a difficult position for Black.

40 h4

40 ♜h6 would have been logical to put the king on the 'ideal' square g7. Even then, however, Black can draw with 40...♝d7 41 ♜g7 ♛e6 42 ♜xh7 and now the thematic 42...♝f1! 43 g3 (43 g4 ♜e2 wins a pawn back with an easy draw) 43...♝g2 44 f4 ♜h3 with a fix on the light squares.

40...♝d7 41 ♜h6 ♜f1 42 g3 ♜e2

A typical motif. Black fixes all the pawns on dark squares so he can control them with his bishop.

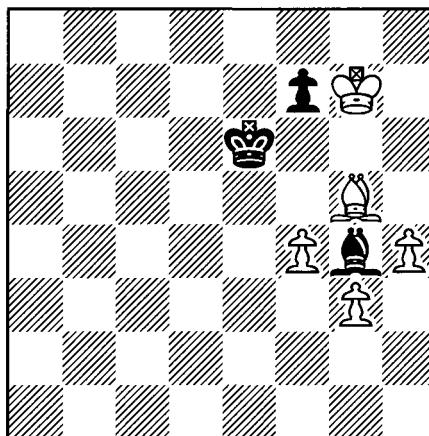
43 f4 ♜e8

Black can afford to keep his king passive.

44 ♔g7 ♜g4

44... $\mathbb{Q}d3$ should also hold: for instance, 45 g4 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ 46 $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg4$.

45 $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 46 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 47 $\mathbb{Q}g5$



Exercise: Can you find a way to complete the successful blockade?

Answer: 47... $\mathbb{Q}f5!$

Very nice! Black sacrifices his last pawn to secure the light squares.

47...f5?? 48 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ followed by the promotion of the h-pawn would be a complete disaster, though I don't see anything wrong with just 47... $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 48 $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ as 49 h5 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ which is going to be a draw.

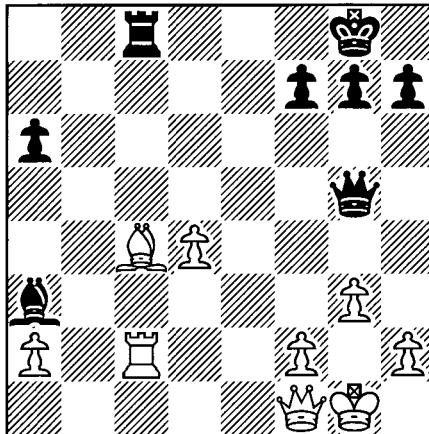
48 $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}h5+$ 49 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ $\mathbb{Q}d1$ 50 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ ½-½

After 50 $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 51 h5 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 52 $\mathbb{Q}d8$ $\mathbb{Q}e2$ Black just sits on the light squares.

Summary

Rublevsky instructively showed that material wasn't the most important factor in the ending and that instead it was all about blockading the light squares. Many seemingly secure fortresses are broken by positional sacrifices to gain control of key squares, but Rublevsky didn't allow this here.

Game 105
R.Fischer-J.H.Donner
Santa Monica 1966



Exercise: Bobby Fischer, playing White, has successfully neutralized Dutch Grandmaster Donner's initiative in a Marshall Gambit and has good winning chances. However, here Black came up with a crafty plan. Can you see it?

Answer: 29...♝f5

Spotting a small tactic.

30 ♜d3?

It seems as though Black's back rank is too weak...

Instead, after 30 ♜b1! with the queen en route to b3 White would retain a clear advantage.

30...♝xc2!

Fischer didn't account for this! He probably only saw 30...♝d7 31 ♜xh7+! ♚xh7 32 ♜xc8 ♜xc8 33 ♜d3+ ♚g8 34 ♜xa3 when White would have been winning.

31 ♜xf5 ♜c1

Forcing the opposite-coloured bishop ending.

32 ♜xc1 ♜xc1 33 ♜f1 h6 34 ♜e2 ♜f8 ½-½

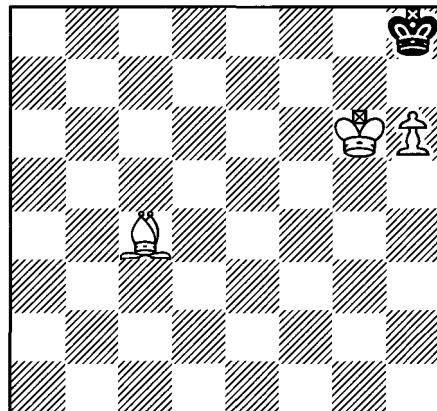
White, presumably disgusted with himself, agreed to a draw. Black will put the a-pawn on a5 and simply hold the dark squares with his king and bishop. The passed d-pawn will not queen.

Summary

Heading for endgames with opposite-coloured bishops is usually a good idea, even if the cost is a pawn or two. You will, though, have to judge whether the opponent will be able to break the fortress using a sacrifice.

The Fortress: 'The Wrong Bishop'

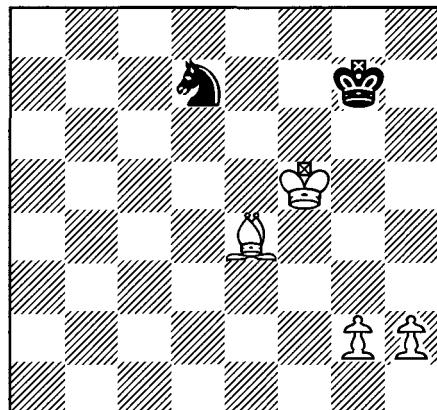
With heavily reduced material, it is possible on occasion to secure a draw by hiding the king in the corner. This normally applies to endings where the opponent has a rook's pawn and some draws can be derived from the basic knowledge that a rook and wrong-coloured bishop (to the queening square) will be a draw.



White cannot make progress and the game is clearly a draw.

The following is quite a famous example of the application of basic knowledge to a grandmaster game. Murray Chandler, playing White, is winning here, but Susan Polgar, the oldest of the three famous chess-playing sisters, recognizes that there is still some hope if she can sacrifice her knight for the g-pawn.

Game 106
M.Chandler-Su.Polgar
Biel 1987

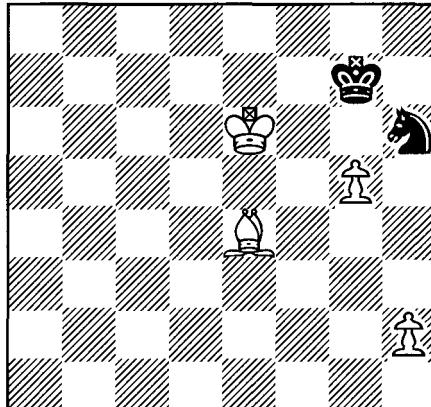


51 g4 ♜f6 52 g5

52 ♜d3?? ♜xg4 would be an immediate draw.

52...♜g8

Polgar sees one last opportunity and deliberately traps her knight.

53 ♛e6 ♜h6!**54 gxh6+??**

The correct 54 h4 would be winning. You may wonder how it is possible for an experienced GM to make such a blunder. Here, as with so many swindles, it is down to the player with the advantage missing the less natural continuation.

54...♚h8!

We have reached our basic ending, with the addition of an extra white pawn. It makes no difference – the game is drawn.

Chandler probably calculated deeply in the line 54...♛xh6 55 ♜f6 ♜h5 and now White would win as he can eventually force the enemy king off the h-file: for example, 56 h3 ♜h4 57 ♜f5 ♜h5 58 ♜g7 ♜g5 59 ♜g4 ♜h4 60 ♜f6 ♜g3 61 ♜g5 and the h-pawn will queen.

55 ♜d5 ♜h7 56 ♜f7 ♜h8 ½-½

One final accurate move secures the draw. Black had to avoid 56...♛xh6?? 57 ♜e4! when White will win again by forcing the king out.

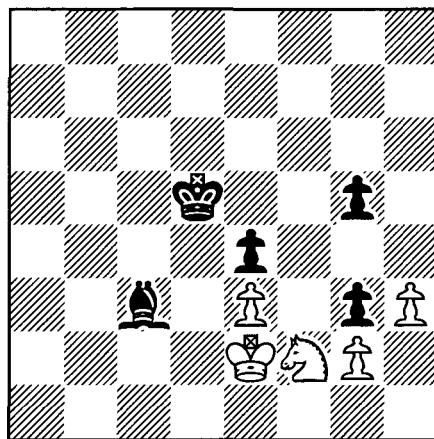
Summary

Always giving yourself and your opponent more than one candidate move, and examining the more unusual responses your opponent can make first, should help to reduce accidents in such situations.

