

2014 Las Vegas Open, U1800 Section: Best Game Prize Submission(s)

River Westing (Elo: 1651)

June 20, 2014

Introduction

Hey there, selection committee.

You really should have put a cap on the number of games we can send in. Here are a few games I've played this tournament, with maybe a fabricated game too for good measure.

But first, I want to clear some things up. I realize I'm a shit player—what 1600 isn't? And yes, best game prizes always go to some flashy sacrifice or drawn-out endgame where Black only wins by promoting to two bishops of the same color or some other quirky nonsense we've all fantasized about. But getting into these scenarios boils down to one thing and one thing only: luck. Luck! In a game so beloved for being 'the purest test of mental skill in existence'. (Your copy, not mine.)

So instead of giving the prize to some tactical genius who's lucky enough to actually encounter a legitimately interesting tactic someplace other than a Dvoretsky manual, why not give it to an entertaining demo on how to win a chess game (or pull a draw out of your ass) that engages in as little chess-talk as possible. Because chess is at least as much about creativity, intimidation, and character work as it is about luck or skill.

Anyway, that's my pitch. Have a nice night.

Round 1

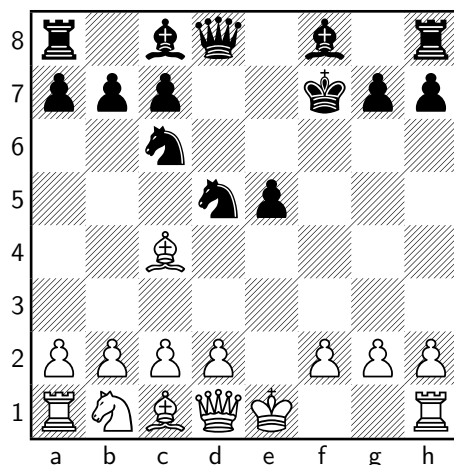
My first game was against one of those fuckers who sets up their board and clock, as White, fifteen minutes before round time. And this wasn't some old nobody trying to impress a nonexistent audience with their eternally-shiny wooden pieces that rest on a board too artsy to be numbered. This was just some ass who decided to take the mantra 'control the board' to its literal extreme.

So I stood back, sipping from a disposable cup, watching them fiddle with their Chronos. When I finally approached the board, my opponent feigned friendliness and I feigned awkwardness. I offered my fingertips for a handshake. He accepted and asked how I was doing this 'fine' evening. I mentioned that I

was Black, and so it was my choice of who's equipment to use. He put his stuff away. I told him I didn't have my set with me, so he brought his out again. He told me his name and I said, "Okay." We sat in silence until the game began.

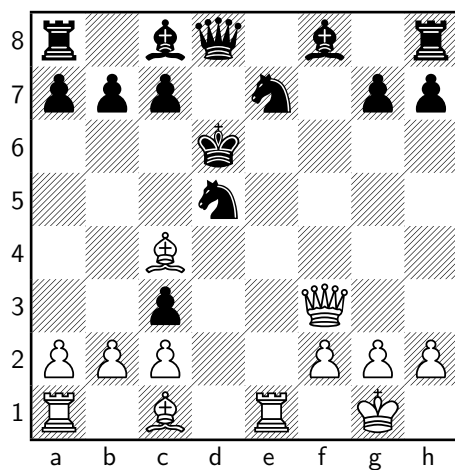
Westing, River (1651) vs. **'Opponent', 'My'** (1588); *2014 Las Vegas Open*, Round 1.

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♙c4 ♘f6 4 ♘g5 d5 5 exd5 ♘xd5 6 ♘xf7 ♙xf7



When my opponents are on the run, I imagine they're a small mammal that is bothersome but ultimately innocent. They're not the kind of pest you'd call the exterminator for, but the kind you would make the day out of catching yourself. (To be clear, I don't think like this in a cliché way—I'm a sadist, not a hack.) I like to lure the amorphous critters (often mentally stitched together from the parts of possums, rats, digitized chessmen, and my opponents' faces) out with—hold on, I'm losing my train of thought.

The game continues: 7 ♙f3+ ♙e6 8 ♘c3 ♘ce7 9 d4 exd4 10 O-O. I thirst for an open position. I don't care about my knight. I don't care about my pawns, my rooks, my king, my queen, my self, my family, life on Earth, the continued existence of mankind. My game is my immortality. I could've taken the simple path (10 ♙e4+ ♙f7 11 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 12 ♙xd5+), but no! How patzers stomach such droll play is beyond me (beyond all?). My plan unfolds, 10...dxc3 11 ♙e1+ ♙d6?. White to move and finish the game.



