

LOOKING *for* **TROUBLE**



Recognizing and Meeting Threats in Chess

DAN HEISMAN

Looking for Trouble

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Introduction

This book is written to address an underemphasized area of chess training and study, the identification of and reaction to threats.

For beginner and intermediate-level players, the study of tactics is paramount. Almost all tactics books take the approach of providing a position where there is a forced win, checkmate, or draw. The text then states “White (or Black) to play and win (or mate or draw)” and then you are asked to find the solution.

However, most games are lost when either:

- 1) you make an outright oversight, where your opponent had no threats but, after you blunder, the opponent can mate or win material, or
- 2) you miss a simple threat made by your opponent’s previous move, allowing your opponent to carry out this threat, usually a basic tactic winning material or checkmating.

This book helps you minimize situation #2 by providing over 200 problems in which you focus on identifying and meeting threats ranging from extremely easy to fiendishly difficult. But even the identification of difficult threats – and sometimes more importantly how to meet them – is discussed in a manner that should greatly benefit players of all levels.

Notice that situation #2 involves opponent’s threats – threats looked at from the defensive side. The assumption that studying problems presented in a typical tactics book makes you a stronger player is not totally realized if you use this practice only to spot *offensive* opportunities that occur *for yourself* on your move. You need to augment this capability one half-move in either direction, so that you can both *spot threats generated by your opponent’s previous move*, and also to *make sure your move does not create new tactical opportunities for him* as well.

Your ability to spot these threats improves if you also consider those “Play and Win” problems from a *defensive* standpoint. That is, you can also use them in reverse: to learn how to identify those same tactics to make sure they do not occur against you. By providing problems that require you both to identify threats and provide best solutions, this book not only facilitates that additional focus, but takes it a step further by overtly forcing you to consider *prior* and *upcoming* tactics for *both* players before deciding upon your move.

Definition

Do you know what a chess “threat” is?

Most of my students, when asked this question, are at loss for a reasonable definition. *A “threat” is a move which, if not stopped by the opponent’s reply, can do something*

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harmful to the opponent and/or useful for you next move: create a passed pawn, make the opponent's King unsafe, win material, force mate, ruin the opponent's pawn structure, etc. Another way to say this is that a *threat* is a move that allows one to do something constructive NEXT MOVE if not stopped.

The way to determine what an opponent's threats are is to assume you just PASS – make no move at all! Say to yourself, “Suppose it was his turn again – what would he do?” You are most interested in his checks, captures, and threats (forcing moves) *on his next move*. If the moves that this process generates are constructive for him, then those are his threats.

Note that while the strongest threats are tactical in nature – checkmate or winning material – a threat might also be positional in nature: ruin a pawn structure, make a piece bad, control a file, weaken a pawn or square, force transition from the middlegame into a won endgame. A threat may be just to make one player's task easier: simplify into a more basic endgame, force a draw from an inferior position, etc.

Threats and Playing Strength

Once people start playing chess, most of them pay disproportionately more attention to their own upcoming threats than to the threats *their opponent generated* last move. And most, even after considerable experience, disregard threats their opponent can play against them next move. Therefore, many players often overlook existing threats or allow future threats that cannot be met.

However, the path to becoming a stronger player must lead to the following realization: any good move must not only address the threats presented by the opponent's previous move, but also must not allow unstoppable threats to be played next move. More experienced players learn to do the former, but only the really serious players learn to do the latter. From this observation, preventing upcoming unstoppable threats lies at the heart of what I have dubbed playing “Real Chess.”

From this standpoint we can roughly categorize players into three levels:

1. Beginners – who ignore most threats, specifically those just made on the previous move,

2. Intermediate – who meet threats made by the opponent's previous move, but may allow unstoppable threats next move, and

3. Advanced – who do not make a move unless it not only meets threats made by the opponent's previous move, but also prepares answers to all of the possible threats generated by the opponent's next move (if possible).

If you accept these categories, then understanding how to identify and meet threats can be seen as vitally important!

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Meeting Threats

There are three main things one can do against a threat:

1. Ignore it
2. Create a bigger counter-threat (a “counterattack”), or
3. Stop it.

When would one ignore a threat? Well, suppose you were up a Queen and your opponent “threatens” to win a pawn. Instead of making the pawn safe you might continue your development, knowing that your greatly superior forces will win easily. In this situation, saving the pawn is not as important as getting all your pieces into play quickly. A second situation to ignore a “threat,” as IM Jeremy Silman correctly states, is if it is not a “real” threat at all – your opponent is going to do something to you which is not only in fact harmless, but actually may help you! While this book does not *primarily* address “phantom threats,” the idea of ignoring phantom threats is incorporated into several of the problems.

Consider another possibility, where someone is threatening to win your piece by attacking it with something worth less, or attacking it in such a way that the threatened capturing sequence, if not met, would win material. There are five possible ways to meet such a strong tactical threat:

1. Capture the attacking piece,
2. Move the attacked piece to a safe square,
3. Guard the piece to make it safe (not feasible if the attacker is worth less),
4. Block a long-range attack from a Bishop, Rook, or Queen, (interposition) or
5. Counterattack – do not defend, but make an equal or greater threat to your opponent; this could include pinning the opponent's attacking piece.

There is no single consistently correct answer – any one of these might be forced, or best, depending upon the situation. However, some rough general observations can be made:

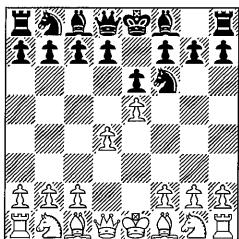
- 1) On the average, the “best” of these is usually to capture the attacking piece (if such can be done without loss of material) or just move to a safe square.
- 2) Guarding a piece is not as good, as this both ties down the guarding pieces, which likely have better things to do, and also may allow “removal of the guard” combinations.
- 3) Blocking the attack pins the blocker, and thus may lead to further combinational problems. However, early in the game if the attacked piece is the King (check!), blocking may be best if it allows one to castle.

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4) Counterattack is by far the most complicated and dangerous. It can be highly effective and is used quite a bit by strong players. In many situations counterattack has the big advantage of not “backing down” and ceding the opponent the initiative.

However, I teach anyone who is not high-rated that, when they have a large advantage, not to meet a threat by counterattack. Non-experts who are winning easily should refrain from that method of dealing with threats because, after counterattacking, they are often faced with two threats (if their counterattack is met by a second threat):

Example: Black to play after 1.e4 e6 2.d4 Nf6 3.e5



After 3.e5 the black Knight is threatened and it should move. If instead Black counterattacks with 3...Bb4+?? Then White just plays 4.c3 and has two threats to win a piece and Black cannot stop both. As a chess teacher, I see this kind of mistake all the time!

So the possibility of additional threats after a counterattack just complicates matters, and when you are winning easily you are more likely to be the one harmed by complexity (you have more to lose). Counterattacks are a legitimate way to meet a threat, and all *zwischenzugs* (in-between moves) pretty much fall into this category. Stronger players not only do counterattack, but often find this a most effective method; it is just that compared to relatively weak players, they rarely make tactical misjudgments, and so can afford the extra luxury of this possibility. So I do look for counterattacks.

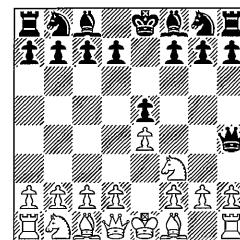
You also need to determine how your opponent’s previous move has met *your* previous threats and also how it created new opportunities for him that are not direct threats, such as indications of some plan or maneuver of which you must be aware.

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Threats versus Good Moves

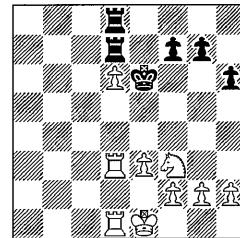
It is important to note that *not all threats are good moves nor are all threats necessarily very harmful.*

A trivial example of a threat that is not a good move is 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Qh4??.



Black threatens the e-pawn, but while this is a “good” *threat*, 2...Qh4 is a terrible *move* because the threat can obviously be prevented by 3.Nxh4.

Threats that are not very harmful are also common. Suppose you are ahead a Queen and your opponent makes a move to “threaten” to win a pawn. It may be correct to ignore the threat and continue to develop your pieces, or just let him take the pawn if in doing so he has to trade off a few pieces. In the latter case the move might not really be considered a threat at all because although he wins material, the net result (trading off pieces when down a queen) is not good for him. Similarly, consider the following after 1...Ke6:



Black “threatens” to win the d-pawn, but actually it is not much of a threat since White would be very happy ignoring the threat, say with 2.Ke2, and allowing 2...Rxd6 3.Rxd6+ Rxd6 4.Rxd6+ Kxd6 trading off all the Rooks and leaving White with an easy win. Playing the cute 2.Nh4 to “stop” the threat and get a knight fork on f5 after the trades on d6 is not only not very effective (2...g6), but also silly, since why would White want to stop this “threat”?

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Note that your opponent's threats *which were already on the board before your previous move* should either:

- 1) have been addressed by that previous move, or
- 2) be "passed along" to this move.

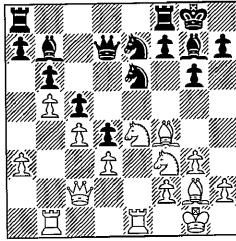
In the second case you must not forget these lingering threats when considering your current move! Therefore, if you do a counterattack and/or a *zwischenzug* to meet a threat, your opponent's new threats must be added to his previous ones, and you may need to address both next move.

Unstoppable Threats

Even though all "winning" threats are stoppable if we see them early enough, in practice this is not humanly possible. When players don't look ahead to what their opponent can do to them *next move* before deciding upon their current one, the opponent sometimes can generate unstoppable threats on that next move. Unstoppable threats might also result at the end of a deep, forcing sequence that a player cannot calculate precisely until it is too late. With stronger players an unstoppable threat often takes the form of multiple threats where each can be met individually, but cannot all be met simultaneously with one reply.

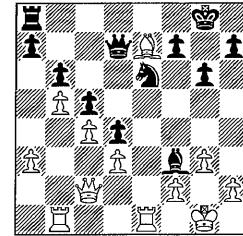
As examples I will show how I was victimized one evening by two pretty, unstoppable threats as I lost two 15-minute games to former student and Pennsylvania High School Champion Mike Glick at our local Main Line Chess Club:

1st game position, after Mike plays 1...Ne6:



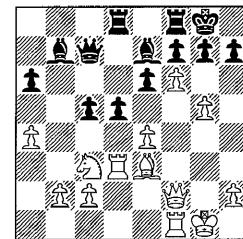
Black is threatening 2...Nxf4, both winning the bishop pair and ruining White's kingside pawn structure. I could have played the complex (and apparently best) 2.Ne5 or just the timid 2.Bd2, but I tried to get tricky with 2.Bh6? and that led to a threat I could not meet: **2.Bh6? Bxe4!** Removing the guard, since 2...Bxh6?? 3.Nf6+ wins the Queen. **3.Bxg7** Forced, to save material. **3...Bxf3 4.Bxf8 Bxg2 5.Bxe7** Losing, but 5.Kxg2 Rxg8 just leaves Black up material with a won game anyway. **5...Bf3!**

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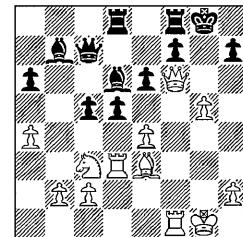


This makes two threats, and I cannot meet both. Black simultaneously threatens 6...Qxe7 again, just going up two pieces for a Rook with an easy win, and also 6...Ng5 and 7...Qh3 with an unstoppable mate. I can stop the latter threat only at the expense of the Bishop, e.g. 6.Re5 Qxe7 (6...Ng5 7.Qc1 and Qf1 holds g2 so Black may as well just take the Bishop with a winning game). I tried **6.Qd2** but resigned after **6...Ng5**.

2nd game position, after Mike plays 1.f6:

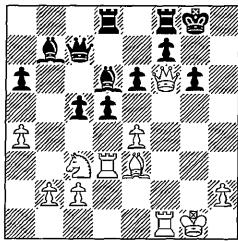


White of course threatens 2.fxe7, but Black has the counterthreats ...d4 or even ...dxe4 in some lines. Normally one likes to play ...Bf8 in such situations, but here that square is occupied! Therefore I played **1...Bd6** Adding ...Be5 to my "arsenal" of defenses/threats. **2.fxg7** Now should I leave the pawn on g7 as a shield, or capture it? In such positions sometimes one, sometimes the other is correct, but in this case I was worried about h7 if I leave the pawn on g7, so **2...Kxg7 3.Qf6+ Kg8**



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Mike correctly played the only strong move **4.g6!** I instantly saw that 4...fxg6 was rather grim after 5.Qxe6+. Interpolating 4...Bxh2+ does not help, although in retrospect this is my best line even though White is better. Ignoring the threat of 5.gxh7+ was not good for my health either, so by process of elimination I quickly played **4...hxg6**, hoping my counterthreat of 5...Be5 would keep me in the game. Unfortunately this was a quick game, and I fell into playing “Hope Chess”, as it allowed the beautiful, but not too hard-to-find “White to play and win” move:



5.Bd4! Much better than the slow 5.Bh6? Be5 stopping the mate threat “from behind”. Now Mike has two extremely strong threats: 6.Qg7# (or 6.Qh8#), as well as 6.Rh3 and 7.Rh8# (or 7.Qh8#) due to his clearance of the third rank. For example after 5...cxd4 (or 5...e5) 6.Rh3 threatens unstoppable mate. After **5...Bxh2+ 6.Kh1** I resigned as 6...Be5 7.Bxe5 loses the Queen and more. Well done, Mike! If these games had been slower than 15-minute I hope I would not have them to show you here!

In these examples Mike’s threats were pretty advanced – quite wonderful in fact for 15-minute play. For instructive purposes, most of the threats in this book will not nearly be so difficult, but a few will be even more so!

How to Read This Book

Unlike a book of tactical problems, which often asks a player how to win after an opponent has made a bad move, this book contains examples of different types of threats, ranging from ignorable to commonplace to ferocious. The identification of the threats varies in difficulty, as does their prevention. The problems are taken mostly from well-known positions (such as openings or endgames), or real games played by myself or students. In the latter cases the names of the combatants are not given to protect both the innocent and the guilty, but I will usually identify myself – often for a mistake!

For each problem, a position is given along with the previous move. Move numbers always start at 1, unless A) it is an opening position, when the real move sequence is given, or B) it is a continuation of the previous problem. The reader is asked to figure out both what the previous move is threatening, labeled “Threat,” and what they should do about it, the “Prevention.” Both the Threat and the Prevention are

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given following the diagram, usually along with some explanation that should prove instructive. Prevention moves that are incorrect but seem like plausible answers may be provided, along with analysis/explanation of why they are incorrect.

The main preventative move(s) and variations are given in **bold** and generic advice is given in *italics*. It is my hope that the reader will find that the italicized guidelines, based on my experiences from instructing hundreds of players, are by themselves worth the price of the book.

In a few problems the player to move is in check, so the “threat” is not to “take the King” but to continue creating problems by a mating attack, a win of material, or possibly other side threats. As in all the other problems, the best answer – in this case the best way to get out of check – is listed under “Prevention”.

In many problems the “Prevention” immediately and directly stops the threat. In others the Prevention move counterattacks or ignores the threat for some positive purpose. In some cases the *immediate* threat can be met, but the player might still have a difficult defense. Therefore, while the result of the “Prevention” move is *likely* to result in an even or better position, that is not always so – the long term prospects may be grim! This, of course, is how things are in real games. Therefore, the practice of identifying and meeting opponent threats that, if missed, can turn your position from bad to lost, will help you provide more resistance. Consistently meeting these threats in bad positions may also frustrate the opponent, and even ultimately result in your saving – or even winning – bad or lost positions. Dealing correctly with these practical situations, both the good and the not-so-good, should prove very helpful to your game!

So the reader should try to first figure out the threats and then try to determine the best way to prevent these threats. However, after doing both, only look at the “Threat” answer! *If you identified the Threat correctly, then see if your Prevention answer is also correct.* If so, well done! *But if your Threat diagnosis was incorrect, then likely your original Prevention answer will not make sense, so you should go back and try to figure out the correct Prevention, knowing the intended threat.* By providing the type of problem where two sets of answers are required, this book is much closer to helping you address problems that you would encounter in a real game, where positions are only rarely “One side to play and win or mate.” The result: problems that are more practical, with a better chance that they will be applicable to your future positions and decisions.

The problems have been divided into opening, middlegame, and endgame stages. Opening and endgame problems are ordered by type and middlegame problems by difficulty. Exceptions occur when there is a series of problems from one game or theme, which are kept in series and occur based upon the order of the first problem of the set. I have also tried to pick problems that represent ideas you will encounter fairly often if you play a bit of chess; this was easier to do in the opening and endgame section, but even in some middlegame problems I tried to select

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themes that should be useful in similar positions. In the middlegame section I have added five “Bonus” positions to illustrate a few of the most famous threats – or famous replies to threats – in the history of chess.

After going through more than 200 practical problems ranging in difficulty and type, you should become much more aware of this important aspect of the thinking process: to identify threats and to make sure that you not only meet them, but that in doing so you do not allow unstoppable opponent threats on the next move. If you can consistently identify and stop immediate threats, and not allow upcoming unstoppable ones, you are well on your way to becoming a very strong player. Don’t be discouraged if the first time through the book you did not find the correct answer to problems ranging from two stars and harder; the goal is to get better and better at the process and pave the way to improvement, not to prove you are already dazzling. Remember, even some of the intermediate level problems came from errors made by players rated 2000+ playing meaningful slow games, so don’t feel too bad. Of course, those 2000+ players (including myself, in many examples), wished they had not missed such “easy” problems when it counted!

The Intended Reader

The intended reader of this book would be rated between 1200 and 2200 USCF/FIDE. This range falls between the “upper level Beginner” through “Advanced” definitions given earlier.

The labeled difficulty of each problem and the level of explanation are calibrated for readers near the middle of that range. The very wide range of difficulty in the problems easily accommodates a wide range of readership – the easy problems are pretty easy, but the hardest problems may be devilish for anyone:

* = Very Easy
** = Easy
*** = Medium
**** = Hard
***** = Very Difficult

Most problems labeled *** or less should be quite instructive for players even rated somewhat below 1200. Moreover, most of the generic advice should be helpful for anyone under 1800. The problems labeled *** or harder often are positions that were played incorrectly by experts and masters during slow games, so they should be of benefit to players of any level, right up through master.

Finally, there are a couple of opening analyses – computer-aided – that have never been previously published, and thus may be of theoretical interest to players of all levels.

Dan Heisman
September 2003

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Acknowledgements

First I would like to thank Dr. Steven Rolfe of the Main Line Chess Club, who not only suggested the idea for this book, but was also gracious enough to put aside some of his valuable time to work on the manuscript. He reviewed both the general and specific nature of the problems to make sure they were the “flavor” that he had originally envisioned, and to see if the problems were useful for players of his level. Steve also helped ensure that the Introduction clearly stated why the book is unique and instructive.

I would also like to thank Kevin Fonseca, who took time to stay inside his home in Hawaii to help me proof the problems, and USCF Expert Mike Glick, who was much more happy to stay inside during the freezing winter weather here in Philadelphia for his proofing.

I would like to thank ChessCafe’s Hanon Russell for agreeing to publish the book and for being willing to put up with a few extra typos in my Novice Nook column while I concentrated on the manuscript. And of course I would also like to thank my editor, Taylor Kingston, for allowing me to concentrate more on content than on grammar. Taylor not only edited the text, but double-checked each analysis with Fritz!

Finally I would like to thank my wife Shelly, who has to tell me to get up and stretch occasionally when I glue myself to the computer late each night.

Opening Threats

Section 1: Opening Threats

For each position, the reader is asked to identify the “Threat” (the strong move or moves possible if the same player were to move again) and the best way to stop or counter that threat in some way: the “Prevention”.

The threat(s) can almost invariably be generated by simply “passing” and letting that player play again, identifying his best move(s). The tactical threats were verified by taking the position, giving it to the strong *Fritz* chess software, and instructing *Fritz* to analyze the position with the same player to move again!

A threat does not have to be a mate or outright win of material. It could be other compensation such as making the opponent’s King unable to castle, winning the bishop pair, ruining the opponent’s pawn structure for no compensation, etc. A special case should be mentioned, and that is when a player is in check. In that case the threat is not to take the King, but rather how the checking player might continue if the check is not answered properly. In other cases the threat may be positional or long-term (not just the next move), such as pushing connected passed pawns in the endgame. However, in this book almost all of the threats are “what could happen next move if you don’t do something to prevent it this move.”

Each problem has an assigned difficulty, one star (easiest) through five stars. The level of difficulty is the *combined* relative difficulty in finding the threat and the best prevention. In many cases the threat is extremely easy to spot, but the prevention can be difficult. In a few cases it may be the threat that is more subtle, but the prevention, once the threat is identified, may not be nearly as difficult. All the tactical problems have been checked by computer to make sure the answer is correct; there may be other solutions that are plausible, but the answer given has been chosen to be clearly best, easiest, or most instructive among possible answers. If more than one way of meeting the threat is close to best, then multiple Prevention moves are bolded as correct.

So, for example, suppose White has just made the last move. Then it is **Black’s** turn, so you have to figure out **White’s** threat – as if Black did not respond at all. *Thus all continuations given under “Threat” assume the player who just moved gets to move again*, so if **White** just made the last move then **White** will also move first in the Threat part of the answer. After deciding upon the threat(s) you have to figure out what Black should do to prevent/address that threat. If Black has just made the last move then everything is reversed.

It is very instructive to include typical positions or maneuvers that look like clear threats, but are really not. This type of misleading problem is common in actual play, so it is important for the improving player to be able to differentiate between

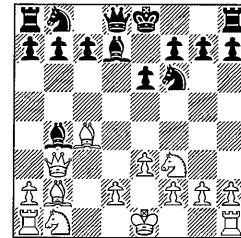
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threats which must be avoided and those that are not “real” and can be ignored, or even subtly invited! By including such positions we hope to help the reader develop a better sense of danger, and also keep him honest when solving the problems!

The choice of opening problems has been based not on the popularity of the opening, but on instructive value. Opening problems are ordered by their opening variation.

Problem O1

Black to move after 1.b4 d5 2.Bb2 Nf6 3.Nf3 e6 4.c4 dxc4 5.e3 Bd7 6.Bxc4 Bxb4 7.Qb3 (Polish Opening, **):

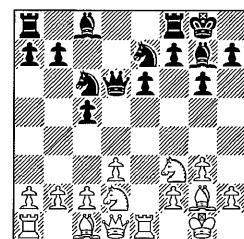


Threat: 8.Qxb4 with a further eye on b7 as well.

Prevention: 7...Ne6! as 8.a3 Bd6 is good for Black, who has a healthy extra pawn. A further 9.Qxb7?? loses to 9...Rb8, skewering the Queen and Bishop, winning the Bishop.

Problem O2 (2-problem set)

Black to move after 1.Nf3 c5 2.g3 Nc6 3.Bg2 g6 4.O-O Bg7 5.d3 e6 6.e4 Nge7 7.Re1 O-O 8.e5 d6 9.exd6 Qxd6 10.Nbd2 (Petrosian-Pachman, Bled 1961, King’s Indian Attack, ***):



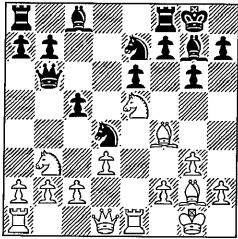
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Threat: White threatens 11.Ne4 winning the c-pawn because 11...Qd5 12.Nfg5! (threatening 13.Nf6+) causes Black to lose the c-pawn, e.g. 12...Qd4 13.c3.

Prevention: 10...Qc7 is what Pachman played, and 10...b6 (*Fritz*) is about as good.

Problem O3 (2nd of 2)

Black to move after 1.Nf3 c5 2.g3 Nc6 3.Bg2 g6 4.O-O Bg7 5.d3 e6 6.e4 Nge7 7.Re1 O-O 8.e5 d6 9.exd6 Qxd6 10.Nbd2 Qc7 11.Nb3 Nd4 12.Bf4 Qb6 13.Ne5 (Petrosian-Pachman, Bled 1961, King's Indian Attack, ***):

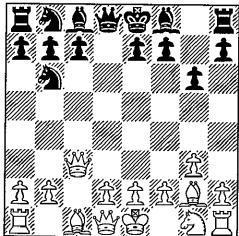


Threat: White threatens 14.Nc4 winning the c-pawn because 14...Qb5?, attempting to guard the c-pawn, runs into 15.a4 Qb4 16.Bd2 which wins the Queen.

Prevention: 13...Bxe5 14.Bxe5 f6, although 13...Nd5 (retaining the fianchettoed Bishop is always appealing and often necessary) 14.Ne4 Qc6 is almost as good. In either case, White retains a pleasant advantage.

Problem O4

Black to move after 1.c4 Nf6 2.g3 g6 3.Bg2 d5 4.exd5 Nxd5 5.Qb3 Nb6 6.Qc3 English Opening, ***):



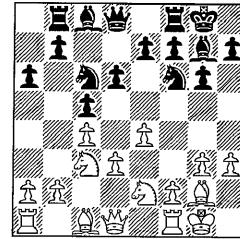
Looking For Trouble

Threat: 7.Qxh8 winning the Rook.

Prevention: 6...Rg8 or 6...f6 – what could be simpler? Here an IM correctly chose 6...f6! retaining his option of castling kingside. While ...f6 is a move not usually played before castling with Queens on the board (a general guideline), here it is fairly flexible compared to ...Rg8. The Queen is somewhat awkwardly placed on c3. Black went on to win the game, although this position is more or less even. White tried 7.h4?! but the simple 7.d4 was probably safer.

Problem O5

Black to move after 1.c4 Nf6 2.g3 g6 3.Bg2 Bg7 4.Nc3 O-O 5.e4 d6 6.Nge2 c5 7.O-O Nc6 8.d3 a6 9.h3 Rb8 (English Opening, **):

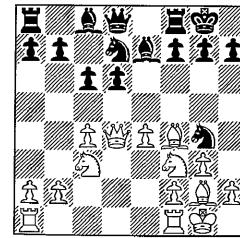


Threat: 10...b5 with queenside expansion.

Prevention: While not forced to do so, in positions like these White does well to prevent Black's threat with 10.a4. The resulting hole on b4 is not too dangerous and later, if Black plays ...b5, White will have the choice of creating a passed pawn with c4xb5 a6xb5 and a4-a5, or capturing a4xb5 and opening the a-file for his Rook.

Problem O6

Black to move after 1.c4 e5 2.g3 Nf6 3.Bg2 c6 4.d4 exd4 5.Qxd4 Be7 6.Nc3 O-O 7.e4 d6 8.Nf3 Nbd7 9.O-O Ng4 10.Bf4 (English Opening, ***):



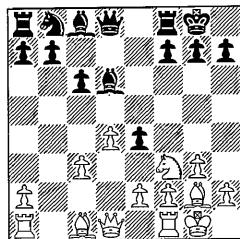
Opening Threats

Threat: 11.Bxd6 winning a pawn.

Prevention: 10...Nge5 is best, blocking the Bishop's attack and giving a meaning to Black's previous move. Acceptable are 10...Nc5 (discovering the guard of the Queen on d8) or 10...Qb6, so that 11.Bxd6?? Qxd4 12.Nxd4 Bxd6 wins a piece. Notice that all of these are somewhat indirect defenses to the pawn, while the direct defense, 10...Qc7? allows 11.c5. In many cases, when you are winning, the simplest defenses, such as moving an attacked piece, are best, but in a case like this it is often correct to find something that enhances your other pieces, too.

Problem O7

White to move after 1.e4 Nf6 2.g3 d5 3.cxd5 Nxd5 4.Bg2 e6 5.Nc3 Nxc3 6.bxc3 e5 7.Nf3 Bd6 8.O-O O-O 9.d4 e4 (English Opening, **):

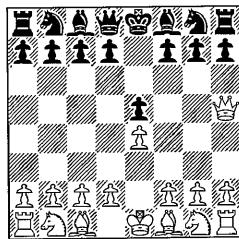


Threat: 10...exf3 winning the Knight.

Prevention: 10.Ng5 wins the pawn because the pawn is attacked twice and not defended at all. The point is that if Black tries to defend the pawn with a pawn he loses the exchange: 10...f5 11.Qb3+ Kh8 12.Nf7+ Rxf7 13.Qxf7. So 10.Nd2 does not work the same way, and only 10.Ng5 does the trick.

Problem O8 (2-problem set)

Black to move after 1.e4 e5 2.Qh5 (Scholar's Mate, *):



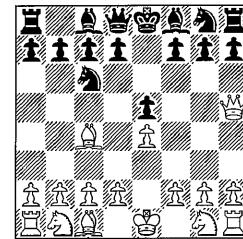
Looking For Trouble

Threat: 3.Qxe5+ winning a pawn.

Prevention: 2...Nc6 (see next problem) Of course not the "threatening" 2...g6 when Black has not only ignored the threat, but also allowed 3.Qxe5+ picking up the Rook on h8. *When I see a player make a move like 2...g6, it is an undeniable sign that he is playing "Hope Chess" or even "Flip Coin Chess," where even immediate threats are ignored!*

Problem O9 (2nd of 2)

Black to move after 1.e4 e5 2.Qh5 Nc6 3.Bc4 (Scholar's Mate, **):

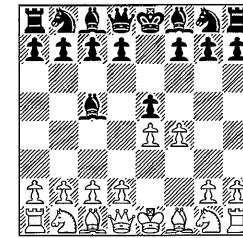


Threat: 3.Qxf7# "Scholar's Mate". If you said 3.Bxf7+ you need to A) practice "When you see a good move look for a better one", and B) always look at the most forcing lines first – in this case bringing the Queen closer to the King is more likely to be deadly than doing so with the Bishop.

Prevention: 3...Qe7. For years I have taught that 3...g6 is best, and that defense is also pretty good, e.g. 4.Qf3 Nf6 5.g4?! (A poor move, but consistently trying to play g5 to remove the Knight, which is blocking the Queen from f7; 5.Ne2 is much better.) 5...Nd4 and Black is much better. However, after 3...Qe7 4.Nc3 Nd4 5.Nd5 Nf6 Black is doing very well, and *Fritz* likes this line best, which is fine with me.

Problem O10

White to move after 1.e4 e5 2.f4 Bc5 (King's Gambit Declined, **):



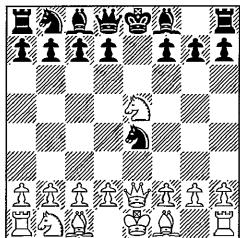
Opening Threats

Threat: It looks like 3...Bxg1 4.Rxg1 Qh4+ is a threat, winning at least the h-pawn, but after 5.g3 Qxh2 6.Rg2 Qh3 7.dxe5 White is actually OK, but that is not the kind of development for which he was hoping. Notice that 3...Qh4+ is *not* a threat, since White can just play 4.g3 and the Queen must retreat.