*Game 107***G.Serper-H.Nakamura**

US Championship, San Diego 2004

White has been defending a slightly worse position for some time against the eventual winner of the event (the first of his three US titles so far) and superstar in the making, Hikaru Nakamura.



Exercise: Apply your knowledge of the wrong-coloured bishop ideas to this position and assess the sacrifice $\mathbb{Q}xe4$. Does it draw?

Answer: Yes!

82 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 83 $\mathbb{Q}f1$

The white king cannot be prevented from hiding on the h1-square and Black's only pawn break ...g5-g4 will not help him. Nakamura manoeuvres for a while without achieving much.

83... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 84 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 85 e4 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 86 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 87 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 88 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 89 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}e2$ 90 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 91 e5 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 92 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}e1$ 93 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}f2$ 94 h4

White's only legal move, but enough to hold.

94...gxh4 ½-½

The Fine Art of Swindling

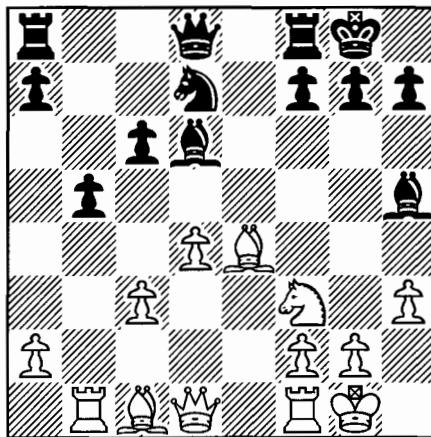
When all hope is lost, your position is broken and you are completely beaten, there is still one chance, the most underhand, nastiest and dirtiest chess tactic that is bound to make your opponent hate you forever – the swindle. Swindling requires the creation of a trap, which can vary in its level of craftiness.

Getting Your Swindle in Early

It is very important that the good swindler realizes in time that his position is hopeless and therefore uses all the resources at his disposal to create tricks before his chances evaporate. Try to look for hidden swindles, perhaps when the opponent has a choice of moves

where the obvious one draws or loses. In the next game Black blunders a pawn, but carries on regardless. Up against an experienced grandmaster, Shirazi (himself an IM) realizes that with normal play he is just going to lose and so aims to create confusion by throwing the kitchen sink at White.

Game 108
N.De Firmian-K.Shirazi
 US Championship, Estes Park 1986



15...Qc7?

Both 15...Qg6 and 15...Qc8 are fine for Black.

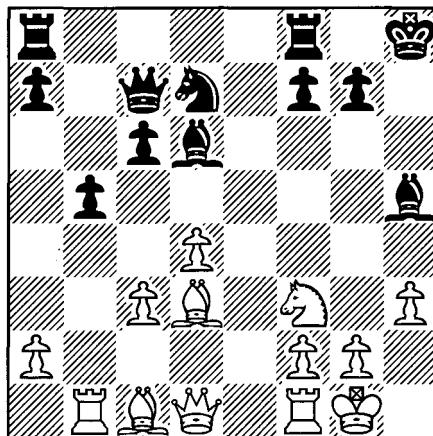
16 Qxh7+!

Whoops! Now there is no cover on the g5-square.

16...Qh8

16...Qxh7 17 Qg5+ Qg6 (17...Qg8 18 Qxh5 Qf6 19 Qf3 is just a clear extra pawn for White) 18 g4 is no good for Black.

17 Qd3



Exercise: Black is a healthy pawn down and so needs to start creating chaos as soon as possible. What is the best way to do this here?

Answer: 17...f5!

A good practical move. Although not carrying a direct threat, 'ghosts' (threats that look like they might be scary but are actually not real), such as the rook swing via f6 are created.

17... $\mathbb{R}ae8$ would allow the simplifying 18 g4 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ fxg6 20 $\mathbb{W}d3$.

18 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{R}ae8$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$

Black aims all his pieces at the white king.

20 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}h2+$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe2!$

Again designed to complicate the issue as much as possible.

22 $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$

Playing practically, this is absolutely correct! Black seeks to avoid simplification at all costs and instead banks on White going astray somewhere along the line.

From an objective point of view 22... $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 23 $\mathbb{W}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ is stronger, though Black doesn't have any real play after 24 $\mathbb{W}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}d2$.

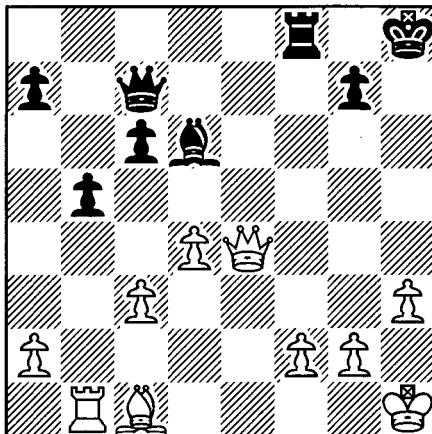
23 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ fxe4 24 $\mathbb{W}e1!$

White steers clear of any complications by removing himself from the pin.

24... $\mathbb{Q}xe2$

Sadly for Black he can't wait any longer here. 25 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ was threatened.

25 $\mathbb{W}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 26 $\mathbb{W}xe4$



Exercise: It feels as though the game is slipping away, thanks to some accurate play by Nick De Firmian, but Shirazi must keep fighting to the end! After all, when you are completely lost there is nothing more to lose. The psychological pressure is on your opponent to win the won game. Can you find an active move to stay in this one?

Answer: 26... $\mathbb{W}f7$

Hitting the targets on f2 and a2.

26... $\mathbb{B}xf2??$ would allow the crushing fork 27 $\mathbb{W}h4+$, picking up the black rook.

27 $\mathbb{W}xc6!$

De Firmian refuses to be bluffed and plays the strongest move. A typical grandmaster trait.

27 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ would have perhaps been a safer option: 27... $\mathbb{W}xa2$ and now the pretty pawn sacrifice 28 d5! cxd5 29 $\mathbb{W}g6$ would have also kept White in control.

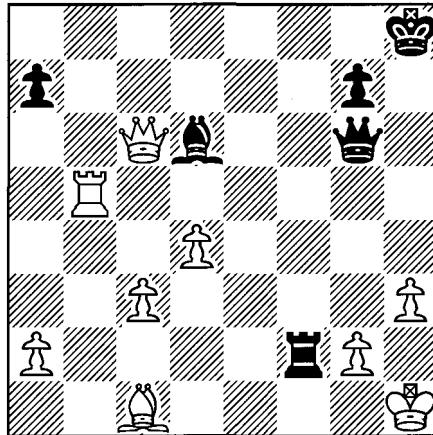
27... $\mathbb{W}g6$

The problem with 27... $\mathbb{W}xf2?$ is that 28 $\mathbb{Q}e3!$ simplifies matters to a relatively easily winning ending by covering the back rank: 28... $\mathbb{W}xe3$ 29 $\mathbb{W}xd6$ and White will surely win the queen and rook ending two pawns up.

28 $\mathbb{B}xb5?$

Grandmaster De Firmian loses his focus and allows too much counterplay. I'm guessing he miscalculated the line in the game. Instead 28 $\mathbb{B}b2!$ nullifies the threats on the second rank. After 28... $\mathbb{B}e8$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{B}e2$ 30 $\mathbb{W}f3$ White should win.

28... $\mathbb{B}xf2$



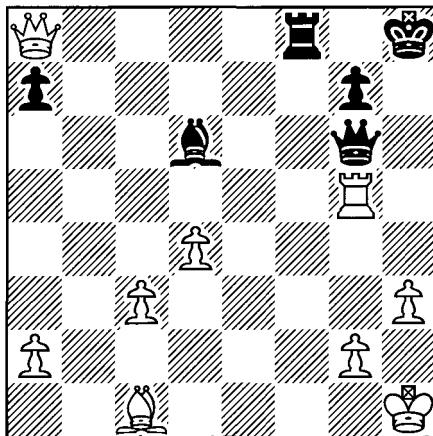
29 ♔ a8+?

This compounds his error.

Exercise: Can you find the only move that would have saved White here?

Answer: 29 g4! is desperate, but seems to hold as the black king is exposed to checks on the light squares: for instance, 29... $\mathbb{W}c2$ 30 $\mathbb{M}h5+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 31 $\mathbb{W}d5+$ $\mathbb{M}f7$ 32 $\mathbb{W}a8+$ $\mathbb{M}f8$ 33 $\mathbb{W}d5+$ $\mathbb{M}f7$ with a perpetual.

29...f8 30 g5



Exercise: If you haven't done it already, find the winning move for Black here!