I took my time here, not to check the correctness of my move, but to watch my opponent. I wanted to see when, if ever, he smelt the copious stench of his own rot. Do you see it yet? I'll give you a hint. It's **12 ♖xe7!!**. Black can capture back in four ways, but each is equally doomed:

1. 12... ♗xe7 13 ♖xd4#
2. 12... ♖xe7 13 ♖xd4#
3. 12... ♘xe7 13 ♖d3+ ♗c6 14 ♖xd8±
4. 12... ♗xe7 13 ♗g5+ ♘f6 14 ♖e4+ ♗d6 15 ♗xf6 ♖xf6 16 ♗d1+ ♖d4 17 ♗xd4+ ♗c5 18 ♖d5+ ♗b4 19 ♖b5#

My opponent, a perceptive coward, resigned. **1-0**.

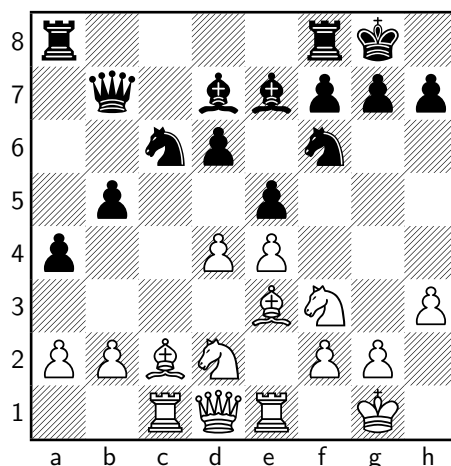
So yeah, that was my take on the narcissistic sociopath chess player archetype—a staple villain for any TV procedural balls deep into season four filler-episode territory.

Round 2

My second-round opponent was a chess kid, but not a very good one. That is both a judgment of his chess skills and of his character. I only blame his parents—who orbit about the board—for the later. His mother had bony fingers. His father looked like a German pastry chef addicted to his own product. His mother scrambled to set up his board (and accompanying snacks) before leaving for the rest of the game. His father stayed for the match's entirety.

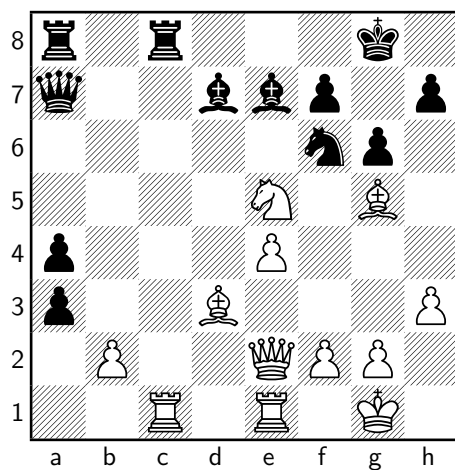
Gubin, Max (1740) vs. **Westing, River** (1651); *2014 Las Vegas Open*, Round 2.

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♙b5 a6 4 ♙a4 ♘f6 5 O-O ♙e7 6 ♚e1 b5 7 ♙b3 d6 8 c3 O-O 9 h3 ♘a5 10 ♙c2 c5 11 d4 ♙c7. My opponent played through his moves quickly, not using a second from his clock. He's probably been coached on openings. It probably cost his family a few hundred dollars for the advice 'know your openings'. 12 ♘bd2 cxd4 13 cxd4 ♘c6 14 ♘b3 a5 15 ♙e3 a4 16 ♘bd2 ♙d7 17 ♚c1 ♙b7. The kid was playing more attention to his cranberry juice bottle than he was to his game. This made me pay attention to his cranberry juice bottle, too. What kid likes cranberry juice?

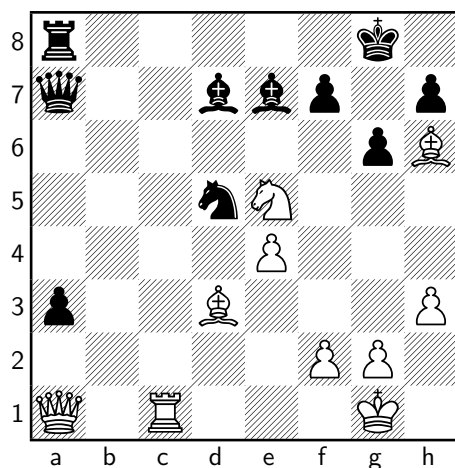


Seventeen moves in, and I've reached the classic Spanish position I've been in dozens of times. My opponent resists the allure of 18 ♘f1. It's this kind of ignorance that irks me the most, when somebody knows something without understanding it. Next comes 18 a3?! ♚fc8 19 ♙e2 g6. My opponent had moved from his juice to a muffin. He peeled the wrapper and began mashing his hands into the top. I looked at his dad and put on my best 'But actually, does your kid know how to eat food or not?' face. When more pieces came off the board with 20 ♙d3 b4 21 ♘c4 exd4 22 ♘xd4, I noticed my opponent really enjoyed smashing the clock buttons with the pieces. I pressed my side of the clock extra calmly, so he would realize what he was doing was rude. It didn't work.