Prevention: The natural and correct 3.Nf3 stops all the funny business. Notice that the pawn is taboo: 3.fxe4? Qh4+ (Now the Queen has access to e4) 4.g3 (4.Ke2? Qxe4 is mate!) 4...Qxe4+ wins the Rook on h1.

Problem O11

Black to move after 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.Nxe5 Nxe4 4.Qe2: (Petroff's Defense, **)

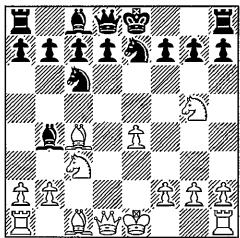


Threat: 4.Qxe4 winning the Knight.

Prevention: Moving the Knight to safety (such as 4...Nf6?) loses to the famous "Petroff's Trap" 5.Nc6+! winning the Queen no matter what the reply. So relatively best is 4...Qe7 when after 5.Qxe4 d6 the counterpin limits the damage to at most a pawn. This is why 3...Nxe4? is not best and Black almost invariably plays 3...d6 before recapturing the e-pawn, so that 4.Nf3 Nxe4 5.Qe2 Qe7 is harmless for White.

Problem O12

Black to move after 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 exd4 4.Bc4 Bb4+ 5.c3 dxc3 6.Nxc3 Ne7 7.Ng5 (Scotch Gambit, ***)



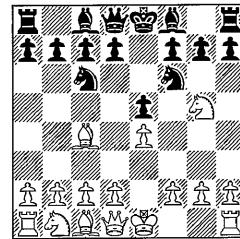
Looking For Trouble

Threat: 8.Nxf7 winning the Queen and, to a lesser extent, 8.Bxf7+ and 8.Qh5.

Prevention: 7...Ne5 is best, both guarding f7 and simultaneously threatening to capture the offending Bishop. 7...Bxc3+, and 7...d5 as was actually played, are also candidates. Note that playing 7...Bxc3+ is not played to "waste time and give you more time to think while the other player gets out of check"! I have seen so many weaker players give a check just because they don't know what to do, when in fact it ends up not being the previous threat but instead the check that ruins their position. However, in this case 7...Bxc3+ is somewhat justified as long as Black follows up with 8.bxc3 Ne5 anyway. Also note that 7...O-O?, the usual antidote for many early Bc4 plus Ng5 threats to the f7 square, does not work here due to 8.Qh5!, when both h7 and f7 are attacked more times than they are defended and White is winning straightforwardly. Normally in this opening Black plays something like 6...d6 and 7...Nf6; with his Knight on e7 the move Qh5 looms in many lines.

Problem O13

Black to move after 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Ne6 3.Bc4 Nf6 4.Ng5 (Two Knights Defense, *)



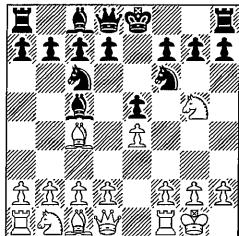
Threat: 5.Nxf7 winning a pawn and the exchange or 5.Bxf7+ winning a pawn and preventing Black from castling.

Prevention: The standard move is 4...d5 blocking the Bishop's attack. After 5.exd5 a common mistake is 5...Nxd5? allowing the Lolli (6.d4), or the less good Fried Liver Attack (6.Nxf7). Normal is 5...Na5 or even 5...b5!? or 5...Nd4!?. The Lolli is really just a better Fried Liver Attack, but it is not as popular, partly just because of the attractive name "Fried Liver Attack". (Perhaps we should rename the Fried Liver and Lolli the "Bad Fried Liver Attack" and the "Good Fried Liver Attack" respectively, and that would solve that!) I also spent two years writing an enormous e-book about 4...Bc5 which is the Traxler, or Wilkes-Barre variation, sacrificing the f-pawn for a very complicated counterattack.

Opening Threats

Problem O14

Black to move after 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Bc5 4.O-O Nf6 5.Ng5 (Gioco Piano, *)

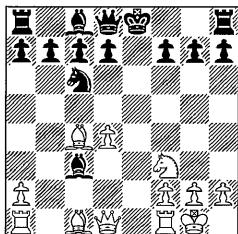


Threat: 6.Nxf7 winning a pawn and the exchange or 6.Bxf7+ winning a pawn and preventing Black from castling.

Prevention: This may look similar to the previous problem, but *sometimes a little difference in position – as in this case – makes the consequences quite large.* White's 4th move is unusual; much more common is either 4.d4 (Max Lange) or 4.c3 (Main Line Gioco Piano) and his 5th move is just a dud. Black should best reply 5...O-O, making White's fifth move look silly. If White persists with 6.Bxf7? then after 6...Rxf7 7.Nxf7 Kxf7 Black is up two pieces for a Rook and a pawn (that is about half a pawn advantage for Black already), he has the bishop pair, and is up about three tempos and development. That should be enough for a winning advantage. Notice also that 5...Qe7? is a good illustration that having two defending pieces is not always enough against two attackers, since White can capture on f7 anyway. Because *each* defender is worth more than *both* attackers (the King so much so that the rules do not allow it to capture first!), White just wins a pawn.

Problem O15

White to move after 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Bc5 4.c3 Nf6 5.d4 exd4 6.cxd4 Bb4+ 7.Nc3 Nxe4 8.O-O Nxc3 9.bxc3 Bxc3 (Gioco Piano, ***):



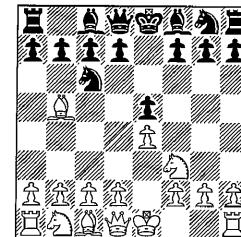
Looking For Trouble

Threat: 9...Bxa1 winning the Rook, but to a lesser extent 9...O-O with a fairly safe position and extra two pawns.

Prevention: 10.Ba3! prevents castling and also indirectly saves the Rook, as 10...Bxa1? loses to 11.Re1+. I had a game once that continued 11...Ne7 12.Rxe7+ Kf8 13.Rxf7+ Kg8 14.Rxd7#. The book moves are 10...d6 11.Re1 Much better than the flashy 11.Bxf7+ Kxf7 12.Qb3+ Be6 when Black is OK. 11...Ba5 12.Qa4 a6 Here 12...Bd7 13.d5 wins a piece by removing the guard of the Bishop on a5, when 12...Bg4?! is interesting, though White is still better in a complex position. For example after 13.d5! Bxf3 14.dxc6 Qg5 threatens mate, but then White can win with accurate play: 15.cxb7+ Ke7 16.Rce1+ Bxe1 17.Rxe1+ Kf6 18.Bb2+ Kg6 19.Bxf7+ Kxf7 20.Qd7+ etc. 13.Bd5 Bb6 14.Rxc6 Bd7 15.Re1+ Kf8 16.Rxd6 cxd6 If 16...Bxa4? 17.Rxd8# 17.Bxd6+ Kg8 18.Bxf7+! will win for White, as verified by computer analysis.

Problem O16

Black to move after 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 (Ruy Lopez, **)



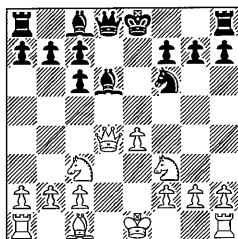
Threat: 4.Bxb5 and 5.Nxe5 is *not* a threat, e.g. 3...a6 4.Bxc6 dxc6 (an exception to the guideline to capture toward the center) 5.Nxe5 Qd4 and Black is already in good shape with the bishop pair. So the threat is really much more general: to put indirect pressure on e5, which Black must watch throughout the opening.

Prevention: No tactical prevention is required, so 3...a6 ("Morphy's move") is playable and, after the normal 4.Ba4, allows Black to play a later ...b5 if he wishes to guard his pawn without worrying about Bxc6 "removing the guard." Note that the immediate 4...b5 is a common beginner inaccuracy that prematurely places the Bishop on the a2-g8 diagonal. For example, if White wishes, after 5.Bb3 Nf6 he can even consider 6.Ng5?! with a possibly "improved" variation of the main line of the Two Knights Defense. He can also decide to transpose toward a main line with simply 6.O-O. Of course, there are other good moves besides the popular 3...a6. For example, a key to Kramnik's strategy in winning the World Championship from Kasparov was to play the tough 3...Nf6, the "Berlin Defense".

Opening Threats

Problem O17

Black to move after 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 Nf6 4.Bxc6 dxc6 5.Nc3 Bd6 6.d4 exd4 7.Qxd4 (Ruy Lopez Berlin Variation, **)

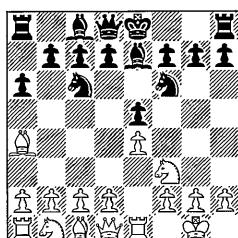


Threat: 8.e5 wins a piece no matter how Black wriggles. For example 8...Qe7 pins the pawn to the King, but 9.O-O still works as after 9...Bc5 there is 10.exf6!

Prevention: Apparently 7...Qe7 is best, e.g. 8.e5? Ng4 and Black is already better. But also reasonable is 7...O-O, a defense that beginners often don't even consider in similar positions, but they should. The possibility of a capturing sequence on e5 followed by a pin is often a good tactic. For example 7...O-O and if 8.e5? (better 8.Bg5 when Black should play 8...c5 with a slight advantage to White) 8...Bxe5! 9.Qxd8 (9.Nxe5?? Qxd4 wins the Queen. 9.Qxe5 Re8 also winning the Queen is a point of 7...O-O) 9...Bxc3+ is a zwischenzug that leaves Black on top by a pawn.

Problem O18

Black to move after 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.O-O Be7 6.Re1 (Ruy Lopez Closed Variation, *):



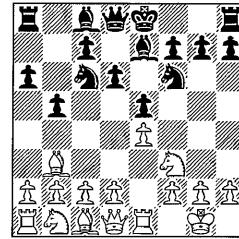
Looking For Trouble

Threat: 7.Bxc6 and 8.Nxe5 removing the guard and winning the e-pawn.

Prevention: 6...b5 (removing the attack – a primary reason for 3...a6) is by far the most common “cure.” Black can play the Steinitz Defense Doubly Delayed with 6...d6 as an alternative. Beginners often get confused at this point and play 6...O-O? allowing the threat to be carried out. The key is that once White has guarded his own e-pawn the removal-of-the-guard play is “on” for e5.

Problem O19

White to move after 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.O-O Be7 6.Re1 b5 7.Bb3 d6 (Ruy Lopez Closed Variation, **):

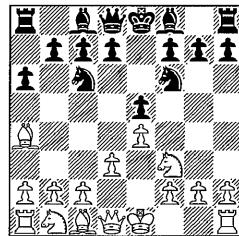


Threat: Black's last move guards the e-pawn and frees the Knight, so he threatens 8...Na5 trading off White's best minor piece, the Bishop on b3, and winning the bishop pair (worth about ½ pawn, on the average). Note that 8...Bg4 is not a threat until there is a White pawn on d4.

Prevention: 8.c3, a dual-purpose move that both preserves the bishop pair and prepares the thematic c3-d4 central advance. After a further 8...O-O (8...Bg4? 9.h3 Bh5 10.d3 when after 11...Nbd2-f1-g3 the Bishop on h5 is poorly placed) 9.h3 we have the Closed Ruy Lopez “tabiya,” or standard position.

Problem O20 (2-problem set)

Two of my students played the following practice game. Black to move after: 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.d3 (Ruy Lopez, *):



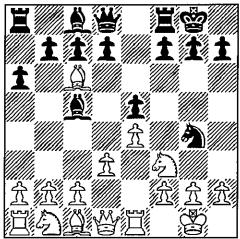
Opening Threats

Threat: The removal of the guard tactic 6.Bxc6 followed by 7.Nxe5, now that the White e-pawn is guarded.

Prevention: Black can play 5...b5 blocking the potential remover, or 5...d6 guarding the e-pawn.

Problem O21 (2nd of 2)

The game continued, with neither player understanding the threat from the previous problem: 5...Be7 6.O-O O-O 7.Re1 Bc5 8.Bxc6 Ng4 and now White to move (Ruy Lopez, ***):



Threat: Black's "threat" to win the exchange and a pawn with 9...Bxf2+ and 10...Bxe1 wins less material than the simple recapture 8...dxc6! If you did not realize this, then you really should take some time to review the value of the pieces and *make sure not to confuse "losing the exchange" with "losing a Rook"*, a common but egregious error. In other words, don't think "I am losing a Rook" – the Rook is guarded, so you are only losing the exchange plus a pawn, which even together are almost always worth less than a piece. *This type of common error I call a "counting" mistake, and the fewer you make of these the better player you will be!*

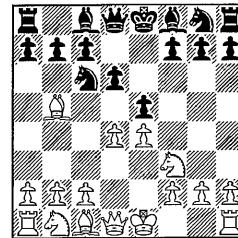
However, bonus points if you saw that 9...Nxf2 is better and more complicated than 9...Bxf2+, so ignoring the threat completely and just saving the Bishop on c6 with 9.Ba4 or 9.Bd5, while decent, is still not best.

Prevention: Highest grades if you found the correct 9.d4! when, no matter how Black wriggles, he is losing a piece. For example, if 9...Bxd4 10.Nxd4 dxc6 11.Nf3 the square f2 is safe and White has won a Knight for a pawn.

Looking For Trouble

Problem O22

Black to move after 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Ne6 3.Bb5 d6 4.d4 (Ruy Lopez Steinitz Variation, ***)

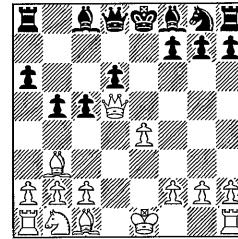


Threat: 5.d5 is *not* a threat, e.g. 5...a6 6.Ba4 (or 6.Bxc6 bxc6 7.dxc6 when White has not only lost the bishop pair, but his extra pawn on c6 is not defendable after, say, 7...Ne7) 6...b5 and Black is not losing material. So the real threat is on e5: White can win a pawn with either 5.Bxc6 bxc6 6.dxe5 or just 5.dxe5 right away.

Prevention: The principal "book" antidote in this relatively rare Steinitz variation is 4...Bd7, when 5.Bxc6 Bxc6 6.exd5 does not win a pawn since White's e-pawn is now hanging to the Bishop.

Problem O23

Black to move after 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Ne6 3.Bb5 a4 4.Ba4 d6 5.d4 b5 6.Bb3 Nxd4 7.Nxd4 exd4 8.Qxd4 c5 9.Qd5 (Ruy Lopez Modern Steinitz Variation, ***)



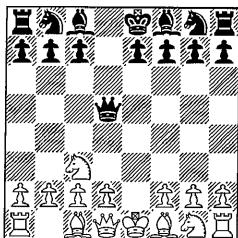
Threat: 10.Qxf7# and 10.Qxa8 winning a Rook.

Prevention: The only move to stop both threats is 9...Be6. White then tries for a draw with 10.Qc6+ Bd7 11.Qd5 but now the black Rook is guarded and there remains only one threat, so 11...c4 stops the mate and traps the Bishop! This is the famous "Noah's Ark Trap" in the Ruy Lopez! Using pawns to trap a Bishop in this way is sometimes referred to as a "Noah's Ark" pattern even though there is only the one true "Noah's Ark Trap".

Opening Threats

Problem O24

Black to move after **1.e4 d5 2.exd5 Qxd5 3.Nc3** (Center Counter, *):

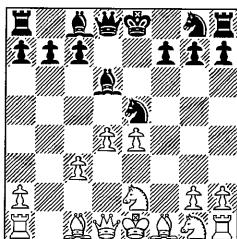


Threat: 4.Nxd5 winning the Queen. Because White is supposedly “winning a tempo” – that is, he gains a move because he gets to bring his Knight out to a better square while Black “wastes time,” forced to use his turn to move the Queen a second time. Note that if 3...Qc5? then not 4.Na4? which does NOT win a tempo, but does just the opposite – puts the Knight on a worse square while forcing the Queen to make essentially a neutral move, but rather 4.d4 gaining yet another tempo for development. *If you understand why 3.Nc3 wins a tempo and 4.Na4? would not, then you are on your way to generally understanding when you should threaten and when you should not.*

Prevention: 3...Qa5 is considered best and is most popular but 3...Qd8 and even 3...Qd6!? are considered candidates.

Problem O25

Black to move after **1.e4 d5 2.Nc3 d4 3.Nce2 e5 4.d3 Ne6 5.f4 Bb4+ 6.c3 dxc3 7.bxc3 Bd6 8.fxe5 Nxe5 9.d4** (Center Counter, ***):



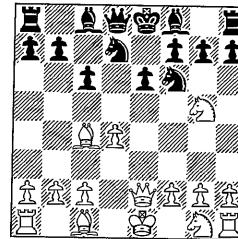
Looking For Trouble

Threat: 10.dxe5 winning the Knight.

Prevention: 9...Qh4+ 10.Ng3 Not 10.g3? Qxe4–+. Ng4! 11.e5 Nxh2 12.Ne2 Be7 and Black has good counterchances. Instead he meekly played 9...Ng6, and after 10.e5 Be7 11.Nf3 f6 12.Nf4 Nxf4 13.Bxf4 fxe5 14.Nxe5 played 14...Nf6! He thought this was the best way to stop the threat of 15.Qh5+ ; instead 14...Qd5! left White with only some advantage. After 14...Nf6? 15.Bc4! – the real threat – White was winning.

Problem O26

Black to move after **1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Nd7 5.Bc4 N8f6 6.Ng5 e6 7.Qe2** (Caro-Kann, ***):

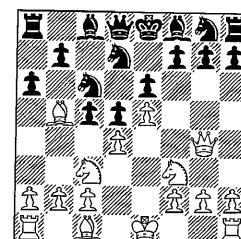


Threat: 8.Nxf7!, e.g. 8...Kxf7 9.Qxe6+ Kg6 10.Bd3+ Kh5 11.Qh3#. On the other hand, 8.Bxe6 is not much of a threat, e.g. 8...fxe6 9.Nxe6 Qa5+ 10.Bd2 Bb4 11.c3 Be7 and White’s advantage is minimal.

Prevention: The simple 7...Nb6, allowing the Bishop to guard the e-pawn while threatening the white Bishop, defends nicely.

Problem O27

White to move after **1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.e5 Nfd7 5.Qg4 c5 6.Bb5 Nc6 7.Nf3 a6** (French Defense Steinitz Variation, **):



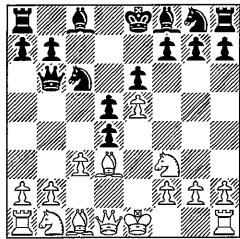
Opening Threats

Threat: 8...axb5 winning the Bishop.

Prevention: **9.Bxc6** Unfortunately, saving the bishop pair by, say, 9.Be2 loses a pawn to 9...cx d4, removing the guard on e5, e.g. 10.Nxd4 Ndx e5. Of course 9.Ba4? loses immediately to the ‘Noah’s Ark’ pattern 9...b5 10.Bb3 c4. In general, moving Bb5 in an Advance French formation is not a good idea. Besides usually gaining the bishop pair, Black is happy to recapture with the pawn on c6, giving him an additional “break” move against White’s key pawn on d4; the doubled pawns are actually an advantage for Black, especially since White cannot prevent captures of the fixed pawn at d4. Finally, if Black is able to play ...Bd7 and trade Bishops, he has rid himself of his worst minor piece – his “bad” Bishop – for a good white Bishop.

Problem O28 (2-problem set)

White to move after 1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 c5 4.c3 Ne6 5.Nf3 Qb6 6.Bd3 cxd4 (French Defense Advance Variation, *):

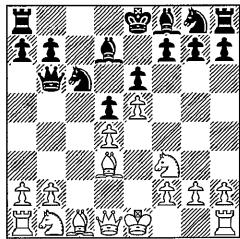


Threat: 7...dxc3 gaining a pawn for only minimal compensation. But Black is *not* threatening to retain his pawn on d4 due to ...

Prevention: **7.cxd4** since 7...Nxd4? 8.Nxd4 Qxd4?? 9.Bb5+ wins the Queen on the discovered attack. Therefore Black almost always plays 7...Bd7 (see next problem).

Problem O29 (2nd of 2)

White to move after 1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 c5 4.c3 Ne6 5.Nf3 Qb6 6.Bd3 cxd4 7.cxd4 Bd7 (French Defense Advance Variation, **):



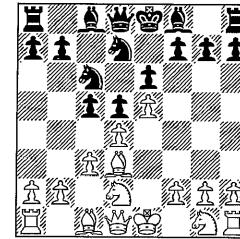
Looking For Trouble

Threat: 8...Nxd4 winning the pawn.

Prevention: Saving the pawn with 8.Be3? Qxb2 is not reasonable, and 8.Bc2 Nb4 is not good for White. Finally, 8.Be2 is illogical, since White could have played this move on his sixth turn, and thus he would now be down a tempo over a main line. So if White purposely plays 6.Bd3, he is now committed to the Milner-Barry Gambit, where **8.O-O** voluntarily gives up the pawn to 8...Nxd4 9.Nxd4 Qxd4 10.Nc3 and Black can play 10...a6 or 10...Qxe5 with a complicated middle game. Consult your local opening book!

Problem O30

White to move after 1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 Nf6 4.e5 Nd7 5.Bd3 c5 6.c3 Ne6 (French Defense Tarrasch Variation, **):

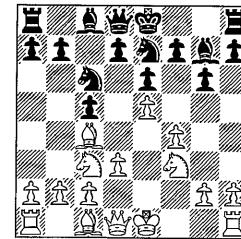


Threat: 7...cxd4 8.cxd4 Nxd4 winning a pawn.

Prevention: For the longest time it was thought that White should play **7.Ne2** keeping the f3 square open for the other Knight to guard d4 after ...Qb6. However, White has recently been disappointed in the main lines of this variation, so top players (including Kasparov!) have been experimenting with the Milner-Barry Gambit-like **7.Nf3**, intending 7...Qb6 8.O-O cxd4 9.cxd4 Nxd4 10.Nxd4 Qxd4 11.Nf3 with compensation for the pawn and an exciting middlegame in store.

Problem O31

Black to move after 1.e4 c5 2.Nc3 Ne6 3.f4 g6 4.Nf3 Bg7 5.Bc4 e6 6.d3 Nge7 7.e5 (Sicilian Defense Grand Prix Attack, **):



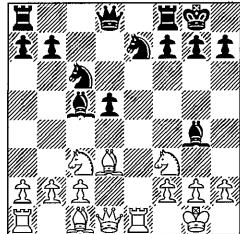
Opening Threats

Threat: 8.Ne4 followed by 9.Nd6(+) possibly preventing Black from castling, but in any case tying up Black's pieces.

Prevention: 7...d6 (or even 7...d5) because 8.exd6 Qxd6 9.Ne4 does not win the c-pawn due to 9...Qc7 10.Nxc5?? Qa5+ winning the Knight. Note that ...Nf5 is not a good cure since g2-g4 can drive it away, e.g. 7...O-O 8.Ne4 Nf5 9.g4 followed by Nd6.

Problem O32 (2-problem set)

Black to move after 1.e4 c5 2.d4 e6 3.Nf3 d5 4.dxc5 Bxc5 5.exd5 exd5 6.Bb5+ Nc6 7.0-0 Nge7 8.Nc3 Bg4 9.Re1 0-0 10.Bd3 (Sicilian Defense Marshall Variation, ***):



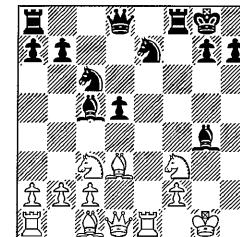
Threat: 11.Bxh7+ so that if 11...Kxh7 (11...Kh8 is likely better, but then White has just won a pawn for almost nothing) 12.Ng5+ K-any 13.Qxg4 regaining his piece with interest. A common pattern that is good to know! But White has moved his Bishop twice (Bb5-d3) just to make a threat. This breaks general opening principles if the threat can be met. What should Black do?

Prevention: Best is 10...Qb6, counterattacking f2 when Black is at least even, e.g. 11.Na4?! Bxf2+ 12.Kf1 Qa5 with a small advantage. I played the anti-positional 10...f5?!. Now my opponent figured that if he destroyed the f-pawn he could play Bxh7+ anyway. I had seen further, so after 11.h3?! Bh5 12.g4? fxg4 13.hxg4 Bxg4 we reach the next problem.

Looking For Trouble

Problem O33 (2nd of 2)

White to move after 1.e4 c5 2.d4 e6 3.Nf3 d5 4.dxc5 Bxc5 5.exd5 exd5 6.Bb5+ Nc6 7.0-0 Nge7 8.Nc3 Bg4 9.Re1 0-0 10.Bd3 f5 11.h3 Bh5 12.g4 fxg4 13.hxg4 Bxg4 (Sicilian Defense Marshall Variation, ***):

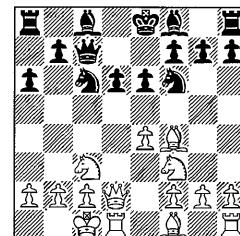


Threat: 14...Bxf3 and 14...Rxf3 winning the Knight.

Prevention: The intended defense/offense 14.Bxh7+ Kxh7 15.Ng5+ K-any 16.Qxg4 fails to 14...Kh8!. By refusing to capture the Bishop Black dooms the Knight on f3! So my opponent had to settle for the meek and forced 14.Be2 when 14...Qd6! threatening 15...Qg3+ is an immediate crush. Instead after 14.Be2 I played the complicated and aggressive 14...Bxf2+?! and after 15.Kxf2 Ne5 16.Bg5! – the best defense to the attack on f3 – won a fantastic game after 16...Qb6+, the first game I ever had published in *Chess Life*.

Problem O34

Black to move after 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.Nc3 d6 4.d4 exd4 5.Qxd4 a6 6.Bg5 Qc7 7.0-0-0 Nc6 8.Qd2 Nf6 9.Bf4 (Sicilian Defense, ***):



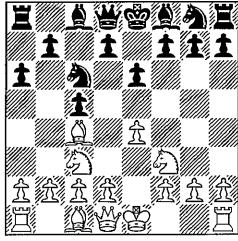
Opening Threats

Threat: 10.Bxd6, winning a key pawn.

Prevention: 9...Ng4! For example 10.h3 10.Bxd6? Bxd6 11.Qxd6 Qxd6 12.Rxd6 Nxf2 is not as good for White. 10...Nge5 with only a slight advantage for White. Instead I was Black and played 9...e5, and after 10.Bg5 Be6 11.Kb1 Rc8(?) 12.Be2 Be7 13.Bxf6 gxf6? (Better to retain the bishop pair with 13...Bxf6 even if it loses the d-pawn!) 14.Nd5 I was squeezed and lost.

Problem O35

White to move after 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 e6 4.Nc3 a6 (Sicilian Defense "High School Attack", *):

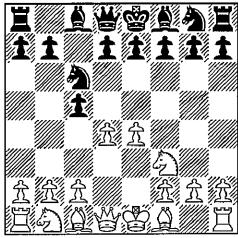


Threat: 5...b5 driving out the Bishop and expanding on the queenside. White even has to watch out for 6.Bb3? c4 with a "Noah's Ark" win of a piece.

Prevention: White can play 5.d3 to stop the Noah's Ark and secure b3, but most players first play 5.a4 to equalize the queenside space. However, White cannot forever prevent ...d5 and Black is doing more than fine, so this line, popular among players who only know basic opening principles, is not common among strong players.

Problem O36

Black to move after 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 (Sicilian Defense Open Variation, *):



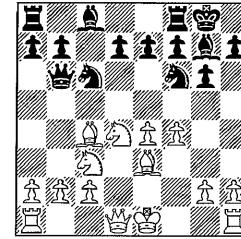
Looking For Trouble

Threat: 4.d5 driving the Knight out of the center. 4.dxc5 is *not* a threat since at worst Black can play 4...Qa5+ winning the pawn back immediately, or he can even try 4...e6 to try to recapture with the Bishop.

Prevention: 3...cxd4 is the normal move, when after 4.Nxd4 not 4...Nxd4 5.Qxd4 with a strong centralized Queen not easily attacked, but rather 4...Nf6 or 4...e6 or 4...g6 with regular, Open Sicilian lines. Note that 3...e6? (or 3...d6?) does not stop the threat as then White still has 4.d5.

Problem O37

White to move after 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 g6 5.Nc3 Bg7 6.Be3 Nf6 7.Bc4 O-O 8.f4 Qb6 (Sicilian Defense Accelerated Dragon, *****)

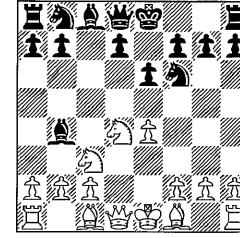


Threat: Black actually has multiple threats, so you need to see them all! For example, 9...Qxb2 (winning more than just a pawn) or 9...Nxe4 10.Nxe4 Bxd4 or even 9...Ng4.

Prevention: This is not an easy position for White, but he should play 9.e5!. Then if 9...Qxb2 10.Nde2 seems good for White, e.g. 10...Ng4 11.Bc5 b6 12.Rb1 Qxb1 13.Qxb1 bxc5 14.Qb5 and Black does not seem to have sufficient compensation for his Queen. So Black probably has to settle for 9...Ng4 first, when after 10.Bg1 (10.Qxg4 Qxb2 is not as good for White.) 10...Qxb2 11.Nd5 e6 12.Rb1 or 12.Nxc6 leads to complicated play.

Problem O38 (3-problem set)

White to move after 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Bb4 (Sicilian Defense Pin variation, **)



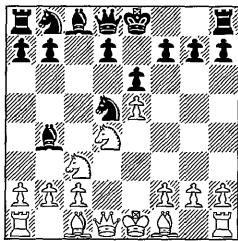
Opening Threats

Threat: 6...Nxe4 winning the e-pawn, although White can still counterattack with 7.Qg4 Nxc3 8.Qxg7 Rf8 9.a3.

Prevention: Rather than making his development awkward by guarding the e-pawn, White should play 6.e5 and after 6...Nd5 we reach the next position.

Problem O39 (2nd of 3)

White to move after 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Bb4 6.e5 Nd5 (Sicilian Defense Pin variation, ***)



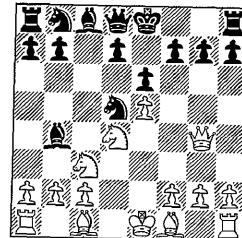
Threat: 7...Nxc3 when 8.Qg4 (Just bad is 8.bxc3 Bxc3+ 9.Bd2 Bxd4 winning easily. Note that 9...Bxa1? is much worse than 9...Bxd4 – winning the exchange is not nearly as good as winning a piece, and Fritz rates the position after 9...Bxd4 as over 3 pawns better for Black than the position after 9...Bxa1? If you make this kind of counting mistake because you would rather “win a Rook” than “win a piece”, you need to learn the difference between winning the exchange – only worth about half a piece - and winning a Rook!) 8...Nxb5+ 9.c3 Nxd4 and Black is just up a piece.