Answer: 30...♝e4! 0-1

A nice tactic, exploiting the weakness on the back rank. There are other ways to win here as well, but this is the prettiest, inflicting maximum pain on White.

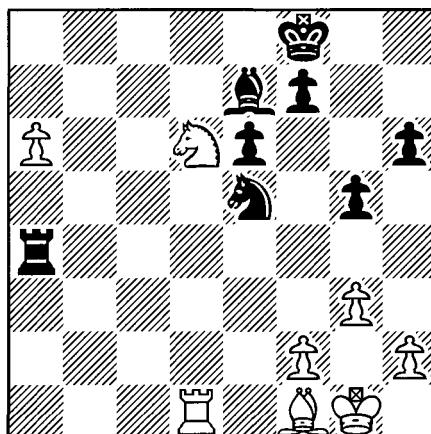
Summary

This game actually won a prize for the best swindle in the tournament! Black recognized at an early stage that he was in big trouble and kept things as complicated as he possibly could. White almost found the path to victory, but slipped up right at the end, partly as a result of the psychological pressure he was under.

Counterattacking

Without counterplay a difficult position often becomes untenable. You must learn that attack is often the best form of defence! Be resourceful, let your imagination run wild and try to visualize any chances you may have in the future.

Game 109
Zhou Weiqi-G.Kamsky
World Cup, Khanty-Mansiysk 2009



Exercise: This position looks difficult for Black due to the advanced passed a-pawn. Can you find a way to generate some counterplay?

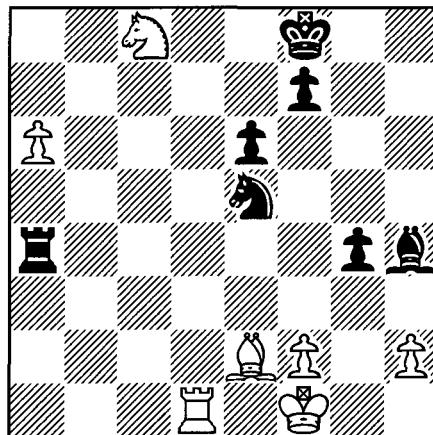
Answer: 29...g4!

This fixes the f3-square for the black knight. Could Kamsky already be thinking of a mating net around the white king?

30 ♜e2 h5 31 ♛f1 h4!

Black continues to play actively. The idea is to lock the pawn down on h2, creating the 'threat' of ...♞f3.

32 gxh4 ♜xh4 33 ♜c8



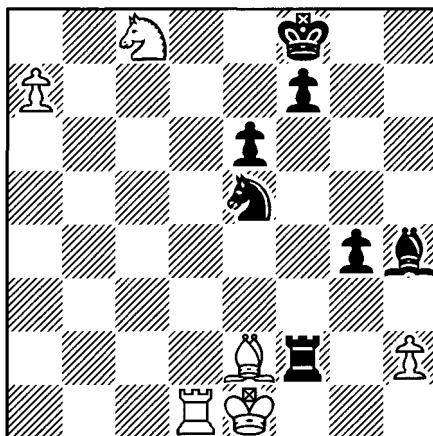
Question: White prepares to advance the a-pawn. How should Black respond?

Answer: 33...♞f4!

Targeting the weakness in White's position.

34 a7 ♜xf2+ 35 ♛e1

35 ♛g1 ♜xe2 36 a8♛ ♜f3+ 37 ♛f1 ♜f2 mate is a nice example of the attacking power of the knight and rook combination.



Question: What's the most effective way to use the discovered check?

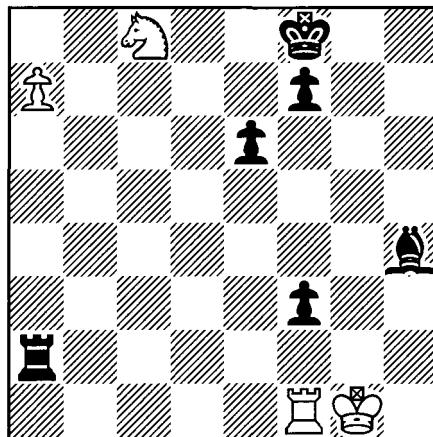
Answer: 35... $\mathbb{Q}f3+$

The immediate 35... $\mathbb{Q}xh2+??$ would lose after 36 $\mathbb{Q}d2 \mathbb{Q}f3+ 37 \mathbb{Q}c3 \mathbb{Q}f6+ 38 \mathbb{Q}b3$ when the pawn will queen.

36 $\mathbb{Q}xf3 \mathbb{Q}xh2+ 37 \mathbb{Q}f1 gxf3$

Threatening mate on h1.

38 $\mathbb{Q}g1 \mathbb{Q}a2 39 \mathbb{Q}f1$



Exercise: The game is almost wrapped up.

What's the best way to finish it off?

Answer: 39... $\mathbb{Q}e7$

Kamsky eliminates White's last hope, which is the a-pawn.

40 $\mathbb{Q}xf3 \mathbb{Q}c5+ 41 \mathbb{Q}h1 \mathbb{Q}xa7 42 \mathbb{Q}d6$

42 $\mathbb{Q}xa7 \mathbb{Q}xa7$ is also easily winning.

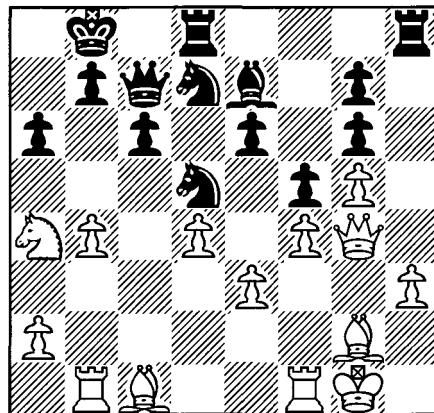
42... $\mathbb{Q}f2$ 0-1

Zhou resigned, sending Gata Kamsky through to the next round where he lost to the young Philippine Grandmaster Wesley So.

The Money in the Bank Strategy

As we saw in our introductory game to the chapter, successful defence often requires strong nerves and the mental fortitude not to break under pressure. This is particularly true in situations where the 'money in the bank' strategy is used, where material is grabbed in exchange for a certain amount of suffering. In this game the irresistible force meets the immovable object as a young Garry Kasparov takes on 'Iron' Tigran Petrosian.

Game 110
G.Kasparov-T.Petrosian
Tilburg 1981



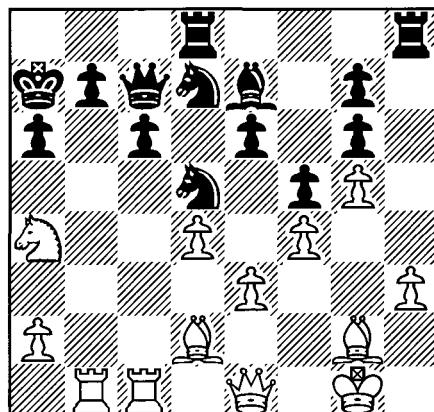
20...♝xb4!

An exclamation mark for bravery! I wonder how many of us would have the nerve to take such a pawn? Of course the cold-blooded computer has no doubts, but Black must now withstand heavy pressure on the queenside as a consequence.

21 ♕d2 ♜d5 22 ♜fc1 ♛a7

A prophylactic measure, removing the black king from the b-file.

23 ♔e1



Exercise: Can you find a way to disrupt the harmony in the white camp and as a result buy yourself some time?

Answer: 23...♝a3

Black must tread carefully as 23...♝7b6?? would walk into 24 ♜a5.

24 ♜c2

24 ♜a5 would also be met by 24...♝d6.

24...♝d6

Organizing a strong defensive battery along the a3-f8 diagonal.

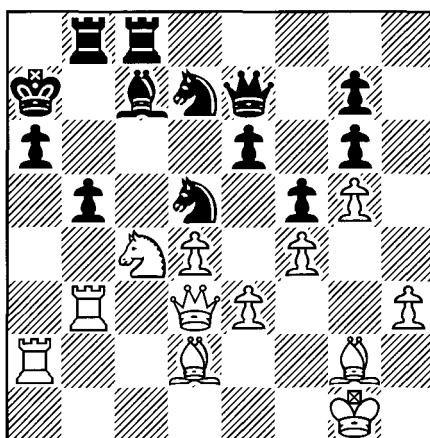
25 ♜b3 ♜e7

Over the next few moves Black curls up tightly in a ball like a hedgehog, with the belief that someday his extra pawn can win him the game.

26 ♜e2 ♜b8 27 ♜d3 ♜d6 28 ♜b2 ♜hc8 29 ♜c4 ♜c7 30 a4 b5?!

A radical reaction and by no means the only one.