The game continues 22... ♘e5 23 ♙g5 ♙a7, a particularly subtle prophylactic move I no longer recall why I played. It does frazzle the brow of the Father, though. We reach a critical position after 24 ♘xe5 dxe5 25 ♘f3 bxa3 26 ♘xe5:



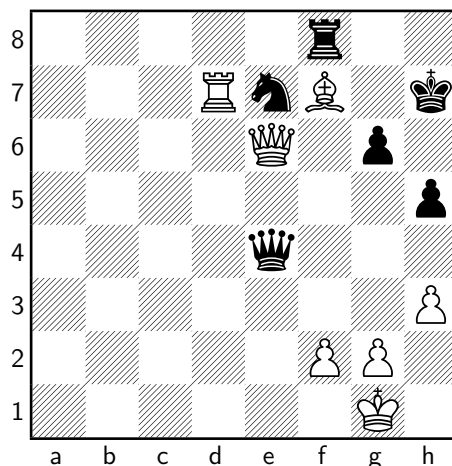
Shit's a mess, but a roughly equal mess. I simplify with **26...a**x**b2 27 ♖**x**b2 a3 28 ♜a1 ♜**x**c1 29 ♜**x**c1 ♞d5 30 ♠h6**. At this point, my opponent has consumed: a bottle of cranberry juice, a clementine, three muffin tops and two muffin bases, several Trader Joe's products I was unable to identify, and at least three hundred M&M's. The boardstate is:



I screw up, plain and simple with **30...♞f6**, an attempt to repeat the position and go for the ol' three-fold repetition draw. Call me what you will, I was feeling lonely and hungry and wanted to be done with this game. Naturally, my opponent misses 31 ♠c4 and just trades with **31 ♠g5 ♞d5 32 ♠**x**e7 ♞**x**e7 33 ♠c4 ♠e8 34 ♞g4 h5 35 ♞h6+ ♜h7 36 ♞**x**f7 ♠**x**f7 37 ♠**x**f7**.

Despite my threatening passed-pawn on a3, I'm worse. And I'm super low on time. Maybe my pressure on the queenside is enough to hold a draw, but my prospects are doubtful. Then I notice that Max Gubin is out of snacks.

37... ♖f8 38 ♖a2 ♖d4 39 ♖e6 ♖b2 40 ♖c7 a2 41 ♖xa2 ♖e5 42 ♖d7 ♖xe4 43 ♖e6. Little Gubin grabs his empty cup and gets up.



I play 43... ♖f4? and immediately realize it's a blunder. If my opponent finds 44 g3 ♖c1+ 45 ♖g2 ♖c6+ 46 ♖xc6 ♖xc6 47 ♖d5+ ♖h6 48 ♖xc6 I'm in a dead-lost endgame. At least there's a chance he'll miss it, I think to myself. I had. That's when Big Gubin removes from his pocket a single Chewy granola bar and places it near Lil' Gubin's notation sheet. A signal? A reward? I look around and see Lil' Gubes filling up his water. With no further thinking, I snatch and devour his granola bar. I lock eyes with Father while placing the wrapper back on his son's notation. He darts towards the tournament director's booth just as Little Gubin returns.

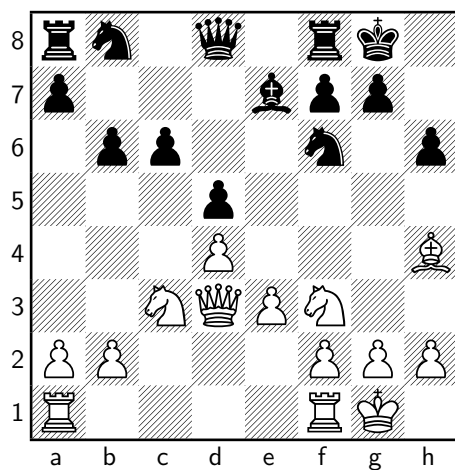
Max Gubin quickly moves 44 ♖xe7, already toying with his half-empty water cup. I let out a sigh of relief, play through 44... ♖c1+ 45 ♖e1 ♖xe1+ 46 ♖xe1 ♖xf7, and offer a draw which my opponent accepts. 1/2 – 1/2.

I think the Gubin parents were even more incensed by the several friendly blitz games Max and I played between Rounds 2 and 3.