Prevention: According to *Beating the Sicilian 3*, the old line was 7.Qg4 – for which see the next problem! Instead White has been having better luck with 7.Bd2! Nxc3 7...Bxc3 8.bxc3 leaves White with the bishop pair and a dark-squared Bishop to harass Black’s weak squares – more than making up for the doubled isolated pawns. This is the kind of position intermediate players usually misevaluate as better for Black but, in fact, White’s wrecked pawn structure is not enough compensation for White’s long term domination of the dark squares. So Black’s “threat” to double and isolate the White pawns on the c-file turns out to be not much of a threat at all. 8.bxc3 Again 8.Bxc3 would not be thematic. After 8.bxc3 White’s superior development and control of the kingside dark squares gives him such a nice advantage that one does not see the Pin Variation played by strong players.

Looking For Trouble

Problem O40 (3rd of 3)

Black to move after 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Bb4 6.e5 Nd5 7.Qg4 (Sicilian Defense Pin variation, ***)

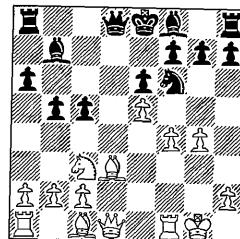


Threat: 8.Qxg7 with havoc on Black’s kingside dark squares.

Prevention: 7...O-O!? – An interesting exchange variation looking to turn the tables on White’s strategy. After 8.Bh6 g6 9.Bxf8 Qxf8 it is Black who is ahead in development and dominating the dark squares – notice it is he that has the only dark-squared Bishop. Black has the initiative for the exchange, and that is why white players have switched to 7.Bd2.

Problem O41

Black to move after 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bd3 e6 7.f4 Nbd7 8.0-0 b5 9.g4 Nc5 10Nb3 Bb7 11.Nxc5 dx5 12.e5 (Sicilian Najdorf, ***):



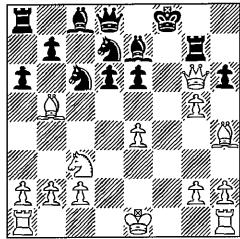
Threat: 13.exf6 winning the Knight.

Prevention: 12...c4! I often tell students that when they are winning easily they should shy away from counterattack. But, conversely, when you are not easily winning, counterattack, if properly calculated, is often one of the best ways to meet an attack. In this case Fritz rates four (!) moves better than moving the Knight, and 12...c4! as winning easily, e.g. 13.exf6 Bc5+ 14.Rf2 gxf6 or 13.Be3 cxd3 14.exf6 b4!.

Opening Threats

Problem O42

White to move after 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bg5 e6 7.f4 Be7 8.Qf3 h6 9.Bh4 g5 10.fxg5 Nfd7 11.Nxe6 fxe6 12.Qh5+ Kf8 13.Bb5 Rh7 14.Qg6 Rg7 (Najdorf Sicilian, Göteborg Variation, *):

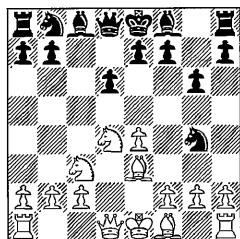


Threat: Black, who is already ahead a piece, threatens 15...Rxf6 as well as 15...axb5 if White does not mount some quick threats.

Prevention: There is nothing like facing a new move when you are already playing a line where you sacrifice two pieces! I was White in the 1977 World Open and decided to try this really complicated line in the Najdorf. So now I am out of book and what can I do? Happily, I found the best line, the refutation of 14...Rg7?, and the reason the book line 14...Rf7 is correct: 15.O-O+ Kg8 16.Qxe6+ Kh8 17.gxh6! I was much better, especially after the desperate 17...Rxf6+ (critical is 17...Rh7 18.Bxd7 Nxd7 19.Bxe7 Qxe7 with a nice white advantage) but later I went wrong and only drew.

Problem O43

White to move after 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Ng4 (Sicilian Defense Dragon Variation, **):



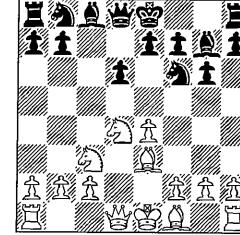
Looking For Trouble

Threat: 7...Nxe3 winning the bishop pair and destroying White's central pawn structure.

Prevention: 7.Bb5+ shows 6...Ng4? to be premature. For example, 7...Bd7 8.Qxg4 snare the Knight! Or 7...Nc6 8.Nxc6 bxc6 (8...Nxe3?? 9.Nxd8+ is check!) 9.Bxc6+ Bd7 and White has a choice of winning plans. Likely 10.Bd4 Bxc6 11.Bxh8 is winning as Black has no time to trap the Bishop with 11...f6 because this allows 12.Qxg4. But Black should not give up on this idea ... (see next problem)

Problem O44

White to move after 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 (Sicilian Defense Dragon Variation, *):

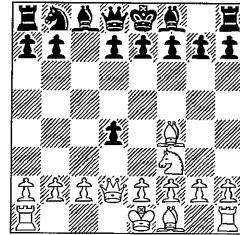


Threat: 7...Ng4, harassing the Bishop and in turn threatening to win the bishop pair and destroy White's central pawn structure. This threat to win the bishop pair by Ng4-Nxe3 is a common theme in many openings.

Prevention: 7.f3 (Yugoslav) or 7.Be2 is required to try to retain the opening initiative. For example, if instead 7.Qd2 Ng4 8.Bb5+ Bd7 and Black is already well on his way to equality, or if 7.Bc4 Ng4 8.Bb5+ Kf8!. If White plays 7.f3 he is likely going to castle queenside; on the classical 7.Be2 it will be kingside.

Problem O45

Black to move after 1.d4 Nf6 2.Bg5 Ne4 3.Bf4 c5 4.Nd2 Nxd2 5.Qxd2 cxd4 6.Nf3 (Trompowsky, **):



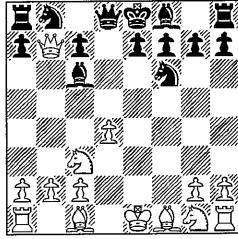
Opening Threats

Threat: 7.Nxd4 or 7.Qxd4 winning back the pawn with better development.

Prevention: Black is behind in development, but 6...d6! makes things awkward for White. White can regain his pawn with 7.Qxd4 e5 8.Qe3 pinning the pawn (e.g. 8...Be7 9.Bg3) but after 9...f5 10.Qc3 O-O Black has a slight advantage. In a game at the 2002 National Chess Congress White tried 7.O-O-O but after 7...e5 8.Bg3 Black was comfortably better.

Problem O46

White to move after 1.d4 d5 2.e4 dxe4 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.f3 exf3 5.Qxf3 Bd7 6.Qxb7 Be6 (Blackmar-Diemer Gambit, **):

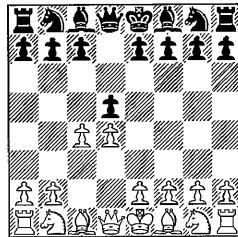


Threat: 7...Bxb7, winning the Queen.

Prevention: All Queen moves here are very bad, for example 7.Qb3 Qxd4 and Black has regained his pawn and his pieces dominate the board. But 7.Bb5! just wins, as 7...Qd7 8.Bxc6 Qxe6 9.Qc8# is a famous mating pattern! So 5...Bd7? was just bad.

Problem O47

Black to move after 1.d4 d5 2.e4 (Queen's Gambit, **):



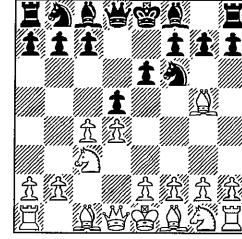
Looking For Trouble

Threat: 3.cxd5 Qxd5 4.Nc3 “winning a tempo”

Prevention: 2...e6 (Queen’s Gambit Declined; see next problem) 2...c6 (Slav) 2...dxc4 (Queen’s Gambit Accepted), or even possibly 2...e5?! or 2...Nc6. Less good is the common beginner’s move 2...Nf6(?) when 3.cxd5 Nxd5 (3...Qxd5 4.Nc3 wins the tempo anyway) 4.Nf3 followed by 5.e4 or just even possibly 4.e4 is good for White.

Problem O48

Black to move after 1.d4 d5 2.e4 e6 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.Bg5 (Queen’s Gambit Declined, ***):

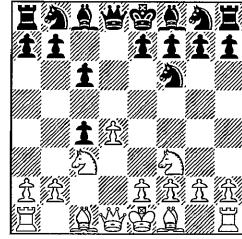


Threat: 5.cxd5 exd5 6.Bxf6 gxf6 (6...Qxf6 7.Nxd5 snares a pawn) and all of Black’s kingside pawns are isolated and his King lacks protection.

Prevention: 4...Be7, or even 4...Nbd7, which meets the threat because of the famous trap 5.cxd5 cxd5 6.Nxd5?? Nxd5! 7.Bxd8 Bb4+ 8.Qd2 Kxd8 and Black wins a piece.

Problem O49

White to move after 1.d4 d5 2.e4 c6 3.Nf3 Nf6 4.Nc3 dxc4 (Slav Defense, **):



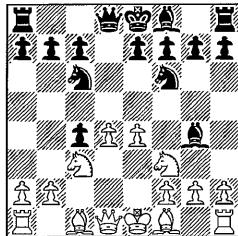
Opening Threats

Threat: 5...b5 making White prove that he has something for his lost pawn.

Prevention: 5.a4 The main book line. Other moves are more rare. Graham Burgess states in his excellent book *The Slav*, "White prepares to regain the pawn by preventing ...b5. White has a few other possibilities, but nothing that appears promising. The gambit 5.e4 b5 is currently viewed as rather suspect, while 5.e3 b5 6.a4 b4 is fully acceptable for Black." I might add that allowing ...b4 after White plays Nc3 in similar positions is usually acceptable for Black. That is one reason why 3.Nf3 is more flexible than 3.Nc3.

Problem O50

White to move after 1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e4 Nc6 4.Nf3 Nf6 5.Nc3 Bg4 (Queen's Gambit Accepted, **):

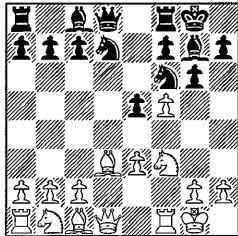


Threat: 6...Bxf3 removing the guard on d4 and winning the d-pawn.

Prevention: White can play the counterattacks 6.e5 or 6.d5 or even 6.Be3. Instead he played 6.Bxc4, but instead of executing his threat with 6...Bxf3, Black played 6...Nxd4?? losing the Knight to 7.Qxd4, since the attempt at further removal of the guard with 7...Bxf3 fails to 8.Qxd8+ Rxd8 9.gxf3 and White is up a piece. On top of all that, after 6...Nxd4?? White did not play 7.Qxd4 and lost! Yet another example of why even low intermediate players need to play slowly and count carefully.

Problem O51

White to move after 1.d4 Nf6 2.e3 g6 3.Bd3 Bg7 4.f4 d6 5.Nf3 O-O 6.O-O Nbd7 7.f5 e5 8.dxe5 dxe5 (Stonewall Attack, ***):



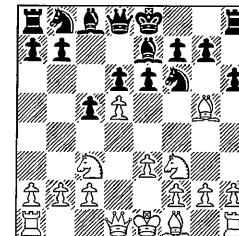
Looking For Trouble

Threat: 9...e4, forking the Bishop and Knight.

Prevention: 9.Nc3 with equality, e.g. 9...Nc5 10.Nxe5 Nxd3 11.Nxd3 Bxf5. Slightly less good is 9.Be2 when 9...Qe7 or possibly even 9...e4 gives Black a slight pull. Instead White played 9.e4? but after 9...gxf5! Black is better because 10.exf5 still allows 10...e4. Notice that Black, a strong player, is not afraid to open his King position slightly to win the pawn. If he plays carefully his King should be fine, but the extra pawn, in the center, will be a big advantage.

Problem O52

White to move after 1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 e6 3.Bg5 Be7 4.Nc3 c5 5.e3 d6 6.d5 h6 (Torre Attack, ***):

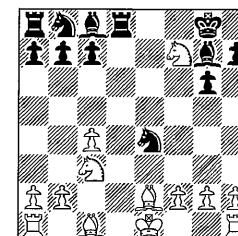


Threat: Of course Black threatens 7...hxg5, but in some lines he also threatens the discovered attack ...Nxd5.

Prevention: White blundered with 7.Bh4? when after 7...Nxd5 8.Nxd5 Bxh4 9.Nxh4 exd5 (9...Qxh4? 10.Nc7+) 10.Nf3 Qb6 Black would have a good game. Instead White should play the zwischenzug 7.Bb5+ first, and after 7...Bd7 If 7...Nbd7 8.Bxf6! is very good for White. 8.Bxf6 Bxf6 9.Bxd7+ (White gets rid of Black's bishop pair,) 9...Qxd7 10.Ne4 and White has a pleasant position.

Problem O53 (2-problem set)

Black to move after 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7 4.e4 d6 5.Bc2 O-O 6.Nf3 e5 7.dxe5 dxe5 8.Qxd8 Rxd8 9.Nxe5 Nxe4 10.Nxf7 (King's Indian Defense, *):



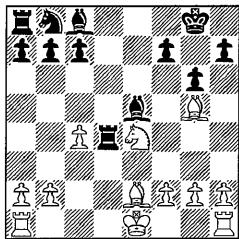
Opening Threats

Threat: 11.Nxd8 winning the exchange, as after 11...Nxc3 12.Bf3! ignoring the Knight, White is just much better.

Prevention: 10...Bxc3+ removing the attacker on e4 with check just picks up a piece after 11.bxc3 Kxf7. Of course if Black first captures the “desperado” Knight with 10...Kxf7?, White achieves his objective of pawn-snatching after 11.Nxe4. So 10.Nxf7 is very bad. See next problem for 10.Nxe4, which is probably not as drawish as its reputation.

Problem O54 (2nd of 2)

White to move after 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7 4.e4 d6 5.Be2 O-O 6.Nf3 e5 7.dxe5 dxe5 8.Qxd8 Rxd8 9.Nxe5 Nxe4 10.Nxe4 Bxe5 11.Bg5 Rd4 (King’s Indian Defense, ****):



Threat: 12...Rxe4. This move is recommended for Black in a line where GM Joe Gallagher calls 9.Nxe5 “just a bad move.” He gives 11...Rd4 in the answer to the first exercise in his excellent book *Starting Out: King’s Indian*.

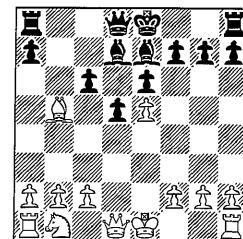
Prevention: 12.Nf6+ This line is not as easy for Black as its reputation indicates! According to computer analysis, White can easily end up with the initiative, the exchange, or the bishop pair in the endgame. For example if 12...Kh8 13.Nd5 Nc6 (13...c6 14.Nc7!) 14.Be3 Re4 15.Bd3 and White has a pleasant advantage, or 12...Kg7 13.Ne8+ Kf8 14.Bf6 Bxf6 15.Nxc7? (15.Nxf6 may also be OK for White, but doesn’t promise much) 15...b6 16.Nxa8 Na6 17.Rd1 intending 18.Bf3, or 12...Bxf6 13.Bxf6 Re4 14.Rd1 Nc6 15.f3 Re6 16.Bc3 when White’s bishop pair gives him a nice edge. You saw it here first.

Looking For Trouble

Section 2: Middlegame Threats

Problem M1

White to move after 1...bxc6 (*):



Threat: 2...cxb5 winning the Bishop.

Prevention: 2.Ba6? was White’s “aggressive” answer, and after 2...Qa5+ he coughed up a piece to a double attack. This illustrates two important, but simple, points:

1) *Don’t make a move without first examining your opponent’s potential checks, captures, and threats on his next move.* In this case Black only has one check and it wins a piece, so that should be the first move you would consider. Missing it means you are either not considering your opponent’s moves at all, or you are not considering his most dangerous and likely moves, and that is a problem with your thinking process.

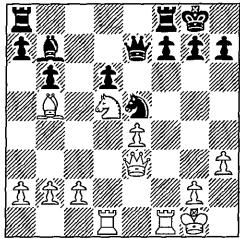
2) *There is nothing wrong with retreating.* Don’t move your pieces forward just because it is “aggressive.” Put your pieces on their best squares, no matter which direction that may be.

Instead White should settle for the safe and sound 2.Bd3, but Black stands better already thanks to his superior center and bishop pair. However, this is the type of position which weaker players often misplay as Black, allowing a kingside attack (often an early ...O-O and ...f6 stop this), so by playing 2.Bd3 and possibly soon Qg4, White remains with decent practical chances.

Middlegame Threats

Problem M2

Black to move after 1.Nd5 (*):



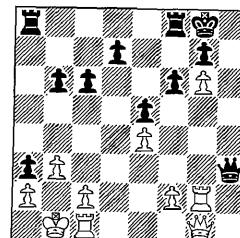
Threat: 2.Nxe7+ winning the Queen.

Prevention: 1...Bxd5 with about an even game – the strong Black Knight on e5 is now posted on a square where no piece of equal or lesser value can evict it – *this kind of invulnerable piece is especially valuable in the opening and middlegame, usually less so in the endgame*; after 2.exd5 the pawn on d5 is on the light squares, which partially blocks the White Bishop's future movement. On the other hand, White no longer has three pawn islands, but the capturing pawn does shield Black's isolated pawn. Chances are equal and the game ended in a 55-move draw. The teenager playing White was very happy to get a half point from the West's 2nd-leading grandmaster in the simultaneous exhibition: Heisman-GM Larsen 1968 (Oh, some guy named "Fischer" was the leading GM according to all but the guy playing Black, who insisted on playing first board in the USSR vs. The World Match in 1970). If you wanted to "preserve your Bishop" or "attack kingside" with 1...Qh4 that is not as good, as neither side has the bishop pair, the Knight on d5 is clearly superior to the Bishop on b7 (whose only task seems to be to capture the Knight), and there are no kingside attacking chances for Black since White's pieces can and do control most of the real estate there. 1...Qd8 has not much at all to recommend it other than it is safe. On the other hand, if you played 1...Qe6, allowing 2.Nc7 forking the Queen and Rook, then you need to check on your opponent's "checks, captures, and threats" before you make a move!

Looking For Trouble

Problem M3 (2-problem set)

Black to move after 1.Qg1 (*):

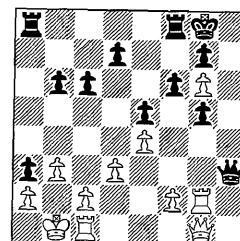


Threat: 2.Rh2 followed by 3.Rh8+! and mate via Queen checks. For example, 2.Rh2 Qc3 3.Rh8+ Kxh8 4.Qh2+ Kg8 5.Qh7#.

Prevention: Black's best is 1...Qc3, threatening an unstoppable mate threat of his own. This is a threat White had to prevent last move, instead of playing 1.Qg1? This problem shows that *just because next move you have a winning threat does not mean your opponent does not have one first!*

Problem M4 (2nd of 2)

Black to move after 1.Qg1 (**):



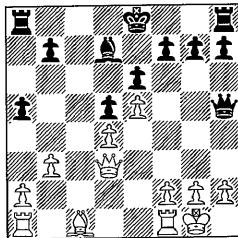
Threat: 2.Rh2 followed by 3.Rh8+ mating if Black's Queen moves (this is also quicker than doubling on the h-file). But now 1...Qc3 is impossible.

Prevention: Black should play 1...Qh6 or 1...Qh5 to answer 2.Rh2 with 2...Qxg6, removing the mate threat. Note how it is important to see the threat this move. If Black waits until *after* his Queen is threatened (This is Hope Chess, meaning he hopes he can meet White's threat once it is made.) then he will be lost, e.g. 1...d5? 2.Rh2 Qe6 3.Rh8+ Kxh8 4.Qh2+ Kg8 5.Qh7# or even 1...Rfb8 (much better than ...d5 because it partially meets the threat) leads to 2.Rh2 Qe6 3.Rd1 Rd8 4.Qh1 Kf8 5.Rh7 with a big advantage to White.

Middlegame Threats

Problem M5

Black to move after 1.b3 (*):

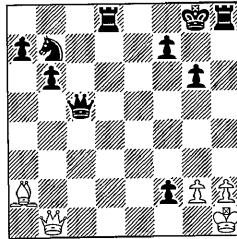


Threat: White has the common positional/tactical threat of 2.Ba3. This move stops Black from castling kingside, a nice advantage in this kind of position when the Queens are still on the board. If Black instead castles queenside his King is vulnerable as his queenside resembles Swiss cheese – lots of holes!

Prevention: 1...O-O and the game is about even. Less accurate is 1...b5 2.Bd2 O-O 3.Rfc1 and Black has problems neutralizing the c-file, e.g. 3...Rfc8? 4.Rxc8 Bxc8 5.Qxb5 or 4...Rxc8 5.Bxa5.

Problem M6

Black to move after 1.Qb1 (*):



Threat: 2.Qxg6+ Kf8 3.Qxf7#. If you find yourself missing this kind of “long” move or missing that the f-pawn is pinned and could not capture the Queen, ask yourself, “What are all my opponent’s checks, captures, and threats?” and “It is important that the pawn capturing the Queen be legally able to do so – I am betting the entire game on it – is it possibly pinned or otherwise unable to do so?”

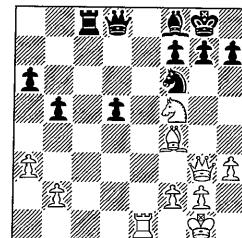
Prevention: Almost anything stops the threat with an easy win - once you identify it! A striking example is 1...Qc2! (2.Qxc2 f1Q#). Similarly, 1...Qf5 is a good

Looking For Trouble

example of a move that, under other circumstances, could lead to ugly, tripled, isolated pawns after 2.Qxf5 gxf5, but in this situation is now trivially acceptable, due to 2.Qxf5?? Rd8#. When one side is winning by a great margin, positional matters that in an even game would be important, or even possibly decisive, are almost always meaningless.

Problem M7 (2-problem set)

Black to move after 1.Qg3 (*):

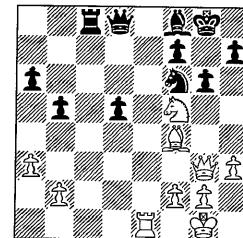


Threat: 2.Nh6+ Kh8 3.Nxf7+ winning the Queen. If you did not see this, pay special attention to pinned pieces/pawns that cannot legally recapture, such as Black’s g-pawn here. See problem M6 for a more radical example.

Prevention: 1...g6 or 1...Qd7. 1...Kh8 also works, but does not retain the advantage after 2.Be5 when White has almost full compensation for the pawn. In the game Black chose 1...g6 (see next problem)

Problem M8 (2nd of 2)

White to move after 1...g6 (**):



Threat: 2...Nh5 forking the Queen and Bishop because the Queen cannot both recapture on f4 and pin the pawn on g6: 3.Qg4 Nxf4 4.Qxf4 gxf5, and so Black wins a piece. Also 2...Ne4 wins the exchange: White is forced to play 3.Rxe4 because 3.Qg4 fails to 3...h5, and the Queen can no longer retain the pin on the g-

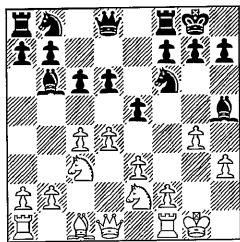
Middlegame Threats

file. But 2...Nh5 is better than 2...Ne4, partly because *a piece is worth about twice as much as the exchange*.

Prevention: After 2.Nh6+ (best) 2...Kg7 3.Be3 or 3.Nf5+, White has some compensation for his pawn. 2.Bg5 and 2.Qg5 meet the threat, but don't get as much compensation.

Problem M9 (3-problem set)

Black to move after 1.g4 (*):

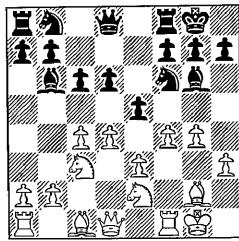


Threat: 2.gxh5 winning the Bishop. If you refrain from such moves because they "weaken your King" you are right to be concerned about King safety, but in many cases the resultant gain in material is ample, even winning compensation if you take a little care to safeguard your King in the subsequent play.

Prevention: 1...Bg6. The "daring" 1...Nxe4 fails to 2.hxg4 Bxg4 3.f3, and 1...Bxg4 (more plausible) to 2.hxg4 Nxe4 3.f3! This type of attack sometimes works if you can flood the area with more pieces than your opponent or get a long-term bind, but usually they fail against even decent defense. If you find yourself doing these unsound sacrifices regularly, you are probably not playing strong enough competition. On the other hand, after 1...Bg6 2.f4 we get our next problem.

Problem M10 (2nd of 3)

Black to move after 2.f4 (**):



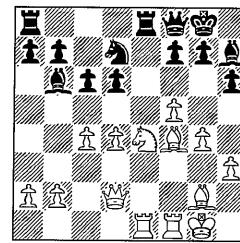
Looking For Trouble

Threat: 3.f5 trapping the Bishop.

Prevention: The best move here is one of the most difficult to determine in the book, not because of difficult tactics, but because the strategy differs and is tough to compare. 2...h6 seems best, but Black has other choices, such as 2...h5. Although this is not the type of position in which *Fritz* excels, in a 14-ply search these two choices top the list. In the game Black chose the preliminary 2...exf4, but this just opened the game in White's favor. After 3.exf4 h6 4.f5 Bh7 5.Bf4 Re8 6.Qd2 Qe7 7.Rae1 Nbd7 8.Ng3 Qf8 9.Nge4 Nxe4 10.Nxe4 it seemed like White had a nice bind, but actually he had strayed, just subtly, because ... see next diagram.

Problem M11 (3rd of 3)

Black to move after 10.Nxe4 (*****):



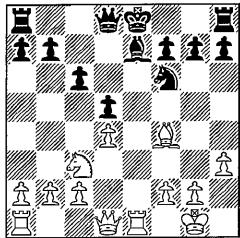
Threat: 11.Bxd6 winning a pawn and seemingly trapping the Queen, when Black would have to save it by sacrificing the exchange with 11...Re7.

Prevention: Black is in some trouble, but his best chance is 10...d5!!, when White's best replies are 11.c5, 11.cxd5, and 11.Nd6, each retaining some advantage. If White instead plays 11.Bd6(?), trying to carry out his threat anyway, there comes 11...Rxe4!! removing the guard on d6. But what about Black's Queen? 12.Bxf8 (Similar is 12.c5 Qxd6! 13.cxd6 Rxd4.) Rxd4! and the white Queen has nowhere to run, nowhere to hide against the discovered check; Black is better. This is certainly one of the most difficult problems in the book, and if you answered it accurately for all the correct reasons you are probably an extremely strong player, likely master level. In the game Black saw that 10...Bc7 11.c5 is strong for White, so he sacrificed the exchange with 10...Rxe4 but soon lost. Also bad for Black is 10...Ne5 11.c5! attacking two pieces.

Middlegame Threats

Problem M12 (2-problem set)

Black to move after 1.Re1 (*):

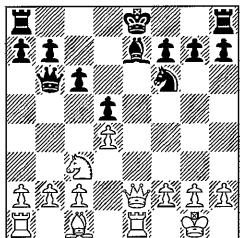


Threat: In this common late-opening/early-middlegame scenario White is threatening to make it difficult for Black to castle by playing 2.Qe2.

Prevention: Black should just play 1...O-O with a playable game. Other moves are not as good, as they let White carry out his threat.

Problem M13 (2nd of 2)

Black to move after 1.Qe2 (***):



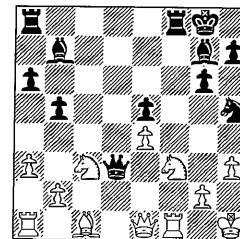
Threat: This may seem similar to the previous diagram, and it looks even better for White since he threatens 2.Qxe7#

Prevention: Black should play 1...O-O! or even 1...O-O-O although that side is clearly more dangerous for Black. After 1...O-O! Black has a playable game. The reason is that after 2.Qxe7? Rae8 (2...Rfe8 is also possible) pins the Queen to the Rook and threatens mate, so White would then lose his Queen for a Bishop and Rook. This is a good tactic to know. It can help you get out of what looks like big trouble in some opening positions.

Looking For Trouble

Problem M14

White to move after 1...Qxd3 (**):

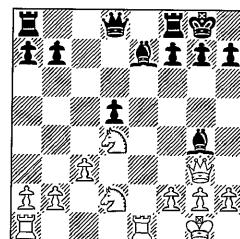


Threat: 2...Qxf1+ 3.Qxf1 Ng3+ 4.Kg1 Nxfl winning the exchange. If you did not see this because you stopped after 2...Qxf1+ saying to yourself, "Oh! I lose my Queen for a Rook – this can't be good," then you are going to miss most sacrificial combinations. *Except for speculative, long-term "real" sacrifices that are decided by intuition, don't stop analyzing until the position is quiescent, or at least until what you could win back is less than what you have sacrificed.*

Prevention: 2.Kh2 is best, when after 2...Nf6 (2...Nf4 is also interesting) Black has a small but comfortable advantage, but there is a long way to go.

Problem M15

Black to move after 1.Qg3 (**):



Threat: 2.Qxg4 winning the Bishop.

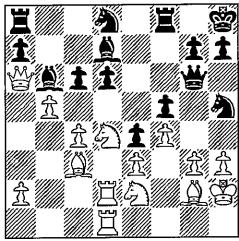
Prevention: Dr. Rolfe, who suggested the idea for this book, had this position as Black just before I sent the manuscript to the publisher. Perfect! How does he save the Bishop? It is really a process of elimination: 1...Qd7? loses to 2.Rxe7 winning two pieces for the Rook due to the overworked Queen. 1...Be6 is bad because of 2.Rxe6! (better than 2.Nxe6 fxe6 3.Rxe6 Bh4 and f2 is loose) 2...Bh4! 3.Rd6!

Middlegame Threats

Bxg3 4.Rxd8 Bxf2+ 5.Kxf2 Raxd8 and White is likely winning with two strong Knights for a Rook and pawn. 1...f5 allows 2.Ne6, and 1...h5 weakens the kingside dangerously, e.g. 2.Qd3 Bd6 3.b3 Bd7 4.Nf5 and White is much better. Dr. Rolfe tried 1...Bd7? but that lost a pawn to 2.Qe5 with a double attack on e7 and d5. After the game I suggested 1...Bc8!, which he rejected because “that can’t be right.” But it is the only move that does not allow an immediate concession/refutation, although White is still clearly better. Of course Black does not wish to put his Bishop back on the first rank and block in his Rook, but it is the best he has. Notice also that his pieces on the back rank, while not placed well, are all at least long-range, so they can control some squares from their rear posts, and possibly could be brought into play quickly. So *if you reject a move out of hand just because “it can’t be right to retreat,” especially to a piece’s original square, be careful as that logic may be dangerous to your score!*

Problem M16 (2-problem set)

Black to move after 1.Rcd2 (**):



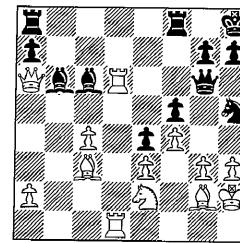
Threat: 2.bxc6 and Black cannot recapture, as White will not only win the pawn on d6, but also attack both c6 and g6, e.g. 2.bxc6 Nxc6 (2...Bxc6) 3.Nxc6 Bxc6 4.Rxd6 and ... see next problem! 2.Nxc6 opening the d-file immediately is also good, but not quite as accurate as 2.bxc6.