30...b6 also came into consideration. If then 31 a5 b5 32 ♜e5 ♜xe5 33 fxe5 ♜d7 and Black is still very solid.

31 axb5 cxb5 32 ♜a2!

Exercise: A fine move and dare I say perhaps one that Petrosian overlooked. Multiple threats fly about. Find a way for Black to defend!

Answer: 32...♝b7

Certainly the great Armenian was feeling bold in this game, here walking into the eye of the storm and two different pins. However, there was little choice:

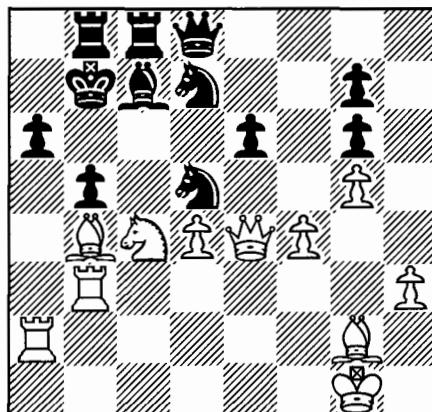
- 32...bxc4 33 ♜xa6+! ♜xa6 34 ♜xc4+ ♜a7 35 ♜a4+ is mate next move.
- 32...♝d6 would allow a pretty tactical shot in 33 ♜xb5 ♜xb5 34 ♜xd6 ♜xd6 35 ♜xb5 with a clear edge to White.
- Something random like 32...♝f8 would allow 33 ♜ba3 which is crushing.

33 ♜b4?

Here *ChessBase* gives only 33 ♜a3 in its analysis, but 33 ♜b1! seems to be strong as well.

33...♛e8!

33...♛d8? allows a potentially gorgeous mate: 34 e4! fxe4 35 ♛xe4, hitting the pawn on e6.



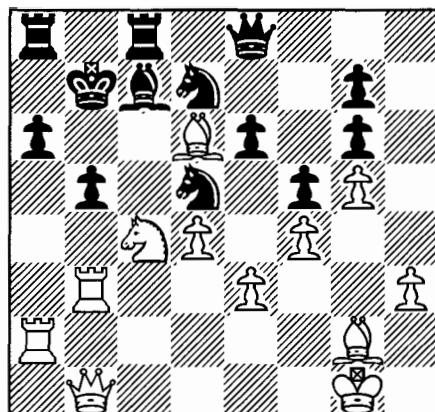
Exercise: If the e6-pawn is defended by 35...♛e8 there is a massive tactical shot. Can you find it?

Answer: 36 ♛xd5+!! exd5 37 ♜xd5+ ♔a7 38 ♜xa6+ ♔xa6 39 ♜a3+ ♔a5 40 ♜xa5 is the beautiful checkmate.

34 ♜d6

White seeks to exchange off the key defender of the dark squares.

34...♜a8 35 ♜b1



Question: Can you find a way to defend here against the threats down the b-file?

Answer: 35... $\mathbb{Q}c6!$

The king makes a move forwards with all the heavy pieces still on the board!

36 $\mathbb{B}a3?$

Faced with such steely defence, even Kasparov cracks.

36 $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ would lead to an approximately equal game after 36... $bxc4$ 37 $\mathbb{B}b7$ $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}xa6+! \mathbb{Q}xa6$ 39 $\mathbb{W}b5+ \mathbb{Q}d6$ 40 $\mathbb{W}xa6+ \mathbb{Q}e7$ (40... $\mathbb{Q}c6?$ 41 $\mathbb{W}a3+$ would be unfortunate) 41 $\mathbb{Q}xd5 \mathbb{B}xb7$ 42 $\mathbb{Q}xb7$.

36... $bxc4$ 37 $\mathbb{Q}xa6+ \mathbb{Q}xa6$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}xa6+ \mathbb{Q}b6$

38... $\mathbb{Q}7b6$ 39 $\mathbb{Q}c5 \mathbb{Q}d7$ would probably have been even stronger.

39 $\mathbb{Q}c5$

39 $\mathbb{W}b4!$ would have been White's best chance, though after 39... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 40 $\mathbb{Q}a1 c3$ it is hard to see any result other than a black win.

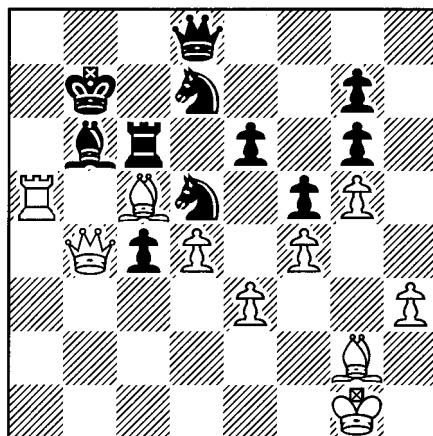
39... $\mathbb{Q}d8!$

Overprotecting the bishop on b6, which holds firm against the white forces.

Instead 39... $\mathbb{Q}b7??$ 40 $\mathbb{Q}xb6+ \mathbb{Q}7xb6$ 41 $\mathbb{W}xb6+$ would be a sad way to end, while 39... $\mathbb{Q}b8$ would also have held cover, though the c-pawn would drop after 40 $\mathbb{W}b4!$.

40 $\mathbb{Q}a1$

40 $\mathbb{W}b4$ would allow 40... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ (preparing to chop off the bishop on c5) 41 $\mathbb{Q}a5 \mathbb{Q}c6!...$



...with a pretty concentration of defensive force around the black king.

40... $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 41 $dxc5 \mathbb{Q}xc5!$ 42 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 0-1

Kasparov resigned without waiting to see 42... $\mathbb{Q}b5$.

A mighty demonstration of force and determination by the black king!

Don't Panic!

As Fischer demonstrated, when faced with an attack the most important thing is to stay calm and weigh up all the defensive options available to you. Chess is such a rich game, full of hidden defensive resources that can often be unlocked. The following game was played

in a crucial round of the 2010 British Championship. Having completely failed to understand the subtleties of the opening, I was trying desperately just to keep in the game.

Game 111

A.Hunt-S.Williams

British Championship, Canterbury 2010

Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♜f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♜xd4 ♜f6 5 ♜c3 ♜c6 6 ♜g5 e6 7 ♜d2 a6 8 0-0-0 ♜d7 9 f3 ♜e7

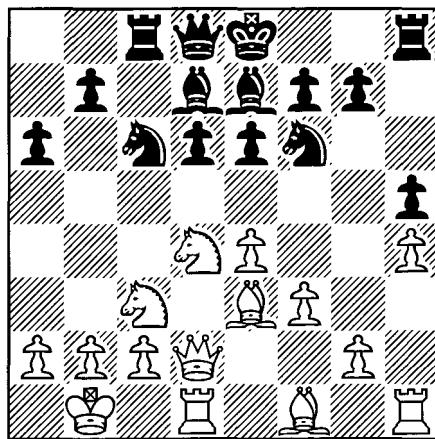
10 ♜b1 ♜c8 11 h4

All well known to theory. White predicts kingside castling and therefore starts operations on that side of the board immediately.

11...h6 12 ♜e3

12 ♜xc6 ♜xc6 13 ♜e3 h5 14 ♜e2 has also been played, looking to reroute the knight to d4.

12...h5!



A good prophylactic move, designed to prevent the advance of the white g-pawn. At the time of the game I was unaware of the idea, as I had not been expecting Simon's choice of opening.

13 ♜f2

Eyeing up the b6-square.

13 ♜g5 may well be best in this position, trying to focus White's efforts on the weakness on d6. After 13...♜e5 14 ♜d3 b5 15 ♜he1 ♜xd3 16 cxd3 the game was pretty balanced in S.Azarov-Z.Izoria, Moscow 2006.

13...♜c7 14 ♜g1?!

The start of a faulty plan. The g-pawn will not get to advance due to Black's next move

and the rook on g1 will look silly.

14...♝e5! 15 ♜b3 b5 16 ♜b6 ♛b8 17 ♜a7 ♛a8

True to his attacking style Simon is in no mood for a quick draw with 17...♛c7 18 ♜b6 ♛b8.

18 ♜d4 b4 19 ♜e2 a5

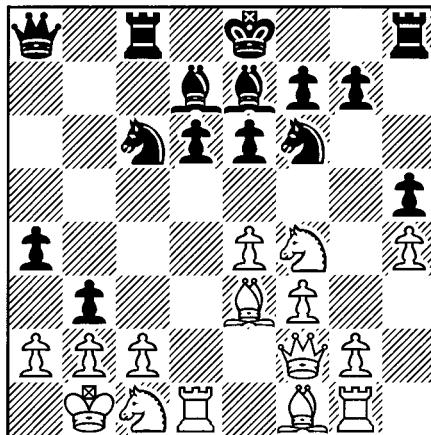
Already the white pieces are looking unhappy and uncoordinated. Black simply looks to push his queenside pawns, leaving White scrambling to find some defensive play.