Round 4

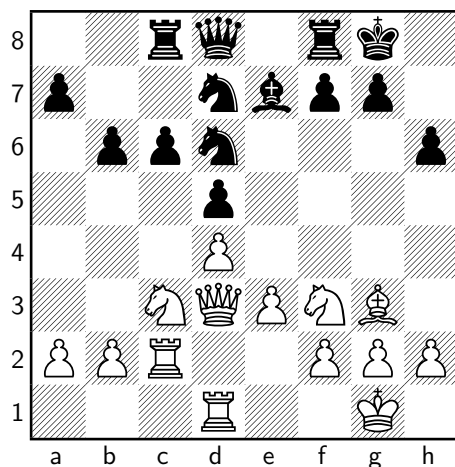
Westing, River (1651) vs. **Masikic, Terry** (1720); *2014 Las Vegas Open*, Round 4.

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♖c3 ♖f6 4 ♖g5 c6 5 cxd5 exd5. Built to Spill is the best Pacific Northwest indie rock band. Sure, Modest Mouse is a better band, but they're so much less Pacific Northwest. Next comes 6 e3 ♖e7 7 ♖d3 O-O 8 ♖c2 h6 9 ♖h4 b6 10 ♖f3 ♖a6 11 O-O ♖xd3 12 ♖xd3.



I really ought to get started on my homework at some point. I took three days off school for this tournament. I need to finish a *Tale of Two Cities* by Monday. By *Monday*. Note to self: check if anybody has written *Tail of Two Cities* furry-based fanfic. Note to self: stop talking to yourself. Stop talking to yourself. Stop talking to yourself. Stop talking to yourself.

The game proceeds **12...** ♖bd7 **13** ♜ac1 ♜c8 **14** ♜fd1 ♖e8 **15** ♗g3 ♖d6 **16** ♜c2



I wonder if I'd get caught if I hid in the bathroom in between moves and re-watched *Leverage* on my phone. **16...** f5 **17** ♜dc1. Holy fuck they're called fidget spinners. Wow. I thought...I thought they were fidget *snipers*. Because they sniped your fidgeting. Go to sleep, River, and be less dyslexic while you're at it.

Some more moves happened, including **17...** ♖c4 **18** ♖e2 c5 **19** ♖f4, literally the only critical move in this entire game, **19...** b5 **20** ♖e6 ♜a5 **21** ♖xf8

$\text{♙}\times\text{f8}$ 22 $\text{d}\times\text{c5}$ $\text{♜}\text{f6}$ 23 $\text{♙}\text{e5}$ $\text{♜}\times\text{e5}$ 24 $\text{♜}\times\text{e5}$ $\text{♞}\text{c8}$ 25 $\text{♜}\text{d7}!?$ An interesting move, for sure, but not nearly as interesting as a form of literary criticism that analyzes a text solely by finding the lens of theory that is the best fit for said text. We finish with 25... $\text{♜}\times\text{d7}$ 26 $\text{♞}\times\text{d5}+$ $\text{♜}\text{h8}$ 27 $\text{♞}\times\text{d7}$ $\text{♞}\times\text{c5}$ 28 $\text{♞}\times\text{c5}$ $\text{♙}\text{c8}+$ $\text{♙}\text{f8}$ 30 $\text{♞}\times\text{f8}+$ $\text{♜}\text{h7}$ 31 $\text{♞}\times\text{f5}+$ $\text{♜}\text{h8}$ 32 $\text{♞}\text{c8}\#$. Hey, why not have three commas instead of three periods in an ellipsis? It simply makes more sense. 1-0.

Sometimes it's best to let your mind wander. Oh, also, you know those sitcom episodes where the some kids form an odd-couple and take care of a fake baby for Health class? Well what if I told you that those babies are real and this will be the primary form of childcare in the future.

Round 7

A bald man emerged from underneath the water cooler table, jostling it. A trail of papers (fliers, mostly, for future tournaments) followed him in what became a torrent of round-times, section prize guarantees, and hotel coupons.

"Have a good game," he said as he began walking toward me. "Have a good game," he said, increasing his speed. "Have a good game," he said, filling the room with splinters as he dragged his hands across the table. "Have a good game," he said as though he had just killed a man. "Have a good game," he said, hand outstretched.

"You too," I said. We signed each other score sheets, made out for a bit, got our dog-show punch-cards verified, adjusted our chairs, cooked a steaming double-portion of fried liver, hit the clock, and began our game.

Cardenas (1798) vs. **Westing, River** (1651); *2014 Las Vegas Open*, Round 7.

My opponent opens 1 $\text{b4}!?$ and shit starts to become absurd.