Prevention: Black’s best defense is the straightforward 1...cxb5, which he found. White has a very slight pull, but nothing special. Black went on to win in a time scramble. Not quite as accurate are 1...Bc8 2.Qa4 or 1...c5 2.Nc6, both with a white advantage.

Looking For Trouble

Problem M17 (2nd of 2)

Black to move after 4.Rxd6 (*):

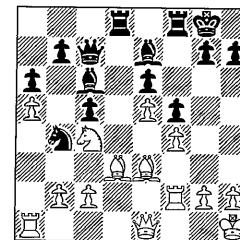


Threat: 5.Rxg6 winning the Queen for a Rook and also attacking the Bishop on c6.

Prevention: 4...Qe8 saves the Queen and guards the Bishop. Black is in bad shape, but if he misses this easy defense he can resign. *If you find yourself panicking because you made a mistake, don’t make it worse by not putting up the toughest defense!* In this case, don’t give him the Bishop just because you missed the threat on the d-pawn earlier and lost material; play 4...Qe8 when there is still a lot of chess left, even if your outlook is currently grim.

Problem M18

White to move after 1...Bc6 (**):



Threat: 2...Bh4 winning the exchange with a pin, plus 2...Nxd3 3.cxd3 Rxd3 winning a pawn. Notice that both threats are made by pieces other than the moving piece: the Rook’s threat was a discovered threat since the Bishop moved from d7 to c6, and the pin ...Bh4 is possible because ...Bc6 makes the interposing move g3 illegal. *If you find yourself missing indirect threats, then when you consider your move, you should ask yourself not just “What can the moving piece do now that it could not do before?” but also “How did the moving piece’s move affect other pieces?”* In this case 1...Bc6 allowed the Rook to attack d3 by

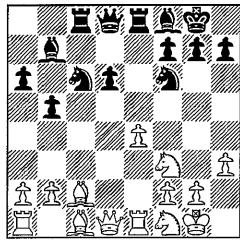
Middlegame Threats

discovery, plus it also allows the Bishop to skewer on h4 since the g-pawn is now pinned.

Prevention: No less than six moves stop both threats: **2.Rd2**, **2.Qe2**, **2.Qd1**, and **2.Qc3** are the best moves among these, and 2.Qd2 and 2.Qf1 also are possible but each has slight drawbacks. For example, 2.Qf1 Bd5 is awkward for White; 2.Qd2 Be4 is also somewhat better for Black. In any case Black retains at least a very slight advantage. *If you find yourself only finding only one or two of these moves, ask yourself, “What are all the moves that both stop the pin on h4 (the stronger threat) and also defend d3?” and don’t stop when you find one or two – you want to play the best! In this case several moves are about equally adequate, but sometimes the ones you stop looking for are by far the best!*

Problem M19

White to move after **1...Rc8** (**):



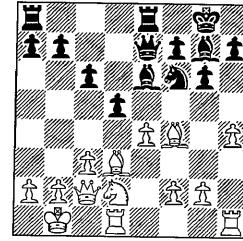
Threat: 2...Nb4 winning the e-pawn, because both e4 and c2 are attacked more times than they are defended.

Prevention: **2.Ng3** since this Knight was on its maneuver Nb1-d2-f1-g3 anyway and f1 was only a stopping point. Then after 2...Nb4 3.Bb1 is possible. Also the immediate 2.Bb1 stops the threat since on 2...Nb4 3.Ng3 anyway. But as long as you are going to put the Knight on g3 anyway, it is more flexible to do it right away; 2.Bb1 would be preferable if you might be considering Ne3. Less good is 2.a3, partly because in these “Ruy” positions White often wants to weaken Black’s queenside further with a4 and should not waste a tempo on 2.a3 unless it is necessary.

Looking For Trouble

Problem M20

White to move after **1...Rfe8** (**):

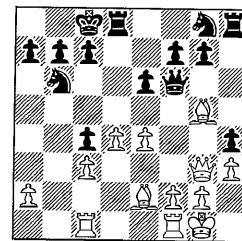


Threat: 2...dxe4 3.Nxe4 Nxe4 4.Bxe4 and now the discovered attack with 4...Bxa2+ 5.Kxa2 Qxe4 wins a pawn. *Sometimes you have no choice but to work through a capturing sequence of several moves. But when you do, be careful to ask yourself, “Is each capture forced?” and “Does this capture open up an opportunity for myself or my opponent on another square?”* In this case the hanging piece on e4 can be attacked by moving the Bishop on e6 with tempo, such as taking on a2 with check.

Prevention: **2.Rde1** or **2.f3**. Note that 2.Rhe1?! is more speculative since Black can exchange on e4 and the h-pawn is loose. *Black may not wish to take the h-pawn since it is a “castling on opposite sides” position; in those positions capturing a pawn in front of your own King is often incorrect so long as there are Queens on the board.* Here 2.exd5 is also less accurate as after 2...Nxd5 Black not only attacks the Bishop, but facilitates ...b5 and ...b4, getting his attack going on the queenside – *you want to attack as quickly as possible in these opposite-side castling positions.*

Problem M21

White to move after **1...h4** (**):



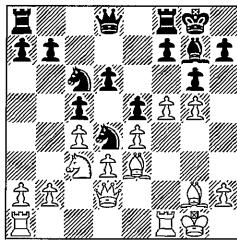
Middlegame Threats

Threat: 2...hxg3 3.Bxf6 gxf2+ 4.Rxf2 Nxf6 winning a piece.

Prevention: 2.Bxf6 hxg3 3.Bxd8 Kxd8 3...fxg2+ 4.Rxf2 Kxd8 5.Rxf7+- 4.fxg3 winning the exchange and a pawn. In the game White played the objectively reasonable 2.Qe3 and won eventually after 2...Qg6 3.Bxd8, but the line he chose violates the strong guideline that *you should make equal trades when winning, and the most important thing to trade is the Queens*. So while 2.Qe3 might be as good, or even slightly better, than 2.Bxf6, why not take the opportunity to simplify?

Problem M22

Black to move after 1.f5 (**):

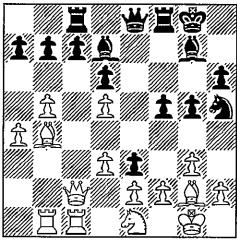


Threat: 2.f6, essentially incarcerating Black's Bishop for the remainder of the game.

Prevention: 1...f6 This is somewhat better than 1...Re8 giving the Bishop the square f8 to get back into the game. 2.Nd5. In either case White is better, but if Black allows 2.f6 Bh8, he may as well be a piece down.

Problem M23

White to move after 1...e3 (**):



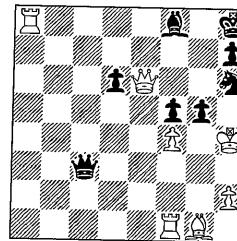
Looking For Trouble

Threat: 2...exf2+ 3.Kxf2 (else White loses a piece) 3...Bd4+ 4.Kf1 Qe3 and mate next move! If you did not see this, remember to *look for checks, captures, and threats each move, especially threats of mate in one!*

Prevention: 2.fxe3 is relatively best when Black is much better but an unbalanced game looms. White played this and lost, but he later had his chances. Notice how Black's Rook on c8 is doing a yeoman's job of bottling up White's queenside forces. On the other hand, if instead White tries 2.f3 f4 3.g4 Nf6 then his light-squared Bishop is entombed and Black is essentially a piece up. By the way, winning this game as Black put me back over master for the second time (don't ask!).

Problem M24

White to move after 1...g5+ (**):



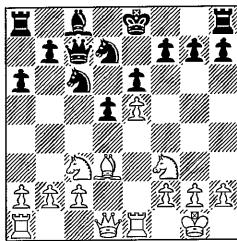
Threat: Another one of those pesky checks. White is way ahead in material but still needs to meet any mating threats, which are about the strongest (chess) threats anyone can have. Obviously Black can do some serious harm here unless the threats are carefully met.

Prevention: 2.fxg5 is the "easy" win. Other moves get mated in 3: 2.Kh5?? Qh3+ 3.Kxg5 Qg4+ 4.Kf6 Qg7# or the game's continuation: 2.Kxg5?? Qg7+ 3.resigns, as it is mate in two at most. But after 2.fxg5 Qb4+ 3.Kg3! Qg4+ 4.Kf2 Black has no reasonable continuation and can resign himself. This is another good example of doing a little required work. *If you find yourself falling for these swindles when not in time pressure you really should work either on your calculating vision or in convincing yourself to work out at least a few forcing lines. In my experience, most good players find doing this work "fun" and many weaker players do not, and that is an important factor in the difference in their playing strengths!* If you saw that 2.Kh5?? and 2.Kxg5?? both allowed mate, and that 2.fxg4 was "unclear," then by deductive logic you could already play 2.fxg4, since you have determined that it must be the best move even though you are not sure how good it is!

Middlegame Threats

Problem M25

White to move after 1...Nc6 (**):

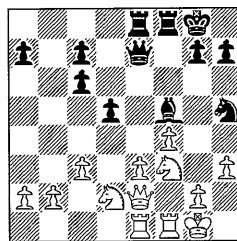


Threat: 2...N(either)x e5 winning a pawn.

Prevention: The simple 2.Qe2. If you find yourself consistently playing moves like 2.Nxd5?! exd5 3.e6 either you are a budding Mischa Tal or are accustomed to playing weak players who just cave in under some pressure. While speculative, 2.Nxd5?! does get some long-term play, as in many lines it may be difficult for Black to develop his King's Rook, e.g. 3...Nf6 4.exf7+ Kxf7 5.Ng5+ Kf8, or White may triple on the e-file as in 3...fxe6 4.Rxe6+ Ne7 5.Qe2 Nf6 (5...Nf8? 6.Re5! and White is better) 6.Re5 with some pressure. So even if 2.Nxd5?! is not best, it was worth considering! If you did not consider it at all, you may be missing some fun. It certainly is not bad occasionally to try speculative moves like this, especially in practice games, just to develop a feel for how good your intuition is. There are often non-simple possibilities in simple-looking positions, but that does not always make them better. Chess can be a tough game – but that is also one reason that should make it fun.

Problem M26

White to move after 1...Nh5 (**):



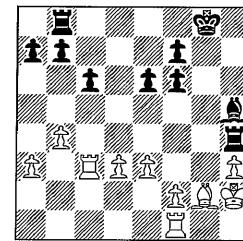
Looking For Trouble

Threat: 2...Ng3 winning the exchange with a fork, and 2...Nxf4 winning a pawn due to the pin on the e-file.

Prevention: Three moves work. In apparent diminishing order of strength, they are 2.Rf2, 2.Qa6, and 2.Qd1, but all are sufficient and after each Black retains some minor compensation for his lost pawn. However, the game continuation is instructive because White's actual move, 2.Qf2?, while meeting both threats, fell victim to 2...Bd3, winning the exchange. Moral of the story: *Just because your move stops all the threats created by your opponent's previous move does not mean it also gives you a reasonable defense to all his upcoming checks, captures, and threats, so you must be prepared to meet them, too!*

Problem M27

Black to move after 1.Kh2 (**):

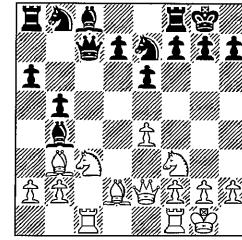


Threat: 2.Kg3 trapping the Rook.

Prevention: 1...Bg6. After 2.d4 White is better but still has a lot of work to do. Instead Black played 1...Kg7 and White carried out his threat and won. *Watch King activity as the endgame nears!*

Problem M28

Black to move after 1.Rac1 (**):



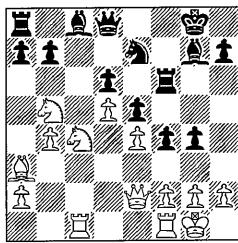
Middlegame Threats

Threat: White threatens 12.Nxb5, winning at least a pawn due to the discovered attack.

Prevention: Notice that the natural 11...Nbc6? fails anyway to 12.Nxb5 hitting the Queen and the Bishop on b4, e.g. 12...axb5 13.Bxb4 and the Knight cannot recapture due to the pin on the c-file. So Black should move the Queen. Probably 11...Qb6 is best with a playable game.

Problem M29

White to move after 1...g4 (**):

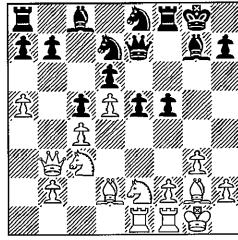


Threat: 2...f3, for example 3.gxf3? gxf3 4.Qd3 Qd7! 5.Ne3 Qh3 and White can resign since both h2 and g2 cannot both be defended: on the next move the black Rook can slide to h6. After 3.Qc2 (relatively best) 3...fxg2 4.Kxg2 Ng6 gives Black a strong attack.

Prevention: For better or worse in these “Main Line King’s Indian” positions White usually has to play 2.f3 and hang on. While 2.Qd3 is also plausible, after White plays the normal 2.f3 Black will play 2...g3 (2...Bd7 and 2...a6 first are also possible) and after 3.h3 Black will try to set up a winning Bishop sacrifice on h3. Meanwhile White will be “winning” the queenside, so an exciting race ensues as to who will get a decisive position first.

Problem M30 (2-problem set)

Black to move after 1.Rae1 (**):



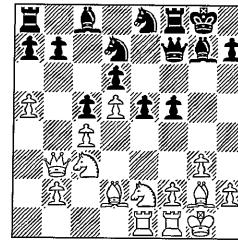
Looking For Trouble

Threat: 2.Nf4 followed by 3.Ne6 or possibly Nh5. Watch those pins! I almost missed this (as Black) even at the relatively slow time limit of game in 75 minutes.

Prevention: 1...Qf7 seems somewhat superior to 1...Qf6, which interferes with Black’s other minor pieces. Lines where Black allows Nf4 are dangerous because on Ne6 Black cannot capture twice without allowing Bd5, e.g. 1...Nf6 2.Nf4 Qf7 3.Ne6 Bxe6 4.dxe6 and the pawn is not only poison due to 4...Qxd5?? 5.Bd5 winning the Queen, but also White can now use d5 for his Knight as well.

Problem M31 (2nd of 2)

White to move after 1...Qf7 (****):

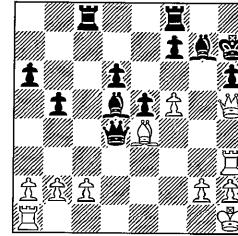


Threat: 2...f4 is not a real threat because 3.gxf4 is perfectly safe. The actual threat is to play 2...N7f6 to control g4 and stop White’s intended maneuver to break up the center (see Prevention).

Prevention: White should play 2.f4! e4 3.g4! breaking open the center before Black has the opportunity to coordinate his pieces. At first this might look odd, but play out the moves and you will soon see that White has far more forces he can bring to bear on the fight after 3...fxg4 4.Nxe4. *The key is that White is much better developed so it is worthwhile to do almost anything to start a fight now. Although White is not losing a pawn, it is often well worth it to lose a pawn to get the fight started when you have the advantage in development!*

Problem M32 (2-problem set)

White to move after 1...Bg7 (**):



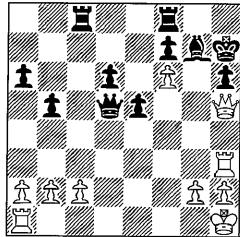
Middlegame Threats

Threat: 2...Qxe4 and 2...Bxe4, both winning a piece. 2...Qxe4 is superior since it introduces its own threat of mate on g2, which gives White fewer options.

Prevention: 2.Bxd5 is the only move to stay in the game. Although Black stays on top after 2...Qxd5 3.f6 (see next problem), other moves just lose. In a moderately quick game White played the tempting 2.f6+? but after 2...Qxe4 3.Rg1 (to stop the mate) Black simply gave back one of his two extra pieces with 3...Qg6 and won easily. *It is often correct to give back some of your material to simplify. Remember that it is not what is traded that is important, but what is left on the board!*

Problem M33 (2nd of 2)

Black to move after 3.f6 (***):

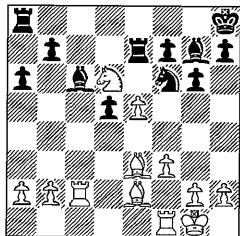


Threat: 4.fxg7 winning the Bishop with additional mate threats.

Prevention: Only 3...Qe6 retains an advantage. Bad is 3...Rh8? 4.Qf5+ Kg8 5.Qxc8+ and White will mate. So is 3...Qd2? 4.Qf5+ Kh8 (4...Kg8 5.Rg3 wins) 5.fxg7+ Kxg7 6.Rg3+. Drawing is 3...Rg8 4.Qf5+ Kh8 5.fxg7+ Kxg7 (5...Rhg7? 6.Qxc8+) 6.Rg3+ Kh8 7.Qf6+. After 3...Qe6 4.fxg7 Rg8 Black will capture the g-pawn and stand better as White will only have minimal compensation for his pawn.

Problem M34 (2-problem set)

Black to move after 1.e5 (**):



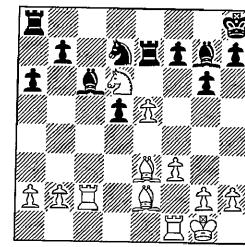
Looking For Trouble

Threat: 2.exf6 winning a piece, as 2...Rxe3 is met by 3.fxg7+.

Prevention: Black can counterattack White's strong-looking center with 1...Nd7. See next problem.

Problem M35 (2nd of 2)

White to move after 1...Nd7 (**):

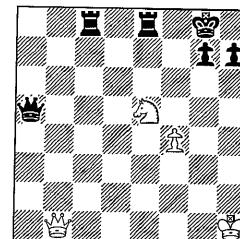


Threat: 2...Bxe5 or 2...Nxe5, but not 2...Rxe5 3.Nxf7+

Prevention: White can hold the center temporarily, but after 2.f4 f6! it falls apart anyway. After 3.exf6 Nxf6 the Knight is trapped on d6 and after 4.Bc5 Rd7 Black is doing well. So this is an example of a series of threats by Black that can be met only temporarily; eventually the right combination of threats will topple White's initially strong-looking position.

Problem M36 (4-problem set)

Black to move after 1.Ne5 (**):



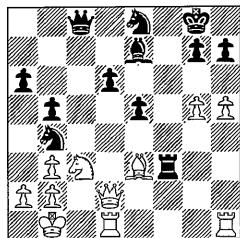
Middlegame Threats

Threat: Philidor's Legacy with 2.Qb3+ Kh8 (2...Kf8 3.Qf7#) 3.Nf7+ Kg8 4.Nh6+ Kh8 5.Qg8+! Rxg8 6.Nf7#. This is the hard part, but *Philidor's Legacy is an easy set of moves to learn and a good one to know because it occurs fairly frequently, at least as a threat!*

Prevention: Almost any random safe Black move works! Besides killer checks, the "sacrificial" 1...Rxe5 is boringly easy.

Problem M37 (2nd of 4)

White to move after 1...Qxc8 (***):



Threat: Here is Philidor's Legacy in a real, practical middlegame position between myself (White) and a 1900 player. Black threatens 2...Qf5+ 3.Kf1 (3.Kh1 Nc2+ wins) 3...Rxe3 and White cannot play 4.Qxe3 due to 4...Qc2#.

Prevention: Only 2.Rh2! does the trick. If White plays anything else Black still has tricks, e.g.

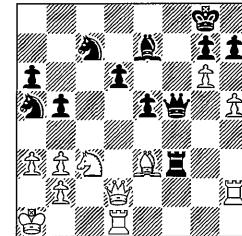
- 1) 2.Ne4 Qg4 (2...d5 3.a3 Qg4 4.Nf2 Qf5+ 5.Nd3 Nxd3 6.Qxd3 Qxd3+ 7.Rxd3 d4 -+; 2...Qf5 3.Rh4 h6 4.Qxb4 hxg5 5.Bxg5 Bxg5 6.Rhh1 d5 7.Rxd5 Nf6 8.Rd8+ Kh7 -+) 3.Nf2 Qf5+ 4.Nd3 d5 and Black is likely winning;
- 2) 2.a3 Qf5+ 3.Ka1 (In these lines 3.Kc1 loses prosaically to 3...Rxe3 and the overworked Queen cannot recapture on e3 and guard mate on c2). 3...Nc2+ -+;
- 3) 2.g6 Qf5+ 3.Ka1 Nc2+ -+;
- 4) 2.h6 Qf5+ 3.Ka1 Nc2+ -+;
- 5) 2.Rc1 Qf5+ 3.Ka1 Rxe3 4.Qxe3 Bxg5 and Black is better, or
- 6) 2.Ka1 Rxe3 3.Nd5 Nc2+ 4.Kb1 Bxg5 5.Rhg1 Qf5 6.Qxc2 Rf3 and Black is better.

After 2.Rh2 Qf5+ 3.Ka1, the c2 square is adequately covered and White retains a nice advantage. The game continued 3...Nc7 4.a3 Nc6 5.g6 Na5 See next problem:

Looking For Trouble

Problem M38 (3rd of 4)

White to move after 5...Na5 (***):

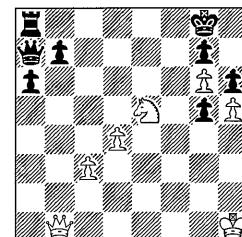


Threat: 6...Nxb3+ winning the Queen.

Prevention: 6.Ka2 is possible, but the sharp 6.Nd5! put an end to resistance. The game finished 6...Nxb3+ There is nothing better against White's counter-threat of 7.Nxe7+, e.g. 6...Bf8 7.Ka2 or 7.Qxa5 with advantage. 7.Ka2 Qe6 A mistake in time pressure. Better is 7...Bf8, but White still wins after 8.Kxb3 Qe4 9.Qb4! Qxb4+ 10.Kxb4 Nxd5+ 11.Rxd5 Rxe3 12.Ka5, because he will get a passed pawn on the queenside. 8.Nxc7 and Black overstepped the time control.

Problem M39 (4th of 4)

Black to move after 1.Qb1 (*****):



Threat: Philidor's Legacy with 2.Qb3+ (or 2.Qa2+) 2...Kh8 (2...Kf8 2.Qf7#) 3.Nf7+ Kg8 4.Nxh6+ Kh8 5.Qg8+! Rxg8 6.Nf7# This is the easy part!

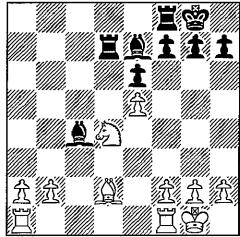
Prevention: Only 1...b6 works in this problem-like position! Black can then draw after 2.Qa2+ Kf8 2...Kh8 3.Nf7+ Kg8 4.Nd8+ Kh8 5.Qd5! is complicated, but winning for White. 3.Qd5 g4!! Other moves lose but this one seems to draw, with some exceptionally difficult play – consult your local computer for further analysis well beyond the scope of this book! After this amazing move White has only

Middlegame Threats

drawing plans, but no win in sight. Other Black defenses on the first move are not good: 1...b5 2.Qa2+ Kh8 (Now 2...Kf8 fails to 3.Qd5 g4 4.Nd7+ Ke7 5.Nc5!) 3.Nf7+ Kg8 4.Nxh6+ Kh8 5.Nf7+ Kg8 6.Nd8+ Kh8 7.Qd5 wins or 1...Kh8 2.Nf7+ Kg8 3.Nxh6+ Kh8 (3...Kh8 4.Qf5! e.g. 4...Qb6 5.Nf7+ Kg8 6.h6! gxh6 7.Nxh6+ Kg7 8.Qf7+ and mate, or 3...gxh6 4.Qb3+ Kh8 5.Qf7 b5 6.g7+ Kh7 7.g8Q#) 4.Qb4+ (The simple 4.Qf5+ Ke7 5.Qf7+ Kd8 6.Qf8+ Kc7 7.Qxg7+ of course also wins easily.) 4...Ke8 5.Nf5 b5 6.h6! gxh6 7.Qd6 crunch!

Problem M40

White to move after 1...Rxd7 (**):

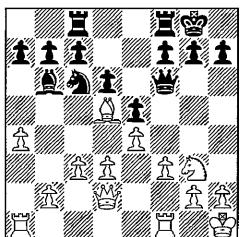


Threat: 2...Bxf1 winning the exchange and 2...Rxd4 winning a Knight.

Prevention: This is another one of those positions where it is important to recognize that *losing the exchange is far less a problem than losing a piece*. So White should just play 2.Bc3 and after 2...Bxf1 3.Kxf1 he has a fairly large advantage of a Knight and two connected passed pawns for a Rook in the endgame. White did this and won easily. More complex and unnecessary is 2.Nc6 Bh4!, and completely wrong is the counterattack 2.Rfc1? Rxd4 3.Be3 Re4 when White is unable to play the “removal of the guard” 4.f3? due to 4...Rxe3, and Black is much better.

Problem M41

Black to move after 1.a4 (**):



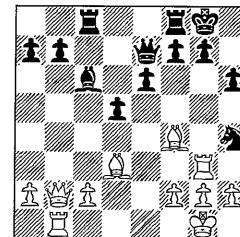
Looking For Trouble

Threat: 2.Bxc6 removing the second guard on a5. After 2...bxc6 3.a5 Bc5 4.b4 traps the Bishop.

Prevention: 1...a6 or 1...a5 (even 1...Qf4 is possible) where, if White plays the break move 2.f4! to open up lines for his Rooks, he retains a pleasant advantage. Instead Black missed the threat and played 1...Rcd8?, but White did not understand that his threat was already realizable and instead played 2.b4? unnecessarily reinforcing 3.a5(!). This finally caused Black to notice the threat, and he finally defended with 2...a6. White subsequently missed the idea of activating his Rooks with f4, eventually drifted into a bad position, and lost. Several good lessons just in this one little problem – learn these patterns and ideas, and next game you might play a little better!

Problem M42 (2-problem set)

Black to move after 1.Rg3 (***):



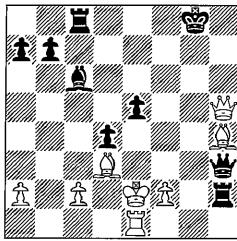
Threat: 2.Qxg7# and 2.Bxh6 winning a pawn with a strong attack.

Prevention: 1...Ng6 is best. Black is ahead two pawns, but White cannot even win one of them back by capturing on g6 due to 2.Bxg6? fxg6 3.Rxg6? Rxf4 and the Queen guards the mate on g7. So instead White would have to settle for 2.Bd2 or 2.Re1 when he has some compensation for his lost pawns (bishop pair, open lines, kingside pressure) but Black is still for choice. 1...g5! also meets the threats, but of course is double-edged as Black’s gain in space is offset by the loosening of his kingside. In the game Black blundered with 1...f6? allowing 2.Bxh6 when White was better but later went astray (see next problem).

Middlegame Threats

Problem M43 (2nd of 2)

Black to move after 1.Ke2 (***):



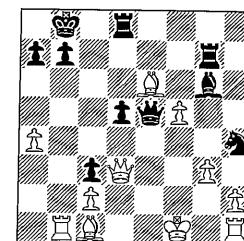
Threat: White has just moved his King to e2 after a Queen check on h3. This is a position where both sides have several enormous threats – and that is the point of the problem. If it were White's move he has mate threats, for example it is mate in four with 2.Qh7+ Kf8 3.Qe7+ Kg8 4.Bh7+ Kh8 5.Bf6#. *But in positions such as these, with lots of heavy material on the board and both Kings exposed, it is often the player who is on the move who wins with a series of checks or major captures, despite any initial material imbalances.*

Prevention: Black can stop all of White's threats with two blockbuster moves: 1...Qe3#! Did you miss this check, with the pinned f-pawn? If 2.Kf1 Rh1#, if 2.Kd1 Bf3+ wins the Queen. Also winning easily is 1...Rxf2#! when 2.Kxf2 Qg2# or the pretty 2.Kd1 Qxd3#! 3.cxd3 Ba4#. Therefore White just loses his Queen with check after 2.Bxf2 Qxh5+. Unfortunately for Black he did not see any of this and played the tempting but non-forcing 1...Qxh4?. After Black has missed these enormous chances White can win fairly easily with 2.Bc4+ Kg7 3.Rg1+ Bg2 4.Rxg2+, when he wins the Queen due to the overworked Rook on h2 because if 4...Kf6 5.Qf7#. Instead he played the less accurate 2.Rg1+ Kf8 3.Qf5+ Ke7 4.Qxe5+ Kd7? (a much more difficult defense is put up with 4...Kf8 when White has to find 5.Qf5+ Ke7 6.Qc5+ Ke8 7.Rg8+Kf7 8.Bc4+Kf6 9.Qd6+Kf5 10.Be6+Ke4 11.Rg4+Qxg4+ 12.Bxg4 Bb5+ 13.Ke1 Rch8 14.Qe6+Kf4 15.Qf5#) 5.Bf5+Kd8 6.Rg8+Be8 7.Qd6#.

Looking For Trouble

Problem M44 (3-problem set)

Black to move after 1.Kf1 (***):

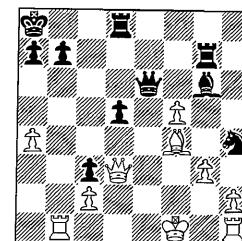


Threat: 2.Bf4 pinning the Queen to the King, and 2.gxh4 winning the Knight.

Prevention: 1...Nxf5! is the move that does the trick. For example, the dangerous-looking 2.Bf4 is met by the discovered attack 2...Nxg3+ 3.hxg3 Bxd3+ 4.cxd3 Rf8! pinning the pinning Bishop! Even after 5.Rh8! (deflection) Blacks wins with 5...Qxf4#! 6.gxf4 Rxh8. Instead Black played the tricky but not as good 1...Qxe6? and White replied with the correct 2.Bf4+ Ka8 bringing us to the next position.

Problem M45 (2nd of 3)

White to move after 2...Ka8 (*):



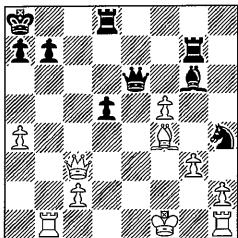
Threat: The simplest is 3...Nxf5 leaving Black a piece up with an easy win, or even the strong 3...Bxf5 or 3...Qxf5.