20 ♜f4

Covering the potentially weak c4-square.

20...a4 21 ♜c1 ♜c6 22 ♜e3 b3!

Energetic and good.



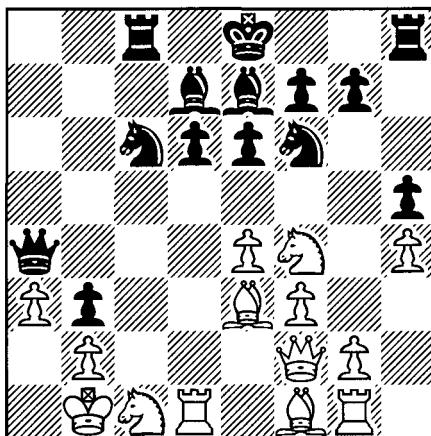
Exercise: Simon is more than happy to give up a pawn for some open files. How best to defend the queenside?

Answer: 23 cxb3 axb3 24 a3

A standard reaction to keep the a- and b-files closed.

24 ♜xb3 was possible too. However, I was worried about the position of my b3-knight after something like 24...♜b4 25 a3 ♜a4!.

24...♛a4



Exercise: Again, find the best defensive reaction here!

Answer: 25 $\mathbb{N}fe2!$

A good move, bringing the knight over to the aid of the white queenside.

25... $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 26 $\mathbb{B}d4$ $\mathbb{W}c6$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}c3$

White has parried the black attack for the moment, closing the c-file temporarily. I was feeling more confident here, but Simon comes up with another energetic and thematic Sicilian break.

27... $d5?$

Designed to shake White out of his comfort zone, this opens up potential sacrifices on a3.

28 $\mathbb{Q}b5?$

I was wanting to get the pieces developed, but exchanging off the defender of the c4-square doesn't seem right in hindsight. Keeping more lines closed with 28 e5 seems to make the most sense. After 28... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 29 $\mathbb{B}a4!$ White has a reasonable position based on the poor position of the black kingside pieces: for example, 29... $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $dxc4$ 31 $\mathbb{B}d1$.

28... $\mathbb{W}b7$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}xd7+$ $\mathbb{W}xd7$ 30 $exd5$

Again, 30 e5 should be preferred.

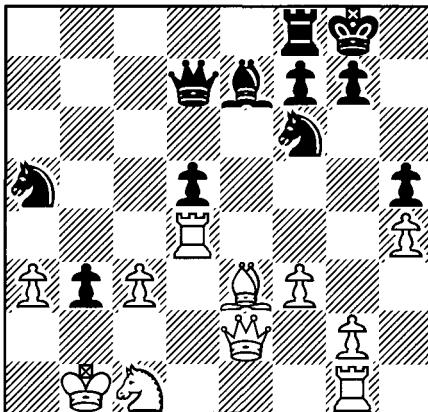
30... $exd5$

30... $\mathbb{Q}xd5!$ was probably stronger here, removing the knight from the c3-square and freeing the f6-square for the bishop: 31 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $exd5$ 32 $\mathbb{B}gd1$ and after 32... 0-0! Black has a dangerous attack.

31 $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{B}xc3!$

Never one to shy away from giving up material, Simon unbalances the position with a good (and typical) Sicilian exchange sacrifice.

32 $bxcc3$ 0-0



Exercise: Black has excellent compensation for the exchange, based upon the weaknesses around the white king.
I must seek some counterplay to get Black thinking. How?

Answer: 33 ♜g5!

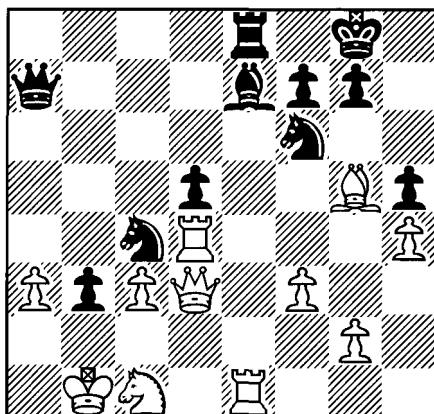
Quite a good move. White seeks to limit the influence of the bishop on e7, by threatening to wreck the black pawn structure on the kingside if it moves.

Instead 33 ♜gd1 ♜c5 34 ♜g5 (White must maintain the rook on d4 to take the knight if it ever comes to c4; 34 ♜d2? ♜xe3 35 ♜xe3 ♜c4 would be curtains) 34...♜xd4 35 ♜xd4 ♜e8! would not be so effective.

33...♜e8

33...♜c5 may still have been best. After 34 ♜xf6 gxf6 35 ♜gd1 ♜xd4 36 ♜xd4 (White must cover the a4-square) 36...♜c8 Black still enjoys all the pressure.

34 ♜d3 ♜a7 35 ♜e1 ♜c4

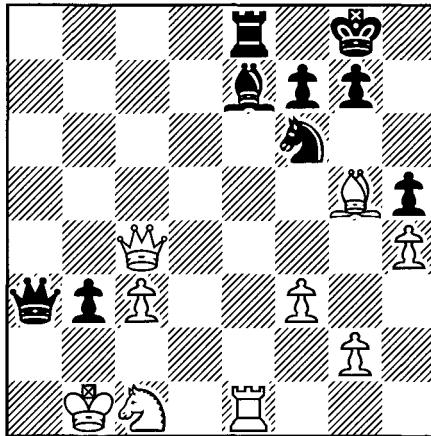


Question: What must White play here?

Answer: 36 $\mathbb{N}xc4$

The knight on c4 cannot be tolerated for one moment!

36... $dxc4$ 37 $\mathbb{W}xc4$ $\mathbb{W}xa3$



Question: Why isn't 38 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ just good for White here?

Answer: 38 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}a8!$

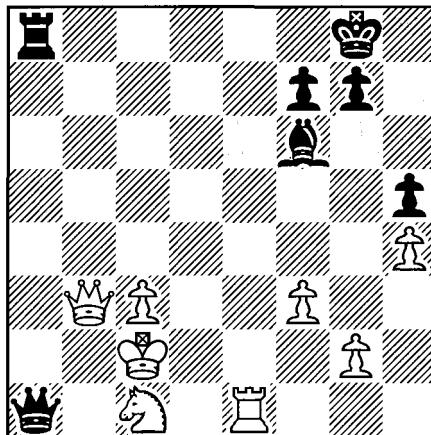
Grandmasters excel in the unexpected. This zwischenzug increases the pressure on the white king.

39 $\mathbb{W}xb3!$

Instead 39 $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ $\mathbb{W}a2+$ 40 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $gxf6!$ is very strong, threatening ... $\mathbb{Q}a3+$ followed by ... $\mathbb{Q}d8+$. The tactical point is that 41 $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{W}a3+$ picks up the exchange.

39... $\mathbb{W}a1+$ 40 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$

The smoke has cleared and the time control has been made. A good point to take stock of the position. White is a pawn up, but Black still has all the pressure on the white king, even though the c1-knight holds the attack at bay for the moment.



Exercise: Here I had a long think and came up with what I think is pretty much the only move. What is it?

Answer: 41 $\mathbb{W}c4!$

The target in the white position is the pawn on c3. Black was threatening ... $\mathbb{Q}c8$, ... $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}a3$. The text move keeps counterplay alive based on the weakness of Black's light squares.

41... $\mathbb{W}a7$

Taking aim at the dark squares. Alternatively:

- a) 41... $\mathbb{Q}a3$ 42 $\mathbb{W}c8+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 43 $\mathbb{W}f5+$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 44 $\mathbb{W}f4+$ is perpetual.
- b) Trying to exploit the drawback of White's last move with 41... $\mathbb{Q}b8$ would have allowed 42 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{W}a7$ 43 $\mathbb{Q}b4$ when White is closing the door on the black attack.
- c) Perhaps best would have been the patient and prophylactic 41...g6! When it is difficult to come up with a way for White to improve his position.

42 $\mathbb{W}b5$

White desperately wants to get the rooks exchanged. Bear in mind that any ending with the heavy pieces off may be winning for White, due to the passed c-pawn.

42... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 43 $\mathbb{W}b4+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$

Simon keeps fighting for the win!

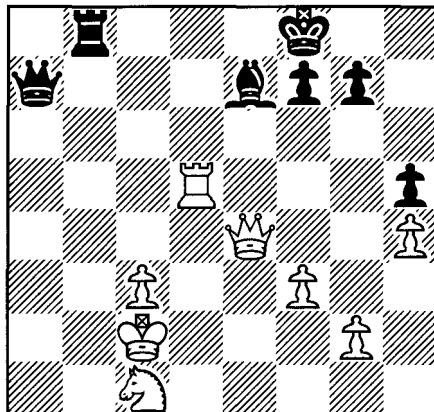
43... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 44 $\mathbb{W}b5$ g6 would be the other way to play on and would lead to a complex ending after 45 $\mathbb{Q}e8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ 46 $\mathbb{W}xe8+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$. My feeling is that Black is still better here as he is winning the h4-pawn, but now three results are possible rather than two (see the last chapter). Black would rather keep the pressure on in a different fashion and hope that White cracks, whilst having the draw in hand.

44 $\mathbb{W}e4$

Centralizing and again looking to tie down the black pieces to defensive duties.

44... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 45 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 46 $\mathbb{Q}d5$

Again trying to centralize, whilst preparing counterplay of my own.



46... $\mathbb{Q}f6$

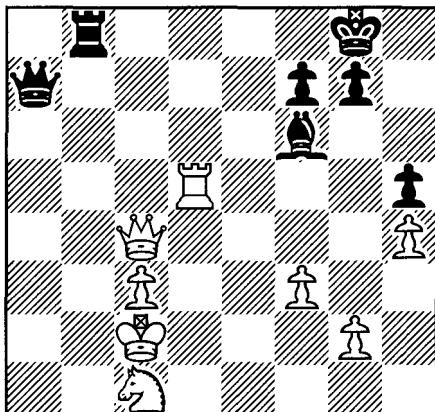
Exercise: What would have been wrong
with the menacing-looking 46... $\mathbb{Q}a1$?

Answer: The ice-cold 47 $\mathbb{Q}xh5!$ $\mathbb{Q}b1+$ 48 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}b2+$ 49 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}d8+$ 50 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ when again the knight holds the white position together.

47 $\mathbb{Q}c4$

47 $\mathbb{Q}xh5?$ $g6!$ 48 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}a1$ would suddenly see Black getting the play he has been looking for over the last few moves. Actually I don't see a good defence for White here: for instance, 49 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ with ... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ to come next.

47... $\mathbb{Q}g8$



Exercise: Find the best defensive move for White! Again be thinking about counterplay and any way to create a threat.

48 ♜c5!

The final accurate defensive move. White seeks again to exchange rooks whilst blocking the long diagonal for the black queen.

48... ♕b7

48... ♕xh4 49 ♔d3 ♕g3 50 ♜c8+ ♜xc8 51 ♜xc8+ ♔h7 would have been a winning attempt, but I think that White has as much chance of winning this position as Black. Simon instead takes a sensible practical decision.

49 ♜b3 ♜a7 50 ♜c4 ♜b7 ½-½

Summary

A big fight and a huge relief to me as I thought I was going to be crushed out of the opening! It shows what can be done with a bit of tenacity. White survived by managing to generate some counterplay, based on focusing on the one weakness in the black position (the light squares around the king). Don't give up when faced with a tough position, look to fight back and don't forget that it is hard to beat someone who never gives up.

Key Points

- 1) Having a knowledge of some key defensive fortresses is invaluable and will often save you a lot of hard work and decision making. Study the classic defensive positions!
- 2) When you blunder, don't give up on the position. Endeavour to fight harder! Make the swindle your friend and not your enemy. Your opponent will be under the psychological pressure to win the game, not you, so start enjoying yourself!
- 3) Don't panic when being attacked. Instead try to be cold and calculate as accurately as possible. If you feel this is a weakness in your game look to improve it by studying calculation exercises.
- 4) If your opponent gives up material for an attack, don't forget that often some or all of it can be given back to defuse the situation.

Chapter Twelve

Chess Psychology

and Practical Tips

Place the board so that the sun is in your opponent's eyes. – Ruy Lopez de Segura

Chess is known to be a mental game, a battle of the minds, but what exactly do we mean by that? There is a lot more to the game than just openings, tactics and endgames, as well as the strategic material that we have discussed thus far. Sometimes chess is a war of the minds off the chess board too. Have you ever played a game of chess where you look over your moves after the game and don't understand why you played them? This is probably because you are analysing your game when you are relaxed in the comfort of your own home, rather than under the pressure that can be felt over the board. In this chapter we will look at some of the psychological aspects of chess in tournament play and different ways in which you can try and tackle them. I'm sure you won't mind that this final chapter is 'wordier' than the others – it will give you a nice break from studying chess analysis!

People often ask "What makes a good chess player?" The usual answers you will hear are: intelligence, a great memory, the ability to calculate, etc. However, many people underestimate the role of psychology in the game, which starts before a move has even been made. Now I know I'm no sports psychologist, but I hope some of the advice provided here that I have picked up from my experiences at the board will be of use to you.

Be Confident

"I'm so mean, I make medicine sick." – Muhammad Ali

Cast your mind back to your first chess tournament. You are new on the chess scene, not sure how the day is structured or of any of the tournament rules. You sit down oppo-

site your first round opponent, who is a lot more experienced than you are. They are relaxed, confident and talking with their friends about previous games, some new openings they have learnt and some trick they remember from one of Carlsen's last games in the Bilbao Grand Slam. How do you feel? Are you confident that you will beat your experienced opponent? Or are you now terrified, nervous and filled with dread that they will smash you off the board with all their tricks they supposedly know?

If you answered 'yes' to the second question, then you already possess a quality that is essential for chess improvement. You are able to zone out from all of the nonsense of your surroundings and really focus on what is important – the game of chess that you are about to play. However, if you answered 'yes' to the third question, then you are amongst the majority that get affected by what people say or do to intimidate us.

This is a common factor in many sports, whether it is intentional or not. 'Trash talking' is recognized as the precursor to many a big sporting battle. Muhammad Ali was one of the most prominent of trash talkers and not only did he do this to unnerve his opponent, but also to work himself up into a state where he really believed that he could knock his opponent out without even breaking sweat.

Confidence is a huge issue in many walks of life and chess is no different. In fact it should be even more important in such a mental duel. Many talented chess players find that they have reached an impasse in their chess journey to improvement, but their tactical and positional understanding is far greater than reflected in their rating and of their colleagues who are of a similar strength. They get frustrated and wonder why this is. It could, of course, be for many reasons, but quite often a big factor is confidence. This can come into effect in many aspects of the game. There is usually at least one area of the game where people are not confident, but it is how we deal with these perceived weaknesses that is important. If our opponents catch a sniff of our lack of confidence, they are sure to prey on that weakness and our results will suffer. They will take us into some boring Berlin endgame (if they are playing me), or set the board on fire with tactics. Quite often, it is all about *appearing* confident that is the main thing.

Who would you fancy your chances against: someone who is looking very calm and confident, or someone who is shaking and looking very scared and worried? Regardless of the position in front of you, I would choose the latter. Letting your nerves get the better of you will easily be seen in your moves. There have been many instances where talented players get worried and lack confidence during a game, despite the fact they have been completely outplaying their opponent. This could be due to the fact they have a lower rating, so they assume the opponent will find some amazing, spectacular combination to blow them off the board, even though one doesn't exist. The first thing to remember is that we are not playing computers and that humans make errors in judgement all the time, for all sorts of reasons, including lack of confidence! The opposite sort of thing is seen when you play a game against someone of the same strength, but are not aware of their rating and play an excellent game, because that psychological barrier is not present.

Take a look at the world's top chess players – Magnus Carlsen, Levon Aronian, Vladimir

Kramnik, Vishy Anand. What do they all have in common? They all come across as extremely confident on and off the board. Do they always know what they are doing in their games? No, probably not, but they do not let this be known to their opponent. It's all part of the game.

If you are the type of person who is negative or lacks confidence for whatever reason, then there are some methods to try and help. Firstly, any time you do accomplish anything, it should feel good and should help build your confidence. You should relish these moments and imagine stepping into a spotlight of excellence and enjoy your successes. Secondly, don't associate with those who are negative towards you and your chess or bring you down at tournaments. Spend time with those who are also achieving the goals that you possess or are positive influences and use them to motivate you. Make friends off the board with people who are of a similar standard to you and they can become possible training partners. If you believe they are about a similar standard to you, then you can gee each other up. Thirdly, verbal positive persuasions to yourself will psyche you up for your big moment, just like Muhammad Ali. I try and spend some time at the board, 10 minutes or so before the game, motivating myself and telling myself I can win the upcoming battle. One of my friends, Grandmaster Stephen Gordon, puts some favourite music on his iPod to get himself 'in the zone'.