Prevention: 3.fxe6 is the only move to regain the piece, leaving White with good chances. Notice that White captures the Queen for nothing but then Black has to give up his Bishop to get back a Queen after 3...Bxd3+ 4.cxd3. This type of counting is *de rigueur* for good chess. Instead White made the horrible counting error 3.Qxc3?, leading to the next problem.

Middlegame Threats

Problem M46 (3rd of 3)

Black to move after 3.Qxc3 (**):

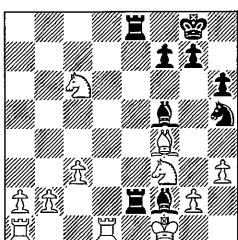


Threat: 4.fxe6 winning the Queen, 4.Qxg7 winning the Rook, or even 4.fxg6 or 4.gxh4 regaining the piece.

Prevention: The simple 3...Nxf5 saves all four at once. There are other good, tricky moves like 3...Qe4, threatening 4...Qxa1+ and 4...Qg2+, but 3...Nxf5 just wins easily. *Why be tricky when you are winning easily anyway? Complicated positions favor the player who is losing, since the winning player has a lot more to lose in the complications.*

Problem M47

White to move after 1...Nh5 (***):



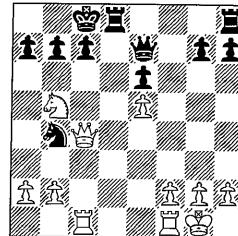
Threat: Black threatens 2...Nxf4, but what to do about it?

Prevention: Best is 2.Bd6 with an interesting game in store after 2...Rxb2 3.Ned4 Bc8!. But wrong is 2.Bh2? because after 2...Rxb2 3.Ncd4 Bxd4 4.Nxd4 Black can play 4...Bxh3!, after which he will have both a material and a major positional advantage.

Looking For Trouble

Problem M48

Black to move after 1.Nb5: (***):

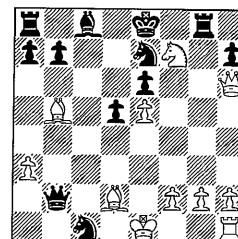


Threat: 2.Nxa7+ winning a pawn and exposing the black King.

Prevention: Best is 1...Kb8 when White retains a slight advantage. But Black played the plausible 1...Nc6? when White missed 2.Qa4! a6 3.Rxc6! (a typical exchange sacrifice) 3...bxc6 (3...axb5 4.Qa8+ Kd7 5.Qxb7 Rc8 6.Rd1+ and wins) 4.Na7+ Kb7 5.Nxc6 Qc5 6.Nxd8+ Rxd8 7.Qe4+ and White has regained all his material and more.

Problem M49

Black to move after 1.Bb5+: (***):



Threat: Another of those “What after the check?” problems. The general threat is to *expose* the black King, and defending the check is not trivial, as all four legal moves have to be considered.

Prevention: 1...Bd7! is the only move that does not lose, and it wins, e.g. 2.Nd6+ Kd8 3.Nxb7+ If 3.0–0 Bxb5 4.Rxc1 Kd7 5.Nxb7 Rg6--. 3...Kc7 4.Bxc1 Qxb5 5.Qxh7 Ng6--.

Other moves are very bad:

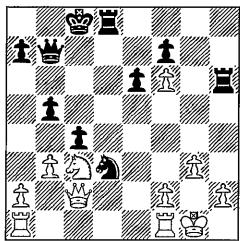
Middlegame Threats

- 1) 1...Nc6? 2.Bxc6+ bxc6 3.Nd6+ Kd8 4.Ba5++-
- 2) 1...Qxb5? 2.Nd6+ Kd7 3.Nxb5 Nd3+ 4.Kf1 Nxe5 5.Qxh7+- and finally
- 3) 1...Kxf7?? 2.Qf6#

I saw this last line, of course, but I thought so long on this move that it became the old “I forgot my analysis” problem, and so I played it anyway and got mated! This is the same thinking-process problem that Kramnik said he experienced when he simply blundered a piece against Deep Fritz in 2002. I had only been playing tournament chess a year and a half at the time, but that was no excuse. I probably felt as bad as Kramnik, but his blunder cost him a lot more money and embarrassment!

Problem M50

White to move after 1...Rxe6 (***):



Threat: 2...Rxh2. If then:

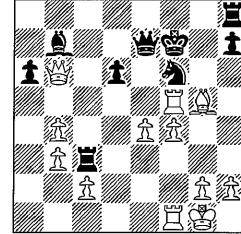
- 1) 3.Kxh2 Rh8+ 4.Kg1 Rh1# (or 4...Qh1#)
- 2) 3.f3 Rxc2, or
- 3) 3.bxc4 when Black has three one-move mates!

Prevention: White needs a move that can obstruct the long diagonal so that he can accept the Rook sacrifice. So while moves such as 2.f3 are possible, most accurate is **2.bxc4!**, e.g. 2...Rxe6 3.Nd5! is a counter sacrifice to block the line and White is slightly better in a tactical melee: 3...Nb4 4.Qc3 Rdh8 5.Qxb4 exd5 6.Qc5+ with a White advantage. Therefore, better for Black after **2.bxc4!** is **2...Ne5** when Black is fine and a sharp game with chances for both sides is in store.

Looking For Trouble

Problem M51

Black to move after 1.Rf5 (***):

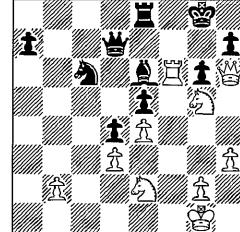


Threat: 2.Rxf6+ winning the Knight, or even 2.Bxf6 not only winning the Knight but with a strong attack.

Prevention: **1...Qxe4!** Other moves lose, but sacrificing the Knight with check ensures Black at least a draw. Play continued **2.Rxf6+ Kg7 2...Ke8? 3.Qxb7! Qxb7 4.Re1+ Kd7 5.Rf7+** and White wins. Now **3.Rf2 Qe1+** would be a draw. However, White was worried that if he played 3.Rf2 I could reply 3...Rxc2, but he missed **4.Bh6+!** winning, so instead he played **3.Qxb7?** and after **3...Qxb7** Black soon won.

Problem M52

Black to move after 1.Rf6 (***):



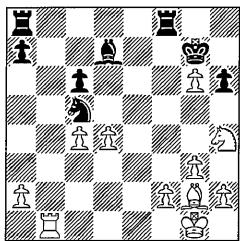
Threat: **2.Nxe6 Rxe6 3.Rf8#**, and also the secondary threat **2.Nxh7 Qxh7 3.Rxg6+ Kh8 4.Rxe6** winning a pawn and smashing open Black’s kingside since **4...Qxh6? 5.Rxh6+ Kg7 6.Rxc6** wins a piece.

Prevention: Black can stop the immediate threats with **1...Nd8**. However, in the long run he has no real defense against White’s better position – this happens sometimes! After **1...Nd8**, White played **2.Nxh7!** anyway with the great follow-up **2...Qxh7 3.Rxg6+ Kh8 4.Qg5!** threatening the unstoppable **5.Rh6** and Black soon resigned.

Middlegame Threats

Problem M53

Black to move after **1.exd4**: (***)

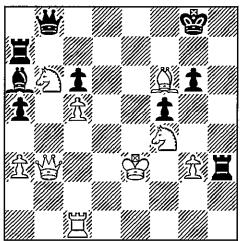


Threat: 2.dxc5 winning a Knight. White has four pawns for the Rook, so if he can win any more material he will be in great shape for the endgame.

Prevention: 1...Ne6? does not work because of 2.Rb7 Rfd8 3.Bxc6 and White is much better. Instead the right idea is to sacrifice the Knight and go into the endgame up the exchange but down the four pawns with **1...Rab8!** Normally this would be disastrous since the Exchange is only worth about 1½ pawns, but here White is all tied up, his c-pawns are worse than useless, and his a-pawn is vulnerable. *So static material count is not all it takes to evaluate a position!* Black won quickly: **2.Rxb8 Rxb8 3.dxc5 Rb1+ 4.Bf1 Bh3 5.Ng2 Ra1 5...Kxg6?? 6.Nf4+ wins. 6.f3 Bxg2! 7.Kxg2 Rxa2+ 8.Kh3 Rd2** resigns.

Problem M54

Black to move after **1.Qb3+:** (***)



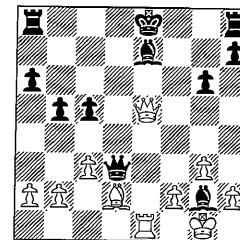
Threat: The black King is in check, but how to best stop the threatened mating attack?

Prevention: Worst is 1...Kf8?? when 2.Nxg6+ Ke8 3.Qe6+ (and others) mate. Not good is the tempting 1...Kh7 when after 2.Kf3! Rh2 3.Qe6 White has a strong attack. Best is **1...Rf7!** when White's King is also in danger, e.g. **2.Kf3 Qe8!** when Black has many threats too, with the outcome still in doubt.

Looking For Trouble

Problem M55

Black to move after **1.Re1** (***) – this position is not a typo; the Bishop on g2 is Black's!:

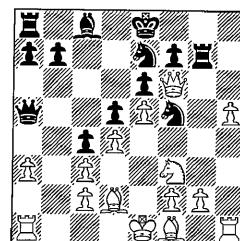


Threat: 2.Qxe7# and 2.Qxh8+

Prevention: I was Black and my opponent had sacrificed material for a vicious-looking attack. I was almost resigned to playing 1...Be4? when I realized the solution was simple – I could still castle! So I played **1...O-O-O!** 1...O-O! is even better, but castling is the only defense and doing so to either side wins easily. My opponent, as I had originally, completely overlooked that simple solution and resigned after **1...O-O-O 2.Qxe7 Qxd2 3.Qxc5+ Kb8 4.Re7 Qd1+ 5.Kxg2 Qd5+** trading Queens. This win was my first over a 1900 player, almost a 500-point upset. I had been playing tournament chess for a little less than a year at this point.

Problem M56

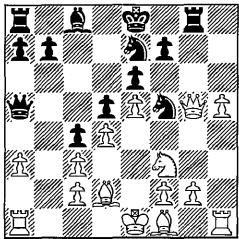
White to move after **1...Rg7** (***):



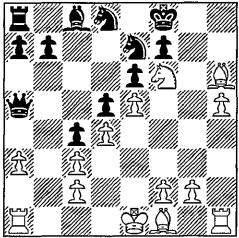
Middlegame Threats

Threat: 2...Ng8 trapping the Queen, although after 3.Qxg7 Nxg7 4.h6 Nxh6 5.Rxh6 White is still doing fine.

Prevention: Allow the threat with 2.h6! After 2...Ng8 3.hxg7 Nxg6 4.exf6 White gets back the Queen and more! In the actual game, I was White and saw this line, but chickened out and did not play my Queen from g5 to f6, and instead won by sacrificing my Queen for a beautiful Bishop and Knight mate. This is worth including so, from the diagram, let's go back one full move, placing the Queen back on g5 and the Rook on g8 (Black has just played Ng6-e7):

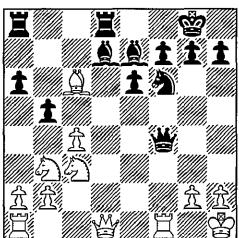


1.Qf4 (instead of the problem's assumed 1.Qf6) 1...Nc6 2.g4 Nfe7 3.Ng5 Nd8 4.Nh7 Rh8 5.Nf6+ 1–0 because of 5...Kf8 6.Qh6+!! Rxh6 7.Bxh6+. Pretty! This became my first published game, in the *Pennswoodpusher*.



Problem M57 (2-problem set)

Black to move after 1.Bxc6 (***):



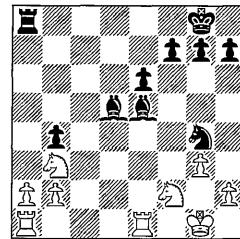
Looking For Trouble

Threat: 2.Rxf4 winning the Queen, and 2.Bxa8 winning the exchange.

Prevention: There are two plausible defenses: 1...Qe5, when after 2.Bxa8 Bd6! gives Black good compensation for his minor material investment, and 1...Qxf1+ followed by 2.Qxf1 Bxc6 with a Rook, a Bishop (half of the bishop pair), a pawn and active pieces for the Queen. Both looked interesting, so I offered my opponent an opportunity to split the game into two and he accepted! This was possible because it was part of an experimental correspondence game played in the late 1980's where I got to use the computer – with my opponent's permission – and then wrote the first article on man-machine collaboration on correspondence chess (but, since it was only published locally, a couple of national articles a few months later got more prominence). See the next problem for a threat from later in the same game.

Problem M58 (2nd of 2)

Black to move after 1.Nf2 (***):



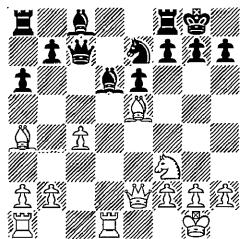
Threat: 2.Nxg4 winning material.

Prevention: 1...Bxb2! is clearly best. For example, guarding the Knight with a pawn is insufficient since White just trades Knights and removes the guard on e5, e.g. 2...h5? 3.Nxg4 and the Bishop is loose on e5. 1...Nxf2 is better, but still not best, because Black can eliminate both the bishop pair and the threats to b2 with 2.Rxe5. However, after 1...Bxb2! White cannot just win material by capturing the Knight since 2.Nxg4 Bxb3, e.g. 3.Rab1 Bd4+ 4.Ne3 Bxa2 5.Rxb4 Bc3 and Black is winning. In the game White tried 2.Rad1, but after the thematic 2...Ne5 threatening 3...Nf3+ Black won easily.

Middlegame Threats

Problem M59

Black to move after **1.Rfd1** (***):

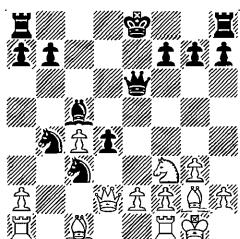


Threat: 2.Bxd6 or 2.Rxd6, both winning the Bishop.

Prevention: 1...**Bxe5** is the only move that does not lose, although Black still faces a difficult defense. My opponent found this but I went on to win a very nice game. However, I was sorely disappointed to miss my chance at copycat immortality if Black had played the very normal looking 1...Rd8? because I saw 2.Bxd6! Rxd6 3.Rxd6 Qxd6 4.Rd1 Qb6 (4...Qc7 5.Qe5! Qb6 is similar) 5.Qe3! Qc7 6.Qe5! (but not 6.Qc5? Nc6) 6...Qb6 7.Qc5! and back-rank mate or win of the Queen is inevitable! While not quite as brilliant as the original Adams-Torre, it would be good enough for me! Darn! At least the notes made this book ...

Problem M60

White to move after **1...Qe6** (***):



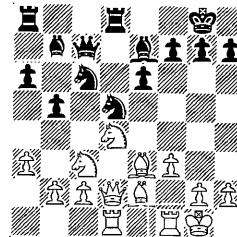
Looking For Trouble

Threat: 2...Qxc4 or 2...Nxe2+, both winning a pawn.

Prevention: 2.e3! is best when the position is very complicated but, since Black has not castled, White has some subtle defenses. For example 2.e3 Ne4 Not 2...dxe3? 3.Qxc3 or 2...Qxc4 3.exd4 with complications favoring White. 3.Nxd4! Nxd2 4.Nxe6 fxe6 Other moves are even worse, e.g. 4...Nxfl 5.Nxc5 and White is winning easily since the black Knight is trapped on f1. 5.Bxd2 and White is up a healthy pawn. I played the less accurate 2.Qg5?! which was properly met by 2...Be7 with a complex game and chances for both sides.

Problem M61

White to move after **1...Nxd5** (***):

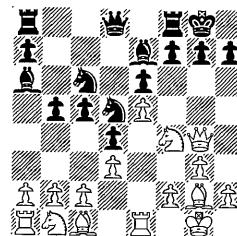


Threat: Black threatens 2...Nxe3, not just winning the bishop pair, but lots of material after 3.Qxe3 Nxd4 because if 4.Rxd4 Rxd4 5.Qxd4 Be5 winning the Queen.

Prevention: Best is 2.Nxc6 Bxc6 2...Nxe3? 3.Nxe7+ 3.Nxd5 Bxd5 4.Bd3 when White stands somewhat worse, but has a playable game. Instead White tried to hold his Bishop with 2.Bf2? Nf4! and lost quickly after 3.Qe1? Nxd4 4.Bxd4 Rxd4 (Even simple exchange sacrifices are often overlooked.) 5.Rxd4 Be5 and Black is winning easily.

Problem M62

Black to move after **1.Qg4** (***):



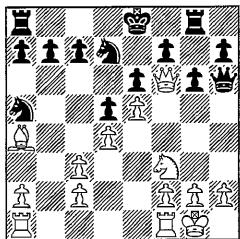
Middlegame Threats

Threat: White threatens 2.Nxe6 fxe6 3.Qxe6+ Kh8 4.Bxd5 (slightly better than 4.Qxc6 or 4.Qxd5) winning at least a pawn after further complications via 4...Nb4. White also has the clearance 2.Nxd5 exd5 3.Bh6 threatening mate, and thus winning the exchange after 3...g6 4.Bxf8, but not 2.Nxd5 exd5 3.Qf3 (instead of the better 3.Bh6) going after the d-pawn, since Black can play 3...Qc7 counterattacking the e-pawn. Notice that 2.Nh5 threatening mate is not as strong after 2...g6 even though White has a nice game.

Prevention: The only move which fully stops both threats is 1...Kh8, when White remains a little better, but through accurate play Black was able to draw in 29 moves. Note that now 2.Nxe6? fxe6 3.Qxe6 without check fails even though White now threatens both Knights, due to 3...Ncb4 and if 4.a3? Black can win not only with 4...Nxc2, but also with the even better 4...Bc8 trapping the Queen! *Positions where one side can dominate with his Queen the side of the board where his opponent has castled, are very dangerous, and it is easy for the defense to go wrong.*

Problem M63

Black to move after 1.Ba4 (***):



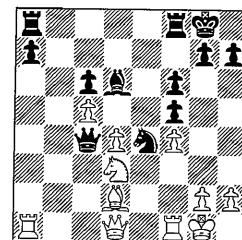
Threat: The devastating 2.Bxd7+ when 2...Kxd7 3.Qxf7+ Kc6 allows a mating attack after 4.Qxe6+.

Prevention: Black can decoy the attacking Bishop with 1...b5!, an easy move to dismiss if you are not familiar with this tactic. Then if 2.Bxb5 c6 breaks the pin and threatens not only the Bishop, but also the Queen, thus winning a piece. The immediate 1...c6 does not attack the Bishop and is not nearly as good. *This is the type of tactic that good players are familiar with and play quickly, while weaker players never even consider it at all: a good reason to study basic tactics.*

Looking For Trouble

Problem M64

White to move after 1...Qc4 (***):

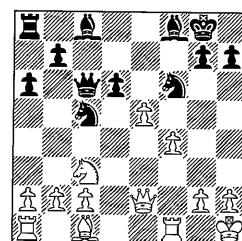


Threat: Best would be 2...Qxd4+ and if 3.Nf2 Bxc5. Hopeless is 3.Kh1 Qxd3 4.cxd6 Qxd2 – almost always capture with the Queen in such winning situations since you want to offer the trade of Queens or make White retreat! Of course the simple 2...Qxd3 is also an easily winning threat since 3.cxd6 Qxd2 leaves Black a piece ahead.

Prevention: 2.Nf2 makes the most of a bad situation. 2.Be3 is not quite as good – after both moves Black is still distinctly better, but 2.Nf2 has the added advantage of setting the trap 2...Qxd4? (2...Bc7! and Black remains better) 3.cxd6 Qxd2 4.Nxe4! and White has almost equalized, e.g. 4...Qxd1 5.Nxf6+ Rxf6 6.Rfxd1 a5 7.d7 Rff8 8.Rac1. *If you have two seemingly equal moves, choosing the one that gives your opponent a chance to go wrong makes sense; on the other hand, playing a clearly inferior move just to set a trap is never justified unless you are losing anyway and desperately need a chance to get back in the game.* 2.Qe2? fails to 2...Nxd2, but not 2...Qxd4? 3.Be3 winning the Bishop on d6.

Problem M65

Black to move after 1.e5 (***):



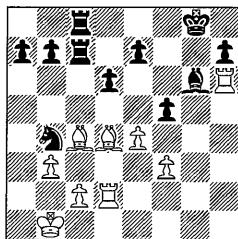
Middlegame Threats

Threat: 2.exf6 winning the Knight.

Prevention: 1...Nfe4 is best when Black has a comfortable advantage. Notice that his two pieces and bishop pair more than make up for the Rook and two pawns, as is usually the case. Next best (and almost as good) is the move I played, 1...Bg4, which seemingly develops with tempo but does not necessarily “win” that tempo since the Queen can reposition itself with 2.Qe1 followed by 3.Qg3 or Qh4 re-attacking that same Bishop. Capturing the pawn with 1...dxe5 first, which many players do automatically (a bad habit – *nothing should be automatic!*) is not as good, as this just opens the f-file for the Rook, a much bigger consideration than dissolving the isolated d-pawn, and then chances are about even, although Black may still have a very slight pull.

Problem M66

Black to move after 1.Bc4+ (***):



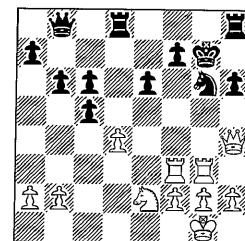
Threat: Black is in check; White has a potentially dangerous kingside attack since he has many more pieces pointed toward Black’s King.

Prevention: 1...Rxc4! This “sacrifice” is not just the only move to retain a black advantage, but it also provides a winning advantage. *If you routinely miss this kind of minor material sacrifice, especially when ahead, perhaps you are overvaluing the exchange, which is worth about half a piece – less than two pawns.* In this case Black can get two pawns back almost immediately, so it is not really a sacrifice at all, but that is not the point – Black breaks White’s attack and the material left on the board is greatly in his favor – Black started out two pawns ahead! After 2.bxc4 fxe4 Black has at least three pawns for the exchange, White’s pawns are isolated and extremely vulnerable, and White is unable to open the g-file for attack. Thus Black is left with a relatively easy winning position. But if instead Black plays another move, then White is equal or better. In the game I played 1...Kf8? when White should have played 2.Be6! with decent chances. That game was played when I was a teenager; today I am sure I would play 1...Rxc4 without too much hesitation.

Looking For Trouble

Problem M67

Black to move after 1.Rcf3 (***):

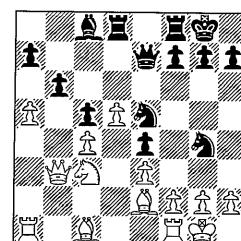


Threat: 2.Qf6+ K-any 3.Qxf7#

Prevention: 1...Rd7! This is better than the alternatives: 1...Rh8 2.Qf6+ Kh7 3.Rg4! with a strong attack, e.g. 3...Rd5 (Best! – weaker is 3...Qc7 4.Rh3 and the threat of 5.Rxh6+ Kxh6 6.Rh4# wins tons of material.) 4.Rxg6 fxg6 5.Qxf8 Qxf8 6.Rxf8 with a good endgame; 1...Qc7 fails to 2.Qf6+ Kg8 3.Rxg6+ fxg6 4.Qxg6+ Qg7 5.Qxe6+ Kh7 6.Rf7 winning the Queen; and finally 1...Qe5?! 2.h3 (Taking away the back rank mate threat and activating dxe5 as a threat) 2...cxd4 3.Qe7 Rh8 4.Nf4! (the only winning move). After 1...Rd7! White is better but a battle still looms, e.g. 2.Nf4 Qe5 3.h3!

Problem M68

White to move after 1...Nfg4 (***):



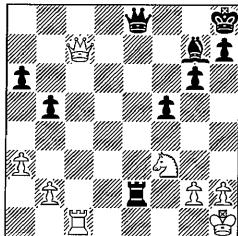
Middlegame Threats

Threat: Black has several threats. In order of severity, they seem to be 2...Nf3+ 2...Qh4, 2...Nxh2, e.g. 2...Nf3+ 3.Bxf3 (else mate in 10 or less says *Fritz!*) 3...exf3 4.h3 fxg2 5.Kxg2 Qg5 6.e4 Ne3+ 7.Kf3 Bxh3+.

Prevention: 2.Nxe4 is easiest, e.g. 2...Nxh2 3.Kxh2 Qh4+ 4.Kg1 Qxe4 5.axb6 axb6 6.Qxb6 with a big advantage to White. The only other good defense is 2.h3 when 2...Nf3+ is no longer as good as in the game, and the retreat 2...Nf6 breaks the attack. My opponent played 2.axb6?! and after 2...Nf3+! the fireworks started, and I ended up winning an exciting game.

Problem M69 (2-problem set)

White to move after 1...Re2 (***):

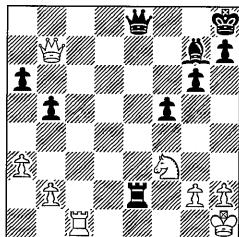


Threat: 2...Bxb2. This is much better than 2...Rxb2, which disconnects the Queen and Rook and does not attack the Rook on c1.

Prevention: 2.Qb7! See next problem. Instead White played 2.Qb6? and lost in a time scramble after 2...Bxb2! 3.Rc7 Bg7 4.Qxa6?? Re1+! 5.Ng1 Rxg1+ and mate next move.

Problem M70 (2nd of 2)

Black to move after 2.Qb7 (***):



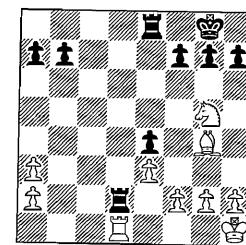
Looking For Trouble

Threat: 3.Rc8 winning the Queen since 3...Re1+? 4.Nxe1 works as the Queen is pinned.

Prevention: 2...Bf8 is best, when after 3.Qxa6 Rxb2 Black is somewhat better with his extra pawn, but not clearly winning.

Problem M71

Black to move after 1.Rd1 (***):

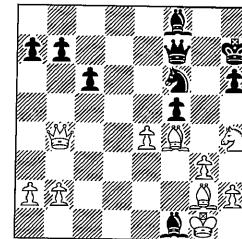


Threat: 2.Rxd2 winning the Rook.

Prevention: 1...Rxd1! Much better than the “automatic” 1...R8d8? 2.Rxd2 Rxd2 3.Nxe4 Rxa2 4.g3 when a very tough endgame ensues. 2.Bxd1 Rc8! The point! White is helpless against the pin on c1 due to his weak back rank. Black won easily after 3.Nxe4 Rc1 4.g3 Rxd1+.

Problem M72

White to move after 1...Bf8 (***):



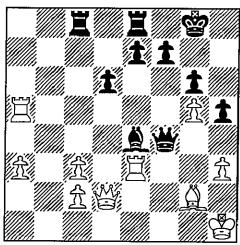
Middlegame Threats

Threat: 2...Bxb4 winning the Queen as well as 2...Bxg2 followed by 3...Nxe4 winning a pawn.

Prevention: 2.Qa5! is the only move that not only avoids a big disadvantage, but even retains the advantage. By threatening to capture on both f5 (with check) and f1, White forces Black to lose material. The game continued 2...Bb5 3.Nxf5 and White went on to win – a victory in my first game against a master!

Problem M73

Black to move after 1.Bg2 (***):



Threat: 2.Bxe4 winning the Bishop. If 2.Rxe4?? Qxd2.

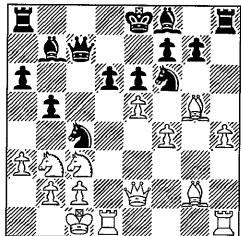
Prevention: 1...Rxc3! Now Black threatens to capture on e3, and all of White's captures lose:

- 1) 2.Rxe4 Qxd2;
- 2) 2.Rxc3 Qxd2;
- 3) 2.Bxe4 Rxe3, and finally
- 4) 2.Qxc3 removes the guard on g2 and allows 2...Qf1+! 3.Kh2 Qxg2#.

Relatively best for White is 2.Rd3, but after 2...Qxd2 3.Rxd2 Rxh3+ Black is winning rather easily.

Problem M74

Black to move after 1.e5 (***):



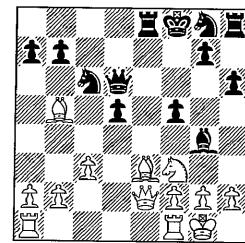
Looking For Trouble

Threat: 2.exf6 winning the Knight.

Prevention: 1...Nh5! Yes, this violates “Knight on the rim, your future is dim” but it makes a lot of sense: 1...dxe5 opens up the center when White has a Rook on d1 and Black does not have a Rook on the d-file and Black’s King is in the center. 1...Nd7 is not as flexible as 1...Nh5, especially since the latter creates a threat of its own, 2...Ng3. And the Knight is a good blockader on h5, where it cannot be attacked by a pawn. Of course, this kind of position calls for concrete analysis, so at 12 ply *Fritz* rates 1...Nh5, which I played, as over half a pawn better than the alternatives.

Problem M75

White to move after 1...f5 (***):

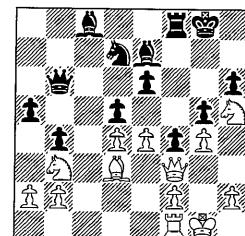


Threat: 2...f4 attacking the Bishop that is pinned to the Queen.

Prevention: I played 2.Rfe1, which worked since my opponent played 2...g5? allowing the cute 3.Bc5!, winning. However, *Fritz* thinks that it is slightly more accurate to play 2.Rae1 when Black’s best is 2...Nf6 and White has a nice advantage. What does *Fritz* think about 2.Rfe1, which seems more natural since it does not block in the king Rook? The same answer: 2...Nf6 with a slight White advantage. I’ll stick with 2.Rfe1 as best; *in this kind of position the computer is not always correct, especially if its evaluation difference between the moves is slight.*

Problem M76

Black to move after 1.e4 (***):



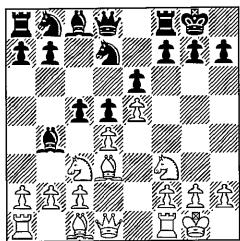
Middlegame Threats

Threat: 2.exd5 and then if 2...exd5 3.Qxd5+ or, if not 2...exd5, 3.Qe4 in some lines.

Prevention: 1...Bb7 is simplest and best, with approximate equality. The only other reasonable move is the counterattack 1...a4, but then 2.exd5 gives White some pull, since 2...axb3? allows 3.Qe4!, e.g. 3...Rf6 4.Qh7+ Kf8 5.Qg7+ Ke8 6.Qg8+ Rf6 7.Ng7+ winning the Queen because of 7...Kd8 8.Nxe6+ Ke8? 9.Bg6#. You don't have to see all this to understand that 2...axb3 is very dangerous. Similarly, if you played the "automatic capture" 1...dxe4?, what were you planning to do about 2.Qxe4, since 2...Nf6 fails to 3.Qg6+ Kh8 4.Qg7#?