Don't Become Overconfident

However, too much confidence can also have a negative effect, leading to mistakes due to the lack of respect for the opponent's moves and carelessness due to not checking them thoroughly enough. The balance is important.

If you are able to tackle this huge psychological barrier and work on your self-confidence through whatever technique works for you, then you should see a big improvement in your chess. Next time you start to doubt yourself, remember another one of Ali's famous quotes: "I don't think it is bragging to say I am something special."

Be Emotionless

"As a chess player one has to be able to control one's feelings, one has to be as cold as a machine." – Levon Aronian

Too much emotion can be bad for anything, but especially in chess. I know that from past experience! If we think about how the top players of the royal game are in action, we rarely see them overreacting to any moves or situations as they are playing. They must remain stoic, so their opponents cannot read their body language or expressions in order to gain more insight into how they feel about their position. This is one of the biggest difficulties in chess – you do not know what your opponent is thinking. If you do, then you have a big advantage. Therefore, it is important not to show too much emotion over the board, so you do not give too much away.

The hardest time to remain calm and emotionless is when you have made a mistake and your opponent can immediately take advantage of this. If you know you are someone who visibly reacts in these situations (like me!), then get up from the board and take a walk. Do not do it in such a way as to alarm your opponent, but take a casual stroll around the room. The ability to maintain equanimity is a difficult one. Even after the mistake has been made, the game may not be over, so the hard part is then not dwelling on this mistake. Your judgement for future moves will be seriously clouded if you keep thinking about earlier mistakes and so this is where some verbal persuasion may come in handy again to keep you focussed and on the right track.

Let's say the game was lost due to an error in judgement and you have thrown away your chance at a big prize or a place in a national team. What do you do? The correct answer is you should analyse your games in the cold light of day and try to work out where you made the mistakes and try to ensure it doesn't happen again. One of the worst things you can do is fixate on all the negative feelings in that game, distance yourself from everyone and let it get to you so much that it affects the rest of your tournament. Remember that the game of chess is fun! So many times there have been situations where one move can cause a player to lose a string of consecutive games. However, as I have previously said, extremes are never good and if someone does not care about their loss at all then this cannot be a good thing as they will have no intention of improving.

Some games are lost before they have even started. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, your game can be influenced by feelings off the chessboard. If you were not in a good place before the game, whether you were nervous or upset, even if you tried very hard to consciously think positively during the game, your emotions may have caused a significant emotional imbalance to throw you off. At the other end of the spectrum, euphoria can have a negative effect. If you are too excited about the result of a game, then celebrating could reduce your energy for the following games. As was discussed in Chapter Ten on Winning Won Positions, perhaps this could even come into effect during the middle of a crucial game (as in David-Hunt), when things are going well and you are about to land a great result and achieve the best performance of your life. Fixating on this prospect can cause you to lose focus and undo all the good work done up to then. Remember a game of chess is never over until checkmate has been obtained or the opponent has resigned or lost on time, so we must keep playing to nullify our opponent's counterplay.

Time Management

You hear a lot of people say: "I was winning, but I lost on time", as if this doesn't really count as a loss! The clock is an important part of the game and if someone handled their time better than you did, then that is fair play to them. It is generally sound advice not to get into time trouble, but it is easier said than done. Many grandmasters regularly get themselves into time trouble, so if they do it, what hope is there for the rest of us?

One of the reasons people get into time trouble comes back to the confidence issue. If we lack confidence, then we are not going to believe that our moves are the best and we

will double, triple and quadruple check them to make sure nothing is wrong. So going back to solving the confidence problem should help in this department too. Another reason could be that you are a bit of a perfectionist and that you have to find the perfect move in every position. You may have a fear that if you don't spend a sufficient amount of time, you will play an inferior move.

What most people don't realize is that they are making a much bigger mistake by using up all of their time and then leaving themselves with very little time at the end of the game in a critical position. There is no point being significantly better or even winning after 30 moves, if you cannot make the time control by move 40. Many strong club players do not improve past this level due to these time issues. It may surprise you but grandmasters don't sit and look for the perfect move, they select a 'good enough' move in an average amount of time. This leaves the pressure on their opponents to find moves to outplay them and they can waste their own time worrying about doing this!

There are several ways of trying to 'cure' time-trouble. Before your game, you can estimate how much time you expect to have used at each milestone, rationing out the time appropriately. Former World Champion Mikhail Botvinnik believed that you should not use more than 20% of your time on the first fifteen moves of the game. This is some very good advice, but can be difficult to implement unless you are booked up on your openings.

If you are the type of person who doesn't have enough time to learn all the latest theory of trendy openings and you play chess based on principles, this is fine. Just stick to developing moves in the opening, rather than complicated combinations that may or may not work. Try to play positions that you are comfortable in. If you like attacking, then make sure you play an open game and vice-versa if you are more defensively inclined. You are bound to slow down and take more time than necessary if you do not feel comfortable in the position and you are unaware of the plans.

Let's say you have tried everything, but you still manage to find yourself in time trouble, then what do you do? The first step is not to panic! Make sure you don't analyse too deeply and try to play the moves that feel right in the position, so you can conserve some more time for the really critical moves later. Try to predict what your opponent is going to do and have a reply ready for each move. This way you are also using your opponent's time to think. Spend your time at the board, not wandering about looking at other games. If you ever get a chance to look at the play of Britain's top player Michael Adams, look at how much time he spends away from the board. The answer: virtually none!

Practical Advice if Your Opponent is in Time-Trouble

What if it isn't you in time-trouble? How do you handle that situation? What you should not do is start to speed up your play in the hope that the opponent will lose on time if you don't give them much time to think. Many times, the advantage has been given away because both sides move too fast when one side is in time trouble. If you have time on your clock, you should use it wisely to play accurately and not just speed up to make your opponent panic.

The Psychology of Draws

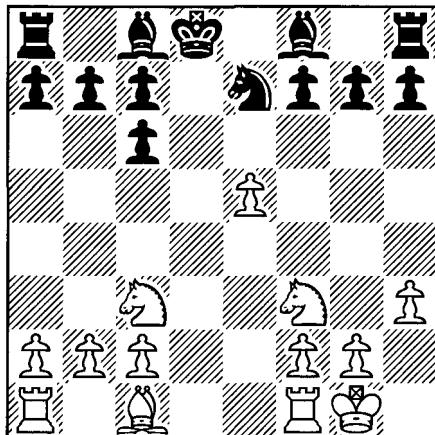
There have been many discussions about scrapping the draw offer and these days, at the professional level, there are ‘Sofia rules’ in place (done for the commercial benefit – for the entertainment of the sponsors and spectators) to prevent early ‘halving out’. This takes away somewhat from the psychological battle on the board. Tactical draw offers are often sprung upon unsuspecting opponents. This could be just as they have got out of a tricky position, or when they are in a slightly better position but may not have that much time on the clock. More often than not, when someone is offered a draw, they will spend longer than they would normally have done over that move, pondering whether they should accept the draw or play for the win. This is a great way to get your opponent to run down his time in the critical stages of the game! However, if you are being offered a draw, do not fall into this trap.

Be Strong and Play for the Win!

Sometimes players use the ‘illusion’ of being happy with a draw, normally through the repetition of moves. This is often seen when the time control involves Fischer incremental timing, so they gain some added time for each repetition. The player is often willing to repeat the position in the hope that the opponent deviates into an inferior line. However, there may be cases where a player has absolutely no intention of accepting a draw, but will repeat the position twice in order to mislead their opponent into thinking a draw is on the table, so that they let their guard down and neglect their analysis. Then much to their disappointment, on the third time around, some different move is made. This leads to the opponent’s emotions running wild, which then throws them off their game and they are more likely to make a mistake. These tricks are perfectly legal in a game of chess and it just comes with experience learning how to deal with them. Don’t be a puppet on a string!

One of the ways to avoid disappointment in the area of draw psychology is to tell yourself you always going to play for a win. If you can do this, tactical draw offers will not faze you. Even if you only require a draw for a prize or a norm, it is a great way to improve if you always play for a win and make your opponent grovel! One of the biggest dangers seen by many players is that they know they are quite happy with a draw before they go in for the game and their mindset is all wrong. This happened to me when I had the chance to make my first GM norm, when I needed a draw with GM Jonathan Parker:

Game 112
A.Hunt-J.Parker
British League 2003



Here, only ten moves into the game, having just played **10 h3** I offered a draw. I was a bundle of nerves. Jonathan turned it down and calmly played **10... ♕e8**. Psychologically, of course, he now had me! He now knew he could make a draw whenever he liked and was in a position of power for the rest of the game, which fortunately I eventually managed to draw.

The attitude I had of playing for the draw is one of the easiest ways to lose. If you train yourself to always look for the best moves and go for the win, then it is more likely that there will be pressure on your opponent and they will be more likely to make a mistake, or you may reach a winning position and they will then be happy to accept a draw. If your opponent knows that you only need a draw and yet you are playing all out for a win, then this will instil even more fear into them!

The Psyche-out

Intimidation is a tactic used in every sport where the idea is to mentally unbalance the opponent and put fear into them, hoping that this will affect their performance. Since chess is a mental game, this tactic can be used to great extent.

Forget the usual staring into the eyes of your opponent, strutting around the room like you own it: everyone knows those moves. I am talking about on the board. Think back to the section where we were working on our confidence. We know that it is a good idea to play an opening that you are familiar with and therefore get into positions where you are comfortable. However, if your opponent has had the chance to look up your games and knows exactly what you are comfortable with, the chances are that they will not allow that to happen. So the first few moves of the game can be a psychological game of cat and mouse. This is especially the case at team events, such as the Olympiad, or a closed tournament, where there is a lot of time for preparation.

If the opponent plays something you don't expect, then was this special preparation? Does this mean that you should change what you play, so that you don't walk down their

preparation? But that means you might not know it as well. What should you do? With all these thoughts racing through your head and your emotions building up, there is little room left to concentrate on what move to actually play.

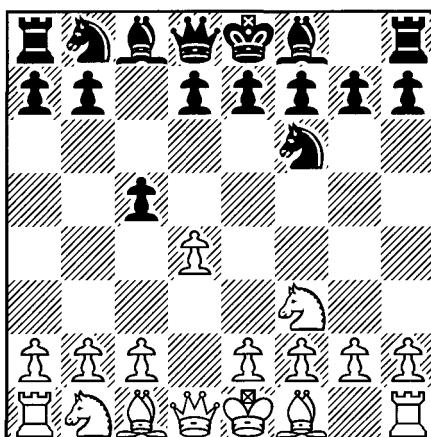
Take a look at the beginning of this game between two women competing in the European Team Championship.

Game 113
S.Chevannes-B.Atnilov
 European Women's Team Championship, Crete 2007
Benko Gambit

In order to fully understand the psychological battle between the two players, you need to know what their usual repertoire is. White is a d4 system player – this means she does not play any main line Queen's Gambits and sets up in the form of a Torre Attack/London System/Colle System against everything. Black is a King's Indian player and has always played ...g6, ...g7, ...d6 against every d-pawn set-up.

1 d4 ♜f6 2 ♜f3

Here White was now expecting 2...g6 as this is what Black had played every single time before. However, the move **2...c5!** was played.



First of all, how do you deal with the shock? The opponent is going to know that you didn't expect it because she had never played it before, but you mustn't look worried. You then need to think about why your opponent has chosen to play this move instead of something she is comfortable with and has played all the time. If she has never played this move, then she cannot know it that well and must have prepared something. Now, White could play either 3 c3 or 3 e3, opting for her usual systems set-up, despite the fact that the main line and better move is considered to be 3 d5. However, 3 d5 leads to completely dif-

ferent positions and some theory on Benoni-type positions needs to be known. When calculating how to respond, think about what they know about your game. In this game, White knew that Black expected either 3 e3 or 3 c3 and had a line prepared against this in which she would get at least equality. Based on this, Sabrina played **3 d5** for the first time in her life.

Question: Was this a stupid decision?

Answer: Not at all. It wasn't that she had no clue how to handle Benoni positions, because that would not have been wise. It would be no good going down a line where you don't know any plans, just to avoid prep. However, Sabrina knew that her opponent didn't know these lines that well either so it was a good gamble. The other factor to think about is how much time you should spend on all these moves. If you take a long time, then it will become apparent that you were not expecting the opening and are unsure of yourself. If you move too quickly, though, then you may play inaccurately.

It is the same thing if you have especially prepared a line and your opponent is walking straight into your prep! You should not get too excited and move straight away each time as this may trigger an alert in their head and they may change their plans. Remain stoic and just act as if you are still thinking about each move, but at the same time, do not think too long. Remember Botvinnik's strategy: less than 20% of your time for your first fifteen moves.

After 3 d5 was played, the Israeli player went into deep thought. This was not a good idea on her part. It left Sabrina feeling a lot more confident that she had taken her opponent out of prep. Even though she didn't know much about the line, clearly her opponent didn't either! Black then played **3...b5** after much deliberation. White then chose to play **4 c4**, but played it rather quickly. Now, suddenly, we are in a Benko-type position, which was not expected by either side. It is now simply a chess match between the two players and no prep is involved. However, how much the psyche-out affected the players is of utmost importance.

The game eventually ended in a draw due to both players spending too much time over the opening moves and then having a crazy time scramble near the end which resulted in a drawn position. However, if White had continued to play confidently and reasonably quickly, Black would have felt a lot less comfortable. The fact that Sabrina took so long over her opening moves gave her opponent confidence.

This battle for the psychological upper hand can be seen right to the top level, where grandmasters have been out-prepped, but they do not want to show it. You may see some of them looking up into the distance as if they are trying to recall their preparation or a game they have seen, but this is often a bluff! Look out for it next time you watch them play; it's quite funny to watch.

Key Points

1) Overall, chess is a hugely psychological game and this can often be a big barrier for improvement. If you are actively aware of these potential hurdles, then you can do something about them. Being able to overcome your natural shortcomings on a temporary basis will do a lot of good for your game. This may mean you have to invoke the verbal persuasion mentioned previously. This is particularly important if you are interested in playing chess professionally. If you are the type who has a nervous disposition, then it may not be the game for you. If you depend on the money that is available for winning chess tournaments, then the stakes are much higher and there is a lot more pressure. Being nervous can negatively affect your play.

2) General self-improvement is necessary to aid your progress. Not only do you need to do exercises that help improve your memory or visualization at the board, but there are physical aspects to work on also. Our top players are normally quite healthy and in good shape and this helps to maintain their mental concentration. Stamina is important because long chess tournaments are extremely tiring. Little things such as getting enough rest in between games is very important and fatigue can take a toll. In hindsight, during my year off, I played *too many* tournaments, not getting the proper rest and analysis time in between the events and as a result this hindered my progress.

3) Character development and generating a positive self-image should help. You must also be able to take criticism and learn from your mistakes. One of the most effective ways to improve is to analyse your games. This doesn't just mean flick through them with a computer, but to really break them down. Get a stronger player to analyse them with you, highlighting both your strengths and weaknesses. Cross-reference them and note any trends. If you can do this, this will help you on the path of self-improvement. It may be painful but will definitely help you in the future.

4) However, it is not a good idea to just focus on the weaknesses as this could bring you down. It is also important to look at your strengths. If you are good in a certain area, then why not practise trying to lead your games this way? This will help with the positive thinking too as you know you are good in this area so should also lead to increased confidence.

5) Last but not least, it is a good idea to set yourself some goals. These should not be totally unrealistic, otherwise you will lose the drive to achieve them, but still ambitious enough so they will motivate you. They need to be positive goals and ones which are measurable so you can track your progress. It may be a rating gain, or a certain amount of games played Christmas, or whatever. These goals then be broken down into categories and checked off as they are achieved.

With all this information and hopefully a deeper insight into chess psychology, you should obtain some new weapons to use on and off the chessboard to help you on your path to improvement. I wish you the best of luck!

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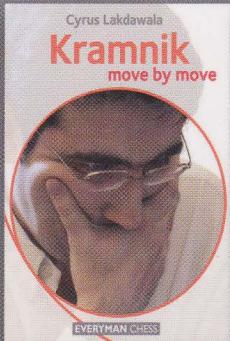
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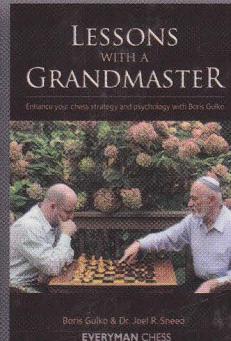
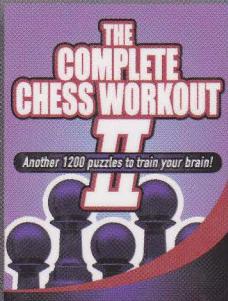
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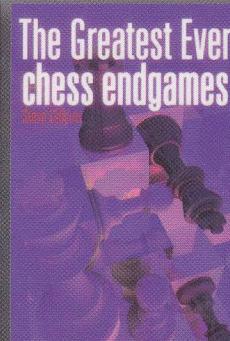


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