Problem M77

Black to move after 1.Bd3 (***):



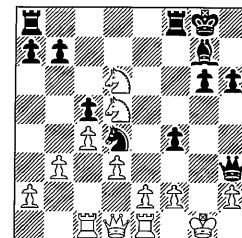
Threat: White threatens the *Classical Bishop Sacrifice* 2.Bxh7+ Kxh7 3.Ng5+ Kg6 (Usually the most resistant defense; consider – and remember! – the recurring pattern 3...Kg8 4.Qh5 Re8 5.Qxf7+ Kh8 6.Qh5+ Kg8 7.Qh7+ Kf8 8.Qh8+ Ke7 9.Qxg7#). By taking the f-pawn first on move 5 White allows the g-pawn capture to be with check – and mate.) 4.Qd3+ (4.Qg4 f5 5.Qg3 wins easily too) 4...f5 5.Ne2! and Black has nothing better than sacrificing his Queen on g5. While this position is technically still in the opening, it is usually studied as part of middlegame tactics, so I have classified it thusly. *Recognizing when a position is "similar enough" to threaten the Classical Bishop Sacrifice is part of a player's chess education – both for offense (to win) or on defense (to prevent it!).*

Prevention: 1...f6 stops the funny business on g5 and is a classic "break" move to help the King's Rook. 1...h6 stops the immediate threat, but creates a nice target for White's attack, and so is inferior.

Looking For Trouble

Problem M78

White to move after 1...exf4 (***):

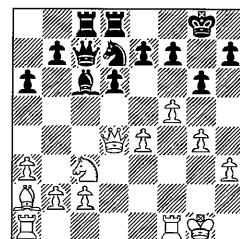


Threat: 2...f3 with a mating attack, e.g. 3.exf3 Nxf3+ 4.Kh1 Qxh2# or 3.Nf4 Rxf4 removing the guard and winning immediately.

Prevention: 2.f3! This is the only chance to keep White in the game. After 2...Rad8 2...Be5! was still winning but difficult to see. 3.Ne4 Rx d5 4.cxd5 Rf5 4...Nf5! was Black's last chance to win. 5.Rf1 Rh5 6.Rf2 White was holding and in time trouble Black even went on to lose. This shows that *by putting up the strongest resistance, even in an objectively bad position, you often can beat even strong players*. Notice also that sometimes the way to stop a pawn move is to put one of your pieces on the threatened square; it doesn't always work, but is usually worth considering.

Problem M79

Black to move after 1.Qxd4 (***):



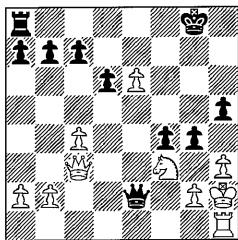
Middlegame Threats

Threat: 2.fxg6, e.g. 2...hxg6 3.Rxf7 Qb6 4.Rxe7+ and White is winning. 2.Bxf7+ Kxf7 3.fxg6+ is more speculative and unnecessary.

Prevention: 1...g5 looks dangerous for Black, but locks out the f-file pressure, and White has no immediate tactical shots. Also plausible are 1...Ne5 or 1...Rf8 – all three leave Black with a playable middlegame. Instead Black played the complicated counterattack 1...d5?! when White should play 2.Qf2! with advantage, but White over-cautiously replied 2.Kg2? and that allowed 2...dxe4! with a Black advantage. White tried the desperate 3.Bxf7?? but after 3...Kxf7 4.fxg6+ Kxg6 5.Qe3 Rf8 6.h4 Qe5 7.h5+ Kg7 8.h6+ Kh8 9.Ne2 Rf3 the board was turning black and White resigned.

Problem M80

White to move after 1...g4 (***):



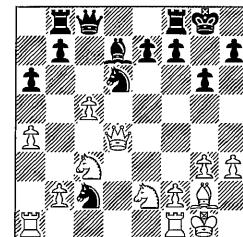
Threat: 2...gxf3 is an obvious threat, but 2...g3+ 3.Kg1 Qf2# is even worse. Even if White guards f2, 2...g3+ is still a threat since 3.Kg1 pens in the Rook.

Prevention: In the game White chose the adequate and sure 2.Re1 and won. The only other idea that wins is the more spectacular 2.hxg4 hxg4 3.Qf6! because White mates if either threat is carried out: 3...gxf3 4.Qg6+ Kh8 (4...Kf8 5.Qf7#) 5.Kh1# or 3...g3+ 4.Kh3 and Black faces a similar mating attack. On the other hand, if you chose a move such as 2.Ng5??, and allowed 2...g3+ 3.Kg1 Qd1+ 4.Qe1 Qxe1#, that is *not good*. Perhaps you should *look to make sure you can meet your opponent's checks, captures, and threats next move before you make this mistake*.

Looking For Trouble

Problem M81

White to move after 1...Nc2 (***):

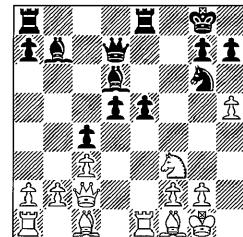


Threat: 2...Nxd4 winning the Queen and 2...Nxa1 winning the exchange.

Prevention: 2.Qd1! Only by attacking the Knight and covering all its escape squares does White get enough time to capture the other Knight first on d6: 2...Nxa1 3.cxd6 and because of the trapped Knight White will end up slightly ahead in material. The sacrificial 2.Qf4?! is interesting, but not necessary.

Problem M82

Black to move after 1.h5 (***):



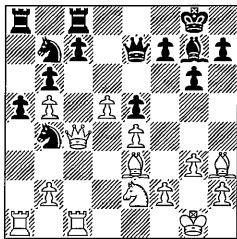
Threat: 2.hxg6 winning the Knight.

Prevention: 1...e4! Mundane retreats such as 1...Nf8 and 1...Nh8 may be OK, but this counterthrust, which temporarily sacrifices a pawn, really gets Black's game going. Black played with great energy and won with 2.hxg6 exf3 3.gxh7+ Kh8 4.Rxe8+ Possibly not best, but White is already in big trouble. Rx e8 5.gxf3 Black is winning beautifully in many lines. For example 5.Be3 Qg4 6.Rd1 Rxe3 7.fxe3 Qg3 8.Bd3 Qh2+ 9.Kf1 Qh1+ 10.Kf2 Qxg2+ 11.Ke1 Bg3+ 12.Qf2 Qxf2# or 5.Qd1 Re4 6.b3 Rh4 7.gxh3 Bh2+ 8.Kg2 d4! 9.Kh1 Bc7+ 10.Kg1 Rh1+ 11.Kxh1 Qd6 12.Bf4 Qxf4 13.Qxd4 Qh2#. 5...Re1 6.Qg6 Qh3 7.Qe8+ Kxh7 8.resigns. Mate is inevitable. This remains one of my best games, and not just for the final moves given here.

Middlegame Threats

Problem M83 (2-problem set)

Black to move after **1.Bh3** (***):

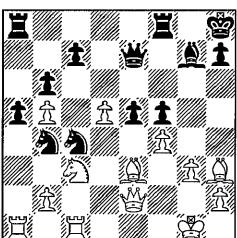


Threat: 2.Bxc8 winning the exchange.

Prevention: Moving the Rook right away allows 2.Qxc7 winning, so it is almost better to give up the exchange than to allow that continuation. But Black has a very reasonable defense in **1...Nd6**, which forces the white Queen off the c-file, since 2.Qc3? allows 2...Nxe4. After **1...Nd6 2.Qb3 Rf8** Black prepared ...f5, got counterplay and eventually the initiative. After the further 3.Nc3 Kh8 4.Qd1 f5 5.exf5 gxf5 6.f4 Nc4 7.Qe2 we arrive at the next problem.

Problem M84 (2nd of 2)

Black to move after **7.Qe2** (***):



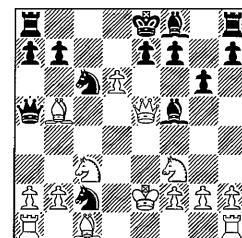
Threat: 8.Qxc4 winning the Knight.

Prevention: **7...exf4!** Much better than the mundane **7...Nxe3 8.Qxe3 Rad8**, which gives Black a nice, but not necessarily decisive advantage. After **7...exf4!**, **8.Bxf4** is questionable due to **8...Qxe2 9.Nxe2 Bxb2 10.Rxc4 Bxa1 11.Bxc7 Nxd5!**. This is the move that needed to be seen when evaluating **7...exf4** to ensure Black would have a decisive advantage. **8. Qxc4 Qxe3+** would now be winning. Instead Black cautiously decided upon **8...fxe3**, but that would not have been as good if White had properly responded with **9.Rf1**, when Black is likely winning but not easily so. Instead White put up less resistance and lost quickly.

Looking For Trouble

Problem M85

Black to move after **1.Ke2** (***):

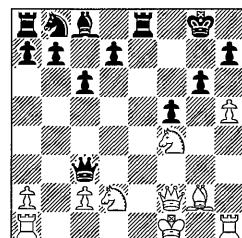


Threat: 2.Bxc6+ followed by 3.Qxa5 – a discovered attack winning the Queen; also 2.Qxh8, although both players are attacking Rooks.

Prevention: *It is important to take a fair percentage of your time on critical moves like this, where pieces are flying around the board. Playing the best move in complex positions gets the best return for your time, as opposed to say, spending it deciding which Rook to put on d1, or taking time after you are easily winning or dead lost. I know players who move fast in positions like this and then, after they make a mistake and get a lost game, slow down because they have unsolvable problems! Here Black's best by far is 1...O-O-O! when White has nothing better than 2.Qxh8 Nxa1. At that point White has a small advantage, but with White's King in the center and the position really imbalanced, almost anything can happen, even with strong players. White's best 3rd moves seem to be 3.Qxh7 or my preference, 3.Rd1.*

Problem M86

White to move after **1...Qc3** (***):



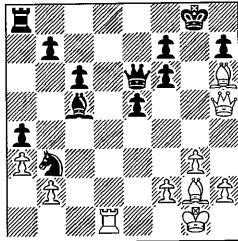
Middlegame Threats

Threat: 2...Qxa1+ and mate thereafter. To a much lesser extent, 2...Qxc2.

Prevention: This is an interesting position. When I was reviewing the game during a lesson and I saw my student's move 2.Nb3, I exclaimed "That can't be right!". *White's imbalance of a piece for three pawns but advanced development means that he should ignore the threat to the c-pawn and just go for the gusto on the kingside. Playing slow defensive moves during such an unbalanced position is rarely correct.* The computer verified that not only is 2.Re1! much better than any other move, it in fact wins quite easily, e.g. 2...Rxe1 3.Qxe1 Kf8 Black has no time for picking up the c-pawn anyway! 4.hxg6 and Black's sky is falling quickly. My intuition that *one should not be worried about a pawn when so far ahead in development and the opponent's King unsafe* was perfect – this time.

Problem M87 (2-problem set)

Black to move after 1.Rxd1 (****):

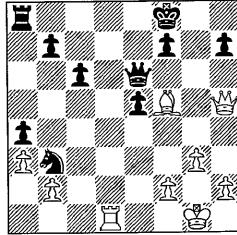


Threat: 2.Bh3 Qc4 (2...f5?? 3.Rd8+ etc. mates) 3.Bf5 Bf8 4.Bxf8 Kxf8 5.Qh6+ Ke7 6.Re7+.

Prevention: 1...Bf8!!! 1...Nd4 2.Bh3 f5 3.Rxd4 Bxd4 4.Bxf5 Qf6 5.Bxh7+ Kh8 6.Bf5 Kg8 7.Qg4+ Kh8 8.Bg5 Qg7 9.Qh4+ Kg8 10.Bh6++ 2.Bh3 f5! 3.Bxf8 Kxf8 4.Bxf5 Black's terrific defense allows us to reach the next problem.

Problem M88 (2nd of 2)

Black to move after 4.Bxf5 (**):



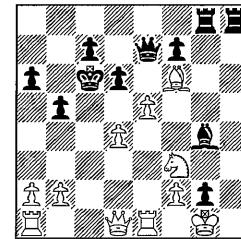
Looking For Trouble

Threat: 5.Bxe6 winning the Queen. To a lesser extent, 5.Bxh7 and 5.Qxh7.

Prevention: 4...Qf6! Not 4...Qe7? 5.Qxh6+ wins for White, e.g. 5...Ke8 6.Qg7 Nc5 7.Qh8+ Qf8 8.Qxe5+ and wins. Black is now fully equal whether White regains the pawn with 5.Bxh7, or with 5.Qxh7, as in the game. That Black went on to win the game when White got into time pressure (do you blame him?) is again a testament to Black's great defense.

Problem M89 (4-problem set)

Black to move after 1.Bxf6 (****):

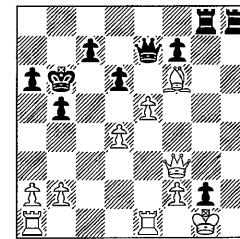


Threat: 2.Bxe7 winning the Queen and, to a lesser extent, 2.Bxh8 winning the exchange.

Prevention: 1...Bxf3! The only move. It is not often you see a threat to a Queen met by a non-queen capture that allows recapture with check, but this is such a position. After 2.Qxf3+ Kb6 Black is threatening mate – see next problem! The only other move is 1...Qxf6?!. This dubious try falls just short despite Black's clever 2nd move 2.exf6 Kb6! – see Problem 92.

Problem M90 (2nd of 4)

White to move after 1...Bxf3! 2Qxf3+ Kb6 (*):



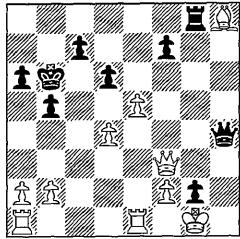
Middlegame Threats

Threat: 3...Rh1#

Prevention: 3.Bxh8 Not 3.Bxe7?? Rh1#, 3...Qh4, when we reach the next problem.

Problem M91 (3rd of 4)

White to move after 3...Qh4 (*):

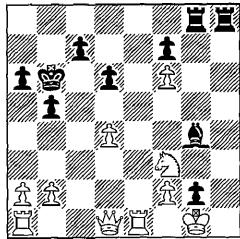


Threat: 4...Qh1#.

Prevention: 4.Qxg2. This should not be too hard to find since other moves get mated pretty quickly! After this the game settled down and ended in a more peaceful draw.

Problem 92 (4th of 4)

White to move after 2...Kb6! (**):



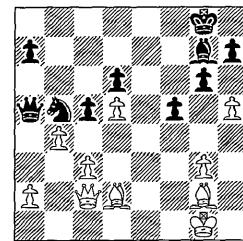
Threat: 3...Bxf3 followed by 4...Rh1#

Prevention: 3.Nh2! Voluntarily giving back the Queen is the only move to retain the advantage. After 3...Bxd1 4.Raxd1 White has every chance to survive and win. *When you are winning easily it is not what is traded off the board that matters, but what is left on the board!*

Looking For Trouble

Problem M93 (4-problem set)

Black to move after 1.b4 (****):

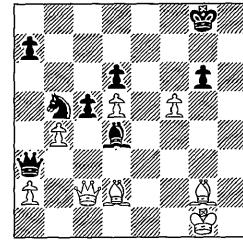


Threat: 2.bxa4 winning the Queen and, to a lesser extent, 2.bxc5 so that on 2...dxc5 White has a protected passed pawn.

Prevention: 1...Qa3! But not 1...cxb4 2.cxb4 when 3.Qc8+ becomes a threat. The game continued 2.hxg6 hxg6 3.g4 Bxc3 4.gxf5 Here Black missed his great chance with 4...Qxb4! See next diagram for the game continuation after the plausible but weaker 4...Bd4+.

Problem M94 (2nd of 4)

White to move after 4...Bd4+ (***):



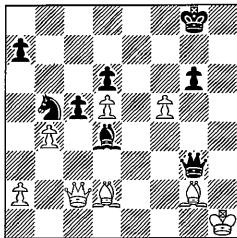
Threat: It is check, but the threat is to create a mating attack on the white King. Where should it go?

Prevention: 5.Kh1! Better than 5.Kf1 Qg3 6.Be1 Qf4+ and Black has a big attack, or than 5.Kh2 Be5+ 6.Kg1 Nd4, again with a big attack. The game continued 5...Qg3. See the next problem.

Middlegame Threats

Problem M95 (3rd of 4)

White to move after 5...Qg3 (**):

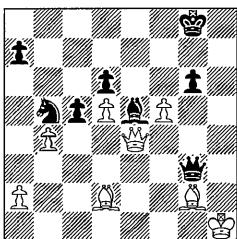


Threat: 6...Qh4+ 7.Bh3 Qxh3#

Prevention: 6.Qe4 The only move. The game continued 6...Be5. See next problem.

Problem M96 (4th of 4)

White to move after 6...Be5 (*):



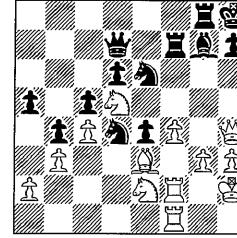
Threat: 7...Qh2#.

Prevention: 7.Kg1 Again the only move. With this good defense the game was drawn after 7...Bd4+ 8.Kh1 Be5 as Black was only a little better and was running short on time.

Looking For Trouble

Problem M97 (2-problem set)

White to move after 1...fxe4 (****):

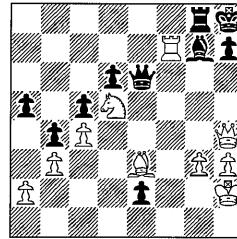


Threat: Black primarily threatens 2...Nf5 eventually trapping the Queen, with complex play greatly favoring Black., And as a lesser threat, Black has 2...Nf3+ forking Queen and King, winning the exchange for a pawn.

Prevention: 2.f5! *Fritz* rates this counterattack as the best move, and it started a long tactical sequence where White played great: 2...Nf3+ 3.Rxf3 exf3 4.fxe6 Less good is 4.Rxf3 Nc7 5.Nef4 Be5 6.Nxc7 Qxc7 7.Nd5 Qd7 8.Bg5 Bd4= 4...fxe2 5.Rxf7 Qxe6. See the next problem.

Problem M98 (2nd of 2)

White to move after 5...Qxe6 (***):



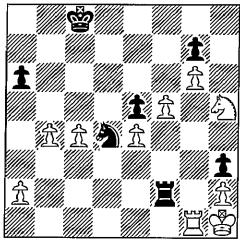
Threat: Black threatens 6...Qxf7 and 6...e1Q. How can White possibly prevent both?

Prevention: 6.Re7! Qxd5 If 6...Qxe7? 7.Nxe7 e1Q 8.Ng6#! is the cute and beautiful point. Best actually was 6...e1Q forcing a draw: 7.Rxe6 Qe2+ 8.Kg1 Qe1+ etc., but Black didn't see it. 7.cxd5 e1Q 8.Qe4 Qe2+ (8...Qa1 9.Qc2 is good for White.) 9.Qg2 Qxg2+ Or 9...Qe1 10.Bg5 Qd1 11.Bf4±. 10.Kxg2 and White won a nice endgame.

Middlegame Threats

Problem M99 (2-problem set)

White to move after 1...Rf2 (****):

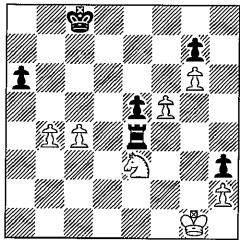


Threat: White has been winning the entire game but all of a sudden Black has created the gigantic threat of 2...Nf3 mating on the next move, e.g. 2...Nf3 3.Rg2 hxg2# or 3.Nxg7 Rxh2#.

Prevention: This is from a real game, but it might as well be a cute “White to play and win” problem! It is not at all easy to see that White’s only winning move is the stunning 2.Nf6!! – 2.Rg3 draws after 2...Rf1+ 3.Rg1 Rf2, but after 2.Nf6!! White stays on top, e.g. 2...Nf3 3.Ng4 or 2...Re2 3.Ng4 Rxe4 4.f6 or 2...gxf6 3.g7 Nf3 4.g8Q+. In the game White tried 2.Ng3? but after 2...Nf3 3.Nf1 Nxg1 4.Kxg1 Rg2+! 5.Kh1 Rxg2 Black had a kind of see-saw mating threat (6.f6? Rf2) and was on his way to victory. After 6.Kg1 Rg2+ 7.Kh1 Re2 8.Kg1 Rxe4 9.Ne3?! see next problem.

Problem M100 (2nd of 2)

Black to move after 9.Ne3 (**):



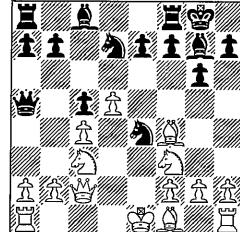
Looking For Trouble

Threat: 10.f6! Rd4 11.fgx7 Rd8 12.Nd5 so if 12...Rg8 13.Ne7+ wins, and on other plausible fourth moves by Black 13.Nf6 would win.

Prevention: 9...Rxe3 10.f6 **Rd3!** 10...gxf6?? 11.g7; 10...Rf3?? 11.fgx7 **11.f7** If 11.fgx7 Rd8. **11...Rf3** and White resigned. After his pawn moves are exhausted Kh1 Rf1 will be mate. Don’t get swindled back with 9...Kd7?? 10.f6! when White wins by carrying out his threat.

Problem M101

White to move after 1...Ne4 (****):

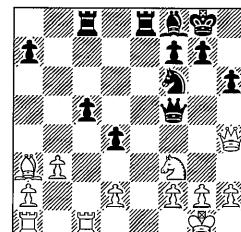


Threat: 2...Nxc3! (2...Bxc3 3.bxc3 Qxc3+ [3...Nxc3? 4.Bd2 wins] 4.Qxc3 Nxc3 5.Ne5 with good compensation for the pawn) 3.Bd2! (You expected 3.bxc3? Qxc3+ winning the Rook?) 3...Qa4! 4.b3! Qa5 5.Rc1 Qxa2 snagging a pawn but White has some compensation.

Prevention: Fall for the trap and take the bait! **2.Qxe4! Bxc3+ 3.Bd2!** pinning the Bishop to the Queen with about equal chances. If you did not consider this line as best because you thought 3.bxc3 was forced instead of **3.Bd2!** (which I did see *after* I played 1...Ne4 in this G/15 game), consider the following: *During combinations where you start by winning a piece – as here with 2.Qxe4 – you don’t always have to recapture later in the sequence since your opponent’s captures may only restore material equality.* In the game my opponent did not play **2.Qxe4!** and lost quickly.

Problem M102

White to move after 1...Rac8 (****):



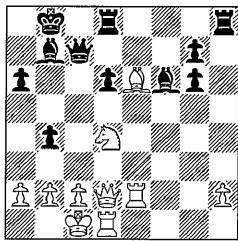
Middlegame Threats

Threat: Black's previous moves were seemingly made to guard (overprotect) the pawn on c5, but 1...Rac8 was played instead actually to guard c7 (!) and therefore threaten 2...g5! 3.Qg3 Ne4! to win material. This is one of the more subtle threats in the book.

Prevention: White has to acquiesce to the destruction of his kingside pawns with 2.Qh3 Qxg3 3.gxh3 when Black is distinctly better but there is a lot of game left to play. Also insufficient is 2.h3 Bd6 3.Nxd4 Qd3! 4.Nc2 Re4 with a winning attack, e.g. 5.g4? Kh7 threatening 6...g5 and the Queen is in trouble. Instead White played 2.Rc4? intending to double on the weak c-pawn, but fell for the threat: 2...g5! 3.Qg3 (3.Qh3 now fails to 3...g4) 3...Ne4 4.Qh3 g4 5.Nh4 Qxf2+ and White resigned.

Problem M103

Black to move after 1.Qd2 (****):



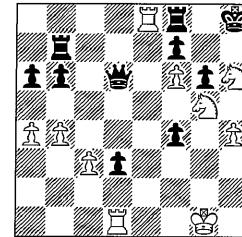
Threat: 2.Qxb4 winning a key pawn.

Prevention: 1...Rh4! A deceiving position. It looks as though White's safer-looking King, his centralization, and his threat give him the initiative. But all of Black's pieces are long-range, and his bishop pair is extremely powerful. After 1...Rh4! Black threatens 2...Rxd4 and White is helpless against a barrage of threats due to the geometry of the pieces, e.g. 2.Qxb4 Qc5! 3.Qxc5 dxc5 4.Nb3 Bg5+ or 2.Qe3 Re8 3.Qg1 Qc5 or 2.Nb3 Bf3. In all of these cases Black is winning. If instead Black just guards the pawn as he did with 1...Qa5 he is still better after 2.Qe1 Rh4, but not as much as after 1...Rh4!

Looking For Trouble

Problem M104

Black to move after 1.Re8 (****):

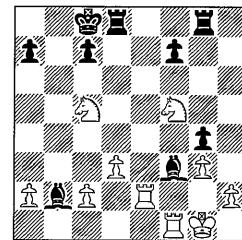


Threat: Both 1.Nhxf7+ Rxf7 2.Nxf7+ winning the Queen, and the removal of the guard 1.Rxd3, e.g. 1.Rxd3 Qxf6 2.Rxf8+ Kg7 3.Ng4! Qf5 4.Rg8+! Kxh8 5.Nh6+

Prevention: Only 1...Qxf6! will do. Without the Rook on d3, the latter threat does not work: 2.Rxf8+ Kg7 3.Ng4 Qxc3 and Black is winning, nor the game's continuation 3.Rxf7+ Rxf7 4.Nhxf7 Qxc3 when the uncoordinated White pieces are no match for the black Queen and pawns. White's best chance is 3.Nhxf7 when 3...Qe7 4.Rd8q Qe2! and Black is likely winning, although it is still complicated.

Problem M105

White to move after 1...Bf3 (****):



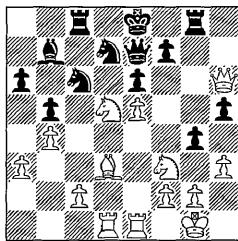
Middlegame Threats

Threat: 2...Bxe2 winning a Rook. You also have to watch out for ...Bd4+ if the Knight on f5 moves. Finally, Black has offered a draw. What do you do?

Prevention: White thought Black's threats and bishop pair made up for his extra pawn, but he forgot his biggest advantage of all – *it was his move and tactics abound on the board!* If this is ever the case, you probably have a big advantage, and here White does. His best is 2.Ne7+ Kb8 3.Rb1 Now it seems as though Black should take the Rook because if he does not, he is just going to be down in material, but taking the Rook leads to mate in 5: 3...Bxe2 4.Rxb2+ Ka8 5.Na6! (the quiet move that makes this problem hard – threatening 6.Nxf7#) 5...Rc8 6.Nd5! Dance of the Knights! 6...c5 7.Ndc7+ Rxc7 8.Nxc7#. The point is not that readers should see this somewhat difficult but beautiful combination, but they should see that *White has many possibilities for attack and that trying one is likely good.* White has other good continuations if he does not play 5.Na6!. For example, the simple 5.Nxg8 Rxg8 6.Kf2 leads to an endgame where he is not only up a pawn, but almost a King as well (an active King is worth about 4 pawns of fighting value in the endgame) with an easy win. Therefore, White could easily have played on with almost no risk if he had just started with 2.Ne7+. *If you want to improve, always think of a draw offer as an offer to remain ignorant of what you would have learned if the game had continued.*

Problem M106

Black to move after 1.Nxd5 (****):



106

Looking For Trouble

Threat: 2.Nxe7 winning the Queen for a Knight.

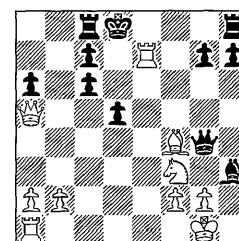
Prevention: 1...Qf8! Is the best reply. *Normally if the opponent makes a capture, like White did here, one must capture back or just be down material. However, there are three main exceptions:*

- 1) *If the captured material is not necessarily enough to win the game (as here "only" a pawn in a complicated position) then it may be possible to endure without the material.*
- 2) *If the defender is already ahead in material, and after the capture is still at least even, or*
- 3) *If the defender has other threats, and ignoring the capture enables him to keep multiple threats alive.*

This is an example of the first and third cases: Black was already threatening 1...gxf3 so, by ignoring the Knight, he can generate multiple threats, such as exchanging Queens with both white Knights in jeopardy. After 1...Qf8 White has nothing better than 2.Nf6+ Nxf6 3.Qxf6 gxf3 4.Qxf3 with some compensation for his sacrificed piece, but Black is better. Instead he opened the floodgates with 1...exd5(?) 2.e6 and instead of the forced 2...fxe6, leaving White with a strong attack on 3.Rxe6, succumbed to 2...gxf3 3.exd7+ Kxd7 4.Bf5+ Kd8 5.Rxd5+ Kc7 6.Rxe7+ Nxe7 7.Qd6#.

Problem M107

White to move after 1...Qg4 (****):



107

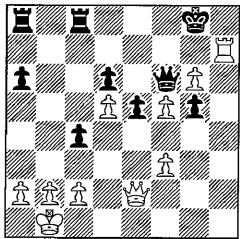
Middlegame Threats

Threat: 2...Qxg2# but White also has to watch for possibilities of 2...Kxe7 and 2...Qxf4 in many lines.

Prevention: 2.Bxc7+! In the game I could not resist the cute 2.Rd7+!?, a move which makes the win a lot harder. My opponent was already in time trouble and replied with the weak 2...Ke8, allowing 3.Qe1+ with a win. But instead, what if he meets 2.Rd7+ with 2...Qxd7! (2...Kxd7? 3.Ne5+ wins the Queen)? Starting at the time the game was played, it took many years for computers to get good enough to find a forced win with 3.Re1!. One key line runs 3...Ra8 4.Ne5 Qe6 5.Qc3 c5 6.Qxc5 Kc8 7.Ng6 Qe1+ 8.Kh2 etc. Instead after 2.Bxc7+ White wins with 2...Kxe7 3.Qc5+ Kf6 4.Qxc6+ Qe6 5.Qe3+, e.g. 5...d4 6.Qxd4+ Kg6 7.Re1 Qf6 8.Ne5+ Kh5 9.g4+.

Problem M108

Black to move after 1.Rh7 (****):



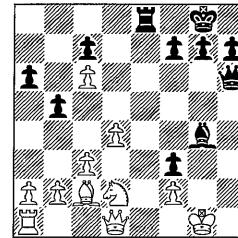
Threat: 2.Rf7 Qh8 3.Rh7 drawing. 2.Qh2 e4 3.Rd7 Qh8 4.Qxh8+! is also a cute draw: 4...Kxh8 5.f6 exf3 6.Rh7+ Kg8 7.Rg7+ Kf8 8.Rf7+ Ke8 9.Re7+ Kf8= (9...Kd8?? 10.g7 will mate!).

Prevention: Black wriggles out with the accurate 1...Qxf5!, e.g. 2.Qh2 Qxg6 3.Rh6 Qf5 4.Rh8+ Kf7 Not 4...Kg7?? when 5.Qh6+ Kf7 6.Rh7+ forces 6...Qxh7 and White is much better. 5.Rh7+ Kf6 6.Rh6+ Kg7+ Instead I played the inaccurate 1...Re8? 2.Qh2 Re7? and even managed to lose after 3.g7.

Looking For Trouble

Problem M109

White to move after 1...Rxe8 (****):

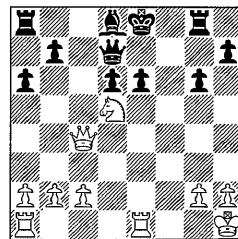


Threat: In this complex position Black has a tremendous attack for his piece. He has many threats, but the biggest two by far are 2...Bf5!, clearing the g-file for a Queen check, and 2...Re2, tying up the 2nd rank. Both would win if White were to pass or play an innocuous move like 2.a3. If you said 2...Re6 to get the Rook into action along the 6th rank you get partial credit.

Prevention: White found 2.Ne4, which at least gives Black the most problems to solve in order to win. *Sometimes the best(or only) thing you can do when faced with a series of threats (as in this game) is to continue to give your opponent difficult problems to solve.* Fritz likes 2.Ne4 best by far at 14-15 ply, but when forced down the line of the game eventually sees that Black is still much better. All other moves leave Black with an immediate large advantage or more. The only reasonable alternative is 2.Qc1, which after 2...Re2 forces White to give back the piece immediately and still leaves him with a difficult game after 3.Nxf3 (best). The game continued 2.Ne4 f5 3.Ng3 f4 4.Ne4 Re6 Instead 4...Qh3! wins e.g. 5.Qf1 Qh5 6.Qc1 Rf8! The game eventually ended a well deserved, hard-fought draw.

Problem M110

Black to move after 1.Qc4 (****):



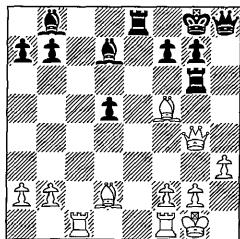
Middlegame Threats

Threat: White threatens 2.Rxe6+ Qxe6 3.Nc7+ Bxc7 4.Qxe6+ winning material. Note that moving the King on move 3 does not help Black since White's Queen and the Knight both attack the Queen!

Prevention: There are three plausible moves, but only one works. First, 1...Rc8? fails to 2.Rxe6+ anyway since the Rook on c8 never gets a chance to capture the Queen, e.g. 2...Kf7 3.Rf1+ Kg7 4.Qd4+ is a rout. Therefore Black must move his King. But the hasty 1...Kf8?, as played in the game, allows 2.Nf4 when neither 2...e5 3.Ne6+ Ke7 4.Nc5 Qe8 5.Rf1! nor 2...Kg7 works: 3.Nxe6+ Kh6 4.Re3 g5 5.Rh3+ mates as in the game. So the only defense is 1...Kf7! when White has many moves that continue to give him more than enough compensation for the pawn: 2.Re3, 2.Rf1+, 2.Nf4, and 2.Qg4, but none seem to promise anything more than some pressure.

Problem M111

White to move after 1...Rxg6 (****):



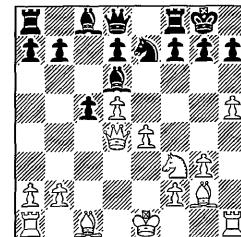
Threat: 2...Rxf4 winning the Queen for a Rook.

Prevention: 2.Qxg6! is the only move which retains a nice advantage (2.Bxd7 is a poor second). This was from a game I played and, after my opponent played 2...fxg6, then 3.Bxd7 was awkward for Black since his Rook needs to guard e6 and the back rank. My opponent chose to give up the exchange right away with 3...Kh7 but I won rather easily after 4.Bxe8. Instead he could have tried 3...Rd8 4.Be6+ Kh7 5.Bg5 but I would have had a clear advantage.

Looking For Trouble

Problem M112

White to move after 1...c7-c5 (****):



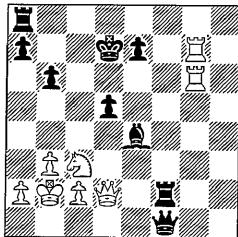
Threat: 1...cx d4 winning the Queen.

Prevention: This problem is tricky – I was White and never seriously considered the best move because it did not look strategically correct – “anti-positional” as some would call it. However, that best move permits White to play a strong tactic, once again proving that tactics, at least in the short run, are more important than strategy. This was a fun game and White had been prematurely attacking on the kingside. After 1...c5 I was following the dictum *a flank attack is more justified when the center is closed or fixed*. I certainly did not want to help Black coordinate his awkward Bishop on d6, so I immediately rejected 2.dxe6!, which opens the center and solves most of Black’s development problems. Instead I played 2.Qc3. But 2.dxe6! gives me an important tempo, as after 2...dxe6 guarding the Bishop, I have 3.h6! threatening mate on g7, which is awkward to meet. 3...gxh6? 4.Bxh6 attacking the Rook and continuing to threaten mate is hopeless for Black, so he must allow 3...f6 4.hxg7 Rf7 4...Kxg7? 5.Bh6+ + 5.Bh6 and White has not only won a pawn, but Black’s kingside is starting to look like spaghetti. Strangely, some beginners would play 2.dxe6! not because of any tactical or positional reason, but just because they play *en passant* every chance they can, just to show everyone how much they know! Yet others whom I have shown this problem never consider 2.dxe6! because they forgot about *en passant*! So this seems to be a problem in which mostly very strong or very weak players are likely to play the right move, but only the strong players will do so for the right reason.

Middlegame Threats

Problem M113

White to move after 1...Rf2 (*****):

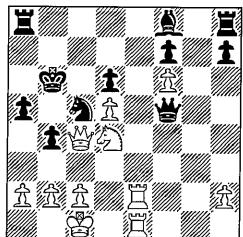


Threat: 2...Rxd2 winning the Queen and, if the Queen moves to prevent this, 2...Rxc2+

Prevention: 2.Nxd5!! Counterattack! Now the Queen is taboo, as 2...Rxd2? 3.Rxe7+ Kd8 4.Rg8+ and mate is a pretty way for the game to finish. Black's only move is 2...Bxg6 when White is better after 3.Nxb6+ Kc6 4.Rxg6+ Rf6 5.Rg5!. Instead Black took almost all his time – about 40 minutes – and was mated after 2...R8f8 3.Rxe7+ Kd8 4.Rd6+ Kc8 5.Qc3+, Heisman-Edmondson US Amateur 1968.

Problem M114

Black to move after 1.Qc4 (*****):



Threat: 2.Qb5+ mates, e.g. 2...Kc7 3.Qc6+ Kb8 4.Re8+

Prevention: 1...Qd7! 2.Re7 Bxe7 3.Rxe7 Qa4 4.b3 trying for removal of the guard. It looks strong, but 4...Nxb3# holds. I saw this before I played 1...Qd7! Black survives, e.g. 5.Nxb3 Rhc8 and although the position is about equal, Black had the psychological advantage of surviving and later I won. 5.axb3 Rhc8 is better for Black, and 5.cxb3 is a slight improvement over the game, but after 5...Rac8 Black is also about equal.

Looking For Trouble

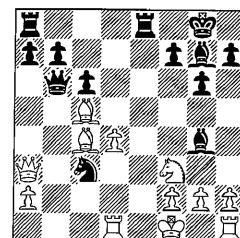
BONUS: FAMOUS THREATS

As a bonus, the following are threats from five very famous games. Naturally they are also pretty difficult, and some occurred in a crucial moment of a high-level event. Enjoy!

Famous Middlegame Threat #1

(D. Byrne – Fischer, Rosenwald Tournament 1956, “The Game of the Century”)

Black to move after 1.Kf1 (*****):



Threat: 2.Bxb6 and, to a much lesser extent, 2.Qxc3 (but see Prevention).

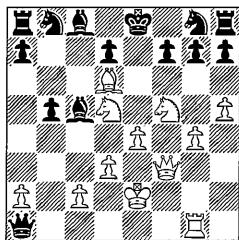
Prevention: 1...Be6!! This startling Queen sacrifice sets up the see-saw check: 2.Bxb6 If 2.Qxc3 Qxc5!; If 2. Bxe6 then Black has Philidor’s Legacy with 2...Qb5+ 3.Kg1 Ne2+ 4.Kf1 Ng3+ 5.Kg1 Qf1+ 6.Rxf1 Ne2#; if 2.Be2 Nb5 wins – analysis by Fischer in *Bobby Fischer’s Games of Chess*. 2...Bxe4+ 3.Kg1 Ne2+ 4.Kf1 Nxd4+ 6.Kg1 Ne2+ 7.Kf1 Nc3+ 8.Kg1 axb6 9.Qb4 Ra4 saving the Bishop, too! 10.Qxb6 Nxd1 and Black went on to win “The Game of the Century.” Byrne has been criticized in some quarters for playing until checkmate against the 13-year-old Fischer, but about 13 years after the game, my coach told me, “Bobby had played such a terrific game that I asked some of the other competitors if they thought it would be a nice gesture to let him mate me. They said they thought that would be OK, so I did. Of course, at the time I didn’t know that Bobby Fischer was going to become *Bobby Fischer!*” So what has been criticized as an unsportsmanlike act by some was actually another very sportsmanlike act by one of the most gentlemanly players ever to represent the game of chess, US Chess Hall-of-Famer Donald Byrne.

Middlegame Threats

Famous Middlegame Threat #2

(Anderssen-Kieseritzky, London, 1851, "The Immortal Game")

Black to move after 1.Ke2 (*****):



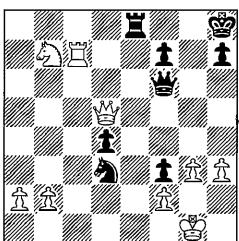
Threat: 2.Rxa1

Prevention: 1...Qb2!! Taking the Rook with the Queen loses easily: 1...Qxg1 2.Nxg7+ Kd8 3.Bc7# so Black's Queen must continue to guard g7. Taking the Rook with the Bishop loses brilliantly, as the game continued: 1...Bxg1? 2.e5!! Na6 (Better but less immortal, is 2...Ba6! when after 3.Nc7+ Kd8 4.Nxa6 Qc3 5.Bc7+ White is still winning, though more mundanely.) 3.Nxg7+ Kd8 4.Qf6+! (deflection) 4...Nxg6 5.Be7#. After the spoilsport 1...Qb2 it is likely Black is just better, e.g. 2.Bxc5 Qxc2+ 3.Kf1 Qxc5. But instead of possibly just winning a nice game Kieseritzky will always be remembered as the loser of an immortal.

Famous Middlegame Threat #3

(Deep Blue – Kasparov (1), 1st match, Philadelphia, 1996)

White to move after 1...Re8 (*****):



Looking For Trouble

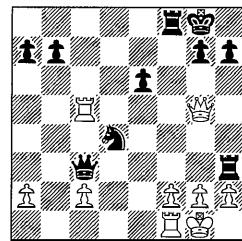
Threat: 2...Re1+ 3.Kh2 Nxf2 and with a practically unstoppable mate on 4...Rh1#.

Prevention: 2.Nd6!! Cool-CPU'ed (as opposed to cool-headed). White counter-threatens with tempo. The game continued 2...Re1+ 3.Kh2 Nxf2 but now 4.Nxf7+ Kg7 Unfortunately for Garry the Queen sacrifice 4...Qxf7 fails to 5.Qd8+! Kg7 [5...Qg8? 6.Qf6+] 6.Rxf7+ Kxf7 7.Qd5+ K-any 8.Qxf3 and White wins easily with the mate threat gone. 5.Ng5+ Kh6 If 5...Kg6 6.Qe8+ Kf5 [6...Kh6 7.Rxh7#] 7.Rc5+. 6.Rxh7+ resigns. Tough way to start a match, but Garry finished by winning four of the next five points to take the match 4-2. The next year was another story.

Famous Middlegame Threat #4

(Marshall-Lewitzky, Breslau 1912)

Black to move after 1.Rc5 (*****):



Threat: 2.Rxc3 and 2.gxh3. White is temporarily down a piece but hopes to win it all back and more.

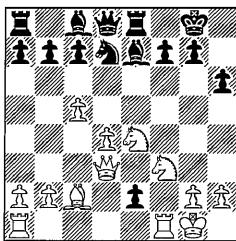
Prevention: 1...Qg3!! "The most elegant move I have ever played" – Marshall from *Marshall's Best Games of Chess*. Now Black threatens 2...Qxh2#, but all the defenses fail: 2.hxg3 Ne2# or 2.fxg3 Ne2+ 3.Kh1 Rxh1# or 2.Qxg3 Ne2+ 3.Kh1 Nxg3+ 4.Kg1 (4.fxg3 Rxh1#) Nxh1 and White is up a piece. So after 1...Qg3!! White resigned and the spectators reportedly showered Marshall with gold pieces: "... yes, that is what happened literally" – Marshall.

Middlegame Threats

Famous Middlegame Threat #5

(Spassky-Bronstein Leningrad 1960)

White to move after 1...e2 (*****):



Threat: 2...fxe1Q+ winning a Rook for the pawn.

Prevention: 2.Nd6!! And you expected 2.Qxe2? – that reply would not make this book! Providing a few skimpy notes would not do justice to this fantastic game. For depth you can consult *The World's Greatest Chess Games* by Burgess, Nunn, and Emms. I will, however, give you the rest of the game: 2...Nf8 3.Nxf7 exf1Q+ 4.Rxf1 Bf5 5.Qxf5 Qd7 6.Qf4 Bf6 7.N3e5 Qe7 8.Bb3 Bxe5 9.Nxe5+ Kh7 10.Qe4+ resigns.

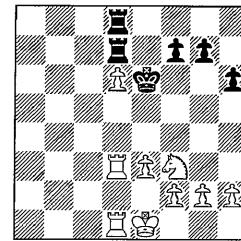
Looking For Trouble

Section 3: Endgame Threats

The problems in this section are ordered from most complex (more pieces) to least (king and pawns only).

Problem E1

White to move after 1....Rhd8 (from the Introduction; *):

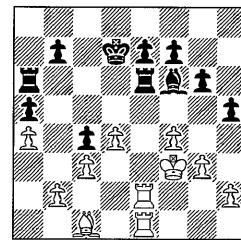


Threat: Black “threatens” to win the d-pawn with 2...Rxd6, but actually it is not much of a threat since White would be very happy to do nothing about Black’s threat, say with 2.Ke2, allowing 2...Rxd6 3.Rxd6+ Rxd6 4.Rxd6+ Kxd6 trading off all the Rooks and leaving White with an easy win.

Prevention: Playing 2.Nh4 to “stop” the threat and get a Knight fork on f5 after the trades on d6 is not only not very effective (2...g6), but also silly, since why would White want to stop this “threat”? Better is just 2.Ke2 activating the King for the endgame, or even 2.e4, “threatening” 3.e5. If White wants to try something “active,” 2.Nd4+ works, too.

Problem E2

White to move after 1...Re6 (***):



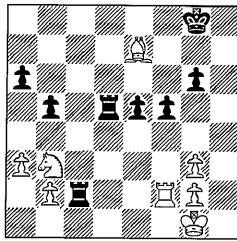
Endgame Threats

Threat: Black threatens to trade off all the Rooks and go into a somewhat advantageous Bishop-and-pawn endgame with most of the white pawns fixed on the color of the Bishops.

Prevention: After 2.Be3!, avoiding the trades, the game is going to be easily drawn as Black has no break moves which give him the advantage. In the game White traded rooks and likely had a difficult theoretical draw, but the tough defense got him into time pressure and he lost (see E27).

Problem E3

Black to move after 1.Rf2 (**):

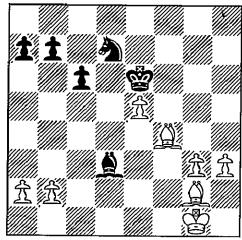


Threat: 2.Rxc2 winning the rook.

Prevention: 1...Rd1+ Because of his pawns and threats Black is winning, but he must be careful trying to cash in his chips, as two pieces for a Rook is, pawns notwithstanding, a large advantage for White – worth about a pawn and a half. By checking, Black threatens to remove the guard on f2 and thus ensures he can win the key pawn on b2. After the forced 2.Rf1 Black should be able to gather in the extra pawn and win with 2...Rxf1+ 3.Kxf1 Rxb2. Instead I played 1...Rc7? and after 2.Bb4 Rc4 3.Re2 Kf7 4.Kf2 my edge was very tiny and I could find no way to make progress.

Problem E4

White to move after 1...Ke6 (***):



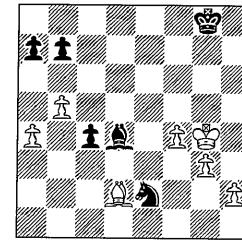
Looking For Trouble

Threat: Black threatens 2...Nxe5 when White is winning but Black can still struggle a little, only down a pawn.

Prevention: 2.Bf1! This was my first game against a master and I was White. After I found this move I knew that the win would be easy. The idea is that Black can still win the pawn, but if he does so, he has to acquiesce to an easy King-and-pawn endgame with 2...Bxf1+ 3.Kxf1 Nxe5 4.Bxe5 Kxe5 when the white King can just leisurely go to the queenside and mop up Black's queenside pawns, while his own connected passed pawns hold the black King at bay. And if Black avoids trades with 2...Bc2, as he did, then on 3.Bc4+ Kf5 4.e6 I held onto my second extra pawn and the Bishop pair, which also was an easy win.

Problem E5

White to move after 1...c4 (***):

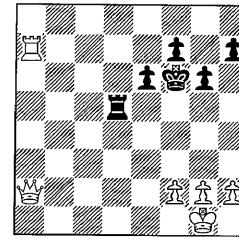


Threat: 2...c3 3.Be1 c2 4.Bd2 c1Q winning easily.

Prevention: Only 2.Kf3! gives a chance to save the game. For example, on 2...c3? 3.Kxe2 cxd2 4.Kxd2 Bg1 5.Ke2 and if 5...Bxh2 then 6.Kf2 traps the Bishop and wins. If 2...Ng1+ 3.Ke4, or the game continuation of 2...Nc3 3.Bxc3 Bxc3 4.Ke4. White eventually managed to hold a nice draw with King and four pawns vs. King, Bishop, and two pawns.

Position E6

White to move after 1...Rd5: (*):



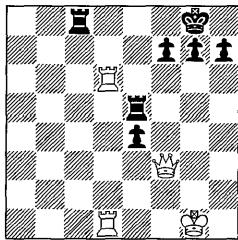
Endgame Threats

Threat: 2...Rd1#.

Prevention: 2.Qxd5. Of course, theoretically this is not best and a strong player or a computer would play other moves; any move that stays way ahead on material and does not allow mate wins. However, after 2.Qxd5 Black has lost all means of resistance, so I would play this move without any hesitation. Then Black's only threat remaining is to promote his pawn, so White should march his King to the d-file, at which point there is no hope left for Black. Usually when I play a move like 2.Qxd5 my opponent takes the hint and resigns. If he does not resign, then after 1...exd5 I stop his only threat, which is to promote his passed d-pawn, by immediately moving my King to the d-file. Then the only way I could not win is if I stalemate him! Of course 2.Kf1 or 2.f3 remove the back-rank mate threat and are also fine, but Black may play on in hopes of skewering the white Queen on a blunder. 2.Qa1+ of course both stops the mate and gives a check, but then White still has not eliminated the only way he can lose: allowing a later back-rank mate. *When you are winning, think defense first!*

Problem E7

Black to move after 1.Ra6-d6 (*):



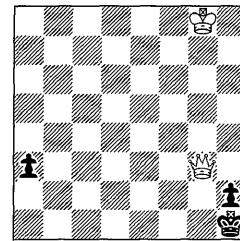
Threat: White's "threat" is really to save his Queen, since his previous move, 1.Ra6-d6??, does not threaten mate! *Sometimes a threat can be left over from a previous move.* For example, Black may have just captured on e4, threatening the Queen. White thought he was playing a zwischenzug where his "mate" threat was stronger and would have to be met first, delaying Black's capture of the Queen. However, due to his miscalculation this will just lose the Queen. *Therefore White, ahead a Queen, should have played simply and just moved his queen to safety instead of getting tricky.* Yes, it is true that White has other "threats" now such as 2.Rd8+ Re8 3.Rxe8+ Rxе8 4.Qxe4, but they are largely irrelevant compared to his threat to save the queen and win easily, and all of these "other" threats can be prevented by capturing the Queen. This is not meant to be a "trick" question but, no matter what you call it, it certainly has an important point!

Prevention: 1...exf3 stops the real threat, since 2.Rd8+ R5e8 just leaves Black up a few pawns. Beginners sometimes automatically play 2...Rxd8?? and get mated after 3.Rxd8+. Chess is not checkers: you don't have to capture, and in this case it would be disastrous. *Consider all of your alternatives, especially if the first one leads to getting mated!*

Looking For Trouble

Problem E8

White to move after 1...a3 (**):

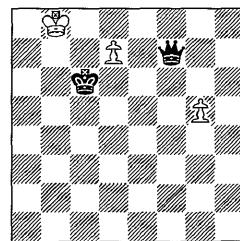


Threat: 2...a2 and Black draws by sacrificing his a-pawn and reaching a drawn King and rook pawn on 7th rank vs. queen ending.

Prevention: 2.Qf2! (but not 2.Qxa3? when 2...Kg2 draws because queens cannot win against a rook pawn on the 7th rank protected by a King on the 7th or 8th rank unless the King is close enough to help the Queen; here it is not.) 2...a2 zugzwang – but no stalemate! Without the a-pawn it is stalemate and a draw unless the white King is closer. 3.Qf1#. *If you find yourself overly drawn to your opponent's last move, especially if the moving piece is clearly undefended as you might have thought if you played 2.Qxa3?, then you should remember "If you see a good move, look for a better one." Also, ask yourself, "Is this move surely best?". If you think the answer may be "No," then don't be so quick to decide.*

Problem E9

White to move after 1...Qxf7 (**):



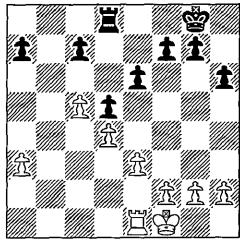
Endgame Threats

Threat: 2...Qxe7 and mate on the next move.

Prevention: 2.d8N+! After 2...Kd5 3.Nxf7 Ke6 4.g6 Kf6 5.Ne5 (5.Nh8? Kg7 draws) it is White who wins. But not 2.d8Q?? Qb7#. It does not happen very often, but when you get a chance to save the game with underpromotion, don't "automatically" get a Queen!

Problem E10

Black to move after 1.Rxe1 (*):

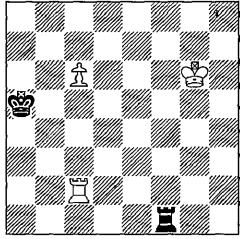


Threat: 2.Rb1 getting the only open file for his Rook, which White can use to penetrate Black's position.

Prevention: 1...Rb8. Tit for tat. The first one to control the file has an advantage. This is a good example of a position where one does not have to "look ahead" to find the best move; general principles and a little experience will tell you that grabbing the open file first must be better than the alternatives. Therefore, it is just a waste of time in this position to see what will happen next. Just make sure the move is really safe and play it, and figure out later if you are winning or just on the better side of a draw.

Problem E11

Black to move after 1.Rc2 (*):



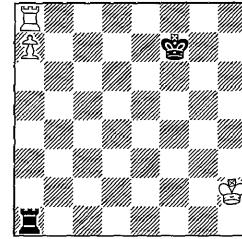
Looking For Trouble

Threat: 2.c7 when the threat of promotion forces 2...Rf8 3.c8Q Rxc8 4.Rxe8 winning the Rook for the pawn.

Prevention: Black must play 1...Rf8 immediately to answer 2.c7 Re8 and draw. All other moves lose immediately, e.g. 1...Rg1+? 2.Kf7 and Black's Rook has lost access to the 8th rank, e.g. 2...Rf1+ 3.Ke7 Re1+ 4.Kd7 Rd1+ 5.Kc8, and if 5...Kb6 6.c7 Rh1 7.Kb8 Rh8+ 8.c8Q wins or 5...Rh1 6.c7 Rh8+ 7.Kb7 Rh7 8.Kb8 Rh8+ 9.c8Q wins. This again shows that when your opponent makes a threat sometimes just "giving a check" to gain more "time" can be disastrous.

Problem E12

Black to move after 1.a7 (**):

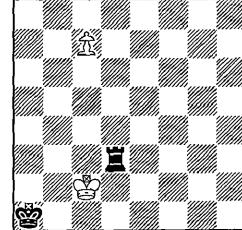


Threat: 2.Rh8 and White wins the Black Rook, e.g. 2...Rxa7 3.Rh7+

Prevention: 1...Kg7! And if Black's King just shuffles back and forth between g7 and h7 it is a draw because if White's King approaches b7 it can be checked away so long as Black's Rook keeps its distance. Any other King move loses, and if Black plays 1...Ra2+ then he still must eventually play ...Kg7 before White's King attacks his Rook because then White will have two threats and will win!

Position E13 (2-problem set)

Black to move after 1.Kc2 (Saavedra Problem; ***):



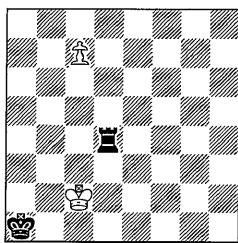
Endgame Threats

Threat: 2.Kxd3 winning the Rook and 2.c8Q with a won Queen-versus-Rook endgame.

Prevention: 1...Rd4! is Black's only chance because 2.c8Q? Rc4+ draws instantly as 3.Qxc4 is stalemate.

Position E14 (2nd of 2)

White to move after 1...Rd4 (Saavedra Problem; ***):

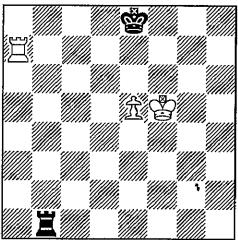


Threat: 2...Rc4+ wins the pawn and the game.

Prevention: 2.c8R!! (threatening Ra8+) still wins as 2...Ra4 allows 3.Kb3 with the twin threats of 4.Kxa4 and 4.Rc1#, and Black cannot stop both.

Problem E15 (2-problem set)

Black to move after 1.Kf5 (***):



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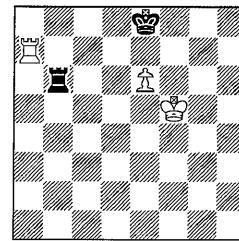
Looking For Trouble

Threat: 2.Kf6 with the further threat to play 3.Ra8+ and get the black King out from in front of the pawn, eventually reaching the winning "Lucena" position when White's King is instead in front of the pawn and Black's King is not. For example, 2.Kf6 Rb6+ (2...Rf1+ 3.Ke6 Kf8 4.Ra8+) 3.d6 Ke8 4.Ra8+.

Prevention: Neither 1...Rb5? 2.Kf6 nor 1...Rf1+ Ke6 work. Instead the right idea is 1...Rb6! when Black just shuffles his Rook on the sixth rank until White pushes the pawn and then ... see next problem!

Problem E16 (2nd of 2)

Black to move after 2.e6 (***):

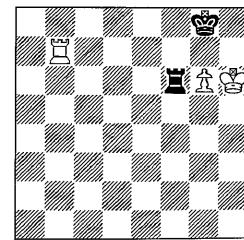


Threat: 2.Kf6 with the further threat to play 3.Ra8+ and get the black King out from in front of the pawn, eventually reaching the winning "Lucena" position.

Prevention: Black goes back to the first rank to check after the King gets to the sixth rank: 2...Rb1! White can make no progress as his King has no shield and approaching the Rook on checks leaves his pawn vulnerable: 3.Kf6 Rf1+ 4.Kg5 Rg1+ 5.Kf4 Rf1+ 6.Kg3 Re1! 7.Ra6 Ke7 and the pawn falls. This drawing maneuver is called a "Philidor."

Problem E17

Black to move after 1.Kh6 (**):



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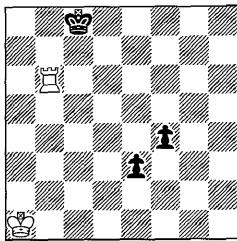
Endgame Threats

Threat: 2.Rb8+ Rf8 3.Rxf8+ Kxf8 4.Kh7 promoting the pawn.

Prevention: 1...Rf8 when White can make no progress, e.g. 2.Rg7+ Kh8 3.Rb7 Kg8 or 2.Ra7 Rb8 3.Rg7+ Kh8 4.Rf7 Kg8. After 1...Kf8? either 2.Kh7, or the slightly more difficult 2.Rb8+ Ke7 3.Kg7, eventually leading to the Lucena position (offensive King in front of the pawn), will win.

Problem E18

White to move after 1...e3 (**):

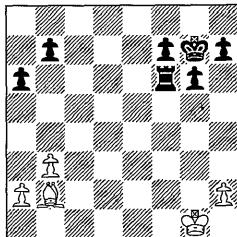


Threat: 2...f3 and connected passed pawns on the sixth rank beat a rook.

Prevention: 2.Re6! Putting the Rook behind the more advanced pawn. This move wins and all other moves lose! White wins after 2...Kd7 3.Re4! Kd6 4.Rxf4 Ke5 5.Rf8 Kd4 Not 5...e2? allowing the skewer 6.Re8+. 6.Kb2 Kd3 7.Kc1 e2 8.Re8.

Problem E19

White to move after 1...Rxf6: (***):



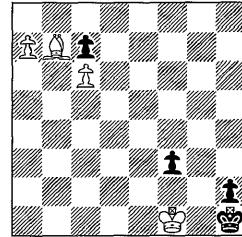
Looking For Trouble

Threat: 2...g5! unpinning the Rook with the further threat 3...Kg6 winning for Black. f7 and g6 are the only squares where the King can go and unpin the Rook, but f7 is not possible since the Rook would have to move first. So the only way Black can ever unpin himself is first to move ...g5. If you didn't see this, perhaps you should go back to the Introduction and review the definition of "threat."

Prevention: 2.h4! and if 2...h6 3.Kg2 g5 4.h5! when eventually White zugzwangs Black into losing his Rook. Or 2...h5 3.Kg2 and again Black has only queenside pawn moves and eventually has to give up his Rook.

Problem E20

White to play and mate in 3 (***):



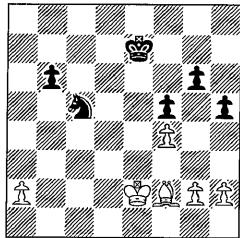
Threat: This problem by Holst, which I first saw in Chernev's amusing, out-of-print *The Bright Side of Chess*, is an excellent example of how analyzing to meet threats can also help you determine the best move. This may as well also be labeled "White to play and win" since *the threat is for Black to stalemate himself after 1...f2!* So the puzzle for White really becomes "how to give Black two more moves (or a second move) without White losing or stalematting Black."

Prevention: Since all of Black's second moves that promote can also promote with check, e.g. 1.Ke1? f2+ 2.Kd2? f1N+, White cannot mate in three by letting the pawn promote. Therefore in trying to avoid the threatened stalemate on the second move, he cannot move the King. It then follows that Black's King and h-pawn also cannot move. The only other possibility is that the c-pawn must make the second move for Black. The only way White can allow this pawn a move that quickly is 1.a8N! f2 2.Nb6 exb6 3.c7#. By the logic above, if this did not work then there could be no solution. So, by identifying the threat and logically deducing how it can be prevented, White also solves the problem!

Endgame Threats

Problem E21

Black to move after 1.Bf2 (**):

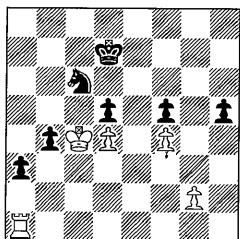


Threat: White threatens to get the outside passed a-pawn in a King-and-pawn endgame and win: 2.Bxc5 bxc5, e.g. 3.Kd3 Kd6 4.Kc4 Kc6 (4...h4 is slightly better but does not change things after 5.a4.) 5.h4! Good technique, locking up the Black pawns. 5...Kb6 6.a3 Why hurry? 6...Kc6 7.a4 Kb6 8.g3 Ka5 9.Kxc5 Kxa4 10.Kd5 and White mops up Black's pawns first.

Prevention: Black should play 1...Kd6 so that if White plays 2.Bxc5(?) then 2...Kxc5 will not only avoid the outside passed pawn, but also give Black the superior King position. After other second moves by White, Black is not only OK, but may have a tiny advantage even though the game should be drawn.

Problem E22

White to move after 1...d5+ (***):



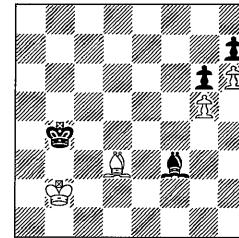
Looking For Trouble

Threat: White is in check, but he must find a way to defend against the multiple threats of Knight forks and possible promotion combinations based on the connected passed pawns.

Prevention: 2.Kc5! is the only move that draws; all other moves lose. I dreadfully miscalculated with 2.Kxd5 Na5! when Black wins because the white King is unable to return via c4: 3.Ke5 b3 4.resigns. This was especially galling since I was playing the top-rated player in the tournament, then untitled but later GM Andrew Soltis, and he later told me it was the first time he played the "Soltis Variation" of the Dragon (...h7-h5) in a tournament game. So instead of drawing a future GM in an historic game, I ended up losing, which is *not* how one wishes to go down in history...!

Problem E23

Black to move after 1.Bd3 (*):

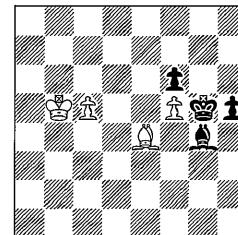


Threat: 2. Bxg6! winning both pawns since 2...hxg6 3.h7 promotes.

Prevention: Only 1...Bh5 suffices. Other moves lose instantly. After 1...Bh5 White is still better, but Black can draw with careful defense: 2.Bb1 Kc5 3.Ba2 Bf3 3...Kd6 works as well. 4.Bf7 If 4.Bg8 Bd5! 5.Bxh7 Bf7=, 4...Bd5 5.Bxg6 Bg8 is drawn.

Problem E24

Black to move after 1.c5 (**):



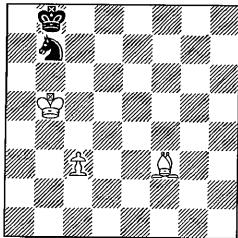
Endgame Threats

Threat: 2.c6 and White promotes.

Prevention: 1...Kf4! Of course not 1...Bxf5 2.Bxf5 Kxf5 3.c6 Ke6 4.Kb6 and White promotes first. After 1...Kf4! Black draws easily because 2.c6?? Kxe4 wins for Black and 2.Bd3, as played in the game, allows 2...Bf3 when the sacrifice for the c-pawn means Black has the better side of the draw: 3.c6 Bxc6 4.Kxc6 h4 5.Kd5 h3 6.Be4 drawn, e.g. 6...h2 7.Kd4 h1Q 8.Bxh1 Kxf5=.

Problem E25

Black to move after 1.Bf3 (*):



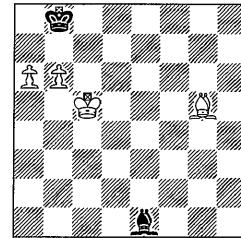
Threat: 2.Bxb7 transposing into an easily won king-and-pawn endgame, e.g.: 2...Kxb7 3.Kc5 Kc7 4.c4 (making it Black's move so White can make progress with the opposition) 4...Kd7 5.Kb6 Kc8 6.Kc6 (always good to move the King into place first) 6...Kb8 7.Kd7 Kb7 8.c5 and the pawn promotes.

Prevention: Either 1...Nd6+ or 1...Nd8 should draw comfortably. Black is just looking to keep his Knight on the board and either sacrifice it for the pawn or, along with the black King, use it to control a dark square in front of the pawn. Of course not 1...Kc7?? allowing White to carry out his threat. *Beware of “transition” points in the game where you go from one stage to another, like going into a king-and-pawn endgame here. Being down a pawn when your opponent has only one pawn left is less dangerous with a piece for each side since you can sacrifice your piece and your opponent cannot mate. But being down that pawn in a king-and-pawn-versus- King endgame is easily lost unless you know you have reached a drawn position before allowing the simplification to happen.*

Looking For Trouble

Problem E26

Black to move after 1.Bxg5 (*):

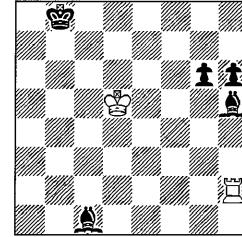


Threat: 2.Bf4+ K-any 3.g7+ and promotes next move.

Prevention: 1...Bf2+ 2.Kf6 Bxb6! destroying the valuable b-pawn and going into a dead drawn King and “wrong colored Bishop” Rook’s pawn endgame.

Problem E27

White to move after 1...Bxh5 (*):



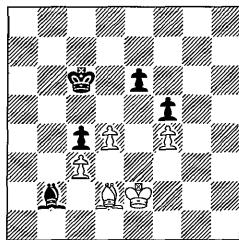
Threat: 2...Bg4 (or other safe Bishop moves) and Black’s Bishop pair and connected passed pawns will easily beat the Rook.

Prevention: 2.Rxh5! After this if Black plays 2...gxh5 then 3.Ke4 will draw easily. Black cannot prevent White’s King from reaching the corner when the doubled rook pawns with Bishop of the wrong color is a trivial draw. Therefore Black may as well try 2...Bd2, but then 3.Rh2 – or even 3.Ke4 – should still draw pretty easily.

Endgame Threats

Problem E28

White to move after 1...Bb2 (***):

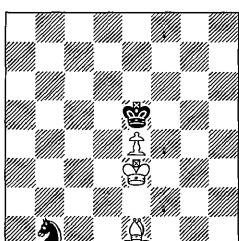


Threat: If it were Black's move, nothing wins immediately, but he has the generic threats to both penetrate with his King to e4 and place White in zugzwang, or to outrace him to attack the pawn on c3. Therefore White cannot just do anything and draw.

Prevention: White cannot just play 2. Kf3? intending to play Kf3-e3 forever because of 2...Kb5, getting to b3 before White can play Kc2, thus winning the c-pawn. White also cannot play his only Bishop move that guards c3, 2.Be1?, as he did in the game, because 2...Kd5 3.Kf3 Bc1 and White resigned since he is in zugzwang and has to lose something. So the only defense against both threats is 2.Ke3! with the key line being 2...Kb5 3.d5! Sometimes it is necessary to give up material temporarily to distract the opponent from getting the time he needs. 3...exd5 4.Kd4 Ka4 5.Kxd5 Kb3 6.Kd4 and Black can make no progress.

Problem E29 (2-problem set)

Black to move after 1.Be1 (**):



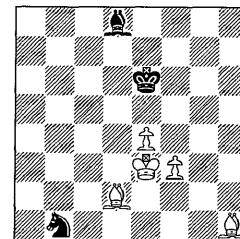
Looking For Trouble

Threat: 2.Bb4 "dominating" the Knight so that a king-and-pawn type of endgame can be reached where Black can never stay in front of the pawn on e7 and loses, e.g. 2...Ke6 3.Kd4 Kf6 (or 3...Kd7 4.Kd5 Kf7 5.Kd6 wins).

Prevention: 1...Na3 is required to return into play via b5 or c4 and then the black King can blockade on a white square and the Knight can threaten either to move around forever or sacrifice itself for the pawn. A fairly easy draw.

Problem E30 (2nd of 2)

White to move after 1...Nb1 (**):

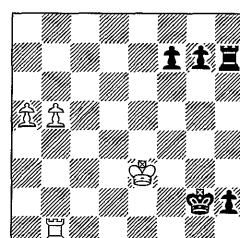


Threat: 2...Nxd2 drawing instantly with Bishops of opposite colors and a dark-square blockade after 3.Kxd2 Ke5 and 4...Bg5(+).

Prevention: So of course not 2.Bg2? "activating" the light-squared Bishop, but instead a move that preserves the bishop pair and every chance of winning with the extra connected passed pawns. 2.Bb4 "dominating" the Knight is a good one, but 2.Bc1, among others, likely works as well.

Problem E31

White to move after 1...h2 (**):



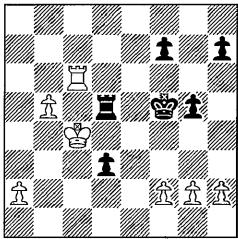
Endgame Threats

Threat: 2...h1Q 3.Rxh1 Rxh1 4.b6 Rb1 stopping the pawn and threatening 5...Rb5 as in problem E17.

Prevention: 2.b6 But not 2.Rb2+, as checking loses a tempo: 2...Kg3 3.Rxh2 Rxh2 4.b6 Rb2 2...h1Q (2...Rh3+ just delays things.) 3.Rxh1 Rxh1 4.a6 and connected passed pawns on the sixth rank beat a Rook. In some cases a Rook and pawn can form a fortress against a Queen but in this case Black is not well enough coordinated, e.g. 4...Rb1 5.a7 Ra1 6.b7 Rx a7 7.b8Q Ra3+ 8.Kc4 when Black can hold on to only one pawn at most, and White should be able to win with careful technique.

Problem E32

White to move after 1...d3, Timman-Kasparov (**):

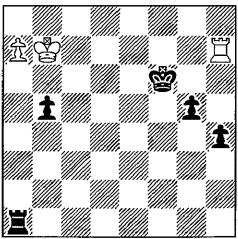


Threat: 2...d2 3.Kxd5 3...d1Q+. Can White stop this?

Prevention: In this case, given the players, of course, otherwise why would Kasparov allow this pawn thrust? Timman had been desperate and tried this in time trouble. After 2.Kxd5 d2 3.g4! Black's King must go to the fourth rank and allow 4.Rc4+ and 5.Rd4 winning easily.

Problem E33

White to move after 1...Ra1 (**):



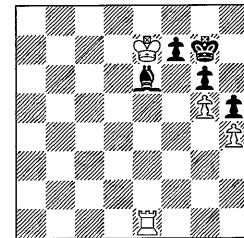
Looking For Trouble

Threat: Now that he has the white rook pawn in his sights, Black threatens 2...Kf5 followed by 3.a8+ Rxa8, and Black might think about playing for a win in the Rook vs. three pawn ending.

Prevention: 2.Rh6+ Much better than 2.a8Q+? Rxa8 when White is fighting uphill for a draw 2...Kf5 3.Ra6 and White gets a Queen, not just a Rook, to fight against the three pawns. For example 3...Rxa6 4.Kxa6 Kf4 5.a8Q Kg3 6.Kxb5 g4 7.Qh1 h3 8.Kc4 h2 9.Kd3 Kh3 10.Ke3 g3 11.Kf4 and mate shortly.

Problem E34

White to move after 1...Bxe6 (**):

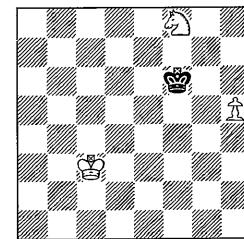


Threat: Black threatens 2...Bd5 (or other moves on the a2-g8 diagonal), endlessly moving the Bishop to safe squares along the a2-g8 diagonal, thus drawing.

Prevention: Only 2.Rxe6!, sacrificing the exchange to reach a winning King and pawn endgame, will do. *Often when you are up the exchange, even for a pawn, as here, the correct technique is to sacrifice it back at the correct time to reach a winning, simpler, endgame.*

Problem E35

White to move after 1...Kf6 (**):



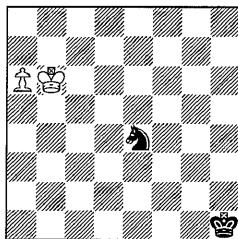
Endgame Threats

Threat: 2...Kg5 winning the pawn and drawing.

Prevention: Not 2.h6 Kf7 3.h7 Kg7 4.Kd4 Kh8 5.Ke5 Kg7 6.Kf5 Kh8 and White can make no progress, but 2.Ng6 Kg5 3.Nf4! when both the Knight and the pawn are untouchable. That allows White time to maneuver his King to g6 and his Knight to f7 with an easy win, e.g. 3...Kh6 4.Kd3 Kg5 5.Ke4 Kh6 6.Kf5 Kg7 7.Kg5 Kh7 8.h6 Kg8 9.Kg6 Kh8 10.Ne6 Kg8 11.Nd8 Kh8 12.Nf7+.

Problem E36

White to move after 1.a6 (**):

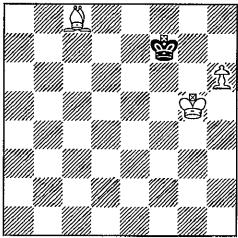


Threat: White has four moves that would win: 2.a7, 2.Kc6, 2.Kc7, and 2.Ka5, but of course 2.a7 is the clearest.

Prevention: 1...Nd6! is the only drawing move. Then if 2.a7 Nc8+ allows Black to sacrifice his Knight for the pawn. If White tries to prevent this, he still fails to proper defense, e.g. 2.Kc6 Nc8 3.Kc7 Na7 4.Kb7 Nb5 5.Kb6 Nd6 repeating the position, or 2.Kc7 Nb5+ with a similar draw. If you resign in positions like this, then not only should you take some time to see if a defense is possible, but also become familiar with defenses like this to help you see similar “saving” ideas.

Problem E37

White to move after 1...Kf7 (*):



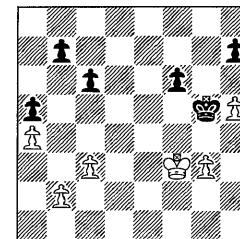
Looking For Trouble

Threat: Black threatens 2...Kg8, reaching the corner in a “Bishop of the wrong color” ending, thus drawing.

Prevention: Only 2.Be6+, sacrificing the Bishop, works to prevent the threat. After 2...Kxe6 3.h7 White wins. This is yet another good example of how identifying the threat helps one find the correct move.

Problem E38

White to move after 1...Kg5 (****):

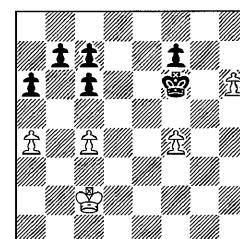


Threat: 2...Kxh5 winning the pawn for no compensation.

Prevention: Against NM Shelby Lyman, of Fischer vs. Spassky PBS fame, I played the natural looking 2.g4?, but this lost to 2...f5! Instead I should have played 2.Ke4! with a draw, as 2...Kxh5 3.Kf5 c5 4.e4 b6 5.b3 h6 6.g4+! Kh4 7.Kf4! draws, as does 2...c5 3.e4 b6 4.b3 h6 If 4...Kg4 5.h6!=. 5.Kd5!.

Problem E39

White to move after 1...Kf6 (**):



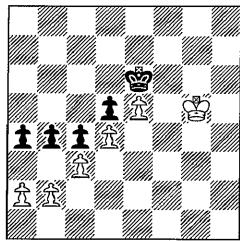
Endgame Threats

Threat: 2...Kg6, winning the h-pawn and the game.

Prevention: 2.f5! freezing the black King and winning for White, as eventually Black just runs out of moves and has to let the h-pawn promote (try it!). Notice this would also work with a pawn on h4 instead of f4, when 2.h5 is the winning shot.

Problem E40

White to move after 1...b4 (**):

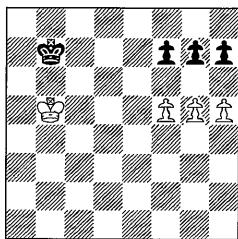


Threat: 2...a3! breaking through and winning, e.g. 3.bxa3 bxc3 (or 3...b3) winning.

Prevention: 2.a3! is the only move to win. This move enforces symmetry (the “rule of symmetry” which allows the defense to keep a symmetrical position and prevent a passed-pawn-creating sacrifice), which is what White needs to achieve so he can use his extra, protected passed e-pawn to win. 2.Kf4? a3! 3.bxa3 b3! wins for Black, but not 3...bxc3? 4.Ke3. Also 2.cxb4 fails instructively to the asymmetric 2...a3 3.bxa3 c3 again winning for Black. After 2.a3 White threatens to capture on b4 and wins no matter what Black plays, e.g. 2...b3 3.Kg6 Ke7 4.Kf5 Kf7 5.e6+ Ke7 6.Ke5 Ke8 7.Kxd5 etc.

Problem E41

Black to move after 1.h5 (**):



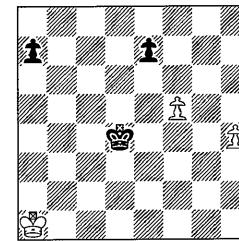
Looking For Trouble

Threat: In this famous endgame problem, White threatens 1.g6! when 1...fxg6 2.h6! gxh6 3.f6 or 1...hxg6 2.f6! gxf6 3.h6 are sacrificial breakthrough wins.

Prevention: Both 1...Kc7 and 1...g6 (Rule of symmetry!) draw, e.g. 1...Kc7 and now both 2.Kc5 and 2.Kc4 both draw. But not 2.g6?? fxg6! (2...hxg6?? loses to 3.f6 as above) 3.h6 gxh6 4.f6 Kd7 and the cavalry arrives in time to not only save the day but even win.

Problem E42 (2-problem set)

White to move after 1...Kd4 (**):

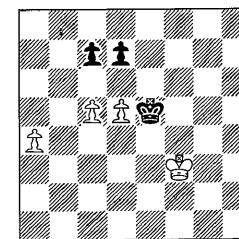


Threat: 2...Ke5, catching both the f-pawn and the h-pawn, winning the King-and-pawn endgame easily.

Prevention: 2.f6! A clear case of interference. Without this threat for White to promote the f-pawn and thus its forced sacrifice, Black wins easily. However, with this possibility, White wins instead. After 2...exf6 3.h5 Ke5 4.h6 Black's King is unable to stay within the “promotion square.” If White plays 2.h5?? then after 2...Ke5 he is just lost, as 3.f6 loses to 3...Kxf6, so waiting a move to sacrifice does not work.

Problem E43 (2nd of 2)

White to move after 1...Ke5 (***):



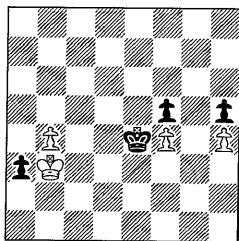
Endgame Threats

Threat: 2...Kxd5, winning the pawn and more, with an easy victory in sight.

Prevention: In this common interference setup, White must first play 2.d6!, threatening in turn to promote after 3.dxc7. Therefore Black must play 2...cxd6 – 2...c6 3.a5 is hopeless, as the Black King cannot stay within the promotion square. In the main line White now has the further interference 3.c6!, threatening 3.c7, and thus Black must play 3...dxc6 when after 4.a5 Black is completely blocked by his own wall of pawns, and cannot prevent White from promoting first and winning rather easily.

Problem E44

White to move after 1...Ke4 (**):

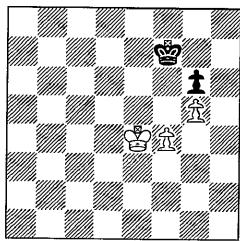


Threat: 2...Kxf4 leading to a Queen-and-rook-pawn-versus-Queen endgame: 3.Kxa3 (3.b5 Ke5 wins for Black) 3...Kg4 (3...Ke4 4.b5 draws) 4.b5 f4 5.b6 6.f3 b7 7.f2 b8Q 8.f1Q and Black wins the h-pawn, with a very difficult defense for White.

Prevention: 2.b5! wins for White as Black cannot both take the f-pawn and stay within the queening square, so he must reverse course and go back for the b-pawn. Meanwhile White will win the a-pawn, hold the b-pawn as a decoy, and win the pawns on the kingside, e.g. 2...Kd5 – 2...a2 3.Kxa2 is a worthy try, but in this case just leads to the same thing. 3.Kxa3 Ke5 4.Ka4 Kb6 5.Kb4 Kb7 6.Kc5 Kc7 7.Kd5 and wins. Note that 2.Kxa3? throws away the win after 2...Kxf4.

Problem E45

Black to move after 1.Ke4 (**):



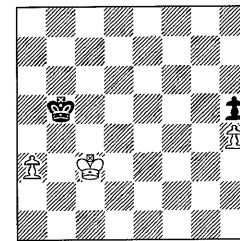
Looking For Trouble

Threat: 2.Kd5! getting the “diagonal opposition” and winning, e.g. 2...Ke7 3.Ke5 Kf7 4.Kd6 Kg8 5.Ke7 Kg7 6.Ke6 Kg8 7.Kf6 Kh7 8.Kf7 and Black is in zugzwang and must lose his pawn. This maneuver is called “elbowing out” the black king.

Prevention: 1...Ke6 (or 1...Ke8) grabbing the “normal” opposition and White can make no progress, e.g. 2.Kd4 If 2.Kf3 Kf7! 2...Kd6! but not 2...Kf5? 3.Ke3 Ke6 (3...Kg4 4.Ke4 Kh5 5.Ke5 also wins) 4.Ke4 and White has gained the opposition and wins! 3.Kc4 Ke6 draws as 4.Kc5?? Kf5 wins for Black!

Problem E46

Black to move after 1...Kb5 (**):



Threat: 2...Ka4 and Black draws, since White can never win just by guarding his a-pawn and running thereafter to capture on h5. That will not prevent Black’s King from getting to f8 and drawing: 3.Kd4 Kxa3 4.Ke5 Kb4 5.Kf5 Kc5 6.Kg5 Kd6 7.Kxh5 Ke7 8.Kg6 Kf8=

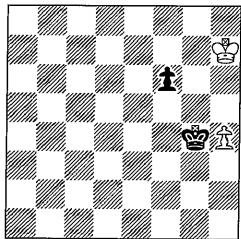
Prevention: 2.Kd4 wins since White is a tempo ahead of the “threat” line and can eventually play Kg7 before Black plays ...Kf8. Notice that this is a baseline position. If the h-pawns were back one rank, on h3 and h4, it would be a draw. Also if White’s a-pawn were back on a2, it would be an easier win. That is why White would NEVER push the a-pawn in such positions – it can only hurt.

For example, suppose the original position is the same as above except that White’s pawn was on a2 instead of a3 and it was White’s move. Then one can directly see from the “Threat” line given above that 1.a3? would draw on 1...Ka4, but 1.Kd4 would win easily, as Black’s King would have even further to travel to the f8 square. *Intermediate players often confuse this position with the “outside passed pawn” position similar to the one above, but with the addition of a black pawn on c4. With that one addition, the situation would be dramatically changed and White would use the a-pawn to distract Black. Instead, without the Black c-pawn, White’s pawn is a distraction all by itself and moving it only wastes tempos!*

Endgame Threats

Problem E47

Black to move after **1.Kxh7 (**):**

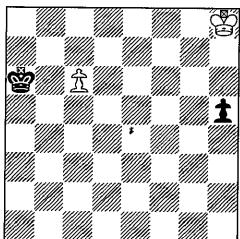


Threat: White threatens 2.Kg6, drawing easily.

Prevention: **1...Kh5!** winning instantly. But not **1...Kxh4?** **2.Kg6** winning the f-pawn nor **1...f5?** **2.Kg6** and in both cases White draws. A good example of how taking a little care to find the obviously best move can make all the difference when others seem tempting. Finding the correct idea is also easier when you realize that **1...Kh5** is the only move which both stops White's threat and also secures the h-pawn for future capture.

Problem E48

White to move and draw (Reti problem; ***):



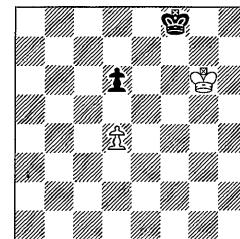
Threat: Either **2...h4** promoting, or **2...Kb6** winning the White pawn. It seems like White is helpless to stop both, but ...

Prevention: **2.Kg7!**, e.g. **2...h4 3.Kf6! Kb6** If **3...h3 4.Ke7 h2 5.c7** draws. **4.Ke5** and Black can only carry out one of his threats, so White draws. This is a famous problem that, at first sight, seems impossible. Reportedly someone said to Reti "It is a good thing you didn't create this 100 years ago or they would have burned you at the stake!"

Looking For Trouble

Problem E49

Black to move after **1.d4 (**):**

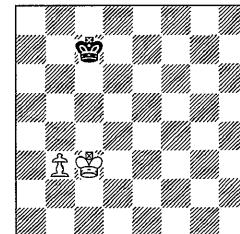


Threat: **2.d5** locking the pawn to the key sixth rank. Not **2.Kf6**, as explained below. After **2.d5** White ensures what I call a Tic-Tac-Toe position where the opposition does not matter (see Prevention).

Prevention: **1...d5!** But not **1...Ke7** (or **Ke8**) **2.d5! Ke8 3.Kf6 Kd7 4.Kf7 Kd8 5.Ke6 Kc7 6.Ke7**. Again the same elbowing-out procedure against the opponent's King as used in E45. **6...Kc8 7.Kxd6 Kd8** It looks as though Black has achieved the opposition, but once the offensive King is on the sixth rank it does not matter: **8.Ke6 Ke8 9.d6 Kd8 10.d7 Kc7 11.Ke7** wins. But after the correct **1...d5** White cannot prevent Black from getting "the real opposition" on **d7** *after* he captures, e.g. **2.Kf6 Ke8 3.Ke5 Kd8** From the previous note you can see that **3...Ke7** is also good, but *not* **3...Kd7??**. **4.Kxd5 Kd7** the position Black has been aiming for. Now Black has an easy draw as White must either repeat the position or eventually move his King behind his pawn, either way with an easy draw, e.g. **5.Ke5 Ke7 6.Kf5 Kd6 7.Ke4 Ke6 8.d5+ Kd6 9.Kd4 Kd7 10.Ke5 Ke7 11.d6+ Kd7 12.Kd5 Kd8! 13.Ke6 Ke8 14.d7+ Kd8** draw.

Problem E50

Black to move after **1.Kc3 (**):**



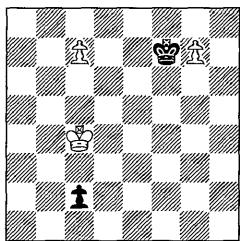
Endgame Threats

Threat: White has no threat if it is his move, but that is Black's problem – avoiding zugzwang. Black must also avoid both being the first one to place his King on the sixth rank ($1 \dots Kb6? 2.Kb4$ wins), and moving backward which allows White to put his King two squares in front of his pawn. If White can get two squares in front he always wins with non-rook pawns: $1 \dots Kb8? 2.Kb4 Kb7 3.Kb5$ wins. If it were White's move, Black would draw even more easily!

Prevention: Only $1 \dots Kb7!$ draws. White would like to play $2.Kb3$ maintaining the “distant opposition” (odd number of squares along the rank, file, or diagonal with his opponent to move) but that is illegal since it is occupied by his pawn. All moves draw immediately, e.g. $2.Kd3 Kc7$ or $2.Kb4 Kb6$, or $2.Kb2 Kb6 3.Ka3 Ka5$. If in the original position we put the pawn on $b2$, then White wins no matter whose move it is since $Kb4$, getting two squares in front of the pawn, cannot be stopped.

Problem E51

White to move after $1 \dots c2$ (*):



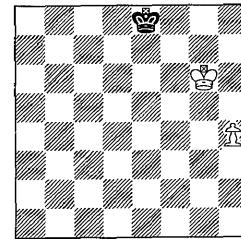
Threat: $2 \dots c1Q+$ wins for Black as both white pawns are immediately capturable.

Prevention: $2.g8Q+$ This easy-to-find sacrifice to deflects the King into a check $2 \dots Kxg8 3.c8Q+ K-any 4.Kd5$ wins easily. Of course White should not play $2.c8Q?? c1Q+$, when the skewer will win the white Queen and the game. *Sometimes it pays just to take a little extra time and be a little extra careful or you might turn an easy victory into an agonizing defeat.*

Looking For Trouble

Problem E52

White to play after $1 \dots Ke8$ (*):

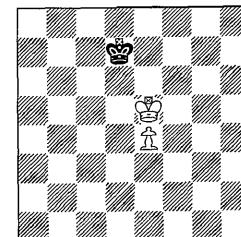


Threat: $2 \dots Kf8$ drawing. The black King will either get into the corner or prevent White's from getting out.

Prevention: $2.Kg7$ winning easily, but not the hasty $2.h5??$ allowing the threat: $2 \dots Kf8 3.h6 Kg8$ or $3.Kh7 Kf7 4.h6 Kf8$ and Black draws with either $5.Kg6 Kg8$ or $5.h7 Kf7$ stalemate. Again, don't be hasty. *The general rule in many King and pawn endgames: the King comes first!*

Problem E53

Black to play after $1.Ke5$ (*):



Threat: $2.Kf6$ winning, e.g. $2 \dots Ke8 3.Ke6$ The King comes first! $3 \dots Kf8 4.Kd7$ and White will promote. *Sometimes players make the mistake wishing to “keep the opposition” and play $2.Kd5$ (assuming this position is reached by Black having just played $Ke7-d7$), but the real idea of the opposition is to “win the race” to the neutral rank in between the kings and make progress, as $2.Kf6$ does here.*

Prevention: $1 \dots Ke7$ grabbing “the opposition” and drawing: $2.Kf5 Kf7 3.e5 Ke7 4.e6 Ke8! 5.Kf6 Kf8=$. But move the position up one rank (White: $Ke6, Pe5$; Black: $Kd8$) and Black can no longer save the game, as $1 \dots Ke8$ now loses to $2.Kd6 Kd8 3.e6 Ke8 4.e7 Kf7 5.Kd7$, so once the offensive King reaches the sixth rank in front of the pawn “opposition” no longer matters!

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